Opportunities and Constraints for System Change

A Historical Perspective on the Community Employment Partnership

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE:

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP

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November 13, 2003

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to describe the history of the Community Employment Partnership (CEP), an experimental approach to implementing welfare reform in Ramsey County, Minnesota, and to raise, throughout the historical narrative, questions and interpretations about CEP that can further our understanding of collaboration as a tool to implement public policy changes. The report draws on extensive archival material, including minutes from all of CEP's governing bodies, as well as recent interviews with seventeen people closely connected to CEP's development, including City and County officials, CEP board members and staff, and employer representatives.

The report is organized in a way that raises more questions than it answers. There is a narrative description, broken down into three distinct phases of CEP's development, that focuses on the development of CEP itself (its missions, strategies, governance mechanisms), its decentralized services to job seekers (the Work Resource Hubs) and centralized services for employers (Employer Solutions, Inc.), its evolving relationship with the County and City, and significant trends in its external environment that affected its work. The narrative description is interrupted at key places by interpretations of events, drawing on scholarly research about partnerships.

Phases

The three phases include the following:

> **Phase 1.** "Stirring up the pot, 1994 –1998." This section examines events and activities in CEP's early years as well as those that pre-date its formation. It is titled, "stirring up the pot" to underscore the extent to which CEP became a focus for sorting out the local effects of major national trends, including labor shortages and welfare reform, broadened the understanding of the problem to extend beyond welfare reform to workforce and economic development, and began to design new ways to approach these issues. By the end of this period, ten neighborhood Work Resource Hubs had started to form to provide decentralized services to job seekers and a plan for centralized services for employers, Employer Solutions, Inc., was on the table.

> **Phase 2.** "How to make it work, 1999-2000." This phase documents how external pressures mounted for CEP to show results, faster and clearer, driven by welfare reform time limits and new federal legislation concerning workforce development. During this time, it was also involved with and affected by the consolidation of the City-County workforce programs that ultimately became the County's Workforce

Solutions. Internally, as CEP attempted to respond to these pressures, it faced direct challenges to its authority. Throughout the phase, CEP struggled with many questions of "how to make it work?" By the end of the phase, CEP decided to change its mission and strategy and to separate from the County and form its own independent, membership-based nonprofit organization.

Phase 3. "Owning a customer-driven philosophy and strategy, 2001-2003." This phase describes how CEP moved away from building services for job seekers and employers ("customers") and toward a strategy of broad scale systems change, driven by the needs of customers, to influence funding streams and policy. During this time, CEP developed a theory of change and, as its centerpiece, organized a Customer Group to recommend specific change strategies. The Customer Group responded with recommendations concerning specific products and services and not broad-scale systems change. CEP agreed to develop these. At the end of this period, CEP decided to cease operations and handed its work over to partners, including ISEEK Solutions, Employer Services, Inc., and the St. Paul Area Council of Churches with oversight by the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board.

Themes

Several interrelated themes run throughout these phases. <u>First, the external environment exerted a significant influence on CEP's development</u>. At times, external factors facilitated CEP's work and, at other times, external forces constrained it. For example, by 1997, the combination of labor shortages and heightened attention paid to welfare reform by many different groups helped promote the CEP model of developing broad, voluntary partnerships to create change. Later, pressures to show results, stemming from welfare reform deadlines and new federal workforce legislation, pointed to vulnerabilities in CEP's initial approaches.

<u>A second theme concerns the interaction of formal and informal authority</u>. CEP chose to operate with informal authority through lateral networks of partners and multiple collaborations in order to cause change from the bottom up. However, it needed cooperation and leadership from formal institutions that were legally charged with implementing welfare reform and workforce system changes. Relationships between CEP and these formal institutions were never clear. Furthermore, its relationships with community based organizations and customers were at times tense, leading these groups to question CEP's authority. Thus, throughout much of its life, CEP operated with informal but often unclear authority.

<u>The third theme concerns shifting definitions of what the problem was for which CEP was designing and facilitating solutions, and, importantly, who was defining the problem</u>. The Future

Search conference in 1997 broadened the problem domain from welfare reform to include workforce and economic development. However, as CEP developed, it was difficult to sustain agreement among all parties involved with CEP concerning this expanded problem domain. As CEP learned, funding streams, public policy and service providers were all geared to working on one part of the problem domain. There were few, if any, incentives within traditional systems to find solutions that addressed issues within the broader problem domain. Furthermore, those most often involved in defining the problem were what CEP called "system operators." As the Future Search conference and then CEP's final Customer Group experience in 2002 demonstrated, when job seekers and employers participated in defining the problem, the problem looked quite different.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons can be learned from exploring the CEP experiment as a collaboration that implemented changes in public policy:

- The influence of the external environment on local collaborations is especially strong when change in public policy is being driven from the top down; that is, from federal mandates to states and then localities.

- Especially in these environments, collaborations that operate with informal authority may be quite fragile because they need the cooperation, leadership, and legitimacy from multiple and often competing interests, including formal institutions as well as community or grassroots organizations.

- A collaboration that broadens the definition of what the public policy problem actually is and who has a legitimate stake in designing solutions is difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, important incremental changes can take place within formal institutions if the collaboration continues to articulate broader aspects of the problem and insists that ignored but crucial stakeholders be heard.

INTRODUCTION

Partnerships and collaborations are now common forms of institutional life, set up voluntarily or by government and funder mandates. The often-expressed hope is that collaborations will redefine problem domains, design more efficient systems of service delivery, and stimulate creative problem solving (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Gray, 1989; Huxham, 1996, 2000; Powell, 1990). Collaborations are, however, complex and difficult to manage and often fall short of achieving their goals for many external, institutional, and internal reasons (Huxham & Vange, 2000; Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1998; Ring & Van deVen, 1994; Stone, 2000). The purpose of this report is to describe the history of the Community Employment Partnership (CEP), an experimental approach to implementing welfare reform in Ramsey County, Minnesota[1], and to raise, throughout the historical narrative, questions and interpretations about CEP that can further our understanding of collaboration as a tool to implement public policy.

The report draws on minutes from the CEP's initial governance structures and from its Board following incorporation, written Board briefings, numerous reports commissioned by CEP to assess job seeker needs, and the development of its Work Resource Hubs and Employer Solutions, Inc. (ESI), funding proposals, CEP newsletters, previous draft histories of CEP, and raw data from large group events. The report also includes material from interviews with nearly twenty people closely associated with CEP, including County and City officials, CEP board members, Hub and ESI staff, and consultants associated with CEP's work. Interview questions are included as Appendix A.

Case study research design highlights nuances and details of a single experience but cannot be generalized beyond the particular situation. This report, therefore, is organized in a way that raises more questions than it answers. There is a narrative description, broken down into three distinct phases of CEP's development, that focuses on the development of CEP itself (its missions, strategies, governance mechanisms), its decentralized services to job seekers (the Work Resource Hubs) and centralized services for employers (Employer Solutions, Inc.), its evolving relationship with the County and City, and significant trends in its external environment that affected its work. The narrative description is interrupted at key places by interpretations of events, drawing on scholarly research about partnerships.

Three interrelated themes are developed in the report. First, throughout CEP's development, the external environment exerted a significant influence. The external environment includes economic, political and social trends as well as institutional pressures from legislative and regulatory bodies and traditional bureaucracies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Sharfman, Gray & Yin,

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[1] Ramsey County includes the state capital, St. Paul, and in 1997, had more than 10,000 families on welfare.

1991). At times, external factors facilitated CEP's work, and, at other times, external forces constrained it. A second theme concerned interaction of formal and informal authority. CEP chose to operate with informal authority through lateral networks of constituencies and stakeholders in order to cause change from the bottom up. However, it needed cooperation and leadership from formal institutions that were legally charged with implementing welfare reform and workforce system changes. Relationships between CEP and formal institutions were never clear, and relationships between CEP and its network partners were sometimes strained, undermining CEP's ability to create change. The third theme concerns shifting definitions of what the problem was for which CEP's work was a solution, and, importantly, who was perceived to have a legitimate stake in defining the problem. Over time, the definition of the problem shifted significantly as did the types of groups most involved in problem definition. Clearly, these three themes are interrelated. For example, pressures from the external environment significantly influenced the extent to which those with formal authority viewed CEP's informal authority as legitimate. External pressures also affected how the problem was defined and who had the right to define it.

What follows is a description of the three phases in CEP's history as well as interpretations of salient events that highlight these themes. To reiterate, this format is used to stimulate discussion in order to facilitate a broader understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of using collaborations or partnerships to implement public policy.

Before proceeding, it is important to describe how we determined the three phases. First, CEP staff and I decided that this research would examine CEP's chronology by tracking changes in its external environment along the top of a timeline and major internal events below the timeline. CEP staff and other key stakeholders developed a more intricate map of CEP's history during the summer and fall of 2002. Then, after I had finished the interviews, we met to analyze the timeline, add important material from the interviews, and ask ourselves whether there seemed to be distinctive phases by which to analyze CEP's history. As a result of these discussions and analyses, we determined that there were three relatively distinct phases, described below.

Phase 1. Stirring Up the Pot, 1994-1998

By the mid-1990s, anticipated federal budget cuts, welfare reform, devolution of responsibility of many federal programs to state and local governments, and looming labor shortages provided strong incentives for thinking differently about how government, local communities and the private sector should respond. The political environment at the federal level supported major redirection in the welfare system – it was apparent that welfare reform legislation would emphasize work requirements, time limits on welfare benefits, and state and local government responsibility for developing and implementing new welfare systems. As the President and Congress were negotiating legislation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted Minnesota a waiver in 1994 to develop an experimental welfare reform program, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). At the same time, economic indicators at local, state and national levels pointed to a rapidly growing economy coupled with significant labor shortages, including shortages in entry-level positions. The need to bring together employers seeking workers with those facing new work requirements was clear; however, doing so meant tackling longstanding bureaucratic systems and entrenched cultures that had kept welfare services, workforce development and economic development systems separate.

