

Towards greater collective impact: Building collaborative capacity in Cork city’s LCDC

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Abstract

Collaboration is an important means of tackling local socio-economic challenges. This paper looks at how the collaborative capacity of Ireland’s community development leaders can be improved. The most recent efforts to establish a more coordinated and coherent approach to community development saw the introduction of a new local committee structure, known as local community development committees (LCDCs). LCDCs were expected to enhance collaboration between public, private and third sector socio-economic partners. However, effective intersectoral collaboration is often difficult to attain. A programme of capacity building can play a key part in supporting collaborative working between local leaders. Based on the findings from a place-based leadership development workshop, this paper discusses the barriers to collaboration facing community development leaders and how these might be overcome. Surfacing and working through tensions to enable clarity, through enhanced mutual understanding and strong relationships across community development committees, is vitally important. To this end, a practical and evidence-based approach to improving collaboration between local leaders is argued for.

Keywords: Ireland, community development, collaborative working, place-based leadership development, local government.

Introduction

Local community development committees (LCDCs) were established in 2014 as part of a comprehensive reform programme for Ireland's local government sector. This new committee system was intended to bring greater coherence to community work by aligning the local government and community development sectors. LCDCs exist in all local authority areas and their main responsibility is the planning, oversight and management of local and community development programmes. In terms of membership, each committee is comprised of between fifteen and twenty-one local partners from the public, private and third sectors. These include public representatives, local authority and state agency officials and community development practitioners (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), 2016, pp. 17–18).

LCDCs are described in *Our Public Service 2020* as the 'primary vehicle for collaboration for national public service providers at local level' (Government of Ireland, 2017, p. 26). Forging a collaborative and joined-up approach to community development is therefore central to the LCDC system. However, the effectiveness of the LCDCs has been the subject of recent scrutiny. In July 2019 the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) published a detailed review of the strategic and operational performance of the committees. Several issues facing the LCDCs were identified by the review, including the extent to which they had brought a more collaborative approach to community development work. Whilst acknowledging the significant efforts at local and national levels to make the LCDCs an effective committee system, the review concluded: 'there is still much to be done to secure their long-term effectiveness and sustainability, and to establish them as catalysts for greater local coordination and collaboration' (DRCD, 2019, p. 7). The capacity of LCDC members to lead community development – through meaningful collaboration – is this paper's focus.

In a previous paper, we explored the barriers to collaboration faced by LCDC members and outlined an evidence-based developmental process to overcome these (Worrall & O'Leary, 2019a). Our findings were based on a national workshop which sought to build the collaborative capacity of participants from multiple LCDCs. This

workshop's design drew on the place-based leadership development (P-BLD) framework, which advocates a proactive approach to surfacing and working with tensions between partners to help improve strained working relations (Worrall, 2014, 2015). It was argued that the delivery of further workshops – but within individual LCDCs – was a possible way forward to help address a weak collaborative culture (Worrall & O'Leary, 2019a, 2019b). A series of pilot workshops for LCDCs were subsequently proposed to develop collaborative capacities (Worrall, 2019).

The first workshop for an individual committee was delivered by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), who worked with members of Cork city's LCDC. Drawing on the lived experience of participants (Kempster & Parry, 2004), this paper assesses the findings from the workshop's evaluation and reflects on the impact for the LCDC structure at large. More specifically, the participant feedback will help address the following research questions:

- How did LCDC members view the collaborative culture in Cork city?
- What barriers to more effective collaboration existed?
- If deemed necessary, which behaviour(s) did participants seek to change to improve their collaborative capacity?
- Was there a clear understanding around why change was required?
- Following the workshop, what were the participants' expectations for the future?

The answers to these questions will provide great insights into the actual experiences of committee members, and how well the collaborative aspect of the LCDC process is working. They will offer evidence in support of a P-BLD approach to help overcome obstacles to effective collaboration. In doing so, the research will reinforce findings from the DRCD's review and directly address its key recommendations focused on strengthening LCDC strategic and operational capacity.

