

Leadership Memphis: An Evaluation of the Development and Progress of a Community Leadership Program

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An important principle that community psychology research relies upon involves researchers acting as collaborative consultants with communities in order to promote social change. This relationship is considered to be a mutual exchange, in which both sides offer their own ideas and compromise on the goals and direction of the research (Duffy & Wong, 2003).

One specific type of community psychology research that can operate out of this collaborative paradigm is program evaluation. This form of research seeks to determine the effectiveness of interventions through a variety of methods, including surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. With the large amount of intervention techniques in practice, this type of research is particularly important as it helps programs and organizations stay aware of what methods do and do not work (Duffy & Wong, 2003).

With these notions in mind, the present study was conducted in order to evaluate the progress of a community leadership development program called Leadership Memphis. This program joins together established and emerging leaders in the community to learn more about the various facets of Memphis and to identify ways in which they can improve the city and develop their own leadership capacities (*Leadership Memphis Brochure Copy*, 2005). Leadership Memphis is only one of over a thousand similar programs that can be found all around the country, as well as parts of Great Britain, Canada, and Australia (Galloway, 1997).

Several aspects of the Leadership Memphis program make it a desirable target for community psychology research. First, the program has a strong focus on diversity, with members coming from various fields across the community (*History and Reflections*, 2005). They, therefore, collectively provide a broad perspective of the needs and ideas of the community. In addition, as stated previously, these participants are established or emerging leaders; thus, they are the decision makers, those who have a voice in numerous parts of the city and who determine its future (*Leadership Memphis Brochure Copy*, 2005). Lastly, after operating for 27 years, the program has recently gone through a major shift in its philosophy and curriculum (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

With evaluation now being especially key, a collaborative effort was made between the experimenter and the program directors so as to ensure that the program was accomplishing its desired aims. More specifically, by focusing on the Leadership Memphis class of 2005, the goals of the study were to identify:

- how well the program had accomplished its learning objectives.
- what participants considered to be the greatest strengths and challenges facing Memphis.
- what participants thought were the most important things they learned from the program
- what specific aspects of the program facilitated their learning
- what they would do differently in their civic work as a result of the program

In addition to the evaluation of its current practices, the historical context of the program was also explored. This context was provided in order to create a clearer picture of why the program was started and how it has developed. This information was obtained

through archival records from newspapers, as well as an interview with the founder of the program.

Memphis History

Memphis' need for a program like Leadership Memphis cannot be understood fully without taking into account the numerous changes and overt racial strife that came about during the Civil Rights Movement. For example, when integration efforts began during the 1960's, thousands of white Memphians moved eastward to avoid the changes taking place in the movement. This migration left the city center abandoned and deepened the separation between black and white Memphians (Bonds & Sherman, 2003). With this move also came the enrollment of thousands of white students into private, predominantly white schools. In the 1960's, 28,000 white students had fled to private schools, a number that would increase to 35,000 by the year 1975. This dramatic shift left many public schools segregated (Bonds & Sherman, 2003).

In addition to the racial strife resulting from opposition to integration attempts, Memphis' stability took an added blow when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in downtown Memphis on April 4, 1968. This tragic event affected the city's reputation to native Memphians, as well as to the rest of the country. In a *Time Magazine* article on the assassination, Memphis was referred to as a "decaying Mississippi river town" (Bonds & Sherman, 2003). It would take tremendous efforts for Memphis to convince itself and the rest of the country that it did not fit that description.

On the political spectrum, the progress of the Civil Rights Movement had led to a political movement in the 1970's in which a great deal of the African American population put forth a strong effort to get African-American candidates voted into political offices.

Through mobilization efforts that included a united African American population and biracial coalitions, many African-American candidates won elections in city, state, district, and national offices (Wright, 2000).

