



VirginiaTech

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**Of Land Grants, Leadership, Nonprofits and Social Change: A Model for
Catalyzing Sustained Community-Based Learning and Change**

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IIG

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Paper prepared for Delivery at the National Conference of the Association for Research on Non-Profit
Organizations and Voluntary Action, Denver, Colorado November 20-22, 2003.

Introduction

This essay addresses a difficult set of concerns. Can a comprehensive research-based Land Grant university with long-term interests in outreach and community-based technical assistance and capacity building develop a model that adequately describes its efforts as it conducts such activities and, more importantly, can it do so in a fashion that might prove useful to institutions elsewhere? This paper explores the case of Virginia Tech's effort to develop a regionally-based model to secure long-term social and economic change in a geographically significant, but economically ailing, part of Virginia. As it has sought to provide assistance to the Southside region of the Commonwealth, an area that has been sent reeling by broader economic trends, the University has had to re-imagine its role as institutional leader while simultaneously thinking anew about how best not only to share its expertise but also how to position the communities with which it is working for lasting social change and economic growth.

To say the challenge is daunting does not quite begin to capture the issues that must be addressed. But it is surely important to develop a conceptual model, that however simplifying, is aimed at providing decision-makers with a construct to help them to devise and to launch ways to direct and to evaluate a range of activities directed at securing social and economic change. This paper contributes to that process.

Hopefully, the rubric outlined here will allow others engaged in like efforts to think afresh about the character and organization of their labors and to refine further the constructs offered below. The essay is organized into several parts. First, the nature of the problems confronted in community change efforts is briefly outlined. Second, the tale of how a research university came to be involved in an attempt to re-imagine an economically distressed region of its home state is sketched. Finally, a rough heuristic model aimed at describing how the University has proceeded to address its challenge and why it has moved as it has is outlined. The conceptual scheme outlined draws on the leadership, community development and nongovernmental/nonprofit organization literatures to provide a description of the University's role at various levels of scale and across multiple social sectors and functions. The paper concludes with a discussion of several implications of the research.

The Character of the Challenge

Southside Virginia, a sprawling array of communities, whose most significant urban center is Danville, stretches from the western to the eastern reaches of Virginia along the state's border with North Carolina. The economic drivers of the area have long been tobacco farming, furniture manufacture and textiles production. (MDC, Inc., 2000: 8-10). But, in recent decades, each of these economic domains or markets has suffered strongly as a result of three basic changes in overarching economic conditions:

- The change in the nation's economy from goods producing to service producing industries for its employment base.
- The shift in economic production patterns from national to global scale especially to locations that afford lower labor or capitalization costs.
- The change in an array of industries from more labor-intensive technologies to more technology intensive forms of manufacturing. This trend, in particular, has hit the textile industry hard by reducing sharply the number of individuals employed in producing such goods- (Mulligan, 1995, 58).

In consequence, for some three decades and more now, and at a quickening pace, Southside has seen its traditional sources of employment close or downsize with relatively few firms replacing them. Furniture production has moved overseas, as have textile plants and at an especially rapid pace in the 1990s and the early years of the new century. Tobacco farmers, meanwhile, have been affected in two ways by globalization. First, the plant is now grown elsewhere and more cheaply. Secondly, the demand for tobacco products in the United States has declined in the face of increased popular awareness of the health risks associated with its use, leading tobacco product manufacturers to look to farmers abroad for the crop and to populations there for their markets to minimize shipping-related costs.

The strategic problem is clear as even a glance at recent and relatively high unemployment levels in the region suggests. How should these communities react to these changes? What sources of employment should they look to "to reinvent" themselves? What steps should they take to change their social and economic infrastructures in order to attract employers once again?

A Tentative Community Response

In late 1999 a group of prominent business leaders in Danville came together to establish a foundation aimed at addressing the region's ongoing economic slide. That group, the Future of the Piedmont Foundation, in turn commissioned the Manpower Development Corporation (MDC) to study the area and to suggest a strategy for its economic re-founding (MDC, 2000, 1-37). Not surprisingly, the firm proposed a transition to businesses that participated in, and arose from, the knowledge-based economy as it is these forms of enterprise that are now one of the primary employment growth centers of the nation. Of course, to call for such a transition from the traditional blue-collar and agriculture-related industries of the region was one thing. But to realize that transformation, quite another, and altogether intimidating prospect. This vision of community redevelopment implied a hard look at several important attributes of the region and the development of strategies to address them:

- Education at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels, as the workforce for new business forms required both different and increased levels of education than did the traditional employment base.
- An assessment of the remaining sources of employment in the area and an evaluation of whether and how they might be better positioned to provide comparative economic advantage in the nation's increasingly knowledge-based economy.
- A careful analysis of the region's telecommunication infrastructure since firms offering these services are now a key fulcrum point in the advancement of economic change and growth. These technologies also require a rethinking of traditional forms of activity and organization for collective enterprise—itsself no small challenge.
- Development of a strategy or better, set of strategies, by which to secure broad community awareness of the need for adjustment and the design of forms of intervention to assist area governments, businesses, community organizations, churches and other nonprofit entities in the development of a shared vision of needed change in citizen values, attitudes and mores (MDC, 2000).

