# The Power of Institutions and Agents: Sources of Failed University-Community Collaboration

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**Abstract**

*Some urban university engagements with their local communities have given the mistaken impression that universities can be neutral or equal partners with their communities. When universities adopt this view (e.g., the case presented in this article), they contribute to unsuccessful partnerships with their communities. Failures can be prevented if universities establish engagement programs and structures that link faculty expertise to the knowledge needs of the community.*

Local settings throughout the world are rising as research sites for contemporary social analysis. Many forces have contributed to making local life significant. The globalization of a market-based economy, for instance, has brought about a resurgence of cities as essential transaction points for finance, trade, and management (Sassen 2000). Local government decision-making has taken on increased importance with the devolution of political responsibility for both social and economic policy (Clarke and Gaile 1998). Higher education has also contributed to a renewed emphasis on the local context. The Kellogg Commission Report, "Returning to Our Roots: A Learning Society" (September 1999), called for all public and land-grant institutions to enter into partnerships that would make life-long learning more accessible, meaningful, and affordable for their communities.

## The Goal: Collaboration

One local development has increased emphasis on civil society - building community through the creation of new volunteer organizations and collaborative partnerships that attempt to shape public policy, and transform norms and social structures. These collaborative efforts require that organizations work together by adapting their individual practices and purposes to the goals for which the partnerships are formed. The Tampa Bay region has been part of this movement. Its citizens have created organizations that enable and encourage the community to become active participants in local governance and civic life. Three organizations have made a contribution to this progress: Speak Up Tampa Bay, Hillsborough Tomorrow, and The Good Community Alliance.

Collaboration among these three organizations and the University of South Florida, a public institution, seemed likely when they formed the Good Community Collaborative (GCC) in May 1998. By December 2000, however, the venture failed to create a model of effective university-community collaboration for two reasons: the University was unable to assist these organizations in adapting their decision making practices and

priorities to the goals of the GCC; and the idiosyncrasies of each organization's representatives to the GCC executive committee did not overcome this structural impediment to collaboration. These deterrents were reinforced by the GCC selection of a particular geographic location in which to develop collaboration, and by the GCC's reliance on a state grant to fund the effort. The choice of Citrus Park and the grant awarded by the Florida Institute of Government were controversial issues that invited the worst possible outcome. They enhanced the organizational and individual predispositions of the players.

# Explaining the Failure

Why did organizational differences have to be reconciled in order for collaboration to occur? As described below, each organization had distinct strategic goals and different decision-making procedures in place when they began the collaboration. Hillsborough Tomorrow had a bureaucratic and hierarchical system of decision-making, while the Good Community Alliance adopted a non-hierarchical and consensus-building approach to making decision. The leaders and representatives of Speak Up and the University of South Florida were free to make decisions because their organizations had no decision-making procedures that effected collaboration. From an institutional perspective, these differences posed formidable obstacles to collaboration. For instance, some organizations were more flexible than others in making decisions based on new information or viewpoints. Also, some organizations relied heavily on the views of their individual representatives.

Collaboration could not occur unless individuals representing these organizations supported it or changed their respective organization's processes. That people can change institutional procedures is central to one explanation of social history. According to this view, agency and structure are mutually constituted, and the use of knowledge is critical to outcomes (e.g., Giddens 1984). While such a view may be correct, this does not mean collaboration would occur if the organizational representatives took control over the process. On the contrary, the collaboration failed despite the fact that people representing the organizations were in control of the project. The individual agents contributed to the failure because their own strategic goals did not predispose them to resolve organizational goal differences. Furthermore, they did not want to delve into what their decisions meant for creating collaboration; and, finally, they chose leaders who did not advocate collaboration.

Organizations and individuals interact through the way in which both use knowledge to bring about change. Since knowledge is socially constructed, its impact on the distribution of power in social relations requires negotiation between organizations and their members. Hence, collaboration successes or failures result from an interaction between how organizations construct knowledge and how their representatives alter this construction. Further description of organizationally constructed knowledge is necessary since it was particularly influential in bringing about the failure to collaborate. Organizations create procedures for the way in which knowledge is used. They do so, in part, because people cannot constantly think about how to act or what positions to articulate.

Institutions construct meaning and uses for knowledge. By doing so, they contribute to what Giddens (1984) calls "practical consciousness" or what I refer to as practical knowledge. People acquire knowledge from the way in which it is practiced in their social environment. This environment includes community-based organizations or universities with which people become affiliated. By joining these organizations, they learn the way things are done (i.e., embedded knowledge).

Organizational knowledge is shaped by strategic goals and the decision-making procedures established to meet the goals. Embedded in the latter are relations of power within the organization (Foucault 1991). Each of the organizations involved in the Good Community Collaborative had a unique purpose and different procedures for making decisions. Power relations also differed within each organization. These inter-organizational differences among Hillsborough Tomorrow, the Good Community Alliance, Speak Up Tampa Bay, and the University of South Florida ultimately blocked collaboration. Only the representatives to the Good Community Alliance and the facilitator attempted to overcome these institutional barriers. They were unable to prevail because the other representatives were unwilling to move beyond either the practical knowledge base of the organizations they represented or their personal preferences. My intent in assessing why the Good Community Collaborative failed is to learn what role the university played in this failure and how universities can become more effective agents of collaboration with their communities.

# I. Organizational Impediments to Collaboration

Collaboration among community-based organizations requires that they adapt their goals and ways of doing business to the purpose for which they formed the partnership.

