Mission-Driven Followership and Civic Engagement: A Different Sustainable Energy

Susan Keim
Donnelly College

Abstract

The concept of civic engagement, defined independently of engagement in political, social, or vocational organizations connects the parallel concept of followership to civic engagement with two kinds of follower motivation emerging: mission-oriented and leader-oriented. The mission-driven follower "owns" the cause and supports it with an ongoing, sustainable energy, while the leader-driven follower participates based on esteem for the leader. In the latter case, the leader must continually renew the follower's engagement through direct requests and exhortation. This research has identified an area of emergent opportunity in the leadership and followership literature, conceptualizing civic engagement as most significantly motivated by mission-driven followership. Practically, mission-driven followers should be sought out and encouraged to volunteer because they support the mission and are more likely to stay with the organization through leadership changes. Theoretically, the addition of a quantitative analysis of mission-driven and leader-driven followership contributes to the emerging scholarship on followership.

Introduction

Mary Parker Follett (as cited in Graham, 2003) first introduced the concept of followers as distinct from leaders in the 1920's and ushered in an entirely new way of thinking about leaders and the people they presumed to lead. Barnard (1938), Kelley (1988), Chaleff (1995), and Kellerman (2008) would eventually follow, with Burns (1978) developing the concept of followership. Rather than leaders and followers working together through transactional means, Burns visualized leaders and followers as mutually benefitting from what he described as

transformational leadership. Thus the power and identity of followers in relation to leaders was born.

Followership

While Chaleff (1995) acknowledges formal leadership as having final accountability and authority vested in an elected or appointed leader, he views the leader and follower as responsible to each other via a partnership. Similar to Kelley (1988, 2008), Chaleff places an emphasis on the need for courage in formation of leader-follower relationships. In addition, he discusses the need for followers to engage in courageous acts that could be perceived as challenging the leader. Courage also implies risk because a follower is (a) responsible to the leader as well as to the mission of the organization, (b) willing to serve the leader, (c) willing to challenge the leader, and (d) at times, even participate in helping a leader to transform. . Additionally, (e) the courageous follower knows when it is time to leave the organization, (f) when the values of the leader and his or her values no longer match, and (g) when the follower would simply be in the way of the leader and the organization.

Citizen Engagement

Through a historical lens of citizen engagement, Skocpol and Fiorina (1999) examine changing organizational patterns, shifts in social and political activity, and the changes in the relationships between elites and ordinary citizens. These shifts are examples of civic groups' use of mass protests, money, bureaucracy, politics, and the courts to achieve women's right to vote in 1920 and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Social upheaval in the last decade underscores the effectiveness of citizen engagement worldwide. This paper offers a brief introduction to the contemporary concept of citizen engagement in the U.S.

Understanding the historical lens through which one can view citizen engagement is important; however, the social capital approach as coined by Coleman (1988) is more consistent with and reflective of citizen engagement as a tool rather than a movement. As devised by Coleman, the term social capital refers to social ties and shared norms that can enhance economic efficiency and help individuals participate more successfully in society. The key elements of social capital in any societal setting are trust and reciprocity. For example, it is important for individuals to trust each other's actions as much as it is for neighbors to reciprocate neighborly actions to one another. Neighborly mutual action may include small caretaking activities such as watching each other's houses or watering the garden while a neighbor is on vacation. Mutual action can go a long way to build trust among neighbors.

In a comprehensive study of citizen engagement, Putnam (2000) brought talk of citizen engagement into the living rooms of citizens who were engaged in their communities. Through an examination of civic decline in organized groups since the 1960s, Putnam's study expanded the discourse for proponents of neighborhoods and citizen involvement in terms of an individual's ability to become involved in their community and ways to imagine a better future. Putnam combined Coleman's social capital theory and de Tocqueville's (1835/2012) concept of voluntary associations to explain how social capital in the United States has eroded, particularly since the 1960s. Putnam sees the unraveling of social connections and declining social trust in the United States as attributable to the challenges of democracy and governance. Kellerman (2008) has stated that the era of leader-centrism has ended, due to the rise and prevalence of technology. Social media in particular, has empowered "everyman" to trumpet a cause, gain support locally and beyond, and motivate significant change. However, this does not suggest any ongoing commitment to local civic concerns, more an action imperative taken when a tipping

point is reached. We focus more specifically on the ongoing, local involvement that makes up the social identity of American communities.