To induce shifts in any one of these communally anchored attributes implied large-scale social learning and adjustment. And more difficult still, Foundation leaders came to understand that Danville alone, however entrepreneurial and economically and socially significant to the region, could not itself transform the region for a new future. Danville did not exist apart from its broader regional economy and it was that area that was declining — whether in Virginia or just across the state line in nearby North Carolina. Ultimately, the critical question for the Foundation became not only how to conceptualize what its leaders now saw as necessary, but how to identify and secure the expertise and capacity to develop a strategy to do it. The intellectual capital, research infrastructure and outreach interests of Virginia Tech, the Commonwealth's largest Land Grant university, represented one possible answer to the Foundation's resource quandary.

Virginia Tech's Response

The University responded to calls for help from the area's economic leaders by first asking its telecommunications and outreach leaders to work together to see what might be done. These ultimately proposed the development of a University center to be located in Danville whose remit it would be to secure social and economic change by drawing on Virginia Tech's intellectual infrastructure to galvanize support for sustained change across the region. The new center, dubbed the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), initially received support from the University, from the Future of the Piedmont Foundation affiliated businesses and from the local city (Danville) and county (Pittsylvania) governments. Virginia Tech also soon partnered with the local community college and a nearby private liberal arts four-year institution to develop the possibility of a larger localized infrastructure to support change.

Strategically, when the University agreed to provide assistance, it essentially assented to develop means by which to initiate a social movement in support of economic and social reinvention and, given the level of local unemployment and political angst, to do so in ways that produced perceived wins as quickly as possible. While University and IALR leaders initially did not pause to develop a grand strategy as they sought to provide aid, what follows seeks to describe their response to their challenge in light of specific analytical constructs drawn from the leadership, nonprofit and community development literatures. It is therefore somewhat artificial but hopefully no less helpful for coming after the fact as a possible heuristic for others engaged in similar activities.

Leadership for Community Regeneration: A Problem in Adaptive Change

Robert Rodale of the Rodale Institute developed the idea of regenerative agriculture in the early 1980s to call for forms of farming for developing nations that were modeled on natural processes (Rodale, 1983,32-35). He was struck by the fact that Nature regenerated even the most devastated of landscapes over time. Accordingly, he argued that people should act in a way that enhanced the environment's natural capacity to support a diversity of life and suggested that farming should be undertaken first and foremost with that fact in mind. Virginia Tech confronted an analogous challenge: how could it catalyze social and economic change while simultaneously augmenting and sustaining the community's capacity to develop and embrace its own vision of its future possibilities? How could it act and act in ways that affirmed the Future of the Piedmont Foundation's call for help without at the same time forestalling the creativity and engagement of individual citizens, businesses, community organizations and governments across the region? How could it both confirm and renew the social landscape in which it was at work and which it sought to regenerate?

The University's response was to act first to assist the Danville city and Pittsylvania county communities in a high profile and highly symbolic initiative to develop their information technology infrastructure — to install "high-end wire" for improved access to the nation's "information highway." But Virginia Tech officials always saw this as insufficient and, as the IALR was staffed, its leaders began to work across the University with other faculty and staff to develop additional responses to the University's (and region's) strategic problem. That test is neatly captured by a concept offered by Ronald Heifetz of Harvard University: adaptive work. Without anyone at the University calling it that but just as surely notwithstanding, Virginia Tech had been called upon to help Southside's citizens engage in adaptive work. It would lead a region to a new vision of itself while providing as it did so reasons for hope and new tools to help to realize those dreams for the future:

Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior. The exposure and orchestration of conflict-internal contradictions-within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways (Heifetz, 1994,22).

The gaps that needed bridging in these communities were quite large indeed: citizens did not much value higher education or education in general, as they had never really needed to do so. (MDC, 2000, 21) Work at the textile looms did not require higher order analytical thinking or capacities, nor did furniture manufacture or tobacco farming. And, as a population, they were justifiably proud of their long-time excellence in craft-based production. But these industries were very nearly in free fall as far as employment levels were concerned and they were decidedly unlikely to return to the region. So the key challenge became how to use the University's resources to help a region to develop its own strategy for social, and not merely economic, change.

It was a paradoxical role for a higher education institution. Virginia Tech was called upon at once to launch and to orchestrate opportunities for the communities of the region to grapple with their long-time understanding of themselves in the face of economic decline without letting the conflicts get so strong that they boiled over on the one hand or undermined the University's legitimacy on the other hand. Moreover, the University had also to keep all the stakeholders engaged focused on the tasks ahead. As textile and furniture plants continued to close it became very clear that the task at hand was to develop and to settle upon a multidimensional strategy, via adaptive work, to secure long-term regenerative social and economic change.