## A. Strategic Goals

When the three community-based organizations approached the University of South Florida (USF) in May 1998, each shared a common view that the Tampa Bay area had a void in civic leadership. At the same time, each organization had distinct but compatible organizational strategic goals for how to overcome this void. Speak Up Tampa Bay encouraged civic dialogue in a manner that would promote civic participation by connecting citizens to the media. Hillsborough Tomorrow emphasized the role of citizen input and inclusion in decision making to form a community vision statement for Hillsborough County. The Good Community Alliance served as a resource and catalyst for inspiring diverse people and organizations to work together for the betterment of the community and its members. These differences were, in fact, the reason why the three organizations claimed they wanted assistance from the University. It seemed reasonable that deliberation, planning, and action to enhance citizen participation could be integrated through a collaborative effort.

Was each organization willing to alter its individual goals for the sake of collaboration? In retrospect, there would have been some reason to doubt this even at the outset. The request to the university was largely the idea of one organization's leader; and he made a compelling case to the College's representatives between February and May 1998. He

claimed that each of the three organizations was providing "a neutral civic space for citizens to conduct their business" and each was "effective at getting citizens together and moving in the right direction." Yet he felt that at least two of the organizations had problems. Hillsborough Tomorrow was unable to go beyond planning. It needed to "hand-off" its plans to the Good Community Alliance for implementation. In addition, he felt there was no need for Speak Up "to remain a distinctly different organization" from the other two organizations. Therefore, he recommended the creation of "a structure to house all three processes under one roof. That is where USF may be able to play a tremendous role in facilitating these processes...we need to merely coordinate these structures." When the College indicated it would respond favorably to a formal request, this individual then obtained agreement from the heads of the other two groups to sign the letter he drafted.

Early on, the representatives of these organizations committed themselves to the language of collaboration. They did so in their July 1998 review and endorsement of the following language in a grant submitted to support the initiative:The long-term goal of the project is the enhancement of the Tampa region's civic capacity by developing its civic infrastructure. This means that additional individuals and groups must come into the civic arena and that the behaviors practiced in this arena must become collaborative rather than competitive or conflictual. (Good Community Collaborative, grant proposal, p.1)

From June 1998 through its last official meeting in September 2000, however, the organizational representatives to the Good Community Collaborative resisted review-ing their different goals to determine how they related to collaboration. They did so even when the University facilitator brought the issue to their attention (see below). Instead, the representatives agreed that each organization's distinguishing contributions to the community (i.e., visioning, dialogue, and action) would be strengthened by "working together" in a common geographic area, Citrus Park. Each organization could pursue its own "piece of the action" there, handing off to the next organization what it had finished. When this failed, the representatives turned their attention to how each organization could spend funds from the grant award for its projects.

## B. Decision-Making Structures

Differences in organizational purposes allow inter-organizational collaboration if organizers are willing to adapt their individual purposes to collaboration. To some extent, such adaptation is premised on the decision-making behavior of the organiza-tions in question. Two kinds of decision-making processes were in place among the GCC organizations: cybernetic and analytical. A cybernetic process of decision-making may occur in organizations that create subunits to oversee various programs of the organization. Each program is intended to play a role in meeting the overall purpose of the organization. Toward that end, standard operating procedures are established within the organization to address decisions peculiar to the program. These procedures remove the burden of uncertainty, thereby reducing the burdens of processing information. Those in charge of the program identify problems relevant to it, select information, and make decisions perceived to be relevant to the program. Problems are broken down to

fit preexisting procedures. Leadership in the organization is hierarchically structured, focused on problem solving delegation, and breaks down problems to fit the existing procedures of the organization's programs. When organizational goals are not being met, additional information and alternative procedures are selected and considered to the extent that they are consistent with the prevailing procedures and programmatic division of the organization. Organizational change is incremental and based on an instrumentalist approach to decision making. The processes and decision-making authority prevail, even when new programs are created.

By mid-1998, Hillsborough Tomorrow had become an organization in which decision-making was fairly complicated. On the one hand, issues were delegated to that area of the organization affected by it. On the other hand, any decision affecting the strategic goals of the organization had to work its way through the hierarchy to the top. Such a process was inconsistent with the initial purpose for which the organization was founded. In October 1994, some community leaders sponsored a meeting for over two hundred volunteer organizations at the Tampa Convention Center. In part, these volunteer board members of United Way agencies came to the meeting because they were dissatisfied with the County's Needs Assessment completed by the State of Florida in 1993. The general feeling was that the political and corporate leadership of Hillsborough County lacked a vision. Over the next two years, Hillsborough Tomorrow became a formal structure: an executive director; eleven-member executive committee; a coordinating committee of sixty-two people; and project chairs and standing committees for outreach, recruiting, process, logistics, fund-raising, and research. Once the structures were in place, an action plan was launched with a kick-off conference for county residents in November 1996. The conference was run as an assembly and led to the creation of nine workgroups to discuss areas of concern identified at the conference: education, community spirit of caring, growth management and economic development, families and children, the environment, government, public safety, health care, and race relations.

The workgroups met throughout 1997. During the year three more assemblies were held to create a common vision. A forty-two-page community statement was issued after the October 1997 assembly. The statement identified where the community should focus its collective energy. All citizens were called to make the vision a reality. The reports of the nine work groups were included in the document. Each report included specific goals, objectives, and benchmarks to measure progress. At the end of the year a report was issued that contained detailed benchmarks and indicators for children and families, community spirit of caring, economics and growth, education, environment, and public safety. By early 1998, Hillsborough Tomorrow had completed a significant amount of citizen-based planning and visioning. While the organizational structure and workgroup activity continued during that year, the question became how to implement the plan. Hillsborough Tomorrow had no process in place to move the plan into action.