In this section, we examine events and activities in the Community Employment Partnership's (CEP) early years as well as those that pre-date its formation. We title Phase 1, "Stirring up the Pot" to underscore the extent to which CEP became a focus for sorting out the local effects of major national trends, broadening the understanding of what the problems really were, and designing new ways of approaching them.

Pre-Future Search

During the mid-1990s, local discussions were occurring within the private sector and within government about how to understand the scope of the problems and issues and what to do about them. For example, the Midway Chamber of Commerce[2] formed a task force to examine the effects of welfare reform, labor shortages and workforce development issues. A number of industries in the Midway area desperately needed entry-level workers, and the task force saw the potential connection of this need to people coming into the workforce from changes in the welfare system. And, within Ramsey County government, efforts were underway by 1994 to assess the impact of anticipated changes to the welfare system.

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[2] Midway is a geographic area of St. Paul on its western outskirts.

The Welfare Reform Planning Project, undertaken by Ramsey County Human Services (RCHS), assessed impact broadly, including changes needed in employment and training programs, child-care, housing and health care support services for those transitioning off welfare and into work. The Project involved a wide range of participants. In particular, RCHS staff met with several dozen people on public assistance and heard that, to assist them in transitioning off welfare, they wanted to talk with people with similar experiences, not government caseworkers. To respond, the County freed up money to organize an on-going group of current and former welfare recipients. This group became the community organization, Sister-to-Sister. In September of 1995, the Project team presented its interim report to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners for discussion.

> *"In Ramsey County there are approximately 11,000 families who are currently receiving AFDC. The challenge facing these families, and the community, as a whole is <u>to find the resources within the community to help them move from public assistance to jobs – jobs that support their families.</u> …This will be a large task. It will require more than any one system or agency can currently provide." (Organizing a Coordinated Network of Community Resources, 9/95, p.3, emphasis in the original)*

The Welfare Reform Planning Project sought and received approval from the Ramsey County Board in early 1996 to move forward with an implementation plan, and, in September of 1996, one month after Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the County Welfare Reform Working Group presented to the Board its implementation plan, "Ramsey County's Response to Welfare Reform." The plan emphasized two principal outcomes: 1) AFDC families that could work would be working in jobs that supported their families before time limits; and 2) those who could not work would be supported by the community. To achieve these outcomes the plan described five strategies, including a county-community partnership. On September 3, 1996, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners adopted Resolution 96-374, endorsing the full Plan.

Commentary

Gaining support from the local political system was critical because it gave both CEP and Ramsey County Human Services a mandate from their authorizing environment (Moore, 1995) that legitimized a broad-based, partnership approach to implementing welfare reform.

> *"One of the most important sustaining events for CEP was the County Board's recognition of the importance of welfare reform." (County affiliated)[3]*
>
> *"The County's leadership and [County Commissioner] Sue Haigh in particular were critically important." (Employer affiliated)*
>
> However, the County role was not clear from these early reports – it both was "only one partner" and was "critically positioned to play the role of leader/initiator." Did these different roles indicate that internal differences of opinion or unresolved issues existed within RCHS from the beginning regarding what its relationship should be to a County-community partnership?
>
> *"In addressing [a host of needs], the County is only one partner in a network of community based organizations, communities of faith, employers and units of government who share a stake in the community's future… However the County is critically positioned to play the role of leader/initiator for this partnership." (pp. 10 and 29, Ramsey County's Response to Welfare Reform, 9/3/96).*

Future Search – The Problem Gets Redefined

Roughly nine months after the County Board's endorsement of the implementation plan, over seventy people came together May 1-3, 1997, in a Future Search conference entitled, "BEYOND WELFARE REFORM: Coming Together to Build WORKable Solutions for Families and Employers."[4] Its goal was to achieve "breakthrough" strategies to accomplish the two principal outcomes of the Ramsey County Welfare Reform Plan (Gehrman, 1997). Future Search participants were those with a clear stake in strengthening the workforce system – half were current and former welfare recipients and employers, and the rest were community leaders, government officials, and representatives from education and job training institutions, funders, community based organizations.

At the beginning of the second day of the conference, discussions across stakeholder groups

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[3] Interviewees are not named to protect their confidentiality and instead are simply designated broadly with their affiliation. Also, even when two or more quotations have the same affiliation, each quotation comes from a different interviewee.

[4] A Future Search process, based on the work of Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, included a large, diverse group of individuals planning around an issue of common concern.

highlighted significant tensions – on a day-to-day basis, jobseekers and employers were having a difficult time connecting, due to a fragmented workforce system of multiple government agencies and nonprofit employer service providers. Recognition of the limitations in the existing workforce system broadened the conference focus beyond welfare reform. At the end of the second day, a consensus emerged that a Community Employment System was needed that included Resource Hubs, located in neighborhoods throughout the County that could provide one-stop shopping for both employers and job seekers.

On the final day, participants formed action teams around the following aspects to make the community employment system a reality: Work Resource Hubs where employers could list jobs and jobseekers could learn of work opportunities and access a variety of resources to assist them in getting and holding a job; a central database with decentralized access for storing lists of job openings and other employment related resources; consumer support, including an expanded Sister-to-Sister operation; childcare and transportation services; an Employer Task Force and a centralized access system for employers; and emergency services to support people who cannot work or who end up working in jobs that do not support them ("Welcome to Ramsey County: The Year is 2002," nd). Action teams agreed to take responsibility for moving their part forward in terms of implementation following the conference. The County committed to "keep the pieces moving" (raw data from conference, nd).

Commentary

Initiating partnerships to tackle complex problems depends on certain antecedent conditions, such as a legitimate convening party, general consensus on an overall vision, existing networks of resources (Waddock, 1986) and necessity or looming crisis if solutions are not found (Oliver, 1990). There were several important antecedent conditions, prior to Future Search, that contributed to the consensus that emerged at Future Search. As described earlier, Ramsey County Human Services established itself as a convener of a broad range of constituencies for early discussions of welfare reform and, within RCHS, there was some agreement that it needed to move, at least incrementally, toward a more decentralized service delivery system.

"I always thought the County and City needed to get out more, not be so centralized. The County was legitimately interested in welfare reform and we needed help doing it. We knew we couldn't do it all… We tried to look for partners to relocate our financial workers and had early agreements with Regions Hospital and Dorothy Day." (County affiliated)

"I sense a mythology that Future Search is where Hubs developed, but it's not. A couple of months before [Future Search], we had a day and a half meeting, with half the people from Ramsey County, half not. That group came up with a vision of Hubs and the belief that it would take more than a financial worker and employment counselor to meet new demands." (County affiliated)

"Sister-to-Sister [begun prior to Future Search] has remained involved throughout CEP's development and continually gave us the job seeker's voice." (CEP/ESI/Hub affiliated)

An essential theme throughout CEP's development was that how "the problem" was defined and by whom indicated the extent to which system change was necessary. Future Search expanded the problem domain, meaning the boundaries circumscribing elements of the problem (Gray, 1989), from a single focus on welfare reform to issues with the workforce and economic development systems. Furthermore, research suggests that partnerships are more capable of producing innovations (versus incremental change) if they are comprised of people outside of traditional, bureaucratic systems (Roberts & Bradley, 1991). It is likely, then, that Future Search was able to redefine and broaden the problem domain because half of its participants were not part of traditional service delivery systems. For example, the very direct and tense discussion among job seekers, employment service providers and employers was an event that stayed in the memory of people who attended Future Search and unleashed creative energy to broaden the problem domain.

"[The] other thing it [Future Search] helped to do was generate a lot of interpersonal interaction from diverse economic spheres. Pretty equal job seeker – employer representation. Powerful interaction! Most helpful learning for me [was when] a mom with kids and no jobs interacted with the guy from McDonalds who said, 'I got jobs!'" (County affiliated)

"I've always been glad we did the Future Search conference the way we did. Customers drove the agenda and outcomes, and that was the place where so many heard for the first time in the

words of real people in the system that the workforce system just wasn't effectively connecting job seekers and employers. The Conference was also the place where we realized that thinking about welfare reform was only part of the big picture. We needed to combine the focus on welfare reform with an emphasis on the looming labor shortage. We also realized that whatever we came up with needed to provide a win/win solution for job seekers and employers. That was a key insight." (CEP/ESI/Hub affiliated)

In retrospect, however, the consensus about the problem domain and what needed to be changed was fragile. Participants underestimated the extent of systems change needed at many different levels of government and across several different institutions to enact their vision. And on-going discussions of the powerful conflicts that existed among job seekers, employers and employment service providers did not continue.

"It was an edgy conversation [at Future Search] but we didn't stay on it. Confrontation doesn't happen here [in Minnesota] but it needed to happen." (City affiliated)

Transition to Implementation

There was a flurry of activity following Future Search aimed at continuing the momentum of the conference and moving people toward action. The action teams continued to meet and design aspects of the Community Employment System. An Employer Task Force integrated employer concerns into the work of the teams and the overall system. A Design Team, made up of representatives from the Action Teams, had responsibility for integrating these efforts and designing and building the new system. Teams were given guidelines for conducting their work (Ramsey County Partnership for Welfare Reform, Action Team Worksheet, 5/97):

- Vision: A Community Employment System that effectively links and supports job seekers and employers;

- Operating principles: people with a stake in the outcome are involved, recipients and employers are primary customers, no Partnership member goes forward unilaterally, commitment to action and relationships among people from different sectors and perspectives will make the change work successful.

During the summer and early fall of 1997, the Resource Hub Action Team worked on the basics of Hub design and proposed ten geographic locations for neighborhood Hubs. A crucial decision made by the Hub Action Team was that individual Hubs would develop from their local communities without a rigidly imposed structure from above. In late September, the Team sent a letter to community partners throughout Ramsey County inviting them to assess interest in their neighborhoods for forming a Resource Hub (Resource Hub Action Team letter, 9/27/97). A goal was to have three Hubs operational by January 1st, 1998.

