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THE philanthropist LE PHILANTHROPE

a place for nonprofit sector discussion

volume 26 • 1 / 2014

VOLUME 26 • 1 / 2014

THE philanthropist LE PHILANTHROPE

The Philanthropist/le philanthrope is an online journal for practitioners, scholars, supporters, and others engaged in the nonprofit sector in Canada. It publishes articles and useful information about the sector's important contributions to our communities, our country, and our world.

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www.thephilanthropist.ca • ISSN: 0316-3849

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Larry Gemmel

Since its introduction in the Winter 2011 edition of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, the theory of "Collective Impact" presented by FSG consultants John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011) has attracted considerable attention in the United States, Canada, and around the world. According to Regina Starr Ridley, Publishing Director, "'Collective Impact' is *SSIR*'s most viewed article with close to 300,000 page views, more than any other article *SSIR* has published." The framework certainly has resonance with many people in the social sector, and its potential promise of fostering innovation and addressing complex social issues has spawned a virtual movement of those adopting the approach and eager to learn more. But is Collective Impact merely a re-branding of collaborative approaches that have been used for years, or does this model provide new insights and techniques that will in fact break through on some of the most intractable problems affecting western societies?

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In this special issue of *The Philanthropist,* we set out to explore Collective Impact from a Canadian perspective in considerable depth and detail, and we think you will find the results to be interesting and thought provoking. Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to speak with many people to try to learn more and get a handle on Collective Impact, and I found that there was indeed a strong current of interest in the framework, along with some healthy scepticism.

In a conversation in December 2013, Tim Brodhead, former President & CEO of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, suggested that "This is really a corrective to some of the pathologies of traditional philanthropy. Most philanthropy is driven by the very personal ideas and needs of the donors, whereas Collective Impact has the potential to create more community-based solutions and approaches." Tim thought that Collective Impact could also be a corrective to our over-reliance on government to solve problems but pointed out "that success often depends on a level of maturity and skills at the community level" and that backbone organizations must first and foremost be learning organizations dedicated to creating a sense of shared responsibility. He saw a challenge in the "centralizing tendency" of the approach, and the risk of "funders trying to avoid responsibility, or ending up exercising too much centralizing control and power."

Funding Collective Impact

Indeed, funding was one of the challenges we identified early on. Personally, I felt that the increasing awareness of the Collective Impact framework would be very helpful because it provides explicit recognition of the important role of backbone organizations and the need for such "infrastructure" in supporting and sustaining collaborative ventures. In "Collective Impact: Venturing on an Unfamiliar Road," Hilary Pearson, President & CEO of Philanthropic Foundations of Canada, explores the challenges that private funders face in getting involved in Collective Impact initiatives and describes some of the experience to date in Canada, finding engagement to be limited so far due to the different and demanding nature of these projects. Cathy Mann, a fundraising consultant with more than 25 years of experience, looks at funding from the recipient's point of view in "The Role of Philanthropy in Collective Impact." Cathy is less optimistic than I am and feels that there are still few funders in Canada who are prepared to support backbone infrastructure. In her article she explores current approaches to fundraising for Collective Impact and concludes that many of the basic principles still apply.

Evolutionary, not revolutionary

Collaboration has become common in the nonprofit sphere and is encouraged by funders as a response to the complexity and interdependence of social issues as well as the scarcity of resources. But herein lies a common misunderstanding: Collaboration is not about eliminating duplication – indeed true collaboration demands more of its participants because it requires them to work together in different ways, some of which may in fact require additional resources and effort. And collaboration is just the starting point: Collective Impact is really all about how to get from collaboration to collective action.

I call Collective Impact evolutionary, not revolutionary, in that it very much builds on extensive experience over decades of the arduous and complex work of creating transformative change at the community level. Along with FSG, particular credit is often given to Anne Kubisch, who led the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change for many years, the work championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the principles of Asset-Based Community Development developed by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann. In conversation, John Kania has stated that Collective Impact "is squarely in the systems change category" and suggested in our interview that "the five conditions of Collective Impact gave language to what many people already intuitively knew, but in a way where we can now have consistent conversations about this work, and people understand what it takes to do this work in a rigorous way."

In our opening article, *The Promise and Peril of Collective Impact*, Liz Weaver, Vice President at the Tamarack Institute, reflects on Collective Impact from her experience with Vibrant Communities and other anti-poverty initiatives. Liz provides a detailed description and explanation of the conditions and pre-conditions that are needed to effectively implement Collective Impact, which she believes holds the promise for progressive and substantial community impact at scale, but she

also points out the perils in misapplying or mismanaging the labels and concepts, underfunding the initiatives, and not recognizing the essential long-term nature of the approach. Liz has suggested that Collective Impact is "deceptively simple" and that initiatives will take a minimum of five to ten years to mature.

Collective Impact is drawing on prior experience in other ways, as people struggle with the challenges of guiding and managing such initiatives. A case in point is governance because, in many ways, it requires new and different ways of thinking as described in a number of our articles. Interestingly, the path in search of governance for Collective Impact has led Liz Weaver and others to circle back a few years to the Constellation Model of Collaborative Social Change, described by Toronto-based Tonya Surman in a June 2006 paper, *Constellation Collaboration: A Model for Multi-organizational Partnership* (2006) for the Centre for Social Innovation and emerging from her experience going back to 2001 with the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment. Further developed in partnership with Mark Surman, Tonya took the model to the network level in 2007 as Co-Founder of the Ontario Nonprofit Network and continues to be a leading figure in the field of social innovation. I think this example nicely illustrates the spirit of inquiry and appreciation that infuses the Collective Impact movement, which could be characterized by Isaac Newton's famous protest; "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

From community impact to collective impact

My own background is primarily with United Way Centraide organizations, and I was intrigued, though not surprised, to discover that United Way is embracing the Collective Impact framework as the latest iteration of its community impact mission. In its June 2012 white paper *Charting a Course for Change: Advancing Education, Income and Health through Collective Impact*, United Way Worldwide set out its ambitious goals for 2018, and President and CEO Brian Gallagher explicitly called for a Collective Impact approach in his opening letter: "Of course, United Ways can't do it alone. We must work with our community partners. Together, we must tap into people's aspirations, focus on issues and underlying conditions for change, and bring people and organizations together to create collective impact."

In Mark Kramer's foreword to *Charting a Course for Change* (2012), he states that "United Way Worldwide is well positioned to lead this sort of cross-sector endeavour, and this report is a good starting point…" He goes on to conclude that:

> When United Ways create and sustain collective impact they redefine their role in the community – truly becoming the backbone of community change efforts. It is not merely an opportunity for United Ways to take on this role – it is a necessity if we are to meet the urgent challenges our society faces today. Collective impact will bring renewed vitality to United Ways, enabling them to strengthen their communities in ways we have never before seen. This vision, I believe, can – and must – become the United Way of the future.

United Way Australia is enthusiastically embracing the Collective Impact framework, adopting the language and approach and engaging actively with the Centre for Social Impact to share knowledge and ideas. In the foreword to their 2012 Community Impact Report *Collaborating for Community Impact*, CEO Doug Taylor reports that "Like all organizations investing and engaged in social impact, we are learning. This is particularly the case for United Way as we pioneer new forms of collaboration increasingly referred to as Collective Impact which presents another important dimension of work to be closely evaluated" (United Way Australia, 2012).

In this special issue, we feature two articles that relate stories about United Way Centraide experience here in Canada. In a deep reflection on more than 25 years of working with collaborative community development projects in Québec, Lyse Brunet describes her experience at Centraide du Grand Montréal and Le Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon in *Apprendre à danser le tango sur un fil de fer: agir selon une approche d'impact collectif (Learning to Tango on a Tightrope: Implementing a Collective Impact Approach* – We are pleased to provide an English translation for this French language article.) At Centraide Lyse was directly involved with three large-scale Collective Impact initiatives focused on creating change at the community level in Montréal. As the first executive director of *Avenir d'enfants*, Lyse was at the heart of developing an innovative program that used a Collective Impact approach to community mobilization in support of young children and their families throughout Québec. In creating a $400 million public-philanthropic partnership with the Québec government, this program was not without controversy, but it firmly established the importance of early childhood development and intervention in Québec and ultimately supported 128 local communities in 16 regions, engaging more than 2,000 local organizations acting on behalf of 300,000 children.

In *United Way and Success By 6: Growing up with Collective Impact*, Michael McKnight and Deborah Irvine from United Way of the Lower Mainland provide a retrospective analysis of the 11-year history of a province-wide collaborative approach to early childhood development in British Columbia that successfully engaged the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Of particular importance are more than 100 Early Years Councils and Aboriginal Councils that support over 500 communities, a level of community engagement that has completely changed the paradigm of delivering province-wide services and has become a model for other initiatives. Their analysis also provides concrete examples of policy and systems change that resulted directly from the Collective Impact approach.

Creating innovation

Innovation has been a pre-occupation of many in the social sector for some time now, and another aspect of Collective Impact that I found intriguing was its promise of fostering innovation in dealing with complex and "wicked" problems. This is achieved in several ways that are described by Kania, Kramer, and their colleagues in the original *SSIR* articles. One way is through cross-sectoral engagement, which tries to get all of the parties to the same table, many talking together for the first time. Many of the articles in this issue touch on the ways in which Collective

Impact can create new ideas and approaches. While the initiative predates Collective Impact theory, Roisin Reid does a thorough job in *The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement: Unlikely Allies Pursuing Conservation and Sustainable Development in Canada's Boreal Regions* of applying a retrospective analysis to examine how this unique agreement came about and how the initiative is taking a very different approach by getting environmentalists and forestry companies working together.

Evaluating Collective Impact

Evaluation plays a key role in Collective Impact initiatives, both as part of the immediate feedback loop from shared measurement, which is critical in identifying and encouraging innovation, as well as to measure the long-term effectiveness of these projects.

Ted Jackson, Associate Professor in the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University, is a recognized expert in evaluation and suggested to me in a conversation in March 2014 that we needed to take a long-term view:

> My own view is that Collective Impact needs a good 10 years of implementation for the sector to really understand what it offers and how to do it well. Fifteen or twenty years would be even better. But for Collective Impact to embed itself in the nonprofit sector deeply enough to be tested over 10 years – to have sufficient staying power and resilience as a new paradigm – it will have to address not just the learning dimensions of evaluation, but also the accountability dimensions. That is to say, when the parties to a Collective Impact initiative establish results targets and indicators, and theories of change, it is not good enough for them to "slide" off those targets and theories in the name of complexity, learning and innovation – and onto new ones. What is needed is for the collaborators to be held accountable for achieving their original targets and theories, while still adjusting their initiative as they proceed forward. I'm a little concerned that taking a purely developmental evaluation approach, which has many strengths, could result in marginalizing the accountability function. If that happens, funders won't stay in the game, nonprofits won't improve, and the Collective Impact approach itself will wither, unfulfilled.

In order to explore this important aspect of Collective Impact in more detail, we invited Mark Cabaj, who has been involved in evaluating programs and social change initiatives since 1994 and was an "early adopter" of developmental evaluation, to write about the challenges in *Evaluating Collective Impact: Five Simple Rules*. Don't be fooled by the title: Based on his considerable expertise and experience, Mark provides a very detailed and comprehensive explanation of five significant evaluation issues that potentially affect all Collective Impact endeavours, and we believe that his critical analysis and original thinking is an important contribution to the field.

Shared measurement

Closely related to evaluation, the shared measurement condition of Collective Impact is both critical and challenging. In its simplest form, shared measurement involves agreeing on which indicators participants will contribute to and monitor in order to assess progress towards the agreed goal. But as Kania and Kramer suggested in *Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Embraces Complexity* (2013), it is the process itself of engaging participants in collective action, focusing attention and resources, and revealing which strategies and activities are actually working that is so critical to creating real change. Kania pointed out in a recent interview with *The Philanthropist* that shared measurement is often misunderstood because people focus on collecting quantitative indicator data, but that they need to also focus on learning and look at the "why" through continuous communication.

In his article *Community Knowledge: The Building Blocks of Collective Impact*, Lee Rose, Director, Community Knowledge at Community Foundations of Canada, suggests a potential solution to the problem of the cost and complexity of shared measurement that Mark Cabaj identifies. Drawing on experience with *Vital Signs* and other collaborative community-wide data sharing approaches, Lee asserts that in many cases the required data already exists in the community, but that the real power of community knowledge is found in our ability to organize and interpret this data to give it new meaning and value.

Building capacity

There has been tremendous interest in learning about Collective Impact, and Tamarack is engaged in a partnership with the Aspen Institute and FSG to provide resources and support for initiatives and practitioners. The first *Champions for Change – Leading a Backbone Organization for Collective Impact* conference in Canada was convened by Tamarack in Toronto in May 2013 and attracted 141 participants. This year's conference in Vancouver in April 2014 had 247 people registered and was sold out with a waiting list. Related workshops developed by Mark Cabaj and Liz Weaver on *Evaluating Community Impact: Capturing and Making Sense of Community Outcomes* will be held in Halifax and Winnipeg in 2014 and are already full to capacity with 100 participants and more than 20 people on the waiting list. Paul Born, Liz Weaver, Mark Cabaj, and other Tamarack associates are busy responding to an increasing number of requests for workshops and speaking engagements focusing on numerous aspects of Collective Impact.

Innoweave, an award-winning collaborative capacity building program designed and delivered by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, SiG, and more than 150 partners from all sectors across Canada, has added new workshops and resources to help groups of community organizations develop Collective Impact initiatives. Drawing from this experience, Aaron Good and Doug Brodhead wrote *Innoweave and Collective Impact: Collaboration is just the Beginning*, which describes why Innoweave added a Collective Impact module to its offerings and what it hopes

to achieve, citing examples of organizations that are successfully using Collective Impact to tackle complex problems.

International perspectives

While we are primarily bringing a Pan-Canadian perspective to our inquiry, we were also cognizant that Collective Impact has generated worldwide interest and attention, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Australia, where the Centre for Social Innovation and United Way Australia have played a leading role in exploring the potential of Collective Impact. Key to this process have been two veterans of many social change initiatives, Kerry Graham and Dawn O'Neil, who have taken the lead in researching Collective Impact in the Australian context. We are fortunate to have just caught them in the "afterglow" of Australia's first-ever Collective Impact conference in February 2014, and in *Collective Impact: The Birth of an Australian Movement* they reflect on their findings and suggest that now is the time for a transformational "step" change to address marginalization and significant disadvantage. They both believe that the Collective Impact framework offers an opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration to create innovation and systems change in Australia, and that they are witnessing and fostering the birth of a movement.

Point/Counterpoint

Given the questions and scepticism about Collective Impact, it made sense for us to renew a popular feature from previous issues and invite Don Bourgeois, an advocate, writer, and former editor of *The Philanthropist*, and Paul Born, President of the Tamarack Institute, to face off on the question of whether Collective Impact is a new and innovative approach or merely a re-packaging of existing ideas about collaboration. The resulting commentary sets out the issues in an entertaining but serious way to round out the debate.

Q&A with John Kania and Fay Hanleybrown

Although we were primarily interested in a Canadian perspective, we were delighted to have the opportunity to interview two of the leading voices on Collective Impact, John Kania and Fay Hanleybrown of FSG, when they participated in the most recent *Champions for Change: Leading a Backbone Organization for Collective Impact* conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, in April 2014. In a conversation with Liz Weaver from Tamarack, John and Fay were generous with their comments as they described their latest experience and thinking about the Collective Impact phenomenon. It is particularly appropriate to conclude this special issue with their reflections on differences in approach between the United States and Canada and their interpretation of nuances in implementation as they continue to learn about "what it takes to do this work in a rigorous way."

Where to from here?

One of the themes that I heard frequently throughout this inquiry into Collective Impact was the desire to learn from each other, and I was delighted to find that this spirit infuses Tamarack and FSG as well. In our interview with John Kania and Fay Hanleybrown, they both emphasized how enthusiastic they were about the recent launch of a Collective Impact Forum, an online community designed to invite "collective impact practitioners and those interested in collective impact – from nonprofits, to funders, to people in government, to business leaders, and others – to come together to share challenges, problem-solve, and learn from each other." Seventeen hundred members have already joined the forum in the first month and more than 100 resource documents have been uploaded.

Tamarack has launched its own Community of Practice for Collective Impact practitioners and freely shares resources through its website and online communities. In addition to an active program of workshops scheduled across the Canada, the big news is the Collective Impact Summit to be held October 6-10 in Toronto. Designed as a hands-on learning event for practitioners and others interested in Collective Impact, the Summit will feature many of the leading thinkers from Canada and the United States in a five-day interactive conference.

As many of our authors have suggested, we look forward to continuing the conversations in communities across Canada and in future issues of *The Philanthropist*. As the African proverb suggests, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." That pretty much sums up Collective Impact for me.

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THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Liz Weaver

Summary

On the one hand, Collective Impact is deceptively simple: a clearly defined framework with three pre-conditions and five conditions and a growing body of experience about how such an approach can effectively address complex social issues. But as is often the case, the devil is in the details, and Liz Weaver provides a detailed analysis from an implementation perspective based on the 12 years' experience that Tamarack has had acting as the backbone organization for Vibrant Communities and now playing the lead role in Canada in providing support for the implementation and development of Collective Impact networks across the country.

Liz Weaver is the Vice President of Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, where she leads the Vibrant Communities Canada team and provides coaching, leadership, and support to community partners across Canada to utilize a Collective Impact approach to community development. Liz brings more than a decade of experience to this work and is recognized for her strength and experience in translating theory into practice. Email: Liz@tamarackcommunity.ca .

It has been just over two years since the first article about Collective Impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011) was published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Little did the authors, John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG, realize how quickly the Collective Impact framework would catch on and, in many ways, go viral as a framework for collaborative planning tables trying to tackle some of the most complex issues facing communities.

There are many who say that the Collective Impact framework, consisting of three pre-conditions and five conditions, is exactly how many collaborative tables are already operating and that there is nothing really new or innovative in the design. Indeed, staff at Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement viewed the Collective Impact framework as a clear and concise way of describing the place-based poverty reduction efforts called Vibrant Communities that we have been advancing in Canada over the past 12 years.

But there is something different, unique, and challenging about Collective Impact. Its application, employing all five conditions effectively and simultaneously to drive change forward, requires collaborative tables to work simultaneously within two spheres – both from an organizational impact perspective and also with a systems level lens. This article provides a frame for understanding and employing Collective Impact as an approach to collaborative community change from an implementation perspective. It will look at both the promise of effectively applying the framework and also the peril in its misapplication.

Communities are complex

It should be noted that Collective Impact works best when the issue being tackled is complex and dynamic. Complex issues are such that they have multiple root causes, there are many players already at the table, and there may not be a direct line between an intervention and a result. Communities are equally dynamic and complex. The leadership in communities is always in flux, the connections between the different players can vary over time, and sustaining and building trusting relationships to enable different sectors to work well together is often challenging. Collective Impact, as a framework, seems to work well in these complex and dynamic situations. In "Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity," Kania and Kramer (2013) identify three specific strategies to employ in dynamic contexts: collective vigilance, collective learning, and collective action. They recognize the tension between being flexible and responsive while continuing to stay focused on the agreed end goal of collective action. Collective vigilance, learning, and action help to push the collaborative tables from talk into action. Effective implementation of Collective Impact therefore requires people to be willing to work and do things differently as they very consciously move toward Collective Impact.

The pre-conditions for Collective Impact

Collective Impact, as a framework for community change and impact, consists of three pre-conditions and five conditions. The three pre-conditions include having influential leaders, a sense of urgency for the issue, and adequate resources. These necessary pre-conditions are often overlooked but have been foundational to many of the Vibrant Communities initiatives across Canada. Finding and engaging influential leaders can be critical to Collective Impact approaches. These champions bring with them a number of strategic assets, including a sphere of influence that can be tapped for resources and funding and connections to broaden the network and lend credibility to the collaborative effort. A collaborative effort that effectively engages influential leaders and their spheres of influence can ramp up more quickly.

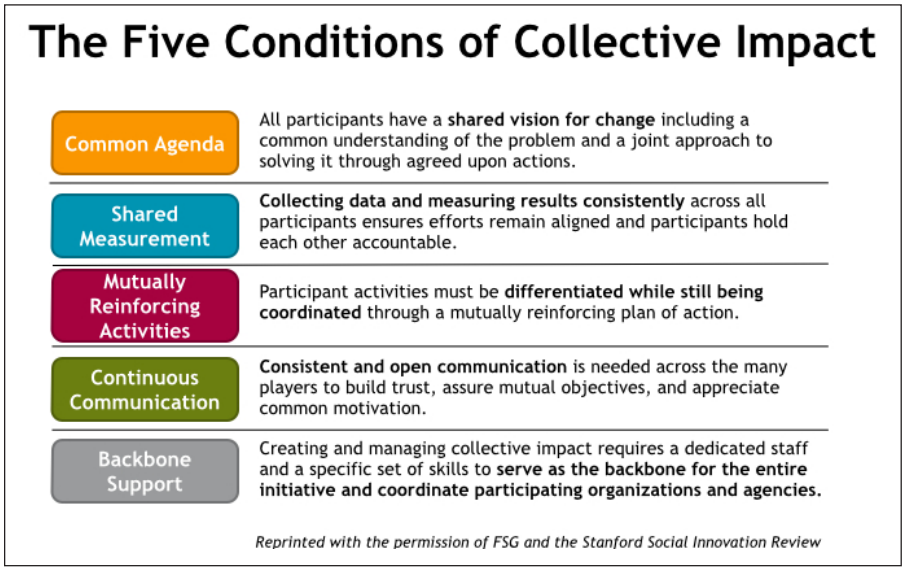
The second pre-condition is the urgency of the issue. For any type of collaborative change effort to get traction, the issue being tackled has to be perceived as either urgent or important to the community. This can be challenging, as there is so much "noise" and so many important issues out there in communities. Urgency identifies the need for data to inform the issue and as a key strategic tool. Consider the example of low birth weights of newborn babies. There is significant evidence linking low birth weights to educational achievement. If low birth weight children do poorly in school, they are less likely to graduate from high school, enter post-secondary education, and/or be successful in the workforce. Many low birth weight babies are born into families with economic and social disadvantages and face challenges throughout their lives. But how often is the issue of low birth weight considered a key economic challenge for a city as a whole and not just among those working directly in public health or social services? Urgency of the issue highlights the important work of utilizing data and research evidence to "connect the dots" and make the case that upstream interventions will have positive downstream consequences.

The third pre-condition for Collective Impact is adequate resources. The collaborative table needs to determine the appropriate level of resources required to effectively do

this work. Collective Impact efforts operate at the systems-change level and require the engagement of multiple partners and multiple strategies. Many collaborative tables undervalue what it takes to make effective progress within this sphere. A common strategy for many organizations is to try and undertake collaborative efforts as an add-on or a "side-of-the-desk" activity. As well, there is little funding available in Canada to resource the administrative or backbone functions to support the effective multi-sector collaboration required for Collective Impact, as these are often not considered to have direct impact on issues. Adequate resources must be in place in advance if Collective Impact initiatives are to succeed.

The five conditions of Collective Impact

Much has been written about the five conditions of Collective Impact: a common agenda; shared measurement; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communications; and, a backbone infrastructure. The articles "Collective Impact" and "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work" (Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012) provide a useful overview of these five conditions as well as examples of collaborative efforts effectively employing the framework.



The first three conditions – developing a common agenda, shared measurement, and mutually reinforcing activities – are inextricably linked. The common agenda sets the broad frame that all partners agree to act within. It should include an aspirational statement that describes an outcome that is beyond what any single partner can achieve alone. The goal of "Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child" drives the work of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, but is also a call to action that the Roundtable and community partners use to consider whether their efforts are indeed enhancing the lives of children and youth in the city. The common agenda also needs a clear statement that provides a focus for the measures of change the table envisions as well as the priority areas of its work. Finally, a common agenda should include the principles as to how the partners agree to work together to drive change.

The statement setting out a clear measure for change links directly to the second condition of shared measurement. Shared measurement involves all partners in reaching an agreement on the set of indicators or measures that they will all contribute to and use to ultimately demonstrate their progress. The Calgary Homeless Foundation's *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2008-2018* has identified that it is striving to ensure that "by January 29, 2018, an individual or family will stay in an emergency shelter or sleep outside for no longer than one week before moving into a safe, decent, affordable home with the support needed to sustain it" (Calgary Homeless Foundation, January 2011 Update). The Foundation has developed a shared measurement strategy that ensures that each partner around the table knows what progress is being made and what their contributions to this change are. Similarly, the Our Kids Network in Ontario's Halton Region has developed a data portal that allows its community partners, parents, teachers, and anyone concerned with the success of children in that region to access open source data that describes how children and their families are doing in 21 neighbourhoods. These two examples shine a light on the enormous potential of shared measurement to drive community change.

This collaborative approach leads naturally to mutually reinforcing activities. To achieve progress on a common agenda and shared measures, a coordinated set of actions is required that involves multiple stakeholders across a community. For example, if a community is seeking to increase high school graduation rates, it needs to engage strategic partners including the school board, parents, students, community support organizations, and employers. Isolated strategies have limited impacts; however, when these strategies are integrated and coordinated, it becomes possible to leverage the skills and resources of many players to successfully achieve impact.

The final two conditions required to achieve Collective Impact are continuous communication and a backbone infrastructure. Again, these elements are linked and integral to Collective Impact. Ensuring that multiple partners are strategically engaged requires a strong focus on communication. The partners need to know the impact of their contributions as well as those of others in the group, and they need to be able to mutually identify, in a timely way, those strategies that are having the greatest impact. Continuous communication is also needed to create community engagement and buy in. Sometimes effective strategies will emerge in the most unlikely places. When the broader community is engaged in the success and achievement of the project, they begin to work in a concerted way. This is often where the backbone can be most potent. Backbone infrastructure can help focus the Collective Impact effort on moving forward by keeping an eye on the overall vision and by understanding and tracking the strategies being employed. They can bring partners to the table around shared measurement strategies and mutually reinforcing activities. Working towards systems level change, the backbone infrastructure can also facilitate the development of the collective voice needed to identify and advocate for potential policy shifts.

The promise of Collective Impact

Collective Impact efforts are still in their early days, but there is a growing understanding about the value of applying Collective Impact as a framework to community change efforts and there is emerging evidence of the impact of these initiatives in both Canada and the United States. Vibrant Communities Canada, funded by the J.W. McConnell

Family Foundation with Tamarack and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy as key strategic partners, was collectively able to positively impact the lives of 202,931 households living in poverty in 13 cities in its first ten-year phase through a broad range of assets that includes: new skills & resources; improved social ties; and, direct benefits that enhance life circumstances for those living in poverty. In addition to the direct poverty-reducing initiatives of this work, many of the local poverty roundtables also influenced the design of provincial poverty strategies, which resulted in 53 substantive policy changes.

Source: Vibrant Communities Canada

In the United States, collaborative efforts that focus on educational achievement across the lifespan such as the Strive Partnership and the Seattle Roadmap Project are showing significant progress on a wide-range of indicators that are impacting children and improving school success. These and other Collective Impact initiatives are being documented as case studies by FSG and Tamarack to better understand how this approach actually works from an implementation perspective, and these are readily available on the websites listed at the end of this article.

The peril of Collective Impact

As much as Collective Impact approaches are showing a lot of promise, there are also some warning signs. As with any framework, there is scepticism by some that Collective Impact is nothing new, that it is merely a re-packaging of old ideas about collaboration, and that collaborative efforts using Collective Impact will not achieve the outcomes they promise or desire. What is clear, though, is that the current design and delivery of services through individual organizations are not moving the needle on many of the most vexing issues facing our communities, such as homelessness and poverty.

Another warning sign is the idea that every collaborative effort needs to use the Collective Impact framework as a way of organizing. The Collective Impact framework is best suited to collaborations focused on a complex community need, problem, or opportunity. It requires adequate human and financial resources to be implemented

effectively. It also requires the commitment by all participants that a Collective Impact approach is the most appropriate. The fact is, not every collaborative effort either has adequate resources or can operate effectively within a complex system that requires a high degree of commitment and coordination. Some collaborative efforts are necessarily more narrowly focused with shorter-term goals and commitments. These don't need a Collective Impact approach.

That being said, the likelihood of success of most collaborative efforts can be improved if one or more of the conditions defined by Collective Impact are used. Asking the questions "What measures will show that we are making progress?" or "How can we improve communications across partners?" are simple strategies that will undoubtedly enhance collaborative work. While not everyone who becomes interested in Collective Impact or attends a workshop adopts the framework, we believe that many come away with new ideas and understandings about collaborative work and community engagement.

It is also perilous for funders to ask collaborative tables to champion Collective Impact without understanding and investing in the backbone infrastructure. The backbone infrastructure is critical to aligning partners and purpose in Collective Impact. Without staff and key leadership support, Collective Impact efforts can flounder. In the early stages of Collective Impact, there is a great deal of negotiation that is required simply to bring partners to agreement around the common agenda, shared measurement approach, and mutually reinforcing activities. This is definitely not business as usual, but rather a new way of working and being that requires time and effort. A strong backbone is instrumental in continually moving the process forward, getting it unstuck, and holding the agreements of the engaged partners. This is an essential element of the process.

In the article, "Understanding the Value of a Backbone Organization in Collective Impact" (Turner, Merchant, Kania, & Martin, 2012), the authors tackled many of the preconceived notions about the role of backbone organizations. Organizations cannot simply appoint themselves to the backbone role. They work in service of the collaborative table. If a group declares itself as the backbone and, in doing so expects to advance its own agenda, then typically we will see partners vacate the table. Effectively advancing a Collective Impact initiative requires relationships of trust amongst participating partners. So, when organizations participating in a Collective Impact initiative act in ways that are primarily self-interested, they often fail to create the relationships of trust needed to ultimately be successful. It is perhaps this whole question of the most appropriate approach to the governance of Collective Impact initiatives that needs to be the subject of further thought and reflection as more organizations and individuals become engaged in these processes.

Final thoughts

Collective Impact suggests a useful set of conditions that provide simple rules for complex interventions. The devil, as they say, is in the details, and the way in which these conditions are implemented will affect the success of the Collective Impact framework in its ability to move the needle on a community challenge or need. As collaborative initiatives continue to emerge and apply the Collective Impact framework to their work, we continue to watch for the most effective tools and techniques that will improve the

probability of success. There are some promising results, even in the early application of Collective Impact. But there will also be some colossal failures as the conditions essential for Collective Impact are unevenly and incompletely applied.

During the first ten years of Vibrant Communities in Canada, we learned a lot about how local context informs application. Many of these lessons were shared across the "Poverty Reduction Community of Practice" that Tamarack hosted and which helped to build the collective capacity of all partners, but this was not by accident and required considerable effort by the coordinating teams and those most directly involved. FSG and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change have now created a Collective Impact Forum where they hope to capture and share how communities are applying Collective Impact. Tamarack is the Canadian partner for these efforts, and we will continue to listen, watch, and engage with communities as they take on the challenge of systems change using the Collective Impact framework.

While Collective Impact is showing promise and starting to deliver results, this approach is still in its early days, in large part because the problems that we are trying to tackle are large, complex, and challenging. While our society often seems to demand quick action, instant solutions, and immediate evidence of outcomes, in my own estimation Collective Impact initiatives require up to five years to fully develop and to begin showing concrete results. The longer-term nature of these initiatives needs to be understood by communities, participants, and funders because it requires commitment, investment, and determination. But the payoff will also be long term, as root causes are addressed, lives and systems are changed, and communities thrive.

Conclusion

The promise of Collective Impact lies within the simplicity of the approach or framework – three preconditions and five conditions – that, when executed effectively, can lead to progressive and substantial community impact at scale. The conditions seem both obvious and, in many ways, intuitive: a common agenda driving collective action, shared measurement to assure progress is being achieved, mutually reinforcing activities that ensure alignment and contribute to the goals, continuous communications, and a backbone infrastructure that coordinates and supports the collective efforts.

The simplicity of a Collective Impact approach belies the challenges that are embedded in the execution of working collectively on a complex community-change issue. Many organizations and collaborative planning tables think they are implementing collective impact when they focus on one or two of the conditions or include one or two sectors in their efforts.

This is not the intent of Collective Impact. The intent and innovation of Collective Impact is in implementing all five conditions in a focused and measured way with the intent of moving the needle (increasing or decreasing) on a complex community problem like poverty, educational outcomes, obesity, or neighbourhood renewal. The partners engaged have to believe that the collective effort will have the capacity to drive

the change. Collective Impact is about working differently. It is about understanding the complexity and nuances of the problem and using data intentionally and as a driver toward innovation and results.

That is also the peril of Collective Impact. Current systems and structures create barriers to the effective implementation of the five conditions of Collective Impact. These barriers include funding mechanisms that are short-term and focused on individual organizational outcomes; the need to get credit for the collaborative work; and, internal organizational structures that have a low tolerance for risk. Implementing Collective Impact also requires a different set of leadership skills.

Collective Impact is gaining worldwide popularity as a framework that can have significant impact in shifting problems that seem to be intractable. But there is also a healthy scepticism of it as an approach. As it continues to gain traction, it will be important to continue to gain greater clarity about what Collective Impact can effectively achieve and what it takes to succeed.

