

THE HANCOCK COUNTY KATRINA RELIEF INITIATIVE: FOCUSING COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP TO FACILITATE RECOVERY AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER*

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Abstract

Eighteen months after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi coastal community of Hancock County on August 29, 2005, volunteers and organizations assisting with recovery in the area found chaos, confusion, and a desperate need for leadership. This qualitative study reflects the efforts of two University of Southern Mississippi professors as they planned, organized, and facilitated a strategic meeting of 104 individuals representing 60 different social service agencies, organizations, faith-based groups, local and state governments, and volunteers assisting with recovery in Hancock County. The researchers used focus group methodology (a) to identify the various groups assisting with recovery in the area and the services they provided; (b) to facilitate collaboration and communication among the care givers and the citizens; and (c) to better understand the problems of recovery associated with a storm of this magnitude. The researchers used large group presentations; small group break-out sessions; and a large group summarizing and planning session. Data collection and analysis included scripting all segments of the of the meeting; organizing, sorting, coding, and calculating frequency distributions of responses; and identifying emerging themes and patterns of the data. Results revealed victims of the storm were weary, depressed, and losing hope; care givers were burning-out from emotional and physical exhaustion; the pool of volunteers and workers was dwindling; the number of qualified social and medical workers was insufficient to meet the needs of the community; available and affordable supplies were minimal; and leadership to establish a point of centralized communication, collaboration, and coordination of recovery efforts was desperately needed.



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1 Introduction

Identified as the worst natural disaster in American History, the magnitude and force of Hurricane Katrina pounded the Mississippi coastal communities when the eye of the storm made landfall in Hancock County on August 29, 2005. The winds of the storm raged between 130 and 150 miles per hour while a tidal surge between 25 to 36 feet swept across the area causing massive destruction of property, communities, and lives (Department of Home Land Security, 2005) that led to a loss of hope among the citizens in the regions impacted by the storm. Eighteen months after the storm, the post-Katrina environment was one of abysmal need for residents returning to their homes in Hancock County.

Recovery in the midst of such massive destruction and loss of thousands of lives would require new strategies and a different kind of collaborative leadership. Heifetz (1994) described two types of leadership for change: technical and adaptive. Technical leadership refers to change that can occur with current knowledge by those in positions of authority. On the other hand, adaptive leadership for change requires learning for the problem definition, solution, and implementation. Solutions to adaptive challenges reside not in the “collective intelligence of all members of the organization at all levels, who need to use one another as resources, often across boundaries, and learn their way into solutions” (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p124). Adaptive changes force the organization to “clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating.” (Heifetz, 1997, p. 124)

Led by the citizenry of two Pennsylvania communities located near Philadelphia, a Katrina relief team was formed and partnered with The Salvation Army, United Way, and residents of the Mississippi Gulf Coast to forge a strong working relationship. Together, they collaborated with other social service agencies and faith-based groups to identify needs, gather resources, and begin a process of facilitation to rebuild the coastal county. Collectively referred to as the Hancock Initiative, the Pennsylvania Katrina Relief Team has worked collaboratively since 2006 and completed multiple and meaningful projects to help Mississippians recover from this natural disaster.

In an effort to identify the collective needs of the Hancock community and to broaden the knowledge of services being provided, two University of Southern Mississippi professors were asked to lend their skills to this rebuilding effort by facilitating the collaborative development of a strategic plan for Katrina recovery among the Pennsylvania Katrina Relief Team and other relief workers and agencies working in Hancock County. This emerging community of learners developed and distributed a handbook of providers, identified needs and available resources, and began the dialogue to collectively restore hope and rebuild lives affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Buckingham (2005) noted one of the human universal elements uniting all societies is the *need for authority*. Douglas Reeves (2006) added we survive as a species and as leaders of organizations not due to solitary efforts but due to *organizational and collaborative success orchestrated by a strong leader*. The *purpose* of the collaborative learning process undertaken this day in March 2007 was an effort to *better understand the problems of recovery after a natural disaster of this magnitude, begin a collaborative effort in which all participants could communicate more effectively, and to develop new initiatives to address Katrina recovery issues*.