The rest of the paper is structured into five sections. Firstly, to contextualise the paper's main themes – barriers to collaboration and the effectiveness of P-BLD – a brief overview of key literature is provided. The next section explains the methodological approach used for the workshop's design and evaluation; research limitations will also be set out. Thirdly, an outline of the topics covered by the workshop is

given. Fourthly, the findings section explores participant feedback from the evaluation process and its meaning. It will be interspersed with discussions that link the research to the wider literature, and general conclusions will be drawn. The findings will offer answers to our core research questions. Finally, in conclusion, the paper will argue the case for further P-BLD workshops within individual LCDCs.

Literature

Barriers to collaboration

Community development, as a field of professional practice, broadly refers to a collective approach aimed at improving socio-economic conditions at community level (Crickley & McCardle, 2009). Collaboration, in this paper, refers to the act of joint working by statutory and non-statutory partners towards common social objectives. It has long been advocated by policymakers as the means to effect change locally (Walzer et al., 2016). However, building the collaborative capacity of local leaders, who seek to collectively transform conflict and tensions into social transformation, comes replete with challenges (Chavis, 2001). The steps along the path to effective joint working can therefore be difficult to negotiate.

Chris Huxham has written extensively on the area of collaboration. She warned that 'working with others is never simple! ... When collaboration is across organisations the complications are magnified' (Huxham, 1996, p. 4). Writing on the obstacles to community-based collaboration, David Sink refers to 'extraordinary bridging challenges' for cross-sector collaboratives. Despite this, he asserts that, 'as proponents and practitioners, we must anticipate potential obstacles and prevent them from defeating our purposes' (Sink, 1996, p. 108). These obstacles will be discussed further in the paper's findings section. Community-level collaboration requires a committed approach by all those involved. Forging and maintaining good working relations takes ongoing effort. To address collaborative issues, academics have called on practitioners to undertake a 'continuous process of nurturing' (Huxham & Vangen, 2003, p. 6). Moreover, Warmington et al. (2004, p. 7) argue that the 'emphasis placed upon consensual models of working in strategic and good practice may place constraints on expansive learning in practice ... (and the development of) tools for disagreement'.

Place-based leadership development

In recent years scholarly and practitioner research has demonstrated how P-BLD can enable local leaders to effectively collaborate on localised responses to intransigent social problems (Beer et al., 2019; Hambleton, 2015; Homes & Communities Agency/University of Birmingham 2011; Knight et al., 2019; Worrall, 2018; Worrall & Callahan, 2017). Drawing on the lived experiences (Kempster & Parry, 2004) of statutory and non-statutory leaders in three English intersectoral county-based collaboratives, the P-BLD framework (Worrall 2014, 2015) explored how the tensions between partners can be surfaced and worked with to create collaborative advantage (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Indeed, this approach directly addressed the lacuna identified by Warmington et al. (2004), who argued that the learning processes that take place within interagency settings, and the learning process that might form a prerequisite to effective interagency collaboration, remain underexplored.

This practice-based P-BLD research subsequently helped develop leadership capacity within intersectoral violence prevention programmes in Kenya, Uganda and Guatemala (Worrall & Kjaerulf, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019; Worrall et al., 2019). P-BLD interventions are designed specifically for the local context and work on themes identified by local partners to build their collective strengths (Knight et al., 2019). By building greater understanding, respect and trust, local leadership can be empowered to move from an isolated (one organisation or sector solution) to a more collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Kania et al., 2014; Worrall et al., 2019).

In a previous paper, we looked at developing the collaborative capacity of Ireland's LCDCs through a place-based lens (Worrall & O'Leary, 2019a). It set out an evidence-based process for building capacity within this structure (Worrall, 2014, 2015). Poor levels of trust within LCDCs were identified as the 'most concerning common challenge' (Worrall & O'Leary, 2019a, p. 79; Worrall & O'Leary, 2019b). Of course, this is a commonplace problem for local partner organisations engaged in community development. For example, P-BLD workshops in Kenya, Uganda and Guatemala found distrust to be a major cause of collaborative failure between groups working to prevent urban violence (Worrall & Kjaerulf, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Leadership development interventions, delivered by expert facilitators, are often necessary to open up mindsets (Boyd, 2014; Dweck, 2006) and encourage mutual understanding within

collaboratives – essential for building trust. We concluded that the design, delivery and systematic evaluation of local P-BLD workshops could lay the ‘foundations for a more effective, longer term intervention’ (Worrall & O’Leary, 2019a, p. 79; 2019b). This current paper builds upon our initial research in this area (Worrall, 2019).