Websites

Collective Impact Forum: www.collectiveimpactforum.org/

FSG: www.fsg.org

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: http://hamiltonpoverty.ca/

Our Kids Network: www.ourkidsnetwork.ca

Strive Partnership: www.strivepartnership.org

Seattle Roadmap Project: www.roadmapproject.org

Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement: www.tamarackcommunity.ca

Vibrant Communities Canada: www.vibrantcommunities.ca

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APPRENDRE À DANSER LE TANGO SUR UN FIL DE FER : AGIR SELON UNE APPROCHE D'IMPACT COLLECTIF

Lyse Brunet

Sommaire

Au cours des vingt dernières années, Lyse Brunet a été au cœur d'initiatives majeures axées sur une approche d'impact collectif en tant que vice-présidente de Centraide du Grand Montréal et première directrice générale d'Avenir d'enfants, un fonds de 400 millions de dollars créé conjointement entre le Gouvernement du Québec et la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon. Jetant un regard sur son expérience, Lyse présente une réflexion personnelle sur les défis que comporte une approche d'impact collectif et sur son potentiel pour répondre à des enjeux sociaux complexes.

Lyse Brunet a une longue expérience de l'action communautaire et philanthropique, dernièrement en tant que première directrice générale d'Avenir d'enfants, et actuellement comme consultante indépendante. Courriel : brunetlyse@sympatico.ca .

C'est peut-être un inconscient influencé par le Cirque du Soleil qui m'amène à donner un tel titre à cet article. Pour choisir d'agir selon une approche d'impact collectif, il faut non seulement aimer le risque et les choses complexes mais surtout faire confiance à la logique qui sous-tend une telle approche. À ce jour, la preuve de son efficacité se trouve plutôt dans les apprentissages que dans des démonstrations scientifiques.

Au cours des vingt dernières années, j'ai été associée à quatre démarches d'envergure basées sur une approche d'impact collectif qui se sont déroulées sur le territoire montréalais et québécois. Ces initiatives étaient, et sont encore, soutenues par deux fondations parmi les plus importantes au Québec : Centraide du Grand Montréal et la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, au sein desquelles j'occupais une position de gestionnaire principal.[1] Ces quatre initiatives ont été des pionnières. Il s'agit de l'initiative 1,2,3 GO! pour la petite enfance, des tables de quartier de lutte à la pauvreté à Montréal et du projet du quartier Saint-Michel, nommé le Chantier de revitalisation urbaine et sociale du quartier Saint-Michel, toutes les trois soutenues par Centraide. Une quatrième initiative est celle d'Avenir d'enfants (www.avenirdenfants.org),[2] un partenariat initié par la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon avec le gouvernement du Québec pour le développement des jeunes enfants.

Ce qui est fascinant en rétrospective, c'est de constater la filiation entre ces initiatives, ce qui a permis la transmission des apprentissages par des personnes qui y ont joué un rôle clé au fil des ans, et il y en a eu plusieurs. Une partie de ces apprentissages s'est faite par un mode explicite de réflexions consignées dans des textes, mais une autre partie s'est faite de façon intuitive, à travers les innombrables échanges passionnés qui ont jalonné le parcours. Ayant été au cœur de ces initiatives dans le siège du bailleur de fonds, je souhaite, maintenant que j'ai un certain recul, partager quelques enseignements

de mon expérience. Je présenterai très brièvement chacune de ces initiatives—il y en aurait beaucoup plus à dire—et pour bien en montrer la portée, je parlerai du contexte québécois et montréalais au sein duquel elles ont pris naissance.

L'action collective a des assises profondes au Québec

Le Québec est depuis longtemps un terreau fertile de l'action collective et de l'innovation. Les gouvernements, les organisations et les citoyens se sont dotés d'outils collectifs dans plusieurs secteurs. Cette situation n'est pas sans lien avec la position du Québec en tant que nation francophone minoritaire en Amérique du Nord et la conscience qui en découle de la nécessité de se regrouper autour d'enjeux stratégiques pour avoir plus d'impact. Au fil de son histoire, une culture s'est forgée où l'État joue un rôle important dans la redistribution de la richesse et la mise en place de politiques sociales à portée universelle. De plus, environ 8 000 organismes communautaires offrent des services à une grande diversité de personnes. Des centaines de regroupements d'organismes sectoriels et multisectoriels agissent collectivement sur divers enjeux. Le réseau de l'économie sociale est devenu un secteur essentiel de la production de biens et services—que l'on pense seulement à la place qu'occupent le mouvement coopératif et les centres de la petite enfance.

Si la notion d'action collective n'est pas vraiment nouvelle, on peut dire qu'elle a pris une forme nouvelle et qu'elle est mieux comprise et mieux structurée. Depuis les années 90, sous l'impulsion de l'approche de mobilisation des communautés portée par la Santé publique, de même que l'approche territoriale intégrée soutenue par les municipalités et le gouvernement du Québec, on a vu se multiplier les initiatives adoptant une approche de mobilisation des communautés en vue d'un impact collectif. Ces initiatives avaient ceci de nouveau qu'elles voulaient agir en engageant les organisations, institutionnelles et communautaires, ainsi que les citoyens autour d'un même objectif et le faire de façon systématique pour avoir plus d'impact. Aux mots partenariat, concertation et collaboration sont venus s'ajouter ou se substituer des mots comme intégration, mobilisation et convergence.

Grâce à plusieurs chercheurs qui, en collaboration avec les acteurs sur le terrain, ont fait avancer l'analyse de ces dynamiques complexes, nous avons maintenant une compréhension beaucoup plus aiguisée des concepts qui caractérisent une approche d'impact collectif et une connaissance beaucoup plus fine des processus qu'elle met en œuvre. Codifiée et mieux encadrée, cette approche a favorisé une plus grande maîtrise des processus, mais elle a aussi accru les exigences pour les organisations et engendré certains effets pervers : multiplication et superposition des structures de mobilisation, avalanche de procédures et de redditions de comptes. Ceci a fait l'objet de préoccupations très largement exprimées par les organisations concernées au cours des dernières années. Des efforts importants ont été consentis pour mieux intégrer les structures et arrimer les stratégies afin de renforcer la cohérence de l'action et atteindre une plus grande simplicité dans la gestion des ressources.

Sur le plan local, les tables de quartiers qui se sont donné une cible très large comme celle de la lutte à la pauvreté ont pu ainsi intégrer les nombreux plans d'action sectoriels exigés par les bailleurs de fonds et retrouver une plus grande maîtrise d'œuvre de leurs

actions. De leur côté, les bailleurs de fonds associés à ces dynamiques se coordonnent davantage. Ils cherchent à simplifier leurs exigences et à arrimer leurs cadres de référence et d'évaluation, ce qui s'avère toutefois difficile à faire pour des organisations construites en silos. D'autres enjeux reliés à cette approche, comme l'accompagnement et l'évaluation sont discutés avec beaucoup d'intensité dans le cadre de divers forums.

En accompagnant des initiatives de plus près et en mettant à contribution leurs ressources, leurs compétences et leurs réseaux, Centraide et la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon sont venues, chacune à sa manière, appuyer et enrichir les démarches initiées par des communautés mobilisées et en inciter d'autres à emboîter le pas. Ces deux fondations sont devenues des acteurs incontournables dans l'approche d'impact collectif.

Quatre initiatives qui se sont démarquées

Rappelons les quatre initiatives dont il est question ici : les tables de quartier de lutte à la pauvreté à Montréal, le projet du quartier Saint-Michel, l'initiative 1, 2, 3 Go!, et l'initiative Avenir d'enfants. Ces initiatives correspondent à la définition du *collective impact* proposée par John Kania et Mark Kramer et remplissent, à des degrés d'intensité différents, les cinq conditions fondamentales qui différencient l'impact collectif d'autres types de coopération : un plan d'action commun, un système d'évaluation commun, des actions qui se renforcent mutuellement, une communication permanente et une structure de soutien. Elles visent toutes à apporter des changements significatifs à l'échelle d'une communauté locale.

Les tables de quartier de lutte à la pauvreté à Montréal

Au milieu des années 90, alors que les analyses démontraient des concentrations de pauvreté dans plusieurs quartiers de Montréal, des organisations ont commencé à se regrouper sur une base territoriale. La distribution de la pauvreté sur le territoire changeait de configuration : sa configuration en T sur un axe nord-sud et est-ouest faisait maintenant place à une configuration en taches de léopard dispersées sur le territoire. Ce fut le début de l'appropriation des démarches de planification stratégique par des tables de quartier pour produire des portraits de leurs communautés, identifier les enjeux et cibler les plus importants afin de prioriser leurs actions. Ces tables étaient composées d'organisations provenant principalement des secteurs de la santé, de l'éducation, de la municipalité et du réseau communautaire, parfois accompagnées de représentants du secteur privé. Il existe actuellement 29 tables de quartier sur le seul territoire de la ville de Montréal.

Les organisations faisant partie de ces tables ont commencé à regarder au-dessus de leur propre mission et à déployer une action concertée sur le territoire. Trois bailleurs de fonds concernés par la lutte à la pauvreté à Montréal ont entrepris de s'associer pour soutenir ces démarches : Centraide du Grand Montréal, la Direction de la santé publique et la Ville de Montréal. Au terme d'une dizaine années de discussion, après plusieurs versions et applications, ils ont réussi à se donner un cadre de référence satisfaisant tant pour eux que pour les acteurs terrain. J'ai participé à de très nombreuses négociations, médiations et tentatives de rapprochement entre les diverses parties au cours de ces années. Chaque bailleur de fonds, tout comme chaque organisation sur le terrain, avait sa propre logique de développement et même si un objectif commun les réunissait, cela ne voulait pas dire qu'elles pouvaient automatiquement se comprendre et converger dans l'action.

L'effort consenti pour dépasser les contraintes organisationnelles et identifier les leviers du changement a nécessité des centaines d'heures de travail et de dialogue. Vingt ans plus tard, les tables de quartier se sont renforcées considérablement. Quels sont les facteurs qui y ont contribué? D'abord des ressources financières octroyées par les bailleurs de fonds pour soutenir le processus, ce qui voulait dire donner les moyens à chaque table de quartier d'embaucher un facilitateur. Ensuite, la concertation des bailleurs de fonds dans un effort pour parler d'une seule voix et construire une relation étroite avec les acteurs sur le terrain. Enfin, le regroupement des tables de quartier au sein d'une coalition, ce qui a favorisé leur propre cohésion. Mais il fallait aussi contribuer à renforcer le leadership individuel des facilitateurs du fait du rôle particulier qu'ils exercent au sein de la table de quartier puisqu'ils n'ont pas d'autorité sur les organisations qui collectivement leur confient ce rôle. Une posture qui est très différente de celle du leader « qui m'aime me suive ».

C'est avec cette intention qu'avec mon équipe de Centraide, nous avons créé un programme de formation, le *Leadership rassembleur*^{MC}. Cette formation s'étend sur plusieurs mois et amène le leader à réconcilier trois dimensions inhérentes à son travail à partir de son expérience sensible : lui-même en tant que personne, son organisation, sa communauté. Une décennie plus tard, cette formation continue d'être en demande et ses effets se font sentir sur la maîtrise acquise par ces leaders rassembleurs pour jongler avec la complexité des situations auxquelles ils doivent faire face. Depuis, les moyens et l'expertise mis à la disposition des communautés et des personnes impliquées dans une approche d'impact collectif se sont développés considérablement. Signe d'avancées significatives dans le développement des compétences dans ce domaine, deux organisations travaillent à temps plein à les soutenir : Dynamo Collectivo (dépositaire du programme *Leadership rassembleur*^{MC}) et Communagir.

Le projet du quartier Saint-Michel

Un projet pilote a émergé de la dynamique des tables de quartier, celui du quartier de Saint-Michel, qui porte le nom de Vivre Saint-Michel en santé (VSMS). Une occasion m'avait été offerte par Tamarack Institute d'inviter une table de quartier de Montréal à se joindre à son projet Vibrant Communities en 2004. J'ai décidé d'inviter la table de quartier de Saint-Michel pour trois raisons principales. Premièrement, parce que ce quartier représentait le nouveau visage de la pauvreté à Montréal avec une grande concentration de personnes vivant sous le seuil de faibles revenus et des défis importants d'insertion et de cohésion sociale. Sa population de 55 000 habitants, autrefois homogène, était maintenant devenue un territoire d'accueil de plusieurs communautés culturelles. Deuxièmement, parce que la capacité d'entreprendre une action collective avait été démontrée. Confrontée à une problématique environnementale sur le territoire, la population s'était regroupée et avait mené une bataille qui avait renforcé la solidarité des organisations et des citoyens. En 1991, les organisations et les citoyens s'étaient donné une structure de concertation, la table de quartier, qui est devenue un modèle de leadership citoyen au plan municipal. Il y avait aussi une autre raison qui venait renforcer les deux autres : les personnes en position de leadership avaient acquis la confiance des principaux acteurs au cours de toutes ces années et nous pouvions compter sur leur intégrité et leur engagement.

Centraide poursuivait trois objectifs concordant avec ceux du projet Vibrant Communities :

1. D'abord donner plus de moyens à la table de quartier de Saint-Michel pour qu'elle puisse intensifier son action de lutte à la pauvreté en lui accordant un soutien financier, de l'accompagnement, l'accès à des réseaux et des compétences nouvelles. En plus, le projet Vibrant Communities lui fournissait l'occasion de faire des apprentissages et de réfléchir avec d'autres organisations impliquées dans une approche d'impact collectif ailleurs au Canada.
2. Ensuite, en faire un projet phare pour les autres tables de quartier pour qu'il inspire et influence la dynamique sociocommunautaire à Montréal. Comme nous n'avions pas les moyens de multiplier de telles interventions avec la même intensité, il fallait donc s'appuyer sur cet exemple et lui donner le plus de visibilité possible.
3. Finalement, démontrer concrètement aux décideurs la valeur ajoutée d'une telle approche, tant ceux de Centraide que ceux des institutions montréalaises concernées, ainsi qu'aux élus. À cette fin, nous avons multiplié les occasions d'emmener nos-partenaires sur le terrain et nous avons célébré avec eux les progrès réalisés d'année en année. Nous avons provoqué des dynamiques nouvelles en mettant en lien des leaders du quartier avec des gens des milieux d'affaires et de la philanthropie pour contribuer à trouver des solutions innovatrices à des enjeux complexes.

Cette action a porté fruit. La table de quartier de Saint-Michel est devenue une référence et a pu influencer plusieurs organisations dans l'environnement montréalais et québécois.

L'initiative 1,2,3 GO!

Au milieu des années 90, au moment où à Montréal l'action des tables de quartier commençait à se structurer, Centraide a mis en place l'initiative 1,2,3 GO! pour soutenir le développement des tout-petits (0-3 ans) et leur famille. L'approche choisie misait sur la collaboration sur un territoire local entre les organisations offrant des services aux enfants et les parents. Elle visait le développement global des enfants, le soutien aux parents et la création d'environnements favorables. Elle s'inspirait des initiatives *Success by Six* promues par les United Way aux États-Unis et du projet *Partir d'un bon pied pour un avenir meilleur* (*Better Beginnings, Better Futures)* de Ray Peters. La publication du rapport du chercheur Camil Bouchard, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, qui contribua à la mise en place du réseau des services de garde au Québec, fut un déclencheur pour mettre au monde l'initiative 1,2,3 GO!

1,2,3 GO! a été un projet pilote sur cinq ans avec six communautés locales de la grande région de Montréal. Un dispositif de soutien a été mis en place avec deux conseillers de Centraide accompagnant de près les six initiatives et un comité de développement composé de chercheurs et de représentants d'institutions concernées par le projet. Une équipe de chercheurs de l'UQAM mena un projet de recherche pour mesurer l'impact de l'initiative sur les enfants et leurs familles. Pour Centraide, cette façon de faire contrastait avec le financement traditionnel des organismes communautaires un par un. En prenant l'initiative de lancer une invitation aux organisations sur le terrain de s'engager dans une action collective centrée sur un seul grand objectif, Centraide créait un nouveau contexte et faisait figure de pionnier.

Nous présumions qu'en cinq ans nous constaterions des changements significatifs dans la vie des tout-petits et leurs familles, ce que la recherche est venue démentir : aucun résultat probant concernant l'impact sur les enfants et leurs familles n'était démontré au terme du projet pilote. La recherche concluait que puisque l'intervention se déroulait dans des contextes où les ressources manquaient, il était impossible qu'elle puisse transformer la situation en si peu de temps. Pour pallier à ces manques, les actions avaient visé plusieurs cibles en même temps : aménagement des parcs, transport, services de soutien aux parents, services de halte-garderie, etc.

Pouvait-on en conclure pour autant que cette approche avait été un échec? Non, car en réalité il était utopique de vouloir évaluer les résultats sur les enfants après seulement cinq ans, en ayant privilégié une approche d'action collective. Les premiers progrès constatés étaient reliés au processus de mobilisation, ce qui est conséquent avec le fait que l'accompagnement était centré sur les organisations afin qu'elles produisent une vision commune du changement souhaité, un portrait consensuel de leur communauté et un plan d'action collectif.

Dans certains quartiers, le contexte interne n'était pas toujours propice à l'implantation d'une démarche d'impact collectif qui soit rigoureuse et qui s'appuie sur des principes directeurs. Plusieurs facteurs rendaient la dynamique plus complexe que nous l'avions anticipé au départ : inégalité et faiblesse des ressources dans les organisations, tensions dans le partage du pouvoir, faible niveau de confiance des organisations entre elles. Certaines organisations manifestaient une appréhension face au fait que Centraide avait pris l'initiative et, du fait qu'elles agissaient déjà en petite enfance dans leur quartier, il n'était pas évident pour elles que participer à une approche d'impact collectif leur permettrait d'avoir un impact plus grand que celui qu'elles avaient déjà individuellement. Ce qui n'était pas démontré non plus mais seulement présumé.

L'expérience nous a permis de prendre conscience qu'avec une approche d'impact collectif, il faut du temps—le temps, cette denrée précieuse—pour que s'installe une dynamique favorable entre les organisations et qu'ensuite cette dynamique génère un impact auprès des enfants eux-mêmes. Habitués à soutenir des programmes, nous avons constaté qu'une approche visant un impact collectif se gérait autrement qu'un programme qui, par définition, « programme » l'action. Il fallait introduire de la souplesse dans l'exécution et réunir un certain nombre de conditions pour réussir. Au nombre de ces conditions, il fallait que les organisations aient les moyens de consacrer une partie de leur semaine à travailler collectivement de façon efficace mais sans délaisser leur propre mission. Il fallait aussi privilégier une intervention davantage ciblée sur les enfants et enrichie par les pratiques ayant fait leurs preuves. Bien que le dispositif de soutien mis en place par Centraide ait été sans précédent dans sa pratique, la poursuite de l'expérience nécessitait quelque chose de plus costaud.

À la même époque, le gouvernement avait décidé d'implanter un réseau de services de garde à coût réduit à la grandeur du Québec. Ce geste a accompli énormément pour les jeunes enfants. Quand l'action locale évolue dans un contexte où existe un réseau de services de garde à portée universelle et des politiques de soutien à la famille, cela est autrement plus porteur pour l'action collective que de travailler dans un désert social où n'existe aucune infrastructure de services.

L'expérience devait donc se poursuivre. C'est pourquoi, à l'issue du projet pilote, Centraide a mis en place une organisation de soutien sans but lucratif, le Centre 1,2,3 GO!, qui à partir de ce moment a été responsable à part entière du soutien au développement des initiatives. Tout en demeurant un bailleur de fonds présent dans la dynamique, Centraide optait alors pour l'externalisation du projet, jugeant que l'initiative vivrait mieux dans un contexte indépendant de sa propre structure. Le Centre 1,2,3 GO! a poursuivi le travail, et d'autres initiatives ont vu le jour pendant quelques années encore, jusqu'à la création d'une nouvelle organisation, Avenir d'enfants. Un livre auquel ont collaboré les principaux acteurs du Centre 1,2,3 GO! et des chercheurs de l'UQAM intitulé *Le projet 1,2,3 GO! Place au dialogue. Quinze ans de mobilisation autour des tout-petits et de leur famille* relate les quinze années de l'aventure du projet et présente un riche bilan des apprentissages de l'expérience.

Avenir d'enfants : à la grandeur du Québec

En 2009, la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, en continuité avec l'initiative 1,2,3 GO!, et forte de ses apprentissages, décida de déployer une initiative similaire avec immensément plus de moyens. Cette nouvelle initiative allait permettre de généraliser sur l'ensemble du territoire du Québec la mobilisation des communautés en petite enfance selon une approche d'impact collectif.

Créée en 2001, la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon a centré sa mission sur la prévention de la pauvreté en ciblant la réussite éducative. À la faveur des recherches sur l'importance d'agir tôt, la Fondation se concentra sur le développement des jeunes enfants de 0 à 5 ans, en particulier ceux vivant en milieu de pauvreté. Elle choisit d'y consacrer des ressources sur une période d'au moins dix ans et de le faire en partenariat avec le Gouvernement du Québec afin que les enfants de milieux défavorisés dans toutes les régions puissent en bénéficier. Un fonds conjoint de 400 millions de dollars fut créé et géré dans un partenariat public-philanthropique, un modèle innovateur de gouvernance. Une organisation sans but lucratif fut mise en place destinée à soutenir les communautés locales. Ce fut la naissance d'Avenir d'enfants.

L'équipe du Centre 1,2,3 GO! intégra la nouvelle organisation et y apporta son expertise en accompagnement d'initiatives locales qui est venue compléter l'expertise en petite enfance de la Fondation. Fait intéressant, lorsque qu'Avenir d'enfants a tenu son premier colloque, soit une dizaine d'années après la création du projet 1,2,3 GO!, j'ai été agréablement surprise de constater que les intervenants étaient beaucoup mieux outillés quand ils parlaient de petite enfance parce qu'au fil du temps, ils avaient intégré plus de connaissances et de compétences. Il s'agit bien sûr d'une évaluation intuitive, mais qui a sa valeur. Sur la moyenne durée, l'action faisait son œuvre.

En peu de temps, Avenir d'enfants se donna tous les outils pour initier une approche d'impact collectif. Une équipe d'accompagnateurs auprès des communautés locales fut mise en place afin de soutenir celles-ci dans l'élaboration de leurs plans d'action. Une formation à l'approche éco-systémique fut élaborée et dispensée aux regroupements pour les outiller dans leurs démarches. Avenir d'enfants a créé un environnement d'échange et de partage des connaissances sur le développement des jeunes enfants, activé les liens avec la recherche et fait la promotion des initiatives en petite enfance qui se sont développées sur le territoire. Un cadre d'évaluation rigoureux et exigeant a été

produit ainsi qu'une formation sur l'évaluation destinée aux intervenants sur le terrain afin qu'ils puissent nourrir l'évaluation continue. L'action collective en petite enfance se généralisa rapidement dans toutes les régions auprès de 128 communautés locales dans seize régions du Québec impliquant plus de 2 000 organisations locales agissant auprès de 300 000 enfants.

Cette expérience est riche d'enseignements et elle se poursuit toujours. On peut dire d'ores et déjà qu'elle a eu une influence sur le consensus social concernant la place qu'occupe la petite enfance dans les grandes stratégies de prévention au Québec. Elle a pu le faire grâce à l'ensemble des moyens mis en œuvre simultanément : ressources, intensité de la pratique, accompagnement, évaluation et transfert de connaissances. De plus, la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon a lancé une vaste campagne sociétale visant à promouvoir l'importance d'agir tôt. Signe que la petite enfance est de plus en plus considérée par le milieu scolaire comme une étape essentielle du parcours éducatif, l'intervention en petite enfance a occupé une place de choix pour la première fois lors de la 3e édition des Grandes rencontres sur la persévérance scolaire qui a réuni près de 1 500 personnes du milieu de l'éducation en novembre 2013.

Avenir d'enfants est une initiative ambitieuse qui doit jongler avec toutes les complexités en même temps :

- une gouvernance d'un type nouveau mettant en relation deux cultures différentes : philanthropique et gouvernementale;
- un déploiement à l'échelle d'une population de 8 millions d'habitants dans des régions et des localités ayant chacune ses particularités;
- un projet avec des bailleurs de fonds qui sont des acteurs stratégiques très investis dans la gouvernance et l'action;
- la poursuite d'objectifs ambitieux et un rythme intense;
- une pression sur l'organisation et sur le terrain concernant l'évaluation des résultats.

La venue sur la scène québécoise de ce partenariat public-philanthropique a pu en inquiéter certains du fait de la place importante que prenait une fondation privée dans l'espace public en s'associant avec le gouvernement, ce qui constituait une nouvelle forme d'intervention sociale. On ne peut nier qu'un projet à grande échelle disposant de telles ressources mises à la disposition des communautés dans une approche de mobilisation influence nécessairement la place qu'occupe la petite enfance parmi les priorités sociales. Du fait que la création d'Avenir d'enfants provenait d'une intention des bailleurs de fonds et même si, en général, les communautés ont reconnu qu'il s'agissait d'une occasion unique, certaines se sont senties instrumentalisées par le projet et d'autres, une minorité cependant, ont refusé d'y participer.

Sur le terrain, il a fallu démontrer beaucoup de respect à l'endroit des organisations et des communautés, et reconnaître la valeur des actions dans lesquelles elles s'étaient investies bien avant l'arrivée d'Avenir d'enfants. J'ai tenu à rencontrer les décideurs concernés par la petite enfance, en éducation, santé, action communautaire et municipale, lors d'une tournée dans toutes les régions du Québec. J'estimais que c'était une étape nécessaire pour augmenter la confiance entre les parties prenantes dont tout projet de cette

envergure a besoin pour bien fonctionner. L'équipe de soutien à l'accompagnement a déployé beaucoup de talent pour implanter une approche qui soit aidante pour les regroupements qui se sont associés à Avenir d'enfants.

Si on ne peut nier qu'un tel apport de ressources est venu influencer l'importance des actions en petite enfance et bousculer parfois des dynamiques locales… nul doute que ce fut pour le mieux, si on regarde l'expérience dans une perspective à long terme. Du coup, les organisations impliquées dans l'action collective se sont vues octroyer des leviers qu'elles n'auraient jamais eus autrement. Avec Avenir d'enfants, un nouveau contexte a été créé à l'échelle du Québec autour d'un objectif social qui fait largement consensus. Des milliers de parents et intervenants ont été mobilisés et continuent de l'être, et des milliers d'enfants en profitent.

Quelques constats tirés de mon expérience

Ces quatre initiatives se chevauchent dans le temps et les apprentissages de l'une et de l'autre s'additionnent pour constituer une masse importante d'expériences d'actions collectives au Québec. Mon expérience confirme ce qui a été écrit au cours des dernières années au sujet de l'impact collectif : exigeant, complexe, prend du temps, de la patience, des ressources et de l'expertise et se mesure en petits pas et sur la longue durée. Dans sa phase de jeunesse, l'approche d'impact collectif a connu un moment euphorique devant la perspective de tout embrasser dans une cohérence parfaite et la possibilité d'y consacrer des ressources importantes. Sans contredit, la convergence, l'alignement des actions, le savoir-faire pour y arriver sont une voie gagnante en regard de la dispersion, des silos et de la compétition. C'est devenu un lieu commun de l'affirmer. Si cela est vrai en théorie, en pratique le résultat est toujours plus mitigé car un alignement parfait n'existe pas.

On a surestimé la théorie et sous-estimé la pratique

«Tout seul on va plus vite mais ensemble on va plus loin » : c'est un mantra qui a beaucoup été utilisé au cours des dernières années pour illustrer et valoriser l'impact collectif. Il signifie qu'à terme, les résultats générés par l'action collective seront de nature à mieux assurer la continuité et la pérennité des changements souhaités parce que les organisations qui travaillent avec les personnes auront changé leur façon de faire. Dans la réalité concrète, ces résultats ne sont pas toujours évidents, même si le mantra demeure vrai. Très souvent, à court terme, on va moins vite et moins loin : tensions entre les organisations, détournement à des fins politiques ou de positionnement organisationnel, faiblesse du leadership, concurrence entre les organisations, manque de dynamisme, manque de ressources, manque d'appuis.

L'action collective rencontre beaucoup d'obstacles et cela prend un certain temps avant que le collectif ne soit perçu et vécu comme une entité plus forte que la somme de ses parties. Il faut du temps et de la disponibilité pour apprivoiser la démarche et la faire mûrir. Son parcours est sinueux et sa vitesse de croisière dépend du contexte de départ, de l'historique et du leadership des organisations et des personnes impliquées, de leurs qualités d'ouverture et d'empathie les unes envers les autres, et du rôle et de la posture du ou des bailleurs de fonds dans la démarche. Ici, le temps, ce n'est pas de l'argent, mais le souffle nécessaire pour avoir l'impact recherché.

On n'a pas toujours bien aligné le résultat recherché et l'approche privilégiée

On ne peut pas parler d'impact collectif sans parler de ce que l'on vise comme impact et à quelle échelle, et sans mettre son but en lien avec la façon de s'y rendre. En somme, les meilleures approches ne donnent pas automatiquement la direction à prendre ni ne garantissent l'atteinte des résultats escomptés. Sur quoi voulons-nous faire porter le changement : sur les personnes, sur les conditions de vie ou sur les organisations elles-mêmes? Ces trois dimensions sont toujours présentes, mais selon la réponse que l'on donne à cette question, on doit se demander si l'approche privilégiée est la bonne car, à court terme, on ira plus vite en intervenant directement auprès des personnes avec un programme ciblé qu'avec une approche d'action collective qui aura tendance à en prendre plus large.

Dans chacune des expériences dont j'ai parlé, ces enjeux sont sans cesse revenus sur le tapis, la recherche de cohérence dans l'action étant constante et nécessaire mais difficile à réaliser quand toutes les dimensions se croisent en même temps.

On a sous-estimé la complexité du processus pour y arriver

Dans l'idéal, on s'imagine que l'approche va permettre d'atteindre rapidement son but mais, en réalité, les discussions nécessaires pour clarifier les enjeux, stratégies et objectifs, les données à rassembler pour identifier le portrait de la communauté, les tensions à amoindrir pour créer une ambiance positive sont autant de passages obligés qui peuvent donner l'impression qu'on ne se rapproche pas du but alors qu'en réalité, on se donne les moyens pour l'atteindre.

Ce qui garantit le succès de la démarche est la capacité, tant du côté des organisations impliquées sur le terrain que du côté des bailleurs de fonds, de gérer cet équilibre en tension constante en comprenant bien les enjeux de ce type d'approche en lien avec les objectifs poursuivis. Ne pas les comprendre, c'est se buter à de la déception ou à de l'incompréhension devant la lenteur du processus pour atteindre des résultats sur les populations visées. Chemin faisant, il est devenu clair que l'effort de mobilisation exige du temps et que même un collectif qui réunirait toutes les conditions de succès ne dispose pas de tous les leviers du changement. Il ne fera que *contribuer* à de multiples autres actions portées par de multiples acteurs. Bref, l'expérience a fait place au réalisme.

On a appris à bâtir une relation organique entre bailleurs de fonds et acteurs terrain

Comme je le dis souvent, pour optimiser la démarche, « il faut quelqu'un qui se lève le matin et se couche le soir en ne pensant qu'à ça ». C'est ce que nos collègues anglophones appellent une *backbone organization*, soit une organisation de soutien. Dans les initiatives dont j'ai parlé, les bailleurs de fonds jouent un rôle important dans la création et le soutien de cette organisation en tant qu'« actionnaires » du projet, si on peut le dire ainsi. En ce sens, la relation au terrain n'est plus externe comme dans un modèle traditionnel, mais plutôt organique, car les bailleurs de fonds sont partie prenante du projet.

Centraide et la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon ont, chacune à sa manière, joué directement le rôle d'organisation de soutien dans un premier temps pour ensuite créer des organismes de soutien indépendants d'elles auxquels elles demeuraient cependant intimement liés par leur contribution financière importante et par leur présence au sein de leurs conseils d'administration. Du coup, elles ont créé une plus grande distance par rapport aux organismes de soutien nouvellement créés tout en demeurant des partenaires essentiels. Pour Centraide, ce fut la création du Centre 1, 2, 3 GO! et pour la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, celle d'Avenir d'enfants en partenariat avec le Gouvernement du Québec, à la différence que le Centre 1, 2, 3 GO! n'était pas le bailleur de fonds tandis qu'Avenir d'enfants est à la fois un bailleur de fonds et un organisme de soutien auprès des communautés mobilisées.

Quant aux tables de quartier, les bailleurs de fonds ont investi dans un financement de base récurrent afin qu'elles puissent se donner par elles-mêmes des moyens pour coordonner leurs actions par l'embauche d'un facilitateur. Le projet du quartier Saint-Michel pour sa part a pu bénéficier du soutien de la table de quartier, de Centraide et du projet Vibrant Communities, ce qui a facilité la venue de fonds d'autres provenances. Dans ce cas, les leaders ont réussi à tirer profit de toutes ces contributions pour faire avancer leurs objectifs en imposant leur propre rythme, non sans avoir fait quelques concessions aux bailleurs de fonds, il va sans dire.

L'organisation de soutien peut prendre plusieurs configurations. Les fonctions de bailleur de fonds et d'accompagnateur peuvent coexister dans la même organisation ou non. La conjugaison de ces deux fonctions dans le choix d'un modèle d'action est l'objet d'enjeux qui ont souvent été discutés : peut-on être partie prenante de la démarche en même temps que juge de son efficacité? Selon la posture qu'il adopte, le bailleur de fonds est perçu et vécu par les organisations qui agissent sur le terrain comme une entrave plus ou moins grande à leur autonomie. Cette posture peut être plus ou moins contrôlante, ce qui se traduit par plus ou moins de distance, plus ou moins de redditions de comptes, plus ou moins de confiance envers l'équipe terrain, un accompagnement plus ou moins serré.

