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Achieving Communitywide Impact by Changing the Local Culture: Opportunities and Considerations for Foundations

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Keywords: Place-based grantmaking, community culture; culture change, foundation leadership, community foundations

Introduction

The growing popularity of outcome-oriented philanthropy signifies that foundations are increasingly coming to regard their core business as “changemaking” rather than grantmaking (Brown, Chaskin, Hamilton, & Richman, 2003; Fulton, Kasper, & Kibbe, 2010; Brest, 2012; Brown, 2012). This more activist approach to philanthropy is premised on the idea that achieving meaningful improvements in the lives of people and communities requires foundations to do more than fund individual programs or organizations. Change-oriented foundations rely on a broader range of strategies, including convening, mobilizing, advocacy and capacity building, in order to stimulate people and organizations to do new and more powerful work.

A change-oriented foundation can operate at a local, regional, or national scale. National foundations often focus on federal policy or large-scale movements. Most change-oriented philanthropy, however, has a local lens, seeking to improve conditions within a neighborhood, city, town, county, or multicounty region (Hopkins & Ferris, 2015). This line of work is often referred to as place-based grantmaking or comprehensive community change work.¹ By definition, a

¹ The term “place-based initiative” has often been used interchangeably with “comprehensive community initiative” (CCI). The Aspen Roundtable on Community Change, which has served as a thought leader in this line of work for two decades, issued a 2012 publication describing a CCI as a “complex, place-based change effort” (Auspos & Kubisch, 2012, p. 12). According to the authors, the defining principles

Key Points

- With place-based initiatives foundations generally seek to engage a broad set of local stakeholders in developing high-payoff strategies and to build their capacity. However more fundamental changes may be needed to bring about the ambitious impacts that foundations have in mind. This article explores the idea of changing community culture as a means of achieving large-scale impacts.
- In trying to shift a community’s culture, a foundation is inherently seeking to change how residents think and act, as well as how the community defines itself. This raises both practical and ethical questions, particularly when the foundation is based outside the community in question.
- Possibilities and challenges with this line of work are illustrated with the Community Progress Initiative, which sought to build an adaptive culture to revitalize the economy in central Wisconsin following massive dislocations in the papermaking and cranberry industries.

place-based initiative operates on factors in the local environment – ideally, structural factors – that influence whatever problem or issue is

of these initiatives are: (1) They focus on a defined geography and aim to affect the entire resident population. (2) They are comprehensive, meaning that the initiative works across a broad spectrum of social, economic, and physical conditions, and aim at changing individuals, families, communities, and systems. (3) They seek also to build community in terms of social capital, community capacity, and civic voice, as well as attending to racial diversity and equity.

This sobering assessment raises the question of whether foundations actually have the power to promote community-wide improvements in economic prosperity, life expectancy, educational attainment, moving people out of poverty, and the like. It is possible foundations have set their sights too high, but it is also possible that they have not been using sufficiently powerful strategies.

being targeted (e.g., poor academic outcomes, joblessness, violence, obesity, a stagnating economy).²

Place-based initiatives have had a mixed record of success over the past 50 years (Brown et al., 2003; Brown & Fiester, 2007; Trent & Chavis, 2009; Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010; FSG, 2011; Hopkins & Ferris, 2015). Prudence Brown and her colleagues (2003) found that funders who were actively pursuing this approach in the late 1990s and early 2000s came away with tempered beliefs about the possibility of large-scale community change: “Funders acknowledge that their support has yielded less for communities in the short term than they and their community partners initially hoped. They also observe that the work is more complex and longer-term than initially anticipated” (p. 6).

² Recognizing that problems such as poverty, joblessness, and poor health are driven in large part by macro-level forces and policies, some place-based funders couple their local work with advocacy and field-building initiatives at the state or federal level (Hopkins & Ferris, 2015). The California Endowment has taken this two-pronged approach within its Building Healthier Communities work (Iton, 2015).

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Most place-based initiatives have focused on one or more of the following factors as drivers of community change: the quality and reach of local programs, the organizational capacity of local nonprofits, the knowledge and skills (especially leadership skills) of local residents, networking and collaboration across organizations and sectors, the ability of coalitions and other groups to work effectively together around a shared agenda, and the ability of local groups to advocate for policy change.

Foundations are generally comfortable with the idea of increasing the knowledge and skills of local actors, but it is possible that more fundamental changes are needed to bring about the ambitious impacts that foundations seek to achieve. This article explores the idea of changing community culture as a means of achieving large-scale change.

Our notion of community culture closely follows the definition that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) included in its 2002 Guide for Understanding a Sense of Place. In particular, a community’s culture consists of the “values, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions people share about themselves and others. . . . Culture includes values of right or good conduct, such as ideas of justice, freedom, sanctity of life, and responsibility to future generations” (U.S. EPA, 2002, p. 11).

When a foundation enters into the business of changing a community’s culture, it is inherently promoting a shift in how residents think and act, as well as how the community defines itself. This possibility raises both practical and ethical questions, both of which are considered in this article.

The article also reviews a number of instances where foundations have either explicitly or implicitly looked to culture-change as a strategy for achieving large-scale impacts. Our review suggests that this line of work is relatively uncharted and potentially controversial, especially when the foundation is based outside the community whose culture is targeted for change. Community foundations, however, appear to be particularly well positioned to lead local residents toward a new culture that better advances their interests. We illustrate this potential with a case study of the Incentive Community Foundation's community-change work in central Wisconsin following a series of massive dislocations to the local economy.

Changing the Culture of a Community

Without minimizing the role of macro-level social, economic, and political forces, one can safely say that our most challenging and entrenched problems are influenced to at least some degree by the norms, attitudes, and beliefs that prevail within the local community. The local culture can either promote or discourage healthy eating, physical activity, academic achievement, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, cooperation, and nearly every other outcome a foundation might have in mind.

A number of foundations have come to recognize that achieving the large-scale impacts they are seeking will require a shift in culture. Some foundations are explicitly striving to change culture, while others are treating culture as an aspect of community context that needs to be addressed in order to achieve impact in their place-based work. A number of examples follow.³

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

One of the most prominent examples of a foundation treating culture as a vehicle for

³ In addition to the examples we cite here of foundations that have sought to shift the culture of communities, we can point to a parallel stream of work wherein foundations have sought to change the culture of organizations and institutions. One of the higher-profile examples of this work is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's grantmaking to improve the learning environment of high schools, partly through structural redesign (e.g., smaller classroom size), partly through building the capacity of teachers, and partly by shifting the culture of the school to be more relationship oriented (Shear et al., 2005).

When a foundation enters into the business of changing a community's culture, it is inherently promoting a shift in how residents think and act, as well as in how the community defines itself. This possibility raises both practical and ethical questions.

impact comes from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Over the past two years, the foundation has organized its grantmaking around the concept of a "culture of health," which is defined as a culture that "enables all in our diverse society to lead healthier lives now and for generations to come" (Lavizzo-Mourey, 2014, p. 1).

At both the national and the local levels, the foundation is seeking to shift norms and attitudes to support healthier living and wider access to health care. One of its four areas of measurement involves "making health a shared value" (Lavizzo-Mourey, 2015, p. 5).

