Inciting Economic Recovery in Rural Oregon: 
Analysis of the Leadership Development Strategies In Revitalizing Communities 

by 
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---To all those with pride in their roots,
passion for creating positive changes,
courage to create a better future,
and love for all of the Small Town USAs.

DEDICATION

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my parents for all of their everlasting support and encouragement. Thank you for your late night responses, patience and inspiration. You were right. Ever since moving away from Gold Beach, I’ve just come to appreciate our small town more and more. You and I are always going to be downright quirky. Thank you for always providing all the love and help I could ever ask for.

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“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

--Niccolo Machiavelli

UNDERSTANDING RURAL OREGON

With articles like “U.S. Economic Recovery is weakest since World War II” in the Wall Street Journal (2012), “U.S. CEO’s View of Economy Deteriorating” in Fox Business (2011) and “World Growth at risk as U.S. employment stumbles” in Reuters (2012) covering front pages of the news lately, it’s not hard to gather the impression that the U.S. economy is struggling. Driving down the Oregon Coast from Astoria to Brookings, the visible deterioration and storefront openings do not give an impression of thriving rural communities.

Rural and urban residents alike look toward existing leaders to lead them out of this economic recession. Perpetuated by the media, this “heroic figure” style of leadership creates a sense of dependency and acts as a source of all answers because rural residents are awaiting the arrival of an individual to sweep in and save the community, business or even country. What if the emphasis concept of recovery through a single heroic leader, a concept which is heavily engrained in American culture, is partly the cause of this economic deterioration? Instead of waiting for a hero to rescue it, could a community be proactive before they are past a breaking point? In the “Heroic Leadership” individualistic model, there is the idea that some ‘omniscient figure’ will step in to save the community. Regarding community and economic development, perhaps it will be some new industry that
will locate in the area or a new leader who steps forward to lead everyone to an economic Eden.

Problems are swelling in rural communities as local governments threaten to cut services, counties contemplate combining, and businesses close from a lack of tourism. Community inaction only fuels the rapid compounding of these issues. Unfortunately, the story of rural communities wasn't written by Disney or Pixar and America isn't Radiator Springs (Lasseter & Ranft, 2006). The restricted resources, communal exhaustion and increased government-constituency frustration continually sparks the kindling that would effectively burn any bridges toward economic survival and opportunity potential.

Communities are finding that these heroes aren't showing up. Where are they? Where is this person that is supposed to appear and save the town? Instead of taking action, community members are asking “why hasn’t someone done something?” or even worse, farther down the road, “why didn’t someone do something?” For some, there is a point where people recognize that the system they have believed in has failed them and that the rescuer isn’t on his or her way. The following research looks at what would it take to foster a resurgence of collaborative efforts between all residents to create vibrant, healthy communities through leadership.

*Rural Oregon Demographics*

Rural communities are often discounted based on their lack of population. Even the definition of what is considered rural has varied dramatically over the
years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), populations of 2,500 and greater with population densities of 500 or greater persons per square mile are classified as urban areas. Using that evaluation, around a fifth of Oregon’s population lives on over eighty percent of the land (Etuk, 2012). Since most of the natural resources and physical space of Oregon is in rural areas, it’s important not to equate the percentage of the state’s population with its importance and potential contribution.

Examining many of the trends with rural communities, it’s not difficult to see how perceptions of these areas are dismal at best. People unfamiliar with rural areas typically see rural communities as eventual ghost towns featuring empty storefronts, impoverished families, and lacking resources. These are quantifiable standards of vacancy, tax, and poverty rates. What people miss when they drive through a two stop-light town is the unquantifiable: the heart of the community that has been challenged by such adversity. It’s the droves of people that come out to support a local fundraiser for an elementary school program, the letters of support written in the paper for a new idea or for encouraging a local business that is struggling, and the tight-knit friendly community that keeps entangling tourists to call their community home.

Rural communities are not only the backbone of our state, but also centers of underfunded potential that lack the resources provided in larger communities. The lack of unification further decreases productivity for enacting positive change toward being a healthier, sustainable community. Stalled by the current economic state of the country, there is an untapped level of community capacity, a
combination of dimensions classified by the Center for Disease Control to include skills, resources, established social capital, networks, sense of community, values, history and leadership (Goodman, 1998). Although some skills and abilities are missing from an area, there are more assets and potential in these areas than realized.

**Rural Economics**

The “Great Recession” has hit rural communities with devastating results. Currently, rural unemployment rates run 25 percent higher than urban areas, and poverty rates are 18 percent higher (Etuk 2012). Around 25,000 Oregonians have exhausted their unemployment benefits since the beginning of this year. Over 800,000 Oregonians will be receiving food stamps this year alone. Initially, when Social Security began in 1957, the program was designed to help individuals who were too sick or old to work. A surge of applicants over the decades has brought the number of applicants up to 9.6 million people (Bishop & Gallardo, 2011). Around 8% of adults in rural areas receive disability benefits while around 27.7% of the total population receives Social Security. Southwestern Oregon especially has an above average rate of residents receiving disability payments as a proportion of their income. According to the OSU Rural Studies Program, rural America has an 80% higher rate of disability compared to cities (Etuk 2012).

Rural areas are seeking to combat many of the existing challenges, including changing demographics, rural food system issues, lack of employment and investment, food security and poverty rates. With so many different issues there,
often local residents become overwhelmed without knowing where or how to start. For example, looking specifically at the shifting age demographics, there are necessary measures that communities need to identify and adapt to if they hope to survive. According to Hough (2005), the number of people living in rural areas has, “declined from about 70% to 20% between 1900 and 2000, but the total number of people living in rural areas has grown slightly since 1900.” On one end, youth are moving to cities in hopes of better employment and economic conditions, while elderly are moving and retiring in rural areas that may not have the infrastructure to support their needs.

One example of a discrepancy between urban and rural opportunities is exhibited in the difference income opportunities. Youth that form the backbone of the job market seek to make their lives and careers in more promising urban locations. A significant number of recent college graduates are searching for a brighter future with additional educational opportunities and higher income potential will look for resources located in more urban areas. This “brain drain” of skills and manpower is thus further perpetuated because recent college graduates are hesitant to move back to smaller areas which cannot compete with urban pay rates. To get an idea of how significant of a difference this is, the average wage for workers in rural areas was 23% less than urban workers, who earn roughly $783 compared to $602 per week. While more low-skill jobs exist in rural areas, it’s actually the college graduates who have a wider gap compared to those who just graduated from high school and did not pursue further education (Stauber, 2011). As a result, the education gap continues to increase. Two years ago, 30% of people
living in urban counties had college degrees whereas only around 15% of people in rural counties have degrees (Etuk, 2012). People who have newly gained knowledge, entrepreneurial and leadership training do not bring those skills back to the area and instead further existing urban areas.

