

Leadership for Community Engagement—A Distributed Leadership Perspective

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Abstract

This article presents distributed leadership as a framework for analysis, showing how the phenomenon complements formal higher education structures by mobilizing leadership from various sources, formal and informal. This perspective more accurately portrays the reality of leading engaged institutions. Using the application data from 224 Carnegie-classified community-engaged institutions from the 2008 and 2010 cycles, this study investigated leaders responsible for institutional community engagement; their ways of leading and institutionalizing engagement; and the structural, contextual, and developmental elements in the distribution of leadership for engagement in classified engaged institutions. The findings suggest that the engaged institution as a holistic system locates, aligns, and coordinates tasks, processes, and resources along lines of expertise, and not necessarily in alignment with institutional lines of command. The collectivism involved in community engagement provides space for coexistence of planned and spontaneous performance as well as the alignment of leadership functions across various sources of leadership.

Introduction

America's higher education has a long and distinguished record of addressing public needs. Confronted with a host of unprecedented challenges that will define their future, higher education institutions have been called upon by states and local communities to help advance progress related to public school improvement, economic growth, local and regional planning, and more (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011). Indeed, many higher education institutions have recognized these challenges and are facing them through community engagement, which involves "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (New England Resource Center for Higher Education [NERCHE], 2015, "How Is 'Community Engagement' Defined?" para. 1). Less widely appreciated, however, is the degree to which these institutional efforts for realizing the public good through community engagement depend on leadership (Baer,

Duin, & Ramaley, 2008; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Holland, 1997; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Descriptive vignettes and prescriptive advice constitute most current writing on the topic. Some examination exists in two areas of the literature: the nature of executive academic engagement leadership and the institutionalization of engagement (*Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, 2000; Holland, 1997, 2009; Sandmann & Plater, 2009, 2013*).

Discussions of successful community-engaged institutions ascribe a central if not paramount role to administrative leadership, typically that of the president, provost, and/or program director of community engagement, service-learning, or the like (*Sandmann & Plater, 2009*). Because of their resources, roles, decision-making authority, and imputed trust, institutional leaders in higher education are positioned to have a significant impact on the development of community engagement and service-learning. This is especially true in times of limited resources across the university system. Therefore, research on the characteristics and practices of such leaders at exemplary institutions is important as a source of best practices for community engagement. Studies also suggest that grassroots and collective leadership can complement the work of those in administrative leadership roles to advance community engagement (*Kezar, Gallant, & Lester, 2012; Plater, 2011*). Research on distribution of leadership throughout an organization in the K-12 context shows positive effects on aspects such as student outcomes and school culture (*Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane, 2006*). However, less is known about the phenomenon of distributed leadership in higher education, particularly as it pertains to community engagement.

This research investigated leaders (executive and otherwise) of institutional community engagement; their ways of leading and institutionalizing engagement; and the structural, contextual, and developmental elements in the distribution of leadership for community engagement (*Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008*) in leading engaged institutions. Our initial investigation of executive leaders revealed an intriguing pattern—a more “distributed” process of leading institutional community engagement. Therefore, we framed our study around the functions and conditions for leading community engagement and consequently focused less on the individuals and their positions. This article will speak to those findings and their implications for leading community engagement in later sections.

Using the framework of distributed leadership, our findings suggest that, as a holistic system, the engaged institution locates,

aligns, and coordinates tasks, processes, and resources along the contour of the expertise necessary to advance community engagement. The research thus provides a new way to look at the rhetoric and actions of the executive leadership and the connections between roles and behaviors. In particular, when we examined strategic planning and coordination structures for engagement, two major aspects of leading the institutionalization of engagement, we found strong evidence that context is an integral component in distributed leadership. Not every leadership role or function can be distributed, and leadership is in general subject to contextual constraints. Furthermore, the infrastructure for engagement does not necessarily align with the institutional hierarchy. Nonetheless, the collectivism involved in community engagement provides space for coexistence of planned and spontaneous performance, as well as distribution of leadership functions across various sources of leadership. Distributed leadership, which by definition does not reside in a fixed position on an organizational chart, presents the organic coexistence of positional/formal leadership and emergent/informal leadership. Analyzing through this framework enables us to recognize the complementary association between positional/formal and emergent/informal leadership; further, it highlights the need to move our focus beyond executive leadership to the process of leading through a distributed modality as a more accurate representation of how leadership occurs in leading engaged institutions.

Literature Review

Leadership is a highly valued and complex phenomenon. Gaps and challenges remain in the vast literature on the topic (*Burns, 1978; Grint, 2005; Northouse, 2013*). In the past 20 years, significant shifts have occurred in the way institutional leadership is conceptualized. The traditional leadership frameworks—including behavioral, power and influence, contingency, cognitive, and cultural/symbolic traits attributed to leaders—have been challenged not only for their leader-centered, individualistic, hierarchic, rigidly structured, and universal assumptions about leadership (*Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006*), but also because of their emphasis on the leader's power over followers (*Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001a, 2004*) and their value-free conceptualization of leadership (*Sandmann & Plater, 2013*). The unilateral, vertical representation of leadership no longer reflects the increasingly team-based practice in organizations (*Cummings & Worley, 2004; Pearce, 2004; Thamhain, 2004*).