One person shaped Hillsborough Tomorrow. He was well connected to the power structure of the Tampa Bay region. Although his style of leadership was grassroots

oriented, the organization he formed was quickly integrated into the traditional power hierarchy of the community. By 1996, his organization had created a decision-making structure that reflected this hierarchy. To citizens invited to its conferences, the call seemed a legitimate attempt to create a community-wide visioning process. Yet the workgroups of citizens and experts established after the 1996 conference remained disconnected from the power structure. Throughout 1997 workgroups in each of the nine issues refined their vision around the issue, identified goals specific to each issue, and established benchmarks to measure improvement in the issues. Yet the leaders of the organization did not modify the existing structures and procedures to accommodate what the workgroups had created. In one sense, the governing body had created a dilemma for itself. Agreeing to collaborate with the other two organizations in 1998 may have been an easy way to get out of this dilemma: support further collaboration rather than having the organizational leadership tackle the question of implementing the workgroups' benchmarks. Yet its notion of collaboration with the other two organizations was tempered. As described later, its representatives to the collaborative always had to "check back" with the organization about what it could and could not do.

Analytical processes are based on the premise that organizations and their members are willing to base their decisions on new information. Organizations that adopt analytical approaches to decision-making are also willing to adapt their programs, procedures, and purposes to accommodate inter-organizational goals. These organizations take a collective approach to decision-making. Multiple actors strive for consensus through debate. They are engaged in a mutual effort that includes calculating various options according to criteria of analytic logic (Steinbruner 1974). For such conditions to be met, the organization must have a clear idea of its purpose, a set of strategies to meet its goals, a willingness to consider alternative strategies, and an ability to calculate the costs and consequences of choosing various strategic options relative to advancing the purpose of the organization. The leadership of the organization must be a team whose authority encompasses the scope of the organization's activities/programs and whose members are willing to engage in causal learning.

Of the three organizations that approached USF in May 1998, only one had developed a decision-making process resembling the analytical model: the Good Community Alliance. The Good Community Alliance (GCA) had also emerged from the October 1994 Volunteer Board meeting mentioned earlier. It was created in April 1996 by a number of volunteer organizations, with the support of a local television station and a weekly newspaper, to help the community build local alliances for civic action. Its purpose was to provide a "neutral civic space" for individuals and organizations to share common resources and projects. The Alliance adopted a formal set of founding principles and a governing structure. The Alliance operated by consensus and set broad policy through a coordinating committee that had open membership. Early on it became effective at getting people together and sharing information about members' projects. It adopted a "project swap" whereby members learn about grant opportunities and meet to collaborate. At its June 1996 meeting, the members determined what it would mean for those joining: integrate resources, network, broadening decision making basis, respect

diversity, support partnerships; focus on solutions; adopt a systemic approach; create a neutral civic space; focus on people who need services; create a realistic, sustainable future; educate; share power and responsibility; empower people without a voice; engage citizens; critique systemic capitalism; reinvigorate leadership; work towards a shared vision; and seek easier media access. At this meeting, it also established its first project: to sponsor the Good Community Fair, modeled after the successful Springfield, Missouri fair. The Fair is designed to be a one-stop shopping experience for volunteers and a celebration of the community's civic life. The GCA has hosted annual fairs, beginning with the first in March 1997. Attendance at each fair has ranged between 12,000 and 18,000. In the nearly five years since it was formed, organizing the annual fair has become the main activity of the GCA.

Like Hillsborough Tomorrow, the GCA quickly created a formal process with regard to organization and decision-making, but emphasized process and principles rather than organizational structure. It established a coordinating committee of open membership; it agreed to governance principles that emphasized inclusiveness rather than hierarchy in decision-making; and it encouraged collaboration through integration of shared re-sources. While the GCA was action- and problem solving-oriented, it was also willing to cooperate with other organizations whose purposes were not necessarily in line with its own. While it was not particularly sophisticated at calculating opportunity-costs, the organization's all-inclusive approach to consensual decision-making and willingness to consider alternative ways to meet its goals reflected a causal approach to learning.

Speak Up Tampa Bay failed to adopt a decision-making process. Consequently, the founder of the organization made decisions on its behalf. The organization began in May 1995 when the publisher of a weekly newspaper brought together a group of community leaders to form an ethics board for the newspaper. The ethics board decided to create Speak Up Tampa Bay, whose purpose was to foster civic dialogue in the Tampa Bay area and to form better connections between the community and the media. Initially, the group sponsored public dialogues (a "civic space") about current issues that were attracting public and media attention. In December 1995, a mission statement was adopted: Speak Up would serve as a catalyst for (1) citizen participation in identi-fying and solving Bay area issues; and (2) better connecting the media to citizens and the issues they face. The model Speak Up adopted was to meet the community, hear concerns its citizens identified, synthesize these into "manageable issues," present these issues to the media, and then host town hall forums to discuss them. Open forums were held in early 1996 to assist attendees in identifying issues of concern to the community. In June the Speak Up group selected the issue of children for public consideration and spent the rest of the year organizing media and public attention around the issue. Based on this experience, the Speak Up members determined that a "framing" conference should be held in January on another issue it selected. The conference would bring the issue to the forefront of the community's attention and create a dialogue that would also lead to action.