La question de savoir quel est le modèle le plus porteur reste ouverte, l'expérience le dira. Une chose est sûre, cependant : conjuguer confiance, efficacité et rigueur avec le bon dosage, tout est là. Trop de contrôle des bailleurs étouffe le travail sur le terrain; en revanche, trop de laisser-aller et de distance de leur part par rapport au terrain peuvent faire perdre le rythme et la direction de l'action. Il existe une tension continue entre ces deux pôles. Le plus important est que les parties prenantes le comprennent et soient en mesure d'analyser cette tension, de prendre une distance par rapport à elle, et de jouer sur ces deux registres.

Dans ce tango incessant se développe une relation qui permet de faire des apprentissages ensemble et de cheminer vers l'objectif visé. Au final, c'est l'ouverture vers le dialogue qui garantit que s'installent une relation de confiance et une transparence, deux conditions incontournables pour assurer le succès d'une démarche d'impact collectif.

Continuons…

Le capital de connaissances et de compétences accumulées au fil des vingt dernières années est sans doute beaucoup plus imposant qu'on ne le pense. La culture de la mobilisation est plus intégrée dans les pratiques. Nous commençons à peine à avoir le recul nécessaire pour en mesurer les acquis et ses effets sur les organisations et les populations, mais on constate qu'ils sont réels :

- mobilisation des citoyens et des parents;
- multiplication des activités en regard des enfants;
- mise en place de nouvelles ressources dans les quartiers;
- création de passerelles entre des secteurs qui travaillaient en silos;
- plus grande synergie entre les organisations;
- plus grande capacité d'élaborer des stratégies de changement;
- plus grande intégration des connaissances;
- capacité de s'inspirer des bonnes pratiques et de les adapter au contexte;
- plus de savoir-faire dans l'évaluation.

Maintenant que les expériences privilégiant une approche d'impact collectif sont nombreuses et que l'on sait mieux comment faire, le véritable défi sera d'arriver à démontrer concrètement comment l'implantation de cette approche contribue à long terme à atteindre les transformations durables visées tant auprès des organisations que des populations concernées et de leurs conditions de vie.

L'évaluation dans ce domaine a fait de grandes avancées : elle est utilisée de plus en plus comme outil de développement plutôt qu'outil de contrôle. L'utilisation d'enquêtes populationnelles sur de longues durées permet de mesurer le chemin parcouru, comme l'a fait récemment l'Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants à la maternelle publiée par l'Institut de la statistique du Québec. L'enquête dresse un portrait de la situation pour chaque région sur lequel peuvent s'appuyer des centaines d'intervenants.

Cette enquête est le fruit d'une étroite collaboration entre l'Institut de la statistique du Québec, le ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, le ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, le ministère de la Famille et Avenir d'enfants. Cette entreprise est un très un bel exemple de coordination de la mobilisation aux plans local, régional et national. Si tous les rouages ont pu s'articuler les uns aux autres au profit de la même cause, c'est beaucoup grâce à l'ouverture et à l'attitude des principaux acteurs qui ont voulu franchir toutes les barrières. De plus, à la suite de l'enquête, l'Institut national de Santé publique du Québec a publié *Les conditions de succès des actions favorisant le développement global des enfants*, un outil d'aide à la décision collective sur les actions à mettre en œuvre.

En résumé, une approche visant un impact collectif nécessite un savant dosage de leadership, de connaissances, de compétences et de ressources pour que les organisations conçoivent leurs actions dans un environnement éco-systémique plutôt qu'isolément. Une telle approche exige des actions qui dépassent le niveau local et impliquent les ressources gouvernementales.

Plus les niveaux d'action sont liés, plus l'impact sera grand.

L'attitude change, l'expertise se construit, le risque est balisé... et on devient plus habile à danser le tango sur un fil de fer! Devant la complexité, il est difficile de faire autrement si on veut faire plus pour que nos sociétés s'en portent mieux.

Remerciements

Pour leurs contributions à cet article, je remercie, chez Centraide, Odette Viens, vice-présidente, Innovation et développement, et Mario Régis, directeur, Service d'allocation et d'analyse sociale, et, chez la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, Jean-Marc Chouinard, vice-président, Stratégie et partenariats. Je remercie aussi Benoît Lévesque, sociologue et professeur émérite à l'UQAM, pour ses commentaires.

Notes

1. Chez Centraide, j'étais vice-présidente, Développement social, et chez Avenir d'enfants, j'étais la première directrice générale.

2. Avenir d'enfants est un organisme à but non lucratif (OBNL) voué au soutien des communautés locales dans le but de contribuer au développement global des jeunes enfants de milieux défavorisés sur tout le territoire du Québec afin que tous aient un bon départ dans la vie.

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LEARNING TO TANGO ON A TIGHTROPE: IMPLEMENTING A COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH

Lyse Brunet
Cynthia Gates, *Translator*

Summary

For the past 20 years, Lyse Brunet has been at the heart of collaborative community development in the province of Québec through her work at Centraide of Greater Montréal and as the first Executive Director of *Avenir d'enfants*, a $400-million philanthropic partnership between the Québec government and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation. Looking back at this experience, Lyse notes the many similarities with the Collective Impact model and reflects on the successes and challenges of developing collaborative solutions to complex social issues.

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It may have been a subconscious influence by the *Cirque du Soleil* that inspired the title of this article. Choosing to use a Collective Impact approach demands not only courage in the face of risk and complexity, but also trust in its underlying logic. To date, I believe that proof of its effectiveness lies more in what we have learned than from scientific demonstrations.

Over the past 20 years, I have been associated with four large-scale Collective Impact initiatives in Montréal and the province of Québec. These projects were – and still are – supported by the two largest foundations in the province: Centraide of Greater Montréal and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, where I held senior management positions.[1] All of these initiatives were groundbreaking. Three of them – the 1,2,3 GO! early childhood initiative, neighbourhood round tables to fight poverty in Montréal, and the urban and social renewal project in the Saint-Michel district (the *Chantier de revitalisation urbaine et sociale du quartier Saint-Michel*) – were funded by Centraide. The fourth, *Avenir d'enfants*[2] is a partnership that was created by the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation in cooperation with the Québec government to promote early childhood development.

Two decades later, it is fascinating to recognize how these initiatives are connected and how many lessons have been passed down by the many people who played key roles over the years. Although some of these lessons were learned explicitly by reading the reflections of others as documented in written accounts, others were acquired intuitively during the countless passionate exchanges that occurred along the way. Having been at the heart of these initiatives in the role of funder, I would like to share some of the lessons learned from my experience with the added wisdom of hindsight. I will briefly describe each of the projects and, to illustrate their scope, explain the context in the province of Québec and the city of Montréal in which they evolved.

Collective action has a long history in Québec

Québec has always been fertile ground for collective action and innovation. Its governments, organizations, and citizens have created collective resources in several sectors. This situation is partly due to Québec's position as a French-speaking nation in North America and the resulting awareness of the necessity to work together in order to have a greater impact on strategic issues. Over the course of its history, the government has become a major player in Québec society, taking a key role in redistributing wealth and setting up universal social policies. In a population of just over eight million, approximately 8,000 community organizations offer services to a wide range of people. Hundreds of organizations and associations from different sectors act collectively on various issues. We need look no further than the cooperative movement and *Centres de la petite enfance* to see the extent to which the social economy network has become an essential provider of goods and services in the province of Québec.

Although the concept of collective action is not really new, it has certainly undergone a transformation that has left it better structured and more clearly understood. Since the 1990s, under the influence of the community mobilization approach endorsed by Public Health and the integrated territorial approach supported by Québec municipalities and the Government of Québec, a growing number of initiatives chose to use a community mobilization approach to assure Collective Impact. What was new about these initiatives was that they wanted to engage both institutional and community organizations and citizens around a single objective, and to do it systematically for greater impact. People who talked about partnership, consultation, and collaboration started to talk more about integration, mobilization, and convergence.

Thanks to the efforts of several researchers who, working with participants in the field, made great strides in analyzing these complex dynamics, we now have a much clearer understanding of the concepts that characterize a Collective Impact approach and a keener knowledge of the processes involved. A codified and more clearly defined approach has led to increased competence in implementing these processes. This, however, has resulted in more demands on organizations and other less than desirable effects, such as the superimposition of mobilization structures and an avalanche of procedural and accountability requirements. In response to vociferous objections from the organizations involved over the past few years, major efforts have now been made to integrate these structures and align strategies.

At the local level, neighbourhood round tables that took on such wide-ranging issues as the fight against poverty have been able to integrate the numerous sectoral action plans required by funders and regain greater control over their actions. Funders are now better at coordinating their efforts as they seek to simplify their requirements and align their frames of reference and evaluation methodologies, which can be challenging for organizations that were built as silos and still operate as such. Other issues related to this approach, such as support and evaluation, have been subjects of lively discussion in various forums.

By supporting initiatives more closely and by pooling their resources, skills, and networks, Centraide and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation have, each in their

own way, supported and enriched projects initiated by mobilized communities, while encouraging others to follow suit. These two foundations have thus become key actors in promoting and supporting the Collective Impact approach.

Four ground-breaking initiatives

You will recall the four initiatives mentioned at the beginning of this article: neighbourhood round tables to fight poverty in Montréal, the Saint-Michel district project, 1,2,3, GO!, and *Avenir d'enfants*. All of these initiatives correspond to the Collective Impact framework proposed by John Kania and Mark Kramer (Kania & Kramer 2011) and meet, to varying degrees, the five basic conditions that differentiate Collective Impact from other types of collaboration: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support structure. These initiatives were all intent on making significant changes at the local community level.

Neighbourhood round tables to fight poverty in Montréal

In the mid-1990s, when analyses were showing concentrations of poverty in several Montréal neighbourhoods, organizations in these areas began to join forces. The configuration of poverty distribution was changing: the traditional T-shape that followed the north-south and east-west axes of the Island of Montréal was shifting toward a leopard-spot configuration across the entire territory. This realization was what prompted neighbourhood round tables to take strategic planning into their own hands, preparing portraits of their communities, identifying key issues, and targeting the most critical needs to prioritize their actions. These round tables were made up primarily of organizations from the health, education, municipal, and community sectors, sometimes including representatives from the private sector. There are currently twenty-nine neighbourhood round tables in the City of Montréal alone.

The organizations involved in the round tables began to look beyond their own individual missions in the interest of deploying a concerted action across their entire territory. Three funders committed to fighting poverty in Montréal together decided to support their actions: Centraide of Greater Montréal, the Director of Public Health, and the City of Montréal. After some ten years of discussion and many versions and approaches, they arrived at a frame of reference that satisfied both themselves and the actors in the field. I participated in many negotiations, mediations, and attempts to find common ground during those years. Every funder and every organization on the ground had its own development logic; the fact that they shared a common objective did not automatically imply that they could understand each other and agree on a joint plan of action.

The communal effort of all stakeholders to break down organizational boundaries and identify levers for change required hundreds of hours of work and dialogue. Now, 20 years later, the neighbourhood round tables are the stronger for it. What were the contributing factors? First, sufficient financial resources were made available to support the process, which entailed giving every round table the means to hire a facilitator. Second, a concerted effort was made to enable funders to speak with a single voice and build a close relationship with actors in the field. And third, a coalition of neighbourhood round tables was created, which strengthened their cohesion. It was also necessary, however, to help reinforce the individual leadership of the facilitators

in the specific role they had to play at the neighbourhood round tables, as they did not have any authority over the organizations that had entrusted them with this role. This required a very different attitude from the top-down leadership model commonly used.

It was to meet this need that my Centraide team created *Leadership rassembleur*™ (Bridging Leadership), a training program that focused on the leader as a person. The training, which extends over several months, helps facilitators reconcile the three dimensions of their work: themselves, their organization, and their community. A decade later, this training program is still in demand, and its effects are apparent in the skills trained leaders have acquired in dealing with highly complex situations. The resources and expertise available to communities and individuals involved in a Collective Impact approach have evolved significantly. Two organizations now work full-time to provide support – evidence of the advances made in this field: Dynamo Collectivo (licensed user of the *Leadership rassembleur*™ program) and Communagir.

The Saint-Michel neighbourhood project

One of the pilot projects that emerged from the round table process was "*Vivre Saint-Michel en santé*" (living healthy in Saint-Michel). When the Tamarack Institute wanted to invite a neighbourhood from Montréal to join its Vibrant Communities project in 2004, I decided to ask the Saint-Michel round table for two reasons:

1. This neighbourhood represented the new face of poverty in Montréal, with a large proportion of its population living under the low income cut-off, and it faced significant challenges related to social integration and cohesion. Its once homogeneous population of 55,000 was now home to newly arrived members of several different cultural communities.
2. The community had shown the ability to undertake a collective action in the 1980s. Faced with a local environmental problem, the population had joined forces to fight a battle that had strengthened the solidarity of organizations and citizens. In 1991, they created a consultation structure in the form of a neighbourhood round table that became a model of citizen leadership at the municipal level.

A further factor reinforced the other two: over the years, the people in charge of the project had gained the trust of key community leaders, and we knew we could count on their integrity and commitment.

The three objectives identified by Centraide corresponded to those of the Vibrant Communities project:

1. To give the Saint-Michel neighbourhood round table the resources it needed to intensify its fight against poverty in the form of funding, support, and access to networks and new skills. The Vibrant Communities project also gave Saint-Michel the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and exchange ideas with other organizations involved in Collective Impact approaches elsewhere in Canada.

2. To make Saint-Michel a flagship project for other neighbourhood round tables

in order to inspire and influence the dynamic of community life in Montréal. Since we didn't have the means to reproduce similar interventions with a comparable scope and intensity, we wanted to pin our hopes on this example and give it as much visibility as possible.

3. Last but not least, to provide decision-makers – at Centraide and among concerned Montréal institutions and elected government representatives – with concrete evidence of the added value of this type of approach. To achieve this goal, we took every possible opportunity to bring partners into the field, joining them in celebrating the progress being made from year to year. We created new dynamics by putting neighbourhood leaders in contact with key figures from the business and philanthropic community to help find innovative solutions to complex problems.

This action was a huge success: the Saint-Michel neighbourhood round table has become an influential model for organizations in Montréal and throughout the province of Québec.

The 1,2,3 GO! initiative

In the mid-1990s, when actions launched by neighbourhood round tables were becoming more structured, Centraide created the 1,2,3 GO! initiative to support the development of very young children (from 0-3) and their families. This approach, aimed at encouraging collaboration among organizations that offered services to children and their parents in a local community, promoted overall childhood development, support for parents, and the creation of favourable environments. The project drew its inspiration from such initiatives as the United Way's *Success By 6* in the United States and Ray Peters' *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* (Peters et al, 2003). The publication of researcher Camil Bouchard's report, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants* (Québec, a province crazy about its children) (Bouchard, 1991), one of the major drivers of the publicly funded day-care network in Québec, was also a catalyst for the 1,2,3 GO! initiative.

1,2,3 GO! was originally conceived as a five-year pilot project in six local communities in Greater Montréal. A support system was set up, with two Centraide advisors closely involved with the six initiatives, and a new development committee made up of researchers and representatives of institutions interested in the project. A research team from UQÀM (*Université du Québec à Montréal)* conducted a study to measure the initiative's impact on children and their families. This marked a significant departure from Centraide's usual method of funding community organizations on an individual basis. By inviting organizations in the field to engage in a collective action with a single large-scale objective, Centraide created a ground breaking new context.

We all assumed that in five years we would see notable changes in the lives of very young children and their families, but the findings proved otherwise. At the end of the pilot project, results showed no significant impact on either the children or their families. The study concluded that since the intervention had taken place in environments lacking in resources, it had been impossible to transform the situation in so little time. To compensate, the actions had targeted several challenges simultaneously: playground projects, transportation, parent support services, drop-in day care, et cetera.

Was the project a failure? No: we realized that it was utopian to assess results related to children after just five years of a collective action approach. The first signs of progress were in the mobilization process, which was consistent with the fact that our support had been focused on helping organizations create a common vision of change, a shared portrait of their community, and a collective plan of action.

The internal structure of certain neighbourhoods was not always conducive to setting up a rigorous Collective Impact initiative. Several factors made the dynamics more complicated than we had anticipated: unequal and inadequate resources within the organizations, power struggles, and a lack of trust among the organizations themselves. Some were uncomfortable with the fact that Centraide had taken the initiative: certain groups that were already active in early childhood services were not convinced that a Collective Impact approach would enable them to have a greater impact than they were already having on their own. Funders assumed positive outcomes, but nothing had been proven.

This experience helped us to realize that a Collective Impact approach needed time – that priceless commodity – for the dynamic to generate an impact on the children themselves. Our experience in supporting programs had shown us that a collective impact approach had to be managed differently from a program that, by definition, "programmed" the action. We had to be more flexible, bringing together a certain number of conditions in order to succeed. For example, we realized that organizations required the means to be able to devote a portion of their week to working efficiently and effectively together without having to neglect their own mission. We needed a more targeted intervention, reinforced by proven best practices. Although the support structure set up by Centraide had been unprecedented, we would ultimately need something even more robust if we were going to continue the experiment.

It was at this time that the Québec government introduced its province-wide network of affordable day care. This program singlehandedly improved conditions for many young children while giving a boost to local initiatives. When the universal government program was combined with targeted actions at the local community level, both were strengthened. When local action evolved in a context that already offered a day-care network and family-friendly public policy, any collective action was likely to have a greater impact than in a social wasteland with no service infrastructure.

When, at the end of the pilot project, it was therefore decided that the experiment should be continued, Centraide set up the *Centre 1,2,3 GO!*, a not-for-profit support organization that would henceforth be fully responsible for supporting development of these initiatives. Although Centraide would remain in the picture as a funder, it felt that externalizing the project outside of the Centraide structure would enable the initiative to operate more independently. The *Centre 1,2,3 GO!* continued the work as other initiatives were launched over the next few years until a new organization was created: *Avenir d'enfants*. A collaborative study by the main actors of the 1,2,3 GO! project and the UQÀM research team, entitled *Le projet 1,2,3 GO! - Place au dialogue - Quinze ans de mobilisation autour des tout-petits et de leur famille* (reflections on fifteen years of mobilizing communities around infants/toddlers and their families), relates the story of the 15-year adventure and provides an invaluable record of the lessons learned from the experience.

Avenir d'enfants: A province-wide initiative

In 2009, armed with this wealth of valuable experience, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation chose to continue the 1,2,3 GO! initiative by deploying a similar program but with vastly greater resources. This new initiative would use a Collective Impact approach to expand community mobilization in support of children and families throughout the entire province of Québec.

Created in 2001, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation focused its mission on preventing poverty through educational success. Taking its cue from research showing the importance of early action in children's lives, the Foundation decided to concentrate on the development of children between the ages of 0 and 5, particularly those living in poverty. It chose to devote resources to this project over a ten-year period, setting up a partnership with the Québec government to ensure that children in disadvantaged areas in all regions of the province could benefit. A joint fund of $400 million was thus created and managed through a public-philanthropic partnership, an innovative governance model. A not-for-profit organization was subsequently established to provide funding and support for local communities: *Avenir d'enfants*.

The 1,2,3 GO! team joined forces with the new organization, bringing its expertise in providing support for local initiatives to complement the Foundation's extensive knowledge in the area of early childhood development. When *Avenir d'enfants* held its first conference some ten years after the initial creation of the 1,2,3 GO! project, I was pleasantly surprised to see that, over the years, participants had become much better equipped to speak about early childhood and more effective in their actions due to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Although this was an intuitive evaluation on my part, it has proved to be valid: over the medium term, time and experience had done their work.

Avenir d'enfants wasted no time in acquiring the tools needed to initiate a Collective Impact approach. A local community support team was set up to help communities develop their own action plans. Training within an ecosystem approach was developed and offered to organizations to assist them in the process. *Avenir d'enfants* created an environment that encouraged the exchange and sharing of knowledge on early childhood development, reactivated connections with research, and promoted the early childhood initiatives that were being developed throughout the province. A rigorous, meticulous evaluation framework was prepared, and training was developed for frontline workers to ensure that community actions were evaluated on a regular basis. Collective action on early childhood spread rapidly into 128 local communities in 16 regions of Québec, involving over 2,000 local organizations acting on behalf of 300,000 children.

This experience has taught us – and continues to teach us – a great deal. First, it has influenced social consensus on the importance of early childhood in Québec's key prevention strategies. This has been the result of the simultaneous implementation of many different elements: resources, more intense and focused action, support, evaluation, and knowledge transfer. The Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation also launched a mass social campaign, stressing the importance of early action in childhood development. Schools are increasingly taking early childhood development into account as an essential stage in a child's education: at the third edition of a Québec-wide event, which attracted

close to 1,500 participants from the educational milieu to discuss the issue of student retention, early childhood intervention was given top billing for the first time.

Avenir d'enfants is an ambitious initiative that has to juggle many complex challenges at the same time:

- a new type of governance that integrates two different cultures: philanthropy and government;
- deployment to a population of eight million living in regions and communities that are very different from one another;
- a project with funders who are also strategic actors strongly involved in governance and action;
- pursuing ambitious objectives at an intense pace; and
- strong pressure with respect to outcome measurement and evaluation.

The arrival of this public-philanthropic partnership on the Québec scene has raised certain concerns about a private foundation working so closely with the government – an arrangement that represented a new form of social intervention. It cannot be denied that such a large-scale project, with seemingly unlimited resources to devote to community mobilization, has had a significant influence on the place of early childhood on the province's social agenda. Since the creation of *Avenir d'enfants* was the initiative of funding agencies, even though most communities recognized that they were being given a unique opportunity, some felt controlled, while others – albeit a minority – have refused to participate in the project.

In the field, it was important to show a great deal of respect for organizations and communities and to recognize the value of what they had accomplished before *Avenir d'enfants* arrived on the scene. In my role as Executive Director and intent on meeting with the decision-makers involved in education, health, municipal action, and early childhood, I toured all the regions of Québec. I felt this to be a necessary step in building the kind of trust among stakeholders to ensure the success of a project of such scope. The team at *Avenir d'enfants* showed great skill in setting up a support system that was truly helpful for the associated organizations.

Although it cannot be denied that such an injection of resources had an influence on actions focused on early childhood development, occasionally disrupting local dynamics, there is also no doubt that, if we look at the experience from a long-term perspective, it was beneficial. Organizations involved in the collective action were suddenly granted resources, the likes of which they never would have received otherwise. *Avenir d'enfants* ushered in a new context in Québec that was focused on a widely accepted social objective. Thousands of parents and stakeholders were – and continue to be – mobilized while thousands of children reap the benefits.

A FEW OBSERVATIONS BASED ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE

As these four initiatives overlapped in time, the lessons each learned from the others make up a significant body of experience on collective actions in Québec. My own experience affirms everything that has been written about Collective Impact over the past several

years: it is demanding, complex, and time-consuming, requiring infinite amounts of patience, resources, and expertise. Its impact can be measured only in increments over the long term. In its early years, the Collective Impact approach inspired a moment of euphoria, as we eagerly looked forward to the prospect of bringing everything together in perfect cohesion, with the possibility of devoting substantial resources to a common cause. It is now universally agreed that the combination of convergence, aligned actions, and acquired knowledge constitutes a winning formula against duplication, silos, and competition. That may be true in theory, but in practice the results are somewhat less effective, as perfect alignment does not exist in the real world.

We overvalued theory and undervalued practice

"If you want *to go* fast, go alone. If you want *to go* far, go together." That is the mantra that has been used during the past several years to illustrate and promote the value of Collective Impact. It suggests that, in the long run, the results generated by collective action will ensure the continuity and sustainability of desired changes, because the organizations that work with the people concerned will have changed their methods of operation. In the real world, however, even if the proverb is true, the results are not always obvious. In the short term, a Collective Impact initiative often advances slowly and not very far, due to strained relationships or continuing competition among organizations, political manoeuvring, jockeying for organizational positioning, poor leadership, or insufficient drive, resources, and support.

Collective actions run up against many obstacles, and it takes time for the collective to be seen and experienced as an entity that is stronger than the sum of its parts. It takes time and commitment to take ownership of the process and move it forward. It is a long and winding road, and cruising speed depends on the initial context, background, and leadership of the organizations and individuals involved, their openness and empathy towards each other, and the role and attitude of the funder(s) in the process. In the case of collective action, time is not money; it is the essential ingredient needed to produce the desired impact.

We did not always accurately align our approach with the targeted result

We cannot talk about Collective Impact initiatives without talking about what we hope to achieve and on what scale and without ensuring that our approach is in line with our objectives. In short, the best approaches do not automatically tell us the best direction to take, nor do they guarantee that the desired results will be achieved. What are we aiming to change: people, living conditions, or the organizations themselves? Although these three dimensions are always present, we must determine whether our approach is appropriate based on our answer to that question. In the short term, results may be obtained faster by working directly with people in a targeted program than with a collective action approach, which will always tend to broaden the scope of the impact. These issues came up constantly as each of the initiatives described in this article strove for coherence of action – a difficult task when multiple expectations were continually competing with each other.

We underestimated the complexity of the process

In an ideal world, we trust that our approach will enable us to rapidly achieve our goal. In reality, however, the discussions required to clarify issues, strategies, and objectives, combined with all the information that needs to be compiled to build a comprehensive community portrait and the tensions that have to be alleviated in order to create a positive atmosphere, are all steps in the process that seem to delay us from our goal while actually providing us with the means to achieve it.

What guarantees success is the ability of both the organizations involved and the funders to constantly balance these tensions through a clear understanding of the issues involved in this type of approach in relationship to their objectives. Failure to understand this factor leads to disappointment or incomprehension when faced with slow progress in achieving results in targeted populations. Along the way, we realized that even a collective that brought together all the conditions for success did not itself possess *all* the levers for change, and that community mobilization efforts required a great deal of time. All we could do was *contribute* to the actions of many other actors. In short, we learned from experience.

We learned how to build an organic relationship between funders and actors on the ground

As I am fond of saying, "If the process is going to work, there has to be someone who doesn't think about anything else from the time they get up in the morning until they go to bed at night." That's the definition of a *backbone organization.* In all the initiatives I have described here, the funders played an important role in creating and supporting the backbone organization as "shareholders" in the project. This meant that their relationship to the field was no longer external, as in the traditional model, but organic as the funders were directly engaged in the project.

Both Centraide and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, each in their own way, initially played this role in order to create backbone organizations that, although independent, remained closely connected through major financial contributions and a presence on their boards of trustees. In so doing, they put distance between themselves and the newly created backbone organizations while maintaining their role as key partners. Centraide created the *Centre 1,2,3 GO!* and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation set up *Avenir d'enfants* in partnership with the Québec government, the difference being that the *Centre 1,2,3 GO!* was not a funding organization, while *Avenir d'enfants* was both a funding and backbone support organization for the mobilized communities.

In the case of the neighbourhood round tables, funders invested recurrent core funding in order to provide them with the means of coordinating their actions by hiring a facilitator. The Saint-Michel project received support from its neighbourhood round table, Centraide, and the Vibrant Communities project, all of which helped to bring other funders on board. In Saint-Michel, leaders were able to take advantage of all these contributions to advance their objectives at their own pace, while making a few inevitable concessions to the funders.

There are many forms of backbone organizations. Funding and support functions may or may not co-exist within the same organization. Combining these two functions is an issue that has often come up for discussion: Is it possible to be a stakeholder in the process and an impartial judge of its efficacy at the same time? Depending on the attitude it adopts, the funder may be perceived and experienced by organizations on the ground as more or less of a hindrance to their autonomy. Funders can exert varying degrees of control, resulting in varying degrees of independence, accountability, trust in the field team, and levels of support. Only experience can tell which approach will work best in a given situation. One thing is sure, however, everything depends on a judicious combination of trust, efficiency, and rigour. Too much control from funders stifles the work in the field, while too much lenience and distance from the field can cause the collective action to lose momentum and direction. Since there is constant tension between these two extremes, it is essential that stakeholders understand and are able to monitor this tension, maintaining an appropriate distance from the initiative.

Within this relentless tango, a relationship develops that enables all the partners to learn together and progress together toward the target objective. In the end, it is openness to dialogue that is the guarantee of a relationship based on trust and transparency – two key conditions needed to assure the success of a Collective Impact initiative.

The dance continues …

The wealth of knowledge and skills that we have accumulated over the past 20 years is undoubtedly more impressive than we realize. The culture of mobilization is being increasingly integrated into practice. Although we are just barely beginning to have sufficient distance to be able to measure our achievements and their impact on organizations and populations, they are real:

- mobilization of citizens and parents,
- more activities for children,
- new neighbourhood resources,
- creation of links between sectors formerly working in silos,
- increased synergy among organizations,
- greater capacity for developing strategies for change,
- better integration of knowledge,
- ability to draw inspiration from best practices and adapt them as needed,
- increased competence in the area of evaluation.

Now that we have extensive experience using a Collective Impact approach, and we are better at it, the real challenge will be to find concrete evidence that implementing this approach makes a positive long-term contribution to achieving lasting change in organizations, as well as the populations concerned and their living conditions.

We have made great strides in the area of evaluation, which is increasingly used as a development tool rather than a control measure. Long-term population surveys, like the one recently used in the Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK) conducted by the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* (INSPQ), enable us to measure our progress. The study in question produced a profile of the

situation in each region of the province that could subsequently be used by hundreds of teachers and partners.

The QSCDK was the result of a close collaboration between the Institut de la statistique du Québec, the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports, the Ministry of Families, and Avenir d'enfants. The study was an excellent example of coordinated mobilization at the local, regional, and Québec-wide levels. The fact that all parties involved were able to work together for the benefit of a single cause was due in large part to the openness and attitude of the primary actors, who were intent on reaching across all barriers. On completion of the study, the INSPQ published *Les conditions de succès des actions favorisant le développement global des enfants* (Conditions for success of actions promoting overall child development), a tool designed to stimulate collective decision-making on actions to be taken.

A Collective Impact approach requires a careful combination of leadership, knowledge, skills, and resources to ensure that the organizations involved develop their initiatives in an ecosystem rather than in isolation. This kind of approach requires actions that go beyond the local level to engage government resources at all levels. The greater the connection between the levels of action, the greater the impact.

Attitudes are changing, expertise is expanding, risks have been mapped out ... we are definitely getting better at dancing this tango on a tightrope! In the face of such complexity, can we really do otherwise if we want the best for our societies?

Acknowledgements

For their contributions to this article, I wish to thank Odette Viens, Vice-President, Innovation and Development, and Mario Régis, Director, Allocations and Social Analysis, Centraide of Greater Montréal, as well as Jean-Marc Chouinard, Vice-President, Strategy and Partnerships, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation. I also wish to thank Benoît Lévesque, sociologist and Professor Emeritus at UQÀM, for his comments.

Notes

1. At Centraide of Greater Montréal, I held the position of Vice-President, Social Development, and was the first Executive Director of *Avenir d'enfants*.

2. *Avenir d'enfants* is a non-profit organization (NPO) devoted to helping local communities throughout Québec support the overall development of children five and under living in poverty in order to ensure that every child has the same chances for a good start in life. URL: http://avenirdenfants.org/en.aspx .

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT: VENTURING ON AN UNFAMILIAR ROAD

Hilary Pearson

Summary

In 2010 Hilary Pearson wrote in *The Philanthropist* about the emerging trend of creating Funder Collaboratives to address the challenges of the 2008/2009 economic downturn. In this update, Pearson looks at the emergence of Collective Impact from a funder's perspective, exploring whether this new approach can help address perennial questions of effectiveness and impact and how funders are responding to these collaborative initiatives.

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Over the past five years, since the financial crisis and recession of 2009, which had such a negative impact on charitable endowments and funding strategies, Canadian private funders have talked much more about the importance of collaboration. Working together is attractive because it is potentially a way to extend scarce resources and increase impact. More importantly, collaboration is an important strategy for funders focused on addressing complex social issues in their communities, such as homelessness, substance abuse, youth disengagement, and child poverty. None of these issues are easy to resolve, and many of them have persisted over time or even worsened. It is clear that no one funder, no matter how large, can make a significant difference on these issues without collaboration. In times of on-going austerity, even government funders are motivated to find funding and implementing partners. But the challenges of working together are as great, if not greater than the benefits, as those who have tried it can attest. Knowing when and how to work together is essential; it calls for resources that not all possess, and a willingness to work outside of one's "comfort zone."

This is even more true when we look at the intensively collaborative approach known as "Collective Impact," the term first brought to wide attention in the influential article by Mark Kramer and John Kania published in the Winter 2011 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. This approach is gaining some currency, at least in conversation, among Canadian funders. It has the appeal of promising sustainable impact in addressing what are generally intractable and complex social problems. Yet it must be pursued rigorously and persistently to achieve results. In this commentary, I would like to offer some observations on the reasons why this approach is an unfamiliar and therefore challenging road for private funders. When I use the term "private funders" in what follows, I refer in most cases to private charitable foundations.

There are still relatively few examples of Collective Impact initiatives as defined by Kramer and Kania either in Canada, or even in the United States. This is not because

funders are not interested in exploring such initiatives. On the contrary, there has been willingness to discuss and learn about it from funders across the spectrum of private foundations, community foundations, United Ways, and funding charities. But Collective Impact is not simply a more elaborate form of funder collaboration. It is painstaking, complex, and evolving work, demanding a high degree of commitment and flexibility, as well as new forms of shared accountability and measurement. None of this is easy for funders used to making their own decisions and being accountable primarily to their own boards and stakeholders, not to a collective.