As teams and task forces convened, Minnesota's largest foundation, the McKnight Foundation announced a major statewide, two-year, $20 million welfare reform initiative. Phase one of the initiative involved three month planning grants to broadly based partnerships convened in the state's counties. The second phase of the initiative included two-year implementation grants. The goals and basic design for the partnerships were very compatible with what Ramsey County had been developing.

> *"[To design the initiative,] McKnight called together the likely suspects in regional meetings, formed planning teams and then developed funding criteria. The major criteria were that the most important sectors be involved and that teams represent an area where at least 500 public assistance families lived. Ramsey County had the Future Search conference, so they were doing similar work. Their concept was the same as ours – the County was saying it couldn't do it all by itself. The involvement of employers as a core group with us [McKnight] was relatively new. Ramsey County was at the forefront of this. [It] had really good employers involved." (Funder affiliated)*

Following a unanimous resolution of the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners on October 7th, the Chairperson submitted a proposal to the McKnight Foundation, requesting $2.2 million over two years for what would be called the Community Employment Partnership (CEP).

Key features of the proposal included a focus on decentralized services for job seekers and centralized services for employers. The proposal clearly hoped to link welfare reform, workforce development, and economic development – " The purposes of this new and integrated system are: to effectively link and support job seekers and employers; to invest in Ramsey County's workforce; to foster economic stability and growth" ("Implementation Proposal to the McKnight Foundation, 10/97, p.5). The proposal also stated that much of the overall structure of the new system envisioned in the proposal was still evolving. McKnight awarded Ramsey County a two-year grant for $2 million.

Research points to the general sequence of phases that collaborations experience, recognizing that not all proceed through these sequentially: 1) problem-setting where appropriate stakeholders convene and make a commitment to collaborate; 2) direction-setting when stakeholders explore the problem in depth and reach agreement about alternatives; and, 3) implementation. Failure to adequately address issues within these phases can severely hamper the collaborative's success (Gray, 1996). It appears that these phases were compressed due to time pressures both from the need to begin implementing welfare reform and from the McKnight grant deadline. For example, Design Team minutes reveal that it initially spent considerable time on Action Team updates and coordinating work across the teams, work with employers and job seekers, and Resource Hub design. With the McKnight proposal deadline looming, more and more time was spent on developing the overall structure for CEP and on translating ideas coming out of the Action Teams into components of the proposal to McKnight, including which components would request funding from McKnight and at what level.

Clearly, the McKnight grant legitimized the County's response to welfare reform in general and the work leading up to the Community Employment Partnership more specifically. However, there may have been several unintended consequences of receiving the McKnight grant. McKnight really defined the problem as implementing welfare reform through service delivery, not systems change. And one could question whether the immediate availability of what some perceived as "new money" helped or hindered the early development of CEP.

"I got excited about the CEP because, by focusing on using existing resources in new ways instead of attracting new public or foundation funding, it provided the opportunity to wean nonprofit service providers from greater dependence on grants by challenging them to cooperate on their shared missions and to become more entrepreneurial and focused on customers, which CEP defined as job seekers and employers. Unfortunately, most the nonprofits were at the table because they thought there would be more funding available to allow them to pursue their own individual and sometimes microscopic missions." (City affiliated)

The literature also points out that it takes a great deal of time to develop trust among partners, which is an absolutely essential ingredient to any successful collaborative effort (Van de Ven & Ring, 1994). In the case of CEP, however, time pressures presented a real paradox – CEP organizers knew that to carry forward the Future Search momentum, they needed to start acting sooner rather than later. Nonetheless, it may be that through the flurry of activities, CEP organizers did not hear dissenting voices or pay attention to lingering conflict among and within partners.

"I think I was getting nervous about where we might be going. I was involved [with another partnership] and I thought [the other partnership] had made some big mistakes – the scope of what we tried to do was large, too large, and in the end, we were left with nothing tangible, it was all abstract. So by that summer [1997], I got nervous about CEP…. The Hubs made sense but I was concerned with how they developed. The process for deciding where Hubs should be and how they should come into being was very political. Decisions around how to draw geographic boundaries were made in a way that made sure major community players each had their traditional turf. Then they just pulled everyone together inside those [geographic] boundaries, irrespective of compatible missions or past experience, and said, 'be partners.'" (County affiliated)

The Work of Partnership Begins

The Servant Leadership Team (SLT) began its work in November of 1997, vowing to be a "model of collaboration," accountable to partners and funders. It was "not intended to be a new administrative entity but to become a conduit for the energy, imagination, and issues of job seekers and employers alike" (SLT minutes, 11/24/97, p.1). In its role as conduit, it helped organize, coordinate, and keep moving ad hoc task forces, working groups, and nascent affiliated partnerships. For example:

- The Employers' Task Force, made up of representatives from local employers, came forward with ideas for the centralized employer services that included a nonprofit broker organization (that eventually became Employer Solutions, Inc. or ESI).

- In response to employers' concerns expressed at Future Search about the fragmented workforce development system, a collaboration of twenty government job counselors and community employment service providers formed JobConnect to simplify connections between employers and people needing jobs.

- CEP also developed the Health Care Workforce Pilot with selected health care employers in Ramsey County to provide customized job training and retention services using applicants from the existing workforce development system and from MFIP.

- A Hub Funding Group developed criteria for reviewing plans and made funding recommendations to the SLT as proposals arrived from developing Hubs. Three Hubs began work by January 1, 1998 and ten were developed by the end of the year. As Hubs formed, a Hub Contact Group began to meet on a regular basis.

In keeping with its desire not to become an administrative entity, the SLT emphasized alternative ways to structure its work. Its ad hoc task forces and working groups, as well as the SLT itself, operated with informal authority, outside institutional structures, although participants included both those inside and outside of these structures. For example, members of the SLT included County and City managers, employers, a representative from job seekers, schools and local nonprofits. Letters of commitment from partners on the SLT (for example, from the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, and a child care nonprofit) formed the essence of its accountability system.

Commentary

The letters clarified working relationships between individual partners and CEP, but it was not clear exactly what CEP was and from whom it derived its authority. While it was physically housed in the County and its Director was a County employee, the relationship between CEP and the County was complicated. As CEP evolved, the County had made it clear that it was just one of the partners comprising CEP, and it stepped back from any formal decisions to link its welfare reform activities specifically and directly to CEP programs – "[The] County came in with a certain wariness, it did not want to be seen as running things. 'This isn't a RC initiative. RC is a partner.' CEP with McKnight money had a larger role" (County affiliated interviewee). For example, in its Request for Proposals to community agencies to deliver contracted employment services, it suggested, but did not require, that these be delivered on a neighborhood basis through the developing Hubs.

"CEP and the County started to go down two very different tracks. The CEP track was with McKnight funds and the Hub concept. County had its own welfare reform money and put out an RFP [for employment service contracts] that asked if applying agencies would be willing to participate in Hubs. But it was never clear that those agencies with a key responsibility for MFIP would play a key role in helping to shape Hubs. That role might belong to some other agency outside the County's MFIP service system. So there was only a very, very thin thread connecting these two tracks…. And, the County didn't have much experience working with the community. For some, it was scary, so they retreated. Others in CEP didn't understand systems, didn't want to deal with the complicated County systems stuff – but still wanted to be about systems change." (County affiliated)

From interviews, it was also apparent that there were many different initial expectations of what CEP was and what it should do. Even within RCHS, different expectations existed.

"County had two goals: employment for those who could work and safety net for those who couldn't. CEP started with both goals, then shifted to employment. Nature of the people involved, were really interested in employment. Hubs were not designed to be safety nets." (County affiliated)

"My initial expectations of CEP were that it would be a systems' barrier buster. Deal with some policy things, like childcare, housing, transportation, that we all talk about but can't get our arms around. We'd [County] focus on local level and CEP would take on the systems piece." (County affiliated)

"We [County] needed really concrete things. For example, transportation is a huge problem for MFIP folks, so we needed a car repair program. CEP could have helped us here versus concentrating on the bigger systems stuff that never became tangible." (County affiliated)

Furthermore, many Ramsey County Human Services managers were

already dealing with difficult internal challenges: operationally, retraining staff and redesigning their work was needed; the culture of their departments had to change to reflect new mandates; and, they had to start placing people now in jobs in order to meet placement requirements upon which funding depended. It is not surprising that there were early indications of resistance to the CEP and Hub concept from some County staff.

> *"[The] design [of CEP] was very fuzzy. All came together somehow but very fast and loose. The County stayed back, asking, "How big can this be?" There were those who said, 'we can go to 10+ Hubs' versus [those who said] 'we shouldn't do 10 Hubs. We can't manage this, can't control this.'" (County affiliated)*

> *"The County was lead facilitator of CEP but we didn't think we should own it. The County's responsibilities for placement were very specific. Regardless of CEP, we had to meet deadlines, whatever CEP did. County management staff was skeptical of CEP, reserved. All the talking [within CEP] versus our accountability measures which were numbers of people in jobs." (County affiliated, emphasis added)*

Now, almost all of the County staff interviewed has second thoughts about the County's stepping back from a leadership role.

> *"County made a choice – 'we won't be the lead partner and we won't dictate.' If I did it over, I would get clearer on expectations." (County affiliated)*

> *"County was the convener and equal partner. [I am] not sure that was the best role. County started convening discussions and tried to make everyone an equal partner. 10 was too many Hubs but the County didn't say this." (County affiliated)*

The fact that the County stayed back probably did encourage more groups and organizations outside of the traditional systems to become involved. At the same time, this position, its own mixed expectations concerning CEP, and some internal resistance to CEP helped create the ambiguity surrounding what legitimacy and authority CEP really had within the formal

welfare system. On the other hand, some   outside of the system felt that CEP was too closely aligned with the County, an issue that surfaced in SLT discussions over the role of the County as the sole fiscal agent for the $2 million McKnight grant.