Heifetz has argued that the challenges implicit in this role, of holding stakeholders feet to the hard work of reconciling and compromising among competing values claims and perspectives, represent the critical and defining characteristic of adaptive leadership and therefore of adaptive work. Adaptive leaders help to define the nature of the work to be undertaken without thereby ordaining the outcomes of that labor. They seek only to offer a vision sufficient to bring the parties to focus on the claims before them without specifying how their search should be resolved. It is a difficult and often conflict-filled balancing act:

In this view, getting people to clarify what matters most, in what balance, with what trade-offs, becomes a central task... How can one sequence the issues or strengthen the bonds that join the stakeholders together as a community of interests so that they withstand the stresses of problem solving? ... Values are shaped and refined by rubbing against real problems, and people interpret their problems according to the values they hold. Different values shed light on the different opportunities and facets of a situation. The implication is important: *the inclusion of competing*

value perspectives may be essential to adaptive success (Heifetz, 1994, 22-23. Emphasis in original).

For example, if, to compete in the new economy, the schools of the region need better-trained teachers with more facility with, and openness to, technology, how do you raise this issue in a way that allows the community's citizens and institutions to come to acknowledge it and to decide how best to address it themselves? Or, more importantly, if citizens simply do not value education, especially higher education, very much because they have never needed to do so to obtain gainful employment, how do you catalyze broad scale conversation about this question and the development of strategies to address it?

In short, the University confronted a need, when it offered to seek to assist Southside's communities, not only to deliver a technical fix for the region (none existed in truth) but to spark a process of social learning and change that might take years or even decades to come to fruition. University leaders needed not only to spur adaptive learning, but also to do so in a highly adaptive and evolutionary way. The essential tactical question became how to seek to do so while sustaining the legitimacy of the University's role and providing the region's communities hope for the future. Too much focus on the University as potential savior could interfere with the adaptive work necessary for community awakening to the need for change, while too little apparent progress could rob the citizens of hope — amidst ongoing and highly publicized plant closings that together made that virtue even more precious — even as the effort began (Luke, 1997).

The Holding Environment for Social — and therefore for Economic — Change

Heifetz has suggested that adaptive leaders need self consciously to create holding environments in which organizations or communities may undertake the difficult work of adaptive change- (Heifetz, 1994, 104-113). The concept requires that leaders shepherd a social learning process that both tests reality and clarifies values on an evolutionary basis. Such a process is innately stressful for those involved and managing that stress becomes a central responsibility of leadership. The stress is particularly strong and hard to manage, when as in the Southside region, scapegoating and blame casting of a pantheon of possible villains — other nations, contemptible corporate leaders, government trade policy, globalization — can get in the way of developing constructive responses to the realities confronting the community. For Heifetz, a “holding environment consists of any relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of

another party and facilitate adaptive work” (Heifetz, 1994, 102-103). But in Southside that power is neither certain nor secure for Virginia Tech, resting as it must on the communities and their citizens allowing the University the legitimacy to engage with them in adaptive work. The University’s authority must finally be founded, and re-founded often, on the basis of perceived reciprocal ties, on mutuality. In Southside, it rests on little more than the perceived potential efficacy of the University to deliver economic renewal and the social change that underpins it. Virginia Tech must work not only to ensure that the communities with which it collaborates actually come to confront the realities of their situation, but that they do so in a fashion that secures enough “wins” to continue to ensure support for the hard sledding that such adaptive work entails. In consequence, the University, or for that matter, any adaptive leader engaged in community development, must discern leverage points for change. It must identify places/spaces at which it may intervene with results that ultimately encourage continuing adaptive work.

As a part of that process its leaders must consider that its actions will create holding environments at multiple scales and that this fact complicates their task. As its leaders craft initiatives they will wish to offer those at the appropriate scale: organizational, community or regional. And since labors at any one of these affects the others, university officials must seek to identify the implications of their efforts at one scale for the others. These judgments of relationships are simply that but they should be framed as artfully as possible and in consultation with participants from the levels of activity in play. A discussion of certain of the spaces in which universities might intervene to encourage adaptive work and how they have thus far been employed in the Southside effort follows.