¹<http://ijelp.expressacademic.org>

2 The Problem

One organization that has not lost focus in helping the Mississippi Gulf Coast recover is the Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief workers. A few weeks after Katrina made land fall in Mississippi, a lawyer and philanthropist from a community near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was haunted by the reports of people suffering and governmental interventions failing on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, he decided that his affluent community should work collaboratively and directly with the Mississippi Gulf Coast to assist with recovery efforts. The lawyer and two of his friends, a local philanthropist and a newspaper publisher, donated funds to form the Katrina Relief Project and rallied an entire community to make financial donations, provide supplies, and to travel to Hancock County in Mississippi to help people rebuild their homes and their communities. Similar to the passion of the patriots who pushed for American liberty in 1776, the Pennsylvania-based Katrina Relief Project workers pursued recovery for the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This group facilitated fundraisers; collected and delivered donations of money, food, clothing, and supplies; built and donated a child care center; and assisted with rebuilding homes and businesses for the Mississippi Gulf Coast areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

In early 2007, the success of Katrina Relief Project captured the attention of the Dean of the College of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. Already involved in fund raising projects to help fund relief efforts on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the dean sensed that more needed to be done to help recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Consequently, a request was made to the Katrina Relief Project leaders to schedule a meeting with the various constituents and service providers in Hancock County to discuss progress being made toward recovery and to identify needs and resources that the University of Pennsylvania may be able to address. To facilitate the meeting, a leader of the Katrina Relief Project turned to the University of Southern Mississippi Educational Leadership and Research Department and requested a facilitator to plan, organize, lead, collect and analyze the input of participants, and to report the findings of this collaborative effort to all participants. This collaborative effort became known as the Hancock County Katrina Relief Initiative.

Essential to this initiative was an in-depth understanding of those who had suffered great loss, those who were attempting to provide relief services and yet others capable of providing much needed financial resources. Each subgroup had specific needs, aspirations, and plans.

A carpetbagger mentality could have negated the process if Mississippians had viewed the Pennsylvania initiative as opportunistic or self-serving. Capra (1997) noted “A paradigm is a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way a community organizes itself (p. 6).” It was imperative that relief efforts respect the existing paradigm while seeking to broaden the community. If a single vision could be cast from such diverse cultures then the community could reorganize itself into a more effective post-Katrina initiative. Hancock county residents and relief workers became a community of learners.

Initially, there was little understanding among relief workers on the Mississippi Gulf Coast because few people were truly listening to others. Most local governments were in disarray with virtually no place to function and leaders displaced throughout Mississippi and the rest of our country. Additionally, state and federal programs and funding sources were entangled with no clear direction. As a result, individuals and small groups of volunteers from around the world converged on the Mississippi coast to assist with recovery efforts. Unfortunately, there was little collaboration, communication, or cooperation as each organization responded to the disaster from their singular perspective. Without a centralized source of leadership and collaboration, relief organizations and faith-based initiatives were duplicating services while operating with limited resources and few workers. Consequently, relief efforts were widely inefficient. The challenge for the Hancock Katrina Relief Initiative was to (1) define and update the system of providers in the Hancock community, (2) bring organizations and individuals together to create a single portal to let this emerging community of learners share information quickly and easily, and (3) identify areas where new resources might be added to existing networks to speed the process for providing much needed services for rebuilding the community and the lives of the people impacted by Katrina.

3 Related Literature

The Hancock County Katrina Relief Initiative orchestrated a purposeful community of learners based on a foundation of theoretical research regarding collaborative leadership with the goal of providing relief for a Mississippi community devastated by the impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. For the purpose of this paper the author developed a comparison chart of collaborative leadership models and model indicators aligned to Defour's (1998) *Professional Learning Community* indicators to determine the structure for this study. The comparison of collaborative models is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Comparison of Collaborative Leadership Models to DeFour's (1998) Professional Learning Community Guiding Questions

