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Collective leadership development in the civic arena

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Abstract

Purpose – As a collective paradigm of leadership emerges in the literature, many community leadership programs still align with leader-centric perspectives. The Kansas Leadership Center's Leadership Transformation Grant is an exemplar of developing collective leadership in the civic arena. The purpose of this article is twofold: (1) to present the findings of a community-engaged, qualitative research study on the impact of collective leadership development on the practice of civic leadership and (2) to discuss relevant implications learned from reflections on the methodology for the practice of community-engaged research.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is a form of engaged research (Van de Ven, 2007) and is consistent with the principles of community-based research (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). I took an exploratory approach to this study because the knowledge intersection of collective leadership, civic leadership and leadership development is still emerging and understudied. I explored the individual, group and systems levels as three components of a complex adaptive system (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). To better understand the dynamic relationship between individual, group and system in this grant team, I employed a three-phase study including methods of deliberative civic engagement, open-ended survey and interview.

Findings – Findings illustrate the effectiveness of the grant program on developing a shared language and leadership framework and clarifying leadership goals for participants. Implications include the importance of collective leadership development opportunities that center adaptive challenges and convene participants across levels of leadership and sectors. Additionally, the findings highlight the need to consider authority, identity and culture as central components of the practice of leadership. Reflections on the community-engaged methodology demonstrate the value of learning about leadership practices from the community practitioners to inform community leadership development interventions. Implications include approaching research as iterative and pushing back on academic norms that provide tension in engaged work.

Originality/value – Little research crosses all three boundaries of collective leadership, leadership development and civic leadership literature. This intersection focuses on understanding how collective leadership can contribute to enhancing the practice of civic leadership. The current study is situated within this knowledge gap and explores (1) the experiences of members of a civic group who have (2) participated in leadership development that (3) aligns with a collective leadership paradigm and are (4) trying to make progress on an adaptive challenge.

Keywords Civic leadership, Leadership education, Collective leadership, Community-based research

Paper type Research paper

The complex social issues of the 21st century are multi-faceted. They do not reside within one sector, one system, one organization, one group or individual. They cross social, political, economic and cultural boundaries (Crosby & Bryson, 2010). A collective paradigm of leadership is emerging in the literature (Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter, & Keegan, 2012; de Brún, O'Donovan, & McAuliffe, 2019; Ospina, Foldy, Fairhurst, & Jackson, 2020) and is better aligned with civic challenges than leader-centric perspectives (Dugan, Turman, & Torrez, 2015). Collective leadership emphasizes shared responsibility among stakeholders for making progress (Becker, 2019), which means that leadership is needed from a diverse range of people—not just those with authority (Currie & Lockett, 2011). Across the United

States, community leadership programs (CLP) have been a popular avenue for communities to develop civic leaders. In a review of CLP literature, Kniffin and Patterson (2019) found that most CLPs are aligned with leader-centric perspectives and call upon CLPs to re-imagine their approach to align theory and practice.

Kniffin and Patterson (2019) name the Kansas Leadership Center's (KLC) Leadership Transformation Grants (LTG) as an exemplar of a CLP that centralizes an adaptive challenge and invites members at varying levels (i.e. authority, front line) and across sectors (rather than within an organization) to participate in leadership development training. This current study examines the impact of the LTG on the practice of civic leadership for a community coalition focused on school safety for LGBTQ + students.

The purpose of this article is twofold: (1) to present the findings of a community-engaged, qualitative research study on the impact of collective leadership development on the practice of civic leadership and (2) to discuss relevant implications learned from reflections on the methodology for the practice of community-engaged research. Findings will be relevant for leadership educators interested in developing civic leadership to address complex social issues as well as community-engaged research scholars and partners.

Relevant literature
This current study explores (1) the experiences of members of a civic group who have (2) participated in leadership development that (3) aligns with a collective leadership paradigm and are (4) trying to make progress on an adaptive challenge. In this section, I discuss literature on the intersections of collective leadership theory, civic leadership and leadership development to gain understanding about the theoretical, contextual and practical elements of the research problem. Relevant literature related to community-engaged research will be provided in the methodology section.

