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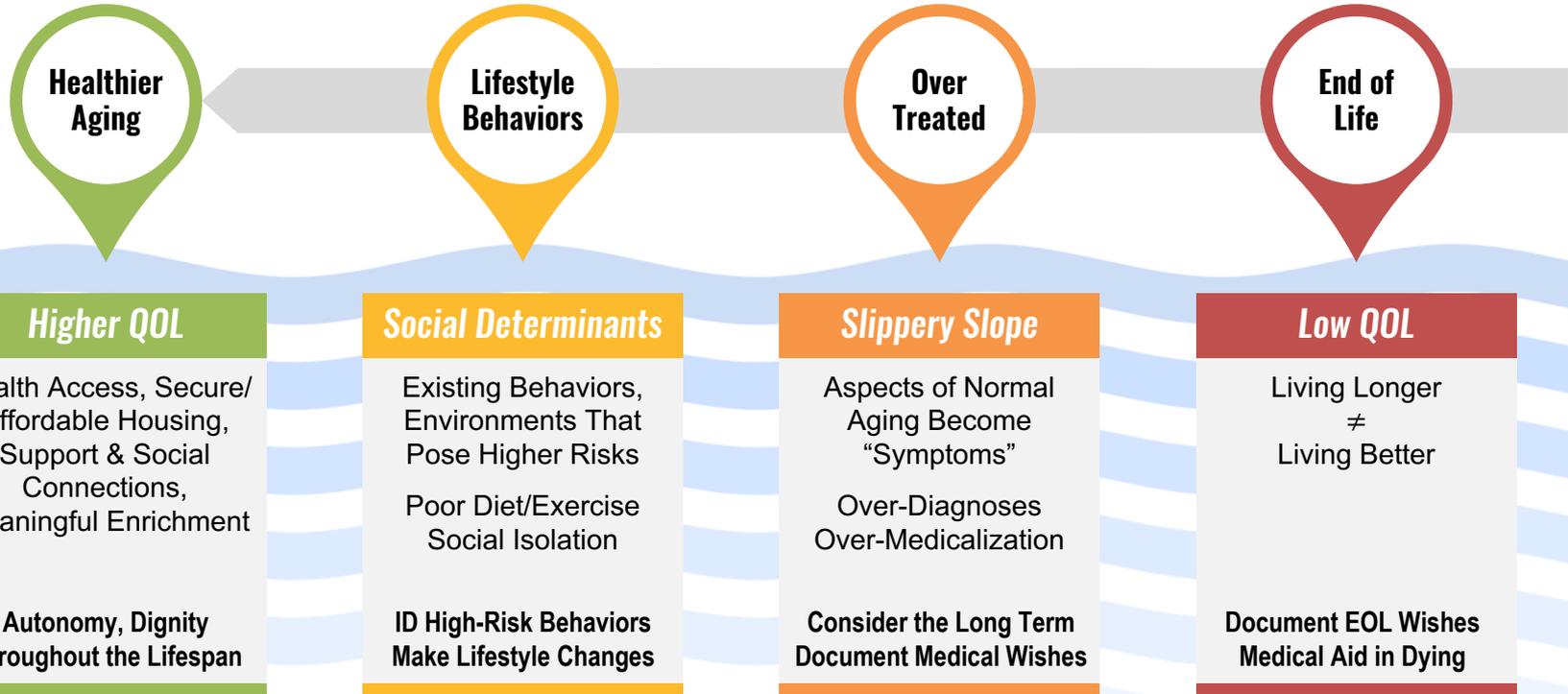
Exploring the Strategic Potential of Internal Communications in Member-Serving Community Nonprofit Organizations

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NPA 622: Nonprofit Data Analysis - Capstone
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Instructor: Dr. Marco Tavanti