Speak Up followed two directions in the spring of 1997. First, the leader began to link the civic journalism mission of Speak Up to initiatives of Hillsborough Tomorrow and the Good Community Alliance. In doing so, he attempted to involve faculty and administrators at the University of South Florida. His initiatives included submission of a grant to the Pew Foundation that was funded and required linkages among the organizations; supporting the Hillsborough Tomorrow December 1996 conference and offering USF expertise for the conference; creation of a graduate seminar in journalism that would support the efforts of both Speak Up and Hillsborough Tomorrow; having the four organizations effect the action agenda set at the Hillsborough Tomorrow conference; and participation in the GCA fair held in March 1997. These actions set the stage for requesting that USF help the three organizations collaborate in 1998.

At its March 25, 1997 meeting, Speak Up took a second turn. One of its members mentioned that Time Warner did not intend to renew its contract with the County and the City to run Public Access Television. Until this point, Speak Up had made various attempts, but did not establish a formal decision making process related to its original mission. While the group had agreed to have members, a consensus approach to decision-making, and rotating leadership, the organization did not formalize a board of directors structure around its original mission. Its leaders seemed more focused on positioning the organization within the community than on establishing an organiza-tional base. As a result, its profile in the community was driven by whoever happened to be representing Speak Up at a given meeting. Thus, the leader was not restricted by any particular decision making process when speaking on behalf of the organization.

After March 1997, the organization became almost exclusively focused on making a bid for the contract.  In March 1999 the city and county awarded the contract to Speak Up Tampa Bay Public Access Television, Inc. after it agreed to open its membership to a group whose bid had not been accepted. Speak Up established itself as a 501 (c) 3 organiza-tion, formalizing its structure with officers and committees (Executive, Finance, Commu-nity Affairs and Marketing, Programming, Facilities, and Nominating). It acquired an annual operating budget nearly $1 million and hired a new station manager in fall 1999.

For over two years Speak Up had no organizational structure or formal decision making process that constrained its leader. Its activities until March 1997 were dependent on the idiosyncratic characteristics and preferences of those who attended its meetings. Hence, the identity and direction it took was *ad hoc* and largely driven by the publisher of a weekly paper who convened the group. It began as an ethics board with a focus on civic journalism, turned to hosting public dialogues on matters of concern to citizens, and finally formalized itself in response to a possible take over of public access television. It was the only one of the three organizations that had resources: funding support from the Pew Foundation. These resources were acquired and largely distributed by the convener.

Between June and August 1998 the organizations met to establish a name and a com-mon decision making process. The process adopted required no change in the existing procedures within each organization. Instead, each organization selected two individu-als to represent its views in a joint committee established to implement policies set by a

planning group that included all members of each organization. It was to meet quarterly to review the actions of the joint committee. This group was to meet on a regular basis to make implementing decisions about how the "collaborative" effort would be enacted. The planning group was discontinued in early 1999 since very few at-large members from each organization came to the meetings. The disbanding of the planning group was further evidence that the members of each organization were not interested in adapting their strategic goals or decision-making processes to advance collaboration. The emphasis on individual organizational representation was also evident when the part-time person hired to help the organizations collaborate resigned in October 1999. She did so because she felt the representatives on the joint committee were resisting her efforts to bring them together.

## C. The University's Organizational Role as Expert
The College of Arts and Sciences should have been more circumspect in its response to the request from the three organizations to assist them in working together. At the time, the College was preoccupied with developing its own community initiative program, but wanted to appear responsive to community requests. The university's mission to its communities was also in transition. Many faculty and some administrators had worked with various constituencies since USF was established in 1956. Yet these were individuals fulfilling their service responsibilities to the community rather than representatives of a university mission to the community. As part of their service, several USF faculty and administrators were actively involved with Hillsborough Tomorrow, the Good Community Alliance, and Speak Up prior to 1998.

The university did not have an articulated mission to its communities when S. David Stamps became Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in June 1996. With support from its applied and community-focused programs, the College established a Community Initiative (CI) in the summer of 1996. The Coordinator, who came from the University of Pittsburgh's Urban Studies Program, was hired in early 1998. The mission of CI was to begin breaking down barriers not only between the university and the community but also within the university between the missions of teaching, research, and service (Bird and Stamps 2001). Hence, the College and the University were developing a formal community engagement mission when the three organizations requested (1) physical space to support the common interests of the three groups and a location where they could work with faculty and students; (2) facilitation support in the form of faculty and graduate students who have expertise in organizational development; and (3) support/advise in grant writing so that the three groups could seek common external funding support (McBride, Thompson, and Eason to Stamps, May 5, 1998). The College viewed the proposal as an opportunity to bring the university system closer to its local community. It therefore agreed to assist these three groups by facilitating the process of collaboration and by submitting a grant to support the collaboration in its early stage of development.

Three guidelines for universities can be drawn from the institutional impediments to collaboration identified thus far. These guidelines concern the ways in which universi-

ties can ground their engagement programs and structures in the knowledge expertise of their faculty and staff.

First, **a central goal of urban universities should be to engage the community with the knowledge of experts at the university.** Universities should acknowledge, in their mission statements, that their relation to the community is based on their expertise in the acquisition, dissemination and application of knowledge claims. Communities should turn to the university for the knowledge it has to offer. Since universities are experts in the field of knowledge, they are not on a level or neutral playing field with their communities. Since knowledge is socially constructed, it is neither neutral nor acquired independent of the community. At the same time, it is the university alone whose central mission to the community is the business of knowledge. Had this been of utmost importance to the university representatives in the spring of 1998, their response to the leaders of three community-based organizations may have taken a different form. In May 1998, these organizations had asked the College for physical space, facilitation, and grant-writing skills because they saw the university as a neutral place. However, at the August 1998 planning group meeting, the three organizations asked the College of Arts and Sciences to be an equal partner with them. College representatives at the meeting reluctantly agreed to do so because they did not want the other organizations to continue their expressed view that the University was disengaged from the community. The College identified two faculty members to join the other six representatives on the GCC joint committee. This meant that the University had considerable presence at the joint committee meetings: the two representatives, a USF facilitator, and a graduate assistant who was also the recorder of the meetings. Even though the college agreed to become an equal partner, its representatives never overcame the disengaged university image held by other representatives on the joint committee. Furthermore, the college representatives lost their effectiveness because their decisions were not based on the university mission of expert engagement.