Unfortunately, communities haven’t adapted to their changing demographics; the shape of the age ranges have now become an inverse pyramid with youth and high school to college age individuals becoming scarcer. Additional amenities designed for older residents become more essential. Housing, health care, and transportation market needs are all expanding as the percentage of older rural inhabitants grows. If these amenities are not available, in some cases, the older citizens must move to a more urban area where those necessities are available. Rural counties have a higher median age than other urban or small cities according to the Census Bureau (2012). Thirteen of the twenty-seven rural counties in Oregon saw a change in median age from between 4.3 to 13.5 years according to the Census. Of those top 25 oldest counties in the entire nation, both Curry (ranked 14th) and Wheeler (20th) counties of Oregon saw around a 4.8 year increase (Census, 2012). The dramatic shift in demographics serves as an important example of how important it is for communities to adapt to their changing environment. These communities need to seek a way of developing that is as flexible as communities are changing.
Even though one out every six people in rural areas lives below the poverty line as of 2009, rural areas haven’t always been blighted (Stauber, 2011). Many of these communities were thriving with their respective industries like timber mills, farming, fishing, and small businesses. Over time, many of those industries have decreased as the culture, technology, and incomes changed. Rural areas have often resorted to tourism as the primary industry with some small businesses capable of surviving although many local residents are heading out of town to shop at larger box stores with greater buying power.

Living and working in a rural community is becoming part of a living, breathing entity that is ever changing and evolving. Capitalizing on whichever industry seems to be most thriving at the time has been the strategy of many rural businesses.

Communities as a whole have taken a significant hit and declined with time. The deterioration of downtown is common in areas when big box stores move into the community. According to Goetz and Fleming (2011), Wal-Mart and other “larger retailers tended to depress income growth generally in the communities where they operate.” In rural areas, residents are more price-driven because often costs of living in relation to income are a lot higher. The types of occupations that are most prevalent in rural areas include hands-on jobs like machinists, basic laborers and construction trades. The areas of Oregon that saw strong job growth were areas along the Gorge who had wind power investments.
There has been a restructuring of rural society in the past century. Rural areas have been less proactive in dealing with these changes. Only four states, which did not include Oregon, have a majority of the population living outside of metropolitan areas compared to fifty years ago where around 19 states were considered a majority rural (Stauber, 2011). Many of the states with large percentages of urban areas have also invested in economic development of their communities. Successes in urban renewal are traced to a combination of factors though larger areas have significantly larger capital funds to leverage as well as a wider tax base. Renewed prosperity in urban areas that had seen disrepair like New Orleans, New York and Spokane, were the result of a combination of vital investments by government and private sector dedication and innovation.

If rural areas can find a balance of motivated, dedicated leaders and important government partnerships and investments, rural areas might flourish again. Some rural areas are starting to bloom again in a growth stage. According to Daily Yonder, Bend is one of the most successful examples of that economic and social transition. Of the three highlighted examples in the article, Bend was an area dominated by saw mills and timber logging that adapted to shifting demands and revitalized itself into a thriving community based on tourism and retirement facilities as a result of public investment and private sector commitment (Stauber, 2011). It’s essential to understand leadership and how it has developed as a concept and impacted the development of individuals.
LEADERSHIP

While some research topics have a limited audience, leadership and interpersonal communication principles are both subjects that everyone encounters on a day to day basis. The study of leadership has been widely discussed since before Aristotle’s writings in 350 BC. As a subject, leadership has very important implications for society. Poor leadership has led many people, businesses, communities, and even countries to their demise. Everyone encounters some form of leadership on a daily basis through interacting with others. Though the exact definition of leadership is often disputed, it intermixes as a person, as a process and as a position. Though there are commonalities throughout time, leadership theories as a whole have evolved. Individuals who have become leaders started as religious heads of the Church, the most victorious in battle, the first born son, political figures, business creators, and more. Those demographics of who is a leader and who has the potential to lead have grown to encompass a more diversified segment of the population.

Theory Development

The theories of leadership have evolved significantly within the past half century. Initially researchers in the field of leadership believed that specific innate traits like charisma, sociability and confidence were the key to being a successful leader (Zaccaro, 2007). This evolved into the belief that leaders would exhibit certain behaviors that would allow them to easily usurp the role. This more
behavioral approach looked at how a leader’s specific actions would make them more likely to take on the role.

There was a slow mindset change that perhaps there was more to leadership than just traits and behaviors that also included situations and relationships. The interesting point about this situational approach is that a leader doesn’t have a fixed position of being the “assumed leader,” instead the position depends on the environment and circumstances. For a leader to be the go-to-person every time meant that he or she would need to be exceptionally adaptable with a wide breadth of knowledge and confidence in taking on any task. It is difficult to be the leader in every situation, all of the time.

This theory then developed into a focus on the interpersonal relationships between a leader and a follower. Because a leader interacts with a diversity of people, that leader has a variety of different level relationships. This leader may not pay equal attention to each follower and may distribute tasks unevenly by giving more responsibility to someone they are more familiar with. Leader-member exchange theory incorporated in this concept illustrates that each individual relationship between leader and follower is different, based on the exchange and the type of contribution given by the follower. Both individuals in the dyadic relationship are evaluating the other for skills, expectations, and level of trust (Brower, Schoorman & Tan, 2000).
Transformational Leadership

The applicable theory to this research however focuses on how a leader both motivates and inspires their followers toward completing a common goal. This is called Transformational leadership. According to Riggio (2009), transformational leadership is the most popular leadership theory today. While this form of leadership is far different than past theories, this leadership concept can trace its roots to these historical theories. For instance, the way that a leader is capable of motivating a follower involves utilizing their personal traits, behaviors, reactions, and relationship management. There is a heartfelt belief in a single, positive vision that everyone is striving toward. Transformational leaders are not focused solely on profits, transactions, and status but instead on empowering, building and caring for those who work with them.

The Four I’s

Transformational leadership is made up of several different perspectives. Commonly called the four I’s, these pillars according to Riggio (2009) that make up transformational leadership include:

1. **Intellectual stimulation**

A leader is capable creating opportunities for growth through creative stimulation. By fostering opportunities to challenge their followers, they can increase the level of performance and build stronger goal results. There is a prioritized focus on innovative critical thinking and creative problem solving to brainstorm new ideas. In a study by Vandenberghe, Stordeur and D’hoore
(2002), an application of intellectual stimulation ensured that “followers putting in extra effort, showing satisfaction with their leader and overall job satisfaction, emphasizing goal attainment and supporting positive staff retention.”