Methodology

Workshop design

A national pilot workshop was initially delivered by the IPA (in late 2018) to test the applicability of the P-BLD framework within an Irish context. The subsequent analysis of its content, structure and impact clearly identified a need, and demand, for further P-BLD interventions (Worrall & O’Leary, 2019a, 2019b). Building on this work, the IPA proposed pilot P-BLD workshops for individual LCDCs, in collaboration with local partners and the DRCD. This series of one-and-a-half-day pilot workshops would seek to develop collaborative capacities within individual LCDCs. It was envisaged that participant feedback could provide the evidence base for a more intensive 2–3-year P-BLD programme (Worrall, 2019).

The design of the leadership development intervention for Cork city drew heavily on this national workshop, as well as practice-informed and research-based experience of P-BLD implementation in East Africa and Central America (Worrall & Kjaerulf, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The workshop took place in late 2019; its primary objective was to build collective leadership capability amongst twenty to twenty-five LCDC members and support officers. Approaches on how to work through deep-rooted problems – hindering collaboration – were a focus. In terms of the research tool, participants completed a pre-workshop questionnaire at the beginning of day one and post-workshop questionnaires at the end of days one and two. The data gathered from the pre-workshop questionnaire provided an overview of the group’s age range, managerial responsibilities and sector experience; attitudes towards collaboration were also captured. The post-workshop questionnaires focused on the intervention’s impact and the lessons learnt by the participants. An analysis of the feedback forms the basis of this paper’s research.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaires’ focus of enquiry was on the participants’ attitude towards, and experiences of, the LCDC process. It was equally

important to gather information on their understanding of leadership approaches to collaborative working and obtain evidence of a changed mindset. Table 1 outlines the key questions asked to the participants.

Table 1: Key questions from questionnaires

Pre-day-one questionnaire
What are the challenges in developing more effective intersectoral collaboration on the LCDC?
How can these challenges be overcome?
How can your leadership role help overcome these challenges?
What are your expectations for the workshop?
Post-day-one questionnaire
How has day one's activities impacted on your attitude towards your role in enabling more effective leadership and collaboration?
What have been your main learning points from the day? What actions will be taken, if any, to apply this learning as a leader?
Do you feel that there is an agreed understanding among LCDC members of the issues to be addressed?
What will be the visible indicators of success?
Which activity did you find the most challenging?
Post-day-two questionnaire
Has participation in the workshop changed you? Can you describe this impact?
What do you consider that you need to do differently? Why?
What are your priorities for action before the next LCDC meeting?
How will Cork city's LCDC have changed as a result of today's actions?
What will we see that is different? How will we feel this difference?

Extensive scholarly research, which underpins the P-BLD framework, identified relational tensions ‘within self, between self and other, between self and organisation/sector, and between self and wider place’ (Worrall & O’Leary, 2019a, p. 77). The questionnaires, drawing on the lived experience of participants, helped evaluate the workshop’s impact in terms of enabling members to address tensions within the LCDC. Any changes in the participants’ outlook and future expectations were broadly captured in the feedback. Essentially, was there a clear understanding around why change was needed? And what attitudinal change, if any, to improve collaborative working, was achieved at an individual level?

Research limitations

Questionnaire data from a workshop provide very good insights. However, a greater depth of analysis would be possible if common themes, identified from the intervention’s feedback, were discussed in follow-up interviews with LCDC members. This would offer an opportunity to explore the extent to which self-reported mindset change (to enable enhanced outcomes) had led to actual behavioural change (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Kania et al., 2014; Worrall, 2015; Worrall & Kjaerulf, 2019). In order to assess the wider impact, experience suggests that a more in-depth evaluation should form part of a longer-term P-BLD programme (Knight et al., 2019). In addition, it would be hoped that attendance at future workshops could be improved as low attendance limits a workshop’s impact and the amount of data that can be collected.

Cork city’s LCDC workshop

The P-BLD intervention delivered for Cork city’s LCDC took place in a central location to maximise committee member attendance. Ultimately, thirteen of the twenty-one expected attendees participated. The learning from the workshop centred on several areas (Table 2).

