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Widening the view: situating collective impact among frameworks for community-led change

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Collective impact is a framework for achieving systems-level changes in communities through coordinated multi-sector collaborations. It has quickly gained influence in public health, education, and community development practice. Many adherents to the collective impact framework position it as a novel approach, however, and they often neglect many of the relevant findings from previous research on coalitions, interorganizational alliances, and other forms of organizational and cross-sector collaboration. Additionally, the collective impact model differs in important ways from other effective models for community-driven changes in systems and policies, including grassroots community organizing. This article situates collective impact in relation to similar approaches, makes key distinctions between the collective impact framework and principles for grassroots community organizing, and draws on these distinctions to offer recommendations for enhancing collaborative practice to address community issues. The clarification of these distinctions provides possibilities for future innovations in community development practice, evaluation, and research. To tackle the root causes of the systemic issues that collective impact efforts seek to address will require learning from the community organizing approach to community engagement, analysis of power, and capacity for conflict.

Keywords: coalitions; collective impact; community organizing; power

Introduction

Collective impact is defined by Kania and Kramer (2011) as "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" (p. 36). A community-based obesity prevention effort, *Shape Up Somerville* in Somerville, MA, and a comprehensive education reform effort in Cincinnati, OH, called *Strive*, provide case examples of collective impact initiatives in the USA. The uncommon progress of these initiatives in improving multiple indicators and outcomes (e.g. obesity rates and graduation rates) may be attributed to the fact that groups of local leaders decided to prioritize more collective approaches to solve social problems over their individual or organizational agendas.

In the case of *Strive* in Cincinnati, for instance, leaders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors came together to address longstanding issues in the local education system in an all-encompassing way. Through the *Strive* initiative, they established committees that meet regularly to discuss progress on different elements of the educational system (e.g. early childhood education and tutoring), and to establish a common set of indicators to measure progress across the entire system. Instead of seeking to fund and

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implement new educational programs, they have carefully identified and assessed progress toward an agenda that is now broadly shared across the disparate agencies and organizations that contribute to education in the city.

In the case of *Shape Up Somerville*, a community-wide intervention grew out of a community-based participatory research project intended to focus attention on every important environment in the course of school children's days as they are related to the availability of healthy food and opportunities for physical activity (Economos et al., 2007). Facets of the intervention have ranged from educational (e.g. after-school cooking lessons and farm trips) to systemic (e.g. union contract negotiations leading to enhanced school lunches) to policy-oriented (e.g. a city ordinance on walkability and bikability). Due to documented differences in rates of childhood obesity in the intervention community compared with control communities, the initiative has become a model for systems-level interventions to promote health and wellbeing (Economos & Blondin, 2014).

What links these efforts with other case examples of collective impact – and distinguishes them from more common interventions driven by single organizations or programs – is distilled by Kania and Kramer (2011) into five conditions: (1) a common agenda, (2) shared measurement, (3) mutually reinforcing activities, (4) continuous communication, and (5) backbone support. These five conditions are described below:

(1) A common agenda means that, while there will always be some disagreement across a range of issues, all of the leaders involved must agree on the primary goals of the collaborative initiative.

(2) Shared measurement means that data are systematically collected and reported on a set of indicators that can be used to continually assess progress and encourage learning and accountability.

(3) Mutually reinforcing activities mean that, while different partners play different roles in the system, their activities are strategically linked to the overarching plan that is determined collaboratively.

(4) Continuous communication is achieved through regular face-to-face and web-based interactions, in which partners in the initiative build relationships, trust, and shared vocabulary.

(5) Backbone support means that an infrastructure exists – including dedicated staff – independent of the project partners to coordinate, facilitate, support, guide, and mediate the collaborative effort.