The Functional Imperatives and Levers for Change in the Holding Environment

Given the character of its general strategic challenge, the University has had not only to seek points of comparative economic advantage for Southside but also to facilitate social understanding and learning among a wide variety of stakeholders in the region. To succeed, this learning must address the changed economic and social conditions as well as identify possible steps necessary to tackle them. Virginia Tech has sought to take up both of these tests by developing three basic strategic interventions or forms of collaboration or partnership that may usefully be sorted into two broad categories. The first might be labeled education and socialization and has entailed the use of several different tools and strategies. The second might be labeled technology transfer and research and development. These categories are not

absolute and their boundaries are porous. The first category of intervention forms encourages community change and learning indirectly, while the second involves a more direct sharing of University intellectual capital for the principal purpose of developing comparative economic advantage. But it is clear that social learning can yield comparative economic advantage and technology transfer can surely yield social learning so these categories should not be seen as discrete. Nevertheless, broadly, education and socialization initiatives are aimed foremost at encouraging social learning, while technology and research transfer has been targeted to provide highly visible economic gains — whether they encourage social learning directly or not. The explicit hope of University leaders has been that successful technology and research sharing will accord social and institutional legitimacy to the University and encourage support for the change process itself. Brief descriptions and examples of each sort of collaborative initiative as they have been pursued in Southside follow.

Category One: Collaboration with Education and Socialization Institutions

Few social processes are so potentially powerful as education in the development of individual values, perspectives and beliefs. Thinkers as far back as Plato and Aristotle understood clearly how much impact education could have on what one thinks, values and believes. So, one key place to look to secure community change is to public (and private) institutions of education. If drop out rates are high (as in this region of Virginia) or numbers going on to higher education are relatively low (as is the case in Southside) and changes in the economy demand that these trends be addressed, modifications in who teaches and how as well as what they teach can help to reshape social outcomes (MDC, 2000,26-28). Accordingly, to facilitate a rethinking of widely held community values concerning education, an adaptive leader might seek to seed changes in the forms of that education, in curricula and in teacher continuing education. And, indeed, Virginia Tech has advanced initiatives related to all of these by creating a magnet school oriented to information technology, by working with the Danville and Pittsylvania school systems to construct new curricula that integrate technology more effectively and by developing new forms of teacher training in information technology. These interventions may begin as technical assistance but to succeed they must allow those engaged to develop new capacities and fresh ways of thinking about their roles. Otherwise, those targeted will not change their habits of mind and values and behave differently. As with provision of the “wire,” simply providing teachers with software or new skill sets will do little to change attitudes or

ways of teaching. What matters is that classroom leaders adopt those tools and make them their own. With such wholesale adoption of innovation comes real change in ways of thinking. Virginia Tech has sought self-consciously to use its brand identity in high-end telecommunications and information technology as a lever for broader based rethinking and institutional (read teacher and school system) learning. In effect, technology has been used to create school-scale (organizational) holding environments in which teachers can begin to rethink their assumptions about the potential reach and likely roles of their students. Once changes have been adopted by large numbers at this scale they can be shared across schools within school districts and finally among systems throughout the region.

But, of course, education itself is conditioned. It does not proceed in a vacuum. If parents do not value education, do not encourage study or encourage exploration of only that which they perceive to be “useful” the chances are high that their children will follow suit. So, formal education can only ever be part of the story in securing community-based learning and change. Another way to reach family members is to work to develop the community organizations with which they are engaged and which serve in part to acculturate them to their habits, values and beliefs. Virginia Tech has sought to design leadership and management development programs for the Southside nonprofit community’s institutions as well as to assist such organizations with developing their organizational and fiscal capacities to play their roles more effectively. Such capacity-building interventions allow those leading these organizations to share the vision or imperative for rethinking how citizens view their world without demanding allegiance to one or another perspective concerning how to address it. Moreover, and more importantly, they are thereby given latitude to define how the region’s challenges affect and can be addressed by their own institutions.

Nonprofit organization leaders can be encouraged by third parties (here, Virginia Tech representatives) to think about the challenges implicit in economic change for their organizational missions, for the social fabric, for the shared belief sets of their members as well as for the broader community in which they live. And this process is obviously central to adaptive work. As these possibilities are multiplied, those individuals engaged in rethinking begin to constitute a network for a potential new vision of the community; one whose warp and woof they develop for themselves and which is linked to their own identities and understanding of the organizations they animate. Ultimately, social learning requires the

engagement of hearts and minds and that process must occur slowly as new norms and expectations come to be built and shared.

In addition, work with nonprofit organizations permits the University to reach many involved in the for profit and public sectors as well since their members are often active in faith-based organizations, volunteer or serve on governing boards for community-based service providers, civic clubs and charities (Rotary, Masons, Lions, Red Cross, etc.). Work with third sector institutions provides the University an opportunity both to outline the conditions that appear to be demanding change and to allow community leaders to wrestle with how those social conditions are affecting the missions and ongoing work of their organizations. Faith based institutions can be especially powerful leverage points if their memberships become convinced of the need for change and its perceived imperatives can be linked to their members' shared creeds. For Southside, these institutions are especially critical as they are important social arbiters for the African American population. That citizenry has too often been ignored or worse historically in regional community decision-making. The University has launched a special effort to reach and to empower this community to participate in social change (IALR, 2003, 2).