After highlighting the decline of citizen engagement in social organizations, Putnam and Feldstein examined civic organizations throughout the United States that were flourishing. According to Putnam and Feldstein's expanded explanation of social capital, individuals and neighbors who regularly interact with one another face-to-face are more able to work together to solve collective problems. The face-to-face interaction helps individuals gain social trust, which they believe has a natural spillover effect into trust in government. Putnam and Feldstein find that communities with higher levels of social capital also have higher levels of trust in government, suggesting that states high in social capital have more effective and innovative governments. A higher level of voter turnout occurs with citizens who are more engaged in the democratic process (Kraft & Furlong, 2013).

Against the background of social capital and citizen engagement theory, examining the actual study of citizen engagement is useful for this research. Mathews (1999) examines a democracy that relies on public deliberation as a way to inform both representative government and citizen action. Mathews claims Americans feel estranged and disconnected from the political system, perhaps caused not only by citizens' lack of confidence in institutional performance, but the inability of institutions and administrators to relate to the public. While Mathew's premise concedes that it is up to the citizens to take control of their government and make a difference in politics, he uses a broad definition of politics that can involve democracy and governing of the people.

Mathews discusses a new politics in which people rather than politicians have to make the difference. Mathews believes it is people working together in a deliberative process that is

critical to effective politics. At the same time, the deliberative process is a trust-building exercise. The deliberative process can also be apparent in voluntary organizations that Putnam describes such as the local Rotary Club, bridge club, neighborhood group, PTA. As Mathews explains: "People become a public when they acknowledge their interconnectedness and the consequences of their ties with others—over extended time" (p. 203). These are exactly the definitions of social ties and culture that define social capital.

In Mathew's terminology, citizens cannot reclaim politics through a deliberative process without meaningful social ties and time to engage with others in neighborly activities. These are similar to Putnam's terms of trust and social capital. In addition, Fiorina (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), believes that the cure for citizen disengagement is more citizen engagement. This is consistent with Mathews' concept of a deliberative process of citizen engagement in which individuals can share their ideas in an open environment to build bridges of understanding and increase social capital and trust.

Chrislip (2002) highlights the importance of engaging citizens in meaningful and planned collaborative processes with tangible results which provides a counterbalance to Mathews' concerns of citizen disenfranchisement. This is the creation of civic communities in which trust and reciprocity are the norms and collaborative processes thrive. Epstein, Coates, and Wray (2006) provide a model of core community skills - engaging citizens, measuring results, and getting things done - which, as an evaluation process, goes hand-in-hand with Chrislip's collaborative leadership process to engage citizens in meaningful community processes that provide results for the entire community. Shared governance is a rubric within which the concept of citizen engagement resides.

As Leighninger (2006) explains, this participation ranges from one-way communication of local government with residents to citizens engaged directly with local government officials in the process of shared governance. Leighninger examines current citizen engagement structures within communities and their quest to develop shared civic, bureaucratic, and political governance and a new form of democracy. The openness of local governments and administrators to engage in the community building process has provided new avenues for citizens to participate in the open process (Nalbandian, 1999; Nalbandian, O'Neill, Wilkes, & Kaufman, 2013). City officials have the unique ability to promote citizen engagement by encouraging connections among residents in neighborhoods and providing a common neighborhood and community thread for residents to advance participation.

Citizen engagement generally promotes a sense of community among residents and between residents and city staff. Arnstein (1969) suggests a continuum between levels of citizen engagement from nonparticipation and manipulation of the powerless within a community to citizen control exhibited by the powerful within a community. From the citizen perspective of citizen engagement, citizens want to know they have been heard, experience two-way communication, and see their input reflected in the outcome of local level decisions. Examples of effective citizen engagement are active neighborhood associations which produce regular activities or events for neighbors; community leadership programs which provide community knowledge and produce community events or activities; local elections for school bonds; and sales tax increases which produce successful results; or local planning which reflects citizen input in the final decision-making process.