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

While RWJF is seeking to build a more health-promoting culture throughout the U.S., other foundations are looking toward community-specific shifts in culture. With its Healthy Places NC initiative (HPNC), the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust is seeking to change local attitudes and norms as one means of expanding and deepening the work that organizations and residents carry out to improve community health (Easterling & Smart, 2015). All the counties participating in HPNC are rural and economically challenged. Most have experienced a major disruption in their economic base (e.g., textiles, furniture, tobacco) over the past 30 years. As industries have shut down and jobs have

In both the HPNC and SYP examples, changing the local culture is a primary and explicit mechanism for achieving community impact. In other instances, the foundation begins with a different strategic focus, but then finds that making progress on that issue requires some sort of culture change.

evaporated, local residents have felt a growing sense of futility that has undermined initiative and innovation.

Under HPNC, the trust's program officers operate in a community development mode, reaching out to both established and potential leaders in ways designed to provoke bigger thinking and bolder action. On the one hand, the program officers are attempting to elicit more comprehensive and strategic projects that the trust can support with its grants. On a deeper level, they are attempting to cultivate a shift in the local culture that promotes innovation and action. Drawing on Albert Bandura's (2000) definition of agency as the ability of people to "influence the course of events and to take a hand in shaping their lives" (p. 75), HPNC strives for a more agentic culture within the participating counties.

Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation

Another example of a foundation seeking to change community culture comes from the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, which serves communities in northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin. Working with a group of young leaders from throughout the region, the foundation championed the idea

of creating a more civil culture, especially in the political arena. Meetings of city councils and county commissions in the region had gained a reputation for shouting matches and personal attacks; both elected officials and residents were caught up in divisive public discourse. This culture of disrespect made it difficult to reach reasoned decisions on the key issues facing the region and discouraged qualified residents from seeking public office.

As a remedy, the community foundation developed a multipronged communications campaign, Speak Your Peace (SYP), in 2003. The campaign introduced nine principles designed to promote more respectful interaction (e.g., pay attention, take responsibility, apologize, give constructive criticism). The foundation used presentations, posters, wallet cards, publications, and other communications strategies to build broad public support for the SYP principles. Over time, the principles were explicitly incorporated into the decision-making procedures governing city councils, county commissions, and school boards throughout the Duluth-Superior region. In addition, a number of schools – with the prodding of students – developed curricula to promote the SYP principles (Easterling, Sampson, & Probst, 2010).

Community Foundations Seeking to Build Social Capital

In both the HPNC and SYP examples, changing the local culture is a primary and explicit mechanism for achieving community impact. In other instances, the foundation begins with a different strategic focus, but then finds that making progress on that issue requires some sort of culture change. This occurred for a number of community foundations that adopted social capital as a strategic focus in the early 2000s (Easterling, 2008). Their interest in social capital was spurred by the publication of Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* (2000) and by his invitation to participate in the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, which provided local data on factors such as social support, social trust, interracial connectedness, civic engagement,

political activism, and participation in associations and community events.⁴

Many of the 34 participating community foundations used the survey findings as a point of departure to develop programs that would build one or more aspects of social capital (Easterling, 2011). Those foundations that delved into issues such as low interracial trust and weak civic engagement sometimes found that they had entered into the business of trying to change the prevailing culture such that the community would become more engaged, inclusive, open, and trusting. Some foundations embraced this role as an agent of culture change, while others shied away (Easterling, 2008).

Kansas Leadership Center

One group that has not shied away from culture change is the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), created by the Kansas Health Foundation in 2005 as a vehicle for developing civic leaders throughout the state (KLC, 2009a). The founding staff of the center conducted an in-depth study of the leadership landscape in Kansas and concluded that the prevailing civic culture – epitomized by the phrase “Kansas nice” – was inhibiting the risky, adaptive form of leadership that was needed to solve the deeply entrenched problems impinging on the health of the state (KLC, 2009b). The center articulated an alternative model of civic leadership based on Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky’s (2002) concept of adaptive leadership (O’Malley, 2009; Chrislip & O’Malley, 2013).⁵ This new model was grounded in provocative principles such as “the activity of leadership starts with a personal intervention” and “to make progress, we have to be willing to raise the heat to get others and ourselves into the zone of productive heat” (KLC, 2009c, p. 6)

To promote this new form of leadership, the KLC developed a broad portfolio of training

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and coaching programs aimed at emerging and established leaders throughout Kansas. The center also moved beyond training individual participants and added a number of more macro-oriented strategies to encourage a shift in the civic culture of communities across the state.⁶ This new work includes a multimedia communications strategy stressing the value of adaptive leadership, as well as outreach and partnering with various organizations and institutions across the state that provide leadership development. The net result of these activities has been statewide buy-in to the KLC’s principles around civic leadership and adoption of the model as the basis for solving community problems (Easterling, 2012).

Foundations Investing in Community Capacity

Just as the KLC has recognized that individual leadership development requires a change in the culture of civic leadership, others have come to see the link between building community capacity and changing the local culture. In their 2003 review of foundations involved in community change initiatives, Prudence Brown and her colleagues pointed out the need to move beyond

⁴ Information on the 2000 and 2006 Social Capital Community Benchmark Surveys is available on the Saguaro Seminar website: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/measurement>

⁵ The KLC model promotes four key competencies of leadership, namely, the ability to diagnose the situation, manage self, intervene skillfully, and energize others (O’Malley, 2009).

⁶ One key reason that the KLC adopted this parallel track to promoting culture change was the pushback that the early participants often experienced when they attempted to exercise the KLC model of leadership in their home communities (Easterling, 2012).

A critical question facing place-based foundations, as well as larger fields such as community development and public health, is whether it is possible and appropriate to shift the culture of a community to be more conducive to adaptive problem solving.

building the capacity of particular people and organizations and to look at the larger community context:

[F]oundation practice sometimes places too much emphasis on building the capacity of one or a few organizations as a proxy for community infrastructure while giving too little attention to building the broader infrastructure itself – the whole range of individuals, organizations, and associations in a community that have the ability, commitment, and resources to address community-level problems (p. 29-30).

Although Brown and her colleagues did not explicitly include cultural norms in their depiction of “community infrastructure,” there is widespread belief among place-based foundations that this factor is crucial in determining the capacity of a community to carry out the work required to improve prosperity, health, and well-being. Indeed, the widely used Community Readiness Model developed by researchers at the Tri-Ethnic Center at Colorado State University (Edwards, Jumper-Thurman, Plested, Oetting, & Swanson, 2000) includes “community climate” as one of its six dimensions. A critical question facing place-based foundations, as well as larger fields such as community development and public health, is whether it is possible and appropriate

to shift the culture of a community to be more conducive to adaptive problem solving.

Less Explicit Efforts to Change Culture

Other foundations carrying out place-based work have sought to change deeply embedded community traits but have not explicitly referred to changing the local culture. For example, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation launched the Knight Creative Communities Initiative in 2006 as a vehicle for enhancing the creative character of three communities – Duluth, Minn./ Superior, Wis.; Tallahassee, Fla.; and Charlotte, N.C. – using Richard Florida’s concept of a “creative city” (2008). An independent evaluation found limited impact (Stern & Seifert, 2008).

A more recent example is the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities initiative, which seeks to increase resilience to environmental and economic shocks and stresses. The foundation’s City Resilience Framework emphasizes the enhancement of culture-laden constructs such as civic engagement, cohesion, collective identity, mutual support, and social stability, but refrains from talking about community culture (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014; Kete, 2014).

