



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO EVOLVING SOCIAL NEEDS

Usage Note

Introduction

The five Leadership Stories described in this usage note are part of a collection of 33 short summaries of examples of leadership successes. Each of these 5-7 page mini-cases briefly describes a leadership challenge faced by an organization, the circumstances they addressed, and the successful outcomes they achieved. These Leadership Stories are quite different in format and content than many case studies. Often, case studies are considerably longer and offer greater depth into an organization or process. The format for such in-depth case studies most often includes a narrative to engage the reader, extensive background information, and a presentation of a fundamental dilemma that leads to a decision point. Students are then asked to analyze the case with specific teaching objectives in mind— such as recommending a course of action, or considering key points in the case that lead to the dilemma. On the other hand, examining a variety of examples of leadership strategies allows a teaching approach where several points of view can be analyzed simultaneously. Issues can be framed in more flexible and innovative ways than is often the case with a single case study.

Since these Leadership Stories take a different approach, and are all representations of best practices (rather than organizational error or indecision), how one uses them effectively will be different than with individual cases. Instead of focusing on a single Leadership Story, this usage note examines a number of the stories that represent a variety of organizations all with a certain organizational or strategic similarity. By surveying a wide array of responses to leadership challenges, students can compare and contrast decisions and outcomes. The breadth of examples can be very useful— exemplary groups and organizations can respond to an event or challenge in a variety of

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This teaching resource is made available on the Electronic Hallway thanks to a partnership with the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service (www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership) and funding from the Ford Foundation's Leadership for a Changing World Research and Documentation Component (www.leadershipforchange.org).

ways. Exploring those various responses is a celebration of good people doing good work.

Note: These Leadership Stories and Usage Note can be used in conjunction with the Leadership Stories and Usage Note for *Initiating Strategic Responses to Social Needs* as a way to compare and contrast organizations at differing stages of organizational life cycle development.

Teaching Objectives: Adapting to New Challenges

This usage note focuses on existing organizations that have decided to focus around new or significantly expanded purpose. There are qualities of these groups that set them apart from start-up organizations. Studies of organizations at different points in their life cycle reveal that the very systems that have helped to make an organization strong can keep it from being more nimble or adaptable, even when that is their appropriate course of action. An approach for teaching these Leadership Stories centers upon examining these organizations by reviewing how they overcome those organizational and structural constraints and respond to a pressing and evolving need. This note begins with a list of the Leadership Stories that represent a cross-section of organizations that have adapted their work or significantly broadened their agenda, and a summary of each. The second section offers analysis and discussion questions around five main areas:

- The defining moment/event/trend that causes a group to decide to change the way it conducts business and act in a new way;
- The strategic approaches used to seize that moment and make that transition;
- Handling pressure to reprioritize;
- Partnerships and collaboration;
- Developing leadership.

The final section provides an at-a-glance summary of key points.

This note and the related Leadership Stories are an especially good fit with courses on leadership, nonprofit and public management, strategic planning, organizing, and social movements. The brevity of the cases also offers instructors substantial flexibility in the use of the cases in the classroom and the placement of the cases within the overall course syllabus. They can be used in a variety of classroom settings. For instance, the faculty member could introduce a distinct issue, such as how organizations seize upon major events or crises or fail to do so. He or she could then assign each student (or sub-groups of students) a single leadership story so that they could ascertain (and explain to their colleagues) how that organization chose to “seize the day.” These separate methods taken together would help students compare and contrast various approaches.

The individual Leadership Stories also lend themselves to being combined with other materials or readings students have been assigned. For instance, a more general reading on the distinct characteristics of faith-based non-profits or on the strengths and weaknesses of partnering approaches could be combined with the Leadership Story on

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES), thus enhancing the initial reading assignment. Any number of Leadership Stories could be used to help to underscore readings or class discussions on the dimensions of leadership. Individual Leadership Stories could even be assigned to be read during a quick class break to provoke additional discussion once core principles on leadership, management, or program design have been established.

Five Organizational Profiles

Creating a Regional Transportation Authority in Detroit by Connecting City and Suburban Interests: A Different Kind of Stew

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)

MOSES is a congregation-based organization with over 70 different congregations, as well as other community members. MOSES chooses various campaigns and projects to work on as a way to improve the quality of life for their communities. They provided key support for the creation of the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority.

Creating Supportive Housing for People Living With HIV/AIDS: Local Lessons, National Strategies: A Place to Call Home

AIDS Housing of Washington (AHW)

The mission of AIDS Housing of Washington (AHW) is to increase and sustain housing for people with AIDS both locally and nationally. AHW also offers technical assistance to other communities and is a national advocate for effective federal AIDS policy.

From Services to Activism: How Latino Day Laborers and Domestic Workers are Advocating for Themselves: Creating “Co-Authors of Justice”

CASA Maryland, Inc. (CASA)

CASA of Maryland advocates for Latino day laborers and domestic workers. Through employee rights education, CASA helps these members advocate for themselves so that they will have more success and protection from discrimination and abuse in the labor market.