Meanwhile, the SLT also faced questions about how its work would relate to changes occurring in the formal workforce development systems. Was it designing its own workforce system? How would it relate to existing state and local workforce programs? The state Department of Economic Security (DES), which was not involved in the initial development of CEP, raised concerns about the extent to which Hubs would duplicate Work Force Centers and whether the Employer Services Design Plan might potentially overlap with brokering activities carried on by DES programs.   According to some, DES did not like the decentralized notion of Hubs and thought trying to coordinate Workforce Centers with newly developing Hubs was too complicated.

And, from the outset, merger discussions between the City and the County concerning their workforce systems entered into SLT deliberations. The SLT sent a representative to sit on the City-County Work Force System Redesign Task Force while several other members of the SLT were directly involved on the Task Force as representatives of their home organizations. At the end of 1998, the City-County Task Force recommended merger, a move the SLT endorsed, stating that the merger was a "huge step forward" (SLT minutes, 12/17/98).

Commentary

Throughout all of these discussions, a fundamental question kept arising -- what did a dual focus on job seekers and employers actually mean? Who WAS the customer? For example, did the focus on job seekers exclude those who could not work or the "hard to employ" and hence also exclude safety net and emergency services? This was of real concern to the County since the second overall outcome of the County's welfare reform strategy focused on providing services to those who could not work. Furthermore, how would the Partnership balance both employer and jobseeker needs? Some thought employer issues dominated CEP activities while others feared employers had not been involved enough. Here are examples of these concerns drawn from SLT minutes at three different points in time:

12/1/97: " It was reported that the health care partners [of the Health Care Pilot] had asked whether the Partnership was involved in a welfare-to-work or an employment initiative, and that they were pleased at the decision to drop welfare from the Partnership's name." (p.1)

4/10/98: "Concern was expressed that focusing too much on responding to employer workforce needs might dilute the commitment to hire welfare recipients. Concern was also expressed that the Employers' Task Force and the Work Resource Hubs were working toward different ends."

"The major partners aren't communicating well with each other: employers aren't committed to hiring the hardest to employ, and agency staff aren't committed to serving employers. There appears to be a huge difference in philosophy and considerable mistrust in particular on the part of community based agency staff for employers." (p.2)

10/26/98: "The positioning statement on page 6 [of the draft Communications Plan] was discussed at length. It was noted that if the Partnership existed to prepare job seekers, then employers were emphasized too much in the position statement. Another view expressed was that employers were the primary customer, but that it would be O.K. to say the Partnership serves 2 primary customers by making a more effective connection between them." (p.1)

Confusion and disagreement existed about three important questions: 1) who was the customer; 2) what was the problem CEP was trying to solve; and, 3) who had a legitimate stake in defining the problem. The Future Search conference had expanded participants' understanding of the problem – it was more than welfare reform; it was intricately connected to a flawed workforce development system and linked to the region's economic development. And, Future Search had expanded the types of people involved in defining the problem to include employers and job seekers. The vision that partners signed onto in their Letters of Commitment clearly stated the broader problem definition ("to foster economic stability and growth by investing in Ramsey County's workforce and linking and supporting job seekers and employers"). As CEP began to implement that vision, however, it found that it faced multiple and competing pressures among partners and from those outside to define one piece of the problem over the others. This confusion mirrored the fragmented institutional systems within which CEP attempted to operate.

Phase 2. How to Make "It" Work – 1999-2000

Following eighteen months of developing, initiating, facilitating and moving forward the work of CEP, there were several things to show for these efforts. By the end of 1998, work had begun on all ten Hubs, although some were farther ahead in terms of actually delivering partnership services than others. Early in 1999, Employer Solutions, Inc, (ESI) opened its doors as joint venture under contract with CEP of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and the Midway and Suburban Chambers of Commerce. ESI's business plan documented that employers struggled with a labor shortage while facing a fragmented workforce system with few incentives to help employers attract, support and retain qualified employees. Employers wanted a single place to call for help and a link to government and nonprofit employment service providers that had clients needing work. Employers also wanted an organization that would help government and nonprofits understand employer needs more fully (Morehouse, "Reflections on and Lessons Learned From Employer Solutions," 9/01). ESI was conceived as that organization.

Meanwhile, there were increasing pressures on CEP to demonstrate results. The external environment, largely out of CEP's control, was pressing for specific and concrete results from both the new welfare and workforce development systems. Internally, as CEP attempted to respond to these pressures for outcomes, it faced direct challenges to its authority over the programs and services it was helping to develop. Throughout this phase, CEP struggled with numerous questions of, "how to make it work?" By the end of this phase, CEP decided to change its mission and strategy and to form an independent nonprofit organization.

Speeding up the work to achieve results

Externally, pressures to speed up CEP's work came from both welfare reform and workforce development systems. The clock continued to tick for MFIP recipients, and at one SLT meeting, a member brought a burning candle to make this point. In addition, the newly passed federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) loomed large. It targeted low-income job seekers in need of training, displaced workers and youth. Funding from the U.S. Department of Labor flowed to the state Department of Economic Security and was then allocated to local service delivery areas. A local Workforce Investment Board (WIB), required to include fifty-one percent of its members from business and forty-nine percent from nonprofits, educational institutions and labor unions, oversaw the administration of programs and funds. While the local focus contained in the WIA legislation was compatible with CEP's work, WIA stressed outcomes and deadlines.

> *"It was noted that WIA, which supports neighborhood-based service delivery through workforce centers and affiliates, has the potential for integrating with the Partnership but that <u>contracts and hard performance measurements are very different from voluntary collaborations among equal partners</u>." (SLT minutes, 3/8/99, p.2, emphasis added)*

Internally, the Servant Leadership Team expressed growing impatience with the slow pace of Hub service development and the Partnership's efforts at systems change. Early in 1999, the SLT considered the idea of raising major amounts of new money to jumpstart CEP, build partner capacities, and change the service delivery system. The idea of a major new fundraising strategy also raised a central question – what authority did CEP really have to change existing systems?

> *"The question was raised about what authority CEP had to leverage system change. It was noted that it was one thing to identify gaps and quite another to try to eliminate duplication. It was also noted that there was only limited ability to redesign state and federal funding systems. It was responded that the Partnership's authority was expected to come from the local public and nonprofit partners as the result of the process it was initiating…" (SLT minutes, 2/1/99, p.1)*

In light of these concerns, the SLT undertook in early 1999, a significant re-assessment to clarify CEP's mission and the SLT's roles and responsibilities, membership, and, importantly, relationship to ESI and the Hubs. In May, CEP brought over fifty stakeholders and partners together for Acceleration Now "to work together to accelerate customer results by agreeing on a clear direction, accountability guidelines and how we relate, so results can be seen by all." Results from the day-long event were mixed – there was considerable agreement on what needed to be done but considerable disagreement over how to do it. The group also delivered a mixed message to the SLT – it should "get out of the way," and it should "lead" (Acceleration Now meeting notes, 5/20/99, p.6). The meeting did not produce agreement on either accountability guidelines or a governance structure for CEP.

A second meeting was held in June to focus on a structure for CEP "that gets Hubs operational and achieves results for job seeker customers as soon as possible" (Acceleration Now 2 meeting notes, 6/30/99, p.1). Again, no consensus was reached. Instead five stakeholder groups (including employment services providers, employers, jobseekers, Ramsey County, and support service providers) agreed to meet during the summer to try to reach consensus on an overall plan. Once a plan was developed, stakeholders would meet with the City of St. Paul to negotiate how the plan could fit with the Workforce Investment Act and the proposed merger of City and County workforce systems – CEP wanted to help the City and County's workforce systems implement WIA, with the hope that an integrated system could exist at the local level, and then "only if a partnership like CEP were to push it." (SLT minutes, 7/12/99, p. 2). CEP wanted to tie its discussion of a new organizational and governance structure into discussions taking place concerning the newly consolidated City-County workforce system and the Workforce Investment Board.

Negotiation Needed

Negotiations with the City over the Acceleration Plan, however, did not go smoothly. The City was dissatisfied with the draft coming out of the stakeholder groups, viewing it as too process-oriented and not focused enough on results. City staff indicated they were rethinking their commitment to the Partnership and to the merger itself, and during the fall of 1999, merger talks between the City and County stalled.

Reaction to the draft plan from the Hub Contact Group was also strongly negative. The group saw in the plan a softening of CEP's commitment to Hubs, and, in fact, the Acceleration Design agreed to by stakeholder groups called for "less focus on co-location in 10 Hub sites and more focus on the mechanisms that work best for customers," and "connecting job seekers and employers to the breadth of the available resources that work best for customers" (Acceleration Design, 9/21/99, p.1). The Hub Contact Group responded by holding meetings closed to CEP and Ramsey County staff.

The final plan, adopted in November of 1999, and agreed to by the City, the County, the stakeholder group and CEP, stated that CEP's vision was now "an economically vital community mobilized to support successful matches between employers and job seekers," and its mission was to "build a partnership that supports successful matches between employers and job seekers" (Acceleration Plan, 11/4/99). To do this, it would: 1) become an independent, membership based nonprofit organization; 2) create a voluntary network of nonprofit, for profit, and government partners; and, 3) develop tools to build the capacity of its members to support successful matches between employers and job seekers.

Commentary

Pressures to show results were coming from the top down, from traditional institutional authorities (from federal to state to local government entities). CEP's major approach to date had emphasized organizing lateral networks of partners with informal authority and accountability mechanisms. Its process-oriented approach, while necessary for true collaborative efforts (Waddock, 1986) can be vulnerable when faced with institutional demands for fast results.

"This process, the leadership group [SLT], wasn't a good process. Had no place for leadership. Everything averaged out so no room for a visionary leader to say, 'We need to go this way...' [St. Paul Mayor] Coleman had a vision for how it would work. Others did, too. But the vision always got lost to minutiae. No one saying, 'Here are outcomes we are going to produce.'" (City affiliated)

"SLT was hamstrung by process. Everyone had to be involved. Made me wonder if the product of the whole thing was process. But are we doing anything?" (City affiliated).