Author & Year of Publication	Name of Collaborative Leadership Model	What is the purpose of the group?	What do we want to achieve?	What are our strategies for achieving our goals?	How will we assess our efforts?
DeFour (1998)	<i>Professional Learning Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate Find common ground Build relationships Collectively commit to guiding principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group goals Collective inquiry Focused improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding Principles Beliefs and goals govern actions and behaviors Engage interdependently Continuously improve 	Determined by the group
Deming (1986)	<i>Total Quality Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate Teams Facilitate communication Achieve goals collectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Goals of organization Achieve goals collectively as a team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematic process Quality based incremental improvement Teams of workers 	Teams provide feedback on quality of products and organization
Fullan (1994)	<i>Professional Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship balance Local autonomy Professional community 	Shared purpose	High levels of collaboration	Shared accountability
Liethwood, Jantzi, & Steibach (1999)	<i>Transformational Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to the group and Commitment to group purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral needs Collaboration that produces social change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivational processes Inspire higher levels of commitment to the group 	
Mattessich & Monsey (1992)	<i>Collaborative Learning Communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual authority Shared responsibilities Commitment to mutual relationships 	Agreed upon outcomes	Jointly developed structures	Commitment to mutual accountability
Senge (1990)	<i>Focused Collaborative Teams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team learning Focused collaborative teams 	Shared organizational vision, mission, and focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems thinking Individual Mastery Mental Models 	Individual and system accountability
Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003)	<i>Purposeful Community of Learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective Efficacy Work in teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed upon outcomes Focus on questions, concerns, and issues important to group that can be changed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process Use data to motivate change Share assets 	Individual and team accountability for team goals
Wenger (1998)	<i>Communities of Practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relations Engage mutually in task at hand 	Collaboratively negotiate focus of group	Develop set of common practices to share work and significant experiences	Refine and shape practice

Rick DeFour's (1998) *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) contended that collaborative teams form a solid foundation as they engage in collective inquiry and focus on improvement with the goal of finding common ground as the team solves problems together. The PLC shares a common vision and mission structured around shared values and goals, collective inquiry, and continuous improvement. What distinguishes a professional learning community from other groups is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate the beliefs and govern the actions and behaviors of the group. Collective inquiry results in the group challenging the status quo, seeking new and improved methods of achieving goals, and reflecting on

the results. Through the collective inquiry process, the group reflects publicly on their beliefs and challenges the beliefs of others as they hammer out common meanings, plan and test actions, and coordinate the actions of the group.

The group practices that underlie learning organizations are seen as a means of producing more effective organizations. Deming (1986) argued in his work on *total quality management* that quality is achieved through constant incremental improvement as focused teams facilitate the necessary communication and feedback for ongoing organizational improvement. Senge (1990) focused on *five disciplines* that are characteristic of highly effective businesses: team learning, shared organizational vision, systems thinking, individual mastery, and mental modeling. Reeves (2007) reported that the keys to systematic and sustainable change begin with focused collaboration resulting in incremental meaningful change. He suggested the more we collaborate, the more sustainable a change will be (Reeves, 2007). Each of these theorists postulated that working in focused collaborative teams contributes to productive learning organizations.

Wenger (1998) developed a social theory of learning, *communities of practice*, based on effective group practices where individuals must interact and form relationships in unique ways to be productive. The three key components of Wenger's theory required individual group members to: (1) participate in communities of practice and engage mutually in the task at hand; (2) collaboratively negotiate the focus of the group; and (3) develop a set of common practices to share their work. Wenger explained a *community of practice* as a matter of sustaining enough mutual engagement in an effort to share significant learning experiences. Fullan (1994) suggested that a system of accountability grows out of relationships between local autonomy and the creation of professional communities with shared purpose and high levels of collaboration.

On the other hand, Mattessich and Monsey (1992) defined collaboration as a commitment to mutual relationships, jointly developed structures, shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability, and shared resources and rewards. This theory revealed it is necessary to have a layer of individual accountability and motivation for achievement of the goals of the group will grow as relationships are formed through collaborative learning communities.

Transformational leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) focused on influence exercised through motivational processes that inspire higher levels of commitment to the group and its purpose. In this sense, leadership emerges from fundamental moral needs and collaboration that produce social change and satisfy the needs of the followers. Using data can serve as a powerful mechanism and motivation for bringing members of a group together around the issues at hand (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The key to using data for group motivation to change is to focus on the questions, concerns, and/or issues that are important to the group; identify those factors over which the members of the group have no direct control (i.e., demographic data); and shift the focus to the factors over which the group may have some direct control or influence (i.e., programs and practices of the group). When data are used as a tool for positively impacting the group needs, individuals will engage in the process. Once a problem/question is identified, teams then work together through the steps of the process to address the identified needs of the group or the organization. Collaboration, reflection, dialogue, and planning with accurate meaningful data provide powerful learning communities that focus on attaining the goals of the organization.