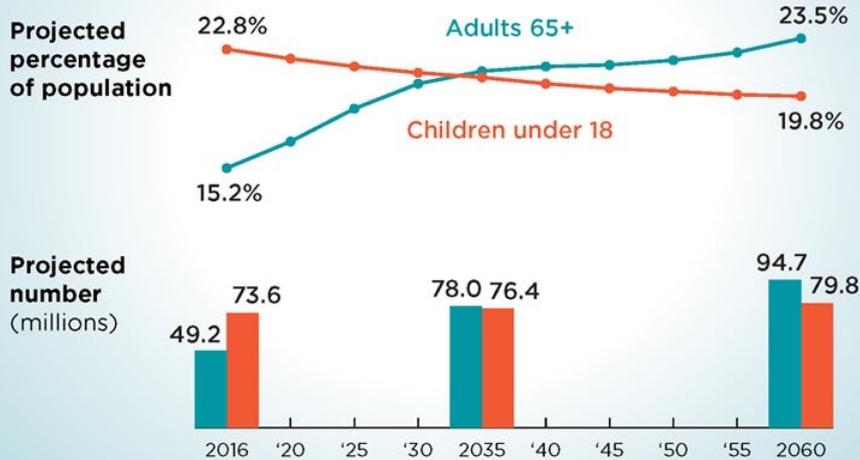
JOURNEY: START @THE END, MOVE UPSTREAM



2035: A DEMOGRAPHIC TURNING POINT

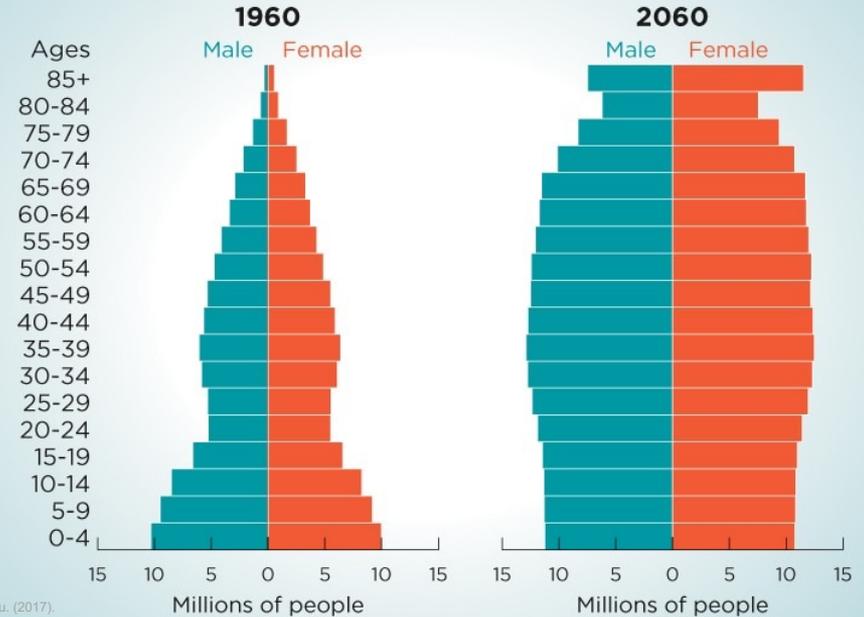
From Pyramid to Pillar

For the First Time in U.S. History Older Adults Are Projected to Outnumber Children by 2035



Note: 2016 data are estimates not projections.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, (2017).



ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNER

A California “Village”

VISION

To be recognized as a leader and key partner in creating and sustaining vital, healthy communities centered on justice, equity, and inclusion where older people are engaged, supported, and honored throughout their entire lifespan

MISSION

To empower all people in our member communities to age with dignity and a sense of belonging by connecting neighbors with one another and offering equitable access to support services and enrichment opportunities for meaningful engagement between members, volunteers, donors, and partners



PURPOSE & SCOPE

- Explore a unique member-driven nonprofit model ...
 - ◆ that meets the needs of older people largely unaddressed by existing local, state, or federal institutions or programs
 - ◆ whose grassroots design can lack strategic thinking, formal processes
 - ◆ has struggled to find sustainable solutions
- Determine whether more formal internal communications processes can channel stakeholder passion toward achieving strategic objectives, greater sustainability