The collective impact frame asserts that when these five conditions are present, collaborative initiatives can gain momentum and achieve large-scale systems change. Hanelybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) detail the necessary precursors for initiatives that are aiming for collective impact, and the temporal phases of implementation. The preconditions they describe include the presence of one or more influential *champions* who can make the case for the importance of the collaborative enterprise without dictating or micromanaging its actualization. Other preconditions include sufficient financial resources for the initiative, and a broad sense of urgency for change. The three phases of collective impact that the authors describe are (1) initiation of action, (2) organizing for impact, and (3) sustaining action and impact. Across each of these phases, various activities are encouraged in different domains or facets of the initiative. For instance, in the domain of community involvement, initiating action involves facilitating community outreach, organizing for impact involves engaging the community and building public will, and sustaining action and impact involves continuing community engagement and conducting advocacy.

The ideas and terminology of collective impact have quickly gained traction across North America – prominent examples include initiatives on mental health and veterans' wellbeing supported by the White House – and beyond (e.g. Graham & O'Neil, 2014; Pearson, 2014). Many collaborative community initiatives are adopting collective impact as the stated goal and/or guiding philosophy for their work. The concept has also attracted the interest of those funding systemic or cross-sector initiatives, with some funders explicitly building collective impact into their grant-making models (e.g. Aspen Institute, 2013; Pearson, 2014). Public agencies, from national governments to city school districts and state health departments are also adopting the frame for their work on pressing social issues.

In some respects, collective impact is different from earlier terms and frameworks for understanding collaborative work across organizations and sectors. For example, Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) claim that collective impact "is not just a fancy name for collaboration, but represents a fundamentally different, more disciplined, and higher performing approach to achieving large-scale social impact" (p. 2). This claim appears to be premised on the distillation of the key preconditions for collective impact described above. The establishment of principles does indeed differentiate collective impact from much of the literature on interorganizational collaboration, although it is not the first to identify key principles or best practices for this type of work (Lasker, Weiss, & Miller, 2001; Wolff, 2001). Further, because many adherents to collective impact position it as a novel approach, they often neglect the existing evidence on coalitions, alliances, and multi-sector collaborations. In the section that follows, we provide an overview of the historical background and contemporary research literature on these topics to further inform discussions of collective impact. Following that, we examine the distinctions between the collective impact framework and grassroots community organizing, a field of practice that has well-developed models for policy and systems change driven by local communities. We conclude with recommendations for collective impact initiatives and other community-led change efforts.

Organizational collaboration and coalitions

Coalitions, partnerships, alliances, and other similar collaborative organizational efforts have, in the past few decades, become mainstays of health promotion, community development practice, and other forms of social and human service provision. Foundation-led initiatives and grassroots groups have also sought to build networks and collaborative structures that have, in many cases, worked across sectors. The goals of such efforts range from coordination to communication between agencies and organizations, to the pursuit of synergy that can create a superstructure that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Context: the need for collaboration

The widespread emergence of a preference for collaboration across organizational systems has not had a single source. Rather, professionals, foundations, researchers, government agencies, and groups of organizations and volunteers have each perceived the clear need for greater communication, collaboration, and coordination of organizational efforts to achieve desired outcomes in local communities.

One likely explanation for this widely perceived need for collaboration concerns the trend among government agencies toward outsourcing the provision of services to

nonprofit organizations. In the US, in the wake of the *War on Poverty* and the *Great Society*, the 1980s ushered in an era of greater public skepticism toward government programs and centrally coordinated social planning and services (Lipset & Schneider, 1983). Cuts in funding led government agencies to seek ways to reduce their costs and long-term obligations. Inviting nonprofit organizations to compete for short term funding to provide services has limited the public visibility and exposure of government agencies, while simultaneously reducing the costs and long-term obligations associated with provision of services (Alexander, 1999; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

One commonly noted outcome of this shift has been a pronounced period of growth in the nonprofit sector (Salamon, 1994). Less commonly noted results include the fragmentation of local organizational systems, and the increased basis for competition between entities within these systems (Frumkin, 2002). The zeitgeist for greater coordination of organizational efforts is therefore at least partially explained by the increasingly complex, disconnected, and competitive terrain of local organizational ecologies. Many contemporary observers have noted a lack of coordination, mutual awareness, and cooperation between organizations in local systems of service delivery and advocacy (e.g. Foster-Fishman, Salem, Allen, & Fahrbach, 2001).