More recent theorizing shifts attention from the characteristics of leaders to the processes of leadership (Barker, 2001; Grint, 2005; Hosking, 1988; Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2002). This process or relational perspective defines leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (i.e. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 668). This perspective acknowledges and highlights the processes bounded by contexts and the relationship dynamics between various actors (Bolden et al., 2008).

The Conceptualization of Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is one of the most prominent models grounded in this process or relational perspective of leadership. According to Gronn (2000), Gibb (1954) first explicitly referred to the idea of distributed leadership in the article “Leadership,” where he challenged the traditional assumption that leadership should reside in a single individual and argued that such roles should be dispersed across the team. Drawing from organizational theory, complexity science, and high-involvement leadership theory, distributed leadership is concerned with mobilizing leadership at all organizational levels (Harris, 2009; van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & van Meurs, 2009). It involves multiple and distributed sources of leadership that stretch over complex social and situational contexts. In other words, leadership is considered as shared social influence that leaders and followers intentionally exert over other people (Wright, 2008) to arrange group or organizational activities and relationships (Yukl, 2002). This does not suggest that greater organizational effectiveness can be achieved simply by spreading leadership to more people without facilitation, orchestration, and support (Harris, 2008). Rather, distributed leadership stands as a critical “complementary understanding of the subtleties of leadership in real organizational settings” (van Ameijde et al., 2009, p. 765).

A common understanding of distributed leadership has yet to be established (Bennett, Harvey, Wise, & Woods, 2003; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). Some scholars use the term *shared leadership* (e.g., Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Sims, 2002), some use *distributed leadership* (e.g., Gronn, 2002), and others treat both terms interchangeably (e.g., Day et al., 2004). Additionally, the concept of distributed leadership overlaps with democratic and participative leadership concepts (Harris, 2008). In fact, this accumulation of allied concepts of distributed leadership has resulted in both the misuse of the term to mean any form of team or shared leadership practice and the

misinterpretation of the term to mean that everyone leads (Harris, 2007).

Despite these differences, most scholars agree that the concept of distributed leadership entails two fundamental principles: Leadership is a shared influence process involving several individuals, and leadership occurs in the interaction of diverse individuals who share a collective identity as well as essential expertise (van Aemeijde et al., 2009; also see Harris, 2008; Gronn, 2000). Distributed leadership supports the idea that people lead when and where they have expertise (Elmore, 2002). As a diagnostic and design tool, a distributed leadership framework helps practitioners explore how leadership is “stretched over” multiple leaders, followers, and the situation—either by design, default, or necessity (Spillane, 2006, p. 23). The situation or context is an integral and constituting component of leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). Aware of the risk of oversimplification of what distributed leadership entails, we provide the following table to summarize the essential characteristics of distributed leadership, laying out the themes that are fundamental for our analysis.

Table 1. Major Characteristics of Distributed Leadership

Distributed Leadership Is and Is Not		
Essential Components	Is	Is Not
1. Process/Relational (fundamental tenet)	Constructed through social interaction	Attributes of individuals themselves
2. Multiple and Emergent Sources of Leadership	Leadership practice performed and coperformed by formal and emergent leaders	Pinned to a position
3. Expertise	People lead when and where they have expertise	Everyone leads
4. Contexts	Integral to leadership	Immune to contextual constraints and/or emergent opportunities

Distributed Leadership in Practice, With Some Cautions

The literature on distributed leadership reveals that shared leadership practice responds well to the incorporation of different perspectives and interests (Feyerherm, 1994), yields better performance than leader-centric leadership (Pearce & Sims, 2002), and

increases organizational capacity while enabling organizational changes (Graetz, 2000; Harris, 2008). In the field of education, where it has been studied extensively (e.g., Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001b), research has found that distributed leadership is positively related to teacher development and school improvement (Harris, 2008).

The most recent research on distributed leadership highlights the relationship between leadership distribution pattern and organizational outcomes (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2007; Locke, 2002). Harris (2008) noted that distributed leadership has a greater impact upon organizational development in the absence of certain structural and cultural barriers. The configuration of leadership distribution is important in that certain patterns of distribution have a more positive effect than others upon organizational development and change (Leithwood et al., 2007). The sources (who) and extent (how many people) of leadership distribution depend at least on which functions are to be performed and the complexity and organizational context of those functions (Leithwood et al., 2007; Wright, 2008).

In terms of the development and continuity of distributed leadership, Pearce (2004) found that expertise, allocation of responsibilities, optimal team size, and a clearly defined goal/vision were essential factors. Other studies indicate that adaptability (Day et al., 2006), mutual performance monitoring (Day et al., 2006), empowerment (Burke et al., 2006), and inclusiveness (van Ameijde et al., 2009)—similar to Day et al.'s (2006) concept of team orientation and Burke et al.'s (2006) concept of consideration—are important to distributed leadership. Additionally, engaging in external activities, termed *boundary management*, is necessary for the ongoing success of distributed leadership (e.g., Burke et al., 2006; Pearce, 2004). Boundary management is not only “a means to integrate certain vital expertise not available within the team, [but also] a mechanism for ensuring continuous alignment between a team and the wider organizational context” (van Ameijde et al., 2009, p. 776).