2. **Individualized consideration**

Leaders must have a high level of emotional intelligence, compassion, and reliability. In order to help their followers meet their true potential, an environment of individual support and self-efficacy must be created. The leaders focus on the needs of the individual and work as both a mentor and teacher that encourage communication, understanding, and acknowledgement. According to Ohman (2000), there is a positive correlation between “the application of individualized consideration, which was defined as having a leader who mentors, coaches and teaches staff while working toward the organizational vision.”

3. **Inspirational motivation**

This is the ability for a leader to really motivate and encourage their followers to achieve. The leader must work to create a meaningful environment where followers feel like they are making a difference and building a collective, encouraging community. One study by Hartog (1997) found that there is a “a positive correlation between transformational,
especially inspirational motivational, leadership and the success of all
[studied] organizations.”

4. Idealized Influence

This influence comes from the leader leading by example as an ‘ideal’ role model. Leaders earn rapport with their followers through building mutual trust and respect. Followers are interested in emulating the role model because of the traits he or she holds. Chen and Baron (2006) found that both leaders and followers that “attributed the practice of idealized influence as having a positive effect on organizational leadership style.” By having strong role models in an organization, the likelihood improves that the quality of results also improves.

The latter two I’s (inspirational motivation and idealized influence) combined represent the concept or trait called charisma. Charisma is seen as that innate, positive personal magnetism that compels people to have a connection. In the following model, there are three primary traits roughly correlated to the 4 I’s that serve as important elements of Transformational leadership. The 4 I’s can also be roughly paralleled to the CIP model that has three distinct types of behavior based on outlook and temporal orientation. A transformational leader often has all three of the following styles in their toolbox of leadership skills but often identifies with one style more so than the other two.
C.I.P. Model

The C.I.P model (Charismatic, Ideological and Pragmatic) fixes three different types of outlooks of transformational leadership along a spectrum based on the leaders’ perceptions of the world. The way leaders have come to their positions, the way they developed through past experiences, the way they perceive their environment, and the way they act to complete goals are keys to determine which style a leader most closely follows (Mumford, Antes, Caughron & Friedrich, 2008). These styles are best illustrated when a leader is forced to interpret and react to a crisis as well as frame the situation in their minds based on the demands and complexity.

Charismatic leaders, the first style, are “vision orientated toward an idealized future.” Charismatic leaders have an innate charm and self-confidence that naturally improves motivation, productivity and morale in followers (Mumford 2009). These types of leaders have an ideal of what the future holds and create actions designed to reach that better future. Determinants of this method include the content, style and delivery of interactions and presentations. Charismatic leaders are very focused on the future goals and positive possibilities. While there are many potential benefits of being a leader who enacts this style, there are several disadvantages especially when there is a grand vision without the sight to identify smaller necessary tasks to complete a goal. According one Harvard Business Review writer, in unstable economic times like now, there is a “tendency to place all hope for the future on one golden-throated [leader] which threatens to undo many a company”
(Gary, 2002). Examples of charismatic leaders through history could include Bill Clinton and Steve Jobs in public presentation settings.

The second style, ideological leaders, are also considered “vision oriented [but to an] idealized past” (Mumford, 2009). Ideological leaders will constantly be assessing past events and behaviors and acting with that history in mind to evaluate their headings. There is a set of principles these leaders follow, established and built upon through their development, which they use to handle current issues. Ideological leaders are rooted in the past and allude to negative historical events that should not be repeated. This type ties in with individual consideration because this type style includes a focus on relatability and mentorship. There is a constant common vision but also a consideration for set principles that tie everyone together. Both ideological and charismatic leaders focus more on the big ideas and end goal; they more often see the forest instead of just the individual trees. Examples of individuals of ideological leadership style might include Jane Addams and the Dalai Lama.

The last type of transformational leadership is pragmatic. Often a strong balance between efficiency and context, these leaders are less focused on inspiring people and more focused on handling current tasks and evaluating the present (Mumford 2009). These leaders are considered the most practical and linear. They take their experience and knowledge and apply it in a very rational way to daily issues. Pragmatic leaders are often seen as the other side of the spectrum to Charismatic Leaders. This type typically includes a lot of intellectual stimulation that
combines facts and creativity by coming up with successful innovative ideas that create measurable positive change. Pragmatic leaders are situated in and mindful of the present, utilizing a combination of negative historical events to motivate in combination with positive possibilities. Pragmatic leaders may include Sam Walton and Bill Gates.

**Evolving Leadership and Training**

Transformational leadership is becoming increasingly popular area of instruction and leadership research. Most people learn about leadership through higher education and workforce training. In 2009, American companies spent around $12 billion on leadership development for executives and nearly $60 billion on learning and development in general (Zenger 2012). It’s clear that leadership training is essential, because nearly 6 out of every 10 companies report a shortage in leadership talent which inhibits growth in the company (Ashford, 2010). Leadership as a field dates back to Sun Tzu and Plato though thorough research into the topic has only been a little longer than a half a century, starting in the 1940s. Leadership training on the other hand started in higher education around the late 1970s (graduate level) and 1990s (undergraduate).

After reviewing many research papers, it seems that much of the leadership research involves three contexts: competitive sports, business groups, and national politics. The leadership theories mentioned earlier have all been analyzed within those three contexts with relatively positive results. However, leadership has been a developing concept that evolves with the people. The fact that many companies
have to train all their employees in interpersonal leadership techniques illustrates the lack of existing leadership skills in the general population.

Strong leadership is essential to create positive change. When leadership skills are lacking, there can be a struggle to create positive change, especially outside of those three contexts. The same strategies that apply to individual leadership through business, athletic or political settings may apply to every circumstance. This whole foundation of leadership focuses on recognizing a single individual and how their tactics of communication and handling people are superior which allows that person to have a higher status and power over their followers. In time, followers can become dependent on that single individual for answers.

It's not that this system is wrong, but it is perpetuated as the ‘correct’ established system--backed by theories of research. Drawing the parallel between current leadership strategies and the current government market structure of capitalism, the system itself may not be perfect, but it is the best working system we have until some other system evolves.

Most leadership trainings take place in urban or academic settings. A lack of leadership training in more rural settings puts these areas at a disadvantage comparatively because of the disparity of amount of guidance and knowledge. In fact, leadership training strategies are significantly behind in rural areas because a lack of access to trainings, information, and resources. Rural areas are more remote and lack both the population and the capital to draw information to them beyond
specific rural development grants. As a result, many community leaders struggle with how to motivate their residents.