In recent years the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted three quantitative meta-analyses looking at the effects of classroom, school, and leadership practices on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The significant findings were used to develop *The Balanced Leadership Framework* of leadership responsibilities and associated practices that have demonstrated a positive impact on student achievement. Based on the belief that leaders are continually engaged in focusing the work of the organization, leading change with varying orders of magnitude, and developing a purposeful community both within the organization and in the larger community, the framework provides a structure for school leaders to connect vision and action in their school communities.

4 Methods and Procedures

4.1 Participants

The Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project began in 2005 with the focused collaboration of a synergized group of passionate adults, the Salvation Army, and the United Way organizations in the Pennsylvania communities of Bucks County and Montgomery County. The focus of the group was to help with the recovery efforts of the Hancock County coastal community of Mississippi devastated by Hurricane Katrina. As the Bucks-Mont group was meeting success in Mississippi, a second collaborative group, the Hancock Initiative, was formed in 2007. On March 12, 2007, two professors from the Educational Leadership and Research Department at the University of Southern Mississippi facilitated a collaborative meeting that brought together volunteers from the Bucks-Mont Katrina Project; 104 social service providers and community and religious groups from Hancock County, Mississippi; administrative representatives from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practices; and officials from the University of Southern Mississippi. Among the Hancock County community were representatives from local and state governments, healthcare, law enforcement, behavioral health services, child services, social service agencies, non-profit organizations—including Salvation Army and United Way, religious groups, local schools, higher education institutions, and a variety of volunteer groups assisting with Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts in Hancock County.

4.2 Purpose

This manuscript reflects a qualitative study of the leadership practices implemented in a strategic planning process orchestrated on March 7, 2007; the collaborative nature of the Hancock Initiative that sponsored the meeting; the participants and their needs; the collective needs of the group; and the recommendations for addressing the needs of those individuals and groups in pursuit of recovery after the destructive blow of Hurricane Katrina. The purpose of the strategic planning session was to identify and update the system of hurricane relief providers in Hancock County, Mississippi; to bring individuals and organizations together to collaborate and assess progress made toward recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina; to assess specific needs in the community; and to begin a collaborative effort in which all participants communicate more effectively. Additionally, the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice sought to develop a plan for providing additional recovery assistance. The University of Southern Mississippi Educational Leadership Department facilitated this strategic planning process by planning, implementing, and reporting the outcomes.

4.3 Procedures

The Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project key leaders contacted Drs. Rose McNeese and Gary Peters, assistant administrators in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Southern Mississippi, in early February 2007 to request facilitators for the Hancock Initiative strategic planning session scheduled for March 12, 2007 in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. When Drs. McNeese and Peters agreed to facilitate the Hancock Initiative meeting, several conference calls were made among the planning team—Bucks-Mont, United Way, Salvation Army, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Southern Mississippi facilitators, to plan the logistics for the March meeting. Discussions included: brainstorming a list of possible participants; composing and disseminating a letter of invitation and a form for each participant to record contact information, operational hours, populations served, explanation of services provided, Katrina relief progress, and current needs for recovery; collecting and synthesizing participants' information; developing an agenda; preparing for the meeting—location, food, equipment, and materials preparation; coordinating and facilitating the meeting; and reporting the results.

The facilitators for the Hancock County Initiative chose research-based leadership strategies developed by DeFour (1998); Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003); and Fullan (1994) to plan, implement, and assess the initiative. DeFour's (1998) professional learning community theory provided four questions that established structure for the Hancock Initiative as they worked toward goal attainment: (a) What is our

purpose? (b) What do we want to achieve? (c) What are our strategies for achieving our goals? And (d) How will we assess our efforts? Additionally, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's (2003) components of the *purposeful community*—collective efficacy, agreed upon outcomes, process, and assets—were used to define the collaborative nature group. To add further dimension, the facilitators practiced Fullan's (1994) elements of the professional *community of learners* to create a sense of balanced relationships among the participants and high levels of collaboration during the process.