A group of key authors writing about collective impact (Hanleybrown et al., 2012) claim that the appeal of the term "may be due to a broad disillusionment in the ability of governments to solve society's problems, causing people to look at alternative models of change" (p. 3). It may not be quite that simple. Indeed, preferences for a small government (i.e. neoliberal and conservative ideology) have helped to create the increasingly fragmented and competitive systems of service provision, intervention, community work, and advocacy that collective impact efforts now seek to address through coordination and collaboration. Leaders advancing neoliberal agendas have sometimes undertaken efforts to encourage community-driven collaborations as a cover for cuts in government services, as in the *Big Society* legislative program in the UK (Eaton, 2010). It is therefore very important to interrogate the rationale for community-driven approaches to progress on social, educational, and public health issues and not simply accept that these approaches are always the best route to progress. Regardless, fragmented local systems are often major barriers to progress on persistent social issues, and local and national governments have played a variety of roles in both maintaining and combating these barriers.

The emergence of coalitions and collaborative initiatives

Many efforts to bring multiple organizational partners together to work toward community-level promotion of health and wellbeing have been supported by government agencies and programs whose intent has been to resolve complex problems (Thomson & Perry, 2006). For example, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration began a program called *Communities that Care* (CTC) in the early 1990s. The goal of CTC is to bring community stakeholders together to proactively work toward promoting healthy youth development by providing opportunities and mitigating risk factors in local environments and institutions. Much like case descriptions of collective impact initiatives, CTC efforts convene and establish a guiding board of key stakeholders and hire a coordinator specifically for the CTC initiative. Evidence-based programs and data-driven decision-making are emphasized in CTC efforts, and a common system for measurement has

been developed in the form of the Communities that Care Youth Survey (Arthur et al., 2007).

Other types of interorganizational collaborations and alliances have received governmental support to address common goals including HIV prevention, mental health services, and child and family services (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001). One of the most prominent recent examples is the *Promise Neighborhoods Initiative* of the US Department of Education, which seeks to emulate the successes of the Harlem Children's Zone (Tough, 2008) in other cities around the US. The Harlem Children's Zone has improved students' educational outcomes at least in part by bringing local institutions – including nonprofit organizations, churches, universities, and schools – together to provide comprehensive supports for academic achievement and positive development of low-income students. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development takes a similar approach to the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative with its *Choice Neighborhoods* program, which funds locally-driven revitalization of distressed neighborhoods.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have funded coalition action on local community health issues through, for example, the *Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health* program and the *Community Transformation Grants* program. The fluctuating levels of support for these programs, however, provide examples of the limitations of governmental funding for local community-driven efforts. In the 1990s, for instance, the National Cancer Institute embarked on a comprehensive program to reduce tobacco usage through local action called the *American Stop Smoking Intervention Study*. The tobacco industry considered this approach a major threat and sought to derail its efforts to change local policy using a variety of tactics including lawsuits, negative publicity, and lobbying to shift funding priorities at the federal level (White & Bero, 2004).

Many initiatives of private foundations have also emphasized the importance of collaboration in the community efforts that they support. For instance, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative, a place-based community change effort aimed at building more supportive schools, families, and communities in 10 US cities (Brisson & Usher, 2007; Coulton, Theodos, & Turner, 2009), has encouraged urban neighborhoods to make schools the nexus of social and organizational networks in low-income communities. Likewise, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has supported community coalitions in addressing numerous issues, including food security, education, domestic violence prevention, and the reestablishment of New Orleans neighborhoods affected by Hurricane Katrina. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has also sought to improve community health and health care access, prevent chronic illnesses, and promote social change (Leviton & Cassidy, 2006). Among others, the MacArthur, Mott, Surdna, and Ford Foundations have also supported collaborative community solutions to various issues. Often, these efforts have been supported or led by intermediary organizations and "think tanks," including the Aspen Institute, the Urban Institute, and the Forum for Youth Investment. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has supported a network of cities (*Healthy Cities*) for the past several decades that are making systems changes to address health at a local level (Tsouros, 2009).