Detroit and the surrounding region of Southeast Michigan are currently engaged in a large-scale effort to remake the local character in order to rekindle entrepreneurship and business development. The New Economy Initiative (NEI) is fueled by the collaborative leadership of a dozen local, regional, and national foundations (including the Ford, Kellogg, Skillman, Surdna, Mott, Kresge, and Knight foundations and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan).⁷ NEI uses grantmaking, training, network development, and strategic communications to foster an environment that breeds innovation and economic growth. While the foundations are not explicitly calling for a shift in culture, the overarching intent of NEI clearly involves remaking the region’s image – both the self-image that local residents hold and the image that is projected to the larger world.

⁷ See <http://neweconomyinitiative.org>

A Special Opportunity for Community Foundations?

Because of their visibility, credibility, neutrality and focus on the common good, community foundations are particularly well positioned to lead efforts to change the local culture. This change-making approach to philanthropy falls outside the role that community foundations have historically played, but it fits squarely within the “community leadership” paradigm that has emerged over the past 15 years (Bernholz, Fulton, & Kasper, 2005; Ballard, 2007; Mazany & Perry, 2013).

According to the Community Foundation Leadership Team (2008) at the Council on Foundations, a community foundation becomes a “community leader” when it acts as “a catalyzing force that creates a better future for all by addressing the community’s most critical or persistent challenges, inclusively uniting people, institutions and resources, and producing significant, widely shared, and lasting results” (p. 2). In their seminal 2005 report, *On the Brink of New Promise*, Lucy Bernholz, Katherine Fulton, and Gabriel Kasper make the case that community foundations should seek out “strategic positions on challenging issues, cross-sector solutions, and a relentless commitment to the betterment of communities” (p. 5). A more recent report by the Democracy Collaborative provides more specific guidance on how community foundations can bring innovative, inclusive leadership to improving their local economies (Kelly & Duncan, 2014).

Ralph Hamilton, Julia Parzen, and Prudence Brown observed that this shift in role was beginning to occur when they conducted their 2004 review of the field:

[Community foundations] are taking on more complex and demanding roles to convene, connect, inform, influence, and lead solutions to pressing problems. They are helping their communities take broader, bolder, and more comprehensive steps to build better futures. And they are connecting their donors to these efforts, expanding the influence, resources, and knowledge that are brought to bear. In short, they are becoming “community change makers” (p. 2).

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A Legitimate Strategy for Foundations?

While changing the local culture might allow a foundation to achieve powerful impacts, the approach might also be viewed as audacious. Despite benevolent intentions, foundations have sometimes caused harm with their community change strategies (Brown & Fiester, 2007; Kubisch et al., 2010; FSG, 2011). Because of their resources, privilege and power, it is possible for foundations to influence the way in which people and organizations operate. The idea of changing a community’s culture brings intentionality to this dynamic. Is this sort of social engineering ethical?

Ethical Considerations

A culture-change strategy by definition seeks to change the environment within which residents live their lives. When a powerful institution pursues this strategy, there is inherently a threat to the autonomy of local residents. And the consequences may not necessarily be positive. Changing the local culture might destabilize the norms and structures that allow the community to function as a community. It might also fundamentally change the composition of the community. For example, a foundation working in a low-income neighborhood might introduce new cultural norms that appeal to entrepreneurs, which would raise the possibility that the neighborhood would begin to attract a new and distinct cohort of residents who would displace the existing residents.

Place-based funders often espouse the principle of community-driven solutions, but they but they have their own goals, outcomes and theories of change.

Despite these very real and serious concerns, one can also envision situations where the residents of a community recognize the downsides of their existing culture and would welcome support from a foundation in shifting that culture. This might be particularly likely to occur if the community is facing an existential threat to its economic, physical, social, or emotional well-being. But even in the case of a crisis, there is an ethical argument for eliciting informed consent from those who will be affected.

This last point suggests that locally based foundations, especially community foundations, have more legitimacy than do state or national foundations when it comes to determining whether or not the community's culture needs to shift. If a community foundation decides to take the lead in this line of work, then the staff and board are effectively consenting to the personal consequences of having a new culture (assuming that they actually live in the community where the strategy is directed).

A community foundation's legitimacy in this line of work depends to some degree on how fully the board represents the larger community. A foundation with an "elite" board comprised solely of established civic and business leaders will have limited legitimacy with regard to deciding how the community as a whole should change. Legitimacy is enhanced as more segments of the community are represented on the board, especially if there are explicit mechanisms for ensuring that all perspectives are incorporated into decision-making and policy. Even with a diverse and active board, however, community

foundations should be cautious about deciding for the larger community if and how the local culture should change.

Engaging the Larger Community in Decisions About Culture

Based on the principle of autonomy, one can make the case that any effort at culture change should be driven by the affected community rather than by a funder – especially an outside funder. According to the Movement Strategy Center (2013), a foundation should never make a unilateral decision, based on its own analysis, to change a community's culture, but instead should engage members of the community in that determination. The Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group and CFLeads published a guidebook in 2014 that provides extensive guidance on this task, focusing specifically on how community foundations can engage a broad cross-section of residents in developing community solutions and in crafting their own strategy.

Place-based funders often espouse the principle of community-driven solutions, but they also have their own goals, outcomes, and theories of change (Aspen Institute & Neighborhood Funders Group, 2015). As pointed out in the examples above, some place-based funders have distinct ideas about what type of culture will promote improvements in a community's well-being. Sometimes there is actually a body of evidence that a particular culture has a positive effect.

Different foundations have found different answers to the question of who decides if and how a community's culture should change. The Speak Your Peace example provides a more nuanced answer to this question. In that instance the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation convened a group of next-generation leaders, the Millennium Group, to develop strategies for improving social and economic conditions in the Duluth-Superior region. This group arrived at the idea of improving local policymaking and decision-making by establishing pro-civility norms of behavior. The foundation then became a leader of the culture-change work. It brought its resources, visibility, and

reputation to bear to create and implement a communications campaign that would promote new norms of behavior, especially in political discourse (Easterling, Sampson, & Probst, 2010).

From an ethical perspective, decisions about how a community's culture should change should directly engage the people who will be affected. Of course, even if we accept that deliberations should be open and participatory, there is still the question of whom to involve and how to reach decisions. If everyone from the community has a voice in the deliberations, it will likely be difficult to arrive at an agreeable vision of how the community should change. Alternatively, one might make the case that elected officials, as representatives of the local population, are ultimately the appropriate decision-makers on the matter of culture change. But sometimes the established leadership structure is overly entrenched in (and served by) the traditional culture. Leaving the question of culture change to those in power might not serve the community's broader and longer-term interests. This consideration suggests that foundations can potentially play a legitimate role as a disruptive facilitator of community change.

Shifting the Culture

If we acknowledge that there are situations in which foundations, especially community foundations, have the ethical standing to lead culture change, we next come to the daunting challenge of how to actually change community culture.

There is a significant literature on the topic of changing the culture of organizations (e.g., Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Schein, 1990; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007). When it comes to shifting a community's culture, however, most of the literature focuses more narrowly on changing specific behavioral norms, such as tobacco use (Hovell & Hughes, 2009), alcohol use (Wechsler et al., 2003), civic engagement (Rheingold, 2008), and social action (Harter, Hamel-Lambert, & Millesen, 2011). Much less has been written about how to change the larger, more fundamental values, beliefs, and

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expectations that influence how residents live their lives, interact with one another, and view the world.