Nonetheless, distributed leadership should not be taken as a panacea for generating positive results under various circumstances (Harris, 2008). Jones (2014) cautioned that evidence for an inherent direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and collaboration is inconclusive; a similar situation exists regarding the transferability of functional change—becoming more integrated cross-functional and cross-disciplinary problem solving in specific domains, to other issues and sustainability of such a change. Mehra, Smith, Dixon, and Robertson (2006) noted that distributed leadership enhances performance only if different individuals within

a group recognize each other as leaders (distributed-coordinated leadership). The opposite situation (distributed-fragmented leadership) showed no superiority over traditional leader-centric/vertical leadership. Likewise, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) pointed out that overall patterns of distributed leadership and its effects in large-scale samples may obscure significant variations and inconsistencies that reflect circumstances where distributed leadership is less useful. Scholars who are more skeptical of distributed leadership, such as Heinicke and Bales (1953) and, more recently, Bryk (1999), have argued that the lack of consensus about who are the informal leaders among group members negatively affects team efficiency and may lead to incoherence within an organization.

The ambiguity involved in informal leadership is relevant particularly in partnerships and collaborations, the foundation of community engagement activities. It should also be acknowledged that redundant leadership functions do not necessarily lead to organizational improvement, and all leaders or all people engaged in leadership activities are not necessarily good leaders (Kellerman, 2004; Timperley, 2005). At this point, Pearce (2004) contends, distributed leadership should be seen as an important form of leadership that is complementary rather than substitutive to traditional leader-centric leadership because the latter “still plays an important role in team design and boundary management, two factors considered important for the ongoing success of distributed leadership” (van Ameijde et al., 2009, p. 767).

Distributed Leadership and Community Engagement

A great number of studies of distributed leadership have been conducted in the field of education, predominantly in K-12 settings (e.g., Gronn, 2002, 2003; Harris, 2007, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009; Spillane et al., 2001a, 2004). Few studies look into the notion of distributed leadership in higher education and/or for engagement (Jones, 2014; Kezar, 2001; Plater, 2011; Sandmann & Plater, 2009). In the meantime, leadership in the context of community engagement has been framed from many perspectives, including classic literature and current studies involving theories of leadership (e.g., Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Northouse, 2013; Rost, 1991), innovation and change (Levine, 1980; Pool, Van de Ven, Dooley, & Holmes, 2000; Rogers, 2003), and culture and institutionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Schein, 2004; Tierney, 1988; Weick, 1976). Nevertheless, rarely has this pool of leadership research addressed academic leadership fostering community

engagement. The preponderance of current writing on the topic involves descriptive vignettes and prescriptive advice, and research performed to date has focused primarily on the nature of executive academic engagement and the institutionalization of engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, 2000; Holland, 1997, 2009; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). A general definition can help establish the parameters of what is considered leadership of engagement broadly; however, the layered leadership of engagement warrants more sophisticated conceptualizations.

This research posits that distributed leadership warrants consideration and application as a conceptual framework for leadership in decentralized organizations that have a culture of collegiality and professional autonomy, such as higher education institutions (e.g., Bergquist, 1992; Birnbaum, 1991) and specifically for intra- and interorganizational functions such as community engagement. Distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice. Interactions between leaders and followers are at the center of the analysis (Spillane, Diamond, Sherer, & Coldren, 2004). Distributed leadership's differentiation between numerical and concertive action (Gronn, 2000) and its three indicators—the multiplicity of actors, leadership roles, and leadership behaviors (Robinson, 2009)—provide a promising tool for understanding interactions, networks, and the nature and patterns of distribution of leadership in community engagement. Distributed leadership highlights context and boundary management for ensuring continuous alignment between units and the wider organization (van Ameijde et al., 2009). The attentiveness of distributed leadership to context is well aligned with the reciprocal and coconstructive nature of community engagement.

Research Purpose and Questions

This research had a twofold purpose. First, it investigated the leadership of the leading institutions in community engagement, here defined as those institutions that received the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) Community Engagement Classification in the 2008 and 2010 cycles. Given the complexity of community engagement itself and the decentralized nature of higher education, it could be hypothesized that, despite current research and literature supporting heroic leadership, a layered leadership or a distribution of leadership among executive and other leaders is taking place in leading community-engaged institutions. Thus, we pose our first research question: (1) How are leaders involved in institutional community engagement (that is, who

performs which engagement leadership functions)? To examine cross-sectionality in leadership, we also inquired into institutional contexts influencing leadership for engagement. Informed by the literature, we understand that distributed leadership's underpinnings of fluidity and contextualization of leadership (which will be discussed in the next section) do not equalize absolute distribution, nor do they void structural confinement; thus, we pose our second research question: (2) What are the institutional structural, contextual, and developmental elements that foster distribution of leadership for community engagement? To be more specific, how does institutional planning and institutional structuring relate to the distribution of leadership for community engagement?

The second purpose of this research focused on theoretical exploration of distributed leadership in community engagement. Building on the results from the examination of leadership practices in leading community-engaged institutions, this work introduces, applies, and critiques distributed leadership literature and theory as a conceptual framework for understanding the leadership practices of community engagement within institutions.