Research that has been conducted alongside these efforts has made important distinctions between the various forms of community-led change. For instance, one key distinction between forms of organizational collaboration concerns their origin – more specifically, whether the collaboration has been initiated from outside the community where the work is taking place, or from within it (Stevenson & Mitchell, 2003).

Himmelman ([1996](#)) describes efforts originating from outside the community as *collaborative betterment*, contrasting these endeavors with those that are initiated from within the community as *collaborative empowerment*. Collaborative empowerment approaches are likely to be geared toward building sustainable capacity in the community, rather than assessed for progress toward specific outcomes or indicators (e.g. educational or health outcomes). According to Wolff ([2001](#)), collaborative initiatives are more likely to reach their goals if their reason for existence comes from within the community. Some local initiatives, however, gain legitimacy at the local level through affiliation with larger state, national, or international enterprises. The WHO initiative mentioned above provides an example of this phenomenon (Tsouros, [2009](#)).

The variety of ways that collaborative efforts are initiated and implemented has led some observers to propose syntheses, classificatory rubrics, and practical how-to lessons. For instance, Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, and colleagues ([2001](#)) developed an integrated framework on building coalition capacity that was synthesized from numerous previous research and practice documents. In another integrative review on collaboration in the domain of substance abuse prevention, Stevenson and Mitchell ([2003](#)) delineated the ways in which collaboration has been situated within the logic of funded initiatives as (1) a strategy, (2) an organizational structure, or (3) as a set of intermediate outcomes.

When used as a strategy, collaboration has been more of a paradigm than a specific conceptual framework (e.g. Labonte, Woodard, Chad, & Laverack, [2002](#)). Groups have used a variety of collaborative or cooperative strategies, with varying degrees of formalization, and it has not always been clear how vital these have been to the work that has taken place or the resultant outcomes. For instance, a strategy and framework for collaborative action proposed by Lasker, Weiss, and Miller ([2001](#)) called *partnership synergy* specifies many of the same features of organizational collaborations as the collective impact framework.

When collaboration has been implemented as an organizational structure (e.g. coalition or interagency council), it has tended to create a new entity that is intended to enhance the ability of the partnering organizations to achieve desired outcomes through coordination, planning, resource allocation, delegation, and accountability (similar to the role of "backbone" agencies in collective impact initiatives). Evidence points to increased effectiveness when certain structures are implemented and when those structures evolve over time. For example, Hays, Hays, DeVille, and Mulhall ([2000](#)) studied 28 coalitions, concluding that strong leadership, diversity of the membership in terms of personal characteristics (e.g. race and socioeconomic status), diversity of the membership in terms of organizational situation (e.g. public agencies and nonprofit organizations), and ongoing assessment and strategic planning were drivers of greater success.

When understood as a set of intermediate outcomes, evidence for increasing levels of collaboration between organizations (e.g. changes in interorganizational network structures or exchange relationships such as client/patient referrals) has been studied alongside other outcomes, including coalition successes and community health indicators (e.g. Bess, Speer, & Perkins, [2012](#)). Most studies of this nature have indicated the importance of interorganizational collaboration for positive impact on community health, and some have provided insights into the particular characteristics of organizational networks that are most conducive to these goals (e.g. Feinberg, Riggs, & Greenberg, [2005](#)). In a systematic review of the research literature on coalition effectiveness, Zakocs and Edwards ([2006](#)) identified coalition-building factors that were found to be

associated with coalition effectiveness in five or more previous studies. These included group cohesion, membership diversity, and formalization of rules/procedures. Other studies have used and contributed to a *Community Coalition Action Theory* (Kegler, Rigler, & Honeycutt, 2010) that aims to understand the effects of contextual factors in local communities (e.g. history of collaboration, geography, community demographics, and politics) on coalitions' functioning and effectiveness at various stages in coalition development.