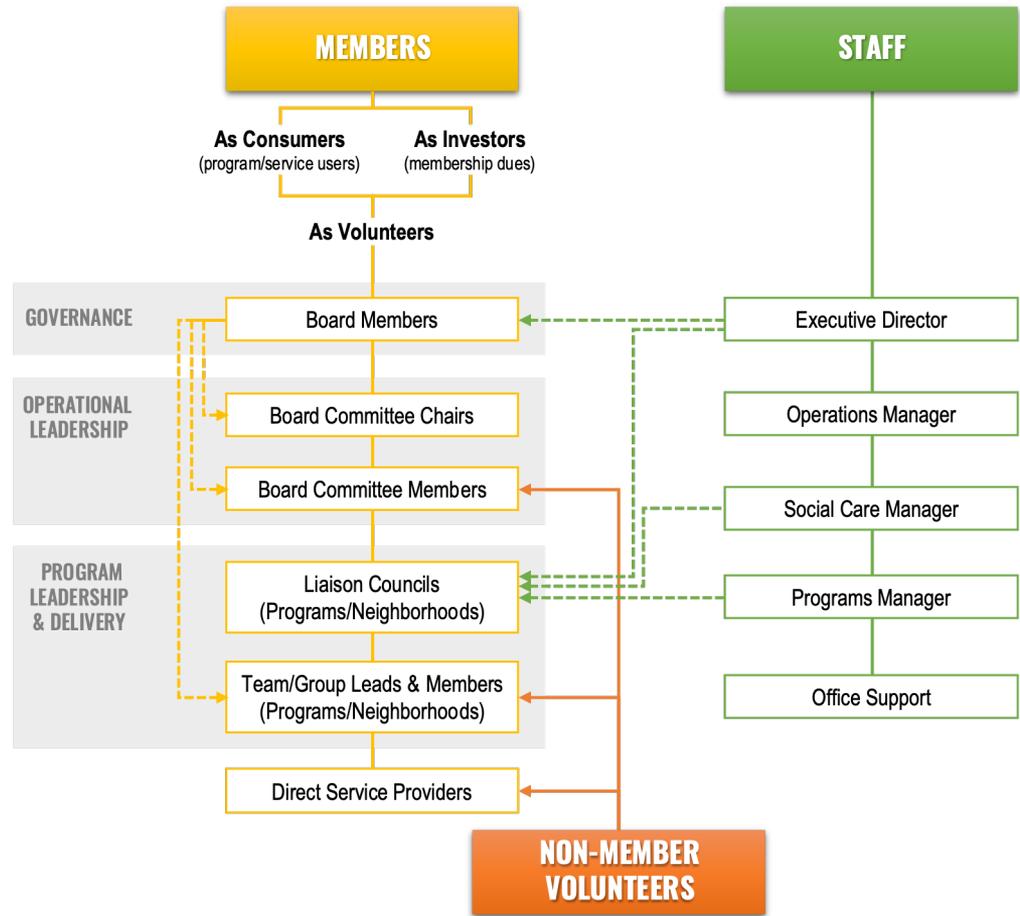
"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."

-Coretta Scott King

The Member-Driven

VILLAGE MODEL

- ✓ Grassroots intentional caring communities, volunteer-based, member-driven, self-governing
- ✓ Promotes meaningful reciprocity between those providing and those receiving
- ✓ Creates opportunities for building interpersonal connections and social activities to minimize isolation
- ✓ Offers varied programs that support healthier aging
- ✓ Cultivates regional and community partnerships to address the challenges of aging



PROJECT OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES & OUTPUT

OBJECTIVES

Identify opportunities where more formal internal communications processes have the potential to promote intergroup knowledge sharing

Identify opportunities where more formal internal communications processes can facilitate greater leadership team coordination and channel efforts toward shared goals

OUTCOMES

Greater Member-Volunteer Embeddedness
Improved Program Efficiency

Greater Leadership Cohesion
Greater Organizational Impact

OUTPUT

An internal strategic communications framework for member-driven NPOs that promotes knowledge sharing and strategically aligns teams to help achieve organizational goals

APPROACH AND METHODS

RESEARCH APPROACH

- ◆ Little research has been conducted on internal communications practices within NPOs
- ◆ This exploratory research project uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist perspective to examine how members perceive, experience, and interact at different levels of leadership in their organization through internal communications practices

RESEARCH DESIGN

- ◆ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer leaders in a member-serving NPO located in California that served as an organizational partner and case study.
- ◆ The nearly all-volunteer run case study organization was formed in 2010 with a mission to empower older people to age in community through programs, services, and policy advocacy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What formal internal communications processes exist to promote intergroup knowledge sharing?

How can internal communications between leadership and member-volunteer leaders be formalized and aligned to collaboratively achieve organizational strategic objectives?