In an article for *The Philanthropist* in 2010, I noted that many Canadian funders were beginning to look at collaboration as a possible tool to achieve greater leverage. Forms of funder collaboration range from relatively simple regular exchanges of information on a shared field of grantmaking, to more formally structured co-funding models. While formal co-funding has not grown very significantly, Canada has seen some definite growth since 2010 in the formation of groups known as a funder affinity groups or "learning networks." This type of collaboration involves coming together regularly to hear what is happening in a field or issue area, share information, and explore potential strategies for making more effective investments. Established funder networks such as the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network (CEGN) have been joined by newly structured groups such as the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, the Early Child Development funders working group, and the Mental Health and Wellness Affinity Group. Other funder groups are being formed in different fields of grantmaking activity. Many of these groups reach out horizontally to include both private and public foundations, corporate givers, and United Ways. Participation in an affinity group at the least helps to inform funding decisions and offers further potential to align funding and policy advocacy work. But funder affinity groups do not represent (and would not claim to be) Collective Impact initiatives.

It has been emphasized that true Collective Impact initiatives are built on five key elements or conditions: a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, shared measurement, continuous communication, and a backbone organization. Perhaps the most important one of these elements, in my view, is the backbone organization, which can ensure that the other elements are in place or being developed. Using these conditions as criteria, we can identify some initiatives in Canada that are much more plausibly in the Collective Impact model than the pure funder collaboration model.

One such example is Upstart: Champions for Children and Youth, a Collective Impact initiative in Calgary championed by the United Way of Calgary and Area, which acts as the backbone organization. Upstart describes Collective Impact as the engagement of the community in developing solutions to complex social problems that cannot be solved in isolation: in this case, giving children and youth a chance to get through school. The initiative convenes community leaders around a common cradle to career readiness agenda, which includes early years, school completion, and Aboriginal youth education. The United Way of Calgary acts as convener, conduit for funding, fiscal agent and funder, and partners with service providers, citizens, researchers, and corporate and private funders for the common goal of helping children become healthy, caring, responsible adults.

In Québec, we see a similar initiative taking place in a different form as a high-level partnership between a private foundation and the provincial government, to accomplish many of the same goals as in Calgary. The Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation has established a ten-year partnership with the Québec government in order to support local and regional mobilization in areas that are critical to educational success: early childhood development, healthy lifestyle habits, and student retention. The Foundation also provides support for awareness activities and tools for parents and Québec society as a whole. Between 2002 and 2009, the foundation and the government created and continue to fund three backbone organizations to coordinate different aspects of this multi-faceted initiative: the overall development of children five and under living in poverty, healthy eating and active living, and initiatives that promote student retention.

Several Collective Impact initiatives at the level of cities have been created to confront the immensely complex challenge of reducing or eliminating poverty within communities. An example is the Cities Reducing Poverty initiatives coordinated through the backbone of Vibrant Communities, the multisectoral action learning initiative that has been operating in Canada since 2002. After more than ten years of learning, Vibrant Communities has ambitiously expanded its goal to create a learning community of 100 Canadian cities with multi-sector roundtables, aligning poverty reduction strategies in cities, provinces, and the federal government. The results of this activity are impressive. In many cities across Canada, municipal governments are coming together with non-profit agencies, funders, business leaders, and intermediary organizations to pursue comprehensive initiatives that tackle poverty, homelessness, child development, stay in school, and youth engagement. These collective efforts are based on the clear realization that "no one sector has the solutions; no one group can tackle poverty alone."

There are other examples where a backbone organization is playing a critical role in pushing forward a collective agenda on a complex social issue. In Winnipeg, the United Way of Winnipeg, in partnership with the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, the business community, the provincial government, and a private foundation, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, is working on a comprehensive effort to support the school-readiness of children in low income communities (the Early Childhood Development Innovation Fund, initially supporting the Point Douglas Boldness Project). Other backbone organizations are trying to bring about major progress in such complex problems as homelessness. The Calgary Homeless Foundation is an example of a local implementing organization that is coordinating the efforts of agencies, governments, business partners, academics, and citizens to pursue a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in the City of Calgary.

At a national level, coordinating organizations such as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Council on Substance Abuse are attempting to use principles of collective action to align the work of many partners and to provide resources across the country for action at local levels. In the field of immigrant integration and support, a coordinating organization, ALLIES (Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies), has existed since 2007 and is jointly funded by the Maytree Foundation, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the federal government, and TD Bank. ALLIES is a backbone organization that supports local efforts in Canadian cities

to successfully adapt and implement programs that further the suitable employment of skilled immigrants.

These examples demonstrate the diversity of collective initiatives. They also suggest that where there is a well-led and resourced backbone or implementing organization, it is likely that the alignment effort and the collective work is being supported and sustained effectively so that over the long-term we will see some important results. But two observations can be made as we look around at the current landscape in Canada:

- Collective Impact is most often undertaken and led at the community or city level by public funders such as the United Way or a community foundation and by multi-partner backbone organizations. Private funders are playing a minor role, with some exceptions.
- Collective Impact is still an unfamiliar concept to most private funders, since these efforts are of relatively recent vintage, and results have not been widely communicated (unsurprisingly since the sharing of results is an inherently long-term and complicated process).

How to explain the very limited (so far) investment by private funders in Collective Impact efforts? I think it relates to the very different and demanding nature of the work. Every one of these efforts requires years to bear results and a very patient commitment by funders who are prepared to wait for those results and not to be the driver of the outcomes. Collective Impact is typically well outside the familiar paradigm of one-to-one grantmaking (grants to a single organization for a single or perhaps two or three years). And most funders – here I am speaking about charitable foundations – do not have the capacity to play an active role in defining the Collective Impact approach or to take on the job of directing or being the backbone organization.

This being said, the examples of private funder engagement in collective action are instructive. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Chagnon Foundation, and Maytree, to take a few, have all chosen to support the development of collective processes through the funding of backbone organizations. If the venture is untried, this is something that private funders can do arguably more easily than government funders or even corporate funders. There is certainly risk in working on untested collective processes, with little in the way yet of agreed shared measurement frameworks to tell funders if milestones are being met. But where Collective Impact is working, it is very much attributed to the effectiveness of the process supported by the backbone. One caveat to this form of support is the danger of mixing the roles of funder and manager or implementer. Due to the inherent power imbalances between funders and recipients, it is probably better for funders to negotiate their participation carefully and to avoid taking on a major role in acting as the actual backbone or intermediary organization. This being said, the United Ways have taken on this role in some cities as noted earlier.

There is no doubt that asking funders to invest in process rather than in projects that lead to immediate or at least short-term results for communities is a difficult ask. And it is not part of what motivates many donors to engage in philanthropy in the first place. Their desire for a more explicit cause and effect link between their funds and a specific short-term outcome, even if they are willing to fund together with other funders, makes

it difficult for them to contemplate stepping beyond collaboration to the demanding world of Collective Impact. Nevertheless, more funders are being attracted by the idea of collectively mapping out complex issues. From there, a private funder may find that it is not a difficult step further down the road to explore a process for tackling those issues collectively. One strategy that may help to bridge between the more familiar work of grantmaking and the unfamiliar challenge of supporting Collective Impact is to look for and fund those backbone organizations that have the potential or can demonstrate that they have the right qualities for success in this work – leadership, strategy, diverse partners, and common goals.

Websites

ALLIES: www.alliescanada.ca

Calgary Homeless Foundation: www.calgaryhomeless.com

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness: www.caeh.ca

Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network: www.cegn.org

Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: www.philanthropyandaboriginalpeoples.ca

The Early Childhood Development Innovation Fund and the Point Douglas Boldness Project: http://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/tag/school-readiness/

Fondation Lucie et Andre Chagnon: www.fondationchagnon.org

The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation: www.mcconnellfoundation.ca

Maytree: www.maytree.com

Upstart: Champions for Children and Youth: www.calgaryunitedway.org/main/upstart
.
Vibrant Communities: http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2_aboutVC.html

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY IN COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Cathy Mann

Summary

There is no doubt that Collective Impact is a "change maker," having considerable resonance with those involved in innovative community development projects like the East Scarborough Storefront. But can such collaborations be funded given the current focus of many funders on narrowly defined issues and specific outcomes? Cathy Mann, a fund raising consultant with more than twenty years of experience, looks at the role of philanthropy in supporting Collective Impact networks and the backbone organizations that are so critical in sustaining them.

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June Callwood was a champion of social justice. In her day job, she wrote 30 books and thousands of articles for newspapers and magazines. In her spare time, she founded or co-founded 50 charities. June had both supporters and detractors, but one thing is undeniable: She was a change-maker.

When she died in 2007, I wondered, "Who will be MY generation's June?" Rather than starting distinct charities, the new June would have to help groups determine how to come together and work collaboratively to be more effective. However, I had no idea what that would look like.

So when I finally met the new June a few years ago, I was delighted. Her name: Collective Impact, a model of working that aims to address an identified problem through the power of collaboration. Like June, it has supporters and detractors, but one thing is undeniable: it's a change-maker.

Many Collective Impact networks work in the realm of social change. Social change is messy and nuanced and difficult to measure and it's difficult to know which of many variables may have led to a particular shift. In fact, this is a key distinction of Collective Impact and is what separates it from the more traditional approach of scaling or taking a known solution and methodology and funding its roll out to new communities. Instead, Kania and Kramer (2013) suggest in "Embracing Emergence" that:

> It is the process that comes after the development of the common agenda in which solutions and resources are uncovered, agreed upon, and collectively taken up. Those solutions and resources are quite often not known in advance. They are typically emergent, arising over time through collective vigilance, learning, and action that result from careful structuring of the effort.

When I started my fundraising[1] consultancy, working primarily in the world of social justice, I wanted to help groups work collaboratively around fundraising. I saw and worked with many groups doing similar or complementary work. Working together on fundraising seemed like a win-win opportunity. But how, I wondered, could I help smaller agencies generate significant revenue to make large-scale, meaningful change? Could I help smaller groups work together to develop the systems, processes, and efficiencies – and ultimately generate the kind of revenue – that larger fundraising shops enjoy?

East Scarborough Storefront

That's why I was thrilled when, in 2009, I met East Scarborough Storefront. The Storefront supports and facilitates the delivery of services from 35 different agencies – under one roof. It works with partner agencies, each of which is a subject matter expert, offering services as wide ranging as employment support, after-school programming, settlement services for newcomers, seniors yoga, legal advice, and a support group for people living with Multiple Sclerosis. As a one-stop shop, The Storefront connects community members to the resources they need, either directly or through referrals to other agencies.

After a decade of working in the community, East Scarborough Storefront had become more than a community resource and an innovative mechanism for service delivery. The Storefront had the trust of the residents, credibility with funders and politicians, and had demonstrated its ability to facilitate collaboration between many actors within and outside of the community. Their trusted role in the community led them naturally into community building activities. Working with residents, they co-created platforms and forums for residents to act as community leaders and to participate directly in making decisions that impacted their lives and community. As The Storefront became more engaged in building relationships and networks – linking people, groups, and institutions – they found themselves in a position to facilitate collaborative solutions to complex community issues. Over time, The Storefront coined its own term for the unique role it plays in the community: Community Backbone Organization.

The Storefront's adaptation shares the five key conditions that distinguish Collective Impact from other types of collaboration, as defined by Kania and Kramer:

1. **A common goal,** identified by residents and local change-makers as a prosperous, safe, and well-educated community.

2. **Shared measurement systems,** using developmental evaluation as the tool and with the understanding that this will be an on-going journey.

3. **Mutually reinforcing activities** in the form of distinct yet inter-related relationships designed to meet the resident-defined common vision of a prosperous, safe, and well-educated community.

4. **Continuous communication,** which is built into the model in the form of multiple opportunities for actors to come together.

5. **Backbone support**, a role that The Storefront plays as the newly coined "Community Backbone Organization."

My initial meeting with The Storefront was to discuss a potential capital campaign for a youth-led building renovation. A group of young architects, planners, and designers were mentoring local youth in a hands-on project: the renovation and re-imagination of The Storefront's home – a dispiriting 1960s police substation – into a vibrant community gathering space.

It was – and continues to be – amazing to watch youth and professionals learn from each other and to see The Storefront help facilitate a messy and exhilarating process that has resulted in some beautiful new spaces: a commercial-grade community kitchen, a community resource centre, additional offices for partner agencies, and a multi-sport outdoor play area for the community, including an innovative shade structure with a green roof and water filtration system. Completing the project is taking longer than hoped due to fundraising challenges; however, everyone involved – community, staff, and building professionals who continue to mentor youth – are in this for the long haul. It has been an insightful journey into the role of philanthropy in Collective Impact networks.

Fundraising for The Storefront

When I first met with The Storefront staff about the possibility of a capital campaign, they had few of the foundational elements one expects as predictors of fundraising success. To their credit, they had excellent and long-standing relationships with a handful of larger, institutional funders. However, the rest of their philanthropy program was underdeveloped. They had only a handful of individual donors, no dedicated fundraising staff, virtually no fundraising infrastructure, and had yet to develop a succinct way of explaining their new model of working in community. For most organizations, I would have suggested that they weren't ready for a capital campaign. But The Storefront seemed different. It had a leader who was inspiring, a group of professionals who were so excited about the project that it was palpable, a community that passionately supported the project, and a new way of working in collaboration that was showing promising results and that struck a chord with me. This, I realized, was the best way for me to approach collaborative fundraising: work with groups that *were already* collaborating.

In the first years of consulting with The Storefront, I watched and learned about Collective Impact. During that time, we began slowly implementing the fundraising infrastructure needed and practiced what I call "responsive fundraising." When fundraising opportunities came our way, we responded, submitting proposals, making presentations, and having conversations. As part of a new approach to addressing old problems, there was a belief that The Storefront could also practice fundraising differently. And there was precedent for this belief. Early funders, in many cases, sought out The Storefront and became engaged as partners, working collaboratively with other funders to develop and strengthen the model. They saw the value in this new collective approach and were prepared to invest to see where it led.

Fundraising for backbone organizations

It soon became clear that The Storefront would have to consider reaching out to a broader donor constituency if it wanted to address long-term sustainability. The Storefront was not the only backbone organization and Collective Impact network reaching this conclusion. In a blog posting by Jennifer Splansky Juster on FSG's website (Splansky Juster, 2013), she shares a common question that emerged from backbone leaders at a Collective Impact workshop: "How do backbone organizations mobilize the funding and resources required to support and sustain the work of the Collective Impact initiative over time?" Among the solutions identified:

- **Make the case for leverage.** Explain the return on investment when organizations, agencies, and systems are in alignment.
- **Emphasize systems building.** Describe how a backbone organization helps to create better systems to address old problems in new ways.
- **Engage funders in creating the solution.** Have funders at the table as part of the conversation to allow them to be part of and co-creators in emergence.
- **Mobilize resources, not just funding.** Engage donors and funders in helping to identify volunteers, in-kind support, and provide introductions to build new relationships.

All of the points above resonate with me as I think about East Scarborough Storefront. Yet, as a fundraising professional, another solution seems glaringly obvious to me: develop a proactive revenue generation program and hire dedicated staff to ensure you can raise funds for the long-term.

Dedicate resources for fundraising

In the world of fundraising, there is a truism: people give because they are asked. The corollary to that statement is that people rarely give if they are *not* asked. Therefore, it is incumbent upon backbone organizations hoping to raise money through philanthropy to proactively ask for money. In order to do so, organizations need to have the appropriate staff, volunteers, and infrastructure to identify and reach out to prospective donors and make the case for this new approach to solving intractable social problems.

Moreover, no traditional fundraiser will do: a backbone organization will likely have to find someone who can bridge the world of traditional fundraising methods with the emerging practices of social enterprise and other hybrid business models.

The literature suggests that most backbone organizations are small – some as small as one or two people facilitating the relationships of their entire Collective Impact network. It can be difficult to add proactive fundraising activities to an already busy set of responsibilities. However, if backbone organizations wish to develop a plan for sustainability, they will eventually have to invest in the staff and infrastructure needed to support revenue generation efforts. The Storefront is currently investigating how to enhance its revenue generation activities, including the structure and culture required to support them. What this will look like, like everything at The Storefront, will be determined through consultation and collaboration.

Fundraising for Collective Impact

Fundraising is an established profession with a growing body of knowledge and research. Even though the Collective Impact approach is new, many tried and true fundraising principles still apply. As The Storefront moved beyond the small circle of donors and funders who knew and loved it, basic fundraising principles became more relevant and useful.

Typically, fundraising practitioners think about philanthropy in terms of three main constituent groups: foundations, individuals, and corporations/groups (which include many different types of groups such as faith groups, service clubs, etc.). To date, much of the philanthropic funding for Collective Impact networks has tended to come from foundations. This is understandable because foundations often play an important role in introducing new and innovative programs and helping them to get off the ground. In the past, once foundations helped move a program from the idea stage to the execution stage and helped to demonstrate its effectiveness, they expected that other sources of on-going funding would be found to sustain the program.

There is now some interesting literature emerging from the world of foundations, reflecting on their roles, their influence on Collective Impact, and the shift some are beginning to make in the ways in which they engage in these initiatives. While most of this literature is from the United States, the lessons seem applicable here in Canada as well. Foundations that have engaged in self-reflection have reached the following four conclusions based on their involvement with Collective Impact networks:

1. **Provide flexible funding, adopt an experimental mind-set, and make a long-term commitment.** It can take years to fully understand the nature of intractable social, environmental, and health issues, and to identify ways of addressing them robustly. "In a world that expects short-term solutions to long-standing problems, it can be difficult to take the time needed to develop the trust that is required between all of the players. But it's virtually impossible to succeed without it" (Mann, 2012). Flexible and long-term funding allows a backbone organization that supports a Collective Impact network to adjust to previously unknown information, changing circumstances, the impact of new relationships, an evolving understanding of needs, and emerging solutions. It permits and encourages experimentation with new approaches to solve long-standing problems and provides the financial stability to build a team with the appropriate skills to engender the trust required to sustain a collaborative approach.

2. **Balance the dual role of funder and facilitator.** The motivation of the funder to support Collective Impact can influence the funding relationship. When funders proactively create networks in support of an identified cause, the vested interest in achieving desired results may lead to the problem of funders trying to direct activities rather than acting as facilitators to draw out the collective wisdom of the participants. This temptation to direct the group may undermine the very collaboration required to create change. So it's critically important for everyone to act as equal partners in the relationship. Collaboration requires humility and an acknowledgement that everyone involved can and must learn from each other.

3. **Encourage candour**. In order for this emerging model of collaborative engagement to make a lasting and meaningful difference, grantees and funders must work closely together in an environment that permits both parties to candidly share their successes and challenges. Relationships between funders and grantees are, by their very nature, fraught with power imbalances. Funders with money to grant to groups struggling to find funding may not be aware of the degree to which this power dynamic influences candid communication. Wiley et al. (2013) address a common barrier to candour in grantor/grantee relationships: "Unfortunately, there is a disincentive for grantees to critically evaluate and honestly report project outcomes because, traditionally, future funding has been tied to a track record of 'successful' projects" (p. 98).

4. **Think big**. Funders, whether they initiate the collaborative approach themselves or fund existing networks, can challenge Collective Impact networks to think bigger than they had originally anticipated and can support this notion of thinking big by bringing additional resources to bear, in the form of relationships, skills, and introductions to additional funders (Wiley et al., 2013; Carlson et al., 2011; Easterling, 2013). To this end, foundations and institutional funders have had a meaningful impact on the emerging Collective Impact network model. They have funded nascent initiatives, prodded and supported networks, and studied the movement itself. As in any relationship, funders and grant recipients are learning how to get along with each other and to work together – the lessons continue.

What of other philanthropic constituents?

As The Storefront began to reach beyond its early supporters to proactively develop relationships with new prospective donors, keeping the following basic fundraising principles in mind has proven helpful:

1. **Be prepared.** Proactive fundraising requires a basic infrastructure as well as an organizational culture that is supportive of fundraising. This requires intentional focus, commitment, and deliberate action. You need dedicated staff, volunteers, and infrastructure, along with an understanding of donor motivations and the ability to succinctly describe the value of your work and its expected impact, in order to be successful. That takes a lot of preparation.

2. **Take a donor-centred approach.** Potential support is dependent on honouring the donor's interests and priorities. This has meant describing the work of The Storefront in terms the donor cares about and being prepared to speak about the work in different ways, depending on the audience. In one case, a donor may be inspired by the role The Storefront plays in facilitating collaboration between higher education and the community, but not necessarily be interested in the role of supporting delivery of services efficiently. In other cases, donors may be more interested in the urban environmental work being facilitated by The Storefront than its community building. Moreover, taking a donor-centred approach means inviting the

donor to be part of the "collective" in Collective Impact, but only if that is the kind of relationship the donor wants.

3. **You have to ask to receive and you can expect to hear "No."** Fundraising requires a proactive approach to reaching out and requesting support. If The Storefront wishes to grow the revenue generated from fundraising activities, it must be prepared to ask more frequently, yet still act strategically. And in so doing, one can expect to be turned down. It happens a lot in fundraising. It may simply not be the right fit, the right time, or the right cause for the donor.

4. **Large donations tend to come in the form of dedicated project or program-based support**. That's just how it is. Very few donors are prepared to hand over a large sum of money and say simply, "You do what you think is best with it." They want to know how it is going to be used and how it will make a difference. They are interested in impact and they want to know your theory of change – how are your actions going to change outcomes. This means that the very nature of backbone organizations – their role to leverage and facilitate relationships – may not have the characteristics that will interest larger and more traditional philanthropic support, primarily because backbone organizations are not themselves delivering direct programs or services, and Collective Impact initiatives do not always start with clearly defined solutions.

This principle is reinforced by research conducted a decade ago by Katherine Scott for the Canadian Council on Social Development. Her conclusions echoed what many in the charitable sector had experienced anecdotally: Traditional funders have shifted away from what they perceive to be administrative or overhead costs, including core operating costs, and are adopting an increasingly targeted approach that is project-based, more narrowly focused, and with funding being provided for shorter periods of time (Scott, 2003). Backbone organizations, central to the effectiveness of a Collective Impact approach can easily be seen as the very "overhead" costs funders strive to avoid.

Philanthropy's role in Collective Impact

So, what does this mean in practical terms for The Storefront and other backbone organizations as they consider philanthropy's potential contribution to their financial sustainability? Here are some of the practical lessons we have learned at The Storefront:

1. **Start with progressive, change-making funders**. Find funders who understand the importance of supporting infrastructure to the success of effecting lasting change and who understand the need of making a long-term commitment. These philanthropic angel investors have been the lifeblood of the Collective Impact movement to date. The Storefront, like many of the Collective Impact networks described in the literature, has also benefited from these kinds of partnerships.

2. **As you expand from angel funders to a broader universe of donors, your organization needs to develop fundraising capacity. This means it should:**

- Develop the infrastructure needed to support more fundraising activity such as donor management tools, policies, donor stewardship and communications, and more complex financial accountability.
- Ask more frequently (and be prepared to hear "no" more often). Effecting social change, and doing so in a new way that is unfamiliar – moreover, without a guarantee of outcomes – poses a greater challenge to making your case understood to a broader range of donors/funders.
- Invest in adequate human resources. Increased fundraising activity, such as infrastructure development and increased volume of asks, requires increased capacity and resources.

3. **Describe your work in ways that will resonate with prospective donors.** Donating is a voluntary action, so, in order to engage donors and inspire them to take action on your behalf, talk about your work in ways that align with their interests and intersect with your cause. StriveTogether, an organization that facilitates a growing number of communities in supporting children from cradle to career, articulated this notion in a recent white paper:

> The difficulty in raising funds is understandable: funding for core operations (e.g. backbone support) is not likely one of the most attractive support options for funders when compared to investing in programs that directly serve children. As a result, effectively framing the importance of the role is critical to ensuring that collective impact efforts are sustained over time. (StriveTogether, 2013)

Backbone organizations, central to the effectiveness of a Collective Impact approach, can easily be seen as the very "overhead" costs funders strive to avoid. This reinforces the need to take a donor-centred approach in order to position the work of Collective Impact in terms the donor understands and cares about.

Conclusion

Philanthropy has the potential to make a meaningful difference in the world of Collective Impact and, by extension, social change. Developing robust and proactive revenue generation programs may be the next big challenge facing this movement if it is to endure and continue to move the needle on intractable social issues.

The 1970s saw the rise of the environmental movement; in the 1980s cancer charities grew in awareness and the revenue they generated; the 1990s saw activism and philanthropy grow in support of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Perhaps ours will be the era of social change, facilitated in large part by the Collective Impact movement.

Note

1. The terms "philanthropy," "fund development," "development," and "fundraising" are used interchangeably throughout this article.

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THE CANADIAN BOREAL FOREST AGREEMENT: UNLIKELY ALLIES PURSUING CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA'S BOREAL REGIONS

Roisin Reid

Summary

Canada's boreal forest is one of the largest and most ecologically significant ecosystems on the planet and the source of supply for one of Canada's most significant natural resource sectors. Recognizing this, forest companies and environmental organizations in Canada came together to create the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA) in 2010, creating a unique and unprecedented approach and a new era in conservation and resource management. Communications Consultant Roisin Reid uses the framework of Collective Impact to reflect retrospectively on the creation and development of the CBFA and considers whether Collective Impact offers further insights into how this work might proceed as they move from Phase III–Organizing for Impact to Phase IV–Sustaining Action and Impact.

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In a recent blog posting, the departing head of Stanford University's Centre for Social Innovation, Kriss Deiglmeier, relayed the following observation: "The cross-sector collaboration things, they're really messy and they're really hard and they're really complex. And they're also the only frickin' way that things are going to get solved" (Deiglmeier, 2014). We couldn't agree more.

Canada's boreal forest is part of the largest and most ecologically significant ecosystems on the planet. One quarter of the planet's intact or undisturbed forest ecosystems and the majority of Canada's remaining wilderness is found there. This vast expanse is home to about 600 First Nations communities that hold unreconciled Aboriginal and Treaty rights to share the boreal forest and, among other things, "hunt and fish as formerly."

The Canadian boreal forest as a whole is home to a vast collection of species, including over 300 bird species, as well as species at risk of extinction, such as the forest-resident woodland caribou, which is listed as threatened under *Canada's Species at Risk Act*. Globally, boreal forests contain 80 percent of the planet's available fresh water, and in Canada much of that is found in carbon-dense boreal peatlands and wetlands.

The boreal forest is also a tremendous source of Canada's natural resources, including conventional and unconventional oil and gas, hydroelectric facilities, and mining developments. It is also the source of about half of Canada's annual timber harvest, which sustains nearly 200 forestry-dependent communities.

Obviously, both conservationists and the forestry industry deeply value the boreal forest; however, their divergent values led to decades of conflict, including large boycotts of Canadian forest products by a number of environmental groups.

More than 95 percent of the Canadian boreal is publicly owned and a significant proportion of this forest is subject to Aboriginal Treaties and rights. The federal and provincial governments allow the forestry industry access to the trees through geographically defined tenures, which are long-term licences to forestry companies. The tenure system was designed to encourage rural economic development and, despite efforts to manage Canada's boreal forest responsibly, nearly 50 percent of the woodland caribou's range has been lost to human activities that fragment or disturb their habitat – activities like forestry, oil and gas exploration, agriculture, and road-building. Meanwhile, recovery plans for the caribou are still a work in progress, and governments have come under fire for slow progress.

> Why pit economic gain against environmental green? Remember the hugely important Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, finalized just in 2010.… Talk about being radical. Bringing together groups that bitterly opposed each other. Well it's working.
>
> Look, Canada is twice blessed here. We have a profitable resource and a priceless wilderness and we are losing track of that. Maybe all the name calling, the demonizing and setting up straw men arguments on both sides isn't the most productive way forward. Maybe being a radical in politics these days should mean something else. Having a reasonable debate and finding a reasonable solution. The forest industry did it. Call it being radically reasonable. It works and don't worry, it's a 100% Canadian idea.
>
> – Evan Soloman, CBC, *The House* (January, 2012)

But a group of forestry companies and environmental organizations has come up with an innovative solution to protect both the boreal forest and the communities that rely on forestry jobs: the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA), the world's largest conservation initiative.

In 2007 and 2008, at the height of the debate over climate change in North America, the leadership that the membership of the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) was showing on climate change created a bridge to the conservation community in Canada. The forest products company members had collectively reduced their absolute greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 70 percent from the Kyoto base-line year of 1990. Building upon this shared interest in action on climate change, a small representative group of forestry company executives and environmental leaders sat down together to explore the possibility of a broader solution to their shared challenges.

How the CBFA works

Signed in 2010, after two years of intensive negotiations, the CBFA recognizes that while governments hold the primary responsibility for managing and conserving Canada's boreal forest, both industry and environmentalists have a duty to help define the future of this important ecosystem. The agreement applies directly to more than 73-million hectares of public forests, and signatories include the 18-FPAC member companies, Kruger Forest Products, and seven leading environmental organizations including Forest Ethics, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), the Canadian Boreal Initiative, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, The Nature Conservancy, and the Ivey Foundation.

A truce lies at the foundation of the CBFA: environmental groups have committed to stop boycotts of the forest companies involved and, in return, the companies have

suspended logging operations on almost 29-million hectares of boreal forest, which represents virtually all boreal caribou habitat within their operating areas.

The agreement represents a new relationship between the former adversaries and has created an opportunity for the more complex work of developing action plans for the recovery of caribou, developing proposals to complete a network of boreal protected spaces, producing ecosystem-based management guidelines that participating companies can use to improve their forestry practices, and presenting a common face to the global marketplace.

As the CBFA moves towards implementation, it is engaging a broad variety of stakeholders and rights-holders, including other industry sectors, Aboriginal groups, affected communities, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments. Once negotiated, recommendations are being presented to provincial and Aboriginal governments for implementation.

The CBFA and Collective Impact

The CBFA exemplifies many aspects of the Collective Impact framework. As an industry-level cross-sectoral collaboration, the CBFA aims to create win-win outcomes for both environmentalists and the forestry industry – a goal that may seem contradictory at first, but one toward which real progress is being made.

In their article defining Collective Impact, John Kania and Mark Kramer note that "large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations" (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

This idea has been echoed by Avrim Lazar, a former CEO of the Forest Products Association of Canada and a key member of the group, who negotiated with the CBFA in May 2010. Lazar explains that government's job is to find out how to reconcile competing environmental, social, and economic agendas, which has traditionally been done using a "consult and decide" model that takes the separate agendas of industry, environmentalists, and communities and often derives solutions, which satisfy none of the stakeholders; indeed, the objective of government policy-makers is sometimes described as ensuring that "everyone is equally unhappy."

"This is bad public policy…but it's the default model for government because we're not really skilled, as a society, at finding solutions through consensus," he said. "We need to put conservation and sustainable use at the centre – alongside economic and social agendas. And we need to pursue this at a landscape level" (Lazar, 2013, November).

Looking at the five conditions of Collective Impact – common agenda, backbone organization, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication – the CBFA is a profound example of the approach.

Common agenda

Signatories to the CBFA share a vision for Canada's boreal forest – all the parties are interested in seeing better protection for key species, ensuring Canada is recognized as a world leader in conservation, as well as ensuring a new prosperity and a sustainable future for the Canadian forest industry and the communities that rely on it for their economic and social well-being.

The agreement has six goals, which aim to find balance between conservation objectives and the health of the forestry industry:

- Implement world-leading sustainable forest management practices.
- Accelerate the completion of the network of protected spaces for the boreal forest.
- Fast-track plans to protect boreal forest species at risk, with efforts initially focussed on woodland caribou.
- Take action on climate change as it relates to forest management.
- Improve the prosperity of the Canadian forest sector and communities that rely on it.
- Promote and publicize the environmental performance of the participating companies.

A dedicated group of environmentalists and forestry industry representatives worked with facilitators through two years of negotiations to write this ground-breaking agreement, which established the architecture for a new relationship between the signatories, based on collaborative solutions, not compromise.

Backbone organization

The CBFA Secretariat is a small group of highly qualified and well-respected experts in the areas of forest management and environment, and is responsible for coordinating the work of all the CBFA committees and working groups to ensure the efficient implementation of the agreement. The Secretariat works closely with the CBFA's forestry and environmental signatories, providing program management, logistics, coordination, communications, and facilitation support.

The Secretariat is headed by executive director Aran O'Carroll, who has been involved with the agreement from the beginning. O'Carroll came to the CBFA Secretariat from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), where he was national manager of legal and regulatory affairs and CPAWS' lead negotiator for the CBFA, and is currently on long-term leave from CPAWS to perform this role.

The CBFA working groups are divided into national and regional committees, each supported by a Secretariat coordinator and a small cadre of facilitators. The national working groups develop science-based guidance, while the six regional working groups apply this national-level guidance to developing recommendations to implement on the ground.

The CBFA's regional working groups include representation from both industry and environment groups. With the support of the Secretariat, these working groups act as liaison between CBFA signatories and governments, Aboriginal governments, communities, and stakeholders. Government and First Nations representatives are increasingly integrated directly in the working groups.

Shared measurement system

Measuring the outcomes of an agreement on the scale of the CBFA can be challenging, but the agreement signatories have assembled a team of leading scientists, headed by Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow, Professor of Northern Environmental and Conservation Sciences at the University of Alberta, to, among other things, help to evaluate the CBFA's progress at implementation.

The CBFA Science Committee provides independent, science-based guidance on implementation of the CBFA by assembling and managing topic-specific Independent Science Advisory Teams (ISATs), which counsel the National and Regional Working groups to promote the use of the best available information in decision-making. The Committee's role is to provide quality control and assurance on the information the CBFA is using to move forward on its objectives.

The fact that the CBFA signatories have agreed to use an independent committee as the arbiter of what is the best available information is another innovative feature of the agreement. Prior to the CBFA being in place, both environmentalists and industry tended to use science as ammunition – each interest group would choose the facts that suited their purpose and use them to support their own interests.

