

Summer 2006

Intersections



Upcoming Events

[June 22: Solving the Talent Challenge, Executive Breakfast](#)

[August 13: Co-producing Knowledge for Action, AOM Conference](#)

Recent Events

[NGL Retreat](#)

[SJF Fellowship Kicks Off](#)

[Participatory Action Research for Social Justice](#)

[Working Together: A Close-in Look at Inter-Agency Collaboration, Executive Briefing](#)

[Radical Possibilities in Educational Leadership and Policy](#)

[RCLA Presents at Congress of Qualitative Inquiry](#)

[Research for Organizing Forum](#)

"How we define the problem determines how we define the solution....We were experiencing a shared problem; therefore, it had to be a shared solution."

**- Commissioner Martin Horn,
New York City Department of
Corrections**

New Program!

The Newsletter of the



Research Center for Leadership in Action

NYUWagner

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Welcome

The second issue of Intersections focuses on the leadership challenges and opportunities associated with effective collaborations within the public sector and between public and nonprofit agencies.

Voices from the Field

Lessons on collaboration from New York City's Prisoner Re-Entry Program.

Try This!

Learn how a "Data Walk" can help build the foundation for moving a collaborative change effort forward.

Methodologies

Learn about narrative inquiry, one of our cutting-edge research methods.

Recently Published

Read about a developing RCLA publication on the dynamic tensions associated with collaboration and how to address them.

Welcome

No leadership challenge is more pressing than effective collaboration—within and among agencies, across sectors, and in global networks. When occurring between nonprofits and government, such collaborations can help address acute community problems and promote a more vibrant interplay between civil society and the public

[NYC Social Justice Fellowship](#)

RCLA Programs

[Leadership for a Changing World Program](#)
[Research and Documentation](#)

[Next Generation Leadership Alumni Network](#)

[Leading Large Scale Change In the Public Sector: Supporting High Performance Government](#)

[Leadership in Action Program](#)

[Special Initiative for Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector](#)

Resources

[RCLA Publications](#)

[Intersections, Winter 2006](#)

Our Team

RCLA is supported by a [team](#) of full-time and part-time staff, a number of whom are NYU Wagner graduate students:

Marian S. Krauskopf, Co-Director
Sonia M. Ospina, Co-Director
Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla, Associate Director
Millard "Mitty" Owens, Associate Director
Angie Chan
Frank Colaianni
Mechan Daigneau*
Jennifer Dodge*
Waad El-Hadidy*
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Steven Jean*
Elizabeth Losey*
Rohit Mallick*
Asia Meshack*
Andres Muñoz*
Amudha Rajendran
Sanjiv Rao*
Avra C. Siegel*
Jamie Vander Loop*
Erica R. Waples*
Rodney Washington*

*Part-time staff

sector. Government agencies turn to nonprofits for effective service delivery. Significant public support enhances nonprofits' reach and capacity. Community-based organizations know that going to scale requires engaging government, sometimes by way of confrontation, but other times through collaboration.

While collaborations between nonprofit and public agencies are increasingly common, they still require considerable work and, for many, new skills. We trust that the stories in this newsletter—examples of RCLA's focus on this most critical challenge—can help.

- In the ["Voices from the Field"](#) section below, we highlight lessons learned from our "Leading Large Scale Change in the Public Sector" briefing series. We examine how leaders can drive collaboration to solve big, systemic problems when "no individual agency holds the marbles" (i.e., when there are multiple stakeholders and no one entity has complete authority). New York City's successful prisoner re-entry project described here required multiple institutions, including the New York City Departments of Corrections and Homeless Services, the Economic Development Corporation, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, and over 40 (!) nonprofit organizations dealing with employment, substance abuse, affordable housing, and mental health.
- Our ["Try This!"](#) section describes a "Data Walk" tool that helps promote discussion and planning, especially in settings with people holding multiple perspectives.
- Our ["Methodologies"](#) and ["Recently Published"](#) sections highlight publications that offer additional insights on collaboration, generated by RCLA and useful to both practitioners and researchers.

Looking ahead, RCLA's research and project work will continue to focus on inter-sectoral collaboration as a key element of leadership. We will continue to unpack and describe how successful partnerships are formed and sustained, and provide nonprofit and government leaders the knowledge and resources they need to make these important and collaborative efforts work.

If you have a leadership issue you would like to see addressed or have any other suggestions for our newsletter, we look forward to hearing from you!

