community
foundation
practice
lab

Theme 1: Leadership by a CF
Ways in which a CF can be a leader in the community
(written as a stimulus for a discussion in travel groups with CF hosts
Boris Strečanský, September 2014)

There are various ways in which leadership can be understood. The traditional understanding of leadership includes elements of hierarchy, verticality and visibility (and the like). Leadership can be seen as taking a **bold** move, a courageous action, opening a controversial debate or simply launching a grant-program having these parameters in the context of the community.

But there are also other ways in which leadership is expressed in life and is depicted in thinking on the subject. Many of these look at leadership from a non-hierarchical perspective as a horizontal, distributed, peer-led collaborative effort for shared purpose. These are referred to, for example, as:

- *facilitative leadership* - allowing others to stand off and emerge, focused on processes that enable something shared to happen,
- *distributive leadership* - a practice of achieving a complex goal by decentralized and seemingly uncoordinated actions of number of different actors, that lead towards a shared common goal,
- *shared leadership* – based on strong team-work
- *collaborative leadership* - recognizing conscious application of skills, developing relationships, using empathy, reading the context, (and other elements), all focused and made by various actors as a concentrated effort on working towards a shared outcome.

In this polarity between the hierarchical and non-hierarchical ways of looking at leadership, how does this modern buzz-word translate into the key dimensions[1] of CF work?

1. Leadership and the Broad Mission focused on Quality of Life of the Community
Quality of life is such a broad and inclusive definition that it almost includes everything, so nothing or no one shall feel excluded. Can we therefore look for the leadership dimension in the way in which a given CF uniquely interprets this broad notion in its purposeful focus on particular issues? Or not? Is leadership the courage of a CF to include into its broad mission a sensitive and controversial topic or a cause? Is it the ability to select and discern what is important and what is less and why? If so, how is this done? Did such situations occur? How did the CF act on them? And why?

2. Leadership and Grant-Making
Grant-making is one of the key functions of a community foundation. Is the leadership in grant-making in the operational aspect of the foundation? For example in ability to say no? Or is the leadership more in the strategic aspect of the grant-making – its focus, goals, themes? Is leadership present when there is a need for a CF to take a "leap of faith" for all sorts of reasons? For example making an innovative grant with high risks or investments into community group that is controversial to the mainstream.

3. **Leadership and the Local Resources (of a CF)**

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[1] These are based on what is often accepted as "key" elements of CFs

CFs are based on local resources (financial and non-financial). What kind of leadership does a CF practice in this field in its context? How does it lead (in all its dimensions) in its practice of local resource generation as practiced fundraising is a form of practiced leadership? What about relationship development experience with individual donors when everybody knows everybody and it seems that there is nothing new to be learned about potential donors interests and preferences. And what about unlocking the leadership potential of the owners of local resources - prominent donors with a potential. Is there a role for a CF to play? Not to mention the new methods of raising funds, such as crowndsourcing, growing on-line community of supporters. These are all potential issues to explore.

4. **Leadership and Assets of a CF**

Building long-term CF assets is not a controversial plan or activity anymore (or is it?:-). It is a relatively high-level goal and effort for most CFs and, from the standpoint of day-to-day needs, perhaps not always the most effective activity. Some CFs pursued this path and achieved great results, others tried hard, without such results. Why? Some CFs face dilemmas about use of the revenues generated by the assets – should they be put towards more mundane purposes or towards more crazy ideas. Some CFs choose strategies of building their assets through a number of little contributions, others by targeting wealthy donors. All these are instances where leadership and asset development of a CF meet and interesting situations emerge.

5. **Leadership and Geographic Focus**

A CF´s geographic coverage is generally determined by the assumptions and judgment of its founders and board members regarding the adequacy and appropriateness of the scale of its resources to act meaningfully in a territory with a certain number of people. Into this judgment call are included estimations and aspirations reflecting the future development of the foundation as well as needs of people in the geographic area. Some CFs expand their coverage after some time. Some do not. Have you faced a difficult decision-making point in this aspect of CF development? Let us explore.

6. **Leadership and Diverse and Reflective Boards, not Controlled by any Single Entity**

Perhaps leadership comes most easily into mind in relation to boards, as it connects to the composition of boards, their diversity, the boldness of their ideas or the toughness of decisions that boards have to take at times. Let us explore these aspects.

7. **Leadership and Accountability to the Community**

The detail and depth of reporting of CFs to the public through well crafted annual report is their typical future. There were times, not that long ago, when an annual report was a unique thing, a sort of leadership act, in a local and national context (for example, when the Transparency International chapter would not have its annual report). But these times are gone and the expectation of accountability of non-profit organizations on the part of different stakeholders has increased. Is there a leadership dimension for CFs in this area, for example, in bringing the development issues of the community to people or in telling an important story in a different way? But does anybody listen? And what about the interactive two-way communication through social networks? Were there any challenging situations that the CF had to respond to?

Theme 2: ENGAGEMENT
Ways in which CFs can intensify citizen / community / donor engagement
(written as stimulus for a discussion in travel groups with CF hosts
Boris Strečanský, September 2014)

Ways of engaging citizens and donors and how these may translate into the key dimensions[2] of CF work.