Methodology

Data collection did not involve direct observations and interviews due to physical and time constraints. Nevertheless, we are confident that the narratives drawn from responses to the selected foundational questions in the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application framework (*NERCHE, 2015*) provided rich and focused information that can serve as a beginning point for examining leadership, organization, and policy that delineated actors, structures, and activities involved in community engagement development within the institution. With institutional permission, we accessed through the New England Resource Center for Higher Education database 224 successful Carnegie applications from the 2008 and 2010 classification application rounds. Three application questions were analyzed:

- IA.5. Does the executive leadership of the institution... explicitly promote community engagement as a priority?
- IB.1. Does the institution have a campus-wide coordinating infrastructure to support and advance community engagement?

- IB.4. Is community engagement defined and planned for in the strategic plans of the institution?

Responses to these questions included explanations and examples. Application question IA.5 solicited information for addressing our first research question, and the remaining two application questions provided answers to our second research question. The distributed leadership literature has suggested that not all leadership can be distributed (*Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2004*), and the distribution of leadership involves both planned and spontaneous alignment for achieving goals (*van Ameijde et al., 2009*). Application questions IB.1 and IB.4 allowed us to explore both the stable and the fluid aspects of distributed leadership for engagement.

The responses were coded using in vivo coding. In vivo coding is an analytic process of examining data and generating concepts using the words of the respondents when these words are so descriptive of what is going on that they become the designated concepts (*Corbin, 2004*). In other words, in vivo coding produces indigenous categories. Applying the constant-comparative qualitative method (*Merriam, 1998*) for each question (IA.5, IB.1, and IB.4), we compared not only the responses of and among institutions within the same cycle (2008 and 2010 respectively), but also across the two cycles. As the classification framework did not differentiate among institutional types, comparisons across institutions based on these types were unlikely to yield meaningful association between features of leadership for community engagement and institutional type and therefore were not considered. Major themes were identified that served as the primary basis for responding to the research questions.

The selected questions from the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification application framework were not designed for our research, and therefore the structure and format of the questions limited the content and the scope of the responses provided. This restricted the range of institutional community engagement available for our analysis. The descriptive and in vivo coding process allowed the researchers to closely adhere to the data where the themes emerged (*Charmaz, 2006*); nevertheless, readers should be cautious in making broader generalizations from the findings.

Findings

In this section, findings are presented in a sequence corresponding to the research questions: First, how are leaders involved in institutional community engagement and second, what are the institutional structural, contextual, and developmental elements for leadership distribution for community engagement? More specifically, the relationship of institutional planning and structuring, as a snapshot of these three organizational components of the institution, to the leadership for community engagement is addressed. Direct quotes are taken from a variety of representative case applications.

Leaders for Community Engagement in Classified Institutions—The “Who” Question

Though the first application question asked only about the executive leadership, the data suggested that leadership practice was multilayered, involving formal and informal leaders. Formal leaders included the executive leaders (chancellors, presidents, and provosts) and many senior campus leaders (e.g., vice presidents, deans, directors, faculty leaders). Informal leaders included faculty, staff, students, and community members involved in various initiatives and projects.

It is worth noting that in some cases, formal leaders may hold the values of engagement and incorporate them into a personal mission extending beyond their positional responsibilities. Our data indicated that as such leaders advanced in their careers, their personal commitment to community engagement persisted and reinforced the institutional commitment. For instance,

President [D] holds the rank of Professor... and teaches in the areas of democracy, citizenship and American diversity. As Provost at [X] College (199x–200x), he instituted The [E] Plan. Dr. [D]... has numerous other publications including 3 books, more than 20 articles and more than 50 conference presentations.

For their part, institutions committed to community engagement consciously seek candidates, particularly for executive leadership positions, who can honor the tradition. A representative description reads:

For years, [Y]’s presidents have played a central role in advancing university engagement. In 1996, President

[A] (1992–2001) led a series of presidential symposia stressing the importance of outreach scholarship and community partnerships.... [A]’s advocacy substantively advanced the discussion on campus regarding recognition of faculty outreach scholarship. President [B] (2001–2004) actively supported the implementation of the new promotion and tenure guidelines in the Faculty Handbook and revision of other university policies promoting engagement. Current president [C] frequently espouses the importance of engagement. Under his administration, engagement is explicitly emphasized throughout the University strategic plan (2007).

Leadership to Advance Engagement—The “How” Question

When focusing on the executive leadership, strong evidence pointed to the importance of rhetorical practice. Chancellors, presidents, and provosts made regular appearances at various highly visible occasions throughout the year both on and off campus. Whether through speeches or written messages, executive leaders explicitly stressed stewardship to the community and institutions. It was a well-established practice for the executive leaders to serve on and/or lead various boards and committees internally and externally, as well as locally and nationally. Other rhetorical strategies through which the executive leadership supported community engagement included highlighting community engagement in the institutional recruitment and marketing strategies, establishing awards for individuals who are committed to community engagement, and publicly endorsing various center directors for their excellence in serving communities. The executive leadership, via rhetorical efforts, sent a clear message about the importance of community engagement to the institutional and community audiences.

