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# **COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS: EXPLORING COMPETENCIES AND PROGRAM IMPACT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The increased emphasis on collaborative governance across the field of public administration necessitates a rethinking of what the core competencies of public managers are and how they might be developed. The traditional model of leadership development, focusing on leading within bounded hierarchy and via command-and-control must be moderated with an additional focus on collaborative problem-solving, working in flattened structures, and incentivizing behavior in new ways. This article reviews relevant literature along with the experience of two local government leadership programs to explore content and training approaches needed to prepare local government leaders for collaborative governance. Qualitative and quantitative survey findings indicate that program content should specifically address collaboration competency development. Further, training evaluation strategy should allow for processing and reflection: immediate reaction surveys should be supplemented with a long-term evaluation strategy. Finally, while scholarly literature recommends non-traditional, peer-learning activities for collaborative leadership development, this research offers mixed support. The program examples and associated research findings highlight the importance of a strategic approach to training that reflects emerging leadership needs.

## INTRODUCTION

One hundred years after Frederick Taylor's seminal work, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), it is worthwhile to observe how much the concept of leadership has evolved. Core themes of motivation, performance, and human interaction have developed and become more sophisticated (Yukl, 2010). "Great man" or "trait" theories have been replaced by more complex, interactive theories of leadership. However, the traditional notion of leadership focusing on hierarchical leaders and followers remains dominant in popular conceptions of leadership and in programs that seek to develop leaders.

What characterized leadership in 20th-century organizations shaped by Taylor's scientific management paradigm contrasts with emerging, contemporary organizational priorities of the 21st century. Today's leadership context, particularly in the public sector, is interorganizational. In public administration in particular, this shift corresponds with an emerging collaborative governance paradigm that is reorienting the field away from a focus on hierarchy, toward a focus on networks and partnerships that cross traditional boundaries (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012). This new focus highlights the need to develop leadership competencies that extend beyond traditional, hierarchical, managerial functions (Morse, 2008; Sullivan, Williams & Jeffares, 2012).

While it is important to understand how the definition of leadership has transformed over time, it is equally important to consider the connected task of *developing* leaders. Iles and Preece (2006) highlighted this need by noting that public leadership development programs must expand their efforts to build the competencies that create value both within organizations and beyond. Considering how these competencies align with leadership training components is necessary to assess training gaps and opportunities for improvement. The transition from leading within organizations to leading beyond them places new demands on leadership development programs. Drawing upon the growing body of literature on collaborative competencies, as well as the literature on leadership development, along with experiences and data from two local government leadership development programs, this article addresses the call to develop leaders who

can achieve results both within traditional organizational structures and also across organizational and sectoral boundaries.

This article utilizes program-specific information to offer insights and respond to the question presented in Getha-Taylor, Holmes, Jacobson, Morse and Sowa (2011, p. i92): “Which programs, strategies, and curricula are most appropriate to build and nurture leadership skills for public leadership ‘across boundaries’?” To this end, three related questions of interest are explored: 1) What additional leadership competencies are required of local government managers for collaborative governance? 2) Which programmatic components are best suited to develop collaborative competencies? 3) What are the most appropriate methods to evaluate the expected outcomes of collaborative leadership development programs?

The article is organized accordingly. First, we review literature on collaborative leadership and collaborative competencies and examine arguments calling for the development of those competencies in public leaders. Next, we consider how training curricula should adapt to develop collaborative competency development. We present insights from local government executive development programs in North Carolina and Kansas and examine data collected from program participants to consider which programmatic components are best suited to develop collaborative leadership competencies. We then turn to the question of how to evaluate program impact on collaborative competency, again utilizing data from the two programs being studied. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research and offer advice for others engaged in training public sector executives.

## **COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCIES**

The transformation of government-centered problem solving to boundary-spanning collaborative governance illustrates both the promise and the challenge of 21st century public leadership. Complex problems and resource interdependence highlight the inadequacies of traditional organizational structures and also the

need for new forms of leadership. Leadership has been identified as a critical element in collaborative effectiveness and an element of capacity for joint action (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Emerson & Smutko, 2011). Working effectively across boundaries requires new paradigms, transformed cultures and supportive training. As noted by Marsh (2010), “the number one challenge for public, not-for-profit and for-profit organizations is *leading beyond boundaries*” (p. 546, *emphasis added*).

Understanding the ways in which public organizations cultivate leaders who can successfully address the complex challenges of the 21st century is a priority across all levels of government (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006). Regrettably, as Light (2011) points out, leadership is still mostly taught using the “great-man theory” although the reality of public leadership today rests on a foundation of “collective” leadership. While traditional models of leadership development help clarify the challenges of leading within organizational boundaries, the demands associated with working across organizational and sector boundaries to address shared challenges requires new leadership paradigms (Linden, 2010; Sullivan, Williams, & Jeffares, 2012). Connected to this, the ways in which we define public leadership and associated competencies requires innovative training techniques that also reflect the transformation of governance (Morse & Buss, 2008).

