The nonprofit sector has been undergoing significant change, particularly since the 2008–2009 recession. Many nonprofits recognize that sustainable social impact can only be accomplished collectively amongst partner organizations and stakeholders. However, there exists a huge gap between the current reality for nonprofit work and the desired outcomes for the sector. Major social issues such as housing, poverty, education, and domestic violence are complex problems that no one entity can solve. Add to that the reality of tight resources, forcing nonprofits to dispatch those resources with extreme care, and an economy that is slowly limping along, it is no wonder nonprofits are struggling to redefine themselves. Nevertheless, nonprofits continue to operate as they have for decades with a singular focus on their individual missions. The concept of multi-sector transformational change is still quite foreign to many, and although the number of examples of such inter-organizational endeavors is growing, the practice is still relatively new and without a significant history.

The literature reflects this disparity as well. Much of the research and literature is conducted and written from the perspective of working within a single organization, and those organizations are more likely to be from the for-profit sector. Well-known authors, such as Schein (1988, 2009, 2010, 2013), Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2001), Block (2011), Verlander (2012), Brooks and Edwards (2013), and Senge (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1999) all consult mainly, if not entirely, in the corporate world and exclusively within single organizations. Much of the theoretical underpinnings of their collective work applies universally across sectors, but the processes or techniques often do not fit in the nonprofit or public sectors. For example, Block’s consultant roles and faces of resistance outline common human themes that are relevant in most, if not all change efforts, but his approach to contracting (2011) simply does not work in multi-sector projects. Rather than a contracting meeting, multi-sector work requires a series of meetings to clarify the purpose and outcomes for the change. Often this work is divided into a discovery/planning contract and a design/implementation contract, specifically because the discovery and planning phase can be lengthy and unpredictable. Ackerman Anderson and Anderson’s Change Process Model (CPM) (2001) relies on transformational change theory, but their drivers for change take some effort to translate into a form usable by the nonprofit or public sector. Furthermore, language intensifies the differences amongst the sectors, a particularly challenging problem if multi-sector work includes all three sectors. Words and phrases like “return on investment,” “customer requirements,” “supply chain,” and “business process groups” do not necessarily have a nonprofit or public sector equivalent.

Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature that focuses specifically on community level change. Borri’s work (2012, 2014) specifically focuses on the power of conversation, connections, and collectively thinking together to raise...
standards in communities. He outlines his approach to transformational change in communities in four steps: converging, engaging, collaborating, and casting a vision (2012). Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007) apply complexity theory to their work, noting that in complex systems it is not possible to control outcomes. Rather, emergence, described as “. . . things that are unpredictable, which seem to result from the interaction between elements, and are outside any one agent’s control” (2007, p. 128) and resilience, “. . . the capacity to experience massive change and yet still maintain the integrity of the original” (2007, p. 65) are necessary attributes for successful transformational change and social innovation.

Dialogic OD (Bushe, 2013; Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Cummings & Cummings, 2014; Ray & Goppelt, 2013) offers additional theoretical and practical contributions to guide multi-sector transformational change. The traditional model of OD, now referred to as Diagnostic OD, places emphasis on planned change, top-down control, and the OD practitioner as an outside, objective observer (Ray & Goppelt, 2013). In contrast, Dialogic OD relies on the emergence of new ideas to guide the community toward its desired outcome, encourages the engagement of the whole community in co-creation, and recognizes that the OD practitioner is not separate from the larger system (Bushe, 2013). Dialogic OD “. . . is not about incremental change, which is how to make the current system better at what it already is and does. Transformation changes the very nature of the community to be better at what it aspires to be and do” (Bushe, 2013, p. 12). Dialogic OD is not exclusively practiced in communities – individual organizations in all three sectors can benefit from its application – but the practice of Dialogic OD aligns well with the requirements for successful multi-sector transformational change.

Undertaking multi-sector transformational change is substantially different than the vast majority of consulting case studies outlined in the literature. The challenges are many, including identifying stakeholders, determining leadership, building trust amongst stakeholders, coordinating work, and maintaining momentum and motivation. These differences require a new approach to multi-sector transformational change as well as the frameworks of transformative learning and organizational learning in order to succeed. There is still much to be learned about placing potential models into practice successfully. This paper will explore the differences between single organization transformational change and multi-sector transformational change, using Ackerman Anderson and Anderson’s CPM (2001) as the basis for comparison. It will also offer possible new approaches that are specifically designed with multi-sector work in mind.