Justice for Janitors: How Immigrants are Organizing for Worker Rights: Your Hands Make Them Rich

Justice for Janitors (JforJ)

SEIU 1877 decided to begin to organize immigrant janitors and bring them into unions in Los Angeles. JFJ educates workers about their rights to organize, broadens the union movement to include worker allies.

Preventing Homelessness and Creating Lasting Solutions through Housing Development, Service Provision, and Advocacy: Staying the Course for a Cause Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH)

CCH works to integrate housing and homeless support services and engages in advocacy to influence public policy. The mission of CCH is “to work collaboratively toward the prevention of homelessness and the creation of lasting solutions for homeless and at-risk families, children and individuals throughout Colorado.”

Analysis

The commonality among these groups is that they are groups that adapted to address a new or evolving social issue which broadened their original scope of work. More established organizations have existing structures and processes that can make them slower to respond to change, a condition which advocacy organizations seek to overcome. Life cycle analysis reveals that the same deliberateness that can help an organization be judicious or deploy resources carefully can prevent it from displaying flexibility or inventiveness at a critical juncture. While the details of each case are quite different, there are some aspects of each case that are similar. The approaches by which to these stories can be effectively compared and contrasted are subdivided into the following five areas:

1. Seizing the Day

Like start-up or developing organizations, established organizations can seize upon a political or historical event to redefine their future. Groups that organize and respond quickly have an accelerated rate of decisions to make and structures to set up. More established groups have management and decision-making structures in place to evaluate opportunities, and that can slow them down and even permit the moment to pass by. In other cases, that same deliberateness will help the organization avoid a major error. Existing organizations can decide to broaden their agenda or adapt their mission for a variety of reasons. As noted, there can be a single event or defining moment to be seized. In other cases, there is a broader trend that is analyzed and responded to, or new funding available that causes a change in direction. Sometimes the population being served by an organization grows, changes, or expands to include different groups.

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) needed to determine a direction for an organization that was relatively inactive. A community needs assessment helped them determine which community projects would be good for the organization to address. MOSES determined that a regional transportation system would help unite the metropolitan region and address problems faced by the city and surrounding suburbs.

In some cases, external events carried the day. For Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), Lowry Air Force Base in Denver was closing and new land in the city was available for redevelopment. CASA of Maryland (CASA) realized that the immigrant population was growing and there was a greater need to combat their exploitation.

In other cases, the change in the population being served propelled change in the organization serving it. AIDS Housing of Washington (AHW) first responded to a growing AIDS population. Later, they found that in addition to an increase in numbers, people with AIDS were living longer and had different types of housing and social needs. Similarly, in SEIU's program, Justice for Janitors (JFJ), the organization recognized immigration trends and discrimination against growing immigrant populations and created a 20-year long immigrant organizing project.

2. Shaping the Strategic Response

Established organizations repurposing themselves must determine their strategic response to a major event or defining moment. This response is of great consequence, especially when there are time constraints on whether or not to take action. Organizations with less of a track record are inventing ways to respond and often can be bolder and more innovative in their response. Organizations adapting their work often need to repurpose or reprioritize to be able to strategically respond. That repurposing can be either impeded or aided by processes and governance structures that are already in place.

MOSES had a long history of working together and had the time and resources to complete a community needs assessment, conduct grassroots organizing, and form new alliances. MOSES had organizational credibility and could mobilize members of their congregations and community because they already had organizational systems in place. Their strategic response was to choose a challenge that was visible and politically important but which was not likely to alienate their members. The CCH already had devised strategic responses for approaching homelessness. When a new opportunity presented itself, CCH was in a powerful position to act quickly. CCH convened a meeting of homeless service agencies to develop a strategy for using some of the reclaimed land for housing and homeless services. The organization had credibility and could mobilize coalitions quickly. AIDS Housing of Washington started with a narrow focus of building a housing facility. As the needs of the AIDS population changed, AHW greatly expanded their focus to include technical assistance, broader housing development, national models, and advocacy.

3. Facing Pressure to Reprioritize

When the outcome of a major event or defining moment is achieved, an organization can be faced with having to reprioritize some of its goals or even portions of its mission. More established organizations often have more experience with paradoxical circumstances and sometimes more finesse. Organizations that are just getting started do not have a history of being confronted with such decisions, and may not have structures in place to make such decisions. The very process of adapting to new challenges demands changes and an examination of all aspects of that organization.

When MOSES was faced with either/or situations, the organization became more politically focused and more activist, which caused tensions among some of the congregations that were members of the organization. Thus, MOSES, as an existing

organization, faced high risks and had to be careful about what form of activism they would embrace. CCH had experience over the years with the types of compromises that come along with housing development and homeless issues. They were able to use their experience to turn the compromises they had to make to their advantage—more units of housing would be built, and they would spread out around the city as well as at Lowry AFB. CCH was used to setbacks and had systems in place to transform them into successes.