Collective leadership
The term collective leadership is best understood as a paradigm of leadership distinct from the leader-centric paradigm that dominates academic literature in the field of leadership studies. The leader-centric paradigm focuses on a heroic individual who has rare skills and behaviors needed to solve leadership challenges (Rost, 1993). Early theories of leadership such as "great man" and "trait" theories (e.g. Carlyle, 1841) set the foundation of the leader-centric paradigm that was prominent in the 19th century. In contrast, collective leadership scholars recognize a variety of strengths and assets as contributions to the leadership process and a shared responsibility for solving problems. Collective leadership is described as "emergent processes and practices that help actors interact, coconstruct meaning, and advance a common goal unattainable by themselves" (Ospina & Foldy, 2016, p. 1). Collective leadership is related to other terms of leadership including but not limited to distributive leadership (Spillane, 2005), shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), network leadership (Cullen-Lester & Yammarino, 2016), complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007), adaptive leadership (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009) and leadership-in-practice (Raelin, 2016).

Although the theory of collective leadership is still emerging within the field of leadership studies, collective leadership has been present in the practices of many communities and cultures for centuries. For example, an ecosystemic view of collective leadership is a facet of the Māori worldview that is informs cultural practices such as the ancient process called *wānanga,* broadly translated as "to collectively deliberate deeply with intention" (Spiller, Wolfgramm, Henry, & Pouwhare, 2020, p. 518). Collective leadership is weaved into the very core aspects of the Māori culture. Additionally, the study of social movements demonstrates

that core practices of what is now termed collective leadership are essential to the long-time practice of social movements (Keshtiban, Callahan, & Harris, 2021).

Civic leadership

Leadership is needed and practiced in a variety of contexts (e.g. business, government, nonprofit, education and community settings). Couto (2014) identifies civil society as the overlapping space between business, government and the third sector. Leadership that occurs within this civil space can be characterized as civic leadership. The vision of civic leadership, as described by Chrislip and O'Malley (2013), is "a means of sharing responsibility for acting together in pursuit of the common good" (p. 1). Additionally, Kliewer and Priest (2017) situate social justice as the purpose and orientation of civic leadership writing that "civic leadership centers inherently on creating conditions for groups of people to make progress on social, political, economic, and moral issues in ways that help them more fully realize the requirements of justice" (p. 2).

Leadership in the civic space has been historically understudied compared to organizational contexts, and civic leadership is not a widely used term in the literature. However, terms such as community organizing, social change and leadership in social movements lead to more promising models of leading in civic settings. For example, The Social Change Model of Leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), although designed primarily for student leadership development, provides insight to values needed within individuals, groups and communities to advance socially responsible and collaborative forms of leadership. Additionally, Ganz's (2010) community organizing framework, popular within social change movements, defines leadership as "accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty" (p. 1). These examples demonstrate the fit between collective approaches of leadership in addressing civic challenges, yet little has been done to explicitly study the impact of collective leadership in civic contexts.

Leadership development

Daloz Parks (2005) demonstrates that leadership can be learned and developed, and there is a plethora of literature on leadership education (for example as evidenced throughout this journal). However, the literature on how to develop collective leadership is very limited. Most studies on collective leadership are unclear about how the actors are made knowledgeable about collective leadership. In several studies (e.g. Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 2010), the participants do learn the term(s) collective, shared, distributed or adaptive leadership. More commonly, collective leadership behaviors are observed by researchers or the collective qualities are rated on a scale by participants. There are some examples of organizations who have adopted a collective leadership perspective and are beginning to make efforts in developing collective leadership (see, for example, Teach For All, 2022). Even though some literature on how to develop collective leadership is emerging from practitioner spaces, research on the effectiveness of collective leadership development is severely lacking (Arkedis *et al.*, 2023).

Azzam and Riggio (2003) note that CLPs have been a popular mechanism for leadership development in the civic context in the United States for over 50 years and define them "formal leadership development programs sponsored by local community agencies with the aim of training future and current leaders in the skills necessary to serve their communities" (p. 55). Wituk *et al.* (2003) wrote that 750 communities had CLPs and explain that two-thirds of those CLPs are sponsored by Chambers of Commerce and primarily focus on providing participants with information about the community, visiting community entities and networking within the program and with other community leaders (p. 76). Porr (2011) notes

that developing leadership skills can often be secondary to networking and conducted a study on the differences between "meet and greet" programs and those focused on leadership skills. In a study of 86 CLPs in Ohio, Porr found that "meet and greet" programs were more prevalent if they were sponsored by Chambers of Commerce than academic sponsors. An analysis of CLPs across the United States (Kniffin & Patterson, 2019) indicates that the majority of these programs operate from a leader-centric paradigm and often limit participation to "leaders" with formal titles and positions (e.g. nonprofit directors, board presidents, city managers). The literature demonstrates an interest in studying collective practices and implementing CLPs. However, the elements of collective leadership, leadership development and civic leadership remain disconnected.

