

Scaling Up Civic Leadership Combining Individual-Level Change and Culture Change

BY DOUG EASTERLING

The ability to adapt to change has never been more important, not only for individuals but also communities. Rapid and fundamental shifts in the economic, technological, and demographic landscape present communities with a host of daunting challenges: plant closings, job losses, foreclosures, inadequate and/or inaccessible health care, increasing numbers of school dropouts, new and more lethal forms of drug abuse, conflict over immigration, and outmigration of young people. Prospering in these turbulent times requires strong civic leadership, defined here as “local residents stepping forward to solve community-level problems or to promote action that advances the community’s overall well-being.”

Virtually all efforts to strengthen civic leadership focus on individual leaders. The most common approach in the United States is a locally based community leadership program. The typical program is operated by the chamber of commerce and recruits participants from local businesses, government bodies, and nonprofit organizations. The intent is to engage more residents, especially residents with leadership abilities, in the civic life of the community.

Many community leadership programs are now recognizing the need to move beyond a meet-and-greet approach and to focus explicitly on developing the skills and competencies required for civic leadership. In some cases, the new curriculum is framed around a fairly traditional view of leadership, one defined by competencies such as developing and communicating a vision, planning and organizing projects, and mobilizing people and resources. A few programs are operating on an expanded view of civic leadership, one that directly embraces the principle of inclusive and diverse participation in community problem solving. Under this paradigm, a leader’s repertoire of skills needs to include facilitating multi-stakeholder processes, building relationships among people with diverse perspectives, creating and

sustaining trust, working through conflict, and fostering creative problem solving.

In the summer 2012 issue of *National Civic Review*, Judy Millesen and I described one example of an innovative community-based leadership program, Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI). ALI is an intensive eight-month training program that has so far reached one hundred established and emerging leaders in central Wisconsin. The program was developed jointly by the Community Foundation of South Wood County (now called the Encourage Community Foundation) and Ki Thoughtbridge, a national firm specializing in leadership training. The ALI curriculum provides participants with a variety of practices and tools to resolve conflicts and facilitate collective problem solving (e.g., the Seven Element Model of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation, Four Quadrant Problem-Solving Tool). Many graduates of ALI have become skilled practitioners in these new approaches to collaborative problem solving and in the process have helped stimulate a number of large-scale initiatives that are improving economic vitality, job skills, and civic life throughout the region.

Our study of ALI brought to light an intriguing insight regarding the process of scaling-up civic leadership. Scaling up clearly involves an expansion in the number and diversity of residents who are trained to be effective leaders. But scaling up also goes beyond bringing the program to all the established and emerging leaders in the community (i.e., saturating the market). The context also needs to become more amenable to the sort of leadership that graduates are practicing.

From a systems-level perspective, there is a strong case to be made that improving a community’s ability to solve its most pressing problems (and to anticipate emerging threats) requires not only skilled individual leaders but also highly functioning

organizations, supportive institutions, and a conducive community culture. Launching new or improved leaders into an old-world context will likely produce a stalemate.

This dynamic suggests that organizations interested in strengthening civic leadership need to do more than help individual participants develop their leadership ability. Individual-level programming is important, but work also needs to be done at a structural level to improve the context within which community problem solving and decision making take place. Creating structural change is challenging and high-stakes work that requires strategies quite different from what is involved in developing the skills and competencies of individual leaders.

The remainder of this article describes two cases where organizations concerned with civic leadership have succeeded in combining strategies that operate on both the individual and the structural level. The first illustration focuses on the work of locally based organizations in a modest-size region with forty thousand residents (Wisconsin Rapids and surrounding communities along the Wisconsin River). The second case highlights the work of the Kansas Leadership Center, a young institution that has made impressive strides in promoting individual-level and structural-level improvements in civic leadership across an entire state.

Individual and Culture Change in Central Wisconsin

The developers of ALI in central Wisconsin recognized the importance of combining individual-level leadership development with transforming the community culture. The context for this paradigm shift was a huge economic upheaval that local leaders and residents failed to anticipate. The region prospered for nearly all of the twentieth century through the success of large locally based papermaking firms, such as Consolidated Papers, as well as a robust network of cranberry growers and processors. Both industries suffered major disruption beginning in 2000, leading to the loss of up to 40 percent of the jobs in the region, including thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs in the local paper mills.

This upheaval in the paper and cranberry industries disrupted not only the economic health of the region

but also the civic infrastructure. Historically, virtually all the economic, political, civic, and charitable decision making in the region had been controlled by a handful of business leaders, most of whom were owners and executives with Consolidated Papers or Nekoosa-Edwards. (Nekoosa-Edwards operated as an independent corporation from 1908 through 1970, at which point the firm merged with Great Northern Paper Company to form Great Northern-Nekoosa. In 1990, Georgia-Pacific acquired Great Northern-Nekoosa in a hostile takeover. Georgia-Pacific sold the Port Edwards and Nekoosa mills to Montreal-based Domtar Inc. in 2001.)