One office that was a particular challenge for African-American candidates in Memphis was the mayor's office. During this time, candidates' race became the driving force of many citizens' voting interests. The fragmentation of the city can be seen by the dramatic racial polarization of voting patterns during this time. For example, in the 1975 general mayoral election, Otis Higgs, the most popular African American candidate won 80% of the black vote and only 10% of the white vote, while the most popular white candidate Wyeth Chandler (who won the election) won 3% of the black vote and 70% of the white vote. This type of pattern continued in the 1979 election in which racial ratios of votes for the general mayoral election were 94%/8% (black/white) for Higgs and 3%/82% for Chandler (Wright, 2000).

One final factor contributing to the program's formation was the adjustment in leadership power that had resulted from the death of E.H. Crump in 1954. Crump, who served as Memphis' mayor numerous times, organized a political machine in 1909 that would control the city for 45 years. He had connections throughout Memphis and used tactics, including payoffs and voting manipulation, to win candidacy. Various systems operated by his command; therefore, when he died, the foundation of the machine that directed the course of the city's affairs was gone and the city was left without the same unified, decision-making force (Bonds & Sherman, 2003).

The Development of Leadership Memphis

Amidst these pressing issues, a Memphis attorney and environmentalist named

Lucius Burch set out to improve the city by initiating the development of an organization modeled after ones that had demonstrated to be beneficial to Atlanta and Nashville, both of which had faced similar challenges as Memphis. These programs focused on unifying the fragmented cities by engaging a diverse group of community leaders in an educational program dedicated to informing citizens about their cities and developing their leadership connections and abilities (*History and Reflections*, 2005).

For Burch and other early developers, the goals of the program were threefold. First, it was hoped that through engaging both African-American and Caucasian leaders in dialogue about pressing issues in Memphis, they would be able to unite through socialization and overcome the racism that divided the city. An additional desired outcome was to increase the network connections between community leaders so that they could work together and use each other's strengths to improve the city. Lastly, it was hoped that through informing leaders of the numerous aspects of the city, they would be more knowledgeable, and therefore, better equipped to make a difference and increase their civic work (K. Gooch, personal communication, June 14, 2005).

In order to establish connections to aid in the program's development, Burch contacted Kate Gooch, the president of the Junior League. Together, they increased the number of interested parties through contacting members of the Chamber of Commerce, the Urban Policy Institute, the Urban League, as well as administrators from LeMoyne-Owen College and Rhodes College. The group got initial funding from the Clarence Day Foundation and sent out over 800 letters to businesses asking for more funding (*History and Reflections*, 2005).

These efforts proved to be successful as they began to receive replies from approximately half of their contacts, declaring interest in participating and a willingness to fund the budding organization (*History and Reflections*, 2005). During the fall of 1978, the founders announced their board of trustees, which included a very diverse group of leaders, and hired Kate Gooch as the president of the organization (“Leadership Group,” 1979). Shortly afterwards, the group sent out a letter requesting nominations and applications for the first class. Following an admissions process, a group of 42 members, representing an equal distribution of sexes, African-American and European-American members, and members from the different areas of civic work, were enrolled (“Leaders to Lead,” 1979).

The course began with an opening retreat intended to acquaint members with each other and begin the process of establishing relationships. Following the retreat were seven day-long sessions, held once a month, that addressed issues such as Memphis’ race relations, city government, education, criminal justice, business and economy, neighborhood development, politics, religion and the arts (K. Gooch, personal communication, June 14, 2005). Through speakers’ lectures, monitored discussions, research study groups, and creative activities, members’ learned more about the city and each other. After these seven sessions came a closing retreat in which members were encouraged to implement what they had learned into their civic work and maintain and increase the networks established through the program in order to spread the message of Leadership Memphis (“Leadership Memphis is Saluted,” 1979).