Intersections and gaps
Little research crosses all three boundaries of collective leadership, leadership development and civic leadership literature (see Figure 1). The intersection of collective leadership and leadership development focuses on how to develop effective teams and systems. Its limitation is its disconnection from complex social issues in the civic arena. The intersection of collective leadership and civic leadership focuses on understanding how collective leadership is practiced in a civic setting. Its limitation is the disregard of the developmental processes of integrating theory and practice. The intersection of civic leadership and leadership development focuses on developing civic leaders and enhancing community leadership programs. Its limitation is the reproduction of the leader-centric paradigm. The intersection of collective leadership, leadership development and civic leadership focuses on understanding how collective leadership can contribute to enhancing the practice of civic leadership. To advance research in this gap, this study explores the practice of civic leadership through a community coalition that participated in a leadership development intervention from a collective paradigm.

The collaborators and intervention
This community-engaged research study involved several collaborators who were all contributors to the research process. Similar to a subjectivity statement which situates the
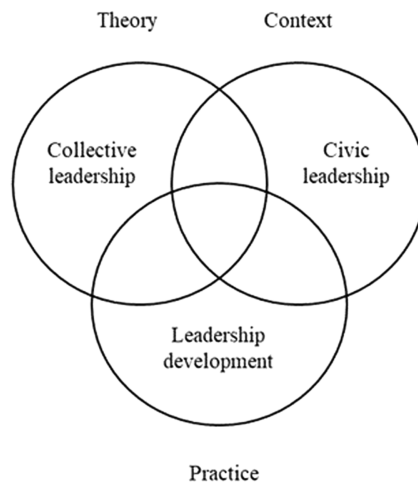
Source(s): Figure by author

author within the context of the study, this section outlines the roles, responsibilities and key contextual information about the collaborators.

The primary researcher

I conducted this study as my dissertation for a PhD program in Cultural Foundations of Education. By design, dissertations are meant to demonstrate the research skills of a student to the academic community. Conducting community-engaged dissertations require navigating tensions between the principles of engagement that emphasize power sharing and the academic requirements of individually published original research. To help with this, I adopted the role of primary researcher setting clear roles for myself and the collaborators while also creating the conditions for co-creation of the study design, knowledge creation and knowledge benefits. I brought to the collaboration the ability to dedicate significant time to the study, knowledge of academic literature and experience with leadership development. I learned a great deal about civic leadership development and the civic practice of leadership through this collaboration. Now as a tenure-track faculty member in leadership, I continue to advance research and practice at the intersection of collective leadership, leadership development and civic leadership.

The Kansas Leadership Center

The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster leadership for stronger, healthier and more prosperous Kansas communities. They are funded through a core operating grant from the Kansas Health Foundation. They carry out their mission by providing leadership development to Kansans through a variety of programs focused on civic leadership. The KLC framework includes five guiding principles: (1) leadership is an activity, not a position; (2) anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere; (3) it starts with you and must engage others; (4) your purpose is clear and (5) it's risky (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). In addition, their principles are translated into four competencies: (1) diagnose the situation, (2) manage self, (3) intervene skillfully and (4) energize others (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). The KLC served as a gatekeeper to the participants of the study and provided the leadership development intervention. This was one of the early studies connected to KLC's research program called Third Floor Research, which studies KLC's framework and training.

The Pride Coalition of Kansas

The Pride Coalition of Kansas (pseudonym) is a grassroots LGBTQ + advocacy organization that brings awareness and change in Kansas for and with the LGBTQ + community. Coalition members advocate for non-discrimination policies that help protect LGBTQ + individuals and provide general education about gender identity and sexual orientation. A primary focus of their work is on the protection of LGBTQ + youth within schools. The Pride Coalition of Kansas is structured as a network of volunteers dispersed across the state including mental health workers, students, professors, personal development speakers and consultants, full-time parents, full-time volunteers, teachers, Gay-Straight Alliance advisers, school counselors and more. The Pride Coalition is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization governed by a board.