In the wake of this social and economic disruption, the local community foundation (Incorporate) and chamber of commerce (Heart of Wisconsin) stepped forward and identified culture change as critical to recovery. The old culture had fostered a sense of dependency and a belief that established business leaders were the only ones who could provide civic leadership. Many residents felt as if they had neither the responsibility nor the right to get involved in larger community issues. Because people were unaccustomed to working together in constructive ways, mistrust was pervasive. This was especially true with regard to officials from the different municipalities in the region.

The community foundation designed ALI to overturn these antiquated and dysfunctional beliefs. To plant the seeds for a more inclusive and open civic culture, ALI promoted a model of leadership that challenged participants to work collaboratively with people beyond their normal circles. The foundation recruited not only established leaders but also people who were known to have leadership potential even if they did not occupy a leadership position.

ALI was only one of an array of programs that the community foundation and the Heart of Wisconsin put in place to change the local culture. From 2004 to 2008, the two institutions carried out the high-profile Community Progress Initiative, which included various leadership programs, community planning processes, the creation of local charitable funds, training programs for fledgling entrepreneurs, venture capital funds, mentoring for business owners, the creation of industry clusters, and study tours to other communities suffering economic upheaval.

These new programs and resources were important in stimulating new business and civic ventures. But just as important was the overall messaging and leadership provided by the community foundations and Heart of Wisconsin. The chief executives of the two organizations, Kelly Lucas and Connie Loden, repeatedly stressed that the region needed to change its culture from one defined by paternalism and dependency to one that embraced innovation, initiative, and working together toward common interests.

The net result of this comprehensive approach has been the emergence of new leaders active in civic affairs, increased collaboration across institutions, reduced divisiveness, and nationally recognized initiatives to retool the local workforce and promote new industry. Changes have occurred not only among individual participants but also at a structural level, with the culture beginning to shift from one defined by dependency and paternalism to one where all residents feel personal responsibility and take initiative. (A fuller version of this story is presented in *Local Climate Change* by Easterling and Millesen.)

Individual and Cultural Change Across Kansas

The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) was created by the Kansas Health Foundation in 2005 to foster and strengthen civic leadership throughout the State of Kansas. In addition to developing intensive training programs to build key competencies within leaders from different sectors, KLC has taken a critical look at how the style of civic leadership needs to shift and evolve in Kansas communities. The net result is a comprehensive strategy that emphasizes not only the skills of civic leadership but also the culture within which civic leadership is practiced.

Origins of KLC

Among foundations with a statewide focus, the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) stands apart in committing attention and resources to strengthening civic leadership. KHF was formed in 1985 as an outgrowth of the sale of the nonprofit Wesley Hospital. Along with the Colorado Trust (another health conversion formed the same year in Denver), KHF recognized at an early stage that building the civic capacity of communities was an important pathway for achieving the foundation's mission of

improving the health of residents across the state. Whereas the Colorado Trust focused on building community capacity through initiatives such as the Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative (see Easterling, Conner, and Larson, 2012), KHF honed in on the concept of civic leadership. According to a retrospective analysis of KHF's interest in the topic, "The KLC—From Conception to Launch," "early in [the foundation's] history, a theory began brewing among its board and staff. The theory surmised that healthy Kansans would be a natural outgrowth from investment in civic leadership training" (p. 51).

The idea that civic leadership could play a powerful role in health promotion was kindled by a 1988 "listening tour." KHF's executive team (president Marni Vliet, vice presidents Steve Coen and Mary Campuzano, and strategic consultant Don Stewart) convened community meetings across the state.

From Dighton to Atchison and Lawrence to Leoti, hundreds of sheets of flip chart paper and numerous packs of colored markers were used in an effort to uncover local health problems. . . . Certain words, including civic leadership, kept popping up. . . . The tours showed that constituents felt a growing shortage of civic leadership and requested help and training to address emerging health issues (p. 51).

These findings led the foundation to create a "Leadership Institute" in 1992, which attracted nearly two hundred hospital administrators, public health professionals, county extension agents, executives from nonprofit and faith-based organizations, and other community leaders. This institute reflected a relatively narrow view on how to strengthen civic leadership, focusing primarily on helping established leaders increase their knowledge about effective health programming and policy.

Subsequent listening tours in 1995, 1997, and 2004 provided evidence that KHF needed to broaden its view on leadership development. According to Don Stewart, who participated in all four listening tours:

The tours told us we just don't have enough leaders to do all of the things we need to do in Kansas. And the ones we do have are burned

out and need to be revitalized. . . . It's difficult to move forward if we don't have leaders (p. 52).