Leadership Memphis 2004 Curriculum Change

Though much of the core mission of Leadership Memphis has remained the same,

several philosophical and structural changes were made for the 2004-year. These changes represent an attitude shift in which additional attention has been given to understanding the complexity and interplay of the inner-workings of Memphis, learning innovative solution-oriented tactics used in other successful areas, increasing the depth of the learning process, and taking personal responsibility for members' commitment to the community (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

In seeking to enhance members' perspective on how Memphis works, the class topics have changed from covering individual topics to taking a more extensive approach, focusing on larger topics such as "Making Memphis smart and resilient." These new topics feature an interplay of the various individual topics, demonstrating how they interact with each other and ultimately relate to the theme. This modification was made in the hopes of capturing the complexity of the issues currently facing Memphis. The only class topic that continues to be addressed on an individual level is the subject of race relations. However, in contrast to the previous approach to this topic, there is an increased emphasis on sameness between groups while continuing the pursuit of understanding differences (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

Another change that has been made involves an added concentration on strategies used by successful cities around the country and world. With the help of national and international speakers, Leadership Memphis participants learn about effective interventions being used in different parts of the country and develop their ideas on how they can implement passed successful interventions in Memphis (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

Additionally incorporated into the program are assignments called “learning journeys” in which participants are given readings and action-based assignments to be completed before the class period. This development not only prepares participants for class periods, but also provides them with concrete experiences outside of the classroom to guide their learning process (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

Further changes in the program include a change in how alumni relations proceed, involving increased encouragement of alumni’s commitment to their civic work and additional learning opportunities for alumni. These changes have been made in order to help alumni stay aware of changes and opportunities in the community and to promote alumni’s continued commitment to improving Memphis. For example, more informal social events will take place in which alumni can maintain contact with those who they met through the program. Another added option for alumni will be class days and learning opportunities in which alumni can continue learning about the Memphis community. Also, through networking and maintaining connections with various organizations within the community, Leadership Memphis will also actively help alumni find community service projects in which to engage (C. Coletta, personal communication, July 10, 2005).

Present Study

Having traced the historical context and development of Leadership Memphis, it is important to now analyze its current effectiveness so as to facilitate continuous progress. This will be done by having past members of the class of 2005 rate how well Leadership Memphis has accomplished its learning objectives. Furthermore, a more in depth look at the learning process will be obtained by having participants respond to short answer questions regarding what they think are Memphis’ strengths and challenges, as well as

what they learned from the program, what specific aspects of the program facilitated their learning, and what they thought they would do differently in their civic work as a result of the program.

Method

Participants

The participant population consisted of 18 members of the Leadership Memphis class of 2005. The entire class includes 44 members; therefore, the study obtained a 40.9% response-rate. The racial/ethnic breakdown for participants within the sample was 16.6% African American and 83.3% Caucasian. Additionally, 38.8% of the sample was female, while 61.1% was male.

This sample more or less reflects the gender makeup of the entire class that consisted of 45% females and 54% males. However, the sample was significantly under-representative of the racial/ethnic makeup of the entire class, $X^2(1, N = 44) = 4.12$, $p < .05$, in which 66% of members were from the racial majority and 34% were from the racial minority.

Measures

Accomplishment of learning objectives. Participants rated on a 7-point scale (1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed with statements affirming Leadership Memphis' accomplishment of its 10 objectives (see Appendix A). Objectives focused on Leadership Memphis' pursuit to help participants learn about the Memphis community, identify strengths and challenges of the community, develop their networking connections, and think of innovative ways to improve the community.

Memphis' strengths. Participants' thoughts on this topic were obtained through the following short answer question: "What do you think are the greatest strengths of the Memphis community?"

Memphis' challenges. Participants' thoughts on this topic were obtained through the following short answer question: "What do you think are the greatest challenges facing the Memphis community?"

Most important things learned. Participants' thoughts on this topic were obtained through the following short answer question: "What are the most important things you learned as a result of your participation in Leadership Memphis?"

Learning facilitators. Participants' thoughts on this topic were obtained through the following short answer question: "What specific aspects of Leadership Memphis (presentations, speakers, discussions, etc.) facilitated your learning?"

Effects on civic work. Participants' thoughts on this topic were obtained through the following short answer question: "What, specifically, in your civic engagement work do you plan to do differently as a result of your Leadership Memphis experience?"