5 Data Collection

The Hancock Initiative planning team collaborated several times via personal and conference telephone calls, emails, and face-to-face meetings to discuss possible agenda items for the March meeting. The final agenda included four sessions: Session I—Introductions, purpose of the meeting, and establishing the process for the meeting; Session II—Individual presentations by the various groups represented at the meeting; Session III—Breakout discussion focused groups and lunch; and Session IV—Large group synthesis and summary of the small and large group input sessions and brainstorming for next steps.

5.1 Identification of Relief Providers

As participants registered for the Hancock Initiative, the facilitators collected registration information and developed a booklet of provider information for distribution at the strategic planning session. The purpose of the booklet was to identify providers and to promote further collaboration and sharing of resources. The names of the individuals and groups providing service in Hancock County were collected through Bucks Mont workers in the field for six months, the hospital administrative staff, the local Chamber of Commerce, and by word-of-mouth.

Small Group Collaboration. The individuals and group representatives were further organized into seven small collaborative focus groups to participate in break-out sessions during Session III of the meeting. The focus groups were structured around possible topics that would need to be discussed to convert the information shared in the March meeting into an action plan to address their identified needs. The topics of the collaborative focus groups included *Front Line Man Power, Liaison Collaboration Possibilities, New Services Needed, Human/Child/Social Services, Financing Options, Community Awareness/Marketing, and Other*. The focus groups were scheduled to meet, collaborate, and report back to the group at large. A discussion facilitator was selected for each group and provided written information regarding the responsibilities of the facilitator, the process to follow during the discussions, and the information to be recorded and reported to the large group during the final session of the collaborative group meeting. A recorder scripted the discussions for further analysis and reporting.

Identification of Group Needs for Katrina Recovery. During Session IV the small diverse groups came back together as one large group to share their discussions and recommendations. Also, during session IV the facilitators provided a summary of the input provided by the individuals and groups and brainstormed possible next steps to be taken to develop a plan to address the needs that emerged during the strategic planning.

After the strategic meeting concluded the facilitators collected and analyzed all recorded information. Needs discussed were organized according to themes and frequency of responses from the individual presentations, small group discussions, and the large group follow-up session. This information was organized into frequency charts and shared with the participants of the collaborative meeting through a group email at a later date. After the Hancock County collaborative strategic planning session came to an end, the participants were focused and synergized with a strong desire to continue meeting, collaborating, and supporting one another as a united group moving forward with Katrina recovery.

6 Results

The data collected from the participant registration forms, individual presentations during the large group sessions, and the focused group collaborative discussions are reported in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

TABLE 2. *Summary of Hancock County Katrina Recovery Initiative Needs Assessment*

<i>Category of Needs</i>	<i>Description of Needs</i>	<i>Frequency of Responses</i>
Caregiver Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burn Out • Dwindling Volunteer Source 	100%
Coordination, Collaboration, and Communication Among Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central communication and sharing of needs and resources—“One Stop Shop” • More Meetings of Hancock Initiative 	90% 70%
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Coordination of Services Center • Housing (Residents, Volunteers, and Workers) • Buildings for Businesses • Buildings for Youth Organizations 	60% 43% 33% 33%
Funding Sources	Operations, Housing, Supplies	57%
Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Needs • Alcohol & Drug Abuse • Medical Needs (Nurses, Doctors, Dentists, etc.) 	63% 63% 17%
Senior Citizen Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing Paper Work for Recovery Assistance • Construction/Rebuilding • Transportation 	20%
Volunteers/Manpower	Construction Workers, Mental Health Intake Assistants, Nurses, Social Workers, School Bus Drivers, Maintenance, Food Service	73%
Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Programs and Recreation • Child Services (Abuse, Neglect, Foster Care) 	40%
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of Devastation (History) • Public Awareness of Needs • Research & Publications 	100%

Table 1 showed the categories of providers working in Hancock County on March 12, 2007; a synthesis of the identified needs for the community and care givers; and the percent of individuals and groups that reported the need as a concern. The data reflected that the top three categories of need identified by the participants in the strategic planning session were (1) *caregiver support (100%)*, (2) *public awareness of problems (100%)*, and (3) *the need for a centralized point of collaboration, communication, and leadership. Summarizing.*

The results of the small focused group discussions are reported in Table 3. During the planning for the strategic meeting and the opening individual and group presentations sessions, input was gathered orally regarding the topics for the focused group break-out sessions. A recorder scripted and summarized the discussions to determine the focus group titles. The participants approved the discussion topics for the break-out sessions. A leader was selected for each group along with a recorder to script the meeting discussions. Each group was challenged to brainstorm possible ways for addressing the categories of needs that emerged during the large group individual sessions. By the end of the large group reporting and synthesizing session, the strongest need was to begin with a *one stop shop* to centralize leadership and available resources and to provide a point for collaboration and communication within the Hancock community and among volunteers, care givers, and residents.