As KHF expanded and deepened its understanding of the state's need for civic leadership, broader-based initiatives were introduced. In 1999, the foundation created the Kansas Community Leadership Initiative (KCLI), which supported (and in some cases established) leadership programs based in small and large communities throughout the state (e.g., Leadership Hays, Leadership Salina, Leadership Wichita, Kiowa County Leadership Initiative). With KCLI, the foundation explicitly endorsed the notion that civic leadership is a central and fundamental determinant of health, a principle that continues to distinguish KHF from other health foundations.

Creation of the Kansas Leadership Center

KHF's commitment to civic leadership took a quantum leap forward in 2005 when the board of directors unanimously approved a \$30 million grant to establish the KLC to extend and deepen the work that was occurring under the KCLI. Over time, the foundation's staff had come to recognize that carrying out effective leadership development work, especially on a statewide basis, would require a dedicated organization able to develop a comprehensive, long-term strategy. According to Don Stewart,

When the board approved the \$30 million, there was very little discussion. It was the final piece of the puzzle we were trying to put together. Thirty million was supposed to say, "We're serious, and this is not a short-term effort" (p. 54).

A year later, KLC hired an energetic, highly regarded state legislator, Ed O'Malley, as its first president and chief executive. He hired a handful of staff members skilled in organizational start-up and engaged a cadre of consultants from around the country with expertise in civic leadership (including David Chrislip, Marty Linsky, and Kristin von Donop). Together this group spent all of 2007 conducting an in-depth analysis of the civic landscape in Kansas and creating a curriculum that would develop the skills needed to strengthen civic leadership.

The curriculum reflects the KLC theory of civic leadership by focusing on developing the skills required

for adaptive leadership and collaborative leadership. The core audience for KLC programming is those Kansans who are engaged in the civic life of their community, either through their position as leader in a community organization or in their role as an active citizen or volunteer.

The typical KLC program includes at least one multiday training session where participants are presented with a mix of information and experiences that introduce a distinct orientation to leadership. Coaches work individually with participants during and after the training to provide support and feedback in implementing the competencies and practices learned during the training. Most programs also have a follow-up in-person meeting approximately six months after the initial training. In addition, alumni networks have been formed to provide participants with opportunities for ongoing peer learning and follow-on training.

To date, KLC programs have directly reached nearly two thousand of the 2.9 million residents of Kansas. KLC alumni reside in 228 communities across all regions of the state. Over that same period of time, the center has grown to sixteen full-time staff, with another seven leadership professionals who serve as faculty for the center's training programs, as well as twenty-one others who provide coaching to participants during and after the formal training segment of the programs.

New Model of Civic Leadership for Kansas

Beyond expanding the number of Kansans who receive leadership training, KLC has done a number of other things to advance the development of civic leadership across Kansas. The center's boldest move was to introduce a new model of civic leadership that contrasts sharply with the styles of leadership that are most commonly observed at the local and state level. In place of a relatively conservative, conflict-avoidant approach to decision making and problem solving, KLC has promoted a model that presumes that progress requires bigger thinking, more risk, and at least some degree of discomfort.

The idea of developing a new model of civic leadership was prompted in large part by the findings that emerged during KLC's initial planning work,

which included an in-depth study of the leadership landscape in Kansas. Between August and December 2007, KLC staff and consultants interviewed twenty key informants with expertise in economic development, health, education, environmental issues, politics, agriculture, and other key issues. In addition, the team conducted seven focus groups with a broad cross-section of Kansans, ninety in total. This study, summarized in a defining document referred to as “the Artifact” (2009), identified a number of positive and negative aspects of civic leadership across Kansas:

On the hindrance side of the ledger, according to respondents, lies a Kansan variant of denial: aversion to conflict, scapegoating, and waiting until a crisis to take action. “Kansans rise to the occasion,” said one interviewee, “but they tend to wait until there is a crisis to do that.”

Some see in Kansans a lack of aspiration—what one interviewee described as an attitude of “We’re average and proud of it!” Another commented, “. . . We’re suspicious of anything that would take us to the top—that’s way too risky. We will only do it if it’s been done before. . . .”

Kansans also demonstrate a fear of and resistance to change, making them reluctant to try something new or risky. “But we’ve always done it this way” often serves as a way to prematurely (and convincingly) end a discussion about a different course of action (p. 65).

This analysis prompted Ed and his colleagues to position KLC not as a straightforward training institute but rather as a force for changing the paradigm of civic leadership across the state. In “From Theory to Action,” a 2009 article, Ed laid out eleven principles that define this new type of leadership. The next sample indicates how far KLC was willing to push Kansans into new and largely uncharted territory:

- Leadership is an activity, not position or authority.
- The activity of leadership starts with a personal intervention.