For the purposes of this study, citizen engagement is very simple and represents active engagement of citizens within their communities. However, the simplicity of the definition hides the range of its complexity (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). For example, citizen engagement could be defined as helping in a child's school, volunteering at a nonprofit organization, attending a neighborhood association meeting, attending a city council meeting, or simply voting in elections. It could also include a complex community conversation about land-use planning or metro-wide economic development strategies. The common ingredient is the act of citizens engaged in their communities in an organized manner with the hope of making their communities better places to live, work, and play.

The emerging concept of followership fits well within the study of citizen engagement. Individuals can choose to act as followers and support the mission of the organization just as they may choose to engage with the community or local government in support of, or in opposition to, local actions. Or they can be engaged citizens working against collective community action.

Research Significance

Through the lens of civic engagement, this research set out to determine whether mission-driven followers are distinct from leader-driven followers. Prior to this study, most scholarship described followers using a series of characterizations from sheep and isolates to star or courageous followers and diehards (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman 2008; Kelley 2008). These concepts describe follower actions rather than follower motivation.

Follower motivation was examined to determine why some individuals are more engaged than others in their neighborhood associations. Mission-driven followers—those who choose to be followers—choose to support the leader, choose organizations in which to volunteer, and are

more likely to be the courageous, diehard, and star followers described by Chaleff (2009),

Kellerman (2008), and Kelley (2008). These individuals want to be involved and select the

organizations in which they engage. Mission-driven followers do not need to be coerced or

strong-armed by the leader of the organization to be involved. They readily volunteer and stay

involved because they believe in the mission of the organization.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Are mission-driven followers more active and engaged in their neighborhood associations and do they tend to stay more involved in their neighborhood associations than leader-driven followers?
2. Do mission-driven followers perceive more neighborhood association effectiveness than leader-driven followers?
3. How does neighborhood association purpose and well-being influence mission-driven follower motivation?

Four hundred members of twenty-five neighborhood associations in Kansas City, Kansas,

population 145,786, were surveyed for this research. Kansas City, Kansas is a city comprised of

clearly defined urban, suburban, and rural areas with diversity of age, gender, race, and

socioeconomic status in its neighborhoods.

The following findings emerged from the study:

Hypotheses and Findings

Hypothesis	Findings
H1: Mission-driven followers are more engaged in the community than leader-driven followers.	Supported
H2: Mission-driven followers will perceive greater neighborhood association effectiveness than leader-driven followers.	Not significant
H3: Mission-driven followers will perceive greater overall neighborhood well-being than leader driven followers.	Partially supported

The study highlights three primary implications for leadership, followership, and citizen engagement: (a) Mission-driven followers are more likely to spend time with neighborhood association meetings and activities (b) they are not influenced by neighborhood association effectiveness, and (c) they are more likely to consider neighborhood safety with regard to neighborhood purpose.

Mission-driven and leader-driven follower motivation contributes to the emerging body of knowledge on followership, specifically through neighborhood associations and the investments of neighbors in them. As noted by Kelley (2008), star followers may indeed be mission-driven followers who believe in their organization and want to make it better. Kelley adds that sheep, or unengaged followers, are more likely to be leader-driven followers who are engaged only because the leader asks, and the leader usually must continue to ask to get these followers to engage even in a limited way. Follower actions may be more easily predicted and followers may be more easily engaged through mission-driven and leader-driven follower designations rather than a general followership typology.

It is conceivable that this research may also connect more broadly to other citizen engagement activities and nonprofit organizations in which mission-driven followers would be more desirable as reliable followers and volunteers than leader-driven followers. Attracting and retaining volunteers is an on-going challenge in the nonprofit sector. With volunteer turnover of approximately 20% per year, this results in a large drain on organizational resources, especially for small nonprofit agencies (Hager & Brudney, 2004). With this high turnover of volunteers, nonprofit agencies either spend precious dollars on volunteer recruitment every year, which results in limited resources in other areas, or they go without volunteers when there is not enough money available to train them. A new approach of sustainable volunteer energy is necessary "to

attract people into volunteering and keep them volunteering over the life course" (Brudney & Meijs, 2009, p. 576). This new approach could include an examination of mission-driven followership. These followers are not likely to be motivated by the formal measures of effectiveness of the associations or organizations to which they are committed - even though they are working towards that goal.