However, particularly at the local level, governments across the nation are faced with severely limited resources and increased demand for services (Okubo, 2010). Rising demand for critical local services such as public safety and health services will require job growth, a priority that will undoubtedly be challenged by budgetary constraints (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Given these conflicting forces of increased demand and decreased capacity, public employees are stressed while resources for training and development are constrained. Thus, understanding how best to stretch limited resources for improved impact is a priority.

Scholarship and practice illustrate the ways in which leadership must adapt to changing mandates, expectations and climates. So too should leadership development adapt accordingly. The traditional model of leadership development, focusing on

leading within bounded hierarchy and via command-and-control must be moderated with an *additional focus* on collaborative problem-solving, working in flattened structures, and incentivizing behavior in new ways. As public managers work across boundaries to solve complex public problems, the ways in which they lead will be influenced by this changing context. Conflict resolution, engaging the public, and balancing ethical priorities will all be influenced by the new landscape of public leadership (O'Leary, Bingham, & Choi, 2009).

The study of leadership and leadership development is often considered generically and broadly to span organizations and sectors (Yukl, 2010). Notably absent from such treatments is a focus on leadership development at the local government level. Yet, it is at this level where the exercise of public leadership (or the lack thereof) is perhaps most evident to citizens. Further, it is at this level, where leadership is needed most acutely given the service demands and prevailing negative perceptions of government (Saad, 2011). This article addresses this challenge by examining two separate efforts designed to cultivate leadership skills in local government managers by integrating traditional leadership development models with contemporary content delivery approaches and specific inclusions of collaborative content. We first turn to the question of what leadership competencies are associated with this emerging collaborative governance paradigm.

### **CONSIDERING EMERGING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND COLLABORATIVE SKILLS**

Understanding of competencies for public leadership is beginning to catch up with our knowledge of collaborative management and governance. For instance, Getha-Taylor's (2008) federal study of high performers found that the most significant competencies for collaborative effectiveness are (a) interpersonal understanding, (b) teamwork and cooperation, and (c) team leadership. These results are significant and contrast with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)'s Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs). OPM identifies (a) political savvy, (b) negotiating/influencing, and (c) partnering as critical competencies for building coalitions. Comparing competency dimensions reveals a shared emphasis on

team leadership in both Getha-Taylor's (2008) findings and in OPM's list. However, OPM's emphasis on organizational awareness and partnering do not emerge as significant in the study findings. Instead, interpersonal understanding and teamwork/cooperation were identified as keys to collaborative effectiveness (Getha-Taylor, 2008).

Morse (2008) examined the question of collaborative competencies by comparing what the literature on collaborative leadership identifies as competencies to an exhaustive list of competencies for "public service leadership" (meaning, administrative leadership or leadership in public organizations) identified by Van Wart (2005). The competencies associated with collaborative leadership were presented in terms of "attributes, skills, and behaviors," similar to how Van Wart organizes competencies in his work. Attributes include systems thinking and a sense of mutuality. Skills include strategic thinking and facilitation. Behaviors include stakeholder identification, issue framing and facilitating mutual learning processes.

Other scholars in public administration have given attention to the identification of strategies and related competencies for collaborative governance. One example is a recent book on networked government, which is closely aligned with conceptions of collaborative governance (Koliba, Meek, & Zia 2011). The authors' strategies for network management are similar to the other works of collaborative competencies. These strategies include oversight; mandating; providing resources; negotiation and bargaining; facilitation; participatory governance / civic engagement; brokering; boundary-spanning and systems thinking. Bingham, Sandfort and O'Leary (2008), similarly outlined what they refer to as the "capabilities" of "collaborative public managers." Included in their list are items such as network design, meeting facilitation, conflict management, and evaluating outcomes.

Perhaps the most exhaustive work to date on collaborative competencies is the result of a working group of the University Network for Collaborative Governance<sup>1</sup> (UNCG), which created the "UNCG Guide to Collaborative Competencies" (Emerson & Smutko, 2011). In 2009, the working group conducted an extensive review of numerous sources of competencies for

leadership and collaboration including the OPM Executive Core Competencies, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the Cooperative Extension System, and the Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership in British Columbia. This work is the most extensive and thorough examination to-date on competencies specifically for collaborative governance. Table 1 presents a summary of the competencies list.