- Exercising leadership is inherently risky. Once we intervene, we lose significant control over the outcome.
- The risks of exercising leadership are both personal and professional.
- Making progress requires us to do what is needed in the situation rather than what is wanted or is comfortable for others or ourselves.
- To make progress, we have to be willing to raise the heat to get others and ourselves into the zone of productive work.

(In an effort to reduce the complexity of its concepts, KLC reduced the list of eleven principles to five in the summer of 2011.)

Behind these principles is the assumption that solving any community’s most critical problems will require new ways of thinking, discussing, and doing that are much more open and cutting edge than Kansans have traditionally practiced.

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KLC specifically endorsed the notion of adaptive leadership developed by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky and described in their book, *Leadership on the Line*. Whereas technical leadership focuses on solving well-defined or recurrent problems, adaptive leadership is the ability to understand and respond to the larger, messier, more fundamental problems that now threaten many communities. Adaptive leadership requires higher-order skills than does technical leadership. The leader’s task is not to find the solution him- or herself but to guide the group in understanding the problem from different angles and then facilitating the process of working out the right solution.

During the planning year, KLC staff and advisors developed a specific leadership model that translates adaptive leadership for the Kansas context. At the heart of this model are four competencies assumed to be critical for effective civic leadership:

1. Diagnose situation.
2. Manage self.

3. Intervene skillfully.
4. Energize others.

These “Competencies for Civic Leadership” were spelled out by Ed O’Malley in the inaugural issue of KLC’s *Journal* in 2009:

1. **Diagnose situation.** “If you are trying to intervene to help your community make progress on a tough issue, it is critical that you understand what you are intervening into” (p. 8).
2. **Manage self.** “Exercising effective civic leadership requires artfully deploying yourself. And artfully deploying yourself requires knowing yourself well enough to make conscious choices” (p. 10).
3. **Intervene skillfully.** “Leadership is about change. And the catalyst for change is often an intentional, well designed intervention. . . . Citizens who exercise civic leadership are intentional about when, why and how they intervene in a civic system or organization” (p. 13).
4. **Energize others.** “No one individual or entity can tackle a daunting civic challenge on their own. Leadership on these challenges must involve energizing more people to take up the difficult work of civic leadership” (p. 14).

To further flesh out the four competencies, KLC identified a number of specific tasks that leaders need to master. These tasks are listed in Table 1.

According to KLC’s theory, leaders who are able to fully develop these competencies will be able to stimulate the conversation, analysis, planning, and action that leads to effective solutions to the adaptive challenges that confront Kansas communities.

Mastering the leadership behaviors listed in Table 1 requires not only a litany of highly refined skills but also an overarching personal orientation toward adaptive leadership. On one hand, civic leaders need to be reflective and analytic in diagnosing the situation and in understanding their own skills and motivations. On the other hand, leaders need to be able to bring forth change, both through their own actions and by mobilizing others. In short, the KLC model challenges leaders to be simultaneously thoughtful

Table 1. Tasks Associated with Each of the Four Competencies of Civic Leadership

1. Diagnose Situation
Explore though interpretations.
Distinguish technical versus adaptive work.
Understand the process challenges.
Test multiple interpretations and points of view.
Take the temperature.
Identify who needs to do the work.
2. Manage Self
Know your strengths, vulnerabilities, and triggers.
Know the story others tell about you.
Choose among competing values.
Get used to uncertainty and conflict.
Experiment beyond your comfort zone.
Take care of yourself.
3. Intervene Skillfully
Make conscious choices.
Raise the heat.
Give the work back.
Hold to pressure.
Speak from the heart.
Act experimentally.
4. Energize Others
Engage unusual voices.
Work across factions.
Start where they are.
Speak to loss.
Inspire a collective purpose.
Create a trustworthy process.

and active, strategic and heartfelt, discerning and provocative.

Programming to Build the Competencies

The first KLC training, “Innovative Ideas,” was offered in March 2008 and attracted 150 participants from across the state. Over the next four years, the center expanded and adapted its core curriculum to serve a variety of audiences (see Table 2). In addition to the open enrollment programs that are open to any Kansan who is active in civic life, a series of role-based programs have been developed to meet the needs of specific audiences, such as newly elected state legislators, staff and board members from community foundations, and the Kansas Volunteer Commission. Working in collaboration with the Kansas Health Foundation, the center provides leadership training to the health leaders accepted