With this rural restructuring occurring, two leadership training options have become prevalent in rural Oregon communities include the Main Street program and Ford Institute Leadership Program. Both have a different take on leadership instruction and how to develop effective leadership to incite economic revitalization. There are benefits and drawbacks to both programs which will be addressed below. As the two leaders in rural development training for communities, the question posed must be whether this training is the most effective at revitalizing areas into healthy, sustainable communities.
MAIN STREET

Main Street is a program created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation with the intent of encouraging preservation and revitalization of historic downtown areas. With an innovative take on how to spur economic development, this program emphasizes the mobilization of a combination of public and private group involvement. By creating a strong network of main street communities, there was a base of likeminded organizations focused on building up business districts to keep the historic buildings intact and thriving. This approach was initially rooted in rural communities but could be applied to larger communities. Urban areas alike could implement this program because both the flexibility of the curriculum and the intentional design for standardization for replication.

Communities with a significant attachment, sense of dedication and strong commitment to their “main street” areas have proven to be the most successful with the Main Street program. This approach is a “historic preservation-based economic development tool that volunteer-driven organizations –often in stand-alone private nonprofit structures—can use to revitalize their commercial districts.”

The Main Street program focuses on eight key principles to create successful revitalization effort in a town (National Trust Main Street Center, 2009). The program is designed foremost to be comprehensive by creating a program that has multiple focuses rather emphasis on a single project. Partnerships with both public and private entities are vital to creating a thriving downtown because of the joint
responsibility and ownership that drives projects. Recognizing and focusing on existing assets is also necessary because of capital restraints and the unique qualities of those assets that act as a foundation for preservation. These programs are incremental because they take small steps forward toward success rather than getting caught up in intricate complex projects. It is necessary that communities seek a hand up rather than a hand out by helping themselves instead of expecting outside stakeholders to lead them out to prosperity. Also, all projects in Main Street are designed to be of quality because high caliber programs place an increased value on the community. The principle of accepting and valuing change is important because those evolving attitudes can mean the success of the projects. Lastly, the focus on implementation helps community members see that these revitalization efforts are taking place.

Main Street has a curriculum given to all application-approved communities to implement which focuses on four key areas: organization, economic development, design and promotion. These four areas have their own respective committees run by volunteers. While some of these goals intersect, each has their own objective aimed at building the community by focusing on the previously listed four facets.

Main Street programs go through three main organizational phases. The first initial phase is called the Catalyst phase where all the interpersonal partnerships begin. The primary focus of this phase is development of the people and the growing of the foundation necessary to create lasting positive change. The second Growth phase focuses on increasing the number of façade improvements, rehabilitation of
property, teaching of leadership qualities, and development of community goals and strategies. The main focus of this phase is on mobilizing those assets into a cohesive web of networks, financing, marketing, and political involvement. Lastly, the Management phase begins. In this phase, the main street program involvement shifts toward being a more hands-off management entity. At this point, many of the programs have been grown and are well established. The commercial business district is no longer viewed by the public as a blighted area. This last phase is an ongoing maintenance process without an end date. If a community backpedals, the previous two stages on program growth and maintenance may repeat if the economic blight reoccur in the community.

**MAIN STREET CURRICULUM**

*Organization*

The organization component focuses on gaining a network of partnerships who are involved in the downtown area. The ‘organization’ committee builds a significant volunteer base and network of local assets, skills, and collaborative opportunities. The organization committee creates the initial volunteer base that will be recruited to participate in projects. It’s important to have metrics evaluated by each committee. For the organization committee, they evaluate the progress they have made by analyzing the increase in their volunteer base, quantifying the volunteer hours, documenting all received grants, contributions and media exposure.
Promotion

The promotion component is the downtown marketing focused committee that builds an established brand, facilitates local events, and promotes business and community activities. The promotion committee will set certain metrics such as event attendance, impact on business sales, and percent change of vendors as well as retail involvement. Promotion focuses not only on events and businesses but also on the program itself. The promotion committee also promotes the Main Street program as well as strategies and goals for the community. Their focus is on communicating and marketing to all stakeholders and involved parties. They are in charge of all the communication: newsletters, annual reports, web presence, branding guidelines, and public relations for the entire town.

Design

The design component crafts a better image of the area by improving the visual appearance through improving signage, public areas, displays, public and private buildings. This committee focuses on creating comprehensive image guidelines that give the main street area a cohesive, united look. Part of the design focus includes having a common look to wayfinding signage that directs new tourists and unfamiliar locals to attractions, new facades that make a positive impression, and improving all visual components of the downtown area. It includes more than just approving designs for new areas but collaborating on a commercial district master plan, facilitating historic preservation, and creating design guidelines. The design committee quantifies their impact on the community through
calculating assessed property value increases, quantity of community improvement projects, and costs of new property rents.

*Economic Development*

The economic development committee focuses on building the business district through fostering a stronger economic base. By working on building clusters of businesses, the skills of local businesses, and attractiveness of underutilized property, this committee can better retain and expand the diversity and strength of the business mix. The stability of a downtown is defined by the mix of private enterprises surviving in the area. The goal of the committee is to create an environment that takes businesses in that area from surviving to thriving. Although the promotion committee focuses on bringing in additional people through attractions to the downtown area to visit businesses, the economic development committee also does so but through other means such as finding additional cluster businesses and complementary services or products to the area that weave together a unified, diverse attractive mix of retail offerings. The economic development committee derives its success through metrics on the increased number of businesses that have moved into downtown locations, the number of jobs that have been available with those new or growing businesses and also the change in percentage of vacancy.
BENEFITS OF THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

Unified network

As a whole, Main Street is a very strong program. The Main Street program encourages a collaboration of organizations by creating a unified network of likeminded individuals. According to the Historic Trust, this Main Street movement has “spanned three decades, taken root in over 2,000 communities and spurred $49 billion in reinvestment.” In many community projects, it’s often the same group of individuals that step forward to work. The Main Street program encourages many people to get involved. While there will always be some people that are more involved than others, this program really seeks to diversify the group of people that become leaders.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, an effective committee size tends to range from 5 to 9 people. The base network needed for the Main Street program with the four committees would then from around 20 to 36 people. Even with small communities like Port Orford (pop. 1,135) or Gold Beach (pop. 2,260) that only represents 2-4% of the community members involved with the committees. While a larger group of volunteers will need to be recruited for implementing projects like event coordinating or building a community garden, it is still a feasible number to obtain. By building everyone up into a unified network in the ways described by the Main Street program, a cohesive group of active volunteers can successfully start on the road to positive implementation of their work plan.
Comprehensive Curriculum

Main Street provides a curriculum and resources which, assuming you have the volunteer base to carry out the projects, can take you step by step toward achieving a successful downtown renovation. The program illustrates how to take ideas from a napkin down to a completed task with metrics to show for it. The curriculum itself is a comprehensive guide to business district revitalization. All that is required on the part of the community to be apply into the Main Street program is a completed submitted application. The four point approach is designed as a flexible tool to encourage the utilization of existing assets for historic preservation. The curriculum itself thoroughly addresses many of the common obstacles communities could face.

