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Applying Collective Change Leadership and Change to Resolve Complex Community Problems

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Applying Collective Leadership and Change to Resolve Complex Community Problems

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Organization of the presentation



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Teen pregnancy in the US

For countries reporting teen pregnancy stats, 15-19, the US is reported as having the highest teen pregnancy rate, 57 per 1,000 from the mid 1990s until 2011 (Guttmacher Institute, 2015; Sedgh et al., 2015).

Welfare reform, tougher enforcement of child support and an increase in comprehensive sex education programs has led to a downward trend since the mid 1990s (Chamness & Tillett-Zinzow, 2006).

Likely reasons that teen pregnancy rates remain high in the US are general disapproval of teen sexuality and comprehensive sex education for teens; abstinence only programs are less effective (Chamness, et al., 2006; Guttmacher Institute, 2019; Sedgh et al., 2015).

A disproportionate share of teen births occur in the African and Hispanic population, leading to a cycle of poverty among the most disadvantaged and largest ethnic groups within the US (2006).

Thus, successful programs that reduce teen births, especially those designed to engage Black and Hispanic groups, continue to be important within the U.S.

Milwaukee demographics

Milwaukee is the largest city in the State of Wisconsin a population of 595,351; 26.2% of its population is under the age of 18 and 51.9% of the city's total population are females.

Black and Hispanic individuals comprise 57.3% of Milwaukee's population as compared to 31.7% nationwide.

Persons in poverty in Milwaukee, 27.4%, compared to Wisconsin's reported 11.3% and the US' reported 12.3%.

Educational levels are 81.2% high school graduate as compared to 90% nationwide and 90.4% statewide.

Of the 100 largest U.S. cities, Milwaukee is the eleventh most racially segregated (Sauter, Comen & Stebbins, 2017).

The FBI ranks Milwaukee fourth for violent crime when compared to other Midwest cities of similar population (Fox, 2017).

Magnitude of the problem

Population demographics of Milwaukee highlight the magnitude of the city's problem.

In 2002, Milwaukee was reported as having the second highest percentage of total births to teens when compared to the 50 largest cities in the U.S. (Chamis et al., 2006).

In 2004, the Milwaukee teen pregnancy rate for teens ages 15-17 was 52.67 per 1,000 as compared to the nationwide rate of 22.1 per 1,000 for the same age group, which equated to 5.3% of Milwaukee teens ages 15-17 giving birth (2006, p. 10).

Due to disparities for teens and their newborns, including high levels of cyclical poverty, family dysfunction, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and high costs associated with teen births estimated at \$179 million annually for Milwaukee, community leadership was compelled to take action (2006).

The initiative

In 2005 the UW, which already invested nearly six million dollars annually in programs for youth development and reducing teen births, commissioned Chamness Consulting, a research firm, to partner with community leadership in assessing funding and program in recommending evidenced-based program practices that were most promising.

Work on the initiative began in 2006, and a publicly stated measurable goal formulated by the Public Health Department and supported by major stakeholders driving the coalition, including the Mayor's Office, was announced in early 2008:

Reduce teen births, ages 15 to 17, by 46% over a ten year period (2006-2015).

Milwaukee focused on teens ages 15-17 as that group had been most negatively impacted by the problem.

Applied theoretical frames

➤ **Change 8-step change model (Kotter, 2012)**

Establish a sense of urgency, create a guiding coalition, develop a vision and strategy, communicate the change vision, empower broad-based action, generate short-term wins, consolidate change and produce more wins and anchor new approaches in the culture

➤ **Leadership in the plural (Denis et al., 2012: Figure 1)**

(1) Sharing leadership for team effectiveness; (2) pooling leadership at the top to lead others; (3) Spreading leadership across levels over time; (4) producing leadership through interaction

➤ **Wicked social systems problem (Kolko, 2012; Rittel & Webber, 1973: Figure 1)**

Complex social and/or cultural problem resistant to resolution characterized by the interconnectedness it shares with other similar problems. Social/cultural problems are difficult to resolve: (1) incomplete or contradictory knowledge; (2) number of people and opinions involved; (3) large economic burden encountered with no guarantee of a permanent solution; and (4) interconnected with other wicked problems (5) dynamic in nature (6) unpredictability of human behavior