Table 2. Kansas Leadership's Programming as of July 2012

Program Type	Program	Description	# Offerings to Date	Total # Participants
Open enrollment	Innovative Ideas	KLC's initial program offering in March 2008. One-day training introducing the theory of civic leadership.	1	150
	Context and Competencies	Intensive five-day training for people who work in civic life. Introduces KLC theory of leadership and offers opportunities to practice and experiment. Coaches work with participants following training. Follow-up in-person session six months later.	6	147
	Your Leadership Edge	Shorter-format version of Context and Competencies launched in 2011. Total of three days spaced over multiple weeks. Offered in various regions across Kansas.	5	294
	ExecCoach Kansas	Executive coaches trained in KLC concepts offer one-to-one training and support tailored to participants' schedule and situation. First offered in 2012.	ongoing	19
Role based	Kansas Health Foundation Fellows	Flagship program of the Kansas Health Foundation for accomplished health leaders across Kansas. Each cohort meets seven times over twelve months to enhance members' leadership skills and develop content knowledge on key health issues. KLC staff offer training on civic leadership. Fellows continue meeting as an alumni network following their training.	3 cohorts have been supported by KLC	61
	Leadership and Legacy in the Statehouse	Four-day training (over two sessions) offered to newly elected legislators. Provides tools to maximize effectiveness in office and gain a wider perspective of their new roles. Creates connections among legislators to increase potential for collaboration.	2	33
	Custom programs (Civic Leadership Lab)	Specially designed leadership development experiences for people who share common roles and responsibilities in civic life. To date, programs have been offered for staff and board of community foundations, local elected officials, mentoring organizations, dental champions, Kansas Volunteer Commission.	5	94
Faith based	Leadership and Faith Transforming Communities	A program funded by United Methodist Church of Kansas designed to increase the civic leadership ability and community health focus of faith communities. Congregations send teams of clergy and laypersons for seven days of training over two sessions.	7	336
	Leadership and Faith Southeast Kansas	Abbreviated version of standard Leadership and Faith program, modeled on "Your Leadership Edge."	4	120
	Leadership Coach Training for United Methodist Pastors	"High-potential" pastors selected by United Methodist bishop and cabinet were selected to receive thirty hours of training over four-month period (2012) to become coaches.	1	15

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued

Program Type	Program	Description	# Offerings to Date	Total # Participants
Place based	Art and Practice of Leadership Development—Faith Educators	Yearlong, seven-session professional development experience for faith educators from across Kansas who qualify as masters' level facilitators. First offered in June 2012.	1	22
	KCLI Summit	Three-day gatherings for participants in community leadership programs throughout Kansas. Complements the training offered by local programs by introducing KLC's leadership model. Conducted each fall beginning in 2009.	3	798
	KLCI Facilitator Workshops	Semiannual, multiday gatherings of persons who serve as facilitators of community leadership programs. Builds participants' capacity to offer effective local programming.	6	332
	Community Collaboration Academy	Partnership with University of Kansas to expand the skills of experienced practitioners who design and facilitate community and regional collaboration efforts. Ten days of training in three sessions over six-month period offered in 2010.	1	23
	Konza Clubs	Local groups of KLC alumni who gather regularly with support from KLC staff. Provides opportunity for mutual support, peer learning, coordination of efforts across region.	4 clubs	85
Faculty and coach development	Leadership Case Facilitation Training	Specialized training experience for participants and alumni of APCLD as well as facilitators of local leadership programs and partner organizations to help learn how to use this teaching method in leadership development programs.	2	60
	Coaches Training	Specialized training experience for participants and alumni of APCLD as well as facilitators of local leadership programs and partner organizations to provide hours and experience to become a certified coach.	2	60
	Art and Practice of Leadership Development (original)	Multiepisodic programs lasting approximately twelve months, each designed to offer intensive leadership and teaching skills development related to KLC theory and methods.	2	50
	Art and Practice of Leadership Development—Next Generation	Yearlong, seven-session professional development experience to develop and support Kansans in their twenties and thirties who have passion and aptitude for developing leadership capacity in others. First offered in June 2012.	1	24

into the foundation's prestigious KHF Fellows program. A grant from the Kansas Diocese of the United Methodist Church allowed the center to develop a program tailored to faith leaders with the intent of increasing their leadership ability and strengthening their congregations.

Initially KLC's programming required participants to travel to Wichita for a four- or five-day training. Recognizing that this model discouraged participation by many Kansans, especially those from the western part of the state, the center developed shorter versions of the curriculum (e.g., "Your

Leadership Edge”) and has begun offering programs on a regional basis.

One of the most important ways that KLC reaches civic leaders across the state is through the KCLI, which supports local community leadership programs. Every year KLC hosts a three-day summit for individuals participating in one of the forty-one local programs. A diverse group of two to three hundred Kansans receives leadership-development training that complements the educational curriculum and networking offered by their local community leadership program. In addition, KLC staff and consultants provide training, coaching, and consulting services to the facilitators of those local programs in order to improve their effectiveness in fostering civic leadership.