"As a policy person, I thought of science and facts as things that I would take to persuade people that what I wanted was right," says Lazar, who was Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy and Communications) for Environment Canada before becoming President and CEO of the Forest Products Association of Canada. "It was rare that I would look to science to tell me what my point of view would be. I knew what my point of view was. I looked at science to provide ammunition to let my point of view prevail. The CBFA basically shifted the paradigm of the role science plays in these discussions" (Lazar, 2013, October).

The CBFA Science Committee is developing methodological frameworks and other guidance for the agreement's goal and is now working on defining indicators of progress and an explicit measurement system.

"Progress across the breadth of activities isn't uniform, and some indicators are clearer than others," says Aran O'Carroll. "For example, with regard to caribou habitat restoration, consistent with the direction of the Government of Canada, we've set a target of having 66 percent of habitat undisturbed across Caribou ranges while ensuring social and economic viability. However, on the economic side, the agreement talks about providing 'demonstrable benefit' to the forestry industry, and that is an example of an area for which we have yet to specify targets and indicators" (Aran O'Connell, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

Mutually reinforcing activities

While the work of developing solutions across the agreement's six goals is key to the CBFA's success, getting rights-holders' and stakeholders' input on and eventual support of the recommendations that emerge from that process is equally important. And there is a wide range of rights-holders and stakeholders who are affected by the CBFA's work – from the residents and leadership of small communities that rely on forestry jobs, to Aboriginal governments, to industries outside forestry, such as mining, that have operations in the areas affected.

As such, the CBFA signatories are becoming adept at tailoring their outreach efforts to capitalize on their varied interests, networks, skills, and capabilities.

"The CBFA is fundamentally an agreement between industry and Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOs), but for it to succeed we need to garner broad support among governments – Aboriginal, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal," says O'Carroll. "There are different levels of receptivity to industry or conservation groups among our stakeholders. Working effectively sometimes recommends unilateral engagement, based on who has the best relationships. For example, in Manitoba, conservation groups have a close relationship with the provincial government, so they have occasionally taken the lead on discussions with government. In other locations, such as Alberta, it is industry which has occasionally taken the lead."

Continuous communication

It has taken years of sustained effort to reach the position in which CBFA signatories now find themselves, where they have moved beyond cooperation and compromise to a truly collaborative relationship. The level of trust involved in the outreach described above – having industry and ENGOs represent each others' interests – has come about through continuous communication and a focus on interest-based negotiation.

The CBFA secretariat has ensured that each working group has received training in interest-based negotiation to establish a foundation for productive discussions.

"Institutional change is a monumental challenge, but we've made a lot of progress in developing trust among all the players at the table," says O'Carroll. "In some instances, we have achieved a very productive and solutions-based space where working-group members are actively seeking solutions to shared challenges."

"What has come out of this work is not about negotiation, it's not even interest-based negotiation. It's the point at which you leave the negotiating behind and become stewards, become responsible for collective problem solving, for finding solutions," says Lazar. "It's about the technology for running environmental and other policy processes in a way that actually is solution-oriented rather than simply interest-oriented."

Funding cross-sector change

Among the challenges facing the prospect for large-scale, cross-sectoral collaboration is that institutional funders usually have a rigorous, investment-like approach to choosing projects. They look for novel and current strategies, and try to pick "winners" – organizations or discrete projects that promise short-term results.

One of the radical requirements of the Collective Impact model is that it's necessary for funders to think differently about enabling change on a larger scale – providing funding that can be used to inspire dialogue and create opportunities to identify a common agenda across sectors.

The CBFA has a diverse funding base – the majority of funding to date has come from the signatories themselves, supplemented by government funding, as well as individual funders. The Ivey Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts took a substantive risk in financing the intensive negotiations of the CBFA from 2008 to 2010.

"Our funders stepped up and invested in the two years of negotiations that led to the initial agreement," says O'Carroll. "But the early successes and the potential of what we can achieve through this collaborative approach is beginning to reward that risk."

Organizing for impact: CBFA achievements and next steps

From the perspective of the implementation phases described by the Collective Impact framework, the CBFA is moving from Phase 3 (Organizing for Impact) to Phase 4 (Sustaining Action and Impact). The infrastructure and processes to support the agreement are in place for the most part, and the work being done under the CBFA is beginning to produce concrete results.

In June 2012, the signatories announced a major breakthrough – consensus recommendations for caribou action planning for an 800,000 hectare area of Ontario's boreal forest – almost five times the size of the amalgamated City of Toronto. The recommendations will help to conserve more than one-quarter of the 3 million hectares of caribou range in northeastern Ontario's Abitibi River Forest, as well as to maintain hundreds of jobs in forestry.

Once implemented, these recommendations would exclude over 800,000 hectares of critical habitat for boreal woodland caribou from harvest. The remaining 2.2-million hectares would remain open to forestry, with sustainable forest practices in place to safeguard wildlife and ecosystems.

This action plan will not only conserve forested areas that are home to critical caribou habitat, but will also allow for increased harvesting in areas where caribou have not been present for some time. In fact, it will provide an estimated 20 percent increase in wood supply over the next 30 years. Since the announcement of support for the CBFA's recommendations in northeastern Ontario, regional working groups have been making substantial progress in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and are expecting to be able to propose recommendations before the end of 2014 in these regions.

Progress has not always been easy – the peace between traditional rivals in the conservation and industry camps can be fragile. For example, in December 2012, Greenpeace Canada and a group called Canopy pulled out of the agreement, in part because they claimed that progress on concrete objectives had been too slow.

The remaining signatories of the agreement have also been frustrated by the slow pace of progress, but there is an emerging appreciation for the challenge represented by the CBFA. Indeed, many signatories would concur that the agreement is "the only frickin' way that things are going to get solved." As part of ongoing work under the agreement, the CBFA Secretariat and working groups are engaging in a formal "lessons learned" process – documenting successful and unsuccessful experiments in the CBFA approach. This is essential to refining the program management approach and dispute-resolution process included in the original agreement, to help get around roadblocks, and to achieve faster progress in specific areas.

"This is the most ambitious agreement of its kind in the world. If it was easy, there wouldn't be anything ground-breaking about what we're trying to do," says O'Carroll. "It would have been miraculous if the first phase of work had resolved all the problems in areas like North-central Québec, where mills have been closing for decades, and caribou have been rapidly disappearing. But we're prepared to keep working at it and the necessary relationships are in place."

But at this point in the evolution of the agreement, it could be said that the CBFA's legacy is as much about the evolution of a productive relationship between signatories as about the outcomes on the ground.

"We went the next step, and shifted the paradigm about what our jobs were," says Lazar. "Instead of the industrialists being at the table to argue for jobs and the environmental community there to argue for conservation, the CBFA says actually you're all responsible for both."

Websites

The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA):
www.canadianborealforestagreement.com

Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC): www.fpac.ca

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS): www.cpaws.org

Canadian Boreal Initiative: www.borealcanada.ca

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COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Lee Rose

Summary

Shared Measurement is a critical, and some think challenging, component of Collective Impact and in this article Lee Rose argues that we already have significant community knowledge, but that the power of community data to support and drive change lies in how we need to look differently at how we use and share these resources.

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"But I need THAT piece of LEGO!"

One Sunday morning, my boys, aged 6 and 10, were sitting at opposite ends of the kitchen table, each with a pile of LEGO in front of them. Both were completely immersed in their individual projects. As their respective piles dwindled, and with creations half-constructed, they began to eye the bits and bricks across the table from them. One-off "this one for that one" exchanges ensued; however, trading quickly became hostile with both boys arguing that the other had "the piece" that he needed. In a pre-caffeinated father-of-the-year-worthy moment, I sat down at the table between them and brought both piles of LEGO together. As neither of them really had enough to build something on their own, why didn't they build something really cool together?

Life lessons from dad aside, there are some parallels between my children co-creating something from the building blocks scattered on the kitchen table and the idea of working together to achieve Collective Impact. The beauty of LEGO lies in it being a dynamic and complex system that is governed by a certain set of rules or assumptions – much like our communities. The bits and bricks in the system are different: some are fat and square; some are long and thin. Some are highly specialized; others are fit-anywhere generalists. While there are nearly endless ways that the bits and bricks can be configured, LEGO also has a pair of system-defining constraints: the nubs and hollows that are built into each individual bit or brick. While you can fit any two parts together, the way they come together is always the same – with a satisfying click.

In the arena of Collective Impact, the bits and bricks that make up the system are things like time, talent, data, resources, money, skills, energy, and space. As we come together to tackle a particular issue – say youth homelessness or environmental sustainability – each of us brings a certain number of pieces to the table. We don't all have the same types or number of pieces, *but we can all contribute something*. The goal is not to create a new system, but rather to find novel ways of working within the existing system to achieve a

desired social change, with the realization and understanding that our good ideas will be inevitably constrained by the parts and skills that surround them (Johnson, 2010).

Another way to view it is to consider all of these bits and bricks as various forms of *community knowledge* – information, facts, and data that are (or could be) shared by you and others. This could include things as basic as your city's transit schedule, the demographic makeup of your neighbourhood, or the number and types of books that are checked out of the local library every year. Other examples could be outcome measures from an after-school program, a municipal database of trees on public property, or the results of a citizen-led neighbourhood revitalization project. On their own and in isolation, these various bits of data and information may seem altogether pedestrian and uninteresting – perhaps that's why so many reports to funders sit collecting dust on shelves or taking up space on servers. But community knowledge also includes "how" and "know-how" – your ability, capacity, and understanding to turn knowledge into action. In other words, what you know is only half of it. It's what you do with that knowledge that really counts.

So how do we get from a seemingly random assortment of building blocks sitting in haphazard piles to a shared vision for Collective Impact? One of the ways that we strive to put the pieces together is through the creation and adoption of community indicator systems – examples of which include the *Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)*, *Peg* (an aptly named joint initiative of United Way Winnipeg and the International Institute for Sustainable Development), and Community Foundations of Canada's *Vital Signs*. Each of these identifies and tracks indicators that speak to a community's – or a country's – wellbeing. In simplest terms, *community indicators* can be described as measures that provide information about past and current trends within a community. They can present information on the overall health of a community, providing insights on things that are working well and things that might be particularly challenging, such as limited access to transit or an increase in the high school dropout rate.

At the core of community indicator systems lie various forms of data. While there's lots of buzz and hype around data – open data, big data, raw data, meta data – we need to remember that data is just data. In fact, I'd argue that data is actually useless until you put it into context. Community indicator systems collect, analyze, and interpret data for a range of indicators and then share that information and knowledge with the broader community. In other words: they give the data context. And context is key.

When you put data into context – by mapping educational attainment by neighbourhood across a city, for example – information and insights emerge. You might start to recognize patterns and see trends. Why does a particular neighbourhood seem to have an elevated high school drop out rate? What's the demographic make-up of that neighbourhood? What after-school programs are available? What other factors might be at play? As you continue to interpret and gather additional information, you're actively building knowledge around the issue. And armed with that knowledge, you can begin to take action.

The other point about community knowledge is that, by and large, it is already there. I believe that we have lots of data; in fact, we're swimming in it. The power lies in

finding it, organizing it, understanding it in context, and packaging it to give it visibility and meaning.

Checking your community's vital signs

Vital Signs is an annual community check-up, conducted by community foundations across Canada – and now around the world – that activates community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities.

It all started in Toronto in the late 1990s when a small group of civic leaders began discussing a new way to engage Torontonians in monitoring the wellbeing of their newly amalgamated city. After a series of meetings and public consultations, the decision was made to develop a report card for the city. The consultations that followed were lengthy and arduous, partially because they involved so many diverse perspectives from community, academia, business, media, and philanthropy. In 2001, the Toronto Community Foundation finally published the first *Toronto's Vital Signs*. It was something of a tome, but an idea was born and, over the next four years, community foundations across Canada began to take notice.

In 2005, Vital Signs became a national initiative of Canada's community foundations, and community after community began to experience the impact of collecting community knowledge with a range of partners around the table and then sharing that knowledge with the community at large. Now, almost 10 years after the national expansion of Vital Signs, more than 40 community foundations in Canada participate in the program and a transformation has taken place in many of those communities. The Calgary Foundation was asked to lead the community-based rebuilding efforts after last spring's devastating floods, the Vancouver Foundation has published ground-breaking research about connection and belonging in its multicultural city, and the Toronto Community Foundation is standing up and raising critical questions about the city's future direction at a time when the eyes of the world are on it – for better or worse.

The impact of collecting, sharing, and acting on community knowledge is not limited to community foundations in Canada's large urban centres. Thanks to Vital Signs, the Community Foundation of Northwestern Alberta is a partner in a new program designed to reduce skyrocketing obesity rates. Rural communities in Nova Scotia are uncovering hidden poverty in affluent university towns.

Today, Vital Signs has become much more than a national data collection program or a series of reports. It provides strategic direction that guides many community foundations and helps them determine everything from their local priorities for action to their grantmaking and donor engagement strategies. The reports are used by local governments, social planning councils, businesses, and countless community organizations. Vital Signs doesn't *talk* about the power of community philanthropy – it *illustrates* and *informs* it. It focuses on building an asset that truly is about "more than money" – *community knowledge*. But building this knowledge is actually only the beginning of the process.

When Vital Signs first became a national program, the participating community foundations focused on the details of collecting data and creating reports – the "how" and the "what" and the "when." But those initial forays quickly expanded into a much larger conversation about mobilizing that community knowledge, and to what end. Why is knowledge important to our communities? What role does it play? How can it enrich our lives and our vision of the future? Those are the questions that Canadian community foundations are tackling now as we consider what's next for Vital Signs. How do we build on the national platform we've created? What can we learn from other communities and other countries who've adopted – and adapted – the program to meet their own needs?

Putting the pieces together

The question of shared measurement often comes up when we talk about the future of Vital Signs and how it aligns with other community indicator systems. Which indicators are the best to peg our performance against? Is there a "right way" to measure community vitality and impact?

While I think that we can all agree that the short answer is no, we must confront the inherent challenge that lies in comparing indicators across various systems. How can we have indicators of community vitality that are relevant to a particular context, while ensuring that they're consistent and comparable at a higher order? In a conversation I had with Daniel Hoornweg of the Global Cities Indicators Facility, he described his work in researching the commonalities of three municipal-level indicator systems in Canada (specifically in Montréal, Calgary, and Vancouver) as being as perilous as trying to find a needle in a haystack. In this particular case, these three cities were measuring and tracking performance on more than 1,200 community indicators. Of these, only two of them were comparable. Perilous indeed. To put it simply: These LEGO pieces don't fit together.

So how do we make the pieces fit? Here are three things we can start doing right now:

Share what you've got. Even if you think it isn't much.

Data. Time. Numbers. Clout. Whatever you've got – it's time to stop hoarding it, because if you keep going it alone, it's not going to amount to much for very long. And guess what: You don't have all the answers. *Nobody does*. There's so much potential for greater impact if we ascribe to a share-by-default philosophy when it comes to community knowledge. To that end, community foundations are exploring how we can make the data collected and presented through Vital Signs even more accessible for others to use and contribute to. What bits and bricks are you holding back?

Stop waiting for perfection.

Vital Signs is not perfect, and I will be bold and presume that other community indicator systems aren't either. However, the lofty goal of perfection is something that we continue to strive for, and often at the expense of something that is good enough. We get caught up in tinkering and fine-tuning, holding more meetings, and trying to build consensus, instead of getting out there and figuring things out as we go along. We could all benefit from adopting a few principles of agile management theory, which espouses the belief that once you have an understanding of a project's overall objectives and goals, that you

can get a move on without getting caught up in planning, securing, and accounting for every resource that a project will require before you start. In short: it's time to toss out the Gantt chart, because when it comes to community knowledge, it is possible to both build the plane and fly it at the same time. Tom Peters called this "a bias for action"; Nike says, "Just do it!"; I say, "Wheels up, let's go!"

Have the courage to follow someone else's lead.

We are all guilty of wanting to own things and to take credit. It is in our nature to want to demonstrate how *our* approach is *the right* approach; however, this organizational hubris often clouds our ability to see the bigger picture. Is it worth the time, effort, and energy to come up with new solutions, methodologies, and frameworks for every project, when others have already done much of this work? I implore you to seriously question the value of starting from scratch. Why? Because, in many cases, we are already using the same alphabet. Wouldn't it be great if we were also speaking the same language?

From community knowledge to Collective Impact

Experts suggest that three pre-conditions must be in place before launching a Collective Impact initiative: an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change. Together, these preconditions "create the opportunity and motivation necessary to bring people who have never before worked together into a Collective Impact initiative and hold them in place until the initiative's own momentum takes over" (Hanleybrown et al., 2012, n.p.).

So what role can community knowledge play in initiating a Collective Impact approach to create lasting social change? Community knowledge and programs like Vital Signs and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing are well positioned, and in fact, are already helping to create a sense of urgency for change around a variety of issues. The release of Vital Signs reports every October provides a catalytic opportunity to focus attention, rally resources, and drive a range of actors to address issues in communities across the country. In many towns and cities, community foundations and other umbrella organizations play a pivotal role beyond funding good works – they are brokers of community knowledge, they create a community table to discuss issues, and they are ready champions for Collective Impact.

When you then consider the five conditions that make up the Collective Impact framework, it's obvious that community knowledge is at work throughout. Let's see how.

A common agenda*: *All participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

Community indicator programs like Vital Signs are well positioned to be the starting point for creating a common agenda to address complex social challenges. The research, data interpretation, and analysis that go into each community foundation's Vital Signs report brings each community's challenges, successes, and opportunities to light, contributing to a common understanding of issues and generating the sense of urgency needed to initiate and drive a process of change. The reports are often cited as a means of

rallying a range of actors from different sectors in a community around a specific issue and agree on a strategy or plan to work together.

Shared measurement: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.

Some may perceive shared measurement as Collective Impact's elusive holy grail; however, creating shared measurement systems isn't altogether impossible. As outlined by John Kania and Mark Kramer, the underlying premise is that we should focus on "collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations [to ensure] that all efforts remain aligned," which will then ensure that participants are able to "hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures" (Kania & Kramer, 2013). The challenge here is on agreeing which indicators to adopt, how to generate and monitor this data in a timely way, and, perhaps more importantly, understanding how each partner's actions and interventions will impact those indicators.

So how can community knowledge support shared measurement? As suggested earlier, we don't necessarily need *more data*; we just need to understand *how to use it*. Community knowledge can form the basis of a shared measurement system to support a Collective Impact initiative by selecting a smaller number of specific indicators that will be used to track and measure impact on the target issue. The value of building the shared measurement system using community knowledge is two-fold: The data in most cases already exists and so the cost and effort of utilizing it is less, and the data already has context. Lots of context. And, therefore, lots of meaning because it is well connected with the community's overall indexes of wellbeing and other provincial, national, and international points of reference. And this context and meaning is important, because to make Collective Impact succesful, you have to know not only which indicators improved, but also which factors, actions, or strategies most influenced the change. An example of using a community-wide indicator system to support a collective impact approach is Peel Counts, a joint project of United Way, the Region of Peel, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which creates region-wide data as the basis for designing and promoting resiliencebased strategies to improve outcomes across a variety of social, economic, and health indicators. Peel Counts also supports a results-based accountability model used by United Way and the region to help evaluate funding initiatives.

Mutually reinforcing activities: Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

Here's where we need to take a look at the various bits and bricks of community knowledge that each of us brings and how we can bring them together for the greater good. This does not mean that all the actors agree to or need to do the exact same thing in an attempt to achieve the same objective. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In a successful Collective Impact initiative, identifying the ways in which each organization's activities mutually reinforce each other allows each participant to continue to focus on what they are good at and already do well, but with a greater understanding of the impact

that their unique contribution makes to the broader agreed-upon goals. This is where the knowledge and context that community knowledge brings to shared measurement systems contributes to our understanding of the interaction and intersectionality of service programs, heightening awareness that to address complex issues we need to use the many bits and bricks of our interventions in a coordinated and collaborative way.

Continuous communication: Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

Most of the continuous communication that is needed to sustain Collective Impact is about shared measurement and the mutually reinforcing activities that drive the target indicators. In part, this comes down to a willingness to share our various bits and bricks openly, and in real time, and to contribute actively to this pool of knowledge. There is little capital to be gained by holding on to our pieces because the only way we are going to be able to innovate is by collaborating and looking at the bigger picture. It may sound silly in the context of our society's (and often our sector's) hyper-competitive paradigm, but imagine a card game in which all the players could put all of their cards on the table and combine their hands to create the best possible combinations as a group. And perhaps even draw more cards from the vast pool of community knowledge.

Backbone support: Creating and managing Collective Impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Canada's community foundations and other players in the community knowledge space are already well-positioned to play the role of backbone support for Collective Impact initiatives and are able to bring together the various players and help to coordinate and provide a platform or vehicle for community knowledge to be shared and acted upon. It is an axiom of current nonprofit practice NOT to create new organizations when launching new initiatives but rather to mobilize existing organizations and infrastructure to work in new ways. One of the pre-conditions of Collective Impact is to ensure sufficient resources, and drawing on the talents and capacity of community knowledge brokers is a good way to leverage investments. The Hamilton Community Foundation is just one example of this, as evidenced by the role it played in the development of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, a community-wide initiative to tackle the city's unacceptable levels of poverty.

In conclusion

As we consider the role of community knowledge in Collective Impact, it is prudent to consider that while you might have all the right pieces, in many cases the order in which you put the pieces together and the interrelationship between the pieces is vital to success. Perhaps it is the right political climate, a particular technological advancement, or just having the right combination of players at the table. Sometimes, like a keenly observant six-year old, we need to hold onto a particular piece of LEGO. Wait patiently. Bring it forward, and click it into place at just the right time.

The challenge that we face in participating in Collective Impact initiatives is that many of us are too busy acquiring new bricks, building our own projects, and protecting our individual inventories to realize that, collectively, we have already got more than enough pieces to go around. Let me illustrate our inherent blindness to this fact by asking you how many ways you think you could configure six identical eight-stud LEGO bricks. If you guessed half a dozen, you would be way off. Even a couple of thousand is far off the mark. 300,000 isn't even in the ball park. It is actually slightly more than 915 million different ways (Eiler, 2005). Now I ask you this: If six identical pieces of LEGO offer up 915 million potential configurations, just imagine what is possible for our communities.

Websites

Canadian Index of Wellbeing: https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing

Community Foundations of Canada: www.cfc-fcc.ca

Global Cities Indicators Facility: www.cityindicators.org

Peel Counts: www.peelcounts.ca

Peg: http://www.mypeg.ca

Vital Signs: www.vitalsignscanada.ca

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INNOWEAVE AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT: COLLABORATION IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Aaron Good & Doug Brodhead

Summary

Innoweave, an award winning collaborative capacity building program designed and delivered by J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, SiG, and over 150 partners from all sectors across Canada, has added new workshops and resources to help groups of community organizations develop Collective Impact initiatives. Drawing from this experience, the authors describe why Innoweave added a Collective Impact module and what it hopes to achieve, citing examples of organizations that are successfully using Collective Impact to tackle complex problems.

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Many organizations understand the importance of collaborating with others to reach better outcomes, but can "collaboration" alone tackle these big, complex issues? A new Innoweave module is helping organizations take collaboration further by engaging in Collective Impact.

If you've ever driven a vehicle with a child in the back asking, "Are we there yet?" over and over, you're familiar with how painstakingly slow progress on complex issues like poverty, crime reduction, or obesity can be.

Collective Impact is gaining significant traction as an approach that helps communities go beyond basic communication and information sharing to address these big challenges. Innoweave, a new initiative of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, in collaboration with Social Innovation Generation (SiG) and 150 partners from across all sectors, is working with community organizations that want to use new approaches to enhance their impact and tackle big challenges. Collective Impact is one of nine approaches that Innoweave currently supports. Innoweave has carefully designed a process to help organizations from the moment they decide to work together, straight through to the implementation of their Collective Impact action plan.

"Our partners all have a shared history of centering our work on youth and recognizing the many assets they bring with them," says Skye Louis, coordinator of AVNU (pronounced "avenue"), an open-learning platform where young people aged 13 to 29 can access workshops, mentorship, and networks. "At the same time, we are keenly aware of the complexity of barriers that youth are facing and the way these barriers are integrated into existing social and institutional structures. For years, our work has been focused on building capacity for youth to overcome these barriers; it's a great approach but it can be frustrating to see that the larger patterns remain the same. Collective Impact represents

a promising way to address some of these systemic issues directly. That way we can shift some of the responsibility for change from the shoulders of individual youth and bring some focus on the larger systems that are creating barriers in the first place."

Many organizations who have traditionally tried to tackle these issues on their own and have moved towards using the Collective Impact approach find the experience daunting. The sheer complexity, time, and resource commitment required for a successful Collective Impact initiative can feel overwhelming, but most find the experience well worth it.

"We came away from the workshop with more questions than we started with, which is a good thing," reports Louis. "The workshops have helped us define where we are at in the process, identify where our existing strengths lie, and understand which areas we need to develop in order to move forward successfully."

What is Innoweave and how does it help nonprofits?

Last summer Innoweave partnered with Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement to launch a new Collective Impact module that includes webinars, workshops, coaching, and grants. The Innoweave platform, which includes eight other modules, helps passionate leaders of successful community organizations learn about, assess, and implement these new approaches to effect large-scale change.

In Canada, community organizations are facing a new set of challenges that are changing the landscape of the sector. These challenges include the current slow growth economy as well as an aging population, which is resulting in a declining ratio of working populations to retirees. Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments are struggling with large deficits, resulting in smaller investments in the community sector and limiting the funding available for new programs, which in turn contributes to a highly competitive fundraising environment. All this is happening at a time when many groups are seeing limited growth in their charitable donor base, and new attitudes and expectations are developing among donors about what they fund, how they fund it, and how the recipients spend these contributions.

Fortunately, there is a range of new approaches available to community nonprofit organizations to address and manage these challenges and generate greater results, including impact and strategic clarity, scaling impact, social enterprise, social finance, outcomes finance, developmental evaluation, cloud computing, and constructive engagement.[1] Through its program, Innoweave helps community organizations learn about and implement these new strategies.

How Innoweave helps nonprofits engage in Collective Impact

Through Innoweave, we tend to focus a lot on moving organizations from thinking to doing. The process has been designed to help organizations take concrete steps to achieve their goals and to generate more population-level results.

First, we offer information, resources, and videos on Collective Impact through our website, along with free Collective Impact webinars. The webinars are designed to

help organizations understand the approach and begin thinking about how it applies to their particular situation. We then have an online self-assessment tool[2] that allows organizations to determine if they have a clear understanding of the issue they wish to address, clear goals, buy-in from other organizations, and the necessary resources.

Once organizations have gone through all of the relevant materials and have participated in an "Introduction to Collective Impact" webinar, they can apply to participate in two workshops that are usually scheduled five to six months apart. "Developing two hands-on workshops for Innoweave that help collaborative partners put the conditions of Collective Impact into practice has been inspiring," explains Liz Weaver, a Vice President at Tamarack. "Community change efforts usually happen in isolation and few people, except those at the table, know about the effort it takes to get change to happen. By working with different groups on different types of problems, we can learn from each other and identify common challenges and opportunities, allowing us to improve together."

Workshop 1

In the first stages of a Collective Impact initiative, we help groups work together to move directly towards an actionable plan by:

- clarifying the population-level outcomes that they want to generate,
- exploring the community system in which they operate,
- starting to build a common agenda, and
- developing a short-term plan, including a community engagement strategy.

Workshop 2

Once groups have clarified their outcome goals, we have found that it is then important to help them develop a more robust plan. This includes:

- reflecting on emerging insights from their community engagement process,
- developing an initial theory of change for their Collective Impact initiative,
- determining the essential governance and backbone infrastructure required, and
- building a longer term plan for their Collective Impact initiative.

Ongoing support

Providing these groups with access to coaching and support from experienced experts in the field of Collective Impact has been essential for the ongoing success and resiliency of the initiatives. By offering modest implementation grants, we have tried to ensure that organizations have this ongoing expertise and support as they develop and launch their initiative. Without this ongoing support, we have found that Collective Impact initiatives often lose momentum and get bogged down by a number of common barriers.

Why Innoweave supports Collective Impact

When Innoweave began discussing which approaches and tools should be included among its offerings, it became clear that the Collective Impact framework had the potential to greatly increase the impact of a community sector group and thus generate population-level outcomes. It was this focus on outcomes for a whole population or system that was a key selling point.

Too often, people think Collective Impact is merely about collaboration between multiple stakeholders or across sectors. While collaboration is important, Collective Impact goes far deeper, establishing common goals and shared measurements, identifying activities that will lead to change and impact, and putting in place a backbone support system to ensure that all the partners in the process have ready access to the information and support they need to successfully execute their pieces of the plan.

It is also important to define what population-level outcomes mean in a Collective Impact context. To take an example from Tamarack's Vibrant Communities work on poverty alleviation, their goal was to reduce the number of people living in poverty. In other words, they didn't want to just deliver better services and support to their targeted population of 5000 and have them remain poor (though with better services) at the end of the impact period; they wanted to have 5000 people lifted out of poverty.

This is a very key distinction. And this is where it gets really exciting. Because it is in having clear impact goals that we can begin to answer that nagging question, "Are we there yet?"

The ability to better engage a range of partners has also been a key motivation. Governments are increasingly looking at Collective Impact approaches and corporate partners see its value as well. "PwC believes in the value of Collective Impact," explains James Temple, Director, Corporate Responsibility, PwC. "It enables leadership teams from across sectors to work together to strengthen organizational effectiveness while solving important community issues."

Collaboration across sectors will be required to address our toughest problems, and we now know that each sector can make an important contribution to this process. When tackling an issue like poverty, for example, the corporate sector can create entry level jobs or pay a living wage, governments can improve access to programs or services, community organizations can deliver services in priority neighbourhoods, and citizens with lived experience can talk about the barriers they face. These kinds of investments can make a big difference in creating community-wide change but often occur only when all of the right people are at the table.

Moving out of theory and into action

During the last year, 37 groups with members from 180 organizations attended Innoweave Collective Impact workshops in Calgary, Toronto, Victoria, Burlington, Montréal, and Winnipeg. The workshop model has also been successfully replicated for teams in Australia (by Collective Impact Australia) and the United States (by Tamarack) as well.

Collective Impact is a framework that can be applied to a wide variety of challenges. Examples of some of the issues being addressed by participating organizations include newcomer integration, economic development, food security and distribution, education, domestic violence, early child development, and active living/wellness.

"My biggest 'aha' at the Innoweave workshop was that in order to use the Collective Impact process, we needed to focus on what we want to increase or decrease by ten percent," says Amy Palmer, executive director at Lenawee United Way in Adrian, Michigan, which is committed to improving the lives of the Lenawee community through education, income, and health. Palmer recently traveled to a workshop in Toronto. "Not every community problem or issue is suitable for a Collective Impact process," she adds. "Also, we really need to focus, focus, focus!"

Skye Louis, coordinator of AVNU, adds: "The Innoweave process has really helped us gain clarity around where our strengths lie and where we need to focus our energy next. When we started mapping out our existing and potential supporters into four major quadrants, we saw clearly that we needed to develop more contacts in the business sector. Identifying and building connections with new sectors is a challenge for grassroots Collective Impact initiatives."

Workshop 1, which is focused on helping teams of organizations start the conversation about what they want to achieve and who else they need to engage, will be run again in Toronto in June 2014. And there are many more workshops in the works for different regions, as well as a new series of webinars (which are accessible worldwide) for organizations wanting to find out more about Collective Impact and Innoweave resources.

Eleven teams from more than 50 organizations have also recently completed Workshop 2 following their five to six months of community engagement. The teams used this workshop to clarify their impact goals and metrics of success and to build greater alignment around the range of conditions and activities that need to be in place in order to move the needle on their specific issue. They all came out of the workshop with concrete next steps for immediate implementation.

What we are learning about Collective Impact

We are excited at Innoweave to see Collective Impact helping groups of organizations work together to address major challenges and change outcomes for whole communities. It is powerful to see leaders of organizations "thinking big" about solving complex challenges such as poverty and enabling substantial societal shifts, such as changing our food systems. And it is heartening to see so many of these dedicated activists unshackled from the constraints of activity outputs and short-term individual goals.

Keeping an eye on big impact goals and what's needed to achieve them is critical. After all, employment training or transitional housing programs are only gateways to ending poverty rather than ends in and of themselves. Common agendas are most powerful when they foster alignment on measurable population-level impact goals and suggest a clear and shared model of mutually reinforcing activities for achieving those goals.

Infrastructure resources and communications strategies are most powerful when they can be linked directly to supporting these goals and enabling them to be realized.

It is the potential for such significant population-level outcomes that first attracted Innoweave to Collective Impact. Our goal has always been to help community sector organizations generate greater impact, and Collective Impact fits well with this toolbox of approaches. As we continue to support organizations through this process, we are con-tinually trying to assess what works and what doesn't. Although we have found that there are significant hurdles and challenges to success in this approach, in our experience the benefits and outcomes from successful Collective Impact initiatives are certainly worth the effort.

Case studies: How people are using Collective Impact

The possibilities for using Collective Impact are endless. As we have already seen from the significant number of groups coming together to create Collective Impact initiatives, there are a great number of applications that can benefit from this type of approach. Following are three case studies that we prepared with Tamarack to more fully describe the process and effectiveness of using the Collective Impact framework. All three projects started prior to the launch of Innoweave.