The executive leadership also employed substantive strategies for integrating community engagement into various operational aspects of an institution. The first strategy was prioritizing community engagement in the vision statement, calling for an institution to be “one of the leading comprehensive universities in the nation, distinctive for its contributions to the understanding of learning and for the creation and study of innovative partnerships to promote educational, social, economic, and cultural advancement in

the region”; “a sustainable bridge to the future through leadership, stewardship and service to the world”; and to have a mission of

bringing together an increasingly diverse and talented student body, faculty, and staff to form a learning community that, along with community partners, involves its members in active learning, scholarly discourse, and reflection. Through engaged excellence [Z] creates opportunities for students to display leadership, civic engagement, social responsibility, and effective citizenship.

It was not unusual to see such statements as:

Many offices and programs have mission statements that emphasize mutually beneficial relationships between [P] university and diverse communities.... describe a pervasive commitment to engagement activities such as opportunities for life-long learning, meaningful student experiences beyond the campus, partnerships with community organizations, and reciprocal collaborations with public agencies, non-profit associations and commercial endeavors.

The second strategy was to dedicate resources to community engagement: for example, setting aside “more than \$1.6 million of internal funding to community engagement activities and infrastructure”; giving “the consistent, fixed-line funding of... centers whose major focus is community engagement”; devoting specific funding for “faculty for the Civic-Engagement and Leadership minor”; channeling “an unrestricted grant to support service-learning on campus providing momentum to increase the number of faculty utilizing community engagement in their courses”; creating “the position... to coordinate institutional outreach initiatives and to foster campus-wide attention to the topic”; and establishing “new, fully-funded offices... and several additional centers to facilitate engagement via communications and partnerships.”

The third strategy was formalizing community engagement into capacity building, such that “new faculty are specifically asked about their own personal level of civic commitment as well as the pedagogy of service learning” during the interview process, and service is recognized as “a scholarly area” and taken as “the conceptual framework for... promotion in rank guidelines and for the

annual assessment of faculty work”. In some cases, “the executive leadership has approved a civic-engagement matrix generated by a faculty committee [and] departments and colleges use this document in identifying levels of civic engagement and rewarding these activities in merit and tenure/promotion evaluations.”

Finally, the executive leadership brought to life the institutional commitment to community engagement by integrating community engagement into academics where “service [is built] into the admissions process and service scholarships are given through the Admissions Office”; “the core values of Service and Learning have been formally integrated into the curriculum... which requires students to engage in purposeful activities outside the classroom”; “each athletic team [is required] to participate in service, to document their reflections, and to record their time spent at an off-campus site”; and “each student will have completed at least one service-learning/civic engagement designated course before approval for graduation.”

Strategic Planning and Structuring

As noted in the Research Purpose and Questions section, we asked questions about the roles of strategic planning and structuring in the institutionalization of community engagement. Our data revealed the centrality of strategic planning and structuring in institutionalizing community engagement. The executive leadership in each of the leading institutions used strategic planning processes to set the tone, establish a vision, specify goals, direct resources (space, finance, and human capital), and provide a mechanism for other groups to exert leadership for community engagement. The strategic planning process aligned the purposes and plans of units with those of the institution but also supported autonomy:

The goals of the institutional plan are implemented at the next levels down in divisional and departmental annual operational plans.... Specific objectives and targets are further detailed in departmental operational plans, but are guided by definitions and expectations of service-learning established at the institutional level.

For some institutions, “guiding documents at the program level reflect the same intent and individual departments outline community engagement needed to fit their priorities.” In terms of structuring for community engagement, the data revealed that insti-

tutions varied: Some have a single coordinating unit, and others have multiple coordinating units on campus. In contrast to Welch and Saltmarsh's (2013) infrastructure analysis focusing on campus centers of community engagement, our categorization is cast more broadly and attends to the connections between the major entities upon which the infrastructure of supporting, advancing, and executing community engagement is anchored. The typology is heuristic and not intended to eliminate possible overlapping in real situations. The four types of infrastructure are (1) centralized; (2) quasi-centralized; (3) diffused; and (4) a hybrid model of complex, targeted, yet diffused units. In a centralized structure, one predominant entity is responsible for campuswide coordination of community engagement, including but not limited to service-learning or applied research, such as an office or a center (see Figure 1). Two examples are provided here:

[X] university has created an Office of Regional Stewardship to support and advance community engagement on an institution-wide basis.

The Community Programs Center (CPC) serves as [Y] University's campus-wide coordinating infrastructure to support and advance community engagement.

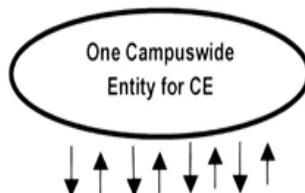


Figure 1. Centralized infrastructure for community engagement (CE).

In a quasi-centralized structure, two or three parallel entities align with the three key organizational divisions: academic affairs, public or government relations, and institutional advancement (see Figure 2). Each entity is a centralized body that coordinates engagement within the respective division. For instance,

The Office of Government and Community Relations... oversees those aspects of community engagement involving communications and relationships with com-

munity leaders, civic and community associations and organizations... and local, state and federal government officials; the [X] Center supports and advances community engagement in the form of service, service-learning, advocacy and justice education.