The leadership development intervention

The KLC's Leadership Transformation Grant (LTG) is for civically-engaged organizations in Kansas interested increasing the capacity of individuals, developing a shared language to deal with difficult challenges and making more progress on tough problems. The KLC,

through support from the Kansas Health Foundation, provides grants to groups/organizations across the business, education, faith, government and nonprofit sectors through the LTG program. "In the nine years of awarding these grants, KLC has given 500 grants, trained more than 11,000 people and partnered with more than 315 Kansas organizations and communities" (Kelly, 2023, para. 7). Groups apply to the grant naming a specific challenge they are facing and identify a group of 20–40 people who will participate in KLC programs over the year. The participants, at the time of the study, could attend any of the three programs but in sequential order: (1) Your Leadership Edge, (2) Lead for Change, (3) Equip to Lead. There are several training sessions offered throughout the year, and they are not dedicated to a specific grant team. Therefore, a participant in one grant program may attend alongside members from their team, other teams, or individuals not on a grant team. The Pride Coalition received a grant from the KLC and received cost-free leadership development training for 25 people across their network.

Methodology
Since a primary purpose of this article is present implications learned from the reflection on the community-engaged methodology it is described in detail. Often methodology sections simply provide context and transparency for how findings were created. However, in this article, the methodology section may be a point of interest in itself for participants of community-campus collaborations involving research.

Participant selection
There were 60 LTG recipients including community coalitions/networks, nonprofits, higher education institutions and municipal divisions at the start of my study design. I visited with the LTG administrator to learn more about the recipients and grant program and then developed three criteria for narrowing down the list. Those included civic groups that: (1) were coalition based, (2) clearly worked on a complex social issue and (3) fully-participated in the grant program (i.e. they adequately used the leadership training opportunities). The LTG administrator applied those criteria and provided me with a list of six groups.

After reviewing their websites, I eliminated three for various reasons (i.e. participating in another study already, participants were all named authority figures, and the complex issue was too broad). Then I discussed the three remaining options with the director of the KLC's Third Floor Research program. He agreed all three groups were a good fit for the study, and I initially selected a group focused on food insecurity, since that was an issue I exercised leadership on myself. Unable to make contact with that organization, I reached out to the director of the Pride Coalition of Kansas. The director, Isabella (all names pseudonyms) agreed to meet with me and brought two other members of the organization. We had a meal together and discussed the research. Excited about the opportunity, they brought the idea to their board and the board voted to participate in the study. After completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at my institution, I worked with the Pride Coalition's national office to obtain IRB approval from them.

Community-engaged research
This study resides in one of four forms of engaged scholarship identified by Van de Ven (2007)—informed basic research, which is "undertaken to describe, explain, or predict a social phenomenon" and "solicits advice and feedback from key stakeholders" (p. 27). The KLC was an early collaborator providing advice and feedback on the appropriateness of the study, lines of inquiry and participant selection. Once the Pride Coalition was selected as a participant, the director and other members became closer collaborators. I hoped to conduct

"collaborative basic research" with them, which "entails greater sharing of power and activities among researchers and stakeholders" (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 27), but time is a resource members of the Pride Coalition do not often have. All members of the Pride Coalition are volunteers, there are no full-time paid staff members. As shared by the participants, their time is dedicated to the urgent priority of keeping kids safe—such as helping prevent suicide. Yet reciprocity, a process of co-creation where collaborators share power and are generative together (Dostilio *et al.*, 2012), still occurred with integrity through microdoses. For example, a participant provided feedback on focus group questions that led to significant changes. Isabella and I had phone calls throughout the creation of the study that informed the time, location and approach to the study.

My community-engaged methodology was consistent with the principles of community-based research (CBR). Strand *et al.* (2003) describe three central features: (1) CBR is a collaborative enterprise between academic researchers (professors and students) and community members. (2) CBR seeks to democratize knowledge by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination. (3) CBR has as its goal social action for the purpose of achieving social change and social justice. (p. 6). These principles are evidenced through the research design, data collection and data analysis processes of the study.

Research design and data collection
I took an exploratory approach to this study because the knowledge intersection of collective leadership, civic leadership and leadership development is still emerging and understudied. I explored the individual, group and systems levels as three components of a complex adaptive system (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007). This study was designed around three research questions: (RQ1) In what ways does collective leadership development impact the practice of civic leadership? (RQ2) How do experiences of this impact compare across multiple levels (i.e. individual, group, system)? (RQ3) In what ways does an individual's position influence the operationalization of collective leadership development in civic leadership practice?