**Table 1**

*UNCG Collaborative Competencies (Emerson & Smutko, 2011)*

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

(1) Strengthening Collaborative Leadership (e.g. collaborative leadership styles, entrepreneurialism and risk-taking)

(2) Planning, Organizing and Managing for Collaboration (e.g. process design, designing governance structures, engaging stakeholders)

**PROCESS**

(3) Communicating Effectively

(4) Working in Teams and Facilitating Groups

(5) Negotiating Agreement and Managing Conflict

**ANALYTICAL**

(6) Applying Analytic Skills and Strategic Thinking (e.g. situation assessment, understanding political and legal context of collaboration)

(7) Evaluating and Adapting Processes

**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

(8) Integrating Technical and Scientific Information

(9) Using Information and Communication Technology

**PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

(10) Maintaining Personal Integrity and Professional Ethics

While the “leadership and management” category includes much of what is unique about leadership in collaborative contexts, and other categories may apply more broadly to generic leadership (e.g. communications skills or integrity), we find that the UNCG work is consistent with what the other research on leadership competencies for collaborative governance. In addition to what we might call traditional leadership attributes and skills we see a *new emphasis on situation assessment and what might be termed as “process” and “design” skills.*

**Table 2**

*Collaborative Competencies by Phases of Collaboration (Morse & Stephens, 2012)*

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Initiation</i>	<i>Deliberation</i>	<i>Implementation</i>
Issue analysis	Stakeholder engagement	Group facilitation	Developing action plans
Environmental assessment	Political/ community organizing	Team building and group dynamics	Designing governance structures
Stakeholder identification	Building social capital	Listening	Public engagement
Strategic thinking	Process design	Consensus-building	Network management
		Interest-based negotiation	Conflict resolution
			Performance evaluation
<b><i>Meta-Competencies</i></b>			
Collaborative mindset		Openness and risk-taking	
Passion for creating public value		Sense of mutuality and connectedness	
Systems thinking		Humility or measured ego	

There is certainly nuance and ambiguity to be found in any distillation of collaborative competencies versus traditional competencies. Table 2 (above) offers a synthesis of the resources mentioned here, along with many others, presented by Morse and Stephens (2012), organizing the competencies along broad phases of collaborative governance processes. At the core there is a set of behaviors (and related attributes and skills, what Morse and Stephens term “meta-competencies”) that revolves around understanding and identifying stakeholders, convening them, designing appropriate processes for them, facilitating agreements amongst them, designing appropriate governance arrangements for agreements reached, and keeping them together to implement what is decided. Working with external stakeholders in this fashion is clearly a different set of activities and requisite competencies than goal-oriented organizational leadership. An important research

question emerges: *how should training curriculum adapt to emphasize these emerging collaborative competencies?*

**Table 3**

*PELA Participant's (2007-2010) Baseline, Self-Reported Competencies (n=92)*

Statement	Mean Normed Score
I am widely trusted	.90
I pursue work with energy and drive	.85
I put the public good first	.89
I convene stakeholders and secure agreement for collective community action	.67
I find multiple champions for change	.67
I build constituent support and citizen coalitions	.63
I identify the full spectrum of knowledgeholders and stakeholders	.71
I enlist different groups and organizations appropriately to address issues or problems	.71

One natural question at this point is whether current public leaders already have these competencies at a comparable level to more traditional public leadership competencies. There are numerous calls for developing this new set of competencies in public (administrative) leaders, based on an assumption that their skill-set is by-and-large intra-organizational. Data from the Public Executive Leadership Program (PELA) (discussed in more detail below), suggests that the assumptions are correct. PELA participants from four cohorts (2007-2010) were asked to fill out a self-assessment based on a list of statements. Some of the questions had to do with leadership generically while others were more closely aligned with specific collaborative competencies. As

a selection from these questions displayed in Table 3 (above) demonstrates, scores on explicitly collaborative governance-related statements scored lower than those with more 'generic' leadership qualities.

### **DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCIES— THE EXPERIENCE OF TWO LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

While there is an emerging agreement on the nature of this expanded set of competencies, it remains to be seen how best to develop those in others. Day (2000) chronicled the evolution of contemporary leadership development, including the refining of methods to address changing leadership needs. He stated, "Developing individual leaders without concern for reciprocal relations among people or their interactions within a broader social context ignores the research demonstrating that leadership is a complex interaction between individuals and their social and organizational environments" (Day, 2000, p. 605).

As part of this transition, Day (2000) noted the importance of action (project-based) learning and peer development opportunities (mentoring, networking) as part of contemporary leadership development programs. Bingham, Sandfort and O'Leary (2008) also argue that collaborative public management requires both new methods and revised content that balances the need for knowledge and the need for application. They submit that the new competencies required for effective collaborative management are best learned through "active and experiential learning" (p. 283).