Partnerships with Area Governments

Governments can support adaptive work and the social learning that such work encourages in many ways. Their representatives, especially elected and high-level institutional leaders, can communicate the need for change and what it requires, can provide resources to help to institutionalize the possibility of community learning through one or more routinized and formal decision processes (such as budgeting, zoning, planning and regulation), can design and launch participatory visioning processes that permit citizens to identify and to confront the needs of their communities for themselves, can offer more appropriate workforce training and development programs and so on. Governments are also critical players in education and the role that education can play in social change via socialization. Virginia Tech has thus far partnered with local governments in Southside to help develop its physical facilities for IALR and to garner resources from other levels of government to secure its public education and workforce training related initiatives.

Category Two: Collaborating to Transfer Technology or to Apply the Fruits of Discipline-Based Research

This category of partnership finds University researchers and representatives working jointly with economic entities in the region to refine and/or to develop potentials for comparative economic advantage. For example, Southside has several firms involved with polymers in some form in their production processes and leaders of these companies are working with researchers at Virginia Tech to refine and develop their products in light of the latest research. Similarly, horticulture researchers are working with interested tobacco farmers to replace their crop with ornamental plants that can often yield equivalent (that is, relatively high) profit margins. Mechanical engineers are seeking to develop a new generation of unmanned vehicles for the U.S. Army at a racetrack in Danville. And forestry researchers are working with landowners and timber companies to determine how best to use existing woodlands to better effect to build more sustainable yields while having fewer detrimental environmental impacts. These examples find the University's personnel seeking to help existing firms develop a new product or to improve those already in production by using existing infrastructure in new ways so as to develop possibilities for different forms of employment. Of course these two basic types of intervention are linked: at their best and in the long pull, education and other related interventions will "home grow" individuals for these new roles as they evolve. The often unstated hope is that synergies among these efforts will reshape the workforce over time to equip it for new kinds of knowledge-based employment.

Thinking of Partnership Building and Interventions as Learning Action Networks

One very useful way to conceive of the University's efforts to encourage the communities and stakeholders with which it is cooperating in their adaptive work is to argue that its interventions help the organizations and citizens with which it engages to develop learning action networks (LAN's) or "sets of relationships which lay over and complement formal organizational structures linking individuals together by the flow of information, and ideas (Clarke and Roome, 1995). Importantly, "These networks are embedded in the complex of organizational and social relationships, management structures and processes that constitute business and its social context" (Clarke, 1999).¹ LAN's, once developed, represent multi-party mechanisms by which those engaged can develop new ways and forms of knowing and can construct and test new forms of cooperative action. One can conceive of the University's technology transfer efforts as developing LAN's that not only may encourage economic change but also result in new paths of communication and

social interaction that may result in shared understandings that otherwise would not have occurred. Similarly, education related change could mobilize new ways of thinking about curriculum and the relationship of formal schooling to life's possibilities by encouraging the development of different networks of interaction and cooperation than those that had existed previously. More deeply, these new linkages would be animated by different understandings and views of the potentials and possibilities that might exist for students upon graduation. Interventions through and with nonprofit organizations may not only lend capacity to those entities but may work to change citizen attitudes and views toward whether and how their communities might change and how to conceive of their collective role and capacity to secure those changes (Foster-Fishman, et.al. 2001, 244-245). Leadership programs could sensitize third sector leaders, for example, to the connections between their missions and processes and socialization and to the potentials for collective action to press for new visions of the future for their members and clients (Roberts, 2000, 170,172). LAN's between and among such organizations and across the business, government and non-profit sectors may illuminate and sharpen issues at play, while also creating and deepening the communication channels by which these may be considered and addressed.

Learning action networks represent inter-organizational and inter-sectoral linkages that are typified by frequent interaction and, ultimately, when successfully established, norms of mutuality and trust. These inclusive networks of learning and action can link disparate stakeholders and promote identification and negotiation of differences and conflicts. LAN's bridge multiple stakeholder groups whose memberships might otherwise not come to know the positions and perspectives of their counterparts. As individuals animate these networks they develop new skill sets, new forms and volumes of communication and thereby promote social learning and change. Taken together a map of LAN's is likely to resemble far-flung and connected nodes of the equivalent of organizational and social cytoplasmⁱⁱ (Roome and Clarke, 2002, 80). Further, not only do these pathways represent the possibility of informed and cooperatively derived change, they ~~also~~ are likely to improve the effectiveness of the organizations whose bounds they traverse. To the extent that they do so they may literally be the social conduits by which sectors of the community come to articulate and found a vision for change that constitutes a fresh identity and a new orientation to the future (Figueroa, et.al. 2002, 36).