To ensure that participants in the various programs receive quality training, the center has a robust strategy for building and deepening the skills of the faculty who teach in the programs and the coaches who work with individual participants. This training occurs on an ongoing basis and builds on lessons learned in carrying out the KLC programs with different audiences. A separate program, “The Art and Practice of Civic Leadership Development” (APCLD), develops the teaching skills of facilitators, trainers, and coaches beyond KLC’s own faculty. A recent offering of APCLD specifically recruited young Kansans in their twenties and thirties who are interested in the work of promoting civic leadership.

Adoption of the KLC Leadership Model by Participants

From the outset, KLC has committed funding to evaluation and has regularly reviewed findings from various surveys conducted immediately after training and at later points in time. The KLC Evaluation Team is headed up by Scott Wituk, Ph.D., and Sarah Jolley, M.A., who are based in the Center for Community Support and Research at Wichita State University. (Data provided by them were essential in writing this article, particularly the sections on adoption and diffusion.)

Posttraining surveys of program participants find that the vast majority regard the training as valuable. Nearly 90 percent of the 459 individuals who participated in programs between August 2011 and

February 2012 rated the experience as positive—either “good” (25 percent), “excellent” (47 percent), or “the very best” (16 percent). In addition, over 80 percent of the alums agreed with each of the following statements:

- “I gained new insights on civic leadership.” (83 percent)
- “The experience will help me make more progress on my leadership challenges.” (86 percent)
- “I will use what I learned to make progress on a civic leadership issue that is important to me.” (87 percent)

Although the training succeeds in convincing most participants that they should develop and practice the four competencies, this is not something that happens immediately or easily. Given the complexity and ambitiousness of the model, it’s not surprising that many of the people who attend the training programs report difficulty in fully grasping it, at least early on. Some participants appear to catch on to the model quickly, while others struggle with the language and the ideas. The model seems particularly difficult for participants who have more concrete thinking styles or who have a tendency to move quickly to action. Additionally, some participants appear to be taken aback by certain aspects of the KLC model, particularly the idea of raising the heat in order to move beyond polite conversation to more productive problem solving.

Despite the complexity and challenging nature of the KLC model, most participants do begin to put the ideas into practice when they get back home. For their 2012 “Annual Alumni Survey Update Report,” the KLC Evaluation Team in August 2011 surveyed 344 alums who had participated in a KLC program since the first program held in March 2008. The vast majority (87.5 percent) agreed with the statement, “I am actively using what I learned at KLC.”

When asked what they have found most difficult in utilizing KLC concepts, many alumni mentioned *just trying to remember to use what they learned*. Because the model is so complex, many participants end up focusing on only a subset of the competencies, leaving the remainder for a later day. The easiest competency to implement seems to be “diagnose situation,” which includes practices such as testing

multiple interpretations and “going to the balcony” for a larger look at the situation. The competency of “managing self” is fairly easy to understand but turns out to be challenging to master. “Energize others” seems to be something that individuals are either predisposed to do or not do; more introverted participants report that this is somewhat unnatural for them.

The greatest challenges tend to come up with the “intervene skillfully” competency, especially the more directive practices related to “turning up the heat.” One alum reported: “I want to turn the heat up but I am scared of the consequences.” Another talked about the fundamental challenge associated with turning up the heat: “Needs to be done. Uncomfortable to do.”

Although alumni generally reported that they have achieved only partial success in adopting the KLC leadership model, they nonetheless report that their new perspectives and behaviors are yielding positive outcomes. Over 70 percent of participants in the Alumni Survey agreed that the ideas they have learned have “helped me make progress on leadership challenges.”

Diffusion of the KLC Model Beyond Program Participants

Participants in KLC training programs are not only putting the center’s leadership model into personal practice but are also promoting the model to others. Approximately half of the alums reported that they had presented the KLC model or KLC ideas to some audience. These presentations were given in a variety of formal and informal settings, including the workplace, nonprofit organizations, churches, and community coalitions.

One reason for this high level of promotional activity is that participants become excited by what they have learned in their trainings and want to share the ideas with friends and colleagues. Equally important, many alums find it difficult to act according to the KLC model when others are operating in more traditional ways. This sense of “feeling alone” came through repeatedly in the Alumni Survey when respondents identified their challenges in implementing what they had learned:

- Working with people who do not know the language or anything about these concepts.
- A lack of local peers who understand the KLC principles and language.
- Most of the people I work with do not yet share the vocabulary I’ve learned at KLC.
- Implementing the concepts in situations and groups that have no education or point of reference for them. It’s a challenge to remind myself to reference them internally as I’m working with people who haven’t been exposed to the concepts or are being exposed to them for the first time.
- It is hard when others have not been exposed to the concepts to get them to go along with your approach.