REACH Edmonton

In 2008, it became clear to many in Edmonton that the efforts by different groups to tackle issues of community safety were not having the intended impact they had hoped for. As a result, the Edmonton City Council decided to convene key stakeholders to develop a Collective Impact initiative that would focus on coordinating and integrating all of the city and community efforts dealing with community safety. From this call to action, the REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities was born, bringing together the City of Edmonton, community groups, businesses, organizations, and individual residents. These groups came together to develop a plan and approach that has led to broad system-level change, and is a great example of what can happen when a group of organizations and individuals go beyond collaborating and instead embrace real Collective Impact.

The Reach Edmonton Case Study is available at: http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Reach%20Edmonton%20Council_Collective%20Impact%20Approach.pdf .

The DiverseCity Project

The DiverseCity Project arose out of recognition by the Maytree Foundation and the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance that a more diverse leadership was required to create a stronger and more prosperous city and region. They understood that to create the conditions for substantive change in diversity, they required the buy-in and participation of organizations, governments, businesses, and individuals from across the city. To empower this change they created a series of action-oriented leadership development initiatives enabling hundreds of new leaders to emerge across the public, corporate, and non-profit sectors. Guiding these initiatives were four key goals: strengthen institutions,

expand networks, advance knowledge, and track progress. Using the Collective Impact approach, the DiverseCity initiative demonstrated the power of this type of intervention and underlined its potential to significantly enhance the representation of visible minorities and marginalized groups as experts, leaders, board members, and elected officials.

The DiverseCity Case Study is available at: http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Diversity%20Project_Collective%20Impact%20Approach.pdf .

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was formed to address the city's high levels of poverty. Created in 2005, the Roundtable recognized that even with the significant amount of investment currently being made by the community to reduce high poverty rates, real progress would only occur if they changed the way the entire community approached the issue. They needed commitment to a collective, community-wide effort. The Roundtable brought together leaders from business, non-profit sectors, government, education, and faith communities, as well as individuals who experienced poverty on a daily basis. The initiative coalesced around a single goal: "To reduce and eliminate poverty through the aspiration of *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child.*"

The Hamilton Roundtable Case Study is available at: http://innoweave.ca/assets/Resources%20Library/Case%20Studies/Collective%20Impact/Collective%20Impact-Hamilton%20Roundtable%20Case%20Study.pdf .

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Stephen Huddart, President and CEO of the J.W. McConnell Foundation, for his continuing support and input into this article. We would also like to thank Geeta Nadkarni for her fantastic research, content, and editorial support and Liz Weaver from Tamarack for her thoughtful comments.

Notes

1. See Innoweave Modules at http://www.innoweave.ca/en/modules .

2. Collective Impact Self-Assessment Tool at http://www.innoweave.ca/en/tools/51c86c50-78c4-405b-8396-3351adec2bf2 .

Organizations and websites

AVNU provides coordinated access to workshops, mentorship & networks for young people creating positive change: http://avnu.ca/ .

Innoweave is an initiative of Social Innovation Generation and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program: http://innoweave.ca/ .

The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation – The J.W. McConnell Foundation was established in 1937 by John Wilson McConnell (1877–1963). Renamed The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation following his death, the core purpose of the Foundation has remained constant since its founding. Its mission is to engage Canadians in building a society that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient: http://mcconnellfoundation.ca/en .

Lenawee United Way is based in Adrian, Michigan, and serves the residents of Lenawee County: http://www.lenaweeunitedway.org/ .

Social Innovation Generation (SiG) is a collaborative partnership of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, MaRS Discovery District, SiG West, and the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR): http://www.sigeneration.ca/ .

Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement is a charity that develops and supports learning communities that help people to collaborate, co-generate knowledge, and achieve Collective Impact on complex community issues. Its vision is to build a connected force for community change: http://tamarackcommunity.ca/ .

UNITED WAY AND SUCCESS BY 6: GROWING UP WITH COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Michael McKnight & Deborah Irvine

Summary

Celebrating its 11th anniversary, the collaborative approach to early childhood development in British Columbia implemented by United Way through its Success By 6 program is an intriguing model, which bears remarkable similarity to the Collective Impact framework. Supported by the provincial government and the credit union movement and coordinated by a modest provincial office, the Success By 6 BC Partnership is an example of a collaborative initiative led by United Way at the community level to address complex issues affecting children and families.

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Introduction

Success By 6 BC – an initiative that strengthens community services and provides support to young children and their families – is 11-years-old next month. This, in itself, is no small wonder.

Like a child whose remarkable development goes unremarked until she is all but grown, the innovative partnership in British Columbia of United Ways, the provincial government, the credit union movement, and Aboriginal and community leaders has matured into a province-wide vehicle for social change.

As such, the Success By 6 provincial partnership is a powerful demonstration of how United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM), as managing partner, is applying the conditions and practices of Collective Impact to improving early childhood development. Long before the Collective Impact concept gained the interest and momentum it has today, UWLM was setting up and supporting a provincial "backbone" office, linking and leveraging grassroots coalitions, recognizing the need for meaningful Aboriginal participation, and taking on the challenges of creating a common agenda and shared measurement.

This was neither by accident nor design. Rather, Collective Impact was (and is) a natural evolution of the United Way of the Lower Mainland's long-standing approach as a catalyst and convenor for social change. In many ways, the very concept of Collective Impact is built right into the DNA of the United Way movement. And although a western construct, Collective Impact, as practised in British Columbia by Success By 6, has been complemented, shaped, and reinforced by the teachings and wisdom of Indigenous traditions.

Scholars will continue to study and refine the principles of Collective Impact. To this end, UWLM can offer some important lessons learned over the past decade. But first, a brief look back: What is Success By 6, how did it come about, and why does it matter?

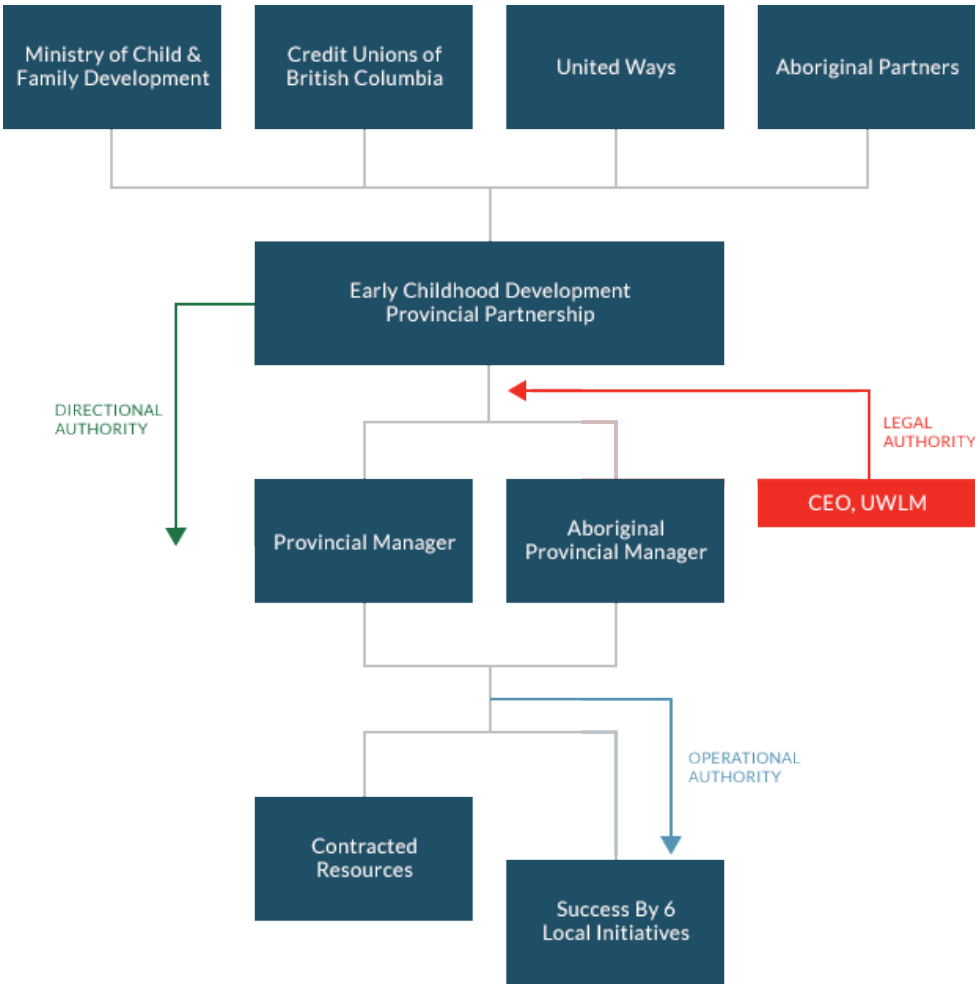
A BRIEF LOOK BACK

Success By 6 – a United Way-branded initiative conceived in 1989 in Minneapolis, Minnesota – was birthed in British Columbia from the unruly jumble of what is known as the Early Years sector. As elsewhere, the Early Years sector in BC is composed of a broad range of actors from government ministries and educational institutions, community agencies, and children's advocates. While all play a role in supporting children and families, historically, none functioned as part of a formalized structure across the Early Years system (K. Adamson, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

The acknowledged risk – some would have described it as the reality – was fragmented early years planning, isolated or missing programs, duplicated services, and funding inequity within and between communities. More worrisome, children and families were potentially bearing the cost. Childhood vulnerability and poverty ratings in the province were climbing higher than anyone wanted or felt they needed to be.[1] While all players knew that tackling these issues would (and does) require far more than a cohesive governance and operating structure, without it, the opportunity to have large-scale impact on a sustainable basis would remain elusive.

But there was more. The Early Years sector knew it could not just continue to talk to itself about these issues. There was an acknowledged need to include non-traditional partners, such as business and municipal leaders, in building community capacity. Furthermore, there was a very real challenge and need to engage Aboriginal communities in a way that was relevant and authentic to their experience. Not only was the harsh legacy of colonization and assimilation a significant barrier to establishing such trust and dialogue, but much of how community development was practised was not resonating with Indigenous teachings.

Into this environment, British Columbia's version of Success By 6 baby-stepped. Launched in May 2003, it was and is governed by an Early Childhood Development Provincial Partnership composed of senior leadership from the BC government, United Ways, and Credit Unions of BC. In 2009, an Aboriginal partner joined the structure.



Source: Success By 6 BC Early Childhood Development Provincial Partnership – Organizational Structure

The vision then, as it is now, was to build the capacity of parents and communities so children could be healthy, safe, secure, socially engaged, and successful learners by the time they entered kindergarten. How would this be achieved? In true Collective Impact fashion, that would depend upon the community, its diverse needs, and its existing capacity, as each one was unique.

What Success By 6 looks like more than a decade later

Across 20 regions in British Columbia, Success By 6 supports the development of more than 100 Early Years Councils and Aboriginal Councils that work with over 550 communities. Each council brings together a cross-section of local stakeholders from multiple sectors to research community needs, develop strategic plans, identify priority areas for funding, and collaborate on delivering programs and activities for young children and their families.

Whether it is by holding local health fairs, developing Aboriginal language resources, hosting cultural events, creating resource directories, or planning new playgrounds, communities collectively decide what is required and take action to make it happen.

Pooled data and shared measurement have demonstrated the value of this approach. Province-wide evaluations carried out in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013 found increased community mobilization and coordination, and many examples of improved service delivery for families and young children.[2]

Equally impressive has been the strength and value of the funding relationship. Since the inception of Success By 6 and up until March 2013,[3] the government of British Columbia has contributed $34.8 million. In this same period, government funding was leveraged by another $41.8 million brought in by United Ways, the credit unions, and community partners. In other words, a 120 percent return has been realized on the government's decade of investment.

No longer baby-stepping, Success By 6 is achieving Collective Impact in stride. Here are some things we've learned along the way.

Lesson one: Choose your champions well

Despite their leadership in social change in British Columbia, the regional United Ways involved in Success By 6 could not have done this on their own. Not only would the dollars be beyond what could have been raised through annual campaigns but the very nature and timelines of Collective Impact – lengthy dialogue and fact-finding, independent decision-making, diverse tactics within common priorities, and long-term horizons to create change – can be challenging for individual donors to support.

Business and government funding is critical to sustainability, as the dollars used can be channelled to capacity-building outside the direct funding of programs and services. But equally important is the message embedded in cross-sector funding. For example, in the case of the credit unions, 25 cents per member per year has been contributed for the past six years for a total investment of $2.5 million. The impact of these dollars goes far beyond their immediate value. Like the tens of millions of dollars provided by the BC government, this community-based funding gives credibility to the Collective Impact approach.

Moreover, funders from multiple sectors can work together to address gaps. In the early phase of Success By 6, there was no dedicated funding stream for Aboriginal communities, and these communities received only .03 per cent of the $10 million disbursed to that point. Now that has changed completely with a dedicated Aboriginal Engagement granting stream, which has seen $1.05 million disbursed to Aboriginal communities every year since 2008.

Lesson two: Embrace diversity

Unique communities. Geographically-diverse regions. Multiple cultures. And a complex and painful history that began with European contact and still echoes the need for reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples to this day. One might well ask: How can you possibly build a common agenda from this?

We learned over time that it is possible if you begin with those whose lives and futures we all have a stake in – the children themselves. Nowhere did this prove truer than with efforts to engage Aboriginal communities in Success By 6.

Age-old, traditional Indigenous values and teachings believe that raising a child is everyone's responsibility in the community. Acknowledging, listening, respecting, and valuing the wisdom of this belief was the basis of Success By 6's ability to build a connection with Aboriginal leaders and elders. If we wanted the initiative to be relevant and authentic to Aboriginal families – whether First Nations on reserve, urban Aboriginals, or Métis – we had to look at the situation in new ways.

The deficit-based lens by which western society perceives Aboriginal communities, and in particular, the care of children, had to be turned on its head (M. Dawson, personal communication, March 6, 2014). Whether hurtful stereotype or researched statistic, the daunting list of challenges – family breakdown, youth graduation rates, poverty, and substance abuse – is well known to Indigenous peoples themselves. That's why building capacity to support Aboriginal children and families must come from cultivating the many strengths found in cultural identity, self-respect, spiritual traditions, and belonging. It is this assets-based perspective that holds the key.

Success By 6 also had to make room and space for different meanings of community capacity building. Self-determination, self-government, the role of elders, and equity for Indigenous knowledge and processes – all these are critically important to the resilience of Aboriginal communities. This might run counter to capacity-building norms in non-Aboriginal rural and urban communities, but if the Collective Impact approach to Success By 6 is to succeed, we need to embrace a "Big Tent" approach and be responsive to cultural context and meaning.

Lesson three: Stick with it

Business imperatives change. Donor interests shift. Policy may ride on four-year election cycles. And economies rise and fall. Through all of this, Success By 6 BC has persevered – a testament to its partners, communities, and the energetic high of achieving significant milestones guided by a long-term vision.

A key tenet of Collective Impact is that you cannot micro-manage all the disparate strategies and tactics that arise in community after developing a common agenda and priorities. But savvy management recognizes opportunities to build momentum by sharing successes, transferring knowledge, and encouraging ideas that can be shown to advance required outcomes.

In British Columbia, many communities are at different levels in their ability to support children and families. Part of the role of the Success By 6 provincial office, managed by United Way of the Lower Mainland, is to identify and provide support to those communities that need it. This can range from sharing tools and plans from communities with strong capacity to developing culturally relevant resources that are more meaningful to those being engaged.

One example of this is the Granny and Grandpa Connections Box – inspired by the popular speech and language resource for Aboriginal children named "Moe the Mouse,"[4] which primarily supports English language development. In collaboration with provincial Aboriginal partners, Success By 6 created an interactive resource that links culture and traditional languages to Aboriginal child development, a critical gap that the Connections Box now helps fulfill. Three years in development, the concept succeeded in attracting significant new funding so that 500 kits could eventually be distributed to First Nations communities, Métis organizations, and Aboriginal agencies in British Columbia.

Some would say that three years is a long time to develop a language and early learning resource. But there is power in bringing together many groups to tackle the complexity inherent in cultural diversity and different states of community capacity. This underlines that sustainability involves both patience and a willingness to not prescribe the outcome.

Lesson four: Use your "backbone" to leverage and link

In his most recent book, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (2013), author Malcolm Gladwell identifies several thought-provoking examples of how perceived disadvantages can often provide a veiled advantage. In other words, a David-like size may not be the problem we first assume when encountering Goliath-like challenges.

Size does matter, but it is not the sole issue in capacity building. While we doubt there are many days when the Success By 6 provincial office views its small size as a clandestine benefit in its quest to support children and families, it does lend urgency and focus (and boundaries) to its task. More remarkable yet is the impact achieved from leveraging and linking coalition knowledge and expertise.

Staff numbers have varied over time at the provincial office, but it has always been very lean. Today, the office is composed of a provincial manager and an Aboriginal provincial manager – that's it. Together, they have operational authority over all contracted resources and local Success By 6 initiatives in more than 500 communities. With direction from the Early Childhood Development Provincial Partnership and legal authority from United Way of the Lower Mainland, it is a tightly run initiative. One can't help but be struck by the compact nature of the operation versus the reach of its influence.

As the "backbone organization" charged with supporting and driving social change across broad and diverse networks, the Success By 6 provincial office plays a crucial role. Continual dialogue among local networks is key. As is the need to be nimble when responding to issues, innovative when it comes to stretching funding, and hyper-aware of what is happening in communities.

Building grassroots coalitions to advocate for and support young children and families

depends upon strong relationships and clear communications. We've learned first-hand that this occurs best when it is modelled and continually strengthened within the funding partnership and the provincial office.

Lesson five: As hard as it is, measure and evaluate

Early childhood development in British Columbia is governed by a vision that "children are healthy and develop to their full potential." This vision is guided, in turn, by four long-term outcomes:

- Mothers are healthy and give birth to healthy infants who remain healthy.
- Children experience healthy early child development, including optimal early learning and care.
- Parents are empowered to nurture and care for their children.
- Communities support the development of all children and families.

There is nothing easy about measuring any of these outcomes, never mind creating an integrated evaluation and reporting system province-wide. But important progress has been made. Thanks to funding from The Max Bell Foundation and the Government of British Columbia, logic models and shared measurement tools have been developed for outcomes three and four. Success By 6 has taken the lead on administering the capacity building evaluation, while the Ministry of Children and Family Development is the lead on parent education and support evaluation.[5]

Shared measurement – a key condition of Collective Impact – can reduce duplication, identify ways to improve programs, and roll up data points for provincial and regional reporting. But even here, we have learned of the need to be flexible in order to be responsive and relevant. For example, initially, Aboriginal communities did not participate in the evaluation related to community capacity. When participation became mandatory, a culturally appropriate means beyond quantitative surveys had to be found.

A *Photovoice* approach, which uses dialogue and video and/or photos to capture the environment and share experiences and critical reflection – provided a successful alternative. Building on traditions of storytelling common to oral societies, evaluation practices gained from increased engagement of Aboriginal communities, while also incorporating Indigenous approaches to accountability.

Promoting policy and systems change

A key tenet of Collective Impact is to recognize that isolated initiatives can struggle to deliver higher-level systems change. Even if good outcomes occur, challenging questions arise about sustainability and scalability. How long will the intervention stick? Can the results be replicated? What happens when funders move on?

In contrast, Collective Impact involves many stakeholders working together through multiple channels. Integrating, coordinating, and leveraging different kinds of expertise can build a less isolated and more networked approach to problem solving and innova-

tion. This not only drives change at the community level but can also drive change in government as well. At its best, Collective Impact can provide government with more policy tools and funding levers to apply to social issues.

Here's one example. This spring, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development is soliciting proposals for test sites for Community Early Years Centres. These centres will build on community services already in place that foster the health, well-being, and development of children. Their focus is on increasing coordination and integration, collaborating across programs and services, and reducing barriers that inhibit access for families with young children.

In the past, similar calls for proposals would have allowed multiple organizations within a community to compete for early years funding. Not so this time. Embedded within the Ministry's criteria is the need for each proposal to be endorsed by a community Early Years Table. Furthermore, only one proposal per table will be accepted for consideration. We believe this shift acknowledges the collaborative and systematic approach used by Success By 6 and our partners. It is causing organizations and communities to rethink how early years services are delivered in British Columbia.

At the municipal level, policy changes are just as evident. While each situation depends on local context, the influence of the community Early Years Tables are at work. For example, in one community, the city council endorsed a Community Children's Charter. It is now woven throughout the municipal social development strategy. In another town, zoning by-laws were amended to reflect local childcare needs. A third community waived late fees on children's library cards. A fourth is including plans from the Early Years Table in an Integrated Community Sustainability Planning process. Yet another community is enhancing transit for families with young children and including children's voices in municipal planning.

Systems change is also moving beyond public policy to encompass other stakeholders, such as business. We know of a Chamber of Commerce that has created a Family-Friendly Business Award. This same chamber also intends to promote a family-friendly business policy, with self-evaluation kits for businesses. While we still have a long way to go, we can see that changes in policy, attitudes, and systems are already happening as the direct result of Collective Impact approaches and experience.

Where to next?

Reaching the 11-year mark is an exciting milestone in the life of Success By 6 BC. We are in our second decade, we have grown up with Collective Impact, and – as managing partner – United Way of the Lower Mainland remains committed to evolving this approach to social change. Two other initiatives we are pursuing, one involving place-based strategies in neighbourhoods in the Lower Mainland and the other encompassing non-medical home support to seniors throughout British Columbia, include important elements of the same Collective Impact concept. We expect more learning to come from these future activities.

In the meantime, we are proud of the results that Success By 6 has achieved in its first decade. Aboriginal leaders and communities – on reserve, urban, and Métis – are a crucial part of this initiative, and we have learned much through their engagement. Community business and municipal politicians are aware, involved, and have become some of our strongest advocates for sustainable funding. The Early Years sector is working more closely together, and the coalitions are a deep source of local knowledge and expertise.

In the future, these networks hold promise for a streamlined, effective, and efficient way of making funding decisions and sharing information on the needs and opportunities for children and families – even beyond Success By 6. Collective Impact is a big part of this potential and vision. The lessons we've learned about champions and diversity, about patience and commitment, and about leveraging and measuring were captured through more than a decade of front-line experience and collaboration that reflects a Collective Impact approach.

Like childhood, the time has passed quickly.

Notes

1. According to the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia, a child vulnerability level above 10 per cent is preventable. B.C.'s child vulnerability rate is about 30 percent based on HELP's latest research: http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/ .

2. See http://www.successby6bc.ca/ecd-evaluation/evaluation-tools-project-reports .

3. Fiscal 13/14 figures were not available as of the date of writing.

4. Moe the Mouse® Speech and Language Development Program - A Program of the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society: http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_2/moe-the-mouse.php .

5. For an overview of Success By 6 BC progress, see http://www.successby6bc.ca/sites/default/files/Quick%20Guide%20to%20Progress%20of%20the%20BC%20ECD%20Evaluation%20Project.pdf .

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COLLECTIVE IMPACT: THE BIRTH OF AN AUSTRALIAN MOVEMENT

Kerry Graham & Dawn O'Neil

Summary

There has been considerable interest in Collective Impact in Australia and Dawn O'Neil and Kerry Graham have been playing a leadership role, supported by the Centre for Social Impact, to bring the framework down under. In this update they relate the latest perspectives from Collective Impact 2014: Convene, Immerse, Learn, Australia's first ever conference on the Collective Impact framework, and describe why Collective Impact is needed in Australia to create transformational change and how they are working together to foster a movement for social change.

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Our Collective Impact journey is personal

Each of us has worked in social change for 20 years. Our combined experience spans working with children and young people, women and violence, justice and human rights, mental health and well-being, and Indigenous people and their communities. The roles we have undertaken have been equally expansive, including advocacy, program design, operations, marketing, business development, governance, and executive leadership. We met when each of us led national mental health organizations.

While we each enjoyed a somewhat similar pathway to becoming social leaders, what is more interesting is that both of us found leading national nonprofit organizations to be somewhat of a blunt instrument for the scale of change we hoped to create. For all the effort, resources, and passion, there just didn't seem to be enough change.

Independently, we left being CEOs and became social change consultants seeking to grow our impact through working with more than one organization at a time. We both had clients who were looking to scale their impact through collaborating with others. Taking such briefs was challenging. Many leaders and organizations were weary and wary of collaboration – it sucked up a lot of time with very few tangible benefits. Plus, it was clear that clients were unsure about *how* to collaborate at scale – working with many organizations and across more than one sector.

During one of our collegial conversations, we looked at the Collective Impact framework. We immediately saw it as a highly useable tool that could focus the inevitably messy initial conversations and create momentum towards purposeful action and measurable outcomes. In addition, the elements of the framework provided much needed clarity on process and roles. But most of all, the Collective Impact framework made

immediate sense – it had an "*ah ha*" moment about it and resonated with our own past experiences fostering large scale change. We agreed to introduce the framework to our clients. Thankfully, they said yes.

As we applied the framework, we started to see a difference in the way people approached the collaborative process – they became less weary and wary, and more open and engaged. It seemed the framework allowed people to feel a level of trust in the process – they could see what the process was up to and where they fit into the larger picture being created.

Off the back of this early and very limited success, we decided we needed to learn more about Collective Impact. We approached the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) and proposed that we undertake a Collective Impact study tour to the USA. CSI saw the value in the framework, and we set off on our learning adventure in September 2012.

We return to Oz as budding evangelists – resolved to promulgate the Collective Impact approach as a means to tackle our country's most complex and entrenched social problems. We didn't know how, but we talked about starting a movement.

We started blogging – posting our "call to action" with credible partner ProBono Australia, an online hub for not-for-profits. We spoke at any conference that would have us. And we sought out social leaders and organizations that shared our frustration with "isolated impact" and were exploring collaborative action. As a result, we worked with new Australian thought leaders like CSI, Social Leadership Australia (SLA), Ten20 Foundation, United Way Australia, Social Ventures Australia, and many others.

It is now 18 months later, and we are in the afterglow of convening Australia's first Collective Impact conference – C*ollective Impact 2014: Convene, immerse, learn*. We worked with the Centre for Social Impact and Social Leadership Australia to design an immersive learning experience for participants to move beyond "what is" Collective Impact and into the "how to."

The conference sold out six weeks ahead of time and was oversubscribed with 230 leaders from government, business, philanthropy, nonprofits, and the community in attendance. All participants shared a frustration that the "isolated impact" of disconnected program-based responses to complex social problems had not created the change they desired: conditions were not changing fast enough or, in some cases, were even getting worse. While some participants came to learn more about Collective Impact, most came to learn how to start or progress a Collective Impact initiative that was already mobilizing in their area.

Why is Collective Impact needed in Australia?

There is no question that Australia is a lucky country – we rank highly on international comparative indices, are one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and weathered the global financial crisis substantially better than most other OECD economies.

However, in spite of this, and after significant commitment by successive governments to a world leading social support system, we still have too many people who live on the

margins and experience significant disadvantage. Australia is no longer the egalitarian society we once were so proud of.

State and federal governments spend somewhere in the vicinity of AUD$165 billion each year on social purpose work. This equates to around 12.5 percent of GDP. About AUD$30 billion of this is funding to the nonprofit sector (and some to for-profit service providers). This compares with the $1.5 billion raised annually through philanthropy. There are around 600,000 nonprofit organizations serving a population of 23 million people.

Despite our national wealth, well-being, and significant social sector investment, we have a number of persistent, complex, and entrenched social problems:

- **Disadvantage** in Australia has a postcode. The most disadvantaged places in Australia have twice the rate of unemployment, disability support, psychiatric admission, and criminal convictions; and three times the rate of imprisonment (Vinson, 2007). In 2010, over 50 percent of people experiencing multiple disadvantages lived in the bottom two social-economic localities (ASIB, 2012). Despite increases in funding to these communities, their positions on rankings of disadvantage have not improved for over 10 years (Vinson, 2007).

- **Mental illness** accounts for 13 percent of the total burden of disease in Australia. Approximately 600,000 Australians experience severe mental illness and some 60,000 have enduring and disabling symptoms. It is now well understood that addressing severe and persistent mental illness requires a complex mix of treatment, care, and support, which is currently delivered by siloed parts of the social system such as health, housing, income support, disability, education, and employment (DOHA PIR, 2012). Australia is half as successful as other OECD countries in finding employment for people with mental illness (ASB, 2012). While our expenditure on mental illness is increasing, so is the cost per person along with the number of people seeking service and support (AIHW, 2010 & 2012).

- **Indigenous disadvantage** is one of our country's great shames. Aboriginal people in Australia have a shorter life expectancy, are more likely to die from major diseases (for example, they are 29 times more likely to die from diabetes), have lower literacy and numeracy proficiency, and are significantly less likely to finish school or to own their own home (AIHW, 2012). Ten years of policy focus and investment has barely started to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

- **Homelessness** in Australia has risen by eight percent since 2006 and the actual number of homeless people rose 17 percent (reflecting the increase in the population). A 2012 study by the University of New South Wales (Baldry et al., 2012) calculated the lifetime institutional cost for eleven homeless people aged between 23 and 55 ranged from around $900,000 to $5.5 million per person. A Victorian report (DHS-Victoria, 2011) found that "despite a thirty-nine percent increase in expenditure over the last five years, we have not seen a reduction in the number of clients accessing services and are therefore no longer homeless. This suggests that the current service system is not getting to the root cause of homelessness."

We could go on and talk about obesity, affordable housing, and our aging population, but you get the point. When viewed as a whole, what we see is that our current responses aren't working and aren't sustainable. Change is urgently needed.

Now is the time for transformational change

We believe that the time has come for a "step" change in the way we respond to social disadvantage in Australia. We know that no single policy, government department, organisation, or program can tackle or solve the increasingly complex social problems we face. The current practice of governments and others of funding more and more projects and programs through a competitive funding system is simply not working and the data above proves it. We need a completely new way of working.

Over the last few years, we (and others) have conceptualized the change that is needed from a number of perspectives. The first is that our social system needs to invest more time and money enacting systemic change and focus less on conceiving social change through the lens of programs and organizations. We need to move beyond siloed responses and fragmented programs.

Related to this, we see a burning need for cross sector collaboration. For a robust process and skilled facilitation that encourages learning from multiple perspectives, creates new thinking and responses, and enables alignment of resources and collective action.

The next lens is that we need to stop doing things "to" people and start doing things "with" them. The social system – governments, nonprofits, philanthropists, and business – need to start engaging citizens in the design and delivery of systemic change as well as services.

And our last perspective is that we need to measure progress and impact. Not just for accountability reasons, but to create a culture and practice of learning and improvement; to have a basis from which to assess calculated risks for innovation, knowing when to scale what works and how to stop what doesn't.

There are many structural barriers to this change agenda. Existing policies, strategies, and structures are deeply entrenched. Changing them requires an enormous shift in thinking, funding, practice, and, most critically, in how we work together across sectors as a system. In particular for Australia, government has a dominant role to play in rethinking the way it funds and participates in this work. But arguably deeper than the structural barriers is the personal shift required. Leading and enacting this change agenda will not be easy, comfortable, or palatable for everyone.

The birth of a movement

Despite these barriers, we are observing and fostering a movement for change in Australia. As with all movements, this starts on many fronts and seems to emerge out of a growing consciousness or awareness that change needs to happen. We believe that it needs to happen now.

Over the past seven years, a number of successful initiatives have emerged to prove our hypothesis that working collaboratively across sectors in a community will shift outcomes. Initiatives like the Blue Mountains Stronger Family Alliance (ARACY, 2011), which is changing trajectories for children and families, and 90 Homes for 90 Lives (Taylor, 2012) that is ending rough sleeping in an inner Sydney suburb. These initiatives, and others like them, have become proof points that Collective Impact can work in Australia. These "lighthouse" stories help create the step-change we are looking for.

In the last four years, we have seen a small but growing number of philanthropists and business leaders take on engaged leadership roles in systemic change initiatives for the first time. They bring with them the disciplined focus on data and results that Collective Impact requires.

And, in February of this year, we witnessed at the Collective Impact 2014 conference just how much the Collective Impact framework has resonated across sectors as a way to frame and talk about systemic change, collaboration, citizen engagement, and measuring impact.

While governments in Australia have not yet engaged beyond isolated pockets, their decade long focus on "place-based" funding structures has become an enabler of this movement. Communities across Australia are seeking to reorient and leverage place-based funding into Collective Impact initiatives. And the government is starting to take more interest.

It is the combination of these conditions – motivation borne out of frustration, willing collaborators who are not the "usual suspects," the resonance of the Collective Impact framework, and a ready vehicle in place-based social policy – that has allowed us to assert that Australia is poised for transformational systems change. We must change or we risk being in the same place in 10 years time.

We now know that there are many ready and willing to do this work – we just need a critical mass to get the transformational change going. We believe the movement that has started will get us there and we – along with many others – are committed to intentionally growing an Australian community of practice focussed specifically on systems change and Collective Impact. Watch this space.

Websites

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Blue Mountains Stronger Family Alliance: http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/an-australian-case-study-blue-mountains-stronger-family-alliance

Centre for Social Impact: http://csi.edu.au

Collaboration for Impact: http://www.collaborationforimpact.com

Collective Impact 2014: convene, immerse, learn: http://collectiveimpact2014.com.au

Collective Impact Australia: http://collectiveimpactaustralia.com

ProBono Australia: http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au

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EVALUATING COLLECTIVE IMPACT: FIVE SIMPLE RULES

Mark Cabaj

Summary

Since the 1960s, the field of evaluation has struggled to develop concepts and methods that are useful for the complex work of community change. The ambitious nature of the latest iteration of community change approaches, Collective Impact, amplifies this challenge. This article describes five simple rules that have emerged out of 50 years of trial and error that can assist participants, funders, and evaluators of Collective Impact initiatives to track their progress and make sense of their efforts.