If this represents the potential of these networks then the University's test is clear: it must help these institutionalized communication paths to form, must encourage the norms of reciprocity and mutuality on which their construction and success depends and must help to build the organizational capacities that together permit their growth and continuing vitality- (Roome and Clarke, 2002, 97-99). None of these tasks is easy but the construct clarifies the geography in which efforts to secure regenerative change must proceed, while suggesting how important conflict management and genuine collaborative efforts are likely to be to success (Figueroa et.al., 2002, 5). And more, network analysis of this sort suggests that process matters but that it alone is not sufficient to create the conditions for social learning. Process interventions must be accompanied by initiatives aimed at providing glimpses of the possibilities for the future if new thinking and new forms of interaction can be elaborated and acted upon. And these possibilities must be elucidated by community organizations and citizens rather than imposed by university or other "outside" actors.

Strategically, these conditions suggest that the University should view its relations with organizational players in light of what they may contribute to the growth of LAN-based social learning. This makes the nonprofit sector critical not only because so many of its member organizations are the product of direct citizen engagement, but because third sector organization governing board and general memberships cross the boundaries of government and market institutions. Universities that would encourage adaptive work should work with the leaders and members of these organizations and seek to intervene in ways in collaboration with them that not only build their organizations' capacities but also are likely to encourage learning across the networks of which they are a part. So, universities should seek to identify the individuals located in nonprofit organization communication networks whose roles position them to work across organization and sectoral boundaries. In practical terms, this may mean, for example, mapping the networks by which executive directors of United Way and social service organizations relate and then seeking ways and means by which to work with those leaders to facilitate their construction of steps for their organizations to reposition themselves to address the potential for a different future. Boys and Girls Clubs leaders might, for example, be encouraged to partner with local governments to provide after school tutoring or to offer special learning programs for troubled students. Alternately, they might be asked to work with church leaders to devise a palette of learning-centered initiatives that seek foremost to emphasize

the importance of education for future personal and professional success. This sort of intervention by the Land Grant could instigate inter-organizational communication, effectively develop new patterns of interaction and result in learning for all concerned. Even as it encourages such efforts, the Land Grant's representatives should take care to sharpen questions and create opportunities for values clarifying interactions, rather than to pretend to provide "answers" to those with whom it works (Foster-Fishman, et.al., 2001, 251). It is easy to multiply these examples to include participants from for-profit entities. But what is noteworthy, and without diminishing the role of actors from the other sectors, is how strategically positioned third sector institutions are to play critical roles in communication and learning networks that ultimately establish the conditions for social change. Indeed, it may not be far fetched to contend that a university ignores the critical potential of these institutions for community development at peril of its failure to encourage adaptive work and therefore of its role in adaptive leadership.

The Elements of a Model for Catalyzing Social Learning and Community Change

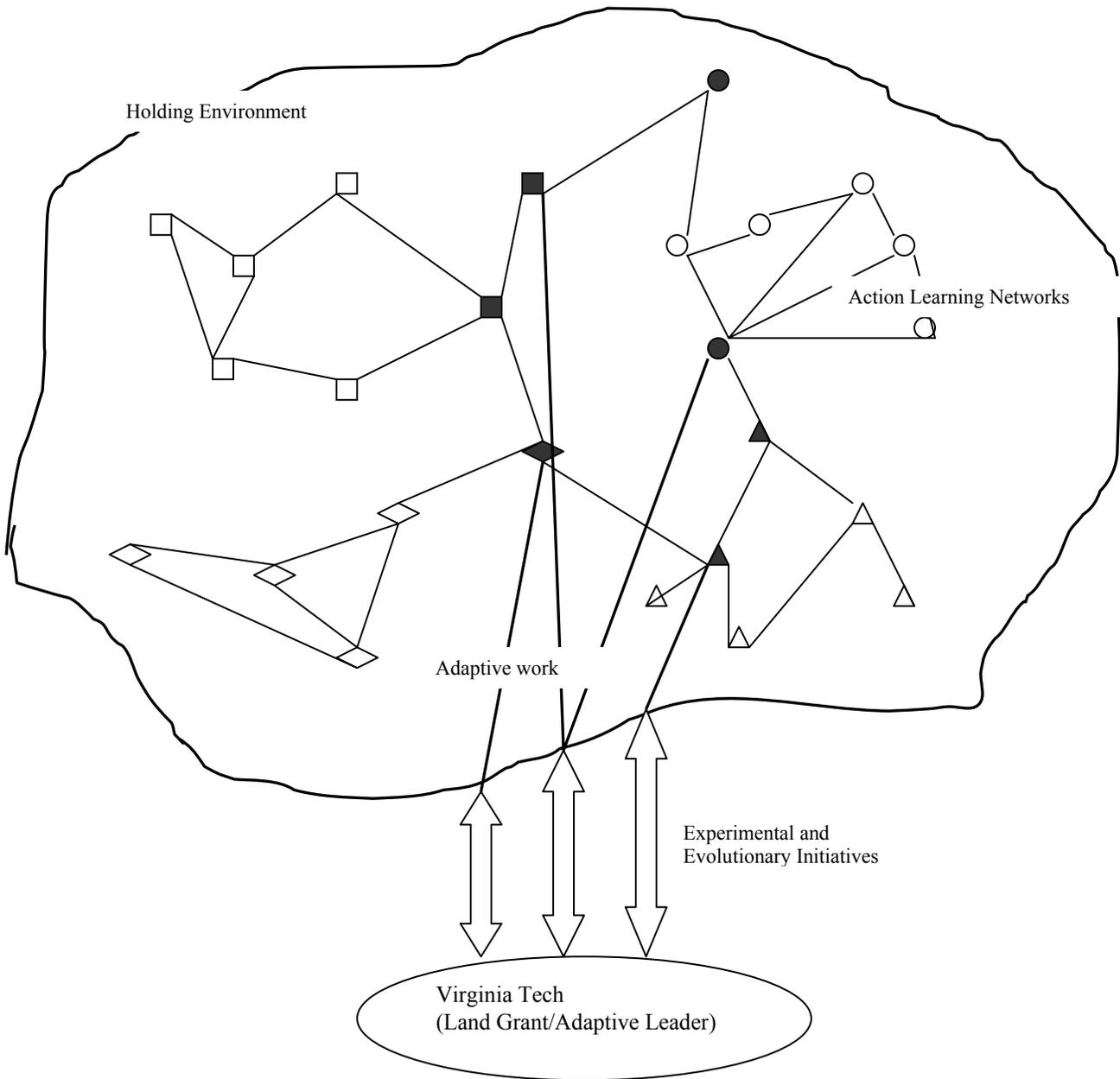
This analysis suggests the following propositions that together constitute the building blocks of a model by which Land Grants may seek to encourage and facilitate community-based social learning and change:

- The leader of such efforts (the university) should begin from a position of humility with an eye to helping those with whom it will engage to address actively and successfully their own adaptive work. That implies that while the university might suggest direction and even offer strategies, it cannot and should not pretend thereby to orchestrate the processes it has unleashed (Luke, 1997).
- Nevertheless, the university is responsible for creating and maintaining a holding environment that encourages institutions and citizens alike to grapple with the central questions confronting their communities. Unmediated conflict or poorly constructed understanding of the issues in play can poison an opportunity for a community to reconceive its possibilities and the university (leader) may properly be held to account if it allows conflict to come to such a level that it undermines the possibilities for constructive change (Figueroa, et.al, 2002, 16-17).

- Universities playing these roles should evaluate all of the efforts in which they engage in light of how they might interact and affect social learning. Will they help to form learning action networks? Will specific interventions offer opportunities directly or indirectly for public, nonprofit and business organizations to rethink their strategic assumptions and roles? (Rowley, 1997: 887-893).
- Will citizens find ways and means by which to share their concerns and especially their fears as an integral part of any authoritative decision processes undertaken? If not, learning action networks are unlikely to arise and even less likely to be sustained if they do arise (Foster-Fishman et. al., 2001, 251-252).
- The leader — the Land Grant in this case — should be open to learning and should see all of the processes in which it plays roles in adaptive and evolutionary terms.
Circumstances and contexts change and these deserve attention for their own sake. Values, mores and cultural assumptions do not shift overnight. Thus, initiatives aimed at securing such adjustments should be built on norms of patience, honest experimentation and openness to rethinking the premises of the interventions undertaken. Doubtless, this will be especially tough to achieve in an environment of cascading bad economic news in which the temptation to demonize someone, anyone, for the very real social pain being endured, is high. Moreover, that same constellation of social forces will tempt many to demand panaceas where none exist. Again, despite these pressures, the leader must encourage patience and constructive engagement in a common and evolutionary search for possibilities. Finally, all of these initiatives should be undertaken with the collaboration of stakeholders from organizations and individuals from the affected communities. There is no room for paternalism or professional hubris if the aim is for these populations to come to understand and create strategies for addressing their collective futures themselves. That, of course, is the hard part.

- All network development activities — whether direct or indirect as distinguished above — should be viewed as opportunities to encourage collaboration and cooperation and the denser and more variegated those relationships the better (Rowley, 1997, 892).

Figure 1 illustrates how these networks might relate to the forms of intervention employed at a specific moment in an inter-organizational environment (community scale holding environment).



Concluding Reflections

Virginia Tech cannot yet claim success in its bold attempt to lend its human and social capital to assist in a region's mobilization for social and economic change. What can be said is that the University can now identify the nature of its principal challenges and perhaps may have an organizing heuristic that may permit it to undertake its efforts more self-consciously and strategically. That proposition does not imply control over either the social energies that have been unleashed nor over the outcomes that those forces and the processes tied to them may yield.