To better understand the dynamic relationship between individual, group and system in this grant team, I employed a three-phase study (summarized in Table 1). Originally, Phase I was designed to explore primarily RQ1 and the group level of RQ2. Phase II was designed to explore RQ3 and the individual level of RQ2. Phase III was designed to understand RQ1 and the system level of RQ2. However, analysis revealed a deep interconnectedness across phases and levels of leadership leading to each phase contributing insight to each research question. Additionally, through data analysis and writing, a fourth research question emerged: (RQ4) In what ways does the practice of civic leadership inform the way collective leadership development ought to be taught? A significant amount of data across all three phases better aligned with this question than the original three.

Phase	Method	Informed by	Participants
I - Group	Deliberative civic engagement	Story circles and public narrative	8 grant team members
II - Individual	Open-ended survey	Collaborative autoethnography	13 grant team members
III - System	Interview	Semi-structured interview	3 people associated with the grant team

Source(s): Table by author

Table 1.
A multi-level
exploratory study

Phase I. Isabella agreed to having the Pride Coalition participate in the study because of the opportunity to convene individuals who participated in the LTG across different programs and to continue their leadership development. Therefore, in Phase I participants were invited to a two-hour meaning making experience in-person. I used a deliberative civic engagement framework for civic leadership development (Kliewer & Priest, 2016), which is a method for leadership development and leadership inquiry. This helped achieve the mutual benefits of the participants and researcher. This framework draws from Ganz's (2010) public narrative for individuals, which consists of the Story of Self, the Story of Us and the Story of Now. Kliewer and Priest (2016) extend this individual storytelling practice into a group setting consisting of four stages focused on helping to connect individuals to group purposes and motivate action toward a collective purpose.

For this study, the framework was enacted by inviting participants to (1) set community commitments; (2) tell stories through a Story Circle process (Roadside Theater, 1999); (3) name themes, patterns or similarities across the stories and (4) complete worksheets and share results regarding individual actions they may take regarding their common goals in the next six months. This session was audio and video recorded and later transcribed. Flip charts and worksheets were captured digitally.

Phase II. In an effort to make participation more accessible to all participants (i.e. not limited by time and geography), Phase II was designed for participation online over seven weeks. I drew from Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez's (2016) work on collaborative autoethnography, which allows participants to write a narrative about their own experiences while doing so in a collaborative nature. The process includes (1) co-creating prompts, (2) writing individually, (3) reading and commenting on each other's drafts, (4) writing individually to expand based on comments and (5) analyzing collaboratively.

In round one, participants had three weeks to draft an initial response to a 12-question, open-ended questionnaire that was designed with advice and feedback from two participants previously. The 13 participants who participated in round one were provided access to a Google folder with all 13 documents and were invited to read through the questionnaires and add comments and/or questions. Although participants ultimately did not end up commenting, similar to my experience with member checking, I felt making this knowledge accessible to people beyond myself to be aligned with principles of engaged research. I added comments to all 13 documents. In round three, participants were able to add text or respond to comments over two-weeks; five participants provided responses.

Phase III. The third phases included interviews with three individuals who interacted with members of the Pride Coalition grant team members but who were not part of that team. The purpose was to gain additional perspectives of the larger system in which the Pride Coalition operates. The interviews ranged from 40–50 min and were conducted over the phone with audio recording. I used a semi-structured interview protocol and a dialogue style (Roulston, 2010), meaning that I shared some of my thoughts with the participants as well as listening to theirs. The three interviews provided similar information, crystallized the findings, but also indicated information on the system was saturated already through the previous phases.

Data analysis

Data analysis began for me during data collection as I actively listened, took notes and documented trends in the conversation. Participants also helped with initial analysis during data collection by naming patterns, similarities and themes they heard in stories during Phase I. I also transcribed all the recordings personally without software. This process allowed me to listen to each word slowly while kinetically engaging with the language. After transcribing a rough draft of each transcript, I listened to each full recording another time to

hear the narrative in real-time. Several themes I present in the findings started ruminating by this point in my analysis.