There is reason to believe that changing a community's culture is more challenging than changing an organization's culture. Unlike communities, organizations generally have structures and hierarchies, and more specifically leaders who are responsible for creating and sustaining the conditions that promote positive outcomes. These leaders determine whether and how the organization's culture should change. For example, leaders in corporations take explicit steps to create a "customer service culture" (Brady & Cronin, 2001), an "adaptive culture" (Kotter, 2008), a "resilient culture" (Sheffi, 2005), and so on.

While communities aren't corporations and foundations aren't corporate CEOs, some of the basic principles that have been found to be effective for organizational change can be translated to the community theater. Drawing on the literature in organizational change, community development, and foundation strategy, we have defined four "big tasks" that a foundation must navigate to promote a change in community culture:

Leading a culture-change process means moving quickly from criticizing the status quo to presenting a positive alternative, or facilitating a process whereby the group constructs the positive alternative. For culture change to occur, the new culture has to have appeal and obvious benefit to those who will be affected. In the context of Virginia Satir's theory of systems change, the new culture is a "transforming idea" that leads to a new way of looking at the world, and ultimately a new status quo (Satir & Banmen, 1991).

1. Create readiness for culture change. Demonstrate what is lacking in the current culture, and why it doesn't serve the community or won't serve it in the future.
2. Determine what type of culture actually does serve the interests of residents. Ideally this task is participatory, with the foundation facilitating an analysis among local residents that leads to a shared vision of what the new culture should be.
3. Encourage new thinking and new behavior in line with the new culture – with grants, thought leadership, and convening around new opportunities.

4. Build the capacity of people, organizations, and institutions to do what the new culture requires.

Nearly all theories on changing organizational culture recognize that there will be resistance among members who have benefited from the old culture or who are comfortable with stability and predictability (e.g., Dawson, 2003; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007). Thus a crucial first step in any culture-change initiative is to challenge the status quo, and to do so in a manner that speaks directly to the interests of those who live within the current culture.

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These first two steps suggest that culture change involves letting go of structures and beliefs that no longer work and bringing in an alternative culture that advances the group's larger and longer-term interests. Within the culture-change framework that Kurt Lewin developed more than 60 years ago (Burnes, 2004), these first two steps amount to **unfreezing** and **moving**. Lewin's third step is to **refreeze** the new culture. This is where people abide by the new norms and eventually come to accept them as the way that things are done within the community.

A new culture, by definition, calls for thinking and behavior that is different from what was expected under the old culture. Foundations can play a crucial role here by helping residents adapt to the new expectations, especially with regard to encouraging experimentation and building the skills that the new behaviors require. These are the third and fourth big tasks identified in our model.

FIGURE 1 Map of the towns in South Wood County, Wisconsin: (Source: Incourage Community Foundation)



The following case study provides a concrete illustration of how a foundation can lead a culture-change process by addressing the four big tasks. Faced with a devastated local economy, the Incourage Community Foundation partnered with the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance (HoW) in the early 2000s to create a more adaptive culture in a rural region of central Wisconsin. We describe why the leaders of these two organizations believed that the culture needed to change, as well as the specific steps they took to introduce the idea of an adaptive culture and to bring residents to accept the new norms. Based on a series of interviews conducted over a five-year period, we present evidence of culture change and lessons for foundations inclined to engage in this bold line of work.

South Wood County Case Study

This case study explores the shift in culture that occurred in the early 2000s within the southern portion of Wood County, Wis., a largely rural region of approximately 40,000 residents.⁸ The

⁸ South Wood County excludes Wood County's largest town, Marshfield, located in the northeastern portion of the county. Whereas the southern portion of the county has an economic base in papermaking and cranberry production, Marshfield is home to a major health care system that serves much of central Wisconsin.

dominant feature of the landscape is the wide Wisconsin River, along which are the towns of Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards, Biron, Nekoosa, and Grand Rapids. (See Figure 1.)

For virtually all of the 20th century, South Wood County enjoyed a stable, prosperous economy based primarily on papermaking and secondarily on cranberry farming and production. Pulp and paper mills were first built along the Wisconsin River in the 1890s. Under the leadership of industrialists such as George Mead and Lewis Alexander, the region became home to major papermaking firms such as Consolidated Papers and Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. Three generations of the Mead family led Consolidated Papers from 1901 to 1999, during which the firm became the industry leader for producing the high-quality calendared paper that is used in magazines, annual reports, and the like. With a smart but conservative approach to business growth, Consolidated Papers was able to grow steadily throughout the 20th century and weathered downturns in the national economy without ever laying off employees. By the early 1990s, the firm was employing nearly half of the region's 12,000 workers.

Faced with the realization that the papermaking industry was no longer the stable economic base to which everyone had become accustomed, local leaders began searching for answers. Some embraced the conventional wisdom that it was time to launch a massive business-recruitment effort. Others recognized the difficulty (or futility) of trying to find another large, well-paying manufacturing employer to fill the void left by the downturn in papermaking. Instead, this group emphasized homegrown entrepreneurship as the key to long-term economic recovery.

The world turned upside down in the late 1990s, when the papermaking industry underwent a dramatic restructuring. Modern facilities were built overseas in countries with low wages. Demand for paper dropped precipitously as a result of the recession of the early 1990s and a longer-term trend toward electronic documents. In 1999 Consolidated Papers announced that 700 jobs would be eliminated. A year later the company was sold to a large multinational firm, Stora Enso, based in Helsinki, Finland. Additional cost-cutting measures led to the loss of another 1,300 jobs over the next three years.

About the same time that local paper mills scaled back their operations, the region's second largest industry, cranberry growing, fell prey to oversupply. A glut in production drove the price per barrel from more than \$60 to less than \$10. This pushed revenues below the cost of production, so thousands of barrels of cranberries ended up in landfills. Many cranberry farmers were driven out of business.

The economic impacts of these twin disruptions rippled through every community in the region. Because the paper mill jobs paid high wages and the cost of living was relatively low, workers had lots of discretionary income to spend on cars, trucks, boats, snowmobiles, and the like. The local businesses that sold those goods suffered considerably in the wake of the layoffs. Many residents left town, especially those who had moved from somewhere else to take a professional position with Consolidated Papers. Houses went vacant and prices plummeted.

Responding With Community Economic Development

Faced with the realization that the papermaking industry was no longer the stable economic base to which everyone had become accustomed, local leaders began searching for answers. Some embraced the conventional wisdom that it was time to launch a massive business-recruitment effort. Others recognized the difficulty (or futility) of trying to find another large, well-paying manufacturing employer to fill the void left by the downturn in papermaking.⁹ Instead, this group emphasized homegrown entrepreneurship as the key to long-term economic recovery.