WEAKNESSES OF THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

Apathy

Overcoming apathy in a community is truly the largest hurdle that must be overcome when seeking to improve a community. To be clear, this is not just a problem with the Main Street program, this is a problem that all communities face regardless of whether they are in Main Street or not. One quality of all successful downtowns according to the Downtown Idea Exchange is that the local residents must be involved and concerned about the vitality of their downtown area. Apathy can be caused by a lack of leadership and accountability but also be a result of the general norm. In communities like Coos Bay, active community members have stepped forward with the intent of revitalizing the downtown area. Unable to get a
foothold in community buy-in and establish a wide volunteer base, the leaders burned out with their enthusiasm and the downtown Coos Bay area remained in disrepair. Multiple groups have since sprung up and unfortunately, met the same fate. Coos Bay was recently accepted into the Main Street program this year. With the help of a paid AmeriCorps volunteer, Coos Bay hopes to regain that momentum and credibility by overcoming apathy, showing progress and establishing a volunteer base.

Reducing apathy in itself could be an entire thesis. It’s also likely that the road to success would be different for any community. One of the primary causes of apathy is a lacking sense of self-efficacy that an individual could create a positive change in their area. In some cases, understanding a community can lead to further apathy and an increasing feeling of hopelessness that the state of their downtown hasn’t changed in a set number of years or it’s only been a downhill slope since one community economic crisis like an industrial mill closing.

One example of this comes from a professor at Youngstown State University who taught an Urban Studies course. In her attempt to reduce apathy, she gave students an assignment intended to improve their knowledge and appreciation of their home town. Instead of students gaining such an appreciation and respect for the community however, they increased their sense of negativity and apathy compared to the start of the semester. Students who planned to leave the community increased 12%. Views of the area became more negative as they examined statistics of crime and job rates. Comments including “I don’t want to live
in a place that has so many problems that they can’t solve,” and, “this [economic situation] has been going on now for 25 years and nothing has changed. People in this community don’t seem to care about it.” It is civil engagement and participation though that is the antidote to apathy. In an article by Wandersman and Florin (2000:265), locals who participated in community organizations had a “strong association between participation and feelings about the self.” An increase in participation likely results in a stronger sense of efficacy and the ability to create positive change. By emphasizing the possibilities for positive change and illustrating existing strides forward, everyone can identify that reversing the negative slope of community desolation.

For Gold Beach, the lumber mills closing during the 1980's sent the area into a micro-depression. Many families were no longer able to support themselves in the area and moved to places where jobs were more prevalent. Businesses that thrived with many customers quickly shut down in what seemed overnight. Many in the area even now still recall the booming economic state of the community before the mills closed and feel the frustration of outside influences impacting the area.

**Volunteer Management**

The program is only as strong as their volunteers. Main Street committees are all run and organized by volunteers. While this is a partnership between both sectors and in some cases, some people are paid to be managers of the Main Street program in addition to having other duties. For example, the Main Street program is run by the Executive Director of the Albany Downtown Association. While this
director also handles a myriad of other tasks like downtown development, parking programs, and other volunteer involvements, he is also the primary point of contact for Main Street in Albany. In Coos Bay and Milton-Freewater, both communities have a hired Main Street Manager through the Resource Assistance in Rural Environments (RARE) program, an alliance between the Community Services Consortium at University of Oregon and AmeriCorps.

Having a dedicated, consistent volunteer base is one of the biggest struggles in the Main Street program. Like any other volunteer organization, it is essential to have volunteers that meet certain standards. Volunteers have to be community minded, knowledgeable, dedicated, team orientated, and open to new ideas. This can be a struggle because many community members struggle to be open to new ideas and meet those criteria. Since these programs are volunteer driven rather than staff driven, the amount of progress on any committee is determined by the strength, communication and compatibility of its members. If one volunteer involved is consistently flakey, uncommitted, or incompatible with one or many of the other volunteers, this can drive down progress and morale. What makes this more difficult is that volunteer turnover, which is either ‘firing’ a volunteer or having people intentionally quit, in a small community can cause a large uproar or the impression that the committee is dysfunctional.

*Proper Volunteer Management Strategies*

Organizations often struggle to maintain a consistent strong volunteer base. There must be a deliberate design to the recruitment, placing, training and
implementation. The Main Street program gives a framework for how to do this. First, the committee chair must figure out the needs of the volunteers. Second, the roles need to be designed so that specific skills, time commitment, activities and benefits of working with the organization are clearly stated. Much like an informal contract, this sets the expectations for the volunteer of what they are expected to contribute and what the organization was responsible for. This recruitment process has to be a proactive effort to involve all stakeholders from business owners, government employees, youth, civic group leaders to local residents. These people are volunteering their time and energy to a common cause, so making sure that their contribution is valued, acknowledged and positive is essential to continuing recruitment and consistent involvement. Part of maintaining that base involves training the volunteers to know what to expect with their assignment. Not only does this increase productivity later on but it improves the prepared volunteer’s confidence and sense of self-efficacy from knowing what to do in the situation. The area that always seems to be missed in communities is the celebration of the volunteer efforts. Now, especially if public funding is part of the organization, it is important to be frugal with volunteer appreciation events while still acknowledging common efforts and successes.

**Funding**

Money in general is a sensitive issue in communities. Although an improving business district in the heart of a community does benefit all stakeholders, funding will almost always be one of the most avidly avoided aspects of the program. As a
shared responsibility from both the government and private sectors, financing improvements is a daunting task especially for areas that have a limited population, restricted government assistance or minimal experience seeking outside monetary resources. Especially with the current state of the American economy, it’s difficult to move past the cognitive dissonance around having money available for improvement projects in the community. Even when funding is available and used, opposing community members still may react poorly to investing in one area (e.g. public benches or wayfinding signage) instead of another area (e.g. water treatment plant improvements or fire hall updates). While all projects could use money, sometime funding is available only in certain areas or it’s necessary to focus on one area at a time or one project must be completed before another type of project can begin. With increasing resources and technology being expanded even out to rural areas, programs are being funded in a number of ways. With a combination of metrics and a strong volunteer base to implement projects, grant funding can become available.