I conducted In Vivo coding, "word[s] or short phrase[s] from the actual language found in the qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 105). This allowed me to stay close to what the participants said without jumping to my academic interpretation. Occasionally I applied analytic codes that were related to the KLC framework. Because this study was intentionally multi-level, I coded and conducted thematic analysis for each phase individually at first. Ultimately, I found the themes across all phases to be connected and represented at multiple levels. Therefore, a second cycle of coding—axial coding—was used to clarify my categories and bring all three phases together. Axial coding can be used to "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured'" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 244). Clear categories and themes emerged, yet it was still unclear how these themes would be organized and presented. A set of themes directly related to the initial three research questions seemed to be answering something different. Therefore, two meta-themes were developed. The first meta-theme "Leadership Educators Teaching Pride" included all the themes related to the expected findings of the study. The second, "Pride Teaching Leadership Educators and Scholars" became an equally robust set of findings that were unexpected.

Findings

A summary of findings for both meta-themes is presented in this section. A full set of findings may be found in the full dissertation (Kniffin, 2019).

The expected: leadership educators teaching pride

The research questions devised before data collection focused on how the leadership development intervention impacted the practice of civic leadership with a focus on multiple levels (individual, group, system). These questions were created from my assumption that leadership educators educate leaders. In this case, the participants were the civic leaders and they were learning leadership from the faculty at the KLC as part of their grant experience. These questions were designed to understand how that leadership development experience impacted their practice of leadership including differences across leadership levels and positions. The findings related to RQs 1–3 are presented here in three themes.

Using a common language and framework. The participants surfaced the value of having a common language provided by the KLC. Although knowing the terms and language was not deemed necessary, participants said it served as a "shortcut" in their work. Using the KLC language could quickly bring focus back to the leadership work, get them on the same page and save time from having to explain things. They also valued the KLC principles and framework for its application to their leadership work. One participant demonstrates the value of the KLC framework with their organization's work:

> You know the other thing is like leadership is an activity right, it's not a position. . .Grounding your volunteers in that is a real solid basis for (a) them all having the same language, and (b) giving them permission to lead from where they are. And that they can lead. And they can make a difference.

One of the participants who worked alongside grant participants but did not participate in a KLC training himself noted that he was able to pick up on the language by reading the *Your Leadership Edge* book (a book that accompanies one of KLC's programs) and being around others who used the language.

Leveraging leadership development. Beyond using the KLC language and concepts, the participants described numerous ways they exercised leadership since the KLC training sessions. For example, several leadership practices aligned with the KLC framework: (1) diagnosing the status of non-discrimination policies within a school district (diagnose the

situation), (2) implementing new approaches to self-care to sustain work with the Pride Coalition (manage self), (3) creating a new position on the Pride Coalition's board focused on research (intervene skillfully) and (4) using leadership development professional background to build the capacity of others (energize others). The participants shared this framework and put it into action. For example, one participant describes how the training helped her realize her lack of confidence how she tries to speak up more: "[I'm] really exercising my voice, exercising my position, and not really relying on that position but utilizing that position to engage people who aren't always invited to the table for discussion."

Engaging others: building an army of people. In connection to the KLC competency *energize others* and the principle *leadership starts with you and must engage others*, a lot of the participant stories of leadership focused on building an army of people to address their common goal: eliminating homophobia and transphobia. One participant shared this sentiment with tears in her eyes:

> I remember thinking it was going to be impossible, cause I remember you know thinking, what can one person possibly do? Like one person can't possibly do. . .anything about that. Um and like one person can't, but like a whole army of people can.

The Pride Coalition is a dispersed network of volunteers. The participants had a keen awareness that the current set of volunteers would not be enough to accomplish their goals. Therefore, instead of continuing individual interventions to exhaustion, they were finding ways to bring others on board both to the Pride Coalition itself but also to the movement by providing more LGBTQ + training sessions across the state. They also engaged key partners in the work such as school boards, service providers within government agencies or treatment facilities and school personnel. Participants also acknowledged the role students played in their own advocacy but desired to take this burden away from them.

In conclusion to these expected findings, the data showed that the LTG led participants to adopt and utilize a common language, demonstrate enactment of leadership aligned the KLC framework and principles and leverage the energize others framework to build an army of leaders. In whole, the LTG shows overarching promise for providing leadership development to community members. The specifics of the findings (i.e. what language and competencies named and used; examples of interventions) can provide the KLC with information on what components of the curriculum most frequently translated into action.

The unexpected: pride teaching leadership educators and scholars

During analysis an unexpected fourth research question emerged from a large set of data that seemed valuable but not connected to the original three questions. The findings in this section help answer the question: In what ways does the practice of civic leadership inform the way collective leadership development ought to be taught? These findings represent the wisdom shared by the participants who are deep in the practice of civic leadership. In other words, these themes represent what the KLC and other leadership educators can learn from civic leaders.