There were two leading voices for this alternative vision of rebuilding the economy from within. One was Connie Loden, executive director of

⁹ The challenge of recruiting another industry to the region was compounded by the low level of postsecondary education among the local population. Only 15 percent of adults in Wisconsin Rapids had a college degree in 2000, compared to 22 percent for the state and 24 percent for the country. Many in the community pointed to the high wages paid by the paper firms as the culprit. As one resident asked, "Why would someone send their child away to college to make \$35,000 as a teacher, when at 18 years of age he could walk into the mill and make \$45,000 or \$50,000 in year one?"

the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance (HoW). The other was Kelly Ryan, president of the Encourage Community Foundation.¹⁰

Loden was hired as HoW's first executive director in 2001 based on her expertise in community economic development (CED). Whereas traditional economic development focuses on the straightforward goal of increasing the number of new jobs, CED pays attention to the types of jobs created and the process through which the broader community is engaged in economic development. The fundamental idea is that if more people participate, the community will create or bring in the "right" jobs – jobs that are in keeping with the needs and values of residents and likely to be sustained. CED employs a range of strategies to expand existing businesses and to create new businesses, including finding new sources of venture capital, setting up training programs to incubate ideas and develop business plans, and organizing "clusters" of businesses that can drive economic growth. Beyond these concrete economic development strategies, CED also emphasizes planning, relationship building, and leadership development.

Ryan shared Loden's vision of a community-driven recovery process. Whereas Loden was focused on entrepreneurship, Ryan was concerned about the lack of civic leadership. This problem was becoming particularly acute as more managers were laid off at Consolidated Papers and left town. But Ryan was more broadly concerned about the region's historical reliance on a small group of businessmen to serve as community leaders. At the time that Consolidated Papers was sold to Stora Enso, Ryan was in the process of convincing her board that the foundation should play an active role in developing grassroots leaders and expanding the local leadership base. In line with the approach of the Kansas Leadership Center described above, Ryan was author vision for the region included a broad cross-section of

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residents working cooperatively to support the common good. She was particularly interested in promoting the sort of adaptive leadership that could deal effectively with the large, complex challenges that defy straightforward, technical solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

As Loden and Ryan met to discuss their visions for reinvigorating the region, they saw many commonalities. Loden's vision was defined in terms of economic development; Ryan's was grounded in community development. But they were both pushing for the same sorts of changes in attitude, behavior, and culture. Perhaps more importantly, they recognized that there were tremendous synergies in combining the frameworks of economic development and community development. Their partnership replicated the approach to community economic development that Vaughn Grisham and Rob

¹⁰ During the period when Loden and Ryan were leading this work, the community foundation was named the Community Foundation of South Wood County and, later, the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County.

FIGURE 2 Economic Development and Community Development: An Interdependence



Gurwitt describe in their 1999 book, *Hand in Hand*, which focuses on the multigenerational success of Tupelo and Lee County, Miss.

The interdependence of economic development and community development can be expressed using a gear analogy. (See Figure 2.) When the economic development gear moves forward, there are more resources in the community, which in turn increases the opportunity for residents to contribute to the larger community. Likewise, when the community development gear moves forward, the community is better able to work together, take initiative, and solve problems, all of which enhance the prospects for creating businesses and attracting interest from outside firms.

Creating an Initiative

In 2003, Loden and Ryan translated their community economic development philosophy into an ambitious, multipronged initiative to move the region forward.¹¹ The Community Progress Initiative (CPI), formally launched in 2004, was designed to “create an innovative, self-reliant and business-friendly culture in a vibrant community with a prosperous local economy.”¹²

¹¹ Loden’s colleague David Beurle contributed a number of ideas to the business development arm of the CPI.

¹² Brochures distributed at community meetings.

A total of 20 programs were launched to advance entrepreneurship, business expansion, industry clusters, networking, leadership development, civic engagement, creative thinking, and other factors recognized within the community economic development framework. These programs and activities fell into two major categories corresponding to the two major aims of CPI: to create a business-friendly environment and to build a strong and positive community. (See Table 1.)

CPI operated as a formal initiative from 2003 to 2007. More than \$4 million was raised to support the various programs, including more than \$3 million from the community foundation’s Barker Mead Fund (endowed by two prominent families) and \$750,000 from the Ford Foundation. Many of the CPI programs were designed to generate specific results at particular times (e.g., launch of the CPI, visioning session, study tours, Community Progress Teams, the speaker series, studies). Other programs operated throughout the initiative and a few have continued post-CPI in one form or another (e.g., Progress Funds, Advanced Leadership Institute, Teen Leadership, HoW Community Leadership, technical support for business development). CPI has also spawned additional programming, such as Workforce Central, a comprehensive training program for workers either entering or re-entering the job market (described below). And more generally, both the community foundation and HoW transformed their organizations to align with the principles and strategies that were developed under CPI.

Changing the Local Culture

Undergirding the twin aims of economic development and community development, CPI also sought to shift the culture of the region. One of the most common descriptions of life in the region before the layoffs was that people felt “taken care of” and “protected.” Along with the high wages, the mills promised job security. Until the late 1990s, millworkers were essentially guaranteed a job for life. In return, they were tremendously loyal, often spending their entire career with the mill that hired them

TABLE 1 Key Programs of the Community Progress Initiative (CPI)

Purpose	Program or Activity
Create a Business-Friendly Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurial Boot Camp • Technical support for business development • Mentoring for business development • Business innovation seminars • Networks focused on developing “industry clusters” appropriate to the region • Study tours • Entrepreneur venture capital • Business Angel network • Incubator website to link investors with entrepreneurs
Build a Strong and Positive Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-profile launch of CPI • Visioning sessions • Community Progress Teams formed in each town • Endow Your Community funds (later called Progress Funds) • Advanced Leadership Institute • Teen Leadership program • HoW Community Leadership program • Discover the Leader in You program • New Ideas! speaker series • Transfer of Wealth study • Annual conference to review progress and trigger new work

out of high school. But this loyalty bred a sense of entitlement. Workers came to believe that the mills actually owed them a job.

This sense of “being taken care of” extended beyond the paper mills. Everyone in the region benefited from the benevolence of the mill owners. Early in the 20th century, George Mead I, Lewis Alexander, and their colleagues established a strong ethic around philanthropy and civic duty. Their descendants continued this legacy, establishing a number of family foundations that continue to support social, educational, economic, recreational, and civic causes. Schools, hotels, parks, and community centers throughout the region are named for members of the Mead and Alexander families.

George Mead I was also a dominant force in local politics, serving as the mayor of Wisconsin Rapids for three terms, from 1926-1932. Under his leadership, the town built new schools, developed an impressive park system, and improved its physical infrastructure in a number of important

ways. Mead’s brand of benevolent paternalism became the prevailing model of community decision-making throughout most of the rest of the century. According to one long-time resident,

If you needed something, or needed someone to sponsor this or do that, the paper company stepped forward. Their executives were in all the leadership positions. If something needed to be torn down or built up, they were the ones to make the decisions.

After multiple generations of powerful businessmen taking care of their employees and almost everyone else in the region, the local culture had become protective and paternalistic. Residents were able to meet their needs and buy much of what they wanted, but this prosperity came at a cost. It also created a pervasive sense of dependency. According to one resident, “We weren’t a community that was prepared to make our own decisions.”

As they designed CPI, Ryan and Loden decided to address head-on the region’s culture of

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dependency. It was clear to them that neither economic development nor community development would flourish under the prevailing culture. Referring back to the gear analogy, we can think of the local culture as the oil in the blue oval crankcase. (See Figure 1.) For the gears to run smoothly, the oil needs to be clean and fresh, but in South Wood County it was old and sludgy.

The new culture championed by Ryan and Loden was defined by the following attributes:

- initiative-taking;
- a positive, can-do attitude;
- new leaders from all walks of life;
- inclusive decision-making;
- a business-friendly environment;
- creativity and new ideas;
- self-reliance; and
- cooperation, especially across towns and social classes.