Second, **universities should delegate decision-making authority to those with expertise relevant to the community.** The associate dean and dean of the College responded to the community's request to assist them because they wanted to expand the College's engagement with the community. They should have passed the request on to a college level body that was able to determine if the College had the ability to meet the request. Assessment entails exploring with the community what it wants from the university. In this case it would have been beneficial for the College to delve into the history of the three organizations and into the origins of the letter from the three community-based organizations. Had it done so, it might have been in a far better position to assess whether or not it had the expertise to respond to the request. Even if it had done so in this request, the outcome may not have been different since the organizations themselves were not clear about what they wanted. Within the College itself, the head of the College's Community Initiative should have been empowered to determine whether or not the College could meet the request. Since neither the University nor the College had a track record of responding to such requests, the College response was based on its desire to develop an institutional relationship with the

community and on the views of the members of the university involved with the organizations. The latter were individuals whose expertise derived almost exclusively from fulfilling their service assignment to the community. Some of them lacked formal training in university-community relations, but were in positions to influence how the College responded. The coordinator of the CI had expertise in this area, but was too new in the position to play an effective role in how the College responded. Still others had expertise in facilitation of organizational development but not in inter-organizational collaboration.

Assessment of requests is only one area of institutional engagement. As was the case with Hillsborough Tomorrow, there is also a tendency in higher education to create institutional programs for engagement that reinforce the existing centers of authority within education. At USF, the University Community Initiative currently is comprised of members of the Council of Deans (Bird and Stamps 2001). The College CI includes several current and past department chairs. Such an approach to institution building may lead to a disconnection between those who normally have authority at a university and those who have the expertise. When such a gap occurs, institutional authority is affirmed but effective engagement is not. One outcome, evidenced in this case, is that those with little expertise (i.e., advising community-based organizations how to collaborate) may end up representing the university.

Finally, **public university funding goals and processes must be restructured to support engagement that enhances community access to university expertise**. Funding streams affect how universities can bring their expertise to the community. When funding is earmarked by legislative initiative, universities are subjected to a political process that often prevents them from offering their expertise. In 1998, the Florida legislature reallocated some funds for its universities to the Florida Institute of Government (FIOG), a state agency. FIOG was mandated to distribute funds, through a grant process, for the purpose of promoting university-community engagement projects. Since a grant for $100,000 was awarded to promote collaboration, FIOG's USF representative was also invited to attend the meetings. The way in which the state grant was handled merely reinforced the image of the university as a bureaucratic maze and power broker. The grant required that products be provided to the state as documentation that the funds were used effectively. It was far easier to comply with this requirement if each organization were given funds to produce what each was capable of doing. Although this approach discouraged collaboration, it was welcomed by organizations that were not all that certain they wanted to collaborate. Furthermore, the community-based organizations were overwhelmed and appalled by the various state rules and procedures regulating when grant funds had to be expended, what could be reimbursed and who was eligible to receive funds. Early on, these bureaucratic issues dominated joint committee meeting discussions, distracted the collaborative effort, and reinforced the view that the university was both disengaged from the community and also holding power over it. As the attempt to collaborate progressed, the grant became an albatross that the community representatives to the joint committee frequently referred to as the ultimate source of the university's power over them. In reality, the

university also had no control over the funds. It also had to comply with state requirements. In order to do so, both the community partners and the university representatives lost sight of what expertise the university could offer the organizations. Those who have the necessary expertise should control public funds; and they should account to both the community and to the university for their use of the funds.

# II. Idiosyncratic Impediments to Collaboration

The attempt to collaborate was doomed to fail if the knowledge practices embedded in each of the organizations alone determined the collaborative outcome. However, agents of organizations can use their knowledge to alter organization directions and outcomes (Amen 1999). The representatives to the GCC could overcome the institutional barriers to collaboration previously identified. Their ability to do so, however, was compromised by a high turnover rate among them. At the same time, frequent change in representation decreased organizational position taking and increased the idiosyncratic contributions to the outcome. Thirteen different people occupied the eight representative slots between June 1998 and December 2000. Within the first eighteen months of the initiative five of the original eighteen representatives had been replaced. Consistent with its weak organizational structure, Speak Up representatives changed more frequently than did the others. Furthermore, the changes were not particularly effective. One of the new representatives was also an associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences and a principle investigator for the grant. The other was the new Executive Director of the Public Access Channel who had arrived from another city and had no prior background about either Tampa or the GCC. While each of the other organizations had one of its representatives remain throughout the entire period, changes in the second representative weakened organizational position taking. The new Good Community Alliance representative also happened to be the convener of Speak Up. The new USF representative was also new in town, having been recently hired by the university. The new Hillsborough Tomorrow representative was that organization's only paid staff person and he, more than any other representative, took an organization position on most issues.