That fact implies a double paradox. First, Virginia Tech could succeed even if the Southside region ultimately fails to reinvent itself. That outcome could occur because so much of the process must unfold beyond the University's purview and it is difficult not to conclude in a democracy that such is how it should be. Perhaps, for example, these communities will settle for only insufficient social change in the face of rapid economic transformation. That is, perhaps despite the University's best (and, let us assume, effective) efforts the region-wide holding environment created in this project may yield conflicts over aims, questions over strategies or values tradeoffs that are not successfully reconciled and with which the communities only partly or inadequately cope. To recognize this possibility; that the University could succeed in its adaptive leadership role while the communities with which it is working could fail in undertaking adaptive learning successfully, rightly roots the adaptive leader in a posture of humility. Adaptive leaders may launch change, they may channel it to some extent, but they can neither ordain its character nor pretend that they alone did anything but encourage a process or set of processes that yielded it. Perhaps that is a powerful lesson unto itself.

But secondly, and perhaps even more paradoxically, the University and its partner communities might succeed in their efforts to facilitate adaptive change through the encouragement of collaborative learning action networks that result in social change but the region may still fail to create conditions that permit it to reinvent itself for the New Economy. While this might constitute "failure" as Future of the Piedmont Foundation leaders or MDC analysts have defined the challenge, it might nonetheless represent success for the University and the communities involved.

This could be so if

1. The processes catalyzed by the University resulted in the construction of self-reinforcing learning action networks that facilitated social learning and social and economic capital growth, even if this did not serve the vision originally foreseen by the region's economic elites or their consultants
2. Or, relatedly, the region had been energized broadly to consider its future and had selected its course deliberately after appropriate discussion and debate. In this circumstance, the University could claim project success and democratic legitimacy whether or not its actions resulted in the realization of the Foundation's original economic development claim. Noting this potential outcome reminds the observer that community building and development both antecedes and undergirds economic possibility and is worth undertaking for its own sake. Perhaps community building should not be driven by an instrumental aspiration alone. In any case, the lesson may well be that universities should not narrow their reasons for intervention or the calculus on which they devise leadership and assistance initiatives to economic claims alone.

Finally, and as an organizing proposition, viewing these community redevelopment initiatives through the lenses of adaptive leadership and learning action network development implies that universities themselves must address at least two large looming organizational problems of their own even as they seek to assist others in their re-founding efforts. First, universities are extraordinarily sub-specialized and "siloeed" organizations whose members do not often speak with one another across organizational lines. Thus, environmental engineers may share a great deal by way of substantive interests with environmental policy analysts and with crop and soil scientists, for example, but never realize that fact since little would ever bring them together across disciplinary boundaries within the university's formal organizational structure (its college and departmental organizational silos). To overcome this difficulty, higher education leaders will need to devise ways not only to provide incentives for their faculties and professionals to provide their professional assistance and know-how but also to encourage cross-disciplinary communication and cooperation among those faculties and staffs (McDowell, 2003, 48). Interestingly, this problem is something of a mirror image of that confronting the communities that universities seek to assist. Without a

self-conscious effort to develop inter-organizational action learning networks of its own, one hand at the university may literally have no clue what the other has undertaken, with the likelihood of failure rising exponentially as a consequence. Higher education institutions engaged in community development initiatives must develop internal learning action networks of cooperation, mutuality and reciprocity that result in levels of trust and capacity that mirror those they seek to encourage in the communities they seek to assist. Universities will need to develop individuals with strong communication and interpersonal skills who can communicate why internal inter-organizational networks matter for external community development success and do so in ways that suggest what steps might help in securing those linkages even when conflict and distrust or worse initially characterizes such relations as may exist. Such interventions create an internal environment capable of addressing and managing conflicts effectively. And on such success an entire edifice of possible community learning and regeneration ultimately must rest. This reality requires that the “community development” issue for universities be redefined as not only demanding society’s engagement and learning but the realization of exactly those same ends within the university as well. To deal well with complex social problems beyond their walls, universities must develop capacities to catalyze the assistance of many of their otherwise organizationally canalized professionals. Profound community change will not be accomplished by technical assistance alone and communities will not be led to address adaptive work without their university partners also engaging in like processes within their own boundaries.

Notes

i. Clarke analyzes these networks as they appear within and among business organizations and their stakeholders. I extend the notion here to all forms of organization whether market-driven, public or non-profit in character.

ii. Cytoplasm here is meant to underscore the vibrant, organic and multidimensional character of these relationships. The metaphor also highlights the considerable complexity of these channels of communication and action.

Acknowledgement:

Thank you to Lisa Poley, a doctoral student in Environmental Design and Planning at Virginia Tech, for her helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks also to David Moore, a Research Associate with the Institute for Innovative Governance at Virginia Tech, for his observations on an earlier draft.

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