TABLE 3. *Small Focused Group Discussion Topics and Identified Needs*

<i>Man Power Needs</i>		
Construction Workers Volunteers	Professional Services Social Services	Psychiatrists Physicians Nurses
<i>Liaison Collaboration</i>		
Collaboration Among Agencies	Centralized Housing	Help Processing Referrals
<i>New Services</i>		
Emergency Licensure Fund Project Recovery Summer Children Programs	Education Center More Volunteers Rental Services	Homeless Shelter Transportation Recruitment Center
<i>Community Awareness</i>		
Linking Websites Distribution in Schools	Chamber of Commerce Medical/Mental Health Van	National Media Publications
<i>Financing</i>		
Frequent Needs Assessments Corporate Donations Financial Management	Local, State, and Federal Funding Sources Grants	Fund Raisers Insurance
<i>Other</i>		
Transportation Parent Training and Support Elderly Needs	Centralization of Service Providers Care for the Care Givers	Youth Clubs After School and Summer Programs Housing for Transient Workers Burnout

7 Discussion

As Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003) have shared, when data are used as a tool for positively impacting the group needs, individuals will engage in the process. Once a problem/question is identified, teams then work together through the steps of the process to address the identified needs of the group or the organization. The key to using data for group motivation to change is to focus on the questions, concerns, and/or issues that are important to the group; identify those factors over which the members of the group have no direct control (i.e., demographic data); and shift the focus to the factors over which the group may have some direct control or influence (i.e., programs and practices of the group). Collective inquiry results in the group challenging the status quo, seeking new and improved methods of achieving goals, and reflecting on the results. Through the collective inquiry process, the group reflects publicly on their beliefs and challenges the beliefs of others as they hammer out common meanings, plan and test actions, and coordinate the actions of the group.

Collaboration, reflection, dialogue, and planning with accurate meaningful data provide powerful learning communities that focus on attaining the goals of the organization. Fullan (1994) shares that a system of accountability grows out of relationships between local autonomy and the creation of professional communities with shared purpose and high levels of collaboration. Based on the belief that leaders are continually engaged in focusing the work of the organization, leading change with varying orders of magnitude, and developing a purposeful community both within the organization and in the larger community, the framework provides a structure for school leaders to connect vision and action in their school communities.

The challenge for the Hancock Karina Relief Initiative was to (a) define and update the system of providers in the Hancock community, the services they provide and their perceptions of community needs for recovery; (b) bring organizations and individuals together to create a single portal to let this emerging community of learners share information and resources quickly and easily to speed the process for providing much needed services for rebuilding the community and the lives of the people impacted by Katrina, and to better understand the impact of Hurricane Katrina.

The data shared and processed at the Hancock Initiative meeting in March 2007 served to identify the most important issue. As shown in Table I, data was collected based on the frequency the category of need

appeared in the recorded reports for the individual group reports, the collaborative focused groups, and the synthesis of the large group discussions presented during the collaborative strategic planning session on March 12, 2007. Results showed that the providers in Hancock County, Mississippi, were quickly burning out. Volunteers and qualified workers were few in number and not enough to meet the demands of the devastated community. Service providers in the area needed housing and transportation for workers. The number one concern was a need to collaborate, share resources, establish a central area for housing offices of the providers, doing intake, and providing services to individuals in the community. Data also revealed a desperate need for mental health services for the community and the service providers as alcohol and drug abuse was increasing at alarming rates and suicide rates were rising.

Data in Table 2 reflect the categories of need established during the large group discussions and the results of the small breakout groups' recommendations of ways to address each category. The categories developed by the large group for the breakout discussion sessions were (a) Front Line Man-power, (b) Centralized Housing, (c) New Services, (d) Community Awareness, (e) Financing, and (f) Other Needs. Although each group was assigned a different category to discuss, common threads of each group's discussions revealed a desperate need for more communication, more collaboration, and the establishment of a centralized point of coordination for relief and recovery providers, citizens in the community, and governments agencies to more efficiently and effectively address the many needs of residents and caregivers in the devastated communities of Hancock County.