Acceleration Now was a dramatic illustration of the problem of a process-oriented approach in a contentious and changing environment.

"I think we would have done the Acceleration Now meetings differently. Looking back, we had too many people with too many competing agendas to reach the consensus about governance that would have allowed us to really accelerate the work." (CEP/ESI/Hub affiliated).

"Acceleration Now was the moment of truth but didn't work. Tried to clarify goals. Had workforce development, financial workers, employment contractors, etc., in the room. [City] said, 'we are going to do Work Force Investment Act the way Department of Labor wants. Go away.'" (Consultant)

"Acceleration Now was a real barrier [to CEP's development.] So bogged down. Negatively impacted CEP's credibility. The City significantly changed its positions, pulled back its support, and adopted a less cooperative negotiating style." (CEP/ESI/Hub affiliated)

In many ways, the CEP plan that was adopted by the end of 1999 was a significant shift. Attention to Hubs was indeed minimal and there was very little mention of systems change. CEP was to be a membership organization whose members included service providers, employers and representatives of jobseekers. Its authority would come from its member base and its focus was on products, outcomes, and results. If members were now "the customer," representing many diverse perspectives, then how were they going to define the problem?

"The problem became defined as 'helping member organizations [the partners] get better at what they do' (Connection Newsletter, 12/99, p.4) in order to match job seekers and employers."

Familiar Issues With (Slightly) Different Looks

Instead of clarity from its new direction, the newly elected CEP board found itself facing familiar issues – its relationships to Hubs and ESI and its response to the hard to employ.

Relationship with the Hubs. By May of 2000, CEP was providing funding for nine Hubs (the Downtown Hub had elected not to seek funding). Its role in Hub funding, however, raised old issues – was CEP responsible for setting standards for Hubs and holding them accountable? To whom were Hubs accountable? Would CEP set criteria for all Hubs for future funding? Using two different consultant reports, the board assessed the goals and needs of the Hubs and then the long-term relationship of CEP to Hubs (MDRC memo, "Summary of Workforce Hub Focus Groups," 5/15/00; "Development Assessment of the Work Resource Hubs," 12/20/00). Both reported that substantial development of the local collaboratives had occurred, although with much variability across Hubs. A third report clearly stated that the challenges facing Hubs were considerable and the decentralized, neighborhood design potentially problematic:

> *"As suggested above, the Hubs remain a 'work in progress' and, at this point, the original vision of full service integration has not yet been realized. This is not surprising given that <u>there are multiple competing goals among the key stakeholders that to some extent cut against decentralizing services at the community level</u>. For example, employers may not see themselves as community-based when their need is to recruit broadly to fill vacancies and retain in a tight labor market. Similarly, from the job seeker perspective, employment opportunities are not typically available in their neighborhoods… Moreover, for providers to be competitive and operate efficiently, they may operate and organize services on a countywide basis rather than focusing on a specific community. <u>Finally, the accountability requirements of government agencies and other funders expect program services to be delivered with some consistency and uniformity.</u>" (Recommendations for Strengthening Employment Retention and Advancement Strategies in the Ramsey County MFIP Program, October 2000, p.3, emphasis added).*

The December report went on to state that Hubs were not self-sustainable in the short term and recommended that CEP continue to fund them for the next two years. The report also recommended that CEP develop standards "that identify what constitutes a viable Hub" (p. 4). The CEP board decided in its December meeting to continue to fund viable Hubs through 2002 based on standards and measurable outcomes.

Relationship with ESI. In the meantime, the Employer Solutions concept continued to evolve. JobConnect became an Employer Solutions component, electronic job posting came online, and a one-stop phone consultation and referral service was established. Workforce specialists were trained and on the job. However, as with the Hubs, it became apparent that the vision of ESI as a broker linking employers with work ready people was not self-supporting – employers who most needed ESI's services were unable to pay for them, and employers with the ability to pay tended to have staff in place that duplicated what ESI had to offer (Morehouse, "Employer Solutions, Inc.: A Report to Funders, Accomplishments and Lessons Learned," March 2002).

Three other obstacles facing ESI were particularly troubling. First, during the course of 2000, it became apparent that the partners making up ESI (CEP and the Midway, Suburban, and St. Paul Chambers of Commerce) had different expectations about ESI's mission and future. CEP leadership was concerned that ESI was being drawn away from the vision of filling entry-level positions with low skilled workers and toward a more general focus on meeting employer training and development needs. To maintain CEP funding, the ESI board considered what became known as the 90/10 plan where ESI would devote 90% of its resources to activities aimed at filling entry-level jobs with low skilled workers and 10% of its resources to building the business.

Second, the Director of the new Ramsey County Consolidated Workforce Development Department (the department that resulted from the merged City-County workforce systems), raised concerns about the relationship between ESI and the new department and stated to the CEP board that she saw "ESI efforts as being duplicative. The Workforce Department will have a unit to work with employers, and they don't want to have both organizations contacting the same employers" (CEP Board minutes, 12/20/00, p. 3).

Third, as the new executive of ESI reported to the CEP board, "A finding has been that, generally, the service providers do not have the capacity to respond to the needs of employers as customers. The focus of their funding is placing and retaining job seekers. This changes the assumptions and possibly the role of ESI" (CEP Board minutes, 11/8/00, p. 2). This obstacle suggested another problem – the extent to which tensions could rise sharply between ESI and employment service providers, many of whom were CEP members.

As the narrative above suggests, both the Hubs and ESI faced serious questions about their sustainability and about the viability of their original designs. By the end of 2000, the CEP board was considering whether, in the not too distant future, it should spin off ESI and the Hubs.

Response to the hard to employ. The question of how CEP should address issues facing the hard to employ had been a longstanding one, raised initially in Servant Leadership Team discussions in 1998. Early in 2000, CEP published Beneath the Barriers: The Challenges Facing the Hard to Employ. The study focused on identifying less obvious factors that kept welfare recipients from finding and maintaining jobs. A key finding of the study was an apparent

disconnect between how MFIP participants viewed employment and the perspectives of job counselors and employers – MFIP participants who had been less successful in moving from welfare to work said they were more focused on basic survival needs, such as housing and child care, and did not view employment as the single solution to their problems. Job counselors and employers, on the other hand, expressed concern that these MFIP participants were not prepared for the culture of work and instead had adopted what they called a culture of poverty. In turn, MFIP participants said they experienced job counselors as judgmental and lacking a true understanding of their challenges.

To address these significant differences in perspectives, Beneath the Barriers identified the need for a jobseeker liaison, roughly equivalent to the role ESI was providing for employers. With the help of CEP staff, a Peer Connectors group formed, consisting of former and current MFIP participants. The link between CEP and the Peer Connector group was controversial within CEP – a strained relationship existed between the Peer Connector group and MFIP employment service providers and built on already existing tensions between service providers and ESI/CEP. Furthermore, both job seekers and employment service providers were represented on the CEP board.

The relationship between CEP and Peer Connectors was also controversial because it became linked to whether CEP should apply to the state for TANF[5] Invention Funds. Twenty percent of TANF Intervention Funds were to be spent as competitive grants administered by the state Department of Human Services and were targeted at collaborative services to those families most at risk of reaching time limits without a job, including the hard to employ. The CEP Board, as well as the County, had endorsed CEP staff convening meetings with partners, members, and community agencies to develop a coordinated plan and application. CEP staff followed through and then faced mounting criticism of its role.

County and contract job counselors were concerned that fully independent Peer Connectors would complicate client relationships, and Peer Connectors were concerned that they would lose credibility with job seekers if either the County or contracting agencies directly employed them. In the end, CEP did not apply for Intervention Funds, the concept of Peer Connectors was not adopted, and CEP lost credibility with employment service providers and the County.

Commentary

Underlying many of the issues faced during Phase 2 was the recurring question, "Who gets to define the problem?" and, increasingly connected to that question, "What authority does CEP have to define the problem?" Tensions between ESI and employment service providers are illustrative.

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[5] Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is the welfare system that replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) following the welfare reform legislation of 1996.

"ESI was very threatening to employment service providers because ESI was pointing out to them how they weren't doing their jobs…As ESI evolved, it said, 'let's build their capacity.' They [employment service providers] were still so suspicious, it wasn't going to work. They asked, 'Who the hell is ESI?'…Employment service providers act like they are the customer of the system with their own needs." (Employer affiliated)

"Nonprofits aren't for-profits. Job counselors aren't business consultants. They place people in jobs as social workers. They sometimes viewed employers as the bad guy, viewing 'their clients' with less understanding than they would like…. Job counselors don't want to hear, 'they don't get it,' [which was] the message from CEP and ESI. The employment service providers didn't view ESI/CEP as their preferred resource for how to improve their services to employers." (CEP/ESI/Hub affiliated)

The controversies surrounding the Intervention Funds and Peer Connectors specifically illustrate members' and nonmembers' rising dissatisfaction with CEP's role in defining the problem and designing solutions.