Long before the launch of the CPI, Ryan and Loden were presenting their ideas in public forums. One of the most important of these was the community foundation's annual meeting in 2000, which coincided with the final board meeting of Consolidated Papers prior to closing

the sale to Stora Enso. In a somewhat ironic but elegant twist of fate, two members of the Mead family, Gilbert Mead and Ruth Barker, attended the foundation's annual meeting and were inspired by its vision. Although the two families had moved to Maryland and Arizona, they retained personal and emotional ties to the area. Over the next few years, the families publicly committed to the community-change efforts that were being led by the foundation and HoW. Gilbert Mead joined the foundation's board and, despite failing health, played a critical leadership role in developing CPI and in challenging local residents to support the new culture. To finance the work of CPI, Gilbert Mead, his sister Ruther Barker and their spouses established the Barker Mead Fund with a \$3.1 million endowment.¹³

Leading the Shift in Culture

To bring about this more adaptive community culture, the foundation and HoW partnered with each other to carry out each of the four big tasks outlined earlier.¹⁴

The first task, which is essentially unfreezing the prevailing culture, involved going public with the analysis Ryan and Loden had developed regarding the region's underlying vulnerability. The two leaders shared their views about paternalism with the staff and board of their respective organizations, as well as with others in the region who showed an interest in a new blueprint for the local economy and for civic leadership. They found a receptive audience in a variety of quarters, including the editor of the local newspaper, a few elected officials, and even some corporate leaders. With a growing cadre of allies, the notion that the old culture was dysfunctional gradually began to spread through various channels, including articles and editorials in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune.

At the same time that Ryan and Loden were raising the public's consciousness about the

¹³ More details on the contributions of the Barkers and Meads are presented in Ryan & Millesen (2013).

¹⁴ It is important to point out that these tasks were identified during our analysis of the case (beginning in 2009) and did not explicitly guide CPI or the change strategy that the community foundation and HoW carried out.

limitations of the prevailing culture, they were also introducing and testing an alternative culture. In conversations with colleagues, board members, and others in the community who shared their concern, Ryan and Loden offered up the idea of an inclusive, participatory culture where residents would take more initiative and personal responsibility. Their ideas evolved over a period of months based on these conversations.

And as Loden and Ryan were refining their vision of what the culture should be, they were also designing the Community Progress Initiative. When CPI was launched in the spring of 2004, the two leaders talked explicitly about the sort of culture the region needed in order to thrive. More than 300 people attended the official launch of the CPI, in Wisconsin Rapids in April. In the following weeks, more than 500 people attended follow-up meetings in Nekoosa, Port Edwards, Vesper, Rudolph, Pittsville, and Rome. The vision of an inclusive, proactive culture was reinforced at numerous Progress Rallies held throughout the region, as well as at annual meetings where the foundation and HoW recounted the progress that had occurred over the prior year.

In retrospect, there was tremendous value in how Ryan and Loden coupled the first task of critiquing the old culture with the second task of articulating a more productive one. For many years, people in the region had complained about paternalism, insularity, and inner-circle decision-making, but this had occurred mostly in private conversations and not in ways that set the stage for community change. When Ryan and Loden brought the issue into the public spotlight, they also pointed to a path forward, one they hoped would include a place for everyone to contribute.

Many residents welcomed the idea of a more inclusive, entrepreneurial community, but others did not. When CPI was launched in 2004, some in the region criticized the approach as feel-good cheerleading without substance. They remained convinced that the path forward involved recruiting new businesses to replace the mills.

The third big task in promoting culture change is to encourage residents to think and act according

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to the new norms. Beyond its many awareness-raising events and communications strategies, CPI included a number of programs and activities aimed at bringing residents into an adaptive, proactive, inclusive way of doing things.

- *The New Ideas!* speaker series brought creative thinkers to the region who discussed such topics as sustainable agriculture, adaptive leadership, social change, and differences between generations. Nine presentations were held, attracting a total of 1,096 participants.
- To stimulate new thinking for economic development, HoW and the foundation organized seven study tours between 2004 and 2007. Bus tours were taken to three Wisconsin communities – Fox Valley, Rhinelander, and Beloit – as well as Red Wing, Minn., and western North Carolina. International trips were taken to Australia and Ireland. At each site, local residents had in-depth conversations with public officials and business leaders saw how rural communities and small towns promoted economic growth. Eighty-four residents interested in busi-

The third big task in promoting culture change is to encourage residents to think and act according to the new norms. ... CPI included a number of programs and activities aimed at bringing residents into an adaptive, proactive, inclusive way of doing things.

ness development participated in at least one of seven study tours.

- During 2004, the community foundation convened Make it Happen visioning sessions in each of the region's seven incorporated towns and villages. These sessions provided local residents with an opportunity to "create the kind of communities they want to live in."
- Following up on these visioning sessions, the foundation established Community Progress Teams in each town or village. Local residents were encouraged to come together and identify creative ways to improve their community. On average, each team attracted 14 participants and met 12 times over three years. Some teams organized festivals that draw visitors to the region; others built playgrounds, community centers, and murals.
- The foundation established a Community Progress Fund in each community to attract and allocate dollars in support of the projects. Each community's fund was seeded with a \$20,000 grant from the Barker Mead Fund, contingent on an equal amount being raised from the local community.¹⁵

¹⁵ Although the progress teams were disbanded in 2008, each of the towns in the region continues to operate a progress fund that is overseen by a local committee. Two of the com-

- HoW organized seven networks around the concept of industry clusters, logically coherent groupings of business activity that build on a region's historical assets and provide a basis for sustainable economic growth. The clusters HoW identified for South Wood County were cranberry/agriculture, downtown revitalization, new e-economies, paper and forestry products, small-business development, tourism, and workforce training and education. An eighth cluster, arts and heritage, was added later. Each networking group identified new business opportunities associated with that particular cluster and provided technical support for emerging entrepreneurs.

The final "big task" facing the community foundation and HoW involved building the capacity of local residents to succeed under the new norms and expectations that come with an adaptive, inclusive culture. CPI included training programs to build a range of relevant skills within targeted segments of the population, including millworkers, budding entrepreneurs, civically minded residents, emerging and established leaders, and teens.

- Entrepreneurial Boot Camp was designed for people interested in starting their own business or expanding a business. The camp provided the information participants needed to take ideas and develop them into workable business plans, understand the basics of cash flow, and learn how to operate a small business. Participants presented their business proposals to a panel of experts, who provided constructive criticism and encouragement. Community volunteers with expertise in business law, marketing, financial planning, market segmentation, finance, etc., provided practical advice and tools to help people create successful businesses. The program attracted 148 participants, who used what they learned to create 42 successful business plans, 24 small businesses, and 11 business expansions.

munities continue active fundraising campaigns. Rudolph, Wis., sells Christmas ornaments modeled on the namesake reindeer; Rome, Wis., sells specialty bricks.

- Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) focused on building adaptive leadership skills, trust, confidence, and networks among civic leaders. Between 2006 and 2010 the program attracted 100 emerging or established leaders from throughout the region. Each of three cohorts engaged in six two-day trainings over eight months. ALI trainings were designed and facilitated by two nationally known experts in leadership development, Katherine Tyler Scott and Irma Tyler-Wood. Our evaluation of the ALI found that the vast majority of participants developed valuable leadership skills, including facilitating a group process, gaining support for an idea, diagnosing situations, and managing conflict (Easterling & Millesen, 2012). ALI participants also described how the program had allowed them to build important new relationships, gain self-confidence, and become more aware of their own strengths, limitations, and aspirations. These personal changes paid off at work, at home, and especially in settings involving communitywide conflict.
- CPI also established a leadership development program for teens. Teen Leadership was modeled after a program in Portage County, also in central Wisconsin, and followed the guiding principles outlined in Sean Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Classes begin each fall at the start of the new school year and meet monthly for nine sessions. Topics include visioning the community's future and lending a hand. Participants visit various people, places, and organizations throughout the region, including a cranberry marsh, a paper mill, and the county courthouse, where they have lunch with judges and tour the jail. The program culminates with a community project designed by the participants.

These programs and activities constitute a comprehensive campaign to change the culture of South Wood County. The community foundation and HoW directly addressed the four big tasks that we contend are key to culture change. We have highlighted the programs included in the Community Progress Initiative, which ran from 2003 through 2007. Additional work has

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been launched subsequent to CPI, including the replication of the Speak Your Peace program, which took root in South Wood County after participants in the ALI program took a study tour to Duluth, Minn. More recent efforts have included the foundation's purchase of the historic Tribune building and involving the public in a process to transform the building into a community center to serve all residents.

Shift in Culture

As part of our evaluation of the Advanced Leadership Institute, in 2010 we conducted structured interviews with 20 key informants who had either participated in or were knowledgeable about the program (Easterling & Millesen, 2012). These interviews included questions about the traditional culture in South Wood County and whether there had been any shifts in recent years. In addition, one of the authors conducted more than 50 structured and unstructured interviews with local informants between 2006 and 2010 to inform the evaluation and organizational-learning efforts of the foundation and HoW.

According to our observations and interviews, the culture in South Wood County has begun to shift in discernible and meaningful ways. Residents

Over the past decade, the passivity and paralysis has lifted. As one local business leader observed, “Before, many people would say, ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do next.’ Now they do. People are going back to school. They know they can’t just sit around. They’ve gotten past the fear of trying something new.”

are taking more initiative in creating economic opportunities and taking more responsibility for the well-being and vitality of their communities. New ways of making decisions and solving problems – more inclusive, cooperative, and creative – are taking root. A broader cross-section of residents are acting as civic leaders.

Residents are taking more initiative to improve their fortunes – by going back to school, starting new enterprises, and seizing on opportunities for business expansion. Innovation and entrepreneurship is emerging even outside the economic realm, with a range of projects that bring residents together to fix a community problem or build something of value.

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A surge in initiative and innovation is occurring not only with regard to economic activity, but also civic engagement and community-building. One

resident who was involved in CPI described this growth in civic participation:

I know that attendance at village board meetings has increased. When I first started going, there might be just the board and a few people, and if you didn’t have something that you wanted addressed or wasn’t concerning you, people didn’t attend. There certainly has been more involvement. ... I think people have found out that they not only have the opportunity, but kind of the responsibility to attend and be informed.

We also heard that community leaders and residents are focusing more on common interests, recognizing that everyone’s fate is interconnected. One person told us “new leaders are coming to the process with a different perspective. They are moving beyond their own personal stake and adopting a larger community focus.” Likewise, we heard that

There is more of a willingness to look at the community and the people [who] live here as a whole, in a broader picture, ... rather than just an individual “it’s all about me.” So as a result, people have been inclined to come together to try to problem solve or to identify solutions that may be meaningful for the community.

There was also a strong sense that the local leadership structure had expanded. According to one interviewee, “This is definitely a different place. There has been a shift in who are leaders – from those who had economic power to those who did not.” Others agreed that the old power brokers no longer hold any sort of monopoly: “Most people feel they can be involved if they want to be.”

Illustrations of the New Culture

One of the most consistent trends we observed was the increased willingness of people throughout the region to take action for the sake of the larger social good. This shift can be illustrated by contrasting the region’s response to the economic crisis of 1999-2001 against the response to a new crisis in 2007.

When Consolidated Papers and Stora Enso announced successive rounds of layoffs in 1999-2001, the reaction was a combination of disbelief, fear, and resentment, all of which translated into passivity rather than constructive coping and adaptation. In 2007, Domtar announced it was closing the large paper mill that for years had been the lifeblood of the village of Port Edwards; 500 jobs were lost. Upon hearing the news, Joe Terry, the village administrator, organized a rally to provide support and encouragement to those affected by the closure. Terry previously had not been a high-profile leader in the region, but his involvement in ALI emboldened him to act decisively in the face of a new crisis. Many others joined with Terry to plan the rally and recruit speakers. Six days after Domtar's announcement, more than 400 people filled the high school gymnasium, some to give support, others to receive support, and many to do both. Speakers included Roberta Gassman, the secretary of Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development, and officials from Mid-State Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, who offered the laid-off workers guidance on opportunities for education and technical training. But the primary message that night was that people throughout the region cared about the well-being of those who were suffering.

This collaborative initiative-taking demonstrated itself again in Workforce Central, which brought together employers, the local technical college, the regional workforce development board, and multiple funders to develop a strategy to train workers in skills necessary in a changing economy. For generations, employees at the paper mills did the same basic work and had little need to develop new skills. As a result, many older workers had little experience with computers. Workforce Central provides job training and career support for job seekers and workers in four industries that have been identified as the pillars of the region's economic future: advanced manufacturing, information technology, health care, and renewable energy. The new workforce development programs at MidState Technical College are providing former millworkers with

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the opportunity to modernize their skills. Another example of the shift toward a more activist and collaborative culture demonstrates the important role of young people. In early 2006 officials from Wisconsin Rapids announced that to save money, the town would no longer provide financial support for the region's Fourth of July fireworks display. Students involved in Teen Leadership took the lead in raising the necessary \$20,000 from area municipalities, service groups, and the local community. They sought support beyond Wisconsin Rapids, making presentations at the meetings of 11 area municipal boards. Nine of those agreed to contribute, which brought in a third of the cost. The teens continued to solicit funds from area businesses, service groups, and residents, and reached the goal a month before the celebration.

This initiative-taking and dogged commitment to making good things happen is increasingly becoming a feature of the culture of South Wood County. The prospects for sustaining this shift are strengthened by the buy-in of many young people. One prominent example is Zach Vruwink, who was elected mayor of Wisconsin Rapids in 2013 at age 24. Vruwink is a natural champion of the adaptive culture that the foundation

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and HoW worked to instill. While still in high school he created a number of small businesses, including Zach's Computer Services, while also participating in many of CPI's community-building and leadership programs. After returning from college, he embraced the opportunity to run for mayor, running a campaign that asked residents for a pledge to "Renew Rapids." As mayor, he created Mayor's Councils, which bring residents together around common interests and are helping to propel a variety of development and redevelopment projects, including an entertainment district along Wisconsin Rapids' riverfront.

Economic Payoff

The election of Zach Vruwink is one of many signs that the leadership structure and mode of decision-making have changed considerably in South Wood County over the past decade. This change toward a more inclusive, participatory culture has its own intrinsic benefits, but it also is beginning to show payoffs for the local economy. The example of the Ocean Spray Craisins plant illustrates how a shift in culture can open up opportunities for business development and new jobs.