8 Summary

Initially, the entire nation responded to help rebuild the devastated areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina along the Mississippi and Louisiana coastal communities. The community of Hancock County, Mississippi, took the brunt of the hurricane eye as it moved on shore during the morning of August 29, 2005 destroying virtually everything within the path of the storm. As time passed after the storm and Hurricane Katrina was no longer head-line news, the suffering of the people affected by the storm continued. Insurance challenges, delays in assistance from state and federal governments, mismanagement of donations, escalating costs of building supplies, dwindling volunteer pools, and few skilled workers caused recovery efforts to move slowly. Unfortunately, adding to the frustrations and chaos of this struggling community, there was little or no communication, collaboration, or coordination among the volunteers, agencies, organizations, religious groups, or the government assisting in relief and recovery efforts.

The Pennsylvania-based Katrina Relief Project volunteers did not lose site of the issues looming on the Mississippi Gulf Coast struggling to recovery from the massive storm damage left behind after Hurricane Katrina. In January, 2007 the group sought the leadership skills of two University of Southern Mississippi professors to plan, coordinate, and facilitate a strategic planning session for the hurricane relief providers located in Hancock County at that time and the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy to explore possible solutions and resources available to address the problems facing the citizens of this devastated community.

Information gathered and analyzed during this initiative resulted in the development and the dissemination of a much needed comprehensive and centralized source of information identifying the Katrina relief and recovery providers working in Hancock County at that time, their contact information, and the services they provided for the community to assist with recovery. The goals of the Hancock Initiative were to provide the opportunity for collaboration among service providers, to share resources and seek new resources as needed, and to minimize the duplication of some services while expanding other services and resources much needed by the citizens of Hancock County.

Revealed in this qualitative study of the Hancock Initiative strategic planning session were the needs to (a) establish communication and collaboration among relief and recovery organizations and state and federal agencies assisting with recovery efforts in Hancock County; (2) address the critical shortage of mental health providers and social workers providing services for residents and tired care givers losing hope, becoming depressed and suicidal, and engaging in alcohol and drug abuse; (c) increase the dwindling pool of construction laborers and volunteers assisting with recovery; (d) provide building supplies at reasonable prices; and (e)

provide a centralized point for the coordination of relief efforts, resources, and agencies assisting with relief and recovery efforts.

A much appreciated outcome of the Hancock Initiative was the coming together of a community as a focused learning group—communicating and collaborating with collective efficacy to develop address needs and to assist with the development of an action plan for recovery in the Hancock community. Additionally, relationships were formed between the University of Southern Mississippi and the University of Pennsylvania for the coordination of Katrina research and collaboration with other universities as they engaged in a professional learning community with a shared focus engaging in collective inquiry, research, and seeking of resources to aid in the recovery of the Mississippi communities as they struggled to rebuild their lives and their community from one of the most devastating natural disasters in United States history.

Importance of Study. Two and on-half years after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Mississippi and Louisiana Gulf Coast, much still remains to be done. Recovery has been a real challenge as citizens and communities impacted by the storm are still waiting for insurance decisions to be rendered, homes to be rebuilt, schools to resume, and communities to “get back to normal.” Hampered by no clear plan or prior training for a disaster of this magnitude, all communities need to learn from the lessons of Katrina: be prepared and develop a plan for evacuation and for collaborating with others during and after the storm. A centralized community coordination point for residents, businesses, and care givers should be established well in advance of the disaster and put into action immediately after the storm. Collective efficacy occurs when a group of knowledgeable and motivated individuals come together and develop a plan to address the problems at hand. Knowing this information could help other communities experiencing natural disasters and huge losses as the residents of Hancock County, Mississippi, on August 29, 2005.

Future Studies. It is clear from this study that a centralized point for communication, collaboration, and coordination of services, resources, and volunteers is necessary beginning immediately after a natural disaster of the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and continuing for several years. It is conjured that the communities hit directly by this storm will take decades to fully recover. Future studies could focus on the longitudinal emotional and physical impact on residents and caregivers who have survived and/or assisted with recovery in a devastated area such as Hancock County

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