Situating collective impact in the context of coalitions

Against this backdrop of decades of work on coalitions and other forms of organizational partnerships, collective impact can best be understood as a synthesis of practice-based principles for those seeking to build alliances and coalitions to tackle complex problems in local communities. There are particular benefits that a collective impact frame provides for those seeking community changes through multi-sector partnerships. For example, collective impact brings high profile attention to the fact that collaborative work across organizations and sectors is difficult, and only succeeds when specific conditions are present and certain practices are employed. Moreover, the collective impact frame emphasizes – appropriately, according to the previous research literature – the need for funding of a separate *backbone organization* with dedicated staff that can coordinate and support activities of collaborating organizations. Collective impact facilitators and consultants stress that the process is emergent (Kania & Kramer, 2013) and that while principles can guide the process, there are not likely to be standardized solutions to many of these complex social problems. This is also consistent with the research literature that has demonstrated that contextual factors play many roles in determining coalition functioning at different stages in the life of a coalition (Kegler, Rigler, & Honeycutt, 2010).

Hence, when considered in the context of the previous research literature, the collective impact framework, largely through its heuristic value, offers an important opportunity for a renewed focus on community collaboration in practice and research. Those seeking to apply the approach should not limit their learning to the recent efforts that have been described using the collective impact frame. Instead, these efforts can be strengthened through additional attention to the more longstanding interdisciplinary study of community coalitions and organizational collaboration. This is particularly important when it comes to evaluation and research on the effectiveness of these initiatives. Although work has begun to establish a field of collective impact evaluation (Preskill, Parkhurst, & Juster, 2014), these efforts have so far been very general and do not yet report findings from empirical data. Alternatively, in the literature on coalitions, measures of coalition functioning and capacity have been developed and tested (e.g. Feinberg, Greenberg, & Osgood, 2004; Kegler & Swan, 2012; Nowell & Foster-Fishman, 2011; Shapiro, Oesterle, Abbott, Arthur, & Hawkins, 2013). In some of the recent literature, these measures have been used to study and compare the effectiveness of efforts across multiple communities (e.g. Oesterle, Hawkins, Fagan, Abbott, & Catalano, 2014; Shapiro, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2014). Further, innovative methodologies such as social network analysis have been applied to understand coalition processes and outcomes (Kegler, Rigler, & Ravani, 2010; Nowell, 2009). It is imperative that collective impact supporters and evaluators broaden their view to include these tools and insights.

Grassroots community organizing

We now examine a specific type of localized effort that has demonstrated effectiveness, in many cases, at accomplishing changes in policies and systems that enhance residents' wellbeing. *Grassroots community organizing* is a field of practice that engages residents in sustained efforts to collectively investigate and address mutual concerns through the exercise of power and collective mobilization (Christens & Speer, 2015; Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Stoecker, 2009). The collective impact framework has many similarities to models for grassroots community organizing. For one, models and frameworks for grassroots community organizing have also distilled principles and process models to guide collaboration and action toward progress on community issues. Further, both community organizing initiatives and collective impact initiatives tend to take a systems perspective on solutions to social problems, meaning that they most often seek to intervene on the roots of these problems rather than on the symptoms. In contrast to the relatively new framework of collective impact, however, the principles that guide grassroots organizing initiatives have been built through continual experimentation and refining of models over more than 70 years (e.g. Alinsky, 1941). Community organizing models are now highly specific in their terminology, training methods, and tactics (Swarts, 2011), yet the models are also adaptable to differences in local contexts. There is therefore much that leaders and scholars of collective impact initiatives can learn from grassroots community organizing.

Before turning to the identification of specific areas where the field of community organizing has developed principles that can inform collective impact initiatives, we briefly explore an example of a community organizing initiative to provide background as the *Strive* and *Shape Up Somerville* initiatives have done for the collective impact framework. An example of effective grassroots community organizing is *ISAIAH,* which consists of more than 100 organizations (primarily faith-based institutions representing multiple faiths) in the Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN metropolitan area in the Midwestern USA. A recent field scan (Wood, Partridge, & Fulton, 2013) indicated that there are currently more than 300 congregation-based organizing initiatives like ISAIAH active in the US. Formed in 2000 through the merger of three preexisting local community organizing initiatives, ISAIAH is currently organizing around resident concerns about education, affordable housing, health and health care, fair/living wages for low-income workers, public transportation, and a pathway to citizenship for immigrants. In 2014, ISAIAH experienced a victory in the wages campaign when the Minnesota Governor signed a bill raising the minimum wage to $9.50/h and indexing it to future inflation (ISAIAH, 2014).