Although representation changed frequently, the GCC joint committee deliberated and acted for over two years. Their decisions, however focused on either how to organize the GCC (i.e., establish the planning group and the joint committee, the roles of the university and of the hired coordinator, establish rotating leadership of the joint committee) or how to implement the attempt to collaborate (i.e., apply for a grant, pick a geographic area, adopt programs for each organization). What they did can be explained by a combination of three traits various GCC representatives exhibited in the positions they advocated and the decisions they made: goal-orientation, reflective predispositions, and leadership style.

## A. Individual Strategic Goals

Each of the community-based organizations in the GCC had a distinct strategic goal to pursue in order to fill the perceived void in civic leadership: dialogue, visioning/planning, and volunteer action. The USF was committed to engagement with the

community. The ways in which the GCC representatives pursued these goals was tempered by their own reasons for joining these volunteer organizations or being a member of the university community.

Preservation of organizational autonomy was the most widely shared strategic goal among the representatives of the community-based organizations. The Hillsborough Tomorrow representatives were most consistent in their support of this goal. They constantly referred decisions back to their organizational hierarchy. This was especially the case when one of its representatives was replaced by the only hired staff person for Hillsborough Tomorrow. He often actively prevented the GCC from moving forward by saying that he would have to take up the matter with his organization. The other two representatives were frequently quiet, except when GCC actions supported Hillsborough Tomorrow interests (e.g., the decision to select one of Hillsborough Tomorrow's nine themes as the content for the GCC's entry into Citrus Park). One of the Good Community Alliance representatives was the exception to this trend. She adopted a consensus approach to decision making. She consistently supported positions that included the preferences of all the organizations; and she wanted to negotiate options that would result in decisions all members could support. The USF representatives appeared to lack any strategic goal. Instead, they complied with any request the partners made.

Many decisions made by the joint committee during the years the GCC was in place manifested a widespread tendency to support organizational autonomy. The decision to create a policy body comprised of at-large members of each organization seemed to advance collaboration. Yet this body never materialized and was formally dissolved within a year. The decision to create a joint committee of representatives from each organization provided a structural mechanism to sustain autonomy. The representatives used their roles accordingly. They selected Citrus Park as the geographic area in which to develop its partnership. Citrus Park, in northwestern Hillsborough County, was an economically and ethnically diverse area that recently had experienced large-scale commercial and real estate development. The joint committee believed that it represented the kinds of development problems other parts of the County (e.g., Brandon) had encountered. The representatives also knew that some Citrus Park residents were not happy with what was happening in the area and that the County was still in the process of finalizing its efforts to engage in community-based planning and development there. Hence, the joint committee felt that it could not only develop collaborative efforts by working in this area, but that those efforts could make a difference in the direction of Citrus Park.

The joint committee adopted an action plan for Citrus Park that preserved organizational autonomy. Each organization in the GCC was to make a contribution to the plan, with the notion that each contribution would reinforce and build on the others. A faculty member at USF created a graduate course to study the area. Graduate students in geography and anthropology who took the course selected research topics that would provide better information and analysis about various development related problems in Citrus Park. This research was to inform the actions of the GCC. One of the nine Hillsborough Tomorrow benchmarks, "community spirit of caring," was the theme for

GCC activities. The plan was for a Speak Up to host a grassroots community dialogue at the elementary school in Citrus Park, where citizens would discuss the theme and talk about their concerns. The Good Community Alliance would then showcase Citrus Park at its annual fair in March.

When the Speak Up event failed, debriefing of the event was couched in terms of organizational competency and motivations. The Speak Up representative who organized the event insisted Speak Up knew how to promote dialogue and that the failure was attributable to lack of support from the hired coordinator and the other organizations. During the discussion, concerns were also expressed about one of the GCA representatives who also happened to be the County employee charged with soliciting input from Citrus Park residents about the county's development plans for the area. His presence at a Speak Up sponsored event in the area led to mistrust among some joint committee representatives concerning whose interests he was actually representing at the event. Concerns were also expressed about what role the University was playing. In particular, some joint committee members felt that the College's management of the grant was driving the process and gave the University more influence than other representatives in GCC's affairs. Tensions also began to surface between the Coordinator, who had a very clear point of view about what role the Citrus Park residents should play in the GCC's efforts, and other members of the joint committee, some of whom believed that relations among the four organizations superceded issues particular to Citrus Park itself.

After the coordinator resigned in September 1999, the representatives made decisions that continued to support organizational autonomy. The joint committee finalized a set of projects that was specific to each organization: Hillsborough Tomorrow would host workshops in Citrus Park on land use and zoning issues, and on a community spirit of caring; the Good Community Alliance would sponsor a fair in Citrus Park; USF would take the lead in creating a website for the GCC and creating a GCC directory; Speak Up would create a video documentary of Citrus Park and of the fair; and the Hillsborough Tomorrow Benchmarks report of 1997 would be updated. In October, the joint committee agreed to rotate leadership and administration, with each organization taking on that responsibility for a six-month period.

In the final months of the collaborative, attention shifted from Citrus Park to the Tampa Bay Community Television Network. It had been turned over to the newly transformed Speak Up organization in April 2000. GCC decisions continued to support organizational autonomy. GCA members (i.e., volunteer organizations) could be trained at the station to produce programs about their organizations. Speak Up could air dialogues. Hillsborough Tomorrow could have the workshop tapes aired, and USF might play a role in hosting programs. The website could be modified for the community, and a TV news program could involve all of the organizations. GCC would focus on project swaps among its members and on working together to identify new projects. The joint committee representatives felt most comfortable with each organization pursuing its own projects and encouraging others to join in if they wanted to do so.