Money can indeed be raised from within the community but it’s crucial to demonstrate the value those developments will have on the area. With the project plan in place, the organization can minimize the amount of fund chasing that may happen. With fund chasing, it’s possible that committees may adapt their goals based on the type of funding and project that fits that grant. It’s important that the established long-term goals be the priority, rather than potential new projects that could be funded through an available grant source.
Capital Raising Strategies

Main Street program leaders need to seek funding from a variety of sources and stakeholders rather than just focus on a single source. Even the recruited volunteers may have contributed in some financial way, if possible, in addition to in-kind time. Government officials involved in the program also need to be proactive in pursuing public funding options for the area including forming business improvement districts, line-item appropriations, enterprise zones, tax increment financing, tax benefits and more. On the private side, memberships, sponsorships, and federal programs like community development block grants.

In Albany, Oregon there has been controversy relating to funding through a City Council created urban renewal district (URD) and agency. The money that finances these public improvement projects and local improvements comes from tax increment financing. This is one financing tool for economic development but there are several others. Government plays a role in the types of projects that move forward. Often public improvement projects are a collaborative effort between property owners, government representatives and businesses. It’s important to have strong buy-in from all parts of the community when moving forward with funding a project. If that support deteriorates, issues can arise with concerned citizens believing that funding should be placed elsewhere or not invested or morale surrounding renovation projects can debilitate positive momentum.
**FORD INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

The Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP) is a series of courses sponsored through the Ford Family Foundation (FFF). The Ford Family Foundation is a private foundation created by Ken and Hallie Ford who owned a family-run logging company that later became one of the “largest family-owned wood products manufacturers” in the U.S. The mission of the Foundation is to help foster “successful citizens and vital rural communities.” Through a three-prong approach, the Foundation helps communities through encouraging higher education for rural and urban Oregon and Siskiyou County California residents, offering grants to communities that serve as public charities to rural areas and advancing rural areas by providing resources and local trainings. It is the rural trainings and associated curriculum though that is most integral to motivating new leaders and cultivating change. Instead of giving communities a guiding curriculum, the Institute collaborates with Rural Development Initiatives (RDI), an Oregon non-profit focused on supporting rural communities making a difference in Oregon.

*Curriculum Stages (Year 1 – Year 5)*

The FILP courses are designed in several stages. This first cohort class officially starts Year One of the 5 year program. Once a community is accepted into the program, they begin recruiting for the first cohort class. This cohort is made up of around 30 to 35 individuals from a similar geographic area. This cohort includes business proprietors, property owners, community members, service organization participants and more. Participants that sign up are required to attend 12 hour
sessions split across a Friday and Saturday held once a month for four months, a social capital luncheon, and spend 20-40 hours of volunteer work across the following year. Their curriculum is taught by a FILP/RDI certified trainer who instructs all of the cohort classes for the area which builds rapport, credibility, and confidence in all related parties.

The second year includes training on effective organizations. This organizational development training teaches “staff and boards of community organizations, nonprofits, institutions, membership groups, and local government” how to be more effective in leadership, fundraising, resource management, strategic planning and more. The curriculum has a variety of tactics to improve all facets of an organization in the hopes that as productivity and efficiency improves, the breadth of service and offerings widen as the entity becomes more sustainable and capable. Participants then take their training back to the organization and start implementing what they learn.

The third year is the second cohort of community leaders. Three members of the first cohort come back as Community Trainers (CAT) to co-lead the curriculum with the help of the same FILP/RDI curriculum certified trainer from year 1. The same curriculum is taught to the first, third and fifth year students. Their intent is to increase the network of leaders in an area that have experience completing community projects and will know how to take future projects from idea to fruition. The three different cohort classes are woven together by the CATs who have been through the process and mentor those going through the current class.
The fourth year includes training on community collaboration focusing on building a more cohesive group of leaders that “leverage the power of working together.” By the fourth year, there will be around 70 leaders trained by the foundation as well as an additional group trained in improving organizations. This forms the foundation of the collaboration training where the focus is on partnership and network building to accomplish goals. This is an 18-24 hour training that discusses topics like power distribution, roles and duties of participants as well as the strengths and weaknesses of jointed efforts.

The fifth and final official year of training is much like the first and third. Communities seeking further training can request additional support from the FILP and RDI. Communities can take advantage of a number of opportunities these two organizations offer. Their Camp Ford leadership development camp for youth is a popular choice for students entering high school. They offer a Regards to Rural conference aimed at improving rural networks and offering informative workshops and seminars.

There are four sessions that each new cohort (years 1, 3 and 5) attend, each with a specific curriculum that builds upon the last. The first session covers four main topics: catalytic leadership, Myers-Briggs type indicators, community vitality and development of social capital. In this session, important concepts are addressed including appreciative inquiry, evolving practices in leadership, the Tupelo Model, and sustainable community development models.
The second session focuses on interpersonal development including communication, team building, conflict management and effective meeting processes. Several of the important concepts addressed here include group development, helpful communication strategies and handling conflict regarding multiple perspectives.

The next session focuses on finalizing the class project which must be approved by all group members. There is a recommended budget, time frame, volunteer hour approximation, and qualifications that the project selected by the cohort must meet. The Ford Foundation will contribute roughly half of the budget but the other half of the funding must be brought in from outside sources. This includes crafting the project description, analyzing the impact on stakeholders, and developing the necessary resources and manpower to complete the task. Participants are taught how to handle Basecamp, a project management tool that will be used throughout the year to keep tasks moving forward.

During the final fourth session, the instructor covers project management, project action planning and the final step necessary to complete the project. The final steps include setting follow-up session dates, group meetings, committee assignments and planning of the social capital event. By this session, members should ideally be very comfortable with their project selection, identify as a network with likeminded leaders, and have a set structure of leadership for project management. (Ford Institute, 2012)
BENEFITS OF THE FILP PROGRAM

*Experiential Learning*

The Ford Program creates an opportunity for experiential learning that moves the curriculum beyond just theory to practical application. While the curriculum does teach a variety of models and theories, it also has a project component that takes community members through the process of coming up with an idea, going through the motions to secure all the necessary permitting to the actual implementation. The program seeks to show community members that it takes a group to build a better community because the collective group is stronger than the individual. No longer is there a set mentality that one individual will step forward and lead a community to success but every individual has a part to play in a collaborative process to improve an area. The experiential learning aspect as a class project is a safe zone for individuals to grow and develop as leaders where they can make mistakes and grow from it.