This story begins in 2004, with the sale by Northland Cranberries Inc. of a large cranberry production facility to Ocean Spray. Northland

was formed in 1987 by a few of the region's established cranberry growers and quickly became one of the largest growers in the world, with marshes in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Canada. Northland fell on hard times when the price of cranberries plummeted in 1999, leading it to sell off nearly all its assets, including the processing plant in Wisconsin Rapids.

Over the next three years, Ocean Spray invested more than \$75 million in an expansion of the facility to meet demand for sweetened dried cranberries, which the company markets as Craisins. The expansion added 100,000 square feet of production and transformed the plant into a state-of-the-art, fully computerized production facility. One hundred new jobs were created, all of which required technical training in advanced manufacturing processes.

Why did Ocean Spray, headquartered in Massachusetts, make its single largest capital investment in a central Wisconsin community that appeared only a couple years earlier to be on the verge of demise? The key factor was the faith and conviction of Ocean Spray's board chairman, Fran Podvin, who had become a strong advocate of the adaptive culture emerging in the region. Podvin is an attorney in Wisconsin Rapids who specializes in the land-use issues affecting cranberry growers, and also a partner in a large cranberry-growing operation. Based on his observations of what was happening under CPI and related projects, he was confident the region was undergoing a renaissance. Podvin was able to convince his colleagues at Ocean Spray that Wisconsin Rapids had a culture of innovation and collaborative problem-solving that warranted the building of an advanced manufacturing facility.

Discussion

The developments in South Wood County strongly suggest that it is possible for communities to shift their prevailing culture in ways that enable social, economic, and emotional well-being. Although we began with a focus on the leadership role that a foundation can play in this change process, the case study makes clear that creating a healthier community culture is

a broad-scale, collective effort on the part of many local actors, especially young people. The foundation's leadership is particularly crucial at the beginning stages of the change process, when residents are locked into old norms and patterns. This is when someone needs to step forward and challenge the aspects of the culture that no longer serve the community (and might never have served some segments of the community), and at the same time present an alternative vision of how people might go about their lives and improve conditions.

Earlier in the article we suggested that foundations leading culture change should facilitate an open process wherein local residents come together to determine a new culture. But that was not exactly the path that Ryan and Loden took. Instead, they struck out on an urgent search for a tangible remedy to an economic crisis. They knew that residents were hungry for answers and were open to changing how things had traditionally been done. Focusing on a culture of dependency and an attitude of entitlement were their own ideas, but ones they believed would resonate with many throughout the region. Based on conversations with their allies, Ryan and Loden arrived at the notion of creating a self-reliant culture that would fuel a prosperous and diverse economy and broad community leadership. A comprehensive and locally attuned communications strategy was used to sell this new culture to residents throughout the region. The approach succeeded because of Ryan and Loden's strong leadership skills; their passionate commitment to the region, which defused critics; and the widespread receptivity of local residents to this new way of thinking.

As a visible, out-in-front champion of culture change, Encourage Community Foundation – and Ryan in particular – epitomize the “bold leadership” model that Ron Heifetz, John Kania, and Mark Kramer (2004) promote for foundations. Alternatively, a foundation might display leadership by facilitating a co-creative process of culture change. The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation provides a clear example of this facilitative style with its strategy of

The foundation's leadership is particularly crucial at the beginning stages of the change process, when residents are locked into old norms and patterns. This is when someone needs to step forward and challenge the aspects of the culture that no longer serve the community (and might never have served some segments of the community), and at the same time present an alternative vision of how people might go about their lives and improve conditions.

convening a broad cross-section of young leaders and taking them through a process of community diagnosis and planning. This foundation was largely neutral while the group was deliberating on what needed to change, then stepped forward to play a visible and instrumental leadership role once the group focused on creating a more civil culture.

Tim Brown (2008) provides guidance on how to carry out this sort of facilitative leadership during a change effort. His model, which builds on Lewin's three stages of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing, identifies three “spaces” that a group goes through on the way to adopting an innovation (which is one way to think about culture change). The first space, inspiration, is where the unfreezing happens and where the search for new solutions begins. The leader becomes immersed in the community

Incourage's bold leadership approach and Duluth-Superior Foundation's more facilitative approach each have their advantages and disadvantages. The former prioritizes immediate action. The latter strives first and foremost for broad community buy-in to whatever solution is adopted, but it doesn't always lead to powerful solutions – or even any solution, if the group has strongly divided opinions.

and engages with a variety of residents to bring needs and opportunities to the surface. The second space, ideation, is where things move, by a process involving sense-making, idea generation, development, and testing or prototyping. The final phase, implementation, is where the innovation takes hold and people behave differently. As the group moves through these three spaces, the leader's role is to create an openness to change, to facilitate discovery and creativity, and to encourage the group to move forward into the new reality. Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze (2011) profile leaders from around the world who operate in this paradigm to bring about social change. The authors emphasize these leaders' ability and willingness to engage a broad range of stakeholders and to create an authentic process of shared decision-making.

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It is interesting to speculate on how the story of South Wood County would have played out if Ryan and Loden had been facilitative rather than bold leaders in 2002. If they had used an open deliberative process to explore how the culture needed to shift, would the participants in that process have been courageous enough to challenge the region's paternalism and dependency? Would residents have even believed that they had authority to enter into these conversations? In retrospect one can make the case that residents were not yet ready to decide if and how the fundamental character of the community should shift. Ryan and Loden assumed that responsibility for the larger community, but in a manner that immediately raised expectations for residents to become engaged in the work of creating a new future. Because of their need to appeal to donors across the community, most community foundations shy away from bold stands on controversial questions such as whether the community's existing culture is dysfunctional. Indeed, some of Incourage's donors stopped giving after the CPI was announced. These losses, however, were more than offset by new funding that came to the foundation from the Meads and the Barkers because of its leadership work in building an adaptive culture.

The facilitative approach to leadership allows a community foundation to lead community change without specifying exactly how the existing norms, structures, and systems should change. But the reputational risks aren't eliminated. When a community foundation convenes a community group to define what should change, the foundation will eventually find itself linked to a course that might alienate some of its donors, but that might also attract others (Easterling, 2011).

The facilitative approach to leading culture change presents a potential pathway for state and national foundations that are interested in using culture change as a strategic pathway for their place-based work. From both ethical and practical standpoints, it is highly problematic for a foundation based outside a community to tell people in that community what their culture should look like. But a state or national foundation can play a useful role in helping residents have those conversations among themselves – by raising questions, offering examples from other communities, and lifting up the perspectives of residents who are often not included in decisions shaping the future of the community.¹⁶ And if a consensus begins to emerge that the local culture should change in particular ways, an outside foundation can help local actors achieve the desired change through grants, training, and technical assistance. But it is important to recognize that this is a long-term, multigenerational change process – one that requires a sustained investment from the foundation. This sustained commitment, on the part of both the foundation and the local actors who are leading the change process, is one of the most important ingredients in effective place-based work.

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¹⁶ This is one of the core strategies within Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust's Healthy Places NC. In this initiative, program officers actively cultivate these big-picture, where-are-we-going conversations among local leaders and residents who are interested in improving health but might not have had a voice in community decision-making.

The facilitative approach to leading culture change presents a potential pathway for state and national foundations that are interested in using culture change as a strategic pathway for their place-based work.

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