"CEP's playing the role of convener, facilitator, coordinator, and applicant turned out to be unclear and troublesome to some. A few members and nonmember organizations perceived CEP's multiple roles as competitive, unfair, and threatening…One of the main issues of concern to some agencies was CEP's role in developing and applying for part of the Intervention Funds for Peer Connectors, the job seeker broker concept. Although Peer Connectors is an idea that has been discussed at CEP Board meetings and at several other meetings over the last few months, applying on behalf of this new concept of Peer Connectors was seen by some as competing with existing agencies for the Intervention Funds. The fact that CEP staff convened meetings and obtained two outside consultants … to facilitate this Peer Connector group was seen by some as favoritism." (CEP Board minutes, 9/13/00, p.2)

Adding to the dissatisfaction key stakeholders held about CEP's ambiguous authority were lingering questions about CEP's relationship to the County in general and to its new Workforce Development Department:

"There still remains the need for more clarification of the relationship between the County and CEP. The County sees CEP as 'the community.' The community service providers see CEP as 'the County.' It is not clear how the CEP Board (individual members or the whole) or the County staff (individually or whole) see the CEP/County/Workforce Development Department roles and relationships." (CEP Board minutes, 10/11/00, p. 2)

In retrospect, it appears that many of the agreements forged among stakeholders during Phase 1 began to seriously unravel during Phase 2, driven, at least in part, by external, top-down driven pressures to show quick and clear results. Notably Ramsey County Human Services, the new Workforce Development Department, and community employment service providers, were being held to results-oriented standards that worked against a time-consuming collaborative service delivery design that could not demonstrate clear outcomes. CEP pushed forward with its work but with shaky support from key stakeholders. Given this context, CEP faced central questions from the initial stage in partnership formation that needed to be addressed again, several years after its founding (Gray, 1996):

- Common definition of the problem and commitment to collaborate – What is the problem and what is in it for me?
- Who are legitimate stakeholders – who has the right and capability to participate?
- Leadership characteristics – Do we trust and respect the lead organization?

Phase 3. Owning a Customer-Driven Philosophy and Strategy, 2001-2003

By the first board meeting in 2001, discussions began to focus on the need for CEP to move away from services and capacity building for members and toward a strategy of broad scale systems change, driven by the needs of customers (employers, jobseekers and workers) to influence both funding and policy. What exactly comprised a customer-driven agenda for change was challenging and complicated. Furthermore, facing CEP and its members was a rapidly weakening economy with declining labor shortages. Previously strong external stimuli for change had evaporated; however, the workforce system still did not adequately assist either employers, job seekers or workers, and that fact continued to propel CEP toward an agenda for change.

Concluding the Service Delivery Phase

As the shift toward systems change was taking place, CEP began to alter the way it related to both the Hubs and ESI and to glean the most important lessons it had learned through those experiences. CEP pushed the Hubs to develop systems for measuring customer outcomes. It committed to fund, through 2002, those Hubs that could demonstrate clear outcomes and to provide technical assistance to all Hubs that would promote their sustainability. By the end of 2002, Hub customer outcomes from the six Hubs still funded by CEP[6] indicated that customer visits were for more than one purpose (with about half for employment-related reasons), Hub customers appreciated the one-stop service, and their satisfaction with Hubs was high. More specifically, financial workers at the Hubs served approximately forty-one percent of Ramsey County's MFIP cases and averaged nearly forty percent closed or employed MFIP cases (Final Report to St. Paul Foundation, 3/03, p. 3). CEP staff reviewed with the board what they had learned through the Hub experience:

> *"Employment outcome data collection continues to be a challenge. Hub customers report they get referred to services they need. Hubs are friendly and less bureaucratic and Hub staff are informed about what is going on in their community. [Unfortunately] we can't compare data for people who use the Hub and those who don't…[A board member] asked, looking back, what would we have done differently?*
>
> *[CEP staff] said, as the Casey Foundation has done, <u>we could have funded fewer Hubs, learned from them, and then expanded. Ten Hubs was a lot to start something new, but, politically, it was difficult to narrow them down. It would have made a difference to have had a formalized agreement with Ramsey County to move more financial workers and MFIP job counselors</u>*

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[6] Two other Hubs had elected not to go through the outcomes process and thus did not apply for CEP funding.

Meanwhile, in September of 2001, the St. Paul Port Authority purchased a controlling interest in ESI, and together with the Midway and St. Paul Chambers of Commerce, who shared ownership, began to offer ESI services as part of a package linking business, economic, and workforce development. ESI no longer had any formal ties with CEP. From its relatively short history, those involved with ESI learned a great deal about the realities of "brokering" employers, government and nonprofit service providers, and job seekers and workers. Some of the most important lessons learned included the following (Moorehouse, "Employer Solutions, Inc. (ESI), A Report to Funders Accomplishments and Lessons Learned," March, 2002):

- Employers need and want help not only with recruitment but also with post-employment support; however, the government and nonprofit workforce system does not meet these needs well.

- Government and nonprofit employment service providers are focused on job placements because that is what they are funded to do; they are not in a position to focus on a broader range of employee or employer needs.

- Employers want "job-ready" workers and view it as government's role to make the investment in getting MFIP job seekers ready to work, but government cutbacks have shrunk that investment.

- These problems are shared across sectors and necessitate collaborative problem solving.

A crucial lesson learned from ESI's experiences was that funding streams helped perpetuate the dysfunctional workforce development system. Quoting from the Moorehouse report, "An ESI board member described [the central issue] beautifully,"

"On the left hand, we could get government dollars to help welfare recipients take ESL classes or whatever. And, on the right hand, we could get business dollars for on-the-job training, but we couldn't move from left to right…It became evident that the funding, whether it's public or private, is part of the problem because the traditional funding mechanisms are counterproductive when it comes to collaboration between public and private agencies…The funding streams from the public and the private sector, with the tax laws as they are, do not encourage organizations to bridge the gap between charitable effort and profitable effort." (p.10)

CEP leadership realized that new service delivery mechanisms like Hubs and ESI were only partial solutions to workforce system dilemmas. Its experiences with Hubs and ESI, as well as what it continued to hear from others, confirmed that problems with the workforce system were rooted in the basic policies that defined and governed the workforce system and the associated funding streams (Patrick, 9/02). Furthermore, CEP realized that much of its work to date had involved convening service providers along with customers in developing recommendations for change. CEP believed this kind of process had muted the voices of the customers, often discouraged customers from continuing to be involved, and left the service providers' agendas as the more prominent ("Listening Made All the Difference," 7/03). With this realization, CEP decided to focus on a new role of, "impacting policy and funding in response to the specific needs and experiences of job seekers, workers, and employers" (2002 Funding Proposal, 7/01, p.3, as cited in Patrick, 9/02).

Trying to Implement an Agenda for Change

CEP grappled on many fronts with what implementing an agenda for change really meant and pursued several tracks, including: establishing clear relationships with Ramsey County, in particular with the newly created Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and Workforce Solutions[7]; expanding its membership base and board to broaden support; and, developing more direct mechanisms for "customers' voices" to influence CEP direction. All were complicated.

Relationship with Ramsey County. Early on in 2001, CEP viewed its role as a "private partner" to the county's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and Workforce Solutions. Thus, as the WIB began a strategic planning process, the CEP board saw this as an opportunity for it to influence both workforce development policy and funding. CEP and Workforce Solutions also worked to develop common ground and avoid duplication. However, while meetings were held between CEP and Ramsey County administrators and County Commissioners, little was resolved regarding CEP's relationship to the County. For example, the new director of Workforce Solutions held the County-designated seat on the CEP board. However, a review of board minutes indicates that the Workforce Solutions director attended only three meetings in 2001 and none in 2002. Furthermore, the CEP Director was a County employee on loan until the end of 2001, at which point the loaned staff agreement and her responsibility to the County ended. Thus, it appeared that after 2001, ongoing communications between CEP and the County were minimal. By the summer of 2002, CEP leadership called for an independent WIB and a CEO for the WIB who was not connected to Ramsey County's Workforce Solutions.
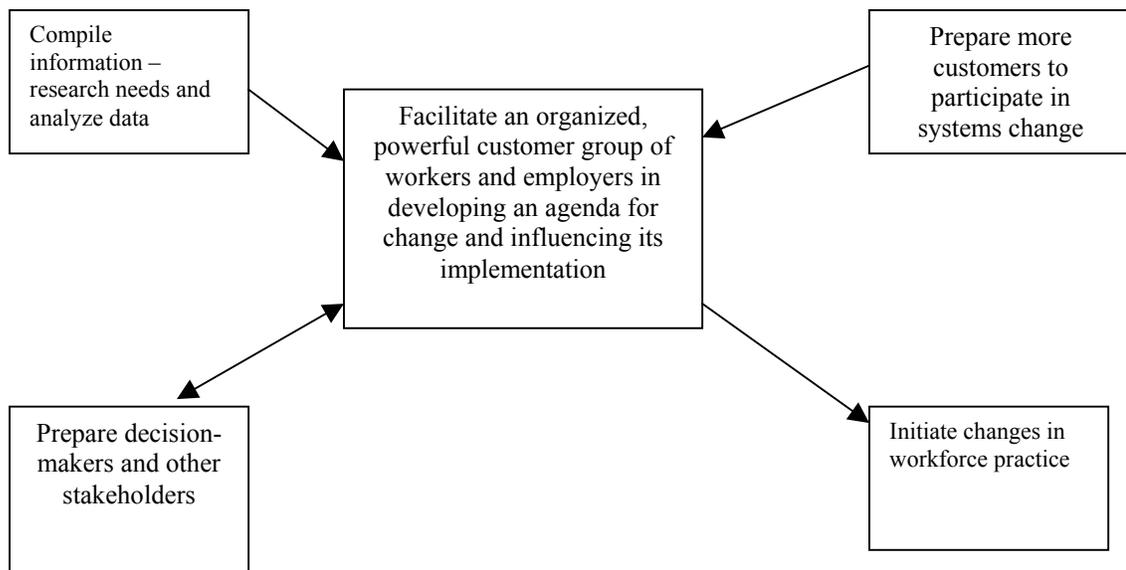
Membership. In terms of membership, CEP recognized it needed a broad and large membership base from which to advocate change. However, with a strategy focused on systems change CEP

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[7] Workforce Solutions became the new name for the Ramsey County Consolidated Workforce Development Department, formed when the City and County merged their workforce activities.

faced a dilemma – from what types of organizations and groups should it recruit members? Most members of CEP were part of "the system," so how they would respond to CEP's new strategy and whether CEP wanted to actively recruit them was unclear.