Procedure

The head of Leadership Memphis made first-contact with all participants, informing them about the study and encouraging them to participate. Following this first-contact, the experimenter mailed participants the questionnaire, an informed consent form, and a self-addressed and stamped envelope. The experimenter had previously obtained participants' contact information with the permission of Leadership Memphis through their alumni directory. Completion of the questionnaire should have taken approximately 15 minutes. Participants were given 2 weeks to return the completed questionnaire to the

experimenter. After a one-week period, the experimenter sent out a letter to those who had not yet returned the questionnaire reminding them of the deadline and encouraging them to participate.

Results

Analysis of Learning Objectives

Frequency analyses were conducted to measure the percentage of participants that agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had accomplished each objective. Three of the 10 learning objectives were rated highly by a particularly large percentage of participants. For example, 77.8% of participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them build a network of Memphis colleagues also committed to making Memphis great. Additionally, 72.2% of participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them discover more about Memphis and learn how to recognize current and future assets that will make Memphis great. Finally, 72.2% of participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them appreciate the responsibility they would carry forward as one of Leadership Memphis' 1,300 alumni.

There were three learning objectives that received lower ratings. For example, 38.9% of participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them think deeply about the opportunities they have to achieve the great Memphis they imagine and the challenges inhibiting that vision. Furthermore, 33.4% of participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them develop a global perspective on Memphis' opportunities and challenges, becoming the city's window to the world—importing and exporting the best ideas to make Memphis great. Lastly, 27.8% of

participants agreed to strongly agreed that Leadership Memphis had helped them develop a deeper understanding about how things are accomplished in Memphis and how to apply that understanding to building a great Memphis. The table below presents all of the learning objectives, along with the percentage of participants that agreed to strongly agreed that they had been successfully accomplished.

Figure 1: Accomplishment of Learning Objectives	
Learning Objectives: Leadership Memphis was successful in helping me:	% of participants that agreed to strongly agreed
Imagine a great Memphis	44.4
Think deeply about the opportunities we have to achieve the great Memphis I imagine and the challenges inhibiting that vision.	38.9
Discover more about Memphis and learn how to recognize current and future assets that will make Memphis great.	72.2
Develop a global perspective on Memphis’ opportunities and challenges, becoming the city’s window to the world—importing and exporting the best ideas to make Memphis great.	33.4
Consider multiple ways to address and capitalize on opportunities and challenges	44.4
Develop a deeper understanding about how things are accomplished in Memphis and how to apply that understanding to building a great Memphis.	27.8
Encourage the discovery of what my role is in the community and determine how I can make a meaningful contribution to making Memphis great.	61.1
Build a network of Memphis colleagues also committed to making Memphis great.	77.8
Develop formal and informal opportunities to communicate to others what is learned through Leadership Memphis.	50.0
Appreciate the responsibility I will carry forward as one of Leadership Memphis’ 1,300 alumni.	72.2

Analyses of Open-ended Questions

Qualitative analyses began with all participant responses being transcribed. Next, the experimenter and a student colleague individually identified themes within responses. After creating a compilation of themes, the researchers met together to compare findings and discuss reasoning for their chosen themes. Only themes that achieved unanimous agreement were included in the results section.

Memphis' strengths. Prevalent themes that researchers found in the qualitative data include Memphis' citizens and civic leaders (n = 7), people (n = 7), diversity (n = 6), its history and culture (n = 5), its location (n = 5), and downtown revitalization (n = 3). A table of all themes found in participants' responses is shown below.

Figure 2: Themes for "Memphis' Strengths"	
THEME DESCRIPTION	Frequency
Citizens/civic leaders (who are active, talented, unified, and proud)	7
People (who have an entrepreneurial spirit, provide the city with a small town feel, and are easy to meet and establish network connections with)	7
Diversity (with emphasis on racial diversity)	6
History and Culture (including cultural heritage and activities)	5
Location (including location on Mississippi River and low cost of living)	5
Downtown revitalization	3
beauty	1
Healthcare providers	1
Generous businesses (philanthropically)	1

Memphis' challenges. Participants' responses regarding Memphis' greatest challenges included pervading themes involving poor race relations (n = 12), poor

leadership (n = 7), a weak educational system (n = 7), and governmental/political challenges (n = 5). All themes found in responses, along with the frequency of their occurrence, are shown below.