Speer, Tesdahl, and Ayers (2014) detail ISAIAH's work on transportation, which began in 2002 with a series of intentional meetings to build relationships between residents and key decision-makers and to develop ISAIAH members' understanding of the complexities of the transportation system. In 2005, ISAIAH began an effort to support a light rail line through Minneapolis–St. Paul. During 2007–08, they sustained both advocacy and investigation into funding models and the array of powerful actors who held sway over the transportation system. They also began conducting research into the connections between transportation and community vitality and wellbeing. In 2008, they were influential in persuading a sufficient majority of state legislators to override the Minnesota Governor's veto of a transit funding bill.

During the planning process for the rail line, however, three stops were eliminated that were to serve the highest proportion of minority residents in the name of

"cost-effectiveness," as that term was defined by US federal transportation policy. ISAIAH responded by building a coalition between their 20 member congregations most affected by the light rail line and other local entities, including housing advocates, a bus rider collective, and neighborhood groups. They worked with the health and policy networks they had identified during their research to investigate the health and economic effects of eliminating these stops, and to make these consequences clear to local, state, and federal officials. Although local officials eventually acknowledged the negative effects that eliminating these stops would have on community vitality, they stuck to their plan based on the economic analysis of cost-effectiveness. Working with its coalition partners, ISAIAH then engaged and persuaded federal officials to change the policy around the interpretation of cost-effectiveness to take health and social consequences into account (Schrantz, 2012). Local officials then agreed to reinstate the three stops along the line, which was constructed and began operation in 2014 as the METRO Green Line (Melo, 2014).

As this example of a grassroots community organizing initiative makes clear, there are indeed many similarities between grassroots community organizing and collective impact initiatives. In fact, from a distance, the ISAIAH federation might even appear to be a collective impact effort. There are, however, at least several salient distinctions between organizing and collective impact as approaches to community change. We highlight three of these: (1) deep resident engagement; (2) analysis of power; and (3) capacity to address conflict. Clarifying these distinctions can lead to more effective efforts to achieve changes in local communities.

Deep resident engagement

One of the most pronounced differences between collective impact initiatives and community organizing initiatives concerns the engagement of residents who are not involved in the effort as professionals, decision-makers, or elected officials. Community organizing initiatives develop nonprofessional resident leaders as their primary constituency and vehicle for change, although they work from this core group to engage with established organizational leaders and decision-makers in various ways (Minkler, 2012; Stoecker, 2009). Collective impact efforts, in contrast, primarily convene established organizational leaders and decision-makers, although they sometimes work from this core group to include nonprofessional community members in various ways (Flood, Minkler, Lavery, Estrada, & Falbe, 2015; Kania & Kramer, 2011). In short, when examined alongside grassroots community organizing processes, it becomes apparent that most collective impact initiatives, like many forms of coalition action described in the first half of this article, are *grasstops* efforts.

It is a principle of grassroots community organizing to prioritize leadership by the people most affected by the issues of interest, thereby ensuring that they are active players in solutions that address structural changes. In many community organizing initiatives, professional organizers provide training to groups of resident leaders so that those leaders can conduct one-to-one meetings in which they listen to the concerns of other residents and build durable relationships with others in their neighborhoods and organizations (Christens, 2010). This phase of the organizing process identifies and develops new and emerging leaders in the community. Grassroots community organizing initiatives can therefore be viewed as empowerment processes (Christens, Inzeo, & Faust, 2014). One simple distinction that this form of engagement creates with collective impact efforts is that organizing initiatives tend to involve greater numbers of people.

Moreover, they involve a large number of these people as leaders. While collective impact efforts convene groups of core leaders, successful community organizing initiatives involve hundreds of people in meaningful leadership roles. Instead of convening already powerful leaders, community organizing efforts seek to broaden and deepen local leadership.