What is shared across these recommendations is a focus on adult learning theory. As Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart (2010) note, this theory "emphasizes the extensive experiences of adults, interest in self-improvement and problem solving, and preferences for active participation and exercise of some control in learning," (p. 279). Thus, traditional models of instruction are less suited to the needs of adult learners. As noted by Mezirow (1997), it is only through critical reflection, engaging with new groups, experiencing other cultures that we can begin to become self-aware and transform "interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view," (p. 7). Adult learners need to

master new content, but they must also consider the ways their own assumptions influence that process. Moreover, they must learn to recognize other frames of reference and learn to work with others to solve problems and accomplish shared goals.

In the context of public management specifically, Denhardt (2001) considers the various developmental needs and managerial skills that are most relevant to students and practitioners. A key component of Denhardt's (2001) analysis centers on the development of "interpersonal" skills that rest on an understanding of others as well as personal self-reflection. This treatment considers the various ways of developing these critical needs, including the value of traditional, classroom-style instruction as well as experiential learning opportunities. This focus helps to illustrate Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which includes experience, observation, abstraction and experimentation. Contemporary approaches that illustrate the cycle components are expected to contribute to improved learning outcomes as a result.

While these recommendations together speak to the value of nontraditional training methods that reflect adult learning theory and experiential learning, this investigation presents an opportunity to test these recommendations in practice and respond to the question: *which programmatic components are best suited to develop collaborative competencies?*

This study draws on comparative data from two local government leadership development programs to answer these questions. Both programs highlight competencies that fall outside the sphere of traditional (organizational) leadership. The two programs also utilize emerging training and development approaches that emphasize adult learning theory and contemporary instructional models. The programs are presented below and summarized in Table 4.

### ***The Public Executive Leadership Academy (PELA)***

The Public Executive Leadership Academy (PELA) is a two-week, residential leadership program run by the UNC School of Government for local government managers and department heads. Its development was a direct response to demand from local government managers in North Carolina for their own senior-level

leadership program. The program was launched in 2005 and has been offered annually since then. The average cohort size is 25.

PELA is distinctive for its focus on “community leadership” and consideration of local government managers as “change agents” in their communities (Stenberg, Upshaw, & Warner, 2008). This focus on community (or collaborative) leadership reflects specific direction from the North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCCMA), whose representatives initially approached the School of Government about developing such a program. Leading across boundaries was viewed as an emerging, critical competency for local government leaders.

Representatives from NCCCMA and ICMA worked with School of Government faculty to design the program, and the community/collaboration focus emerged from those interactions. Additionally, regional focus groups were held with municipal and county managers from across North Carolina to ascertain their major challenges and issues, what they feel they needed to manage those issues, priorities for training programs, and program design preferences (Stenberg, Upshaw, & Warner, 2008). Several collaborative governance-related themes prominently emerged in these discussions, including specifically intergovernmental relations and citizen engagement. Skills identified included facilitation, conflict resolution, collaborative decision-making, and communication. These results were consistent with trends in the field identified by Nalbandian (1999) and the competencies cited above.

PELA was designed around these collaborative competencies and advertised as a mid-to- senior level leadership program focused on *community* leadership (as opposed to other programs’ focus on organizational leadership). Modules on situation assessment, stakeholder analysis and engagement, group facilitation, group decision-making and creativity form the core of PELA’s curriculum. The skill development components are framed within several context-setting sessions on the changing nature of local governance, community values and social equity. Additionally, a 360-degree assessment on “community leadership competencies” (filled out by participants and their colleagues within their organization as well as in the community) is used to

help participants identify areas of strength and needed improvement. Concepts and skills are applied throughout and after the program in a “community change project” identified and spearheaded by participants.

### ***Supervisory Leadership Training (SLT)***

The Kansas Supervisory Leadership Training (SLT) program is a three-day session designed by the University of Kansas’s Public Management Center (PMC) specifically for mid-level public managers. The PMC is the “professional development arm” of the University of Kansas’ School of Public Affairs and Administration. The PMC manages a variety of professional development programs, including the Certified Public Manager program, the Emerging Leaders Academy, and customized courses as requested.

The SLT program focuses on the theme of “supervisor as leader” and emphasizes skill development related to managing the relationship with followers. To this end, the program offers a curriculum of diverse supervisory topics that span individual leadership development (including leadership styles) traditional organizational challenges (such as conflict management, coaching and performance appraisal) as well as emerging leadership priorities (including collaboration). Content is delivered via a variety of instructional tools and techniques, including: lecture, multi-media presentations, self-assessments, group discussions, scenarios and (optional) follow-up peer consultations.

While the SLT program is available for cities throughout Kansas, this investigation centers on data collected from sessions offered in 2010-2011 for managers from a single Kansas city. The city’s mid-level managers (total of 167 at the start of program) were all enrolled in the SLT program. Eight SLT sessions were scheduled over the course of nine months to average approximately 20 participants at each training session. Program coordinators managed enrollment to ensure a diverse group at each session, representing various city departments, to enhance networking and collaboration.