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Introduction

The astonishing uptake of "Collective Impact" is the result of a perfect storm. In the face of stalled progress on issues such as high school achievement, safe communities, and economic well-being, a growing number of community leaders, policy makers, funders, and everyday people have been expressing doubt that "more of the same" will "move the needle" on these challenges. In the meantime, social innovators have been relentlessly experimenting with an impressive diversity of what we can now call "Collective Impact" prototypes and learning a great deal about what they look like, what they can and cannot do, where they struggle, and where they thrive. Many of these early efforts were described and assessed by the first rate work of the Aspen Institute, Jay Connor and the Bridgespan Group in the United States, along with the Tamarack and Caledon Institutes in Canada, to name only a few.

Then along came John Kania and Mark Kramer (FSG), who described the core ideas and practices of the first generation of Collective Impact experiments in a 2011 article for the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. It was this skilfully communicated idea, presented by very credible messengers to a critical mass of hungry early adopters, that seems to have created a "tipping point" in our field and an impressive interest in this approach to addressing complex issues.

I am a participant in this "movement." I was the coordinator of Opportunities 2000 (1996-2000), a multi-sectoral, comprehensive initiative that attempted to lower poverty levels in the Waterloo Region to the lowest in Canada. Soon after, I joined Tamarack and became the executive director of Vibrant Communities Canada (2002-2011), a pan-Canadian network of 15 coalitions focused on further developing and testing this particular approach to tackling poverty. Since branching out on my own in 2012, I have

been involved in a dozen efforts to plan and evaluate Collective Impact initiatives operating in the areas of education, homelessness, and community safety.

I am aware of the many debates about Collective Impact. Is it really a new "paradigm" of community change or simply a long awaited and nicely distilled account of the work that has been going on for many years? Have many well-established organizations and networks adopted the brand of Collective Impact without really adhering to its intent, spirit, and conditions for success? Have funders embraced the approach so completely that they've begun to cannibalize the resources and talent required to support other productive and complementary pathways to change (e.g., direct support to local agencies, hard-edged political advocacy, etc.)? These are healthy debates and an indication of how serious people are about the challenge of community change.

What is *not* debatable is that people have been trying to evaluate a wide range of community change efforts for fifty years. This includes community development, coalition building, collaborative service delivery, horizontal public administration, community and regional economic development, and other comprehensive community initiatives. In the process, would-be community change makers and evaluators have learned a tremendous amount about what does and does not work in terms of monitoring, learning from, and judging the effectiveness of collective attempts to tackle complex community issues. We need to build on – not re-learn – these hard earned lessons.

In this article, I describe five simple rules that practitioners, funders, and evaluators of Collective Impact should consider in their own evaluation efforts.[1] The list is not exhaustive: the art and science of learning and evaluation is too complex to be reduced to just a few points. There are also some very nice resources in development by groups such as FSG that will explore evaluation from the Collective Impact lens in more detail. Instead, these five rules are designed to surface a number of tricky issues that are a central part of any effort to plan and evaluate community change initiatives and to offer some insight into how to navigate them.

Rule #1: Use evaluation to enable – rather than limit – strategic learning

In order for evaluation to play a productive role in a Collective Impact initiative, it must be conceived and carried out in a way that enables – rather than limits – the participants to learn from their efforts and to make shifts to their strategy. This requires them to embrace three inter-related ideas about complexity, adaptive leadership, and a developmental approach to evaluation. If they do not, traditional evaluation ideas and practices will be the "tail that wags the dog" and end up weakening the work of Collective Impact.

Most Collective Impact participants are ready to accept that the vexing issues they are trying to address are complex. Unlike simple situations, where the causes of the problems are clear, the solutions well known, and the implementation of the response can be managed by one or two organizations (e.g., a vaccination campaign for meningitis), complex problems have multiple root causes, unclear solutions, and require orchestrated action by diverse stakeholders, who may not agree about the nature of the problem and

how it should be addressed (e.g., gang violence), and require a great deal of learning-by-doing.[2] While solutions to simple challenges have a long shelf life, the solutions can quickly become less effective as the context in which they occur evolves quickly, requiring yet another round of innovative responses in search of a more up-to-date response.

While most Collective Impact participants would agree that they are wrestling with complex problems, we often continue to operate as if we are trying to solve simple issues on steroids. We relentlessly consult with diverse stakeholders, carry out exhaustive research on the cause of the issue and the latest best practices, patiently build comprehensive strategies, and design elaborate implementation schedules. And it rarely works. The field is littered with collaborative efforts that fail to get off the ground, implode under their own weight, or simply grind to a halt because their participants are frustrated when they yield weak results.

The only way to move the needle on community issues is to embrace an adaptive approach to wrestling with complexity. This means replacing the paradigm of pre-determined solutions and "plan the work and work the plan" stewardship with a new style of leadership that encourages bold thinking, tough conversations and experimentation, planning that is iterative and dynamic, and management organized around a process of learning-by-doing. (See Exhibit 1 – Edmonton's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: A Case Study of Adaptability.)

Where traditional accountability models stress that social innovators should be accountable to external funders for a "high fidelity to the plan" and "delivering results on a fixed schedule," accountability in adaptive contexts requires social innovators to be accountable to each other for achieving results over the long-term, a deep commitment to robust evaluation and learning processes, and the ability and courage to quickly change ideas, plans, and direction when the data tells them they are headed in the wrong direction or the context in which they are operating shifts so much that their approach is no longer relevant.[3]

The hundreds of people involved in the dozen poverty roundtables that comprised the Vibrant Communities network recognized the limitation of traditional planning and developed their own version of an adaptive approach. After we admitted that the members of local poverty roundtables were becoming tired and frustrated with trying to come up with the perfect plan for reducing poverty – and were in fact losing valuable partners in the process – we elected to focus instead on creating a "framework for change" that represented their best hypothesis or bet about how they could dramatically reduce local poverty. While the frameworks varied from community to community, they all tended to have the following elements: (a) a working definition of poverty, (b) an analysis of the leverage points for change in their community, (c) a pool of strategies to achieve, (d) a set of "stretch targets" for reducing poverty, (e) principles to guide their efforts, and (f) a plan for evaluating their efforts.

In order to demonstrate that we were serious about our commitment to be a learning network, and that we rejected the urge to latch on to pre-determined solutions, we jokingly threatened to defund groups whose frameworks did not evolve because it indicated "they were not paying attention and not really learning." In the end, all 13 funded

collaborations in Vibrant Communities adapted (sometimes radically) their approach over their seven-to-ten-year period, including the groups that had the greatest success, such as Vibrant Saint John and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

Embracing a complexity lens and adaptive approach to tackling tough community issues has significant implications for evaluating Collective Impact efforts. It means making Collective Impact partners – not external funders – the primary audience of evaluation. It requires finding ways to provide participants with real-time – as opposed to delayed and episodic – feedback on their efforts and on the shifting context so that they can determine whether their approach is roughly right or if they need to change direction. It begs participants to eschew simplistic judgements of success and failure and instead seeks to track progress towards ambitious goals, uncover new insights about the nature of the problem they seek to solve, and figure out what does and does not work in addressing it. They must give up on fixed evaluation designs for ones that are flexible enough to co-evolve with their fast-moving context and strategy. In short, they need to turn traditional evaluation upside down and employ what is called Developmental Evaluation by some and Strategic Learning by others (see Table 1).[4]

TABLE 1: COMPARING TRADITIONAL AND COMPLEXITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

TRADITIONAL EVALUATIONS	COMPLEXITY-BASED, DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATIONS
Render definitive judgments of success or failure.	Provide feedback, generate learnings, support direction or affirm changes in direction.
Measure success against pre-determined goals.	Develop new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve.
Position the evaluator outside to assure independence and objectivity.	Position evaluation as an internal, team function integrated into action and ongoing interpretive processes.
Design the evaluation based on linear cause-effect logic models.	Design the evaluation to capture system dynamics, interdependencies, and emergent interconnections.
Aim to produce generalizable findings across time and space.	Aim to produce context-specific understandings that inform ongoing innovation.
Accountability focused on and directed to external authorities and funders.	Accountability centered on the innovators' deep sense of fundamental values and commitments.
Accountability to control and locate blame for failures.	Learning to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what's unfolding and thereby respond strategically.
Evaluator controls the evaluation and determines the design based on the evaluator's perspective on what is important.	Evaluator collaborates in the change effort to design a process that matches philosophically and organizationally.
Evaluation engenders fear of failure.	Evaluation supports hunger for learning.

Source: Patton, Michael Quinn (2006). Evaluation for the way we work. *Nonprofit Quarterly, 13*(1), 28–33.

For people firmly rooted in a traditional version of evaluation, this complexity-based approach might appear soft and willy-nilly. For a group that is eager to solve a tough challenge and hungry for evaluative feedback, however, it requires an even more robust and disciplined approach than typically provided by conventional assessment. Vibrant Community partners were relentless about tracking the outcomes of their efforts (some even kept weekly "outcome diaries"), freely admitted to and examined failures (we published a series of "sad stories"), invited their peers to critique their work, and held regular community-wide reflection sessions to make sense of it all and determine if they needed to update their framework for change. We could write a book about the flaws in the assessment of the Vibrant Communities initiative, but it was hardly flaky.

The environment for Developmental Evaluation and Strategic Learning is improving all the time. It's a major theme at professional evaluation conferences all over North America, and intermediary organizations, such as the Center for Evaluation Innovation and FSG, are developing very practical resources that can be employed by Collective Impact practitioners. More philanthropic funders, like the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in Canada and Atlantic Philanthropies in the United States, are encouraging their grantees to employ Developmental Evaluation in their work and are ready to cover the costs of doing so.

While a complexity-based approach to evaluating community change is still the exception, not the rule, it is remarkable how far the ideas and practice have come in just ten years.

Rule #2: Employ multiple designs for multiple users

With so many diverse players, so many different levels of work, and so many moving parts, it is very difficult to design a one-size-fits-all evaluation model for a Collective Impact effort. More often than not, Collective Impact efforts seem to require a score of discrete evaluation projects, each worthy of its own customized design.

Even straightforward developmental projects require a diverse and flexible evaluation strategy. For example, in a long-time partnership between a half-dozen schools, service agencies, and funders to improve the resiliency of vulnerable kids in the inner core of a major Canadian city, a series of interviews with the decision-makers in each of the participating organizations revealed that they required three broad "streams" of assessment:

- school principals and service providers wanted evaluative data in the spring to help them improve their service plans for the upcoming school year;
- the troika of funders required evaluative data to "make the case" for continued funding, with each funder requiring different types of data at different times of the year; and
- the partnership's leadership team wanted a variety of questions answered to help them adapt the partnership to be more effective and ready the group to expand the collaboration to more schools.

In order to be useful, this Collective Impact group required what Michael Quinn Patton, one of the world's most influential evaluators, calls a "patch evaluation design":

multiple (sometimes overlapping) evaluation processes employing a variety of methods (e.g., social return on investment, citizen surveys), whose results are packaged and communicated to suit diverse users who need unique data at different times. Eventually, the members of the school-service partnership elected to develop evaluation designs to feed two streams of work – annual service planning and funder data – leaving the discussion of replication issues for a future time when the opportunity and pressure for expanding the partnership was greater.

The idea of multiple evaluation consumers and designs will not be a hit with everyone. It may confuse Collective Impact participants who perceive evaluation as a mechanical process of collecting data on key shared measures of progress, frustrate evaluators who prefer neat and tidy evaluation designs, and give pause to those funders who are reluctant to pay for evaluation in the first place. However, these inconveniences are far outweighed by the benefits of crafting flexible evaluation designs that are more likely to provide Collective Impact decision-makers with the relevant, useable, and timely evaluative feedback they need to do their work properly.

Rule #3: Shared measurement if necessary, but not necessarily shared measurement

The proponents of Collective Impact place a strong emphasis on developing and using shared measurement systems to inform the work. In their first article on Collective Impact, Kania and Kramer (2011) make the following bold statement:

> Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

I could not agree more. In fact, I will add another reason that shared measurement is important for collective action. The process of settling on key outcomes and measures can sharpen a Collective Impact group's thinking about what they are trying to accomplish. The case for robust measurement processes in Collective Impact efforts is overwhelming.

Luckily, we know a lot about the models and mechanics of shared measurement. Mark Friedmann's resources on Results-Based Accountability detail very practical ways for individual organizations to develop indicators, which work at both the programmatic and community wide level. The Aspen Institute has summarized the lessons of using Performance Monitoring in Comprehensive Community Initiatives, while FSG has stepped up its efforts to track, distil, and share the latest developments in the field. The stage is set for the practice of shared measurement to lurch forward.[5]

While the case for shared measurement is strong and the practice increasingly robust, it's important for Collective Impact participants to proceed with caution in this area. Specifically, there are at least five things to keep in mind while crafting a common data infrastructure:

1. Shared measurement is critical but not essential. The key players in the community-wide effort in Tillamook County in Oregon to reduce teen pregnancy admit that they had "significant measurement problems," but this did not prevent them from reducing teen pregnancy in the region by 75% in ten years. This is not a reason to ignore shared measurement – it simply illustrates that the lack of a system is not always crippling to a Collective Impact group.

2. Shared measurement can limit strategic thinking. Many veterans in the field of poverty reduction argue that employer wages and the benefit levels in government income support programs can have a far greater impact on poverty than innovations in front line social services, where the case for aligning measures across organizations may be quite strong. By pre-determining the indicators to be measured, the group is inherently limiting the scope of their observations. Collective Impact participants should focus on strategies with the highest opportunities for impact, not ones that offer greater prospects for shared measurement.

3. Shared measurement requires "systems change." In order to solve the "downstream problem" of fragmented measurement activities, local Collective Impact groups need to go "upstream" to work with the policy makers and funders who create that fragmentation in the first place. Policy makers and funders often work in silos to develop "categorical" policies and programs, highly targeted for discrete groups and for specific purposes, and with very specific measurement requirements. Local leaders interested in shared measurement are then left with the responsibility – but not with the power, authority and resources – for weaving this all together in a coherent package. This is silly. In order for shared measurement to work, policy makers and funders and local leaders must work together to align their measurement expectations and processes.[6]

4. Shared measurement is time consuming and expensive. While it is true that innovations in web-based technology have dramatically reduced the cost of operating shared measurement systems, it can still take a long time and a surprisingly large investment to develop, maintain, and adapt such systems. The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund in the San Francisco region, for example, spent millions of dollars over a ten-year period to develop, test, and refine a relatively discrete set of measures to track the effects of the youth training programs of their grantees. Collective Impact participants should carry out a rigorous assessment of the costs of developing and maintaining such a system so that they enter into the work with their eyes wide open.

5. Shared measurement can get in the way of action. A talented and hard-working network of Collective Impact participants in the greater Toronto area have elected to keep their strategy "in first gear," while they sort out their out-

comes and measures, and have been spinning their wheels for years trying to land on the right ones. Collective Impact initiatives should avoid trying to design large and perfect measurement systems up front, opting instead for "simple and roughly right" versions that drive – not distract – from strategic thinking and action.

All in all, it is important that we not oversell the benefits, underestimate the costs, or ignore the perverse consequences of creating shared measurement systems. When developed and used carefully, they can be important ingredients to a community's efforts to move the needle on a complex issue. Poorly managed, they can simply get in the way.

Rule #4: Seek out intended and unintended outcomes

All Collective Impact activities generate anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, and participants and evaluators need to try to capture both kinds of effects if they are serious about creating innovation and moving the needle on complex issues.

This is easier said than done. The effects of even the simplest initiatives are hard to predict. An experiment by health activists to improve local access to fresh vegetables through rooftop gardening in a Chicago neighbourhood resulted in less-than-anticipated health benefits for vulnerable families, but unexpectedly led to the widespread adoption of the practice because landlords discovered that the gardens improved the insulation of older apartment buildings and tenants enjoyed getting to know each other while tending the gardens.[7] A program designed to help women on social assistance start up micro-enterprises, improve their financial literacy, and expand their savings led to tension and even abuse in marital relationships because partners didn't appreciate the women's newfound independence. Unanticipated outcomes can be good, bad, or somewhere in-between.

The number and variety of splatter effects dramatically increases in comprehensive community change efforts, which typically have multiple interlocking interventions. For example, a comprehensive region-wide initiative to reduce the production and accessibility of crystal meth in the American mid-west resulted in the actors in the drug trade developing newer, more-difficult-to-monitor ingredients, re-locating their manufacturing activities to nearby counties, and establishing more resilient, tougher-to-locate, and violent distribution networks. Talk about innovation! This is a classic example of the "fixes that fail" archetype often encountered when navigating complex systems, and every Collective Impact effort is rife with potential pitfalls.

It is critical that the participants and evaluators of Collective Impact efforts understand and capture all of the ripple effects of their activities. This (a) provides a more holistic view of what is – or is not – being achieved, (b) offers deeper insight into the nature of the problem that they are trying to address and the context in which they are operating, (c) triggers groups to adjust or drop strategies that may not be delivering what they had hoped, and (d) surfaces new, often unexpected, opportunities as they emerge. Without a complete picture of their results, the chances that Collective Impact participants will be successful are dramatically reduced and the likelihood of unintentionally doing harm to a community or group is substantially greater.

Unfortunately, conventional evaluation thinking and methods have multiple blind spots when it comes to complex change efforts.[8] Logic models encourage strategists to focus too narrowly on the hoped-for results of a strategy, ignoring the diverse ripple effects. Limited evaluation budgets pressure administrators to focus scarce resources on tracking difficult-to-measure progress towards goals and targets. Outcomes dashboards tend to highlight only the results that can inform "results-based accountability" and aggregate data may mask underlying trends. Together, these traditional practices create a dysfunctional type of evaluation tunnel vision.

Happily, it is possible for Collective Impact participants and evaluators to adopt a wide-angle lens on outcomes. It begins with asking better questions: rather than ask "Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?", Collective Impact participants and their evaluators should ask, "What have been ALL the effects of our activities? Which of these did we seek and which are unanticipated? What is working (and not), for whom and why? What does this mean for our strategy?" Simply framing outcomes in a broader way will encourage people to cast a wider net in capturing the effects of their efforts.

There are a variety of practical ways to answer these questions. Some of these include: (a) asking participants to brainstorm all the possible outcomes in advance of a strategy so that they are sensitized to the possibility of unanticipated ones and can look for them as they implement their strategies; (b) not telling external evaluators about the hoped-for outcomes so that their research is free from bias; (c) retaining some of the evaluation budget so that it can be used to further investigate unanticipated outcomes when they emerge; and (d) employing first-rate techniques designed to spot and investigate the inevitable surprises of development work (e.g., most significant change, outcome harvesting). We appear to be at the start of a small-scale methodological renaissance in this respect.

In the end, however, the greatest difficultly in capturing unanticipated outcomes lies more in the reluctance of Collective Impact participants to seek them out than in the limitations of methodology or the skills of evaluators. Many Collective Impact participants are so conditioned by results-based-accountability and management-by-objectives that they can't see the "forest of results" because their eyes are focused on "the few choice trees" that they planted. Others are fully aware of the messy effects of their work but are unprepared to deal with the complications that might arise when they put them on the table. As a colleague in a Collective Impact initiative admitted to me recently, "We can barely deal with the frustration of not getting the results we want. I don't think we can handle the idea that there are other results – good or bad – that we should be paying attention to."

When a great French General asked his gardener to plant an oak tree, his gardener replied that there was no rush because it took oak trees a hundred years to mature. The General responded, "In that case, there is no time to lose; we need to plant the seed this afternoon!"

It may well take a very long time to create a culture where people are deeply curious about all the effects of their work, so let's push for having unanticipated outcomes as part of any Collective Impact conversation wherever and whenever we can and see how far we can get.

Rule #5: Seek out contribution – not attribution – to community changes

One of the most difficult challenges for the evaluators of any intervention – a project, a strategy, a policy – is to determine the extent to which the changes that emerge in a community are attributable to the activities of the would-be change makers or to some other non-intervention factors.

A story from the popular book, *Freakonomics*, illustrates the point nicely. When the rate of violent crime across the United States dropped dramatically from 1974 to 1989, there were many organizations eager to claim that it was their efforts that were responsible for the shift. Common explanations included tighter gun laws, more community policing, and tougher sentencing. While there are studies that demonstrate that each of these efforts improved community safety in some way, a broader and more rigorous analysis revealed that the majority of the improvement was most likely due to (a) a variety of large scale demographic shifts – some of which were due to shifts in public policy – which led to a drop in the number of vulnerable young men (the greatest perpetrators of violent crime) and (b) changes in the drug market that reduced the profit margin on some drugs (e.g., crack cocaine) to such a degree that drug distributors were no longer willing to "go to war" to protect or expand their share of illegal markets.[9]

The question of attribution is a major dilemma for participants and evaluators of Collective Impact initiatives. Collective Impact participants need to sort out the "real value" of their change efforts and the implications for their strategy and actions, yet determining attribution is the most difficult challenge in an evaluation of any kind.

The traditional methodology for assessing attribution is a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT). This involves establishing two (ideally) randomly selected groups – an experimental one that is the subject of a discrete intervention and a control group that does not experience any intervention (or receives a placebo intervention) – and tracking the difference in select indicators between the two groups over time. The hope is that this methodology can determine definitively and objectively whether any intervention (an injection or a comprehensive strategy) generates a different outcome than would otherwise occur.

The problem is that Collective Impact initiatives don't meet the requirements for RCTs. RCTs are designed to assess relatively discrete interventions (e.g., a job search program), whereas Collective Impact initiatives tend to be sprawling efforts with multiple moving parts. RCTs require interventions to be "fixed" during the assessment, while Collective Impact strategies and activities are constantly evolving. While RCTs require a randomly selected – and statistically significant – number of subjects in the intervention group and control group, Collective Impact projects are (usually) a sample size of one. The list of incompatible requirements goes on. Gold standard RCTs might be suitable for discrete parts of a Collective Impact initiative (e.g., a pilot project or a single intervention), but they cannot be used to assess the broader effort.

This would seem to leave participants of Collective Impact initiatives with four options:

1. Commit to only developing strategies that meet the strict conditions of RCTs. This dramatically reduces the range of strategies they can employ, essentially guaranteeing that they will not "move the needle" on community well-being.

2. Claim that whatever changes emerge in a community are largely attributable to their efforts. This is untrue, does not help Collective Impact groups determine if their activities are value-added, and eventually breeds cynicism among Collective Impact participants and their supporters.

3. Assert that it is "too difficult" to assess attribution and declare that everyone's activities contribute to observed changes. While this is nobler than claiming 100% credit, it still does not help Collective Impact groups determine whether or not their efforts are effective.

4. Acknowledge that multiple factors are likely behind an observed change or changes and seek instead to understand the contribution of the Collective Impact effort activities to the change.

Of course, option four is the only acceptable one. The concept and methodology of contribution analysis was first laid out by John Mayne, a former employee of the Treasury Board, who felt that the federal government needed an alternative to RCT. The idea behind the approach is very simple: rather than try to definitively prove the causal relationship between intervention activities and results, program designers should simply acknowledge that the intervention is only one of many factors behind a community change and seek to assess the relative contribution of the intervention.

The six steps of contribution analysis are well developed, but evaluators must customize how they unfold to fit the unique circumstances of each intervention, which can range from simple projects to more comprehensive strategies.[10] For example:

- The Caledon Institute interviewed officials in the Government of Alberta to assess the contribution of a well-organized Calgary-based advocacy network to the government's changes to policies and benefit levels in a provincial program for people with disabilities. Officials reported that the campaign was "unexpectedly helpful" but had little influence on the substance of changes, which had been "in the works" for some time. This was a "big surprise" to the group, who assumed that their efforts were the key influencers in the policy changes. This feedback led to them to decide to begin their next campaign earlier on in the policy-making process when politicians and civil servants' perspectives on the issues were still in development.
- The staff of the Toronto Region Immigration and Employment Council (TRIEC) asked regional employers to describe all their unique organizational efforts to recruit, hire, support, and retain skilled immigrants, and then asked those same employers to rate the contribution of TRIEC's programs on those actions on a scale from one to seven. They were happy to learn that employers consistently

provided ratings on the higher end of the scale – something they "felt but did not know" – which caused them to shift their discussion to how they might scale up their efforts to reach even more employers on the basis that their existing strategy and "mechanisms for change" were the right ones.

- A community economic development group in southern Ontario, which had developed an existing micro-enterprise development program used contribution analysis results to help them decide which direction they might take the program in its next stage: a program to reduce poverty for low income entrepreneurs, or an economic development program designed to help stimulate a lackluster local economy. When they pulled together a combination of participant feedback, Statistics Canada data, and prior research to assess the program's impact on start-up rates and economic activity in different urban neighborhoods, they concluded that the contribution was "noticeable," but not dramatic. This was the evidence the group needed to decide to go with the poverty reduction option.

These examples may not be dramatic, but they are instructive. In each of these cases, the simple process of (a) acknowledging that their activities may not have been the only cause of whatever results they've observed, (b) formally asking the contribution question, and (c) using some method to try and answer it, led to the groups making shifts in strategy that they would not likely have made otherwise. People talk endlessly about evidence-based decision-making and this is a real example of it right here.

There are other ways that contribution analysis can be useful to Collective Impact participants. Simply asking a group to consider the question can encourage them to think more critically about their work. For example, one group immediately initiated a wave of discussions that eventually led them to drop a variety of activities they admitted did not "add crazy value" to a community safety campaign. Another group, whose work required them to coordinate the efforts of diverse organizations on collaborative projects (e.g., customized training, a large social housing project), used contribution analysis as a way to share varying degrees of credit for results amongst members, much like hockey players are awarded two points for a goal and one point for an assist. Contribution analysis is a multi-purpose concept.

Despite the obvious benefits of the approach, the methodology is still not widely employed nor well developed in the field of community change. I scan the Web regularly for examples and rarely come up with much. In my own work, only one-quarter of the Collective Impact groups I have come across even express an interest in the topic. This must change. If Collective Impact stakeholders are serious about understanding the real results of their activities and using evidence – not intuition – to determine what does and does not work, they will make contribution analysis a central part of their evaluation strategy.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the field is going to be busy over the next few years working on the evaluation dimensions of Collective Impact. Evaluation is both an intrinsic component of the Collective Impact framework – enabling the rapid feedback loop that is so critical to adjusting strategies, divining innovations, and supporting the continuous communi-

cation among partners that Kania and Kramer describe as one of Collective Impact's five key conditions – as well as ultimately providing a way to assess the overall efficacy of these complex initiatives in the longer term.

This second generation experimentation will be that much stronger if it builds on the experience and results of the first generation prototypes. I firmly believe that the five simple rules or guidelines described in this article will prove useful and need not be re-learned:

- embrace a strategic learning approach to the work,
- accept the value of multiple designs for multiple evaluation users,
- be thoughtful and cautious about shared measurement,
- assertively seek out the unanticipated effects of Collective Impact, and
- make contribution analysis a more central part of your evaluation strategy.

I look forward to the continuing conversation.

Exhibit 1: Edmonton's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: A case study of adaptability

The Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Edmonton is a classic Collective Impact initiative and a good illustration of the nature of adaptive leadership and strategy.

The participants of this initiative organized their approach on the housing first philosophy – which emphasizes providing homeless persons with permanent housing and giving them wrap around services to deal with the issues that led to their homelessness in the first place – an approach considered a "best practice" because of the promising results of using this model in other cities. After committing to this "theory of change," they crafted a plan with five measureable goals, each with its own targets, strategies, and timelines, and organized the financial resources, leaders, and partners required to move it forward. The Task Force had "planned the work," and it was now the job of implementing agencies, supported by a strong backbone organization, Homeward Trust, to "work the plan."

However, the organizations involved felt pressure to adapt the plan to respond to shifts in context, new learnings about the complex nature of homelessness, and debates about strategies and implementation amongst its diverse partners (see Table 2). This adaptability is a key contributor to the group's remarkable success in moving the needle on homelessness: in just five years, they have built 500 new units of housing, placed over 2,400 persons in permanent homes, and reduced the aggregate number of people who are chronically homeless by nearly one-third (i.e., from 3,079 to 2,174).

Table 2: A sample of factors requiring adaptation in the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness

Factor	Description	Adaptation
Learning About Homelessness	Many people placed in permanent housing are socially isolated and some eventually drift back to the street in an effort to reconnect with some type of community.	Experiment with ways to create relationships and communities for clients that do not rely on the staff of service organizations.
Inward Migration	The large number of people moving to the city has reduced the stock of affordable housing: the waiting lists for increasingly "fatigued" shelter providers are growing.	Consider increasing the target for new units of social housing and making extra investments into the 'shelter system'.
Provincial Funding	The group is behind schedule in its plan to build 1,000 social housing units.	Increase lobbying efforts, consider lowering targets, and place more emphasis on tapping into private rental units with subsidies.
Local Support	Suburban residents are often resistant to efforts to build social housing in their neighbourhoods, a key element in the plan's "distributed housing" strategy.	Place a greater emphasis on engaging the broader community so that they can play a more active role in supporting – rather than resisting – the measures required to end homelessness.

The group expects that they will need to continue to adapt their approach in the future. As the city's Mayor admitted, "Ultimately, a lot of things have to come together for us to actually meet this goal." This includes redoubling efforts to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. One prominent local service provider noted, "At one point, our success in taking people off the street is being outstripped by the increasing number of people who are now forced to call the street their home – we need to spend more time on the other end of this problem." It might even include re-thinking the timeline for the plan. As one seasoned veteran of homeless campaigns mused, "Our plan to reduce homelessness in ten years is on track, but at this pace and with this strategy, it may take 30 years."[11]

Notes

1. The idea for "simple rules" format is not new – I stole it from Tom Kelly, former Director of Evaluation for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who used this format to describe his lessons on evaluating Comprehensive Community Change Initiatives (CCIs) in his article: "Five simple rules for evaluating comprehensive community initiatives": http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/09/01/introduction-to-developmental-evaluation/ .

2. This useful distinction between different types of problems was described in the article, "Leading Boldly," by Ronald Heifetz, John Kania and Mark Kramer (2004, Winter) in *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* pp. 21-31, URL: http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/leading_boldly [June 13, 2014]. For a more elaborate exploration of the different kinds of leadership and management styles required for simple to complex challenges, see David Snowden and Mary Boone, "A Leader's Framework for Decision-Making," (2007, November), *Harvard Business Review,* pp. 1-8, URL: http://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making/ [June 13, 2014].

3. John Kania and Mark Kramer's article, "Embracing emergence: How collective impact addresses complexity," in a January 2013 blog entry of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, offers a helpful lens on this approach. http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/embracing_emergence_how_collective_impact_addresses_complexity [April 1, 2014].

4. For more on Developmental Evaluation, see: http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/09/01/introduction-to-developmental-evaluation/ . For more on Strategic Learning, see: http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/focus-areas/strategic-learning .

5. For further information on Mark Friedmann and Results-Based Accountability™, see the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute website at http://resultsaccountability.com/. For information on Performance Management in Comprehensive Community Initiatives, see the Aspen Institute's Community Building publications at http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/community-change/publications. FSG provides information on Strategic Evaluation on their website at http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/StrategicEvaluation.aspx and in their publication "Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact" available at http://www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/87/Default.aspx .

6. There are some very good examples of policy makers and funders working with local service organizations to create shared measurement systems. The Finance Project, for example, published an account of different funding models used in the USA to support early childhood development systems and streamlined reporting requirements. In Canada, the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region has recently launched a shared reporting and measurement system with two other major funding organizations in the region.

7. See McKnight, J. (1995). *The careless society: Community and its counterfeits*. Basic Books: New York.

8. See Britt, H. (2013) "U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)," Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. *Complexity aware monitoring*. URL: http://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/Complexity%20Aware%20Monitoring%202013-12-11%20FINAL.pdf [April 1, 2014].

9. *Freakonomics: A rogue economist explores the hidden side of everything* (2005) is a non-fiction book by University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt and New York Times journalist Stephen J. Dubner that argues that economics is, at root, the study of incentives.

10. For an overview of Contribution Analysis, see the article "Using theory-based approaches to make causal inferences" on the Treasury Board of Canada website at https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/cee/tbae-aeat/tbae-aeat08-eng.asp. An explanation with further commentary and references is available on the Better Evaluation website at http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/contribution_analysis .

11. For further information about Edmonton's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, see the Homeless Commission's website at http://homelesscommission.org/. A copy of *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness* (2009) is available at http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/10-YearPlantoendHomelessness-jan26-2009.pdf , and a case study has been prepared by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network as part of their "Housing First Case Studies" series and is available at http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Edmonton_HFCaseStudyFinal.pdf . The quote from Mayor Don Iverson comes from a CBC News story "Edmonton plan to end homelessness hits bumps," http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/canada/edmonton/story/1.2502289 [April 1, 2014].

Q & A WITH JOHN KANIA AND FAY HANLEYBROWN

Liz Weaver

Summary

Liz Weaver from the Tamarack Institute was able to catch up with John Kania and Fay Hanleybrown from FSG at the Champions for Change – Leading a Backbone Organization for Collective Impact conference held 1-3 April 2014 in Vancouver, British Columbia. John and Fay share their recent experience and latest thinking about Collective Impact in this interview for *The Philanthropist*.

John Kania oversees FSG's consulting practice and has 25 years of experience advising senior management on issues of strategy, leadership, assessment, and organizational development. Email: john.kania@fsg.org .

Fay Hanleybrown leads FSG's Seattle office and Collective Impact approach area and has nearly 20 years of experience advising foundations, corporations, and nonprofit clients across a range of areas, including strategy development, organizational alignment, and evaluation. Email: fay.hanleybrown@fsg.org .