Developing a theory of change. Meanwhile, CEP pushed ahead in developing its "Theory of Change," based on the belief that "…a powerful group of worker and employer customers, armed with good information and supported in developing a joint vision, can alter the public debate on workforce development and create opportunities for meaningful systems change" (CEP Proposal to Bush Foundation, 1/1/02). Its theory of change, developed during the spring of 2002, looked as follows:

Customer-Driven Change in Workforce Practice, Policy, and Funding

Compile information – research needs and analyze data		Prepare more customers to participate in systems change
	Facilitate an organized, powerful customer group of workers and employers in developing an agenda for change and influencing its implementation	
Prepare decision-makers and other stakeholders		Initiate changes in workforce practice

Published reports on customer, market and best practice information would inform a critical mass of workers and employers who would, using this information and their own experiences as "experts" of the system, create an agenda for change. The customer group would negotiate its agenda for change with service providers and public administrators and advocate for change with specific funders, policy makers, and elected officials (Board briefing handout, 5/02; Final Report to St. Paul Foundation, 3/03, p. 4).

To do this work, CEP knew that it needed the full commitment of the CEP Board and honest discussion of what implementing an agenda for change would entail. It listed the following as key implementation challenges: employers and worker customers are not used to seeing themselves as a common customer group; issues around class and race will surface; "system operators" are used to making decisions on behalf of the customers and are reluctant to give customers power to define the changes; there are key stakeholders who will be reluctant to work with CEP because of its history; and, this work will be difficult to fund (Board handout, 5/02).

As anticipated, CEP ran into trouble attracting funding for its new strategy. Initially, it concentrated on trying to engage funders as partners to examine how funding systems themselves contributed to dysfunction in the workforce development system. While some new funders supported CEP's approach, McKnight no longer did. In particular, McKnight raised the question of CEP's authority that had plagued CEP from its beginnings: "[McKnight] did not recommend that we submit another proposal. [McKnight] wanted to know from whom are we getting our mandate that the system needs to be changed and will change based on our theory. [McKnight] is not hearing from business, the Chambers, or economic development people that what we are doing is important" (CEP Board minutes, 4/24/02, p.3).

As CEP began to develop its Customer Group of job seekers, workers and employers, it faced an additional challenge – what would be the relationship between the Customer Group and the CEP Board?

> *"[CEP Board Chair] raised the following questions: Is the role of the customer group advisory, to provide helpful, useful information and then CEP will do the work of creating the agenda for change? Is CEP in a passive role simply creating an opportunity for the customer group to express their voice and create the agenda for change? What does customer-driven mean to the board?" (CEP Board minutes, 5/22/02, p.2)*

Following this discussion, the CEP Board adopted the model of change that placed customers as the primary voice in determining CEP's strategic priorities and said it was committed to listening to them and pursuing their recommendations. What the Customer Group recommended, however, surprised many within CEP.

The Customer Group Speaks

Over the summer and fall of 2002, the Customer Group of nine individuals (five job seeker representatives and four employer representatives) met and began to redefine CEP's strategic priorities away from broad scale systems change and toward concrete products to foster connections between job seekers and employers. Below are excerpts from CEP Board minutes tracking that change:

> *8/28/02: "Negative feelings exist about "the system" from both customers…The [Customer Group] feels we should focus on how the two customers react with each other and what 'it' can look like. 'It' is change. 'It' is interaction between the two customers. 'It'*

is not necessarily the system." (p.2)

9/27/02: "The Customer Group wants the Board to know they are not working on the workforce 'system.' They are working on the relationship between the employer and the job seeker/worker, which will impact the 'system.' The group needs to know from the Board that they will support and carry forward the group's recommendation."

"[One board member] said she is not sure and needs clarification about where the customer group ends and the board or CEP takes over. [Another board member] said the Board can't give blanket support for whatever the customer group comes up with… [Another] says she will be disappointed if the group comes out without at least one policy recommendation." (pp.2-3)

10/31/02: "Information from the 5-Year Learnings and the Customer Group indicate our Theory of Change is shifting…[CEP staff] said we have learned that doing things on a macro level loses the customers and what is unique about our work is it is customer driven." (pp.1-2)

At the December 2002 board meeting, representatives from the Customer Group said what it wanted were pre-employment, retention and advancement products and services and that it had chosen to first focus on pre-employment. The Customer Group recommended to the Board that CEP develop: 1) an employer guide to effective hiring practices for small employers; 2) a written guide to successful job seeking; and, 3) a service that would match job seekers with modest means with trained volunteer job coaches who would use the job seeker guide in working with the job seeker to create career plans and work through the job search process. The Board decided to move forward with these products.

At that meeting, the board also reviewed four options for how to implement CEP's business plan, including being absorbed into the Workforce Investment Board by July 1st of 2003. It was also learned at that meeting that CEP's Director wanted to look elsewhere for work opportunities in 2003. After some discussion the board voted to: go out of business in six months; negotiate with the WIB to receive CEP assets and products; and develop the products and services recommended by the Customer Group to the point where others could successfully take them over.

The Workforce Investment Board declined to absorb CEP or any of its products and services because it was not ready developmentally for such a significant acquisition. CEP ceased to exist

as of July 31, 2003. The WIB did, however, create a subcommittee to oversee implementation of the Customer Group's products and services and would co-own and co-sponsor the volunteer job coach service with the St. Paul Area Council of Churches. And, CEP board and staff noted its major accomplishments ("Connections," Summer, 2003, p.1): the Hubs were a great experiment with many continued benefits for job seekers; ESI is growing under the leadership of the St. Paul Port Authority and the Midway and St. Paul Chambers of Commerce; the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board is committed and ready to promote customer driven change in workforce policies and practices; and, the customer designed products and services will be implemented and distributed by partners.

Commentary

Himmelman (1996) makes a critical distinction between "collaborative betterment" that is driven by institutional interests and only secondarily by community interests and "collaborative empowerment" that begins within communities and then extends to external institutions. If one substitutes "customers" (in the way CEP thought about customers) for community, then throughout much of its history, it was a hybrid of these two models, at times emphasizing an empowerment model and at other times, a betterment model. During its final phase, the CEP Board and staff were learning several things about this previous approach – it had been largely a partnership of players in the system (which CEP defined as government, nonprofit service providers, and foundations) that would use what customers told CEP to try to change the system. It had remained within a service paradigm and, as such, had been drawn into turf battles with service providers, and had lost their support as well as the support from customers.

"The system paradigm and the customer paradigm are not compatible. [The] customer paradigm is focused on the day-to-day realities and immediate response. [The] system paradigm is set up for organizations to provide the services they get paid to provide, not to respond to the realities of customers. [The] customer paradigm is based in consumer choice; employers have the choice to buy outside the system while still paying for the system, low-income job seekers and workers have no choice. System paradigm allows only service providers to design/improve the systems; [it] limits customers to the role of providing input or voicing satisfaction or dissatisfaction." (CEP Past Learnings – Five Year Story, Draft for Board Discussion, 10/31/03)

Two other issues were important lessons learned from the CEP experiment. First, there was a need for formal authority and institutional leadership to press for the kinds of changes CEP envisioned.

"Key players would have been City, County, state. If they had blessed CEP, okay. What you got was some did, some didn't. They may have publicly supported CEP, but privately they didn't." *(Consultant)*

"There was a different conceptual framework out of Future Search but [it] didn't get there in terms of sustaining the vision. [There were] no institutional leaders." (Consultant)

Second, CEP may have paid too much attention to some aspects of process while disregarding the need for a clearer governance structure with its own internal authority and accountability systems.

"I thought we missed a real opportunity. CEP was part of the merger [between the City and County workforce development departments] but should have been a much bigger player. CEP had the opportunity to make an impact on the silos to get them all pointed in one direction. The SLT was a hybrid board – we represented the failures of the system, so a lot of potential. But we didn't rise up to that level. We got mired down in operational details." (City affiliated)

"[A real barrier for CEP] was the time it took to build relationships across sectors. CEP was so process-oriented with consensus style decision-making, revisiting issues, experimenting with different governance styles… Cultures clashed – nonprofits' sense of time vs. business community's expectations. That happened in both process and service delivery. Doing something expedient for nonprofits meant next week. For businesses, it meant that day." (Employer affiliated)

"CEP morphed all the time. If you missed a meeting, CEP was different the next time." (CEP/Hub/ESI affiliated)

Nonetheless, CEP has clearly had a direct and indirect impact in many different arenas.

"[The] welfare system has really evolved in the last six years. Part of CEP process was to have a community dialogue. That has happened. Discussion [around people on welfare] has changed dramatically, not as punitive. Goal of Hubs was to make the system more efficient for MFIP recipients. That has happened to some extent…Integration of service delivery in neighborhoods is here to stay." (County affiliated)

"Most positive thing now is County follow-through on decentralization. Other positives are conversations among organizations." (Service provider affiliated)

"There are partnerships that have evolved because of Hubs and these have made a difference. County financial workers into the neighborhoods wouldn't have happened without CEP." (Employer affiliated)

As stated in the Introduction, there are three important themes that run throughout these phases – the importance of the external environment in shaping CEP, the tension between formal and informal authority, and the ways in which the problem was defined and by whom. I further note in the Introduction that these themes are interrelated. In this section, I will describe each theme and then how themes interrelated across phases.

How each theme was expressed

The influence of the external environment. The influence of the external environment on CEP during its first phase was largely positive. For example, the confluence of rapid economic growth, labor shortages and heightened attention to welfare reform by multiple constituencies significantly influenced CEP's formation and its ability to broaden the problem domain beyond welfare reform to workforce and economic development issues. However, some, especially within the County, raised early concerns that implementing new welfare requirements meant paying immediate attention to measurable results. The County could not wait for CEP or the Hubs to become fully operational. External pressures for results rapidly built during Phase 2, stemming from welfare reform deadlines and new federal workforce legislation. These pressures began to expose some vulnerabilities in CEP's initial approaches and its emphases on partnerships. Furthermore, the local environment became more uncertain as merger talks between the City's and County's workforce systems proceeded and then stalled. By Phase 3, a weakening economy and declining labor shortages were evident. However, during this phase, CEP became much less reactive to these external pressures and more proactive in its understanding of what problems continued to exist in its institutional environment, including welfare and workforce development systems. In other words, it gained a deeper understanding of why institutional fragmentation existed, regardless of whether the economy was growing or declining.