- ◆ 36 member- and volunteer-leaders within the case study organization were purposively recruited via email to participate
- ◆ A commitment to organization and individual confidentiality was provided to all participants
- ◆ Potential participants self-selected interview dates between July 1 and July 15, 2021

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

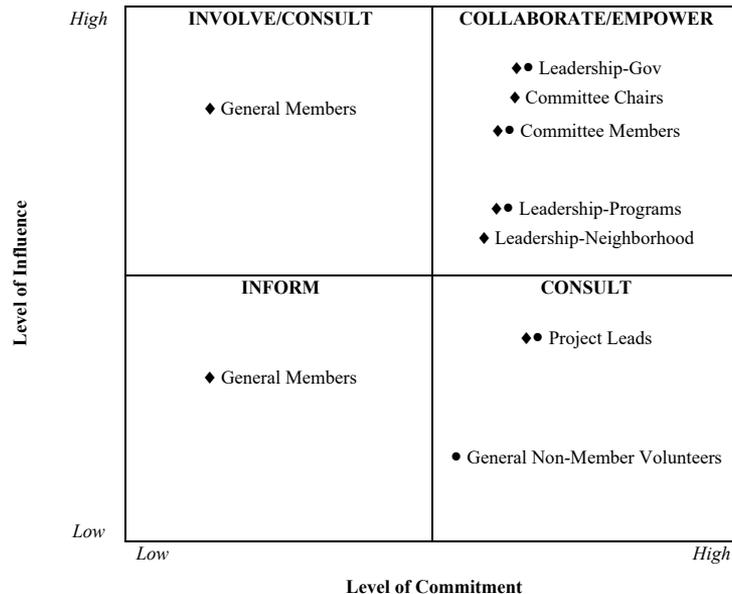
- ◆ 1-on-1 interviews with 10 participants were conducted using the Zoom platform
- ◆ Interview length ranged from 40 to 60 minutes
- ◆ Each semi-structured interview included 5 pre-determined categorical questions and 5 to 10 open-ended questions regarding internal communication and organization strategy awareness depending on leadership level

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

DATA ANALYSIS

Stakeholder Analysis

Figure 4.2: Internal Communication Stakeholder Analysis (CSO)



Source: Author's creation, adapted from United Nations Statistics Division (2020).

◆ Members; ● Includes Non-Members

Note:

--General Members are included in both the High Influence/Low Commitment and Low Influence/Low Commitment quadrants to reflect that a segment of General Members assert more influence through active and intentional communication regarding programmatic and organizational feedback.

Core Communications Themes by Organizational Level

Organizational Leadership

- ◆ Believe organic communication is effective

"The villages are better than the usual groups out there at relationship building and that becomes critical, so what that means is that the people who see common ground between the various committees and so forth, we all find each other." (Board member)

Middle Leadership (Liaison/Council Groups)

- ◆ Lack of transparency from organizational leadership (operational and strategic)
- ◆ Unclear of group's primary purpose/goals, decision-making authority/boundaries

"You know, the words 'manager', 'team', 'support group', 'committee' -- they're all kind of mixed names, and so knowing where to go for information, having the correct information and not having to run around and call different people [is important]". (Neighborhood Lead/Councilmember)

Program Team Leadership

- ◆ Lacking communication regarding staff vacancies, recognition of impact on volunteer time/responsibility
- ◆ Blurred responsibilities

"The position of program director has been open now for over half a year -- it didn't really seem to be an urgent need to find someone... If you have a staff member there, he's in charge. You can say 'sorry, I cannot do this this month', but for half a year now, it was all on us." (Non-Member Volunteer, Program Team Lead)

IMPLICATIONS: ISC FRAMEWORK

Table 5.2 Internal Strategic Communications Framework

<i>Overall Organizational Goals</i>		
<i>Strategic Goal</i>	Make it SMART (specific, measurable, audience-focused, realistic, timely)	
<i>Values to Convey</i>	Which values align with the strategic goal? (Trust, Transparency, etc.)	
<i>Key Strategic Actions</i>	Which actions align with the strategic goal and overall organization mission? (Provide Vision/Leadership, Inform/Engage Certain Stakeholder Groups, etc.)	
Internal Strategic Communications Framework		
Internal Communications Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Make them SMART – Develop one primary objective and at least one secondary objective 	
Internal Stakeholder Audience(s)	Identify stakeholder groups ¹ that will be the target(s) of internal communications messages related to the specified objective	
Internal Stakeholder Messaging	<i>Do</i>	Answer: <i>What specific action(s) do we need each stakeholder audience to take?</i>
	<i>Feel</i>	Answer: <i>What do we want them to feel? What feeling will encourage them to take (the right) action?</i>
	<i>Know</i>	Answer: <i>What do we need them to know? What data/facts explain the reasoning behind the message?</i>
Simple Memorable Message	Develop a short, meaningful phrase that elicits an emotion or catches attention and conveys the value underlying your strategic objectives	
Supporting Messages	Answer: <i>Why should each stakeholder group care? What is the rationale? What happens next and how will it be communicated? Where can more information be found and who is the main contact?</i>	
Messaging Flow (Bi-Directional, Intergroup, Multi-Channel)	Consult the Internal Communications Matrix and establish a messaging flow plan that involves the right communicators for the right stakeholder audiences	
Reinforcing Methods & Channels	Based on the outcome of an internal communications audit, identify the most effective communication methods and channels for each stakeholder group. Reinforce messaging with additional communication as necessary according to stakeholder group needs.	