## B. Reflective Predispositions

How could the joint committee representatives make decisions that promoted organizational autonomy when they had come together to promote collaboration? Initially, the facilitator called their attention to this contradiction. In doing so, he raised the prospect that, through what Giddens (1984) refers to as discursive consciousness, the representatives might visit the institutional barriers to collaboration. Normally, people are not asked to explain their activities or decisions. When others do ask us to explain our actions or positions, they do so because what we have done or said is puzzling (e.g., not what they expected or not conventional) or stands in opposition to what they want to hear or happen. Our response makes us think of why we acted or spoke as we did.

By periodically raising the question of what collaboration entailed, the facilitator created an opportunity for the representatives to alter the decisions they were making. Yet people who see themselves as representing organizations in social settings rely on the practical knowledge of the organization they represent. Collaboration across organizations requires the suspension of practical knowledge particular to each organization so that the organizations can find new ways of working together. Hierarchically structured organizations are not likely to promote collaboration because their practical knowledge does not allow for such a suspension. Such organizations empower themselves rather than their agents. From this perspective, the Hillsborough Tomorrow and USF representatives were most likely to resist discussing collaboration. The Good Community Alliance representatives were more likely to participate in this discussion since their organizational decision making procedures encouraged an analytical model directed toward consensus building and inclusive membership.

One way to resolve the cognitive dissonance between support for organizational autonomy and support for collaboration was to keep the two values separate by circumventing discussion about collaboration. This seems to have been the predominant mechanism used by all representatives, including those from USF. Representatives generally relied on practical knowledge acquired from their respective organizational affiliations. They generally resisted the facilitator's occasional attempts to encourage them to think about what collaboration meant. The representatives from Hillsborough Tomorrow and Speak Up usually did not want to engage in lengthy discussions about what collaboration meant or the difference between it and engagement (Goodier and Eisenberg). Instead, they wanted to test out the possibility of establishing a long-term relationship among them by choosing a place in the community where they could try to collaborate. Their emphasis on action rather than reflection was supported by time constraints for all of them; and it sent a clear signal to the facilitator of the group that practical rather than reflective discussion should characterize their meeting time together. All university participants in this process more or less abided by this wish. Furthermore, the university representatives generally complied with the wishes of the other organizations' representatives. If they were in disagreement, silence became their way of preserving neutrality. They never encouraged reflection on the meaning of collaboration and what changes might be required to attain it.

A second way to resolve inconsistency between support for collaboration and for organizational autonomy was the adoption of rigid viewpoints supported by referring to past experiences. This occurred when issues arose that could not be avoided. A drastic example of this took place around the complexities of involving Citrus Park residents in the GCC's efforts to collaborate. The GCC coordinator and a Speak Up representative had opposing views on this issue. The issue came to the fore after the failed attempt to host a dialogue with residents in the spring of 1999. One insisted that, based on her prior work with the community, collaboration had to include resident representation. The other insisted that Speak Up had a track record of hosting dialogues in the community and knew how such dialogues could promote collaboration. Each had a view of collaboration yet neither wanted to justify her view by discussing what collaboration meant. Ultimately, one resigned and the other's interest strayed from collaboration to acquiring the public access television station. While the facilitator used these occasions to promote committee discussion about the meaning of collaboration, the representatives took a practical approach and decided to pursue projects in Citrus Park with which each organization was comfortable.

## C. Leadership Skills

Since the joint committee representatives were predisposed to promoting organizational autonomy and managed to avoid thinking about the implications for collaboration, it is not surprising that leadership of the GCC appeared to be uninterested in promoting collaboration after the coordinator resigned in September 1999. The committee decided not to replace her. In October, the representatives agreed to rotate leadership among the four organizations. Each organization would have a six-month period of calling and running the meetings and setting the agendas. Three representatives served as leaders through 2000. The leadership skills of each differed, yet the overall impact of leadership reinforced the strategic goal of organizational autonomy. Each leader did so by promoting his organization's particular interests.

For the remainder of 1999, the leadership fell to one of the Speak Up representatives. Since he was also a USF administrator and principle investigator of the grant, the joint committee viewed him as a USF representative. His leadership style derived more from his USF than from his Speak Up affiliation. He was singularly focused on getting any process and leadership system in place that would keep the group together, regardless of how the process would affect collaboration. Consistent with his role as principle investigator on the grant, he came to the first meeting with a comprehensive proposal for how to spend the remaining grant funds by the end of the year when the grant ended. The joint committee revised his proposal but accepted the assumption on which it was based: that the funds should be distributed to each of the organizations for its use rather than to the joint committee as a whole. While his leadership style was consistent with what would have been expected of a university administrator responsible for a grant, his priorities prevented him from seizing the opportunity to lead the organizations into a collaborative relationship.

The Hillsborough Tomorrow representative who was also a staff member of that organization took over leadership of the GCC between January and June 2000. He exercised considerable control over the joint committee. His behavior was consistent with the Hillsborough Tomorrow's hierarchical organizational structure, which was topped by an Executive Committee underpinned by a Coordinating Committee and workgroups. The chain of command in this system required that all Hillsborough Tomorrow decisions had to be run through the organization. Despite the appearance that this system was a democratic process, he used his organization to block GCC decision making. Frequently, he would mention that he would get back to the joint committee after checking with Hillsborough Tomorrow. The link back to his organization may have been even more pronounced because his own position at Hillsborough Tomorrow was under review. He also provoked the members of the joint committee by personalizing his comments. During one meeting he lashed out at the university and its role in the GCC, claiming that it was encouraging work for the other organizations but doing nothing itself. Issues of gender bias were raised. He also controlled the agenda and set it without consulting the other members. He frequently set meetings with little advance notice, would change them at the last minute, or cancel them the day before they were to be held. Overall, his leadership during the period reflected either the organization he represented or himself as a person. Neither of these factors predisposed him to reflecting on the GCC as a collaborative entity or encouraging the group to learn how to collaborate based on its past activities.