Table 2: Learning objectives

<i>Learning objectives</i>
Deepen our understanding around how challenging your way of thinking can develop your capability and effectiveness as a local leader;
Understand how to develop your leadership, collaboration and strategic thinking skills to enable shared solutions to key challenges;
Develop a shared vision of how to make Cork city an even more attractive and sustainable place to live, work and visit;
Identify individual and collective leadership actions to achieve our vision;
Build trust by working collectively towards common purpose and making a commitment to achieve agreed actions.

Workshop: Overview of areas covered

Day one: Developing as a leader and working collaboratively

The workshop’s first day got the participants to think about their leadership role, collaborative working and how to develop both. It was

vital to deepen their understanding on how to achieve effective collaborative behaviour. The developmental stages of a truly collaborative working process were explained. Key concepts were covered: growth mindset (Boyd, 2014), common purpose, personal influence and productive discomfort. The importance of new ways of thinking and a strategic approach to problem-solving were stressed. Likewise, participants were introduced to a strengths-based collaborative tool – to facilitate social change – known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Stavros et al., 2016). Activities were used to explore the discovery and dream phases of AI. Firstly, the participants conducted appreciative interviews amongst themselves. They shared positive work-related stories to help discover the things that work well. This exercise was intended to challenge the group by putting each member ‘on the spot’. It reinforced the notion of focusing on success and the skills that people already possess. Furthermore, individual contributions and core strengths, highlighted by each story, served to boost confidence and generate a mood of optimism.

In small groups, the participants then set about developing a shared vision for Cork city. Practising the AI methodology in this way enabled a better appreciation of its power in collaborative capacity building. Indeed, this leadership approach complements an LCDC guiding principle: ‘experience and contribution brought by all LCDC members should be recognised and respected and approaches that use the strengths and expertise of all members should be developed and implemented’ (DHPLG, 2016, p. 7). In the final segment, the group discussed how the day’s learning and development would practically impact on their leadership style. The first day emphasised the why, and the how, of individual behavioural change.

Day two: Working collaboratively

Day two continued with the AI model. Each group presented their dream/vision for Cork city. There was a focus on the positive aspects of the dreams: what was important, what it connected with, and how it was achieved. The participants then had to imagine living in a city where ‘everything is as it should be’. They interviewed each other on the factors that had enabled this ideal situation to come about. Key questions were: ‘How did you get there?’, ‘What made it possible?’, ‘What are you doing differently?’, ‘What do you see others doing differently?’ and ‘How does it feel?’ This exercise focused the group on the specifics of the process that help make dreams/visions a reality. Finally, the design phase was explored through an action planning

session on how to make Cork city an even more attractive and sustainable place to live, work and visit. Specific actions were agreed, delegated and a time frame set out. The intention was to promote a more strategic leadership approach through a collective commitment to take action.

Towards the end of the day, discussions took place on possible evidence of the workshop's impact. What would be the signs of the LCDC's progress in terms of improved collaborative capacity? Again, the emphasis was on practical changes and getting the participants to commit to these. Furthermore, the group agreed/proposed several actions:

- Continue to develop capability, deepen relationships and improve the LCDC's dynamic.
- Apply the strengths-based approach.
- Seek to hold developmental-type meetings/workshops for all LCDC members. These would facilitate discussions around fundamental questions: 'What we are about?', 'How should we work together?', 'What are our priorities?', 'What is our common purpose?' This would help a more strategic leadership approach emerge.
- Each participant would liaise with an LCDC member who had not attended the workshop. They would share their learning on, and experiences of, the P-BLD approach.

Findings

Pre-workshop questionnaire

Profile of participants

The questionnaire given out at the start of day one was completed by the thirteen attendees. From the data gathered, a profile of the group was provided, and issues of common concern were identified. In terms of demographics, all the respondents were over thirty-five years of age, the majority between fifty-five and sixty-four; one respondent was over sixty-five. The majority of participants had between zero to five years' professional experience (the remaining had between six to twenty-five years); they were predominantly from the public sector, followed by the non-profit and private sectors. Their work responsibilities broadly involved the administration, delivery and management of community services in areas like adult education, homelessness and social inclusion.

The LCDCs are described as 'a partnership committee of local public and private interests' (DHPLG, 2016, p. 43). The feedback therefore gave a good sense of this partnership's background. It is important to remember the cross-sectoral nature of the LCDCs. Therefore, in such a structure, different organisational cultures, priorities and perceptions can frustrate efforts at collaborative working.