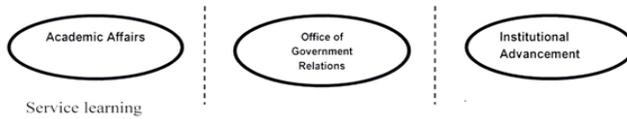


Figure 2. Quasi-centralized infrastructure for community engagement (CE). The dotted lines indicate the relative independence among entities as they support and advance CE within each respective domain.

The diffused infrastructure has no central entity for coordinating community engagement. However, the extent to which the infrastructure is diffused varies: (1) A network comprises connected entities that communicate and collaborate closely; (2) a satellite system is an infrastructure embracing a number of offices and/or centers, each coordinating a specific aspect of community engagement and reporting to separate leadership, with no obvious or limited collaboration with each other (see Figure 3). In the following two examples, the first is the network type, and the second is the satellite type.

The [Y] college has funded a series of offices, centers, and initiatives that act in concert to support its mission of community engagement. Working under the general direction of the President's Cabinet and Council these offices collaboratively engage students, faculty, and staff in specific projects and on-going programs with and for the community.

There are four major centers and offices on campus coordinating community service. The Office of [X] serves to coordinate all sectors of the university that sustain relationships with the community.... The Center [Y]... oversees the various service-learning activities of the university.... The [Z] office... oversees all the non-academic volunteer opportunities for students to interact with their local community.... The Office [U]... oversees all the global opportunities for the university community to serve their world. [V program of] Work

Study coordinates free tutoring for hundreds of local school children as well as other programs benefiting the community.

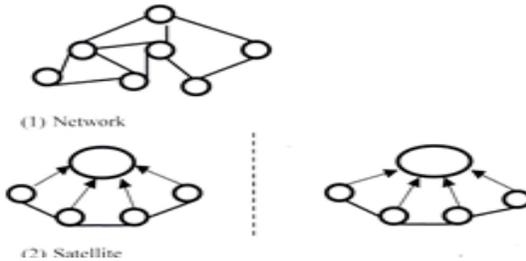


Figure 3. Diffused infrastructure for community engagement (CE).

Last, the hybrid, as the name implies, is an infrastructure combining centralized and diffused characteristics (see Figure 4). For instance,

[X] University has both a centralized infrastructure to support community engagement and a network of interdisciplinary and/or programmatic frameworks that coordinate specific partnerships and opportunities for community engagement.... Campus-wide infrastructure: Initiated by the Office of the President in 2006, each College has appointed a Community Liaison Officer to advance and report on community engagement. Fifteen Community Liaison Officers are active across campus. The Office of Planning and University Outreach coordinates the University's strategic planning process and develops implementation plans for projects, including community engagement projects.... The Office of University Relations is the central communication point between the University and our community.... Interdisciplinary Infrastructure: The Division of Research has established six interdisciplinary Research Clusters that encourage faculty to collaborate across traditional boundaries to work more effectively with industry, other research organizations and the community addressing issues of intellectual, scientific, social, economic, environmental and cultural importance. One of the clusters is Community Advancement and Education.... Focused Infrastructure: The Office [A] in

College [B]... manages community partnerships with over 500 human service agencies. The [C] Program coordinates student volunteer opportunities across the University and throughout the [Y] region. . . . The Office [D] in the College [E] has six administrative staff and two faculty who coordinate all community outreach efforts. The [Z] Alliance coordinates the interdisciplinary efforts of more than 20 energy-related institutes and centers on campus with over 150 faculty to serve the needs of the energy industry.

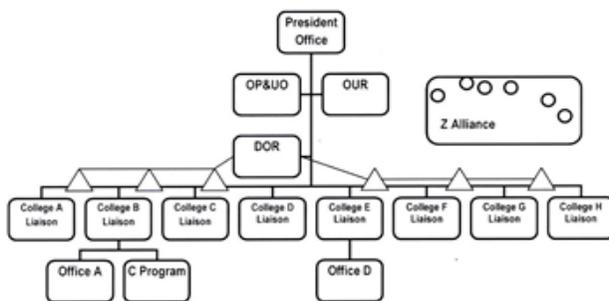


Figure 4. Hybrid infrastructure for community engagement. OP&UO = Office of Planning and University Outreach; OUR = Office of University Relations; DOR = Division of Research. The graph is modified based on the example provided (not all 15 colleges were graphed). The circles represent centers. No lines are drawn from the centers to Z Alliance to represent connections, which are represented by positioning the circles and Z Alliance within the same frame. The six triangles represent the six interdisciplinary Research Clusters, connecting various colleges and being coordinated by DOR.