Areas of Difference

Ackerman Anderson and Anderson’s CPM (2001) begins when an organization experiences a wake-up call indicating a need for change. The author’s divide the transformational change process into the following nine phases:

1. Prepare to Lead the Change
2. Create Organizational Vision, Commitment, and Capacity
3. Assess the Situation to Determine Design Requirements
4. Design the Desired State
5. Analyze the Impact
6. Plan and Organize for Implementation
7. Implement the Change
8. Celebrate and Integrate the New State
9. Learn and Course Correct

In my analysis of the differences, I was able to discern the following seven areas of difference between multi-sector transformational change and change within a single organization: scope, complexity, leadership, discovery phase, timeframe, structure, and lack of history. I will discuss each in detail.

Scope

The reach of a multi-sector change effort is far more extensive than single organization change, encompassing internal stakeholders as well as a comprehensive slice of external stakeholders. The CPM determines the scope of a change effort by analyzing the drivers for change (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001). As mentioned earlier, the drivers for change do not translate well in the public or nonprofit sectors. Instead, a more useful approach to determining scope is for the coalition leading the effort to develop a community assets map. Community assets include individuals, associations, institutions, natural resources, and local economic linkages and business assets (Allen et al., 2002). Mapping them gives
participants in the change effort a visual picture of what currently exists and where it is located. The map will also assist in identifying key stakeholder groups and determining system boundaries.

In addition to creating a community assets map to determine current reality, the coalition should also develop a system map in order to understand more fully how the change effort fits within the individual organizations as well as how it fits within the larger system. This can be accomplished by first understanding how the coalition is embedded or nested at three levels: (1) within the system of interest (the coalition itself), (2) within the enclosing system (the larger system), and (3) within the subsystems (the individual organizations) (Walton, 2004). Figure 1 gives an example of how the Vermont inpatient mental healthcare system is embedded within the larger healthcare system of Vermont. There are three subsystems within the system of interest: the state psychiatric hospital, six designated hospitals with non-secure beds, and twelve crisis bed facilities. Developing this map enables the coalition to discern the linkages amongst the various systems and whether there is any overlap in services or programs.

The second part of making sense of the system of interest is to map the system’s linkages by mapping the suprasystem: “The suprasystem is comprised of the system of interest and other connected systems” (Walton, 2004, p. 272). Using the same example from above, Figure 2 maps the suprasystem of the Vermont inpatient mental healthcare system. The suprasystem of Vermont’s mental healthcare system involves several organizations with both centralized and egalitarian relationships. Centralized relationships are characterized by dominance of one organization over another whereas egalitarian relationships tend to be more collegial (Walton, 2004). The double-headed arrows represent egalitarian relationships while the single-headed arrows signify centralized relationships. The suprasystem map delineates critical relationships to which the coalition will need to pay attention. As the coalition moves forward with change, the suprasystem map will provide insight into potential unanticipated consequences resulting from the change.

Finally, the focus of leadership attention factors into the scope of a transformational change project and is essentially mirror opposites between single organization change and multi-sector change. The CPM encourages organizational leaders to turn their focus away from external drivers to the internal drivers for change in their organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001), something to which they are typically unaccustomed. If a business is attempting to transform work processes to align better with current technology or a new product, the focus in large part will be internal with some attention paid to customers and the supply chain. The opposite is true for multi-sector transformational change. If a coalition leading transformational change is addressing issues within the inpatient mental healthcare system, for example, it must focus externally on all the other systems influencing it, to engage them in collective learning, and to determine leverage points within the larger system. The focus may shift slightly during implementation to ensure individual organizations are supported as they carry out the implementation, but the overall focus is still predominantly external.

Coalition leaders must find that delicate balance between internal and external focus throughout the project, an imperatively much less demanding within a single organization. Clearly, the scope of a multi-sector transformational change effort far exceeds that of a single organization effort and thus adds further complexity to an already complex project.

Complexity

The complexity of multi-sector transformational change projects far surpasses that of a project within an individual organization. The scope is already much broader, and the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders adds to that complexity. The systems map begins to identify those stakeholders, but the coalition needs to take that step further and conduct a social network analysis:

A social network is a social structure made up of individuals (or organizations) called “nodes,” which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or relationships of beliefs, knowledge, or prestige.
Social network analysis views social relationships in terms of network theory consisting of nodes and ties (also called edges, links, or connections). Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 1)

In doing so, the coalition begins to delve into the level of individuals. Social network analysis measures factors such as how close individuals are to others in the network, the degree of connectedness, the number of ties to others, and how well an individual’s ties know each other, to name a few (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). These measures will prove beneficial as the change effort progresses. Social networks are most useful when represented visually, and this can be accomplished through sophisticated software or simply drawn on paper. Social networks are as important in single organization change but are far less complex.