Organizations that can attract mission-driven followers as volunteers will most likely have those volunteers for longer periods of time than leader-driven followers. Mission-driven followers are likely to be more engaged and stay with an organization throughout transitions of management, whereas leader-driven followers engaged because of the leader will most likely not stay with the organization when leadership changes. This mission match of mission-driven followers and organizations could ultimately save organizations significant time and resources in volunteer development and retention, since these followers would more likely provide stability and longevity in the organization. Those who are leader-driven may provide a short-term solution, but also a revolving door of new volunteers who constantly need orientation and training. Seeking mission-driven followers may mean more engaged volunteers and more stable followers over time.

References

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *35*(4), 216-224.

Barnard, C. (1938). *The functions of the executive.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brudney, J. L., & Meijs, L. (2009). It ain't natural: Toward a new (natural) resource conceptualization for volunteer management. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 38,* 564-581.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Chaleff, I. (1995). *The courageous follower: Standing up to and for our leaders.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Chaleff, I. (2009). *The courageous follower* (3rd ed.)*.* San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler.

Chrislip, D. D. (2002). *The collaborative leadership fieldbook.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Psychology, 94,* S95-S120*.*

de Tocqueville, A. (2012). In E. Nolla (Ed.), *Democracy in America: Historical-critical edition of de la democratie en Amerique* (J. T. Schleifer, Trans.)*.* Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

Epstein, P. D., Coates, P. M., & Wray, L. D. (2006). *Results that matter.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Graham, P. (Ed.). (2003). *Mary Parker Follett: Prophet of management.* Washington, D.C.: Beard Books.

Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L. (2004). *Volunteer management practices and retention of volunteers.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Keim, S. (2013). *Following the leader or leading the follower: Exploring the effects of mission-driven vs. community-driven participation.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (UMI No. 3610337)

Kellerman, B. (2008). *Followership.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Kelley, R. E. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review, 66*(6), 142-149.

Kelley, R. E. (2008). Rethinking followership. In R. E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, & J. Lipman-Blumen, J. (Eds.). *The art of followership: How great followers create great leaders and organization* (pp. 5-16). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kraft, M. E., & Furlong, S. R. (2013). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Leighninger, M. (2006). *The next form of democracy.* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Mathews, D. (1999). *Politics for people.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Nalbandian, J. (1999). Facilitating community, enabling democracy: New roles for local government managers. *Public Administration Review, 59*, 187-197.

Nalbandian, J., O'Neill, Jr., R., Wilkes, J. M., & Kaufman, A. (2013). Contemporary challenges in local government: Evolving roles and responsibilities, structures, and processes. *Public Administration Review, 73*(4), 567-574.

Putman, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, R. D., & Feldstein, L. M. (2003). *Better together.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Skocpol, T., & Fiorina, M. P. (Eds.). (1999). *Civic engagement in American democracy.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Svara, J. H., & Denhardt, J. V. (2010, May 18). *Promoting citizen engagement and community building.* (White Paper Proposal).

Author Biography

Dr. Susan Keim is Director of Organizational Leadership at Donnelly College. Her areas of expertise are leadership, followership, organizational theory and behavior, and citizen engagement. In addition, she facilitates strategic planning, community leadership and development, and team building for governments, businesses and not-for-profits throughout the country. Susan's past leadership accomplishments include chairing the All-America City Steering Committee, which won the coveted All-America City Award for Kansas City, Kansas/Wyandotte County and was founding chairperson of the Community Foundation of Wyandotte County. She has won the Preceptor Award and the Distinguished Leader Award from the Community Leadership Association and the Distinguished Leadership Award from the Kansas Leadership Forum. Susan received her BA in Political Science, as well as MPA and PhD in Public Administration from the University of Kansas.