**Table 4**  
*Program Comparisons*

	<b>PELA</b>	<b>SLT</b>
<b>Program goals</b>	Prepare local government managers to lead across boundaries and act as community change agents	Prepare local government managers to lead within and across boundaries
<b>Cohort</b>	Senior and mid-level managers (Average class size: 25)	Mid-level managers (Average class size: 20)
<b>Time in residence</b>	Two weeks (two one-week sessions separated by a month)	Three days
<b>Framework</b>	Community leadership, leading across boundaries	Supervisors as leaders, relationship-based leadership
<b>Training topics</b>	Facilitation, conflict resolution, collaborative decision-making, communication, intergovernmental relations, citizen engagement	Leadership styles, managing change, coaching and motivation, performance management, teamwork and collaboration
<b>Methods</b>	Lecture, discussion, scenario analysis, group activities, simulation/role play	Lecture, discussion, scenario analysis, group activities
<b>Innovative approaches</b>	360 degree assessments, learning teams, community change project	Self-assessment, peer learning applications

We now turn to data collected from program participants to explore how local government managers understand this changing landscape and the resulting demands in terms of individual competencies. Further, we explore the extent to which these programs and the methods employed impact participants' confidence in working in collaborative contexts.

### **EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PELA AND SLT**

Regrettably, as a result of the economic recession, funding for training has been restricted (Ammons & Fleck, 2010) or eliminated altogether (Johnson, 2010) in many local governments. Especially in a time of constrained resources, the investment of scarce dollars into training programs is scrutinized. As a result,

*evaluation* of training outcomes is critical. Local governments want to see the impact of training dollars, but this can represent a difficult request.

As Berge (2008) finds, training evaluation is complicated by a host of challenges, including conflicting goals for the training experience and “antiquated” evaluation methods. While improved performance may be an expected end goal of participating in a training program, the value of other related outcomes, including individual learning and competency development may be lost in the process.

Traditionally, training evaluation centered on immediate reactions to the training experience. According to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), this “level one” evaluation can indicate the level of satisfaction with the training experience, but is insufficient to illustrate training impact. Rather, program evaluators need to move beyond immediate reactions and evaluate higher-order outcomes, including learning, behavior and results.

This research presents an opportunity to evaluate the higher-order outcome of individual learning and address related questions including: “What skills were developed or improved? What attitudes were changed?” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 42). This speaks to a broader research question: *what are the most appropriate methods to evaluate the expected outcomes of collaborative leadership development programs?* As discussed in Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), surveys and self-awareness reflections can provide insights on these questions, which together speak to the broader goal of building capacity for improved collaborative performance.

### ***Methods***

This investigation presents original quantitative and qualitative data to explore collaborative leadership training and outcomes. The quantitative analysis centers on the Kansas Supervisory Leadership Training program evaluation. The methodology adopted is the switching replications approach (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007) that allows for members of a single group (mid-level managers from a single city) to act as treatment and control groups. For the purposes of this investigation, treatment is participation in the leadership development program. Individuals

in the treatment group completed the training as of March 2011. A survey was administered following the March training and ended prior to the start of the April training session. Members of the control group had not completed the training session as of March 2011.

The switching replications methodology is particularly well suited for this research as it allows equality in program participation (i.e., all are able to receive the benefits of the “treatment”) and by spacing out the participation over time, equivalent comparison groups are created in the process (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Substantial qualitative data was also obtained from interviews with a sample of PELA participants from the first five years of the program (n=49). The insights from these interviews shed light on the long-term impact of training and provide avenues for further investigation.

### ***Findings***

PELA program evaluation questions served as a framework for the SLT leadership evaluation and were included items in the SLT survey. PELA evaluation data from the first two years revealed statistically significant increases on all dimensions among program participants (Stenberg, Upshaw, & Warner, 2008).<sup>2</sup> The SLT program evaluation offered an opportunity for comparison by utilizing the same questions for a control and treatment group. This investigation revealed significant differences between the groups on two dimensions: self-awareness and value of public service. Considered together, the data suggest that leadership training can have both long-term benefits for participants (PELA evidence) and that those who participate in similar programs illustrate significantly higher levels of self-awareness and commitment to public service (SLT data).