Generally, the Carnegie-classified institutions enjoyed pervasive engagement efforts but preferred centralized coordination and advancement for reasons of agenda setting, resource efficiency, and unit benefits. Institutions with decentralized infrastructure tended to establish a centralized entity responsible for community engagement indicated in their strategic plan. Comprehensive institutions such as land-grant state universities tended to have a hybrid infrastructure for community engagement coordination. A cross-cycle analysis revealed that, compared to the 2008 cycle, more institutions in the 2010 cycle had their coordinating infrastructure centralized along the key organizational divisions (academic affairs, student affairs, and public or government relations or institutional advancement)—as indicated by a significant increase

in the number of institutions with a quasi-centralized infrastructure (almost triple: from seven to 18).

Discussion

In this section, the major characteristics of distributed leadership (see Table 1 in the Literature Review section) serve as the underlying threads for our discussion on understanding institutional leadership distribution for engagement. In sum, these characteristics include process/relational-focused, multiple-sourced, expertise-oriented, and contextual relevant.

Expertise-Based Leadership

The data revealed primarily rhetorical leadership practices for community engagement at the executive level, such as delivering public speeches and serving on boards and committees. A marriage of personal and institutional commitment for community engagement at the executive level is limited. The possibility exists that leadership suffers dissimulation without attachment and sincere commitment (*Sandmann & Plater, 2009*). Nonetheless, the prevalence of rhetoric practices in leading community-engaged institutions suggests significance for this aspect. It is not our intention here to dismiss the legitimate concerns over the superficiality of leaders' engagement rhetoric; rather, we suggest that the distributed leadership approach allows us to look at the issue from a different angle—one that is based on expertise and synergy.

Distributed leadership acknowledges that leadership is shared and is grounded on people leading when and where they have expertise (*Spillane, 2006*). Viewing the institution as a system, we ask ourselves these questions: Who is most likely to have the best knowledge of symbolic practice? Who is most likely to have the highest public credibility to solicit and secure external funding? Who is most likely to be equipped with knowledge, experience, and skills dealing with politics? Who is most likely to be in a position to access resources and information and reach a broad audience? Our findings suggest that the answer is the executive leaders. This is not an attempt to deny or devalue the important contributions that other leaders make to the institutionalization and advancement of community engagement. However, applying the expertise-based premise, we recognize that distributed leadership supports a more manageable and effective practice “stretched over” multiple appointed (i.e., executive) as well as de facto leaders (*Spillane, 2006*). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that executive leaders,

because of their professional lives and positional powers, are most likely to have the expertise for setting trends, establishing institutional identity, convincing governmental entities, establishing public trustworthiness, and garnering public and private investments. Being public figures, the executive leaders are the public and internal institutional faces, and their voices matter, especially when it comes to the institutionalization of community engagement where the scope is wide (all the constituents on and off the campus) and the scale is large (systemwide).

Leadership for Synergy

The data indicated that those in executive leadership positions employ substantive strategies of financial support, personnel policy, strategic planning, and structural configuration for integrating community engagement into various operational aspects of the institution. Other formal and informal leaders are involved in community engagement through various channels within the institution like “a series of offices, centers, and initiatives acting in concert to support its mission of community engagement” (Case 70, 2008), on various fronts like “a multi-faceted approach to coordinating its multiple engagement endeavors.... Each effort is advanced by a distinct administrative unit; however, each unit works closely with the others and many initiatives are shared” (Case 35, 2010). In terms of infrastructure, Carnegie-classified institutions generally enjoy pervasive engagement efforts *but* prefer centralized coordination for community engagement. Although pervasive engagement and centralized coordination may seem paradoxical, under the tenets of distributed leadership, formal leadership *roles* are designated based on expertise. Gronn’s (2000) distinction between numerical and concertive action, as well as Robinson’s (2009) three indications of distributed leadership, shed light on our understanding of the multiplicity of actors, leadership roles, and leadership behaviors involved in community engagement.

In the data, multiple individuals, whether in designated roles (the executive leaders, senior leaders, center directors, etc.) or not (faculty, students, community members, etc.), have enacted similar leadership *behaviors*, such as fund raising, endorsing, and coordinating. These behaviors should not be confused with roles. From a distributive perspective, the redundancy of behaviors shared by multiple individuals does not necessarily lead to organizational improvement or, in our case, community engagement advancement. As the data suggested, “collaborative efforts have been around events, programs, or grants and not necessarily to estab-

lish a University-wide agenda for community engagement” (Case 25, 2008). The institutions that have changed from a diffused to a more centralized infrastructure recognize “the need for a centralized point of entry as well as coordination and tracking of [community engagement] efforts” (Case 25, 2008) and “the need for a governance structure, which enables joint leadership positions and cross fertilization across [X] University.... [so that] enhance[d] campus/community collaboration and information sharing can be regularly assured and maximized” (Case 90, 2008). The leadership for the institutionalization of community engagement requires orchestration (*Harris, 2008*) so that different sources of leadership (informal and formal) are consciously managed and synergistically connected (*Gronn, 2003*).

Contexts

The who and how of leadership distribution varies depending on functions to be performed, their complexity, and their organizational context (*Leithwood et al., 2007*). As revealed in our data, certain colleges or centers have taken the lead in community engagement whereas the designated office, such as the Office of Community Engagement, appears to be secondary. For example,

The Office of Community Engagement was created within the Provost’s Office.... What has emerged in the last decade is a network of departments and units that are involved in community engagement at multiple levels.... The Service-Learning Center (SLC). . . . The Career Development Office... The [X] Center for Christian Scholarship.