Marian S. Krauskopf, Co-Director

Sonia Ospina, Co-Director

Voices from the Field

Given RCLA's commitment to amplifying the contributions of leaders in the development of new knowledge, each issue of Intersections features a brief article highlighting a leader or leaders' point of view on a particular issue. This issue's "Voices from the Field" examines the experience of the practitioners involved in a prisoner re-entry program in New York City and strategies for successful cross-sector collaboration.

"How we define the problem determines how we define the solution.... We were experiencing a shared problem; therefore, it had to be a shared solution."—Commissioner Martin Horn, New York City Department of Corrections

Commissioner Horn was referring to a challenge posed by the re-entry of released prisoners from Rikers Island to civilian life. A subset of prisoners cycled repeatedly between incarceration and homelessness, also adversely affecting a developing economic area at the prisoners' release point in and around Long Island City. A solution required a dialogue and collaboration first between the NYC Department of Corrections and Department of Homeless Services, and then with a large group of over 40 nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations.

This case was the subject of one of RCLA's Executive Briefing series [Leading Large Scale Change](#) in 2004, bringing together many of the stakeholders in the prisoner re-entry program for a discussion of the practices that led to successful collaboration. Leading Large Scale Change is a program which RCLA supports in partnership with Accenture.

Several factors influenced the collaboration's success, which produced two initiatives

that today help returning prisoners connect quickly and efficiently to a range of social services. These included:

Focusing on results

"[W]e need to identify groups that have a significant impact on city resources and then find out more about the usage patterns of those groups. It is possible that there are different interventions for different groups, but by putting information together from multiple agencies we can alleviate the burden on each agency and find a solution that is mutually beneficial."—JoAnne Page, Executive Director, The Fortune Society

In the prisoner re-entry effort, partners agreed to share data and focus on metrics that would track progress and pitfalls. Credible data helps organizations deploy staff effectively, identify problems, and accomplish a variety of goals. In this case, data enabled the partners to concentrate their efforts on a target group of about 3,400 prisoners who consistently moved in and out of the homeless and corrections systems. Narrowing the effort in this way created a frame for the problem that helped focus and sustain the collaboration.

Using Transparency to Build Trust

Without trust among partners, collaborative efforts fail. Sharing important data in a transparent manner can help. For example, the Department of Corrections put data online that they had never shared before, giving their partners a sense of inclusion and commitment. "It's giving access to information and also giving a sense of shared values about outcomes," said JoAnne Page, "even though there may not be a shared emphasis on means. [This] breeds trust [among] two or more agencies."

Sustaining Meaningful Relationships

"When partnerships are in their infancy, they need a core group that is used to working with government and one another."—Marta Nelson, Center for Employment Opportunities

Long-term relationships can be building blocks for collaborations. Fostering and maintaining connections among colleagues and participating agencies is critical. In the prisoner re-entry effort, many of the partners had worked together during the previous 15 years in one way or another. These relationships helped the partners trust each other and work together as a team.

For more information, download the executive summary "[Prisoner Re-entry—A Case Example](#)," prepared by Justin Miller, that summarizes the meeting's discussions and findings. Learn more about RCLA's executive briefing series by visiting www.wagnerbriefing.com.

Try This!

Data is critical to effective leadership and change efforts of all kinds. Leaders can use data as a key factor for motivating their teams, shaping strategy, and evaluating their efforts. The "Data Walk" is a tool that provides an opportunity to share diverse perspectives across sectors and disciplines.

Data Walk is useful at the outset of a change effort to address a specific problem. Here's how it works:

- On a wall or walls, place meaningful data on a variety of important metrics describing the problem. Include graphs and charts if available.
- Next, using a set of guiding questions developed in advance, "walk through" the data with a group of key leaders/staff.
- Invite people to stroll in pairs through the room to view, consider, and reflect upon the data.
- After everyone has had the opportunity to complete their walk-through, hold a debriefing session where the entire group can discuss their reactions.

This exercise is an excellent tool for generating the foundation for a shared understanding of a problem among a diverse group of stakeholders. Data Walk is a tool designed by LAP program designer and facilitator Jolie Bain Pillsbury, PhD, of [Sherbrooke Consulting, Inc.](#) To download RCLA's recent documentation of LAP, please click [here](#).