Analysis of power

Power is a central theme in grassroots community organizing models. Organizing models propose building and confronting power as a possible antidote to social problems. In doing so, they also suggest that the common problems people face in their communities result from a lack of power. Problems that society often attributes to individual failures (e.g. crime, drug use, and poor educational outcomes) are viewed by organizing initiatives as collective issues that can be addressed through the development and exercise of social power. For example, instead of proposing interventions on individuals who have committed crimes or might do so, community organizing initiatives seek to address neighborhood crime through building and exercising power to increase opportunities and supports for the residents who are most affected by crime (Christens & Dolan, 2011).

The theme of power carries through every phase of a grassroots organizing process, with resident leaders initially grappling with questions such as: How do the current arrangements of power in this community contribute to the problems that we seek to address? Which people or entities hold the power to make meaningful changes in systems (e.g. education and transportation) in the community? What are the relationships between powerful actors in this community? The process of answering these questions is often referred to as *power mapping*. Over time, residents learn to build and claim power for themselves and their organizing initiative. They come to understand their power as inextricably interconnected to the relationships they have with others, and exercise it through mobilizing those relationships for action. Through their actions, they seek not only to alter systems and policies in their local communities, but also to sustainably shift the balance of power in their cities, regions, and states toward the power of organized residents as opposed to the power of money or established institutions. This is a contrast with collective impact initiatives, whose models rarely explicitly address social power and do not, at least overtly, seek to alter existing community power structures and instead operate within them.

Capacity for conflict

A final major distinction between collective impact and grassroots community organizing concerns their respective orientations to collaboration and conflict. Both models for community change involve an eagerness to collaborate. As described above, however, community organizing actively strives to change existing conditions of power. Changing conditions of power – building it, acquiring it, or losing it – is rarely accomplished without the need to confront tensions. This necessitates a readiness to thoughtfully address conflict and struggle (Speer & Christens, 2012). While successful community organizing efforts should be careful not to provoke needless conflicts, they study their field's previous successes such as the ISAIAH case described above, and learn that the status quo almost always has defenders. While it may be possible in some cases to reach a collaborative solution to systems change in which no parties sacrifice or in

which sacrifices are made willingly, it is more common to encounter resistance to changes from those whose resources or relative power would be reduced through a change in a system or policy. Because of this reality, community organizing seeks to be constantly prepared for forms of mobilization that engage conflict as well as collaboration.

This stands in stark contrast to the collective impact framework, which seeks to change those things that can be mutually agreed upon by a group of leaders and decision-makers in the community. Community organizing initiatives, on the other hand, are careful to ensure that the interests and needs of everyday community residents remain at the forefront of the discussion. When these needs and interests do not align with the interests of elites (e.g. corporations and politicians), community organizing initiatives often insist that these differences in views or values are made visible to the public. They make compelling arguments for change that are supported by numerous community residents, and then demand that specific changes be made (Speer & Christens, 2014). This is typically accomplished in a way that is both powerful and respectful. In other words, most community organizing groups do not fit the stereotypes of activists or protesters, and they do not pursue conflict before engaging in extensive dialog with important actors in their communities (Speer, Tesdahl, & Ayers, 2014). They are, however, sophisticated and often effective in their use of conflict to bring about change, once it becomes clear that conflict will be required (Christens, Collura, Kopish, & Varvodic, 2014).

Situating collective impact in the context of organizing

The three distinctions above bring to light the ways that organizing is a response – through grassroots power building – to the neoliberal roots of the shrinking public sector described earlier in this article. Like collective impact, community organizing works toward progress on discrete community issues, but the differences described above demonstrate how organizing can change the conditions of power during the process, as opposed to adapting or operating more efficiently within the current conditions of power. Organizing, then, by virtue of its emphasis on power and empowerment of marginalized groups, is an effective and appropriate response to the conditions that continue to drive the need for more collective frameworks in non-governmental and governmental settings.