The political dynamics of change can be both challenging and advantageous. The CPM recommends addressing the political environment through open dialogue (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001). Change leaders within the organization are likely to be aware of those dynamics and can design a process for engaging participants in a constructive and generative manner. The political reality of a multi-sector change effort is considerably more complex. Not only is there intra-organizational politics, there is also inter-organizational politics and the politics of external stakeholders such as funders, local and state politicians, oversight agencies, and businesses. This requires an ongoing process of relationship building with all involved to create the space for open dialogue. Again, this adds another layer of complexity to the project.

Anticipating any type of unintended consequences of a change effort is the job of impact analysis. The CPM defines impact analysis as “... [assessing] the impacts of the desired state on the current organization and its culture and people. In essence, this function is a detailed gap analysis, determining the differences between the old state and the desired state” (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001, p. 171). While an individual organization can be quite complex, particularly if it is large and global, the task of conducting an impact analysis within a single organization is less demanding simply because it is less complex. In multi-sector transformational change, outcomes are uncertain, the process is continually emerging, and the environment is constantly changing, all of which are magnified by the number of entities involved in the change effort. Nonetheless, coalitions need to consider potential unintended consequences on a regular basis.

While an individual organization can be quite complex, particularly if it is large and global, the task of conducting an impact analysis within a single organization is less demanding simply because it is less complex. In multi-sector transformational change, outcomes are uncertain, the process is continually emerging, and the environment is constantly changing, all of which are magnified by the number of entities involved in the change effort. Nonetheless, coalitions need to consider potential unintended consequences on a regular basis.

Leadership

Transformational change requires a shift in mindset on the part of leaders, something that does not come easily to those accustomed to directing and controlling their organization. The CPM recommends extensive leadership training to prepare leaders for the rigors of transformational change, to support them in making the necessary shift in mindset and to convey the importance of allowing the process to emerge (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001). This preparation is critical in any transformational effort. Unfortunately, the resources to accomplish this are not likely to be available in a multi-sector change effort. The nonprofit and public sectors are famously resource poor and must instead improvise to find alternatives for this essential preparation. One option is to create the conditions for what Rein & Gustafsson refer to as “emergent communities of practice” (Rein & Gustafsson, 2007). These conditions include building trust, establishing a clear division of labor, ensuring key individuals have an apprentice, and offering opportunities for social bonding. If this seems unlikely to happen or too slow to happen, the coalition could also consider setting up a community of practice in a more formal manner. Although the process may be emergent, building leadership capacity into the effort is essential.

Transformative and organizational learning are key factors in transformational
change. Transformative learning is focused at the individual level and is defined as an individual’s ability to question and change one’s worldview (Henderson, 2002; Perkins et al., 2007; Silberstang & London, 2009). Transformative learning and organizational learning are interdependent, with transformative learning as the stimulus for organizational learning (Bess, Perkins, & McCown, 2011; Henderson, 2002; Perkins et al., 2007). Transformational change requires organizational learning capacity in the form of aligning organizational systems and creating a learning culture (Bess et al., 2011). Reflection is as important in organizational learning as it is in transformative learning (Bess et al., 2011). Leadership in both single and multi-sector change must be able to engage in and model transformative learning as well as develop a learning culture within the organizations. The challenge for coalition leaders is to grow learning cultures in multiple organizations. One approach is for the coalition to become its own learning organization and model the process and culture for the partner organizations.

Discovery Phase

The Upstream Change phase (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001) of the CPM is foundational to any transformational change effort regardless of complexity and scope. Nonetheless, how it unfolds in a single organization versus multiple organizations is quite different. The CPM recommends starting this phase by staffing the effort and developing a case for change by asking questions such as “Why transform?” “What needs to transform?” and “What outcomes do we want from this transformation?” (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001, p. 39). In multi-sector transformational change this phase is best described as a discovery phase, and the questions are framed differently. Such a change effort often evolves organically when a few organizations begin to realize they share interest in a particularly intractable problem and realize that no one organization is going to solve the problem. The question is not “Why transform?” – it is usually obvious that something needs to change – but rather “How do we come to a common agreement about the nature of the problem?” Community assets mapping, system mapping, and social network analysis are all part of this discovery process. Agreement on the nature of the problem must happen before answering any questions about outcomes or design for change.