**Table 5**  
*SLT Survey Responses*

Survey Question	Mean	Treatment Group n=62	Control Group n=60	Sig.
1. I know myself as a leader.	4.04	4.12	3.89	.025*
2. I take a broad, systematic view of issues affecting my community.	3.78	3.85	3.65	.109
3. I engage key stakeholders in creating a vision for my community.	3.43	3.46	3.36	.511
4. I encourage teamwork, community building, partnerships, and collaborative problem solving across jurisdictions and sectors.	3.86	3.88	3.81	.579
5. I develop and hone listening and communication skills.	3.84	3.85	3.81	.746
6. I assess risks and develop strategies to minimize negative consequences.	4.06	4.03	4.10	.458
7. I facilitate change to improve the quality of life in our community.	3.75	3.82	3.63	.127
8. I celebrate the dignity and worth of public service.	3.81	3.95	3.60	.013*

Unlike the PELA program responses that illustrated significant differences on all measures, the SLT program (which is

focused on supervisory leadership skills with a secondary focus on collaboration) illustrates an impact on only two measures (see Table 5 above). This finding suggests that if collaboration is an emerging leadership requirement, a more extensive focus will be necessary in training sessions in the future and that an extended time frame may be more appropriate for evaluating the leadership training outcomes. The difference between three and ten days of intensive training is certainly significant. The SLT results seem to indicate that a short program can help raise awareness of leadership concepts but is unlikely to result in immediate behavioral changes (questions 2-7).

Besides the PELA evaluation questions, the SLT evaluation survey included 14 additional questions related to collaboration. The results (see Table 6) reveal that generally, *those who participated in the training indicate stronger agreement with questions related to the value of collaboration.* Two items distinguish the treatment and control groups. First, those who participated in the training session illustrate a significant difference in regard to the perception of collaboration as a requirement for getting the job done. They are more likely to recognize collaboration as a work requirement. Second, those who participated in the training session illustrate a significant difference in regard to the value of collaboration. They are more likely to agree that collaboration is worth the extra effort involved. This finding is particularly interesting given the short duration of SLT and that the collaborative competency element is only a portion of the overall program. One might surmise that more prolonged exposure to collaborative competency training would yield even stronger results, which seem to be the case based on interviews of PELA participants several months after they finished the program.

**Table 6**  
*SLT Survey, Collaboration-related Questions*

Survey Question	Mean	Treatment Group n=62	Control Group n=60	Sig.
1. Collaboration within our organization is critical to achieving our vision, values, and mission.	4.16	4.22	4.05	.184
2. Collaboration within the City needs improvement.	3.67	3.70	3.60	.544
3. Improved partnerships with organizations and individuals outside of our organization would help us meet our goals.	3.68	3.70	3.63	.609
4. My job requires me to collaborate with other departments frequently.	4.09	4.20	3.89	.049*
5. A significant amount of my work week is spent on collaborative efforts.	3.50	3.59	3.35	.176
6. I would describe my previous collaborative experiences as positive.	3.92	3.93	3.89	.686
7. We achieve improved results when we work collaboratively.	4.15	4.20	4.05	.186
8. Collaboration is worth the extra effort involved.	4.20	4.29	4.05	.042*
9. I can trust the people I collaborate with to do a good job.	3.82	3.82	3.81	.956
10. I rely on collaboration to get the job done.	3.73	3.75	3.70	.690
11. Collaboration will be even more necessary in the future.	4.14	4.14	4.13	.920
12. I actively seek the input of others to make better decisions.	3.98	4.03	3.89	.296
13. The input of my peers matters to me when making important decisions.	4.01	4.03	3.97	.603
14. The input of my supervisors matters to me when making important decisions.	4.04	4.03	4.05	.884

Both PELA and SLT include peer group consultation as part of their programs. The inclusion of this pedagogical approach is based on the premise that group collaboration, as part of the program, will lead to improved learning outcomes in terms of collaborative competencies. While the peer groups (called “learning teams”) are a mandatory part of PELA, the SLT evaluation effort allows participants to (voluntarily) engage in peer groups to collaboratively examine organizational challenges (referred to as “leadership apps”), consider decisions jointly, and address shared managerial concerns. This presents an opportunity to investigate the ways in which a contemporary instructional method (peer group consultation) influences attitudes about collaboration.

The results from this investigation (Table 7, below) are mixed and surprising. While those who participate in peer groups were significantly more likely to agree that collaboration is worth the extra effort involved, mean responses indicate that they were somewhat less likely to agree that the input of their peers matters when making important decisions. This observation (though not statistically significant) is somewhat surprising as group work is intended to help participants better appreciate the benefits of collaboration firsthand. Group learning to develop collaborative competencies is thus worth additional investigation. For instance, considering the format and duration of these activities may indicate opportunity for adjustments.