In July, one of the GCA representatives who was also the founder of Speak Up took over leading the GCC. While he was technically a GCA representative, he led the GCC as though it was created to promote his own political agenda. The focus of the joint committee's attention had shifted to how the GCC might interface with the Public Access television station now being run by Speak Up. The committee had already decided that the organizations would swap projects, plan new projects, and consider inviting new partners to join in the project swaps. The day before the September meeting, the leader contacted a GCC representative to say that he was out of town, had not reminded any one of the meetings, and would reschedule the meeting when he returned. Later, he put future meetings on hold until he saw a reason to call a meeting. No one objected. He felt there was no need to meet until issues concerning the Chamber of Commerce and Hillsborough Tomorrow were clarified. As its leader, he put the GCC on hold until he saw a purpose to reconvene it. He believed that the void in civic leadership could be addressed by working with the traditional power players in the city (e.g., city hall, county government, the Chamber of Commerce, and the rising power elites). His interests in the GCC seemed to be in relation to these parameters. Hence, he decided not to bring the joint committee back together until he could identify a role for the GCC to play vis-à-vis the Chamber of Commerce, or county and city organizations.

To summarize, the representations were unable to promote collaboration for at least three reasons. First, they shared a common strategic goal that was inconsistent with collaboration. While some showed an interest in collaboration and others in power-brokering, organizational self-interest was their common ground. Second, the represen-

tatives did not collectively adopt a reflective approach to what they were doing. Most relied on practical knowledge and did not want to think about what collaboration entailed. They were predisposed to taking action. Finally, the leaders among the representatives did not share a common vision of collaboration. Some acted as agents of their organizations while one promoted his own interests. The agency outcome failed to overcome institutional impediments. Instead, it reinforced the relationship among the organizations that pre-dated establishing the GCC. Ultimately, the GCC collapsed.

## D. The University's Agent Role as Expert

This is a rather harsh assessment of the role individuals played in the failure of the Good Community Collaborative. Nonetheless, it provides an opportunity to propose how universities can better prepare their members for engagement with their communities. The following three recommendations address how universities can strengthen the role their individual members play in working with the community. Building on the mission, decision-making, and funding recommendations identified earlier, University leaders should foster a university culture based on the premise that every knowledge expert at the university is part of a community of scholars whose work is relevant for the community (Finkelstein 2001). Therefore, universities should first **adopt the strategic goal of creating a university culture of collective rather than individual expertise**. Faculty members are socialized in a higher education environment that emphasizes individual achievement. The College of Arts and Sciences responded to the requests for assistance from three community-based organizations. It did so through several individual faculty who became involved with the collaborative: an associate dean, a department chair with expertise in organizational development and facilitation, a graduate student, the head of the College's Community Initiative, the head of the Florida Institute of Government, and over the duration of the project, three department chairs. They became involved as individuals. Occasionally some of them discussed the project; but they never approached the project as a USF team. There was no reason to expect they would do otherwise. All of them were busy with other assignments; they agreed to become involved for reasons unique to each. Most importantly, however, their involvement in the project was consistent with a university culture that promotes individual scholarship rather than a community of scholars. That culture is embodied in the university traditions of individual service and of individual research. These traditions can be changed within the university by creating a culture of research and service collaboration.

In conjunction with this change in university culture, university leaders should be **catalysts for internal discourse that encourages the university community to reflect on what is its proper relation to the community**. When Hillsborough Tomorrow, the Good Community Alliance, and Speak Up asked the USF representatives to become an equal partner with them in promoting collaboration, the university representatives mistakenly agreed to do so. While each of the USF representatives may have had a view on this matter, their views were not informed by ongoing, university-wide discussion of the role urban universities play in their communities. Those leading university programs for the community should host opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators to consider the university as equal partner, neutral ground, or knowledge

expert *vis-a-vis* the community. Until such discussions are launched, communities will have false expectations about their universities; and representatives of the university will continue to respond as individuals.

Finally, university leaders can play a critical role by **eliminating barriers inside the university that discourage experts from responding to the community.** The 1999 Kellogg Commission Report encouraged university leaders to give more attention to their local communities. If this occurs without internal reform of some university traditions, the quality of engagement with the community will suffer. One faculty member offered a graduate course on Citrus Park. He did so to help develop a knowledge base for the collaborative. Graduate students conducted research on various issues pertaining to urban development in the area. This represented an innovative approach that integrated all aspects of the knowledge process: acquisition, dissemination, and application. Unfortunately, the research results were not used by the community organizations and did not result in scholarly publications. It was difficult for the instructor to fit this innovation into the normal way in which faculty work is compartmentalized. Hence, the experiment was short-lived and relatively unproductive. At the same time, his effort suggests ways in which traditional distinctions within the university can be changed. Faculty assignments should be structured to encourage an integrated approach to teaching, research, and service. One assignment change might be to make service a subset of teaching and research rather than maintain it as an independent category. Faculty might also consider how they can integrate scholarship and instruction through revision of their core curricula. These and similar reforms should be guided by the reminder that that universities exist to acquire, disseminate, and apply knowledge. This mission makes universities integral to and inherently engaged in the development of social life.

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