Challenges for the LCDC

On the question of the challenges to fostering closer collaboration among LCDC members, many were unequivocal in their responses. Firstly, a lack of time was cited by several respondents: busy workloads and competing demands left little time to be 'reflective or to plan in a collaborative manner'. This comment suggests a lack of available time for committee members to devote to more strategic matters – an issue highlighted elsewhere in the feedback. This aligns with the DRCD's findings, which observed 'little time to consider broader, more strategic issues' (DRCD, 2019, p. 31).

A second concern was the infrequency of LCDC meetings not being conducive to collaboration. This lack of time together as a committee resulted in a poor understanding of each other, and more generally of the LCDC's purpose. It was acknowledged that whilst 'a lot of good work' had been achieved by the committee, its working relations could be improved. 'It is a very large committee, greater understanding of members' backgrounds is needed', argued one respondent. Poor communication was manifest in a siloed approach to work and a duplication of projects. The combined effect of these issues was to undermine trust and ultimately the LCDC's effectiveness. As remarked by a participant, 'respectful, meaningful engagement necessitates resilience and trust within and between individuals'.

The comments showed a general dissatisfaction with an LCDC not functioning as effectively as it could. Indeed, they gave rise to the notion of 'collaborative inertia', whereby the complications of intersectoral collaboration are magnified to the extent that the expected gains are not achieved (Barr & Huxham, 1996; Huxham, 1996). But these are issues that can typically strain relations between cross-sectoral partners. The pilot national P-BLD workshop found misunderstanding, lack of clear communication and poor levels of trust to be obstacles for practitioners. As concluded in our earlier paper, the building of trustful relations, underpinned by mutual understanding among members, ought to be the 'starting point for

developing more effective leadership within the LCDCs' (Worrall & O'Leary, 2019a, p. 79).

The responses on how to overcome these challenges were revealing. The need for the LCDC to adopt a more strategic approach was clearly expressed: better planning, oversight and coordination of activities. It was felt that improved communication and information-sharing would support a more joined-up method of work. The notion of moving beyond personal biases and a controlling instinct was raised: 'local authority to let go of the need to control and see the potential of the collective brought to the table by other sectors/participants'. Barr & Huxham contend that difficulties in cross-sectoral collaboratives can be exacerbated because of perceived 'large power differences between the organisations and there will be perceived, or actual, differences in managerial skill levels between the individuals involved' (Barr & Huxham, 1996, p. 110).

Intersectoral tension within the LCDC system is echoed elsewhere in the literature. Research by Forde et al. (2015) argued that local government's increasing involvement in community development over the past twenty years has disadvantaged the local and community development sector. Heavy reliance on public funding 'weakens the ability and capacity in the [local and community development] sector to act independently of the State and promote innovation and change'. New funding arrangements had led to claims by community practitioners of an overly top-down approach and a 'high degree of unease' within the sector (Forde et al., 2015, pp. 33–4). It is crucial for a sense of equal footing and partnership to exist between all LCDC members; workshop participants believed that a more trusting atmosphere would maximise the committee's impact. An open relationship based on an 'understanding of different perspectives' was urged. It was generally thought by the questionnaire respondents that there was considerable scope to improve relationships and the LCDC's overall effectiveness.

A follow-up question asked the participants about their leadership role, within the LCDC, in overcoming these challenges. Several saw themselves in a supportive capacity, acting as a channel between the LCDC and the wider community: 'I feed information and areas of potential development back,' wrote one. The communication aspect featured prominently in responses. Examples included: 'listen to what other people are saying', 'to engage and build dialogue' and 'ensure everyone is informed'. Some respondents described their role almost in consensus-building terms: 'improving participation', 'to build

understanding' and 'find the ground that will be best'. Therefore, the development of stronger relationships was viewed as a key leadership task. Although the need to represent sectoral interests also came through the feedback.

Other responses referred to typical leadership qualities: utilise the skills available, be open, facilitate agreement and challenge when necessary. Overall, the participant feedback on this question was varied with no shared understanding of their collective leadership role. This supports a general picture of poor clarity within the LCDC system. As identified by the DRCD's review, a 'lack of clarity around the LCDCs' role and the roles of individual members' existed (DRCD, 2019, p. 33).