*Opt-in Volunteer Program*

There are a limited number of spots available for the FILP program. Volunteers that get involved understand what they are committing to and are willing to dedicate that time to the project. Because everything in this curriculum is straightforward from the start, there is a smaller rate of attrition from people stating that they were not aware of the time commitment or did not understand what they would be required to do in exchange for the training.
Personal Development

The curriculum in session one and two focuses on having each individual understand the strengths and weaknesses of their style of leadership. It addresses that no style is bad however there are different ways to cope between styles. For example, introverts and extroverts as defined by the Myers-Briggs type indicator often struggle to work together productively because of the fundamental differences in the way they work. The FILP curriculum looks at these differences and teaches how to understand the dichotomy between how people process the social world as an introvert or extrovert. The curriculum goes further by teaching people basic communication skills like active listening and conflict management. This may seem rather basic but these are necessary tools all members must develop in order to be effective team players.

Curriculum Design

This curriculum is deliberately set up with a sequential design so that each topic builds upon the last to create a very solid foundation of knowledge. Every participant comes into the program with a different level of knowledge in each area. It is the variety of opinions and knowledge that makes this cohort of community so strong. The diversity of information and skill sets creates a well rounded group that comes together as a result of the design. One part of that design is that group norms are established from the beginning that create a common culture threaded throughout the rest of the experience. Those norms include being open, prepared, timely, respectful and more that are set by the group. The curriculum as a whole is a
mix of getting people out of their comfort zones but at the same time bringing each person out to explore who they are as a person and what they could become as a community.

WEAKNESSES OF FILP

Recruitment and Natural Attrition

The demand of this program can be substantial especially for those who are youth, college students and business owners. Although Ford makes it clear that once their program invests its resources into a participant, participants may still drop that obligation to continue through by matching that investment with their time. Even though the requirements of the program are laid out at the beginning, there is a natural attrition that happens at the start. Some of the target market of individuals to recruit for the program like those who have 9-5 jobs or own businesses (sometimes the sole proprietor) struggle to adapt their schedules to fit the demands of the sessions. Some people drop because of legitimate issues like family illness or job issues, but others detach mentally then physically from the program. Sometimes this is a morale issue spurred by struggles between participants or project selection.

Project Selection Issues

It's difficult for some people to commit to a class project that they are not fully vested in. When there is a more prevalent category of people in the cohort (more people from a certain community or more people that prioritize business or environmental issues), it makes selection of projects more tense. It's
understandable that everyone wants their project to be selected and that majority will rule however this becomes an issue when people take the selection personally and become detached from the program instead of just understanding that it is a ‘class project.’

Class Demographics

As mentioned before, the demographics represent a different percentage than the population make-up. The style of recruitment is primarily word of mouth so while the class cohort is designed to have voices from every facet of the community, often larger numbers of people that represent the same views as members from the first cohort will frequent the following two community cohorts. Regardless of the schedule, it will be difficult for business owners, especially sole-proprietors in rural areas, to invest the time into the cohort because it would require them to shut down their store or bring on an employee to cover that day. Many of the meetings for CATs and follow-up events are scheduled for week days which make it difficult for some individuals to travel to the community if they are living in another location during the work week.

COMPARISON BETWEEN MAIN STREET AND FILP

When the concepts in the Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP) are distilled to a focus, the program’s goal is to develop strong leaders that would be effective, capable project managers. The mix of leadership development and experiential learning provides participants with a strong foundation in coordinating volunteers, managing tasks, and how to both lead and follow while knowing their
own strengths and assets. This statewide network of like-minded individuals is a very beneficial tool to foster community development through leadership training. FILP is more of a charismatic leadership development program because it builds the emotional intelligence, passion and social capital of its participants.

The Main Street program, on the other hand, provides a more regimented community organizing strategy that encourages a more pragmatic approach. In the first phase, the Main Street program states that leadership development is necessary in this time period but does not lay out exactly what qualities should be in place before taking the next step. They do provide a concrete plan of action with step-by-step strategies for leaders to follow. Main Street recognizes that a key to the success of the program is the flexibility; it is clear that an identical system will work across all communities but a guiding framework that answers the questions, “Where do we start?” will. The Main Street program provides participants a foundation in historic downtown commercial revitalization through four categories of emphasis in design, promotion, organization and economic development. This national network has decades of experience revitalizing communities by providing direction to foster community development through single-theme, structured committees.

The Ford Institute Leadership Program and Main Street both take their experience in community and economic development to direct towns that apply to their programs on how to fix their area. They encourage participants to become better leaders and to learn ways to design their programs to statistically increase their potential for success. Each program approaches the "fixing rural areas" in
different ways, and there are strengths and weaknesses in both programs. Each provides a different stepping stone to success: a new network of experienced, empowered leaders in one, and a curriculum and program to drive progress forward in the other. However, both of these stones on their own don't create a path to success. Revitalizing a community takes more than just well-meaning people with leadership training and a curriculum of one path to get revitalization efforts stirring in a community.

Having strong leaders is essential to a community. What qualifies as a leader, though, has gone through quite an evolution in history. No longer do people believe that effective leaders are determined only by biological factors or being born with innate traits that are not able to be taught to others. At the core of these programs, they are missing a fundamental key. The weaknesses listed in these programs are tied to their structure but also to the existing systems for community development. For instance, apathy is not an exclusive problem because of the leadership training curriculum but is a fundamental issue for motivating people in general.

Especially out of the context of politics, sports and business, community leadership takes on a new meaning because it is no longer about being the captain of the vessel, but the host. Neither program creates an actual unified community. Many of the people that opt into the FILP program are from consistent target markets: active community members, volunteers, government officials, some business owners and the occasional youth. There is a distinct lack of diversity that would include more youth, recent college graduates/college students, additional business
owners, new members to the area, and individuals from different ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. The FILP program tends to see a repeat of similar demographics from their first cohort because of the recruitment strategy.

BUILDING UPON MAIN STREET AND FILP

Both programs operate within the normal societal structure of leadership training and can be effective in their own right--- but they aren’t completely successful at revitalizing the entire community. As an American society, we have accepted this heroic leadership concept as the norm. It is commonly accepted that some people are better leaders than others and some have a natural tendency toward exhibiting more traits, behaviors and visionary actions that are stereotypically-defined as “leader qualities.”

However, these leaders aren’t showing up to save every community, business, country, sports team, and group. This is a cognitive error to assume that only certain people are leaders. Societal norms dictate that individuals are categorized based on illustrated strengths. One person is an entrepreneur, another an artist, another a writer. This conception dictates that an individual is one of these things: an entrepreneur but not an artist and writer. While it is true that people are born with innate strengths and weaknesses, these qualities are also influenced by an individual’s environment. Women are sometimes pushed away from math and sciences, men are pushed away from occupations in fashion design and elementary school instruction.
There is another form of leadership that isn't considered part of this leadership evolution that started in the 1940’s. Communities outside of the United States are starting to reevaluate the systems that they are working through. Instead of leaders being heroes, they are becoming facilitators. Leaders are no longer the sole source of answers but instead they are the catalyst of questions. Leaders are gathering crowds of community members and recognizing the leadership qualities residing in everyone. With our current existing leadership style, often times there are struggles with power and go. Communities have less need to seek outside perspectives and follow best practices as defined by other organizations. In this way, they seek a hand of assistance from within their own community, rather than a hand out from an expert or government entity.