4. Seeking Partners

Many organizations that are adapting already have established processes with partner organizations and determined objectives with funders. Adapting to evolving social issues potentially puts the organization at risk in its existing relationships with partners and funders. Developing organizations have the ability to be bolder than more established organizations. As a new group seeks out partners and partnerships to carry out its new work, it can even approach more unusual partners. More established organizations might be concerned that a new strategic approach will weaken an existing partnership. However, as an organization adapts, it often does need to seek out new alliances and coalitions.

MOSES had a very broad base of partners, beyond faith-based organizations and the community organizations that are their core members. Their membership included universities, businesses, and some suburban cities. Because of their membership, they made safer choices in seeking out partnerships. CCH did a very good job of combining an agenda or information, education, political activism, and some delivery of services. The increase in homelessness and the inadequacy of the governmental response has forced CCH to remain in the policy arena. CCH balances service delivery and advocacy to address immediate and long-term needs. AHW adapted in an entirely different way, using its growing expertise to take on national challenges and partners.

5. Developing New Leadership

Organizations just getting started often have more innovative ideas around how to develop new leadership and empower citizens. They may be more willing to take aggressive steps to make someone an informed participant than more established organizations. Existing organizations already have leaders—board members, staff, volunteers, and committees. When these organizations expand or repurpose, they need to determine if their leadership structure is still relevant or if new leadership needs to be cultivated. AHW had to find leaders in their staff that could participate on a national policy level. It was no longer sufficient to be familiar with local AIDS policy or local AIDS housing issues. MOSES realized that they needed to expand and determined that the suburbs were where new leadership had to come from in order for its new work to be successful.

Summary

The place in the life cycle of an organization has a direct impact on how it approaches various leadership challenges. The organizations included in this usage note are examples of successful groups who were already established and made the decision to broaden their agenda. They employed a range of strategic approaches to adapt to a new situation or circumstance. With their existing structures and political experience, they skillfully confronted challenges to their core values; reexamined how to forge partnerships; and reevaluated systems for developing new leadership. They were able to display the nimbleness characteristic of newer organizations and find new means to achieve effective results.

Attachment 1 - Organizations At-A-Glance

	Defining Moment/Key Event	Strategic Response	Types of Partners Sought	Leadership Development
MOSES	Organization looking for new project	Needs assessment	More mainstream partners, but broad based	Wide scale as a way to keep organizational energy
CCH	Lowry AFB closing, land becomes available	Fast and focused	Nature of homelessness is very political, more activist partners	National level
CASA of Maryland	Growing population of immigrants who are day laborers	Redress power inequities	Partnerships with other immigrant organizations and labor groups. Also collaborated with construction companies to create jobs	Employee rights education, advocacy education. Established the Center for Employment and Training. Realized that day laborers are true leaders
AHW	Growing AIDS population and people living longer	Huge expansion of scope of work, national level	Had to expand to national level, find partners with technical expertise	Needed to find leadership to participate on a national level
JforJ	Growing population of immigrants in Los Angeles	Wanted to add immigrants to the union to strengthen the union	Different groups of immigrants	Worker education, broadened union leadership development

Organizational Responses to Evolving Social Needs: Usage Note

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action

As the leadership research and development hub for the field of public service, the Research Center for Leadership in Action fosters leadership that transforms society.

Founded in 2003 at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, a top-ranked school for public service, the Center's unique approach integrates research with practice, bridges individual pursuits and collective endeavors, and connects local efforts with global trends. RCLA scholars use innovative social science methodologies to address ambitious questions that advance big ideas in leadership.

Public service leaders rely on RCLA to create customized leadership development and capacity-building programs that facilitate critical reflection, peer-to-peer learning and transformation at the individual, organizational and systems levels.

RCLA collaborates with the spectrum of public service organizations, from government agencies to nonprofits and community-based groups across the country and around the world. Partners include more than 700 social change organizations, universities and leadership centers in the United States and abroad, local and state government leaders, and major foundations and corporations including the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, AVINA Foundation, and Accenture. Learn more at <http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership>.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program

Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) is a signature program of the Ford Foundation designed to recognize, strengthen and support social change leaders and to highlight the importance of community leadership in improving people's lives.

The LCW Research and Documentation Component is housed at the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. LCW uses three parallel lines of inquiry ethnography, cooperative inquiry and narrative inquiry – to explore questions related to the work of leadership. RCLA is committed to developing participatory approaches to research and uses dialogue with LCW participants as a core of the research process. While the award portion of the program has concluded, RCLA continues to partner with nonprofit organizations to develop together new understandings of how social change leadership emerges and is sustained.

Learn more about Leadership for a Changing World at <http://www.leadershipforchange.org>, and learn more about the RCLA Social Change Leadership Network at http://wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/our_work/social_change_network.php.

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