The community engagement projects may require particular types of expertise available in these specific colleges or centers.

A distributed perspective considers leadership a “fluid and emergent, rather than a fixed, phenomenon” (*Gronn, 2000, p. 324*) and recognizes that aspects of a situation “enable and constrain leadership practice” (*Spillane, 2006, p. 4*). Institutions with multiple campuses and/or extensive community partnerships are less likely to have a centralized infrastructure with a centralized leadership and more likely to develop a diffused infrastructure with more local leadership. For instance,

[X] University is not only a huge institution [24,000 students and another 13,000 faculty/staff], but it is a

highly decentralized institution, and as such, the best-fit coordinating infrastructure is a 'Network' of closely connected entities, spanning the campus and involving several departments.

Another example:

[Y] University has [multiple] campuses.... There is not one central coordinating office at [Y] University.... there are numerous institutional structures which support community engagement. Under the Dean of Students, there is an office of career planning and community engagement. The director of this office deals with purely volunteer, non-credit opportunities which become available to students. Another function under the Dean of Students is coordination of the work of AmeriCorps and Vista workers.... Another aspect of the Dean of Students' area which deals with community engagement is overseeing the Associated Student Body organization, which organizes several community activities during the year.... Under many of the academic departments, there are Advisory Committees representing members of the community.

The infrastructural change in community engagement coordination and advancement reflects a systemic adjustment of the institution under various organizational circumstances.

Conclusions and Implications

By investigating the leaders of the leading institutions in community engagement and their strategies for leading and institutionalizing engagement, this study explored the who and how questions—questions that are fundamental for understanding and in turn informing and advancing practice, research, and policy. Situated in a collegial culture characterized by professional autonomy, community engagement in higher education has to recognize holistic efforts that involve multiple players, aligned goals, and collaborative operations. This study revealed that the rich and complex nature of community engagement entails multiple appointed and de facto leaders. Community engagement cuts across not only the boundaries between institutional divisions (and/or academic departments, and/or offices) but also the boundaries between campuses and communities. Concerted efforts

along the contour of expertise support a more effective practice of boundary management and expansion for community engagement advancement. Strategic planning and infrastructure alignment allow the institutionalization of community engagement to occur systemically. Moreover, the who and how of leadership distribution for community engagement vary depending on the institutional context (such as size, organization, and physical location), the functions to be performed for engagement, and the complexity of those functions.

Distributed leadership, as a conceptual framework focusing on the multiple resources for leadership and the fluidity of leadership boundaries, provides a more comprehensive picture of community engagement leadership in practice. Its foundation—that people lead when and where they have expertise—makes more sense in community-engaged leadership, where the *how* of leadership matters as much as *whether* it takes place. Distributed leadership's inclusion of context supports communality and reciprocity, which are fundamental for community engagement. Nevertheless, distributed leadership may pose challenges to leadership and institutional accountability, which is determined by positions rather than aligned with context and expertise. Also, in reality, people's expertise may not be apparent in ways reflecting theoretical conceptions in distributed leadership.

This study raises additional questions that hold potential for further research. An ethnographic study of formal and informal leaders as they develop activities, interactions, and responsibilities involved in a community-engagement project might yield insights into how those performing distributed but concerted leadership are prepared for this function and progress throughout the process. In other words, thick description (*Geertz, 1973*) helps reveal the “black box” of leadership distribution involved in community engagement. Future inquiry is also needed on the relationships between leaders' morality and positionality, and leadership succession and community engagement's implementation and advancement. Further research might look into the relationships between the characteristics of the community (or communities) the institution serves and the outcomes of distributed leadership in community engagement. What historical, economic, political, and cultural factors of the communities influence the institutionalization and advancement of community engagement in institutions? How are these contextual components interpreted in institutional policies and organization? Furthermore, future research using the distributed leadership framework holds potential for examining

leadership in diversity, innovation and change, and globalization of higher education organizations in which the leadership practices share similar functions and complexity with those of community engagement.

In addition to informing the practice of leaders at engaged institutions and future research for scholars in the field, this study raises questions for policymakers regarding accountability. What mechanisms are available for evaluating leadership for engagement? How do these measurements speak to the reality of leadership practice in community engagement? How do policies affect leadership in theory (structured roles) and leadership in practice? This study also indicates directions for future research in the practice of selection, support, and professional development of engagement leaders. How do individuals and teams understand leadership for community engagement? How do institutions and individuals “learn” to become engaged? How is expertise (of individuals and teams) identified, sustained, and expanded? What are the roles of community (or communities) in leadership development and sustainment? What are the roles of professional organizations in educating, supporting, and facilitating faculty in community engagement for leadership roles?

In sum, a distributed leadership perspective holds potential for better understanding the complexity of the contexts, the fluidity of the boundaries, and the multiplicity and concerted efforts involved in community engagement leadership. A distributed leadership framework also provides a common vocabulary to facilitate an open and continuous dialogue between researchers and practitioners. When that dialogue and shared meaning is found, theory and practice will truly connect, enhancing both. The challenge is to build on and move beyond this work to do so.

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