Whether the motivation is excitement or wanting to build a base of leaders operating from the same paradigm, many of those who participate in KLC training become active and vocal proponents of the new leadership model. Respondents in the Alumni Survey reported more than 120 distinct instances where they personally presented KLC concepts.

In essence, the center has created a cadre of emissaries who assist in disseminating the leadership model throughout the state. This diffusion process was explicitly built into KLC’s strategy for strengthening civic leadership across Kansas. According to Mark McCormick, KLC’s former director of communications, the faculty and staff believe exposure to the theory and principles will win converts, as well as champions and evangelists.

In addition to making presentations to colleagues, KLC’s allies have incorporated the model into non-KLC leadership training programs. For example, a number of the community leadership programs operating across Kansas now teach the KLC model of leadership. Shifting community leadership programs toward a true leadership-development approach is an explicit part of KLC’s overall strategy for strengthening civic leadership across the state. Under the KCLI, consultants hired by the center meet with the staff of these programs to assist in marketing, recruitment, designing and facilitating sessions, and selling the merits of the program to the larger community.

The model has also worked its way into formal leadership courses taught at Wichita State University, Kansas State University, and the University of Kansas. And many of the faculty and coaches who work part time for KLC have incorporated the KLC model into their own training, facilitation, and consulting work. The center has encouraged this sort of borrowing by outside groups and, in fact, views such “third-party apps” as success indicators.

These emissaries and third-party applications have allowed KLC to accelerate the diffusion process. While approximately 2,500 Kansans have been exposed to the model directly through KLC trainings, perhaps ten times that number have been exposed indirectly through the efforts of champions beyond KLC staff.

Resistance to the KLC Model

As more people complete KLC training and become emissaries, the leadership model is popping up in more community settings, elected bodies, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and academic institutions across Kansas. This diffusion process does not, however, mean that everyone who is exposed to the model becomes a convert, especially at first.

As mentioned earlier, many participants in KLC trainings find it difficult to fully comprehend the model because of the complex concepts and the new language. While this occurs to some extent when KLC faculty teach the model, it is even more of a problem when participants try to share what they have learned with their colleagues back home. This difficulty was explicitly cited by respondents in the Alumni Survey:

- The language associated with the KLC is often a barrier to getting the idea across to those who have not learned the language and the process.
- The vocabulary of KLC concepts is foreign to most, so translating it for people who have not been immersed in KLC can be challenging.

Getting people to understand the model is one key step to diffusion, but acceptance can also be a challenge. A small but vocal minority of Kansans who have participated in KLC training come out viewing the KLC model as inappropriate. This sentiment

emerged in an independent evaluation of KLC conducted by the TCC Group for the Kansas Health Foundation. In interviewing alumni in four communities across the state, TCC heard generally positive reports of the training’s impact—both for the alumni personally and for their communities. But some interviewees also expressed discomfort with those aspects of the curriculum that bring assumptions and conflict out into the open. They “shared clear concerns regarding the methodology itself and specifically the Case in Point and Raising the Heat concepts. . . . The methodology could be ultimately damaging to the state and is not culturally appropriate” (p. 3). The center has been sensitive to these reactions and has taken specific steps to tone down some of the provocative language it had used previously. Nonetheless, the training, supporting materials, and broader communication strategy continue to emphasize risk taking and turning up the heat in a situation in order to generate productive work.

Shifting the Civic Culture Across Kansas

It is quite telling that objections to KLC’s model are couched in terms of cultural appropriateness. This is a subjective term, one that depends on a particular view of what the civic culture *should* look like. People can legitimately differ in their belief as to whether the KLC model is culturally appropriate. What is unarguably true is that the center is promoting an approach to civic leadership that runs counter to the *traditional* civic culture in Kansas.

Shifting the civic culture of Kansas communities was a key part of what KLC set out to do when it developed its leadership model. This intent was explicitly set out in the KLC Theory of Civic Leadership, which was published in the inaugural issue of the center’s journal:

The more vocal “usual” voices, those with some vestige of authority or power, tend to dominate public debate. They see the process of addressing civic challenges primarily as a zero-sum, win or lose game pitting “us” versus “them.” [At the same time] the vast majority of Kansans do not participate or share responsibility for addressing the challenges, either out of apathy, anger or frustration with the polarizing norms of civic engagement. . . . This default civic culture is a mismatch with challenges requiring

adaptive work . . . The current civic culture impedes rather than facilitates progress (p. 5).

The center has not been shy about promoting a shift in culture. The training curriculum emphasizes this point. KLC staff members speak frequently at meetings and conferences across the state, emphasizing “large-scale leadership development for social and civic change.” In addition, the center has produced TV programs emphasizing the need for a healthy civic culture.