Rivers and tributaries. I was particularly drawn to the Pride Coalition because they were a "loose coalition" rather than a formal organization with clear boundaries. They turned out to be even more loosely connected than I thought. Although each member of the grant team was affiliated with the Pride Coalition of Kansas, they attended different trainings on different days. They did not do their Pride Coalition work "together," but they worked toward the same common goal. One participant named that although they "were all functioning at like this bigger scale" and that they were all "focused so much on our little pieces of it that we don't always have to see the whole big picture of what everything is—changing the face of Kansas." Another participant jumped in and said, "It's like a river and tributary." Another

participant explained, "our big river is to undo homophobia and transphobia," and another clarified that it was "working with and for LGBTQ youth" because "I wish somebody would have done that for me." The tributaries were their own settings in which they had influence such as schools and school districts, Gay Straight Alliance organizations and treatment facilities. The participants articulated the value of a loose coalition who could access similar leadership training in connection to their river. They needed to learn how to lead in their tributaries and yet be connected even more to others in the water system through the KLC language and concepts.

Both leadership and authority are needed. The KLC teaches the skill of distinguishing leadership from authority. The participants described why both leadership and authority are needed to make change in practice. The participants named legislation and policies as key components of authority that help provide support and protection for LGBTQ + students and their allies. Policies in schools can guide where students can go to the bathroom, get dressed for physical education class or how teachers address transgender students by name. The Pride Coalition itself has served as an authority on LGBTQ + issues such that principals have been able to ask them to come do training sessions for faculty and staff. Pride Coalition's national organization being seen as an authority on LGBTQ + matters, especially within schools, provides direction and protection for schools navigating uncharted territory. As one participant describes:

> Pride Coalition of Kansas if often my sounding board and support system for me in particular. Before I take some big step, I often run things by them to see what other people are doing in the state or nation. I always describe [Pride as] the umbrella. It's protecting us from the rain. . .So it's like the parent holding the umbrella there and you can go running to your parent for help, but you also leave them and go out on your own.

Isabella, the director of the Pride Coalition of Kansas, also noted the value of having someone formally named as an authority figure within their loose coalition. Even though she is a volunteer, her title and some of the other administrative roles provide a glue to hold the coalition together.

Culture and identity matter in leadership work. Culture and identity are not specifically highlighted in KLC's principles or framework nor are they discussed much in the collective leadership literature. Yet the participants returned to culture and identity numerous times to describe their leadership practice. The participants specifically described the impact of the cultural context of Kansas and the Midwest in their leadership work. Kansas culture includes strong conservative and Christian values. It is the home of the Westboro Baptist Church— known for its picketing at funerals of LGBTQ + people and hate speech directed at LGBTQ + people. Unlike the Westboro approach, most of the opposition to the LGBTQ + community is representative of a "Kansas nice" culture. One of the participants explains it "So, it's like, I don't hate anybody, but you know, I'm going to push out utterly ridiculous legislation." Or another participant who said that her principal politely asked her to remove her sign about a certain sexuality because her school administration thought it might not be appropriate for her non-Gay Straight Alliance students to see it.

Each participant also navigated their identity as either an LGBTQ + identifying person or an ally. For example, one participant shared that "a lot of the staff in the district identify me as the gay person who knows all the LGBTQ + stuff, so a lot of people come to me with questions." Another participant noted her non-LGBTQ + identity gave her "an automatic platform" with privilege to educate community members in ways others cannot. Other participants describe living privileged identities such as being viewed as straight or as a man when in reality they were married to a transgender partner or were transgender themselves. Ultimately, participants had a layered view of social identity and articulated how many aspects of their culture and identity weaved into their practice of civic leadership.

In conclusion, a wealth of knowledge was shared by the participants about the context of their leadership practice. They described their loose coalition through a vivid metaphor that resonated among members. They demonstrated an integrated approach to leadership and challenged the isolation of concepts like authority, identity and leadership levels.