Q: Given the tremendous take-up and momentum of Collective Impact in the past few years, this must have been a tremendous learning opportunity for you and your colleagues. Has anything surprised you, and what would you say has changed the most since John and Mark wrote the original article in 2011?

John: My initial surprise was the incredible nerve it seemed to strike with many people. There was a lot of resonance, not only in the US and Canada, but around the world, and we were amazed with the number of people that responded. This idea was consistent with what they were learning about how to achieve progress at scale, and it hit a deep visceral chord for many.

Fay: The timing was really right for the article. There was frustration with trying the same approaches and not getting results. Having a common language and frame around Collective Impact has been helpful for people. We were also surprised at how quickly this was picked up by nonprofit and public entities. The White House Social Innovation Fund has written Collective Impact into their most recent round of funding. The Centers for Disease Control have started doing pilots focused around Collective Impact. There have been hundreds of new Collective Impact efforts catalyzed around the world as people try to do this work more effectively… It's been very exciting!

John: One merit of the framework for those doing this kind of work for decades is that it gave them a common language and a consistent way of talking about comprehensive community change. Typically when bringing up that term, unless you're deeply embedded in doing the work, eyes glaze over. But when we talk with others such as government or business – they don't spend so much time doing this work but can contribute – they immediately perk up. The five conditions of Collective Impact gave language to what many people already intuitively knew, but in a way where we can now have consistent conversations about this work, and people understand what it takes to do this work in a rigorous way.

And there continues to be a great hunger among practitioners for information about how to do this better. For example, this conference is sold out with more than 250 people in attendance. We see the same at every conference we've had on Collective Impact since the publication of our first article. We have just launched an online Collective Impact Forum in partnership with Tamarack, the Aspen Institute, and others. In the first week, more than 1,000 users signed up. There is so much hunger for knowledge and engagement around Collective Impact. People doing this work understand the importance of working collectively, and they know it's critical to do it well. Developing a common way to describe this helps us to better understand challenges and overcome barriers.

Fay: I'd like to stress that this is not a rigid model – Collective Impact looks different in different contexts. We have found tremendous value for practitioners from learning across different efforts, so that's why we've launched the Collective Impact Forum. There is great opportunity for learning from one another, but also a danger if people see Collective Impact as a model that looks the same in each place.

Q: You have had the opportunity to work with many people and organizations in Canada and, indeed, around the world. Have you identified any systemic or cultural differences between the United States and Canada that might lead you to interpret the framework any differently here?

John: I've thought about this a bit, though we haven't directly consulted on Collective Impact efforts in Canada. But my sense in talking to folks like Liz and other practitioners here in Canada is that I wouldn't interpret the framework itself – the five conditions – differently between the United States and Canada. There are some countries – for example, many countries that are not democracies – that are just not ready to do Collective Impact, but there is not so much difference between the US and Canada.

I do think I've observed key differences that are a matter of degree, rather than fundamental oppositions, between the United States and Canada. I can think of four specifically:

Readiness and enthusiasm to work collectively seems to be higher in Canada. Americans are more drawn to success of the individual, which is part of our historical and national narrative. We recognize and hold up on a pedestal the awesome individual or organization. Canadians tend to want to believe that the whole can deliver better than the sum of parts and are more willing to act accordingly. National healthcare is an example. Canada seems to me to be a culture more comfortable with collective action.

Role of government. The debate about the role of government is everywhere but is perhaps less fierce in Canada than in the United States. For example, it is more natural in Canada to see a municipal or provincial government play a role as a backbone coordinating resource. It's not impossible this would happen in the US – we have seen some instances in the United States where government is playing the backbone role – but it is more the exception than the rule.

Impact of philanthropy. In the United States, philanthropy typically has larger dollars and a larger voice in collaborative efforts than in Canada, but this is a double-edged

sword. On the positive side, in the US where there is more philanthropy, theoretically there should be more flexible funds to support Collective Impact initiatives and to fund backbone support and shared measurement. But on the flip side, because the US has a fairly crowded funder landscape (particularly in major populated areas), funders love to own their specific initiatives and to pick and choose who they work with. This drives a culture of isolated vs. collective impact. This is something we need to overcome in the US that seems less challenging in Canada.

Appreciation of systems efforts. I think there is greater appreciation among thought leaders and practitioners in Canada for the complex nuances of systems change. Not that this doesn't exist in the US, but proportionally there is a higher percentage of thought leaders in Canada who are engaged in better understanding the nature of systems change. As a result, there seems to be a broader and deeper dialogue in Canada about understanding Collective Impact through the lens of systems and complexity. This is one place where I think Canada is ahead of the US. Not that people in the United States don't get it, but it's a smaller voice in the dialogue about how to make progress against social problems. I often look to Canada for what I can learn from leading practitioners and thinkers here about systems change.

Q: Is it more typical that there's a single funder in Collective Impact initiatives in the US?

Fay: No, there are usually multiple funders involved. But even in a Collective Impact effort, this is not always coordinated. We are now starting to see in the US funder groups that are actively talking, sharing investments, and more actively coordinating. But funder culture in the US is not so much about collaboration or pooled investment at this point.

Q: Looking ahead, what would you say are the greatest challenges facing Collective Impact?

Fay: One of the recent trends we've observed is that as more Collective Impact efforts take off, we are seeing instances of competing efforts in the same geography and on the same issue area. There is competition about who plays the backbone role. This is ironic, because it represents isolated impact in the context of Collective Impact. It is not helpful to communities if the various stakeholders are investing in competing Collective Impact efforts.

Another set of challenges are around measurement and data. This is one of the biggest barriers that we hear many collaboratives talking about: the ability to identify shared measures that all partners agree on; and the capacity to look at data, learn from data, and make course corrections as you go.

A third major challenge is around funding and sustainability. Collective Impact efforts often take a long time to execute. Large-scale change takes years, if not decades, to accomplish. It's important to keep a Collective Impact infrastructure in place over a long period, which requires a mindset shift among funders to allocate funding to infrastructure (backbone support, convening players, and building data systems) and to have the patience to allow the process to work and solutions to emerge. Often the expectation

is to see results in one year, or in one grant cycle, but you need to make a considerable long-term investment to get to large-scale change.

John: I can put together two of these challenges: the long-term nature of the work and the ability to measure progress. These are challenges for all of us who work in the social sector, especially when addressing complex issues. We have a set of funding entities – usually government and philanthropic funders – who (as they should) want to be rigorous, use dollars wisely, and see outcomes from what they invest in. But when we are talking about Collective Impact efforts, where it takes years to see progress, outcomes are not the result of one organization but a collective effort. Many of the outcomes you see in the early years relate less to population-level outcomes and more to how people work together differently in order to come up with more innovative ways of scaling evidence based practices.

But these two stakeholders in the change process – government and philanthropy – are structured to want precise outcomes-oriented data that is often very difficult to deliver in a Collective Impact effort. That's no one's fault. Everyone wants to see outcomes in as clear a fashion as possible. But, as Albert Einstein said, *everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler*. It can be very difficult to find that middle ground for reporting results between making things simple and clear, but not oversimplifying things so much that you disguise the complexity of what's happening on the ground. It's something we all need to work on.

Q: Building interpretation and learning into evaluation and shared measurement is critical. When you see the "needle" actually move at an aggregate level, that's good. But you then need to determine to what degree the population you are targeting is embedded in that movement. If you are looking at poverty, focusing on children, and if it's actually seniors where poverty drops, it creates an interesting dilemma: the poverty needle has moved, but you are not necessarily impacting the targeted population.

John: You raise an interesting point. Here is what we've found to be important in terms of evaluating Collective Impact. The challenge is that evaluation itself is not well understood by most people. Collective Impact evaluation should typically encompass two related but separate kinds of evaluation: The first is performance measurement – do we see indicators moving – that's about the "what." This is important, but Collective Impact work is so iterative we need to also focus on learning that also helps us with the "why." So, second, we need to do evaluation that is diagnostic in nature, and diagnostic evaluation requires more frequent iteration-based on tracking qualitative data as well as quantitative data. When we talk about "shared measurement" as one of the five conditions of Collective Impact, people say they get it, and then they go and collect a bunch of quantitative indicators of progress and feel like they're done. But that's not shared measurement – that's just collecting shared measures. You must also look at "why" the indictors say what they do and engage in dialogue about what the data tells you. This can get lost on people.

Fay: Another key challenge for Collective Impact going forward is the need to build a clearer case for funders to support the backbone resources that help align and co-

ordinate Collective Impact stakeholders. Effective funders of Collective Impact don't see backbone infrastructure as cost – they see it as *leverage*. The reason is simple: if you have a backbone structure and measures that align the work of hundreds of organizations, spending millions or billions of dollars, then the cost of that infrastructure is tiny compared to all the funding being influenced and aligned. And that's tremendous leverage if done well.

Q: That is an interesting reframing of the backbone, an important one for making the case. You need to look at the whole system of investments and, in comparison to the total cost of the system, this investment in a backbone to coordinate collective actions is tiny.

John: It's a drop in bucket. It's hard for people to have that lens into it. Funders are forever looking for leverage. If backbone resources and shared measurement are effectively deployed, this gives you dramatically more leverage than you can imagine achieving through a grant to a single organization or single intervention.

Q. One of the compliments that we hear often is about the clarity and detail of the Collective Impact framework – I call it "deceptively simple." On the other hand, we imagine that this poses a bit of a burden as experience is gained. We also think that you have been very clear on the importance and interdependence of the five conditions. Are you feeling any need to revise or evolve the framework at this point?

Fay: Since publishing the initial article, our team at FSG has continued to research successful Collective Impact efforts around the globe, supported the launch of dozens of new Collective Impact efforts, and trained thousands of practitioners about how to put this work into practice – and the five conditions still hold. We've been pleasantly surprised to see how consistently important they are across the work we're studying and doing. So while we wouldn't change the Collective Impact framework itself, we have deepened our understanding of what it takes to be successful in this work. Take, for example, the importance of cross-sector collaboration. While it is not spelled out explicitly in the framework, we have seen how powerful it is to bring different sectors together around a problem. Each partner holds important keys – no one group alone can solve the problems we're trying to tackle with Collective Impact. Having them all at the table creates a different level of dialogue and action than would occur if you only have the usual suspects or people engaging in their usual groups.

Another key lesson we have learned is the importance of structure in this work. It's really important to have the backbone function to coordinate all of the work, but as part of that backbone infrastructure you also need to have shared cross-sector governance as well as multiple working groups focusing on different parts of the problem. These working groups are constantly communicating with each other, looking at the data, and sharing lessons. This structure for working together is critical for identifying new strategies, scaling what's working, and innovating.

Hand in hand with structure are relationships. We touched lightly on this in the second article "Channeling Change," but we've really come to see the importance of interpersonal relationships to the success of this work. A wise backbone leader recently said to me,

"Progress happens at the speed of trust." Breaking down silos, thinking creatively, and true collaboration just can't happen without strong interpersonal relationships.

John: This is where continuous communication comes in. People interpret this as, "We need to talk on an on-going basis to the outside world about what we're doing." No. It's people *involved* in the Collective Impact effort who must continuously communicate with each other. What we've found is that the five conditions as a framework have held up remarkably well. There's nuance underneath the conditions. Your phrase "deceptively simple" is accurate. Many people, who haven't been involved in the deep and heavy work of community change look at the framework, say "Oh, I get it," and assume it will be easy. Then they begin the work and learn how challenging it is. What I've come to appreciate is that Collective Impact is about really "working the issue" over time. And the nature of this work is that new solutions, not known at the front end of the process, will emerge over time if appropriate attention is paid to structuring the process well. The framework of Collective Impact (e.g., the five conditions) is important, but there's a lot of additional knowledge required to do this work well.

Fay: Another key lesson is the importance of including the voice of persons with lived experience. We've seen a huge range of community engagement across Collective Impact efforts in terms of how broadly or deeply different populations are included. But regardless of the degree of engagement, you must have the voice of persons with lived experience helping to define the problem and key measures, and engaging in the development of solutions.

John: Related to this is the notion of ensuring that a representative set of all the people and organizations who are relevant to a particular issue participate in the work. We talked about this in our "Embracing Emergence" SSIR article. And it's why relationships are so important. One thing we're constantly amazed at is that, once you bring all the different eyes of people who need to be together across the sectors to deal with an issue, it is remarkable that many of those people have rarely if ever been at the same table together. Solutions emerge that they each individually couldn't get to themselves, but when they get together as a collective, innovative answers nobody thought of before become obvious. We have countless examples of this, although it is counterintuitive for many.

Q: Several of our writers for this special issue felt strongly that there are very few "true" or "fully implemented" examples of Collective Impact initiatives in Canada, but on the other hand they felt that people could still gain insight and knowledge from the framework and supporting materials. In other cases, we see considerable application of the term "Collective Impact" without necessarily believing that these initiatives or networks have all of the characteristics that you describe, a phenomenon that we describe as "re-branding." We know it is a tough question to answer publicly because it implies an ownership we don't think you have ever claimed, but are you concerned at all about protecting the integrity and even the "brand" of Collective Impact?

Fay: We have been delighted to see the excitement about Collective Impact and are inspired by the momentum we're seeing in terms of partnerships taking off because of this thinking. At the same time, there is a danger with respect to the term "Collective Impact"

being used too loosely. FSG has no interest in copyrighting the term, and we've given it freely to the field. But there is some utility in being definitive about the five conditions, and distinguishing Collective Impact as something more structured and rigorous than typical collaboration. When Collective Impact is used loosely, it can be problematic if the effort subsequently fails because it doesn't have the structure and conditions for success. This could ultimately label all of Collective Impact as a failure and undermine the hard work of many. Not every effort will be successful, but we see real opportunity here to get to large-scale change in a manner that has been elusive for society to date.

John: I've seen misuse of the term when people use it to describe their way of achieving collective ends. For example, we know of one funder that brought together its grantees – and its grantees only – and said, "We're going to hold all of you accountable to achieve a collective set of outcomes that we will define for you. And you need to report to us the progress you're making on these outcomes consistent with our grant cycle." There are so many things wrong with this at so many levels – not just about how Collective Impact happens, but how one effectively supports social change. Yet they're branding it as Collective Impact. It's damaging – if I were to hear about this effort, and it was conveyed to me as Collective Impact, I would think Collective Impact was one of the worst ideas ever! We also see nonprofits going to funders who are sincere in their efforts to support Collective Impact and make grant requests in the name of Collective Impact, but they are not really following the principles. This can be very frustrating to funders.

Fay: Collective Impact is not the answer for every community or every set of partners. There needs to be readiness for Collective Impact, and the three preconditions that we have found to be really important are: 1) Making sure there are strong champions for this work – leadership is so critical; 2) A sense of real urgency for change; and 3) Having resources to support the planning to do this work. We see communities jumping in when the readiness conditions just aren't there, and that is a problem as well. So there is a danger in dilution, calling something Collective Impact when it is not so rigorous, and also the danger of jumping in when the partners are not ready.

Q: When the McConnell Foundation funded Vibrant Communities, Tamarack invited a number of communities to step forward, but not all did. Readiness is so important. Even today, 12 years later, a community we thought would be out in front of other communities – which has a strong history and strong principles – is still not part of the network, because they didn't see it as right for their community. There's something to think about in developing a staged approach to Collective Impact.

John: Achieving Collective Impact is super hard and challenging for any set of organizations. We're really still at the beginning stages as a society in understanding how to do this work well. We, as well as others, recognize that. I don't think there's a lot of leverage for society in FSG attempting to be the police or certifiers of what is or isn't Collective Impact. What we hope to do, with Tamarack and others through the Collective Impact Forum, is to help those who aspire to Collective Impact access knowledge and tools, and connect with others who are doing this work, so that we can *all* get better together. While we worry about commoditization of the term Collective Impact, we feel the best approach to address the concern is to keep holding up efforts and communities who are doing this well, and help explain why it's working, so that others can aspire to get better.

Fay: We see the new Collective Impact Forum as an opportunity for the whole field to learn about how to do this work well and to get into the nuances of what makes Collective Impact efforts successful.

Q: We also publish book reviews *in The Philanthropist,* and wondered if you were aware of any books on Collective Impact that are in the works or recently published.

John: We're not aware of any book that has yet been written specifically on Collective Impact. We've been approached to write a book, but we're so early in the learning about Collective Impact that we're not ready to write this. However, there are a number of books that have influenced our thinking about Collective Impact. Many of these have been out for a while. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed,* by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton – two of the three authors are Canadian. This book has had a profound influence on my understanding of social change. *The Power of Positive Deviance,* by Richard Pascale, Jerry Sternin, and Monique Sternin. Steven Johnson's *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*. Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto*. These all have a common theme: they are books helping all of us to better understand complexity, adaptation, and systems change. We have a ton to learn about how complex systems effectively adapt and improve over time, and how we as practitioners can positively affect systems. Those who manage resources, who can help to improve society, really need to understand complexity and systems change. Our hope is that, along with Tamarack and others, we can continue to learn about how social change happens and contribute to teaching others about the nature of this important work.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Resolved: That Collective Impact is simply a re-branded and codified model of longstanding collaborative approaches that is too rigid to encourage genuine innovation and social change.

Summary

Paul Born, President of Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, and Don Bourgeois, Barrister & Solicitor and former editor of *The Philanthropist*, face off on the question of whether Collective Impact is a new and innovative approach to create effective social change or just a re-packaging of old ideas about collaboration.

Don Bourgeois is a retired Barrister & Solicitor, a prolific writer, and a former Editor of *The Philanthropist / Le Philanthropié.* Email: donbourgeois@gmail.com .

Paul Born is the President of Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, a Senior Ashoka Fellow, and the author of four books, including his newly released *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times.* Email: pborn@tamarackcommunity.ca .

POINT : DON BOURGEOIS

There is at least one advantage to being closer to the end of a career than at the beginning, and that is that one has seen "it" before. Whatever that "it" is, if you have lived through and survived a few cycles of the economy, "it" has come across your desk two, three, or more times.

A couple of decades ago, the "it" in governance for not-for-profit and charitable organizations was the "Carver Policy Governance Model." This was aimed at enhancing accountability and aligning strategic plans with resources and decision-making. More recently, the "culture of collaboration" has been identified as the way forward for the sector. And we all know how "social enterprise" will result in a well-funded sector.

These are examples of "its" that are purportedly unique to the charitable and not-for-profit sector. There have also been "its" that more directly focus on the business sector but which are also touted for use in the "third sector" to help the sector become more business-like – but, of course, always remaining true to its mandate. Business-like is presumed to be more efficient and effective than an organization otherwise would be.

In my distant youth as an academic, the "its" of the day included "management by objective" and "zero-based budgeting"; thereafter, "Six Sigma" and its many variants became the process to success. It would be easy to take an electronic walk through the archives of the RAND Corporation, the Brookings Institution, the Harvard Business School, or their Canadian equivalents such as the Conference Board of Canada or the Fraser Institute, to find many other techniques or methodologies that were or will be "it."

The latest "it" is Collective Impact. What is wrong with "CI"? Nothing – and everything. I am sure CI will work in some situations. Some organization or group of organizations will use it and achieve success, however success is defined. I am always a bit concerned

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when success is intended to include social change toward social progress and when there may not be a consensus on what that means. The "social progress" that CI is intended to achieve is usually identified as a specific goal, such as reduced teenage pregnancy. Who can argue with that outcome? But what does this mean in terms of the underlying and fundamental changes that appear to be necessary for success?

That, however, is not my immediate concern. Rather, it's that this new "it" allows the sector to use a new miracle process to hide behind rhetoric. It is the shiny new bauble that is being and will be used by some (certainly not all but, alas, too many) to mask inefficiency, incompetence, poor quality, and self-absorbed navel-gazing.

Why does this matter? Let's look at what CI is supposed to be. One proponent commented:

> … and I do believe that collective impact, when skillfully managed under the right circumstances, has great potential to achieve greater social progress at scale. (Gorin Malenfant, 2012)

An overweight, middle-aged male, whose skating abilities have always been suspect, could play goal for the Montréal Canadiens. All it would take is (a) an extensive and expensive training regime, (b) more appropriate nutrition, (c) significant investment in various healthcare treatments, and (d) the disappearance of many other goalies. And I can assure you that there are many, many overweight, middle-aged males who would agree that this outcome would be an important achievement and constitute undeniable social progress.

Perhaps the preceding paragraph is unfair. The same CI proponent quoted above continued that "for this reason, collective impact merits attention as an important model for achieving social and environmental change." I don't disagree that CI merits attention. I am even willing to use the initials "CI" rather than writing out "Collective Impact" in recognition that "it" has become a methodology in the sector. You know "it" has arrived when everyone knows what you are discussing when you use only "its" initials. I even see potential for "it" to achieve success in very specific circumstances where there is a long-term investor (or investors) who can draw on or impose strong management for the strategic vision implementation.

The proponents for CI speak of five conditions:

- a common agenda,
- shared measurements,
- mutually reinforcing activities,
- continuous communication, and
- backbone support.

Who can disagree that these conditions are necessary for success? I don't, and in the right circumstances with skilful management, I agree there is a chance of success.

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The problem with CI is not aspirational; it is reality. The preconditions set out for success are such that "it" will be successful in too few circumstances. What are those circumstances? They are not readily apparent. But in the meantime, the rush to CI will result in "it" being the latest bauble. It leaves me to believe that the dream of the unnamed overweight, middle-aged male playing goal for the Canadiens in the 2015 Stanley Cup playoffs remains possible (as if it ever were).

I leave for others the broader issue of whether my – okay, I admit, it is me, not just some unnamed overweight, middle-aged male – playing goal for the Canadiens is actually social progress.

COUNTERPOINT : **PAUL BORN**

If this were a game of tag – I guess I would be "it."

Don Bourgeois makes an important point. I can especially identify with the story of the "overweight, middle-aged male wanting to play for the Montréal Canadiens" – though for me the team is the Vancouver Canucks. Essentially Don's argument is that Collective Impact is like adding a new iron to a set of golf clubs or a unique paintbrush to the many we already have. The "tool" may help us cut a few strokes off our game or paint better, but fundamentally it's just a tool. It is up to the user to make that tool effective and ensure it has impact. And you still need a lot of skill to make it work.

The fact we are even having this debate makes me believe that Collective Impact is more than a better tool. In general, people have recognized it as a fundamental rethinking of the way we go about making positive change in our communities. It may be that this "rethinking" will be for community development what the flop was for high jumping. When Dick Fosbury soared over the high-jump bar on his back, he forever changed how high jumpers would jump. In the same way, Collective Impact invites the community sector to do more than rethink how to work; it is actually asking the community sector to play a new "game," one that reflects a fundamentally new way to approach social change. Let me explain.

In 1998, the Community Opportunity Development Association (CODA) – a community development agency I co-founded and for which I served as executive director – was recognized with a United Nations Habitat best practices award as one of the 40 top urban development initiatives worldwide. Our community held a huge celebration for us and there, in front of hundreds, I admitted that I was a bit shy about accepting this award because in the 10-year period for which CODA was being recognized (a criteria for the award was our outcomes over 10 years) poverty had actually increased by 5% in our community. I suggested that day that if I was heading a public company, such an outcome would get me fired, not honoured.

Later, CODA was instrumental in founding Opportunities 2000, an initiative grounded in a commitment to fundamentally rethink how we would reduce poverty and set a goal of the Waterloo Region, achieving the lowest level of poverty in Canada by the new Millennium.

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Though we were never sure if we reached our ultimate goal (it is very hard to get definitive stats in Canada on such a complex goal), we did explore together a new approach, which focused on engaging the entire system that cared about ending poverty and working together as equals. It brought together the assets of the business community, all levels of government, the voluntary sector, and people with lived experience of poverty to work together to address this shared challenge.

Our outcomes were remarkable. We reduced the impact of poverty for more than 1,600 families and sparked a whole new range of social innovations in doing so. These outcomes were possible because they were grounded in our recognition that no one sector, working alone, can achieve meaningful and lasting impact on a complex community issue like poverty.

Achieving real, lasting impact on complex community issues requires the engagement of resources and stakeholders across a multitude of sectors, taking into consideration a wide range of perspectives. Ultimately it also relies on the creation of a common and shared agenda across diverse sectors and organizations so that individual efforts and programs are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

The desire to further refine this new approach to achieving better outcomes on complex community issues caused a small group of us – led by the Maytree Foundation, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the newly formed Tamarack Institute – to consider a formidable goal: How might we fundamentally rethink the way that communities work together and, in turn, make the process of working together for social change easier and more effective? Our response led to the formation of Vibrant Communities as an action learning lab. The role of the Tamarack Institute was that of a think tank that would experiment, learn, and refine a "new technology" or a better way of working together for social change and to end poverty in Canada.

After a decade, a formal evaluation of Vibrant Communities (Gamble, 2010) confirmed the success of this new, comprehensive approach. Today, more than a decade later, more than 50 cities across Canada have joined this network and are working together as Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty (Vibrant Communities, 2012). Embracing a collective impact approach, this national network is achieving measureable results in reducing poverty across Canada.

When John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG published "Collective Impact" in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* in the winter of 2011, Tamarack was immediately engaged. The Collective Impact framework was a better articulation of the process we had discovered and were promoting in our own work. This was not a just a meeting of the minds. We were not two think tanks suddenly realizing we were working on the same thing. It was rather a recognition that the "new way" of working that many of us were struggling to define had, at last, been succinctly described by John and Mark in a way that was easy to understand.

Collective Impact resonates so deeply for people because it articulates what so many of us have been looking for and have discovered, often with desperation, as a way to

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achieve deep impacts on complex community issues. As a sector, we were tired of running programs that we knew made the lives of the poor just a little bit better. We wanted fewer people living in poverty. "Collective Impact" articulated the framework that affirmed what some of us, working on the front-line, had come to know. The only way to have impact was to work together, across sectors. This gave us the hope that there might indeed be a path forward toward large-scale social change.

Collective Impact is not an idea that suddenly arose in the minds of a few people, a technique that could easily be adopted, or a new "it," to borrow Don's phrase. It builds on what we have all learned from the work that Anne Kubisch led for many years with the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change, it builds on the work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and in many ways it has incorporated the Asset Based Community Development principles promoted by John McKnight as well as the Collaborative Leadership ideas of David Chrislip and Jay Connor, to name but a few.

Collective Impact is emerging as a new paradigm, more than a technique that organizations should follow. As a new paradigm, Collective Impact asks that we think about the work of social change as the transformation of human systems. So, if we hope to reduce high school dropout rates, we begin by gathering together all those who care about dropout rates and deeply engage with them and all those who would benefit from reduced dropout rates (the system that desires change). Together, we embark on a journey to understand the issue of dropout rates deeply, often by looking at data, identifying root causes, and engaging in iterative conversations. This leads to a common agenda and a system of shared measurement, not as goals to be achieved but rather as an articulation of shared commitments we make to one another as we work toward realizing the shared outcome we desire: a reduction in high school dropout rates. This commitment to one another is what motivates us to work together (mutually reinforcing activities) and to connect often (continuous communication), so we can learn from each other and continuously adapt our strategy within the dynamic reality of our context. We rely on a jointly created backbone organization or structure to help coordinate and facilitate us in working better together.

Collective Impact builds on the promise that communities can work together for large scale change. Simply adding more programs or developing better techniques will not transform a social issue – at best those activities will provide temporary relief or enhance the current system. Enhancing the current system most often gives us more of what we already have. As Einstein said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." For 30 years now our approach to reducing poverty has not resulted in reduced poverty in Canada. It has only been stabilized, at best.

In this context, Collective Impact is a new theory of change rather than a technique for change. It proposes that more money, smarter approaches, or even working harder will not fundamentally change things unless we convince the whole system that desires change – government at all levels, business, the voluntary sector, and the people who will most benefit from our work – to work together as equal partners, bringing many techniques (new and old) and all the knowledge and resources of a community into a unified effort to collectively address an issue from multiple angles. It proposes that the

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path forward is comprehensive change that builds on local assets and evolves as we learn and change together.

I welcome the debate about Collective Impact, not in order for us to get it right as a technique but rather for us to fundamentally rethink how to approach change in our communities. I believe that our current systems for social impact are already highly effective, that our leaders are deeply talented, and that the money we spend on creating a more equitable society is used remarkably well. But what is now needed is a shared commitment: to be willing to do things differently, to rethink how we engage a diversity of perspectives in our social change efforts and, as a result, embrace the many untapped assets that lie dormant or under-utilized in our communities and focus all of these on the same goals.

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Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times
by Paul Born
San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.; 2014
ISBN 978-1-62656-097-0

Larry Gemmel

Summary

Deepening Community is Paul Born's fourth book and his most personal reflection to date on people, relationships, and what constitutes community in today's "chaotic" society.

Larry Gemmel has more than 25 years of experience working with nonprofit organizations at the local, national, and international level. He currently acts as an independent consultant focusing on policy research, philanthropy, and organizational development. Email: Larry.gemmel@sympatico.ca

Born, the co-founder and President of Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, has a long history of leading community-development and community-building projects and is deeply engaged in this work on a personal and professional level. Best known for his anti-poverty work at the Community Opportunities Development Association and Opportunities 2000 in Waterloo Region and through Tamarack's involvement in the Vibrant Communities project, he was recognized in 2013 as a Senior Ashoka Fellow for his "significant contribution as an influencer and thought leader in the economic development sector."

In Born's best-selling first book, *Community Conversations* (originally published in 2008, a second edition was revised and updated in 2012), he described methods for community engagement based on the art of facilitating conversations to ensure that people in communities were directly involved in determining and influencing their own futures. *Community Conversations* arose directly from Born's experience at Tamarack and with Vibrant Communities and suggests 10 specific techniques that can be used by those engaged in community-building efforts.

As editor of *Creating Vibrant Communities* (2008), Born organized a broad cast of contributors to tell the story of 10 communities in Canada and how they embraced the Vibrant Communities approach conceived originally by Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute. Subtitled *How Individuals and Organizations from Diverse Sectors of Society Are Coming Together to Reduce Poverty in Canada,* the book illustrates dramatically the potential of the community conversations that Born advocates.

For Leaderful Communities: A Study in Community Leadership (2008), Born conducted research to better understand the nature of community leadership, how leaders can lead other leaders, and to come up with a model of community leadership that could engage people collectively and collaboratively. He found that community leadership would thrive if people could develop a shared sense of community, purpose, and values, and he used this knowledge to create a community leadership model to support Opportunities 2000, an anti-poverty initiative in Waterloo Region, Ontario.

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Deepening Community is a logical extension of these three previous books and moves the conversation forward to address much more personal aspects of our relationship with communities. In his preface, Born explains, "I have written *Deepening Community* to empower all of us to open up to community, to make conscious choices about the kind of community we desire, and to feel more connected to the people we care about." The book explores what Born calls "four acts of community life":

- sharing our stories,
- taking time to enjoy one another,
- taking care of one another, and
- working together for a better world.

Each of these chapters is bolstered by three types of community stories. The first are Born's personal recollections of the Mennonite community of refugees that he grew up in and which influenced his thinking and character. The second are stories based on his experiences over three decades of community building and economic development work. The third are stories that other personal and professional friends have shared with him over the years.

While the term "community" is used quite frequently in our society, as Peter Block explains in a foreword, this is often without any depth or substance. Block suggests that while there are many factors that lead to alienation and isolation, chief among them is the fast pace of life today, a focus on competition and financial acquisition, and increasing use of technology, which, while seeming to connect us, actually reduces the quality and value of our interactions. Since many different meanings can be ascribed to "community," Born defines his understanding of community in terms of five broad categories:

- community as identity,
- community as place,
- community as spiritual,
- community as intentional, and
- community as a natural living system.

To set up his concept of deep community, Born then characterizes our ways of interacting with each other in terms of three hypothetical "options" (which sound eerily familiar): Shallow Community, Fear-Based Community, and Deep Community. By exploring these alternatives through his own experiences, Born juxtaposes the options to explain the value of deepening community. He then describes in detail how the four acts of community building can be used to create new possibilities for more satisfying and positive community. The bottom line for Paul Born is that in today's world we can make choices that will truly make a difference.

This book, as with Paul Born's other publications, is anchored in research. Much of the content is informed by a detailed survey of 500 of the most active members of Tamarack's communities to find out about their definition and sense of community, and their ideas about how community conversations and relationships can be enhanced. And not surprisingly, Born intends these conversations to continue and has set up a website

(www.deepeningcommunity.org) to facilitate and encourage broad participation. Reading a book by Paul Born is always a bit like receiving an invitation to join something new and exciting.

Paul Born has said that he doesn't consider himself to be a writer but rather an activist and storyteller who writes to share his experience with others. Fortunately for us, that experience is quite extraordinary. And because he is well-connected, with a huge and active network of personal and professional colleagues and friends, his conversations embrace many of the leading thinkers in community-building, social innovation, systems change, and leadership. While Born's reflections are revealing and deeply personal, his thinking is very much informed and enhanced by the ideas and work of others, and he is a master of continuous conversations and learning.

It is also not surprising that Paul Born and Tamarack have becoming deeply engaged in the Collective Impact "movement," acting in partnership with FSG and the Aspen Institute to help people learn how to use the framework to address complex and large-scale social problems. Born recognized in Collective Impact the same kind of approach and collaboration that he and his colleagues had pioneered in Vibrant Communities, and the work of Kania and Kramer on Collective Impact had great resonance for him. If you are interested in Collective Impact, you will know that an important condition of the approach is engaging diverse multi-sectoral partners in a common agenda and ensuring continuous communication and reflection. If you want to know more about understanding your own capacity to engage in such deep collaboration and ways to engage community members more fully in the conversation, then you will find considerable guidance and fresh ideas in *Deepening Community.*