Figure 3: Theme for “Memphis’ Challenges”	
THEME DESCRIPTION	Frequency
Poor race relations (including prevalent racism and racial polarity)	12
Leadership (including lack of unity, vision, cooperation, focus, set goals, risk taking, vocalization of goals, opportunities for new leaders, and a poor image)	7
Weak School/education system	7
Government/political challenges (including limited appreciation of government’s assets, lack of political will, poor political representation, voter apathy, and a restricted tax base.	5
Inferiority complex/overcoming bad reputation/dwelling on the past	4
Economic injustice (including limited middle class with a large socioeconomic gap between classes)	3
Under-educated, under-employed parents/lack of job opportunities	2
Weak healthcare	1
Poor development control	1
Lack of money	1
Lack of unity	1

Most important things learned. In response to the question regarding the most important things they learned in the program, participants most frequently mentioned an increased appreciation and knowledge of Memphis (n = 15), the importance of taking personal responsibility (n = 7), increased awareness of important qualities of leaders (n =

5), and increased awareness of good citizens (n = 4). The complete list of themes and their frequencies is shown below.

Figure 4: Theme for “Most Important Things Learned”	
THEME DESCRIPTION	Frequency
Increased Appreciation/Knowledge of Memphis (including general knowledge, information about the government, economic data, history, extent of diversity, inner workings of city, positive aspects of the city, and similarity to other communities)	15
Importance of taking personal responsibility and being engaged in community	7
Important qualities of leaders in improving the city (including involvement, focused vision, relationships, unity and being active)	5
Increased Awareness of Good Citizens (including civic pride, goodness, unity, talent, commitment citizens in all fields,	4
Increased understanding of diversity and race issues in Memphis (including understanding of the extent of racial polarity and the commonality between races)	3
Import of civic engagement in improving the city as well as united, visionary, participatory, focused leadership	3
Memphis potential/work required to improve Memphis	2
Self exploration (including exploration of leadership style, goals, and objectives, and motivation to be more engaged)	2
Consolidation is an impossibility	1

Learning facilitators. The aspects of the program that participants most often cited as facilitating their learning include the speakers and presentations (n = 13), Team Trek (n = 8), and discussions (n = 8). The table below shows all of the aspects of the program that participants mentioned and indicates the frequency with which they were mentioned.

Figure 5: Themes for “Learning Facilitators”	
THEME DESCRIPTION	Frequency
Speakers and presentations	13
Team Trek	8
discussions	8
Everything/most activities	3
Diversity Day	3
Learning Journeys	3
Exposure and interaction with diverse classmates	2
“At the River I Stand” reading	1
Charter school visit	1

Effects on civic work. Themes most frequently cited within participants’ responses regarding what they thought they would do differently in their civic work as result of their participation in the program include an increase in civic involvement (n = 8), increased focus on certain areas of work (n = 5), working on personal development (n = 4), maintaining friendships and network connections (n = 3), and nothing different (n = 3). All themes to this question are presented in the table below, along with their frequency of occurrence.

Figure 6: Themes for “Effects on Civic Work”	
THEME DESCRIPTION	Frequency
Increased civic involvement (including more activities, working harder, being a stronger advocate)	8
Focus work (including `focusing work in areas most in need and being more discerning about which activities to participate in)	5
Personal development (including taking more risks and working on general personal improvement)	4

Figure 6 (continued): Themes for “Effects on Civic Work”	
Maintain friendships and make use of network connections in work)	3
Nothing different	3
Recruit others to Leadership Memphis	1
Spread messages of Leadership Memphis	1
Financially support candidates	1
Remember impact of civic efforts	1

Discussion

Findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses demonstrated several correspondences between the most highly rated learning objectives and the most frequently cited themes within participants’ short answer responses. Within this overlap, participants’ qualitative reports provide more information about their experience that helps explain why these particular learning objectives were rated so highly.