1. **Engagement and the Broad Mission focused on Quality of Life of the Community**

In what situations is the CF´s mission and progress in achieving its mission re-visited ? Are there any, and who is involved? Because the mission of a CF is typically very broad – there is a threat that the CF will become a "catch-all". CFs therefore develop a story, their own narrative of their mission in the community. What is it? And what place does engagement (of citizens, of donors, etc.) play in it? Who is not targeted by the CF for engagement? On the other hand, what is the engagement of citizens in life in their community beyond the activities of the CF? What are major barriers to engagement and what encourages it? How do you know this, and why do you think it is occurring? How does the CF understand and help to remove barriers to engagement, in case this is part of its strategy?

2. **Engagement and Grant-Making**

Grant-making programs typically apply criteria regarding the participation of volunteers or other forms of participation as a part of the desired outcomes or attributes of projects. Grantees see it often as a compulsory element and describe it eloquently. But what is the CF´s experience with this aspect of grants? Where is there real engagement happenng in your community? What drives people most and does the CF make use of this somehow? Does the CF use other strategies to stimulate engagement in its grants? For example, in terms of how grant-making is organized in the CF (the process), does the CF use any practices to increase the engagement of community or donors? For example, the public vetting of project proposals, voting, public hearings or other ways?

3. **Engagement and Local Resources (of a CF)**

The local donor engagement strategies of a CF: what are they, what is the experience with them and what are the trends we can identify based on these experiences? What strategies and tools does the CF use to keep local contributors engaged and giving repeatedly? How do local donors – small and large- respond to efforts to build longer-term relationships?

4. **Engagement and Assets of a CF**

What are the "assets" of the CF? Are there any experiences with campaigns for endowment? Is there an investment committee of the CF? If so, how does it work and how does CF communicate its work with its assets? If the assets of the CF also includes a number of people that are civic-minded and can be mobilized, how was this achieved and what motivates them?

5. **Engagement and Geographic Focus**

Some CFs face the challenge of how to keep citizens aware of the possibilities offered by the CF. This is partly a communication challenge. What ways does the CF actively use to meet this challenge? How do active citizens see the CF? How strong is their ownership feeling? Aren't the instincts of local loyalty of distinct communities within a geographic region

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[2] These are based on what is often accepted as "key" elements of CFs

stronger and the CF´s appeal builds on this? How does the CF to strengthen community identity and cohesion?

6. **Engagement and Diverse and Reflective Boards, not Controlled by any Single Entity**
How to grow engaged boards? What is the experience of the CF with this? What are the results so far? What can be learned from this experience? What different efforts does the foundation make to maintain a diverse board (capturing different perspectives in the community) and its ability to reflect well on the foundation's work? How does the CF keep a current overview of various sub-communities, groupings and subcultures in the community to keep its board up-to-date and relevant? Were there situations when the independence of the board was threatened or getting off-balance? Were there situations when this issue became a subject of discussion in the foundation?

7. **Engagement and Accountability to the Community**
Is there any link between the engagement of citizens and the CF´s accountability to the community? What is the experience of the CF with its accountability measures towards the community? What is it really that the community is interested to know? And how does the CF know this?

Theme 3: CF BUSINESS MODEL AND SUSTAINABILITY
(written as stimulus for discussion in travel groups with CF hosts
Boris Strečanský, September 2014)

The CF business model was one of the themes that most of the participants in the Study Trip 2014 indicated in the pre-study trip survey finding interesting and relevant to their needs. It is also an ongoing top issue in the chart of popularity of non-profit, civil society organizations.

Wiki provides a broad definition of a business model as: "*a broad range of informal and formal descriptions to represent core aspects of a business, including purpose, business process, target customers, offerings, strategies, infrastructure, organizational structures, trading practices, and operational processes and policies*".

In the community foundation context the business model may be looked at in the following framework:

All elements work together "somehow". For example each CF shapes the elements uniquely to the community – in response to a specific sense of the context, the nature of people that are in control of the foundation and other factors unique in each and every situation.

Business models also include all sorts of assumptions that the CF (both team and board) makes about itself and how it wants to function so that the elements of Program, Resources and Governance are present and work. For example, one assumption may be that the CF business model is based on zero growth. Another CF business model may be based on an assumption of steady growth. Another may give priority to building long-term assets over short-term turnover.

The Business model is also shaped by:

A) the narrative (story) of the CF: How does a CF explain and present its story, its general approach and values and how it translates this into its day-to-day and long-term business practice in a way that is meaningful and makes sense to an unfamiliar audience (and from a professional point of view as well).

B) The financial standing and the language of the finance of the organization, including the rationale behind key financial, fundraising, and expenditure decisions, balanced budgets, etc.

Sustainability. There are various stages of sustainability. Let's explore one that is maybe reasonable to explore after 20 (or, better, 10-15) years of the existence of the concept:

The point in time in the life of an organization when the previous efforts and investments are maturing, the reliance on foreign funding has decreased and is not anymore an issue, relationships are advancing and competences have grown so that the authority and gravity of the organization as well as its prospects of attracting and generating resources allow for the basic implementation of the mission of the organization in the community, generation of operational reserves and development of long-term assets.

Is this the situation, where Slovak CFs find themselves in? Let us discuss this.