Expectations for the workshop

The participants' hopes for the workshop were then explored. Many of their desired learning objectives were to be expected from a leadership programme. A better understanding of collaborative working practices and the P-BLD framework was sought. Others wanted stronger leadership skills to enable them to make an enhanced contribution in the LCDC process. Several respondents relished the opportunity to discuss collaborative problems with fellow LCDC members. It was argued that the insights gained by sharing views and perspectives would help bring about closer working relations.

The desire for change in how the LCDC operated was palpable: 'more of a team focus', 'a new sense of shared mission' and 'no rivalries, personal agendas or conflicting objectives that hinder community development'. Interpersonal problems can significantly hamper collaborative working. Sink (1996, p. 102) refers to the major challenge of 'dealing with individual representatives' idiosyncrasies, egos, personal agendas and interpersonal quiriness'. Again, the issue of greater clarity around roles was touched on by the comments. These included: 'learning on [the] work of LCDC', 'more in-depth understanding of how the LCDC operates' and 'clear understanding of the potential of the LCDC'. Such frustration may have stemmed from an inadequate induction process.

Finally, participants were asked to share their immediate thoughts after having completed the questionnaire ahead of the start of the workshop. The overall sentiment was positive. As noted previously, there was an appetite to improve matters and a shared aspiration to create a more effective LCDC was evident. The workshop, it was hoped, would 'help the committee going forward' and facilitate a more

considered 'collective response'. However, there was some uncertainty over the extent to which all participants would be open and engage. It was felt that this would be a measure of the intervention's success.

The data captured by the questionnaire showed good awareness of intra-committee issues hampering collaborative behaviours. There was a sense of a number of underlying tensions being allowed to fester amongst LCDC members, with the committee's lack of overall effectiveness clearly being one of these. The organisation of the workshop was broadly welcomed by the participants. It represented a rare opportunity to openly discuss relational tensions and learn new techniques on how to improve their collaborative working. One participant simply described the workshop as: 'time to focus on the LCDC'.

Day one: Post-workshop questionnaire

At the end of the first day the participants were asked to complete a second questionnaire to get their thoughts on the learning experience so far. Firstly, the impact was considered: how had the activities influenced individual attitudes towards their leadership role? The feedback was encouraging. Many of the ideas around leadership and collaboration had struck a chord. Some participants gained a better understanding of their role and how they could influence matters: '[the workshop] allowed me to see how I could impact LCDC delivery more positively'. The activities had, on the face of it, demonstrated to participants the necessity of changed behaviour. Other responses included: 'thinking differently', 'have a growth mindset', 'the need for better dynamics in terms of leadership' and 'work from an evidence-based approach, not assumptions'.

Changed thinking

The questionnaire probed deeper into the specific learning points from the day. Different aspects of the workshop resonated more strongly with different people; thus, the lessons learnt varied. Some would rethink their personal approach to leadership and collaboration. For instance, a participant was very positive about the power of the AI model. Focusing more on success and building on it, rather than on challenges or problem-fixing, was described as 'like turning a switch in your mind'. The need to adopt a more collaborative mindset was repeated: 'will be mindful of my closed mindset going forward', 'be a good listener' and 'importance of trust and active listening'. For another participant, systems-thinking was potentially

key to the creation of a more effective LCDC – it could help join the dots and connect people.

A more challenging question was then posed: what action will you take to apply this learning as a leader? The dominant answer was to improve efforts at listening: 'make sure to listen to all views,' stated a participant. Reference was made to building levels of trust, respect and engagement within the LCDC, which again showed an intent to apply a more inclusive and considered style of leadership. Such comments were perhaps inspired by the workshop's section on using influence as a sustainable form of power (Cohen & Bradford, 2005). By building trust and good relations, the group were told that a greater level of influence can be developed – essential for an agent of change. The discussion on the elements necessary to forge a stronger collaborative approach had seemingly made an impact. Of course, the questionnaire captured the group's initial thoughts, and time was needed to properly process the learning from the first day. Indeed, a respondent promised to reflect on the training and how best to engage with LCDC members in the future.