These contrasts with community organizing present serious challenges for collective impact efforts that seek to go beyond delivering ameliorative solutions within broken systems. To tackle the root causes of the systemic issues that collective impact efforts seek to address will require learning from community organizing's approach to deep community engagement, analysis of power, and capacity for conflict. Finally, as with the research literature on coalitions, research and evaluation of community organizing efforts has built a body of findings and measurement tools that should be considered by practitioners and scholars interested in collective impact. A recent integrative review (Christens & Speer, 2015) distills the current state of the research literature on community organizing processes and outcomes.

Conclusions and implications

The collective impact framework has invigorated and catalyzed local community efforts to address persistent challenges and social issues. It has brought practical insights on

community coalitions and change processes to the forefront of discussions and decision-making in public health, education, and community development practice. Nevertheless, there are noteworthy insights that can be obtained from longstanding frameworks and efforts to galvanize organizations for community change. These should be incorporated into the discussions on how to achieve collective impact, and how collective impact efforts can relate to other ongoing efforts to change local systems.

Foremost among the conclusions of this aticle is the need for scholars and practitioners seeking to galvanize, sustain, and evaluate collective impact efforts to consider the findings and tools for evaluation and investigation developed in previous studies of coalition functioning, interorganizational alliances, other forms of organizational and cross-sector collaboration, and grassroots community organizing. For instance, research findings on coalitions and community collaboration reviewed in this article suggest that successful collaborations can rarely be effectively initiated from the outside (Feinberg, Greenberg, & Osgood, 2004; Wolff, 2001), that positive internal relationships between participants are critical to success (Brown, Feinberg, & Greenberg, 2012; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, et al., 2001), and that member diversity and formalization of rules and procedures are important in achieving goals (Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). Another line of research demonstrates that specific features of interorganizational network structures can be conducive to community change (Feinberg, Riggs, & Greenberg, 2005). Furthermore, tools for understanding and evaluating these types of initiatives have been developed (e.g. Kegler & Swan, 2012; Nowell & Foster-Fishman, 2011) and continue to be put to use. Using these tools and building on this interdisciplinary research literature can inform collective impact efforts and those seeking to monitor and understand their successes.

Comparing collective impact efforts to grassroots community organizing initiatives yields insights, challenges, and potential opportunities. For example, descriptions of collective impact tend to minimize the role of power in community change or in maintaining the status quo in communities. This limits the potential of collective impact initiatives to achieve transformational changes. The collective impact frame could benefit from the insights of grassroots community organizers, who have carefully attended to the roles that power can play in coalition formation, maintenance, and the achievement of goals. Likewise, more attention should be paid to the ways that non-professional residents can play meaningful roles in collective impact processes. Drawing insights from community organizing, particular attention should be paid to roles for those most directly affected by the systems that are targeted for change. Evidence from studies of grassroots organizing efforts indicates that involvement of residents in these processes is likely to build capacity at multiple levels for sustaining positive community change (Christens & Speer, 2015). Some of these insights are already informing certain collective impact efforts (e.g. Weaver, 2014), and experimentation with them should continue.

Even if collective impact initiatives become more attentive to power, more ready for conflict, and more deeply engaged with local residents, as we advocate that they should, differences will remain between these two approaches to community change. For this reason, it is important for practitioners, funders, and scholars to understand the distinctions and clarify the approaches that they are seeking to implement. For example, systems changes that can be accomplished through better alignment and interorganizational service coordination may have quicker successes through the use of a collective impact framework than a community organizing effort. On the other hand, community organizing is likely the more effective approach when changes require concessions from entrenched interests, or reorganization and reorientation of existing institutions. It is

therefore important to make the distinctions clear so that appropriate models can be implemented across different contexts and issues.

Finally, this article's analysis brings into focus the potential for collective impact initiatives and grassroots community organizing initiatives to complement and strengthen the other's efforts. The differences in the two models mean that they tend to have different core leaders. This means that a collective impact initiative and a grass-roots community organizing initiative could, at the very least, inform each other about different perspectives on the issues that concern both. More important, however, is that the two often build or harness different forms of power. What is viewed as challenging, off limits, or out of reach for one may be more easily achievable for the other. For this reason, there is great potential for collective impact and community organizing initiatives to become strategic partners in their work to address local social issues. There is therefore a need for scholars to examine and document work at the intersection of these two approaches.

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