Source: Author's adaptation (2021) from Dewhurst & FitzPatrick (2019) and United National Statistics Division (2020)

¹ Precursor planning steps that precede this step could include a comprehensive internal communications audit and a detailed stakeholder analysis that identifies specific groups and subgroups.

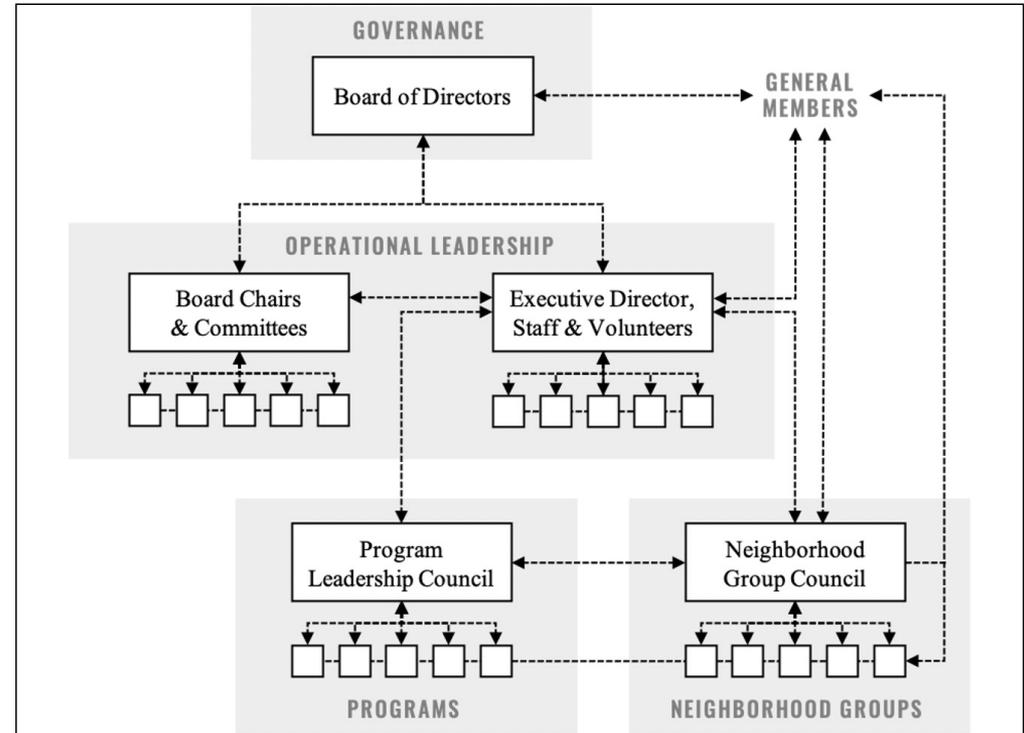
IMPLICATIONS: ISC FRAMEWORK EXAMPLE

Overall Organizational Goals		
	Example A	Example B
Strategic Goal	Restructure Operations Staff & Hire	Increase Membership by 10% (FY21)
Values to Convey	Trust, Transparency, Meaningful Responsiveness	Mission-Centered, Inclusion, Impartiality, Consistency
Key Strategic Actions	(1) Provide Leadership (Set Direction/Plan of Action) (2) Inform & Engage all Stakeholders	(1) Increase Earned (Dues) Income (2) Deliver on Key DEI/Sustainability Objective
INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK		
Internal Communications Objectives	Primary: Provide Awareness/Understanding Secondary: Elevate Trust in Leadership	Primary: Channel Member Engagement Toward Strategic Goal Secondary: Increase Intergroup Collaboration/Knowledge Sharing
Internal Stakeholder Audience(s)	All Stakeholders	Relevant Leads; Members of Program Teams, Groups, Liaison Councils (e.g., Outreach Team, DEI Work Group, Events Team)
Internal Stakeholder Messaging	<i>Do</i>	<i>What specific action(s) do we need each stakeholder audience to take?</i>
	<i>Feel</i>	<i>What feeling will encourage them to take (the right) action?</i>
	<i>Know</i>	<i>What data/facts explain the reasoning behind the message? What evidence shows there is a plan or that a goal has been achieved?</i>
Simple Memorable Message	<i>"Organizing to Better Serve Our Members"</i>	<i>"Inviting Others to Age with Dignity and a Sense of Belonging"</i>
Supporting Messages	<i>Why should stakeholders (by category) care? What happens next and how will it be communicated? Where can more information be found and who is the main contact?</i>	
Messaging Flow (Bi-Directional, Intergroup, Multi-Channel)	ED → All Stakeholders High Influence/High Commitment Stakeholders → General Members General Members → General Members (WOM)	ED → High Influence/High Commitment Stakeholders High Influence/High Commitment Stakeholders → General Members General Members → General Members → Potential Members (WOM)
Reinforcing Methods & Channels	All stakeholder email/postal mail; member and volunteer web portal posts; monthly (e-)newsletter; weekly/monthly liaison/council group communications; job boards	Relevant team lead and liaison/council group communications to members; monthly (e-)newsletter; community partner communications