Not all qualitative findings, however, relate to the highly rated learning objectives. Rather, for these items, there seems to be a relationship between the frequently cited themes and key aspects of Memphis history. Additionally, learning objectives that most participants did not rate highly also do not correspond to findings from qualitative data; however, they do relate to results obtained from a separate study conducted by Leadership Memphis. These items seem to highlight a need for adjustment in the program or in the learning objectives.

In order to create the most cohesive synthesis, interpretations of findings will be organized in lieu of these connections, in the following order:

- explanations for corresponding highly rated learning objectives and qualitative data as they relate to an overarching theme
- explanations for qualitative data as they relate to aspects of Memphis history
- explanations for learning objectives that received lower ratings as they point out areas in the program that need adjustment

Relating Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Discovering more about Memphis. One of the learning objectives that the largest percentage of participants (72.2%) rated highly addressed Leadership Memphis' pursuit to help participants discover more about Memphis and to learn how to recognize current and future assets that would make Memphis great. This finding coincides greatly with frequently cited themes within responses to short answer questions regarding Memphis' strengths, what participants learned in the program, how they learned it, and how the program would affect their civic work.

For example, the most frequently cited theme from the open-ended question regarding what participants learned in the program was additional knowledge and increased appreciation for Memphis. Responses included learning more about Memphis' history, government, and general inner workings. This greater understanding and appreciation for the city is also, according to the founder of the program and program literature, one of the top priorities of the program.

Relating to this trend is the most frequently cited learning facilitator, that being speakers and presentations. This finding relates to the previous two findings because most of what participants learned about Memphis was acquired *through* speakers from the city,

region, and world who gave presentations on various facets of Memphis and how to improve the city.

Tying into these themes is the finding that Memphis' history and culture was frequently cited as one of Memphis' strengths. Because participants are learning and appreciating more about Memphis through the help of speakers and because Memphis' history and culture are integral parts of the city, then participants' considering them to be its greatest strengths is not surprising.

Lastly, one of the most frequently mentioned themes within participants' responses regarding how their civic work would change as a result of the program was an increase in the focus of their work. This finding coincides with the previously stated ones in that their increased knowledge of the city will enhance their ability to discern which area is best for them/is in the most need.

Building network connections. The next set of findings that relate to one another center around Leadership Memphis' desire to help participants build a network of Memphis colleagues also committed to making Memphis great. This learning objective received high ratings from the greatest percentage of participants (77.8%), thus demonstrating the program's success in achieving this goal.

Explaining this objective are the findings that an increased understanding of important aspects of leadership (including relationships and united focus among leaders) and an increased awareness of good citizens were two of the themes most frequently cited as important things learned in the program. Part of building an effective network of colleagues involves meeting fellow community leaders and uniting together in common goals. Thus, learning these things would play an important role in establishing this

network. This objective, according to the founder, was also one of the top priorities of the program.

Furthermore, the program's pursuit of accomplishing this objective can be seen in the areas of the curriculum that participants' frequently cited as being their learning facilitators, namely the Team Trek experience and group discussion. Team Trek involves members spending two nights with each other at a camp near Heber Springs, Arkansas. This trip is one of the beginning activities of the entire Leadership Memphis experience and is meant to help participants get to know each other and establish relationships. Potential factors that may contribute to this activity's effectiveness include its early onset, its significant length, and its distance from members' other responsibilities. Therefore, Team Trek seems to be an intense experience allowing significant relationship bonding.

The other learning facilitator related to the relationship building and networking process was class discussion. This aspect of the curriculum exposes members to an array of different perspectives, furthering their understanding of each other and bringing them closer together. Because the program also has an emphasis on diversity and this experience may be participants' first one involving so many people from various fields and backgrounds, it makes sense that discussion would be such an influential tool in participants' learning process and an integral part of the expansion of their relationship networks.