The next question explored to what extent there was a common understanding of the issues facing the LCDC: did one exist or not? Several respondents thought that broad agreement had been reached, although the absent committee members were again noted. Awareness of what effective collaboration looks like and being able to identify obstacles (through discussion) are obviously important, but the workshop's segment on the practical steps to find solutions proved particularly instructive. Responses included: 'I like the way we did not get into those issues but focused on the strengths-based approach' and the 'solution focus was a key element'. It was recognised that difficult problems had to be resolved collectively. This sentiment was best captured by the comment: 'We all need to feel uncomfortable if we are to really address issues and put them on the table for collective resolution and [a] working full partnership'. This signalled an understanding of why change was necessary: to help realise the LCDC's full potential and move towards a more authentic form of shared leadership. However, not all the respondents shared this optimism. It was thought by one that the LCDC still had 'some way to go' to reach an agreement on its goals.

Responses to a question on the indicators of success, arising from the workshop's learning, were encouraging. These showed a good understanding of the changes needed within the LCDC. Better levels of engagement, trust and collaboration among the committee's

members was the broad consensus. 'Trust levels will be high,' was one comment, and 'Identifiable and improved collaboration will need to be far more visible from now on,' thought another respondent. Other replies were linked to the need for a demonstrable increased commitment. These included: 'a more committed attitude by all members to the process, driven by respect and unity', 'members prioritising attendance over duties', 'respect for everyone around the table' and 'moving to a place where agreement is owned collectively'. This ideal would represent a true partnership approach by the LCDC members. Another indicator was simply described as 'less frustration'.

Day one's activities challenged the group both personally and professionally. They were designed to embed the notion of mobilising change through a greater focus on strengths. However, the self-reflection required during the day was daunting for some. During the appreciative interviews, the participants were asked to share a story about themselves in the context of being a leader. One attendee struggled to identify with their role: 'I find it difficult to name myself, to see myself as a leader'. For others, talking about their best professional experience was difficult: 'keeping the focus on strengths – telling own story – not part of the culture, but needs to be'. Another wrote that 'Discussing our own skillsets and describing these to new LCDC members' was a challenge. Many of these comments strongly reflect the P-BLD method of challenging local leaders to be open and innovative in their thinking.

Respondents were generally satisfied with the learning from the first day – it was constructive and thought-provoking. An appreciation of why change was needed, and of the concepts and practical approaches within the P-BLD framework, was evident. Indeed, there was an eagerness to learn more about mindset tools and joint working practices. Several looked forward to undertaking further group work on day two. Indeed, there was a sense of progress being made in terms of how the 'LCDC could work better'.

The value of a facilitated discussion on issues inhibiting collaborative work, and ways to overcome them, cannot be overstated. A P-BLD intervention provides local leaders with a forum to meaningfully engage with each other and thereby broach contentious topics. From the act of critical engagement comes greater understanding, trust and change. Concepts like a growth mindset, shared understanding and common purpose are key in this regard. Day one began a process of building collaborative capacity for Cork

city's LCDC. Members had discussed themselves, and learned more about each other and how to become better collaborators.

Day two: Post-workshop questionnaire

This questionnaire was completed by eight participants. In terms of overall satisfaction with the workshop, all of the respondents felt that it was either 'very good' or 'excellent'. Furthermore, they all indicated that they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' that the learning objectives (see Table 2) had been met.

The second day put the AI theory into practice by getting the group to work collaboratively. According to a participant, it brought their learning to point where 'we could all identify the positive work we do and identify the potential work we can do in the future'. The participants were asked to describe the workshop's impact and what they would now do differently. A change in thinking clearly came through the data. Collaborative working was described in terms of a process of actions/inputs. For one respondent, 'I am more aware of the importance of getting the agreed vision and how it is arrived at, the process'. Others referred to 'the merit of the collaborative process' and a need to prioritise 'collaborative planning'.

In the context of community development, collaboration between socio-economic partners is a means to achieve social progress locally; therefore, it is not an end in itself. The necessary changes in behaviour to create a more collaborative environment were understood. Examples of this were: 'more awareness of other people's views', 'need to change mindset', 'be more open', 'feedback is essential' and 'learning from mistakes'. Such responses were influenced by discussions on systems thinking, which emphasised the importance of interrelationships and processes of change.