Staffing a multi-sector change effort happens as the discovery phase reveals the various stakeholder groups that need to participate in the effort. Those initiating the change will need to build relationships amongst the stakeholder groups. Those sitting at the table may have very little in the way of a relationship with each other, and it is doubtful they will reach consensus on the vision or goals for the project until they have had a chance to build trust amongst themselves. If the effort is to be successful, then detractors must also be represented at the table, which adds to the challenge of relationship building. Many of the stakeholders are likely to be volunteers, which can change the nature of the relationship. All these factors contribute to a lengthy process of staffing the change effort. Ongoing dialogue amongst coalition members can facilitate the process of building those relationships. As Born points out in the Engage phase of his process:

> Multi-sector conversations provide the platform to understand that even though we all want the best for our community, and even though we have a common vision of what our community should be, agreement on how we go about making it that way need not be the same (2012, p. 41).

Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2001) also support the use of dialogue in building commitment and aligning change leaders within an organization. However, in a single organization change effort, it is unlikely there is a need to pay attention to relationship building to this extent.

Timeframe

The discovery phase alone illustrates the different timeframes for single organization change versus multi-sector change. That difference extends to all phases of the CPM. Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2001) discuss the kickoff of the project like the beginning of a game or race. Kickoff may be an apt metaphor for the typical corporate change effort, but multi-sector change efforts are probably better described as a warm-up run for a marathon. There are no “fans” waiting for the start of the game; rather, the discovery phase is a lengthy, if not nonstop, period where both the shared vision and the process need to emerge along with the implementation. In a single organization effort, only the implementation is emergent. Similarly, it is improbable a multi-sector transformational change effort will reach its desired state, often an ideal toward which the coalition continues to work. Therefore, there is no need to dismantle the structures put in place for facilitating the change. Learning and course correcting will happen on an ongoing basis.

As a result, celebrating successes becomes more challenging in multi-sector work. The desired state, as mentioned above, is either an unattainable ideal that keeps the project moving forward or a distant goal that will not be realized for some years. Unlike with single organizations, there is no obvious endpoint at which to celebrate. Furthermore, because the process is emergent, it is difficult to identify milestones. Consequently, coalition leaders need to be attentive to the small successes that can be celebrated at intervals throughout the project. They are likely capturing data for measuring progress that will be suitable in determining both major and minor accomplishments. Like much of multi-sector work, celebrations will be emergent.

The time commitment required from change leaders within a single organization differs significantly from that required of coalition leaders in multi-sector work. Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2001) recognize the importance of making time for any change effort:

> Change leaders must focus on doing what is good for the overall organization as it transforms while keeping it operational, especially at start-up. There is
no formula for the percentage of time a leader will spend wearing each hat. We do know, however, that keeping full-time functional responsibilities without making real space for change leadership duties is a formula for failure (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001, p. 33).

Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson (2005) also underscore the value of limiting or removing operational duties, recommending that employees involved in the change effort cannot handle more than a ten percent increase in their workload. Pushing beyond that threshold is likely to set the project up for failure. These warnings are important no matter what type of change effort, but multi-sector transformational change has the added complexity of coalition leaders needing to negotiate their time commitment with both their managers and their boards given the expected length of the time commitment.

Structure

The organizational structure of a single organization change effort differs substantially from that of multi-sector transformational change. Multi-sector transformational change efforts must not only create a change structure within each partner organization but must also develop a cross-organizational structure that addresses the change from the larger system level. The CPM offers two options for structuring the change effort within a corporation: hierarchical or networked (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001). If the organization itself is hierarchical, then choosing a networked structure is still apt to have a certain amount of hierarchy involved. Multi-sector projects have a distinct advantage when it comes to structure: they are a self-organizing system and are more prone to creating a flat hierarchy or a networked structure. They are creating a structure from the ground up, whereas a single organization already includes an existing structure with which they must contend throughout the change process. Furthermore, corporations are most likely to be hierarchical with a top-down management style, which is antithetical to transformational change. As Ackerman Anderson and Anderson point out, “Given how unpredictable and uncontrollable transformation is, [a controlling] style is not appropriate or adequate, as it squelches the emergent nature of transformation” (2001, p. 8).