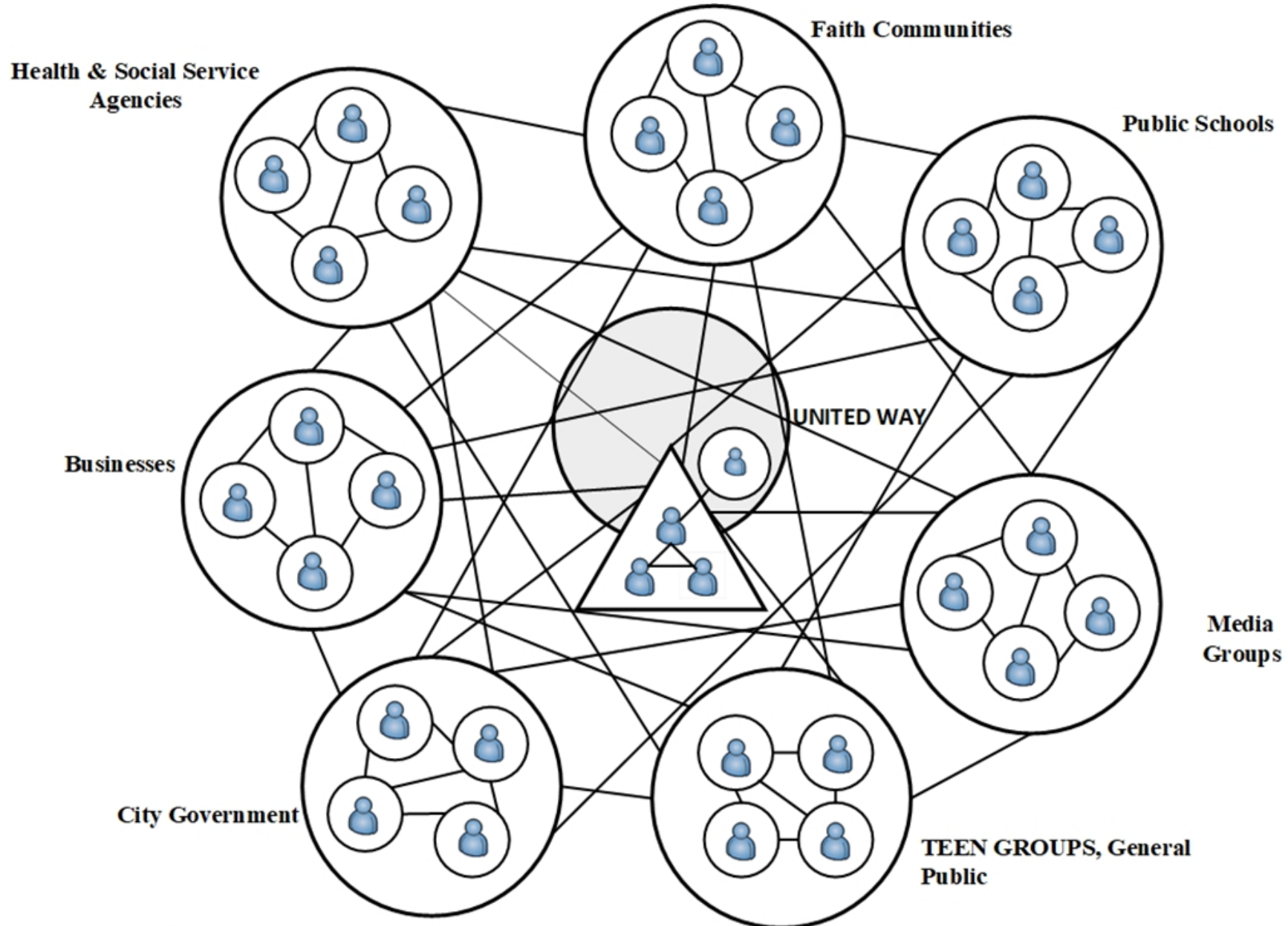


Figure 1: Collective Leadership Structures Embedded within a Social Systems Network

Establish a sense of urgency

Urgency drives the collaboration, cooperation and commitment to major change, and it was sustained for ten years.

The initial 2006 research report drive home the seriousness of the problem relating it to other serious problems: Significant increase in violent crime, an estimated long-term cost for each child born to a teen, and the cyclical social problems of sexual victimization, child abuse, family dysfunction and poverty. Fifty-eight community agencies interviews informed the report.

A sustained public media campaign drove the recognition of the seriousness of the problem. According to Serv Marketing, to change behavior of this nature, people need to feel “wildly uncomfortable.”

Hello rapist . . .



71% of teen births in Milwaukee are fathered by men over age 20 (UW, 2019).

Baby can wait . . .

<https://youtu.be/VOaAbk9UvHs>

Bus Shelter Posters



Create a guiding coalition

“Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is needed to sustain the process” (Kotter, 2012: 53).

- No one individual can do it; to support that statement, much has already been said regarding collective leadership models in place and the competency and consistency of leadership involved.
- To emphasize, as one interviewee stated, “We had the best people at the table. I don’t think either of the co-chairs missed one Oversight Committee meeting.”

Develop a vision and strategy

A vision should have five qualities: (1) paint a picture of what the future looks like; (2) appeal to the head and heart of major stakeholders; (3) be attainable; (4) be focused and (5) be easy to communicate (Kotter, 2012).

- For this project, the vision and the goal were the same, which made both measurable: Reduce teen births, ages 15 to 17, by 46% over a ten year period (2006-2015).
- It was definitely considered a stretch goal, higher than that published for other teen birth reduction programs across the country, but also determined achievable over a ten year period.
- The goal was focused and easy to communicate.
- The campaign appealed to the heart by clearly communicating the negative effects that teen births had on teens, their children and the community as a whole while it appealed to the head by reporting on evidence-based practices.