The strengths-based approach was again praised. For one respondent, the key learning had been, 'looking at strengths-based as a starting point'; in another reply, a priority action would be to apply this approach 'in all the committees I am part of'. This part of the training had seemingly made a strong impression.

The leadership development intervention also had a motivational impact. It instilled greater confidence in LCDC members as local leaders. A response confirmed that the P-BLD workshop had a 'big impact on my perception of my leadership styles and skills and how influential I actually am and could potentially [be]'. The self-reflection had enabled another participant to identify their personal strengths and this would help 'increase the belief in myself' in the future. In

some respects, the workshop may assist LCDC members to overcome any cultural reluctance to talk openly about success. In terms of doing things differently, a participant stated how they would now 'accept gratitude from others and recognise my own strengths'.

Future expectations

Expectations around the LCDC's future had been raised. When asked about the difference to Cork city's LCDC arising from the workshop, responses included: 'stronger', 'shared vision' and 'a workshop style approach to the next LCDC meeting'. There was a sense of urgency around creating the necessary conditions for collaborative behaviour to thrive. The questionnaire asked the participants for their final thoughts: 'Describe how you feel about your experiences of the last two days'. Again, the comments were hopeful and conveyed a changed outlook. 'Very uplifted and positive: the future is bright,' asserted a respondent.

Participants had learnt a lot about themselves and their colleagues on the LCDC: 'gained great insight into myself and my values' and 'benefited from the interactive processes of the workshop' were just two comments. Many felt empowered to deal with the LCDC's work programme: 'less likely to fear the uncomfortable place', 'enthusiastic to engage with other board members'. The group had therefore seemingly been equipped with a better set of leadership tools to work through the committee's challenges.

Conclusion

It is well documented by scholars and practitioners that cross-sector collaboration can lead to transformational social change (Kania & Kramer, 2013; Kuruvilla et al., 2018); however, there are many factors that can frustrate the collaborative process. To achieve better collaboration in a challenging environment, a fully committed and shared leadership approach is vital to work through difficulties. The development of effective local leaders of place is a continuous and dynamic process. As societal problems evolve, so too must the abilities and skills of decision-makers.

The DRCD's review of the LCDCs identified: 'good progress vis-à-vis local coordination and collaboration. Good examples of inter-agency working, improved collaboration and integrated services were identified; however, it is probably fair to say that such approaches are not yet established as the norm' (DRCD, 2019, p. 4). Collabora-

tive behaviour needs to continue improving if LCDCs are to maximise their impact for the betterment of local communities. But to repeat Huxham's contention, collaboration is difficult (Huxham, 1996, p. 4).

There are limitations with the paper's research. It is based on one workshop and the number of questionnaire respondents was quite low. The findings therefore cannot be interpreted as being generalisable to all LCDCs; rather they help to inform thinking and debate in this area. Despite this, several of the findings from the P-BLD workshop strengthen conclusions reached by the departmental review. Poor understanding around individual roles and the committee's function, a need for better communication between members, lack of confidence and time management – identified by the workshop – were also highlighted by the DRCD as issues affecting the committees.

The intervention for Cork city's LCDC sought to build the collaborative capacity of committee members. According to a participant, a key challenge was to bring about a 'redefining of the ethos of the LCDC'. Despite only lasting a day and a half, the workshop had made good progress in its task of getting these local leaders to consider their behaviour and working relations. In the minds of many, the discussions and learning had underlined the need for a change in how they act and think as leaders. Participants were exposed to key concepts and practical approaches under the P-BLD framework. The learning objectives – centred around the participants' mindset, skillset and toolset – had been successfully met. By enhancing their capacity, through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, these local leaders were empowered to more effectively address underlying tensions and thereby allow a more collaborative environment to emerge.

An analysis of the questionnaire data answered our research questions on attitudes, collaborative culture and behavioural change. More broadly, it is argued by this paper, that the design, delivery and evaluation of the pilot workshop has provided strong evidence for the testing of further pilots in other interested LCDC areas (Worrall, 2019). Indeed, a comparative analysis and systematic review of these may indicate the need for a more intensive P-BLD programme for Ireland's LCDCs. In strengthening the capacity of local leaders to tackle societal problems, a longer-term P-BLD programme would further enhance the LCDCs' contribution thus far to improving outcomes for local communities.

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