In multi-sector transformational change, one of the first tasks is to create some form of structure by establishing a steering committee or coalition. The membership of this coalition will largely reflect identified stakeholder groups as well as agencies and organizations addressing the particular issue. Many of the coalition leaders will be leaders of their own organizations, thus creating a ring of T-shaped organizations. T-shaped management is defined as “people who simultaneously deliver results in their own job (the vertical part of the ‘T’) and deliver results by collaborating across the company (the horizontal part of the ‘T’)“ (Hansen, 2009, pp. 95-96). This framework can be applied at the organizational level. Figure 3 illustrates what this might look like. The coalition itself, the ring at the top, is also likely to have its own structure that evolves as the process emerges, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 also presents a new structure, what is referred to as the “backbone support organization” in the Collective Impact model (Kania & Kramer, 2011). This support organization is unlikely to exist in a single organization change effort, specifically because the function of the support organization is to coordinate and facilitate work amongst the partner organizations involved in the effort. The support organization can be structured in a variety of ways: it can be based within a funding organization, created as a new nonprofit, based within an existing nonprofit, established within a governmental organization, shared across multiple organizations, or driven by the steering committee (Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012). It may be dismantled at the end of the project, if it has an endpoint, or continue to provide support to an ongoing effort. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, those leading and implementing the change cannot add the responsibilities of a support organization to an already demanding schedule and be expected to carry out their normal duties. Therefore, a support organization is essential to the success of a multi-sector transformational change project.

Figure 3. The Organizational Structure for Multi-Sector Transformational Change, Where Partner Organizations Create a Coalition in The Form Of T-Shaped Organizations in A Ring

Figure 4 - A Ring of T-Shaped Organizations
Lack of History

One of the factors determining the success of a change effort is its history and track record with past change efforts (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2001). Another advantage of multi-sector transformational change is that it has no history – the likelihood is that this is the first time these organizations are coming together to work collectively on a project. Consequently, participants in multi-sector transformational change are less likely to go through the same emotional reaction to the change, in part because the change is more about changing the larger system rather than the individual organizations. If any individual organization feels the change is a threat to their existence or current structure, they are less likely to participate in the first place, and because a shared vision has yet to be created and the path forward is unknown, participants have less of an emotional attachment to the coalition and no history yet with the change effort. It is possible that as the path forward emerges, participants might then perceive a threat and begin to experience the anxiety that is often associated with change. At that time, it will be important for coalition leaders to support participants as they work through their anxiety.

Another advantage, at least in part, of lacking a history is that participants do not have past behaviors to which they can return, specifically because they have not worked together before. On the other hand, they do bring their own behavior and assumptions to the work and will need to work together to change their behaviors, if they prove ineffective, and challenge their assumptions, if they do not serve the larger purpose. Furthermore, while the individual participants may have no patterns of past behavior with each other, there may still exist some challenging relationships between organizations that will influence the process. Nevertheless, the coalition has an excellent opportunity to be intentional about the relationships they foster, which can set a strong foundation for the work ahead.

Conclusion

The differences between single organization change and multi-sector change are vast. In multi-sector transformational change, the scope of the work is much broader, the complexity of the work is immense, leadership is more challenging, the discovery phase and overall project timeframe are much longer, and the structures required for successful implementation are multifaceted. The coalitions’ leaders must intentionally develop relationships and co-create the required structures to support the change effort and the design for implementing the change. All these differences mean that approaches developed for the corporate sector and employed in single organizations are of questionable value when it comes to multi-sector work. Research and literature in multi-sector
transformational change are limited, and models are still being developed and do not have a long history of success. There are numerous opportunities for research in this growing field. It is a field ripe with potential and possibilities, as well as offering hope that we can aspire to more resilient communities.

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Marty Jacobs is currently a doctoral student in Organizational Systems at Saybrook University. Her research interests are in dialogue and transformative and organizational learning in multi-sector transformational change, as well as complex adaptive systems and system sciences. In addition to her doctoral work, she has been teaching and consulting for over twenty years, applying a systems thinking approach to organizations. She can be reached at marty.jacobs.sis@gmail.com.
Organization Development in Practice brings together experienced OD professionals who share their methods for developing more effective and resilient organizations, enabling organizational and social change, and being responsive to continuous change.

Some of the chapters include:

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Stylistic
» Clearly states the purpose and content of the article
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(continued next page)
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Graphics that enhance an article are encouraged. The ODP reserves the right to resize graphics when necessary. The graphics should be in a program that allows editing. We prefer graphics to match the ODP’s three-, two-, or one-column, half-page or full-page formats. If authors have questions or concerns about graphics or computer art, please contact the Editor.

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Authors should email articles to the editor, John Vogelsang, at jovogelsang@earthlink.net. The deadlines for submitting articles are as follow: October 1 for the winter issue; January 1 for the spring issue; April 1 for the summer issue; and July 1 for the fall issue.