**Table 7**  
*SLT Survey, Peer Group Versus No Peer Group*

Survey Question	Mean	Peer Group Follow-up (n=51)	No Peer Group Follow-up (n=71)	Sig.
1. Collaboration within our organization is critical to achieving our vision, values, and mission.	4.16	4.18	4.13	.678
2. Collaboration within the City needs improvement.	3.67	3.68	3.65	.841
3. Improved partnerships with organizations and individuals outside of our organization would help us meet our goals.	3.68	3.70	3.65	.714
4. My job requires me to collaborate with other departments frequently.	4.09	4.10	4.07	.862
5. A significant amount of my work week is spent on collaborative efforts.	3.50	3.50	3.50	.956
6. I would describe my previous collaborative experiences as positive.	3.92	3.91	3.92	.948
7. We achieve improved results when we work collaboratively.	4.15	4.20	4.09	.332
8. Collaboration is worth the extra effort involved.	4.20	4.31	4.09	.057*
9. I can trust the people I collaborate with to do a good job.	3.82	3.81	3.82	.904
10. I rely on collaboration to get the job done.	3.73	3.64	3.82	.184
11. Collaboration will be even more necessary in the future.	4.14	4.04	4.23	.148
12. I actively seek the input of others to make better decisions.	3.98	3.97	3.98	.990
13. The input of my peers matters to me when making important decisions.	4.01	3.93	4.07	.200
14. The input of my supervisors matters to me when making important decisions.	4.04	3.91	4.15	.094

As noted previously, the role of reflection and self-assessment is considered a way to examine individual development. For the purposes of this investigation, the SLT survey provided an opportunity for participants to indicate their personal level of effectiveness related to collaboration. For those who perceive themselves as above average in terms of collaborative ability, they are significantly more likely to indicate the importance of developing listening and communication skills, which can be considered an emerging competency area for leadership development (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*SLT Survey, Differences in Collaborative Ability*

Question	Self-Assessment: Above Average Collaboration Ability	Self-Assessment: Below Average Collaborative Ability	Sig.
I develop and hone listening and communication skills.	4.08	3.25	.000***

Connected to this point, there exists a strong positive relationship between individual self-assessment of collaborative skills and questions related to two emerging leadership competencies: self-awareness (“I know myself as a leader,” correlation coefficient: .347\*\*) and listening/communication (“I develop and hone listening and communication skills,” correlation coefficient: .490\*\*). This relationship exists among treatment group members but is not illustrated among control group members, suggesting a training impact.

Qualitative data collected from interviews of forty-nine PELA participants from the first five cohorts also supports, at least somewhat, the idea that collaborative competencies can be developed in executive leadership development program settings. Participants were asked which aspects of the program participants valued most and what impact the program has had on them with at

least one, and up to four, years of time passing after their participation. The interview data found PELA participants maintaining very positive impressions of their experience and almost uniformly saying it was a beneficial investment of their time with real impacts on how they lead in their organizations and communities.

Questions regarding what participants felt they gained from the program and how they perceived their leadership had changed yielded some interesting insights into what participants value most. The strongest theme from these questions has to do with participants feeling they understand different points of view better, are better listeners, and generally “deal with people better.” Participants consistently cited a change in how they view and appreciate others, implying that their style is less directive and more relation-based, consistent with working in collaborative settings. Additionally, there are many references to “seeing the big picture.” Another dominant theme was recognition by participants that their facilitation skills have been improved and utilized.

While specific mention of interorganizational collaboration was not a prominent theme from the interviews, there were some specific mentions of note in response to “has your leadership changed as a result of PELA, and if so, how?” The following comments illustrate participants’ feelings of changes in their leadership orientation toward collaborative governance:

“I can more effectively lead through collaboration.”

“Able to view issues from ... the community's frame of mind.”

“More aware of the shared aspect of leadership with shareholders.”

“More in tune with how to engage the public with projects before those projects are too far along.”

“Meeting facilitation; more effective meetings.”

While these statements are not generalizable, they do reflect recognition by program participants of changes in their leadership toward a more collaborative approach, again suggesting that collaborative competencies can be developed or enhanced through leadership development programs.

In short, the interview data strongly suggests congruence between participant's self-reported "take-aways" and the intent of the course to develop collaborative competencies consistent with the changing nature of public leadership. The data confirms that participants appreciate and recognize the importance of developing those collaborative skills. It also confirms that experiential learning methods, including case studies, role-playing activities, and applied learning projects are effective tools for developing those skills in learners.