Communicate the change vision

For the vision to be the driving force, communicating it repeatedly in multiple ways is critical (Kotter, 2012).

High impact, low cost communication

- Local media outlets
- Posters at bus stops
- Tags on telephone poles
- In reports
- On social media
- In schools
- In clubs and associations

Empower broad-based action

“I think the idea of helping more people to become more powerful is important” (Kotter, 2012).

Sixty nonprofits continued to work on the problem, and the UW continued to fund them throughout the initiative

Same three people in triad positions for 11 years

Committed businesses and individuals financially supported the initiative

Mayor’s Office publicly supported the initiative

Milwaukee Public Schools developed a comprehensive evidence-based growth and development curriculum regardless of State Government repealing the HealthyYouth Act in 2012

Generate short-term wins

Achieving short term wins motivates those directly involved in the work to remain engaged (Kotter, 2012).

- First, the large social network provided a natural path to publicize short term wins as they occurred.
- Second, media campaigns kept the public informed of short term wins.
- Third, the quarterly OC meetings afforded opportunities to celebrate short term wins. As one interviewee stated, “From an internal standpoint, when you do good work such as this, it keeps the group energized.”

Consolidate change and produce more wins

In highly interdependent systems, consolidating change is far more difficult. Most of us have not yet learned how to introduce major change into these systems, which is extremely time-consuming due to the domino effect (Kotter, 2012: 142).

- The extent of these changes requires sufficient time. One of the project strengths is that leadership realized this would be the case and planned accordingly.
- From the onset, the initiative had a ten year timeframe with adequate resources.
- Each of the major successful actions discussed continued throughout the initiative, consolidating change and generating more wins.

Anchor new approaches in the culture

Changes in norms and shared values realized at the conclusion of major change are often influenced by the results of the initiative (Kotter, 2012).

It takes several years to determine whether changes will take root. This initiative formally ended with a 'thank you' public media campaign.

The change in teen birth rates was dramatic. Although too early to determine whether progress will continue, a bold goal of reducing teen births another 50% by 2023 has been set (interview data, 2019).

The OC continues to meet and the MPS curriculum remains in place, hopeful signs for continued success.

Constructive insights for complex social problems

Set an adequate time line to accomplish the work (This initiative took place over ten years.)

Focus on proactive strategies versus strategies already in place (Example: Preventing teen births versus assisting teens during pregnancy and following delivery)

Be culturally sensitive (Example from an interviewee: “We can’t come in and say, ‘Let’s talk about condoms’ to Catholic and Hispanic communities.)

Engage the target audience (Example: Interview data from teens informed the media campaign content.)

Identify and put in place evidence based strategies.

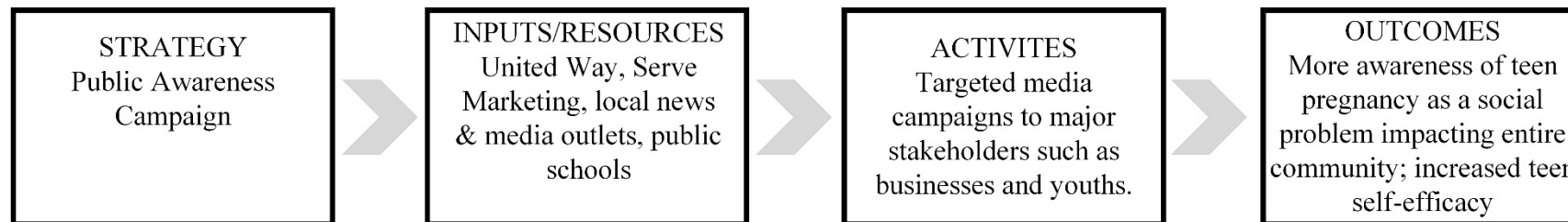


Figure 4: Example from Logic Model

Concluding points

The complexity of the problem drove the complexity of the leadership structure.

Leadership was united in quelling internal and external resistance respectfully and promptly by reminding resisters of the shared outcome they wished to achieve, creating a strong sense of unity throughout the initiative.

Leadership took the time to know major stakeholders, including major funding sources, in order to engage them in parts of the problem where they felt most compelled to provide support. Again, this was a way of maintaining a unified focus among stakeholders.

The focus on unconventional campaigns to prevent teen births was evident throughout the initiative, and much success has been attributed to this strategy.

Though the preceding change actions are replicable to varying degrees, certain contextual strategies are not. As one interviewee said, “It’s not like you can take what we did and place it elsewhere because every community is different” (interview data, 2019).

<https://www.unitedwaygmwc.org/Teen-Pregnancy-Prevention-Campaigns>

<https://www.digitalcitizen.life/embed-audio-files-powerpoint>

<https://youtu.be/VOaAbk9UvHs>