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Illustrating the bi-directional, intergroup, and multi-channel message flow between stakeholder groups

Figure 5.1 Conceptual Model of Directional Internal Communications Between Stakeholder Groups



Source: Author's creation (2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

■ Member-Serving NPOs:

- ◆ Capitalize on the benefits of highly embedded member-leaders by establishing an integrated internal communications process that leverages this passion to achieve strategic goals
- ◆ Ensure programs and decision-making authority are clearly differentiated and communicated
- ◆ Identify internal stakeholder segments and analyze for strategic alignment and communications opportunities
- ◆ Prioritize strategic planning and develop supporting marketing and communications plans (internal and external)
- ◆ Establish a measurement and refinement process

■ Future Research:

- ◆ Explore the value of internal communications, especially within the social sector and subsectors
- ◆ Explore the phased scalability of internal communications process and develop frameworks that support the transition from organic grassroots approaches to more formal processes

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CHANNELING (COM)PASSION:

EXPLORING THE STRATEGIC POTENTIAL OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS IN MEMBER-SERVING COMMUNITY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Charis Hanshaw, MNA - Master of Nonprofit Administration - Capstone Project

SUMMARY

The Village Movement is a unique nonprofit organization model that was born nearly 20 years ago to facilitate peer support, offer healthier aging resources, improve health, and reduce isolation among older people at the neighborhood level. This project explores internal communications processes among high-value member leaders; investigates the level of member-leader awareness of organizational strategic goals; and identifies opportunities where a more formal internal communication framework could be applied to better align strategically relevant program teams to help achieve organizational goals.

PURPOSE

- Explore a unique member-driven nonprofit model that meets the needs of older people largely unaddressed by existing local, state, or federal institutions or programs; whose grassroots design can lack strategic planning/formal processes; and has struggled to find sustainable solutions
- Determine whether more formal internal communications processes can channel stakeholder passion toward achieving strategic objectives

METHODS

- Qualitative approach with a constructivist perspective
- 10 semi-structured interviews, 40-60 minutes in length
- Participants: member and non-member volunteer leaders in a member-serving NPO located in CA (case study organization)

REFERENCES

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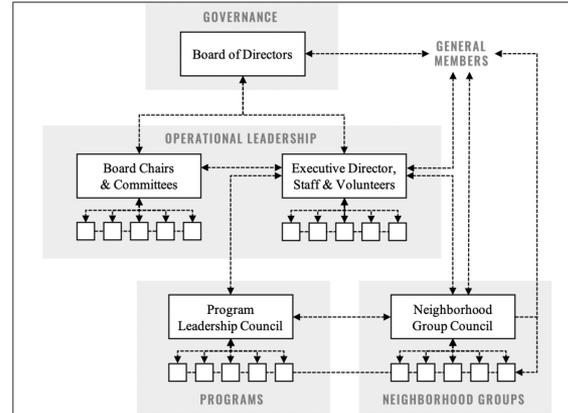
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DATA AND ANALYSIS

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- How can internal communications between leadership and member-volunteer leaders be formalized and aligned to collaboratively achieve organizational strategic objectives?

RESULTS

Organizational Leadership: Believe organic communication is effective

Middle Leadership: Lack of transparency from organizational leadership (operational and strategic); Unclear of group's primary purpose/goals, decision-making authority/boundaries

Program Team Leadership: Lack of communication regarding staff vacancies, recognition of impact volunteer time/responsibility; Blurred responsibilities

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- Establish a measurement and refinement process