### DISCUSSION

This investigation provided an opportunity to consider three related questions that affect both scholarship and practice: 1) *What additional leadership competencies are required of local government managers for collaborative governance?* 2) *Which programmatic components are best suited to develop collaborative leadership skills?* 3) *What are the most appropriate methods to evaluate the varied expected outcomes of collaborative leadership development programs?*

Our study illustrates two approaches to local government leadership development that yield varied outcomes. PELA participant feedback illustrates individual growth on all relevant measures over time. Comparatively, data from the SLT participants does not illustrate the same pattern. The distinctions between the PELA collaborative leadership development program and the SLT supervisory leadership program are notable, given these findings. The PELA program centers exclusively on the development of collaborative/community leadership skills, while the SLT program includes collaboration as a topic area within a broader supervisory skill curriculum. Despite similar instructional methods, responses from SLT and PELA participants do not mirror one another. This suggests that if collaboration is indeed a critical learning objective, training and development curriculum should be more fully focused on that specific outcome. Furthermore, the findings suggest that impact on individuals' collaborative competencies may require more extensive training considering the PELA program devotes a majority of the 10 days of programing to collaboration while collaboration skills are only one part of a three-day SLT program.

Second, while innovative program delivery methods are emphasized by the literature, the findings from this research offer mixed support for the claim that active (and/or peer) learning results in improved collaborative learning outcomes. While the PELA participants' qualitative feedback speaks to the value of these approaches, the SLT data suggests the importance of time in interpreting outcomes. The PELA feedback offers the benefit of extended reflection and application of lessons learned, but additional comparison data is necessary to allow for more nuanced examination of methods and competency development over time.

Finally, considering the ways in which we evaluate learning outcomes, particularly those related to collaborative leadership development, is an ongoing priority. As Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) noted, training program evaluation typically centered on reaction assessments. Both PELA and SLT evaluation approaches offer improvements on this approach and provide insights on how best to evaluate outcomes. In the SLT example, we gain insights on the relationship between self-assessment and emerging leadership competencies. While the validity of self-assessment may be questioned (Fox & Dinur, 1988) there is evidence from psychological studies to suggest that self-assessments can serve as predictors of performance (Shrauger & Osberg, 1981). Thus, findings from our investigation suggest that higher perceptions of collaborative ability may contribute to improvements related to collaborative leadership skills.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

There is strong support in the literature for an emerging set of competencies around collaborative governance that are distinct from those traditional leadership competencies rooted in hierarchy and formal authority. Evidence from two leadership development programs discussed here suggests that local government leaders do see deficiencies in these competencies and that programs that include or even focus on these competencies can lead to improvements in those competencies among participants. Results for the impact of specialized learning approaches, like the use of peer consultation groups, is mixed, suggesting that perhaps these additional competencies can be developed in similar fashion as other adult learning approaches. It also suggests we need more

careful study of leadership development programs, their overall impacts on leadership competencies and behaviors, and the specific impact of pedagogical tools such as peer groups, role-playing activities, and case studies.

There are a variety of questions that follow this investigation. To begin, this article highlights the ways training curricula can adapt to emphasize collaborative competencies, but follow-up questions emerge, including: what is the goal of developing collaborative competencies? Do these competencies result in a more collaborative workforce? How can this be assessed at the local government level? Also, this article identifies ways to evaluate expected training outcomes, but this effort centered on learning outcomes. The additional outcomes of behavioral change and organizational results offer avenues for future research. For instance, what are the tangible indicators of a more collaborative workforce (improved efficiency, effectiveness, or ethical activity, for instance)? To address these questions, additional research is necessary.

As collaborative governance continues to coalesce into a dominant framework or even paradigm for public administration generally (and local government specifically) we need to pay even more attention to the leadership development needs of those individuals that enact collaborative governance. This study is a step in this direction and it is the hope of the authors that others will contribute to better understanding “which programs, strategies, and curricula are most appropriate to build and nurture leadership skills for public leadership ‘across boundaries’” (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011, p. i92).

Beyond recommendations for what academic research might contribute to developing collaborative competencies, this study also suggests recommendations for practice. Local government leaders should approach leadership training and development strategically. They should identify specific outcome goals for training (e.g. goals around better facilitating collaboration), then align training content and methods with those goals. Furthermore, as part of a strategic approach to leadership development, more attention should be paid to evaluating training outcomes meaningfully. Although these are hard fiscal times for local governments, we argue that focusing on leadership

development (for collaborative governance in particular) has never been more important. Effective collaborative leadership may well be the key to local governments surviving, and even thriving, during this long-term fiscal crisis.

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### NOTES

1. The University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG) “consists of centers and programs in colleges and universities that engage in service and scholarship in order to enable citizens and their leaders to engage in dialogue, discussion, problem solving, and conflict resolution around public issues.” The network’s objectives include “support [ing] the use of best practices and systems for collaborative governance.” See <http://www.policyconsensus.org/uncg/> (accessed May 16, 2012).
2. These results were only from the first two cohorts of PELA and the before and after assessment was done retrospectively (meaning the participants answered both sets of questions *after* having completed the program). Though the N is too small to generalize from, the data suggests that PELA participants generally believed their leadership competencies were improved across the board. Additional qualitative data from five cohorts supports this conclusion.

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