Further evidence for the programs' accomplishment of this goal can be seen in the frequently cited themes of Memphis' citizens/civic leaders, people, and diversity being its greatest strengths. Because of the program's success in building relationships, it is not surprising that, after having met and developed relationships with other passionate and

committed leaders, they would consider Memphis' citizens to be a great strength. Additionally, participants' appreciation for diversity could have increased with exposure to other members coming from different backgrounds. After having such a positive experience with meeting a diverse group of people, participants would have an enriched perspective of diversity as a significant strength of the community.

One finding relating to these themes in a seemingly contradictory way is the frequent response of Memphis' leadership as a challenge facing the city. Specifically, participants mentioned a lack of unity, focus, and cooperation as current problems in the leadership. One interpretation of this finding is that, as civic leaders themselves, the leadership of the city is of top priority to the participants. In meeting other civic leaders through the program and learning more about what are integral parts of good leadership (common focus and relationships), they may have become more aware of Memphis' leadership potential, and thus, more dissatisfied with the current leadership body that is not living up to its potential.

100% responsibility. The final learning objective that a large percentage of participants (72.2%) rated highly referred to Leadership Memphis' pursuit to help members appreciate the responsibility they will carry forward as one of leadership Memphis' 1300 alumni. This theme of taking personal responsibility and being more engaged in the community was often found in participants' responses to the question regarding what they learned in the program. In fact, it was the predominant theme of the 2005 curriculum, with the slogan, "100% responsibility," often being cited in participants' responses. This objective is especially important since it is geared toward the actual implementation of what is learned into members' civic work.

Another area where this theme was especially pertinent was in the responses to the question asking participants what they would do differently with their civic work as a result of the program. More specifically, participants often said that they would increase their civic involvement, including pursuing more activities and working harder. Another frequent response was that they would work on their own personal development, working on themselves, internally, so as to become a better leader. These plans demonstrate the application of the overall message of the program involving making Memphis great. They indicate a desire and motivation to take responsibility, as civic leaders, and work to improve their city.

Data Relating to Historical Context

Many of these responses regarding Memphis' greatest challenges correspond to challenges facing Memphis when Leadership Memphis first began. For example, one of the greatest challenges that Leadership Memphis sought to confront was the racial tension going on in Memphis at the time. According to participants' accounts, with poor race relations being cited most frequently, this challenge is still pervading Memphis. Because Memphis has a history of events contributing directly to this dynamic, including white flight and the assassination of Martin Luther King (Bonds & Sherman, 2003), this challenge will be difficult to overcome. It also should be noted that there are other current factors contributing to this problem, including socioeconomic factors. Therefore, in order to face this challenge, systemic, as well as attitudinal changes, must be made.

Another challenge cited that has historic roots is Memphis' educational system. In understanding this challenge, one must, again, take into account the racial segregation in Memphis' city and county schools. This factor arose during the Civil Rights Movement

and continues today, with 87% of students within Memphis City Schools being African American, while only 9% are Caucasian (“Memphis City Schools,” 2004). Though participants did not indicate that they developed ways to confront this issue, it is clear that it is a true concern that must be addressed.

Lastly government/political challenges seem to be another issue still facing Memphis. However, while Memphis’ political challenges formerly involved racial polarity, such is not the case today. Great progress has been made with African American candidates being elected into various city and county offices, including the city and county mayoral position (Wright, 2000). Rather, today the main challenges, according to participants, seem to involve limited appreciation of government’s assets, lack of political will, poor political representation, voter apathy, and a restricted tax base.

Learning Objectives with Lower Ratings

Learning objectives that lower percentages of participants thought Leadership Memphis had accomplished include helping members think deeply about the opportunities participants have to achieve the great Memphis they imagine and the challenges inhibiting that vision; develop a global perspective on Memphis opportunities and challenges, becoming the city’s window to the world—importing and exporting the best ideas to make Memphis great; and develop a deeper understanding about how things are accomplished in Memphis and how to apply that understanding to building a great Memphis.

Interestingly, all of the objectives that received lower ratings all involved developing or deepening their understanding/thoughts on certain issues. Insight into possible explanations for these findings can be gained by taking into account information that participants provided in a focus group format, administered for Leadership Memphis

by an outside consultant. Specifically, one comment that participants often made in the focus groups was that topics were not covered in enough depth. Rather, participants reported feeling that the program provided an overview of issues without digging deep enough (D. Williams, personal communication, July 8, 2005).