Tensions between formal and informal authority. CEP was granted considerable legitimacy and authority during Phase 1, both by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners' endorsement of a County-community partnership to implement welfare reform and through the McKnight Foundation grant. There was, however, ambiguity surrounding CEP's authority within and relationship to Ramsey County Human Services. As noted in the historical narrative, initial expectations of what CEP was and what it would do differed within RCHS, and RCHS wanted to be one of the partners at the CEP table but not the lead partner. Therefore, although CEP was housed within RCHS and its lead staff was a County employee, CEP was more of an "inside outsider," operating both within and outside of the County's formal institutional authority systems. Tensions over CEP's authority and legitimacy to push for changes in service delivery

mechanisms came under rapid and persistent fire during Phase 2. These tensions were expressed, for example, during the two Acceleration Now meetings, the Peer Connectors controversies and difficult relationships between CEP and the Hubs, CEP and ESI, and ESI and employment service providers. Its decision to become an independent membership organization, during phase 2, signaled its desire to derive its primary authority from its members. By Phase 3, there were indications that McKnight and the County no longer vested much authority in CEP. However, as its theory of change developed, CEP clarified from whom it needed authority – a Customer Group of employers and jobseekers.

How the problem was defined and by whom.   The definition of what the problem was that directed CEP's efforts and who had a legitimate stake in defining the problem went through several important changes as well. During Phase 1, and coming from the Future Search conference in particular, the views of employers and jobseekers pushed other stakeholders to recognize that getting people off welfare and into jobs was not simply a welfare issue but was intricately connected to workforce and economic development systems.   As stated earlier, this expanded the problem domain and legitimized the voices of employers and jobseekers.   Maintaining the broader problem definition and the legitimacy of employer and jobseekers' voices, however, was difficult. Even within Phase 1 and less than a year after Future Search, debate surfaced within CEP's governing structure and from other stakeholders about which voice should dominate – employer or jobseeker? For which set of interests should CEP be primarily designing its services and activities? The debate intensified during Phase 2, especially around CEP's report and work with the hard-to-employ, seen by some as giving too much voice to jobseekers. At the end of Phase 2, there was some indication that, as CEP became a membership-driven organization, it defined the problem as lack of capacity among service system members for whom it would design products and programs. Furthermore, Workforce Solutions, the new County department that resulted from the City-County merger, and the Workforce Investment Board became the major local players in defining the problem and establishing who were legitimate stakeholders. While CEP maintained a connection to the WIB, there was little connection to Workforce Solutions. By Phase 3, CEP came to a clearer definition of the problem that spurred development of its theory of change. Central to this theory of change was the need to authorize a customer group of employers and jobseekers to refine the problem definition and recommend solutions that CEP would implement. As described in the historical narrative, the Customer Group surprised the CEP board – they chose not to define the problem or solutions in systems change terms but in concrete products aimed at connecting jobseekers with employers and retaining jobs.

Interactions among themes within phases

Phase 1. During Phase 1, external forces significantly influenced both CEP's authority and how the problem was defined and by whom. Attention to important national events and trends by the Ramsey County Board and the McKnight Foundation eventually led to the formation of CEP and,

through Board action and McKnight funding, CEP was granted initial legitimacy and authority. External forces also helped local stakeholders broaden the definition of the problem and broaden the notion of who had a legitimate stake in defining the problem to include employers and jobseekers. What CEP then did was to link its authority as a County-community partnership with the new problem definition and an expanded group of stakeholders. In hindsight, I would argue that, despite positive external forces for CEP's development, all of this was more fragile than was recognized at the time. Serious, constraining forces existed in CEP's institutional environment that could undercut CEP's authority and its ability to move ahead with a new problem definition and newly expanded group of critical stakeholders. For example, the external pressures RCHS was under to get people into jobs rapidly compounded the ambiguity surrounding RCHS's relationship to the partnership. Furthermore, integrating new players, such as employers and jobseekers, and their new perspectives into a group of well-established, institutional stakeholders was far more complex than the epiphany experienced by many at Future Search.

Phase 2. Tensions over CEP's authority dominate this phase and are driven both by what had become constraining external forces and by conflicts regarding problem definition and legitimate stakeholders. CEP had chosen, from the beginning, to operate with informal authority through many lateral or horizontal relationships with community groups, established nonprofits, and employers. All of its work existed in various types of partnerships that were still evolving – the Work Resource Hubs were neighborhood collaborations, ESI was a partnership among business groups, and its governing structure, the Servant Leadership Team, was itself more of a collaboration than a traditional governing body. Top-down, externally driven pressures to show results exposed the vulnerability of this style of operating. What authority did CEP have to push for results within these partnerships and what was the likelihood of producing results from these time-intensive and still very new entities? As CEP moved toward becoming an independent organization that derived its authority from its membership, the institutional players re-positioned themselves into leadership roles around Ramsey County's new Workforce Solutions department.

Phase 3. By Phase 3, CEP clarified how it understood and would react to its environment, and developed a theory of change that stated who had a legitimate stake in defining the problem and solutions. The most important theme, then, in Phase 3 is resolution concerning problem definition and legitimate stakeholders. Through considered reflections on what it had learned from the Hubs, ESI, Peer Connectors, its interactions with the County, and other activities, CEP understood major forces contributing to a fragmented and dysfunctional workforce system. Its theory of change placed a Customer Group of employers and jobseekers at the center of its activities, charged with defining and refining problem definition and solutions. Despite this clarity, questions remained concerning CEP's ultimate authority and legitimacy. In the end, as it closed down its operations, it turned to institutions with formal authority, such as the Workforce Investment Board, to carry on much that it had established with its theory of change.

DISCUSSION

Below is a summary of important lessons learned from an analysis of one experimental approach to using collaboration as a policy implementation tool:

- Forces in and pressures from the external environment are extremely important in the development of collaborations that are charged with implementing public policy. These external factors are largely beyond the control of the collaboration itself and can, over a short period of time, facilitate the development of a collaboration and then constrain its effectiveness. The influence of external forces is especially strong when change in public policy is being driven from the top down, that is, from federal mandates to states and then localities. In the case of CEP, it believed that changes at the local level in welfare and workforce systems were possible, only to discover the power of federal and state mandates to undercut even the ability to make local changes.

- Especially in environments just described, collaborations that operate with informal authority derived from horizontal networks of partners may be quite fragile. These types of collaborations need cooperation, leadership and legitimacy from formal institutions, community organizations, and, in CEP's case, "the customer." Because of the multiple and often competing perspectives and interests among these entities, it is likely that a collaboration will experience high degrees of conflict internally and externally. Negotiating its authority and legitimacy across all of these groups becomes an extremely complex and difficult task.

- A collaboration that broadens the definition of what the public policy problem is and who has a legitimate stake in that broader problem is difficult to sustain. This is especially true when important collaboration partners have funding streams and accountability mechanisms targeted to narrower problem definitions. Nonetheless, as CEP learned and demonstrated, important incremental changes can take place within formal institutions when these collaborations continue to articulate broader aspects of the problem and demand that ignored stakeholders be included in designing solutions.

These lessons are really meant as hypotheses for further exploration and research. As stated earlier, a case study research design highlights nuances and details of a single experience but cannot be generalized beyond the particular situation. Therefore, we cannot answer the question of what role collaborations can effectively play in policy implementation. Rather, we are left with at least two questions – when systems change is legislated from the top and where government has the responsibility and authority to implement that change, what is the role of broad-based partnerships? Furthermore, what is the role of government in these partnerships?

This latter point deserves expansion. Some may ask, "Was CEP worth it in terms of all the time, energy and money expended to keep it alive for six years?" I would answer, yes. As stated at the beginning of this article, CEP leaves footprints for others to follow. CEP, in fact, was very intentional in its efforts to document what it was learning throughout its experiences and much of this is published and available for others to use. But it leaves other footprints as well. In our rush to demonstrate measurable results, we often overlook less tangible but extremely beneficial outcomes of collaborative ventures. Here are two examples of what I mean. Frontline workers from different agencies who worked side-by-side at a neighborhood Hub formed new and important relationships with each other that broadened their knowledge of community resources and deepened their appreciation of other ways to work with those needing resources. The board members of CEP, many of whom stayed involved throughout CEP's life, developed a common understanding of "the problem" and a set of concepts for how to approach the problem. These board members included former welfare recipients, nonprofit executives, managers of public agencies, and business executives. They persistently worked across entrenched cultures and sectoral boundaries to learn to trust each other and themselves as a group. As the research on collaborations, strategic alliances, and partnerships has established, trust breeds trust and increases the likelihood that future collaborative ventures will form, building on the lessons of the past.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has been your history of involvement with welfare reform, workforce and/ or economic development?

    > More specifically, what has been your history of involvement with CEP, Hubs, and/or ESI?

2. What were your initial expectations about CEP, the Hubs, and ESI in terms of a welfare reform strategy for Ramsey County?

    > How did you see the relationship between CEP and the County in terms of the roles each would play in welfare reform?

    > How about the role of the CEP governance group (Servant Leadership Team)?

    > How about the role of the employment service providers?

3. From your perspective, did CEP, the Hubs and ESI fit into a broader collection of welfare reform, workforce development and economic development programs and services?

    > If yes, how? If no, why?

    > Did the City-County consolidation influence the role CEP could play here?

4. How do you currently see relationships among economic and workforce development and welfare reform?

    - What are the major influences on these relationships now and in the future?

    - Do CEP/Hubs/ESI have a role now? In the future?

5. In general, what are the most important events that have sustained CEP and the Hubs? What are the most important events that have created barriers to their development?

6. Are there any reports, policy statements, and so forth that I should take a look at to gain more information on this history? Are there other people?