Methodologies

RCLA develops new understanding about leadership practice by facilitating an equal exchange between practitioners and researchers. Our research methods create frameworks that invite practitioners into deep conversation, “level the playing field” with social scientists, and generate new and useful knowledge. Here, we feature Narrative Inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that taps into the wealth of knowledge that resides in the stories that people tell about their lives and their experiences. Narrative interviews focus on eliciting stories about experience by framing the research with prompts like “Tell me about a time when building a broad-based coalition allowed your organization to advance its mission.” The stories that are evoked in narrative interviews convey meaning and carry practical knowledge that can help an organization learn about itself, as well as inform others’ work. Narrative inquiry is powerful because it enables researchers to give voice to practitioners’ unspoken assumptions, as well as their tacit knowledge. By conducting narrative inquiry with leaders in the field, researchers can get inside of leaders’ experience and begin to understand the things that actually influence their successes and failures.

RCLA’s work in the Research and Documentation component of the [Leadership for a Changing World](#) program informs “Narrative Inquiry and the Search for Connectedness,” the third of three papers by RCLA researchers Sonia Ospina and Jennifer Dodge (Professor Erica Foldy, a faculty affiliate of RCLA, co-authored the second paper in the series). Published in the *Public Administration Review*, the papers argue that narrative inquiry helps improve the quality of research by:

- Capturing meaning;
- Giving attention to context, voice, and perspective; and
- Providing practitioners space to have a voice in research.

This last paper in the series on “connectedness” argues that the narrative inquiry process can be directly useful to any researcher or practitioner interested in understanding experience in either the public or the nonprofit sector. For example, it can help better understand cross-sectoral collaboration, because it can capture—and place side by side—the various perspectives of participants with experience in collaborative work. Narrative inquiry methodology is essentially collaborative, helping academics and practitioners involved in the research connect theory and practice in ways that generate more grounded knowledge. Based on deep conversations, narrative inquiry creates a reciprocal relationship throughout the research process. Ospina and Dodge argue that narrative inquiry can help practitioners become more engaged in scholarship by way of three different roles: as sources of knowledge, as producers of knowledge and as active consumers who can then inform the research process.

To learn more, visit the [Publications](#) section of our website where you can download the full text of Ospina and Dodge’s article, as well as others in the series.

Recently Published

Dynamic Tensions in Inter-Sectoral Collaboration

“Paradox and Collaboration in Coalition Work” by Sonia Ospina, PhD, and Angel Saz-Carranza, Research Center for Leadership in Action.

In her 2000 article published in the *Academy of Management Review*, Marianne Lewis defines paradox as a dynamic tension grounded in the coexistence of opposite yet interrelated elements. In “Paradox and Collaboration in Coalition Work,” a work in progress, authors Sonia Ospina and Angel Saz-Carranza investigate the work of two immigration coalitions in Illinois and New York. They uncover two key paradoxes or dynamic tensions that leaders in these kinds of collaborative efforts must address in order to help their members work together and succeed:

- **“Managing unity and diversity”** is how the authors term the important process of building community and cohesion among coalition members with divergent

The Research Center for Leadership in Action
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of
Public Service
New York University
295 Lafayette Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10012-9604

Telephone: 212-992-9880
Fax: 212-995-4875
E-mail: wagner.leadership@nyu.edu
Web: www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership

interests. Leaders can address this tension by nurturing and facilitating member interaction, paying attention to personal relationships, fostering inclusiveness, and using participatory processes.

- **"Employing cooperation and confrontation"** addresses the balancing act of using both dialogue and pressure. Community and nonprofit leaders can manage this duality by adopting sophisticated strategies in working with government—approaches that at times call for public confrontation but also facilitate behind-the-scenes negotiation. Critical to the entire process is a keen sensitivity to cultivating relationships with a broad array of actors in the political environment. Such social capital can not only further common interest but build channels of trust through which differences can be better navigated.

The authors' findings suggest that managing these dynamic tensions effectively improves both intra- and inter-organizational collaboration. RCLA will be publishing the article in the near future. To view all of the resources RCLA has to offer, visit the [Essential Resources](#) section of our website.

Photo credits: Top, L to R: Deb Rothenberg, Deb Rothenberg, Jamie Permuth

The Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service translates personally held practitioner experience into shared expertise and leadership theory into useful instruments. Through a variety of programs, seminars, and research, RCLA is committed to creating new and cutting-edge knowledge by addressing real leadership problems...from the ground up.