Changing the civic culture has also been a focus of KLC’s strategy for strengthening local community leadership programs. In 2008, KLC convened representatives of these programs to assess their effectiveness and impact on civic leadership. After lengthy conversation, reported David Chrislip (2009), the group concluded that local leadership programs are “well intentioned and almost universally uplifting for participants” but “do not adequately develop the leadership competencies to cope with the true complexity the challenges” (p. 37). With guidance from KLC:

The advisory group challenged themselves and their programs to “raise the bar” by aspiring to transform the culture of their communities . . . from an exclusive, often divisive and ineffective civic culture to a more inclusive and collaborative civic culture doing adaptive work and ensuring accountability. . . . Community leadership programs should be the catalyst and their alumni the proponents for this transformation.

One critique of the prevailing civic culture is the trait of “Kansas nice,” as illustrated in an article by Chris Green (2010), a Topeka-based journalist and consultant to the center.

My colleagues and friends at KLC have identified “Kansas nice” as a barrier to making progress on building healthier, more prosperous communities. . . . [Kansas nice is] a social way of being that values amicability, politeness and respect more than it values being honest, forthright and candid. At first glance, it seems like a good thing. . . . Delivering a freshly baked loaf of bread or pie to someone visiting the neighborhood church for

the first time. . . . [But] “Kansas nice” folks tend not to rock the boat, which helps preserve established order and authority. They shy away from risk and conflict, often downplaying a problem of denying that it even exists. In its least noble incarnations, “Kansas nice” can be inauthentic or passive aggressive. Instead of disagreeing with someone to his or her face, the authentic conversation takes place with others out in the parking lot after the other person is no longer present (p. 52).

Against this historical backdrop, KLC promotes a fundamental shift in how decisions are made and problems are solved. Participants in the trainings are encouraged to lead through skillful intervention, which inherently includes some level of provocation. Local leadership programs are encouraged to transform the local culture. The intent is not to discourage people from being nice and pleasant to one another, but to overcome the superficial conversation, risk aversion, and avoidance of conflict that sometimes go along with being overly nice.

Adaptive Leadership Within an Adaptive Culture

KLC’s emphasis on civic culture points to a crucial reality about the business of strengthening civic leadership. Leadership skills are certainly important, but skills by themselves will not translate into effective problem solving and healthy, prosperous communities. If participants come home from their leadership training with skills that are not valued or appreciated by their colleagues, it will be difficult to put those skills into practice. Skilled leaders can carry out effective civic leadership only if they are working within a conducive civic culture.

This issue of cultural fit is particularly pertinent when it comes to the adaptive leadership model that KLC teaches. Adaptive leadership calls for the acknowledgment of uncertainty, experimentation with different possibilities, and working through competing solutions. Regardless of their level of skill, adaptive leaders will struggle mightily if the culture in which they operate is not adaptive. KLC program participants have had limited success when they try to promote the edgy, open-ended approach required to solve adaptive problems within groups that are

accustomed to linear analysis and constrained discussion.

The KLC leadership model requires an adaptive community culture, one that is spacious enough to acknowledge and incorporate divergent points of view, where leaders remain focused on the larger common good rather than their own parochial interests, where innovation and divergent thinking are encouraged, and where risk taking and conflict are recognized to be necessary preconditions for real solutions.

The Kansas and the Wisconsin case studies demonstrate the importance of aligning individual leadership development with changes in community context and culture. Perhaps even more important, the case studies present evidence that it is possible for local and statewide organizations to carry out both levels of work simultaneously, assuming that they have a comprehensive, well-designed strategy.

Organizations interested in building civic leadership need to build on whatever programs they have to promote skills development on the part of individuals and to begin operating at the structural level as well. The community foundation in central Wisconsin and the KLC each embraced this challenge head-on, developing a portfolio of training programs, communications strategies, and consulting arrangements to promote a new civic culture that values open, direct, energized community dialogue and action.

In advocating for a transformation of civic culture, both organizations have demonstrated the style of leadership that they are calling for in others. This style of leadership is exemplified by the core principles that KLC developed to guide its programming, especially these:

- Leadership is an activity, not position or authority.
- Exercising leadership is inherently risky. Once we intervene, we lose significant control over the outcome.
- Making progress requires us to do what is needed in the situation rather than what is wanted or is comfortable for others or ourselves.
- To make progress, we have to be willing to raise the heat to get others and ourselves into the zone of productive work.

These principles describe the reality of being in the business of changing civic culture. Although daunting, this line of work is essential if communities are to make significant progress in strengthening their civic leadership and adapting to the challenges that confront them.

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Doug Easterling is a professor in the Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy at the Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

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