By including this different approach combined with both MS and FILP, communities empower their own citizens and mobilize actions through motivation and shared responsibility. These communities recognize that the system that they are operating out of is not really helping them move forward but holds them back. Leaders are not only essential in hierarchal societies, politics, etc., but also in communities though that leadership needs to manifest itself in a new structure.

There is a difference with the heroic leadership style in that the culture itself is what must shift, not just the structure. Communities must be willing to self-organize according to their beliefs, reject powers struggles, and instead seek out better systems that really foster development.
In the Main Street and Ford Leadership Program, both provide a structure for communities to follow. They are very important knowledge foundations to have incorporated into the community but there is a next step missing. Communities operating within regular societal standards would seek out and follow such a program, but communities that recognize that it is the system itself that is the problem begin seeking other practices to create more vital, thriving communities.

There is no blueprint to follow, no best practice in a community to idolize. Especially with this lack of formalized system, it is the community itself that is both the leader and follower as one, because it provides its own answers to questions it created. The community members pioneer a new format of structure for rebuilding the area. This is not a suggestion of complete anarchy or rebellion but instead an introspective look at systems that are effective and systems that are not. It is the systems that are working against the community that need intentional focus and introspective consideration.

One of the recent innovations in business has been crowd sourcing and crowd funding. This new form of leadership can be most closely likened to this concept. Instead of a single individual financing a project or generating ideas, the concept is sent out to the masses who banter ideas back and forth until the best rises to the top. This social innovation from business is something that could be applied to communities, but in an innovative, new format.

Initially this document aimed to include a twelve-step to recovery guide that would direct communities how to achieve stronger economic development.
techniques that are distilled from this new form of crowd sourcing leadership, rather than heroic. Those recommendations would, however, imply that one individual is capable of rehabilitating an economy. It takes a whole community to create change, even if that change does originate with just one person.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPPORTUNITY

Instead, the following five points include an offering of ideas that can help facilitate this new system by drawing inspiration from existing non-mainstream programs. This is neither a curriculum nor a guideline but a foundation that allows communities to analyze current systems and evaluate their effectiveness. If a system is deemed ineffective, the community may choose to crowd source ideas using an organic creation of thought facilitated by community members but led by no one. This process is an opportunity for people to rediscover their community, the people, the assets and the ways everyone can cohesively work together.

1. Appreciative inquiry -- An idea drawn from the Ford Institute Leadership program. Appreciative inquiry is a communication style where community members systematically explore the strengths and assets of their community. To understand where the community wants to be in the future, it’s essential that they understand their past and all the positive historical actions that have brought them to where they are now. It is easy for community members to find fault. Appreciative inquiry focuses to build a constructive analysis of an area based on the positive attributes. This creates a dynamic, optimistic communication forum that has charismatic
leadership qualities that people can still relate with while moving out from the established structure.

2. World Café -- An idea drawn from the World Café movement.

The World Café is a communication methodology designed to promote an open, effective dialogue with all community members. The methodology includes creating up a very open, intentional environment that has small group rounds of 20 minutes conversations. There is a table host to act as “leader” but not by the common definition. Instead, he/she actually is just someone who takes the ideas from that table during the discussion and remains at the same table so that many of the ideas organically spread throughout the room. Each round has a purposeful question that people hold with intent because at the end all members are offered the chance to share their insights which will be written by several recorders throughout the room.

3. Emotional Intelligence -- An idea from the Transformational Leadership Model

Emotional Intelligence is the ability for a person to understand their own and others’ emotions. This concept includes knowledge of personality (Big Five, Myers-Briggs type indicator, strengths finder, etc). Daniel Goleman focused on five characteristics of competencies in his HBR “What Makes A Leader” article including:

a. Self-awareness: knowing one’s own personality, strengths and emotions
b. Empathy: ability to consider others feelings
c. Motivation: drive to achieve goals
d. Self-regulation: ability to monitor one’s emotions and adapt to situation

e. Social skill: ability to craft relationships

4. Servant Leadership -- An idea drawn from Transformation Leadership

Having a transitory leadership model in the interim can be helpful for people struggling to move away from traditional systems. Servant leadership is more of a philosophy than a model. This type of leadership revolves around the focus of the leader being a facilitator of their community, group or organization. They have a philanthropic orientation toward focusing outward toward serving people rather than on “selfish” achievement means.

Servant leaders have ten typical characteristics according to the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership which include listening, healing, awareness, empathy, conceptualization, persuasion, stewardship, foresight and community building (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008).

5. Organic Crowd-sourcing of Ideas -- An idea from Walk Out, Walk On

Walk Out, Walk On is a recent book written by Deborah Frieze and Meg Wheatley that take readers on a walking journey of current communities that are “walking out on a world of unsolvable problems, scarce resources, limiting beliefs and destructive individualism [and instead] walk[ing] on to the ideas, beliefs and practices that enable them to give birth to new systems that serve community” (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011). Crowd-sourcing is outsourcing activities typically decided by one entity and bringing together a community to work together to create
solutions. This concept is designed to generate inspiration and idea sparking that occurs through multiple minds rather than a single originating individual.

These are all suggestions of how to start a foundation for a new type of community leadership. When leaders take on roles as facilitators instead of heroes, they build the potential of an area hinged on all the motivated citizenry rather than one individual. The current direction of leadership research and the established system that it has perpetuated works well in some areas and mildly well in others. Especially in times of economic instability, people seem to bury down to weather out the storm and wait for the economy to get on an even keel again. People have a natural aversion to change so especially in rough economic times, it is easier for people to wallow in their financial state and wait for some outside fix instead of taking action to improve. This isn’t to imply that one rural community can fix the American economy but it does mean that redefining community systems can be an inspiration for change in other areas.

Lao Tzu, around 650 A.D. said that “to lead people, walk beside them. As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate. When the best leader’s work is done the people say, ‘We did it ourselves’” (“Leadership quotes,” 1996). Leadership is an ever evolving concept that changes with the people. Instead of relying on existing systems and others to create change, rural communities need to recognize and reclaim their own power. It’s not the obligation of an outside company or individual to come save the town. Instead, it is the power
of innovation and organic thinking that encompasses an entire community that can be that catalyst for incredible growth and change.
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