Responding to these concerns, Leadership Memphis now informs participants that its job is to, “inform, enlighten, and inspire.” They assert that there is not enough time to cover each issue at its desired depth; therefore, it is the program’s hope to instill the desire and motivation to get members to pursue those issues to the depth of their interest (*Calendar, Expectations, and Tuition*, 2005). This is certainly a reasonable response; however, Leadership Memphis may need to adjust some of the learning objectives to remain consistent with what it considers to be feasible goals.

Limitations

The racially under-representative sample in comparison to the entire class is the most significant limitation of the study. For example, a disproportional amount of the respondents were white males (43%). This response bias may be indicative of a closer connection that white males had to the program. This may also be related to the fact that, contrary to the desired aim of the program to have a fully racially/ethnically diverse class, there were significantly more white members (66%) than black members (29.5%). Therefore, African-American members may have felt unfairly underrepresented and not as connected to the program. It should be noted that the racial makeup for the class of 2005 was quite atypical. In all classes preceding the 2005-year, about 43% of the members were from racial minorities (D. Williams, personal communication, July 24, 2005).

Another limitation of the study is the absence of questions providing participants with the opportunity to offer suggestions for the program. Thus, for the aspects of the program that do need improvement, no constructive feedback was obtained to direct the course of development. It should be noted that discussion about including this question in the survey did occur while the survey was being constructed. However, researchers decided not to include it in the survey because of length constraints, as well as the already existing focus group reports that addressed this issue. Nonetheless, the inclusion of this information might have identified new areas for improvement.

Lastly, though participants were questioned about what they thought they would do differently in their civic work, because the study was conducted shortly after participants graduated from the program, there has not been enough time to actually measure the effect of the program on participants. If what is learned is not put into practice, then the ultimate goal of the program is lost.

Extensions and Recommendations

Extensions of the present study could use other methods, including interviews or a survey sent through email, to obtain a larger sample population and render more valid results. With a larger sample population, experimenters could be surer that the responses were fully representative of the whole class, without response bias getting in the way. Because Leadership Memphis stresses a diverse population, the need for a sample representing people from all backgrounds is especially crucial.

Furthermore, future studies could ask participants for feedback on how they think the program could be improved. This feedback could be incorporated into the program so as to directly foster improvement. Also, future studies could better gauge how the program

has affected participants' civic work by following participants over time. Such a longitudinal perspective would allow for an assessment of whether or not participants are implementing what they learned in the program into their civic work.

In addition, the admissions committee should continue its efforts to recruit and choose a proportional amount of African-American members so that it can successfully accomplish its desired aim of having a diverse class. Additionally, given the growing numbers of other racial/ethnic minority populations in the area, continuing and increasing outreach to these communities is also encouraged.

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Appendix A: Leadership Memphis Evaluation Survey

On the following scale, in which 1 represents *strongly disagree* and 7 represents *strongly agree*, please rate your agreement to the statements by circling the appropriate number.

Leadership Memphis was successful in helping me:

Imagine a great Memphis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Think deeply about the opportunities we have to achieve the great Memphis I imagine and the challenges inhibiting that vision.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discover more about Memphis and learn how to recognize current and future assets that will make Memphis great.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Develop a global perspective on Memphis' opportunities and challenges, becoming the city's window to the world—importing and exporting the best ideas to make Memphis great.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Consider multiple ways to address and capitalize on opportunities and challenges.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Develop a deeper understanding about how things are accomplished in Memphis and how to apply that understanding to building a great Memphis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Encourage the discovery of what my role is in the community and determine how I can make a meaningful contribution to making Memphis great.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Build a network of Memphis colleagues also committed to making Memphis great.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Develop formal and informal opportunities to communicate to others what is learned through Leadership Memphis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appreciate the responsibility I will carry forward as one of Leadership Memphis' 1,300 alumni.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