Implications and recommendations

RQ1(In what ways does collective leadership development impact the practice of civic leadership?) focuses on the practice of the Pride Coalition after their LTG intervention. The findings demonstrate the participants used the KLC language and frameworks to guide their practices and inform their collaboration with one another. The KLC Framework (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015) also provided them an inspiration to engage/energize others in their leadership practice and to strengthen connections within their coalition. RQ4 (In what ways does the practice of civic leadership inform the way collective leadership development ought to be taught?) encourages looking the practice of the participants to inform leadership educators. Doing this in light of RQ1 leads to the following recommendations for conveners and teachers of CLPs. Contrary to prevalent practices of CLPs (Porr, 2011), convening participants by a common "river" or adaptive challenge may be effective in advancing civic work. Arkedis et al. (2023) describe this as convening collective groups to participate in facilitated dialogue, collaboration and learning and cooperative inquiry. Additionally, CLPs ought to consider introducing a common vocabulary and framework that can be easily understood and put into practice. The findings demonstrate that training various participants of the collective at different times can strengthen their practice of leadership through the common framework. More research is needed to understand the effectiveness of other frameworks and interventions beyond the KLC's LTG. More studies on collective leadership development ought to clearly introduce collective leadership to participants through a recognizable intervention and study it's impacts in contrast to studies that focus only on collective leadership behaviors not explicitly taught to participants.

RQ 2 (How do experiences of this impact compare across multiple levels (i.e. individual, group, system)?) and RQ3 (In what ways does an individual's position influence the operationalization of collective leadership development in civic leadership practice?) highlight the different positionalities of leadership participants. The findings suggest that all participants, regardless of their authority roles, ought to learn about authority and leadership as interrelated concepts. Similarly, although each person holds a unique set of identities, the role of identity in the operationalization of leadership development in the civic context matters for all identities. These findings in relationship to RQ4 suggest leadership educators ought to consider how to centralize and hold space for identity work within collective leadership development. Future research is needed to better understand best practices in accounting for identity in leadership learning and practice including identities as authority figures. Additionally, it may be important to consider multiple levels of leadership but the findings suggest they do not operate in isolation and ought to be studied and developed thorough an integrative approach. Johnson (2006) states, "the key to understanding social life is neither just the forest nor the trees but the forest *and* the trees and the consequences that result from their dynamic relationship to each other" (p. 12). Using this both *and* mentality, we might better understand how the practice of civic leadership is occurring in dynamic ways across individual, group and system levels.

Reflections upon the research process itself, rather than simply the data produced through it, can also yield important recommendations. In this study, reflecting on the research process leads to several recommendations for community-engaged and/or leadership scholars and institutions. It is common in research—in leadership development and other fields—to select an intervention and then study its outcomes (i.e. impact, effectiveness, experiences). When

less is known about the intervention, such as a collective leadership development intervention like the LTG, we may not always know what our questions about the outcomes should be. Perhaps learning more about the context of where the outcomes are being practiced can help researchers devise better questions about the outcomes and help leadership developers design better interventions. This can be challenging when the research process is often taught as a series of steps to carry out the scientific method: research questions, frameworks, methodology, methods, analysis and writing. Some acknowledgement about the interactive nature of this process is present in qualitative research literature (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017), but academic systems and policies are strong. For example, many doctoral programs require a full proposal including research questions, methodology and methods prior to IRB submission and participant recruitment. Finalized descriptions of interview protocols and recruitment procedures are also needed for IRB. In engaged studies, getting approval for research in smaller increments may allow for more collaboration between the primary researcher and the research collaborators.

Additionally, best practices of community-engaged research can make one desire to involve community members and/or participants in all stages of the research process, which may not be feasible as found in this study. However, engaged studies can occur in a variety of ways (Van de Ven, 2007). Even in a basic form like this one can be co-created by deeply listening to the community through the research process, so they can be co-creators of knowledge without always being co-researchers or co-writers. For example, in this study doing my own transcription from scratch, listening back to the recordings and In Vivo coding made me listen deeply to the participants and what they were trying to teach me. I brought the research experience and time; they brought the knowledge and wisdom. Being open to honoring knowledge the community was sharing beyond what I was asking about led to insightful findings.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the value of community-engaged collaborations through the example of an engaged study about civic leadership development. A rich description of the collaborators and methodology provide examples of how to design engaged studies that involve participants in a variety of ways that include diverse perspectives while addressing the tension of time faced by practitioners. The findings demonstrated expected knowledge in the described value of the leadership development intervention on the practice of civic leaders. Implications for leadership educators include the value of collective leadership development including a common language and leadership framework; the importance of individual and collaborative leadership development opportunities and the need to consider authority, identity and culture as central components to the practice of leadership. Implications for community-engaged scholars include approaching research as iterative and the need to push back on academic policies that are in tension with engaged approaches.

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