

Advancing the Sustainability of Community-Based Improvement Efforts: Putting Theory Into Practice

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Overview

- I. Background
- II. Research Design
- III. Results
- IV. Implications



I. Background

Community-Based Health Promotion Partnerships

- Formal, semi-permanent organizations
- ACTION oriented
- Centered around a specific health or social issue



Community-Based Health Promotion Partnerships

- Organize around diverse health & social issues
- Often disseminate work beyond the community
- Can have wide-reaching impact



Community-Based Health Promotion Partnerships

Potential to create meaningful change

- Knowledge of local conditions
- Grass-roots interests
- Social networks

Community advocacy can inform others

- Create support for an issue
- Address barriers
- Motivate participation



Community-Based Health Promotion Partnerships

- Have access to human resources
- Have access to local information
- Have capacity
 - Flexible, multi-level coordination
- Can work at all levels of a community



THAT SAID.....

Statement of the Problem

Community-based health promotion efforts have had mixed success long-term

- What happens after project implementation?
- What happens after funding ceases?
- In other words, what makes a partnership *sustainable*?

How do we describe sustainable community-based partnerships?

How do we describe those that are not sustained?

How can we use this to improve research & practice?

Defining Sustainability

For the purpose of this study, **sustainability** is defined as *perceived effectiveness of the partnership after initial project implementation (maintenance phase)*.

Purpose of the Study

To broaden the understanding of sustainability within the context of community health by documenting the factors contributing to perceived effectiveness of community-based health promotion partnerships after initial project implementation.

II. Research Design

Phase I: Systematic literature review



Phase II: Semi-structured interviews

- University researchers
- Community representatives

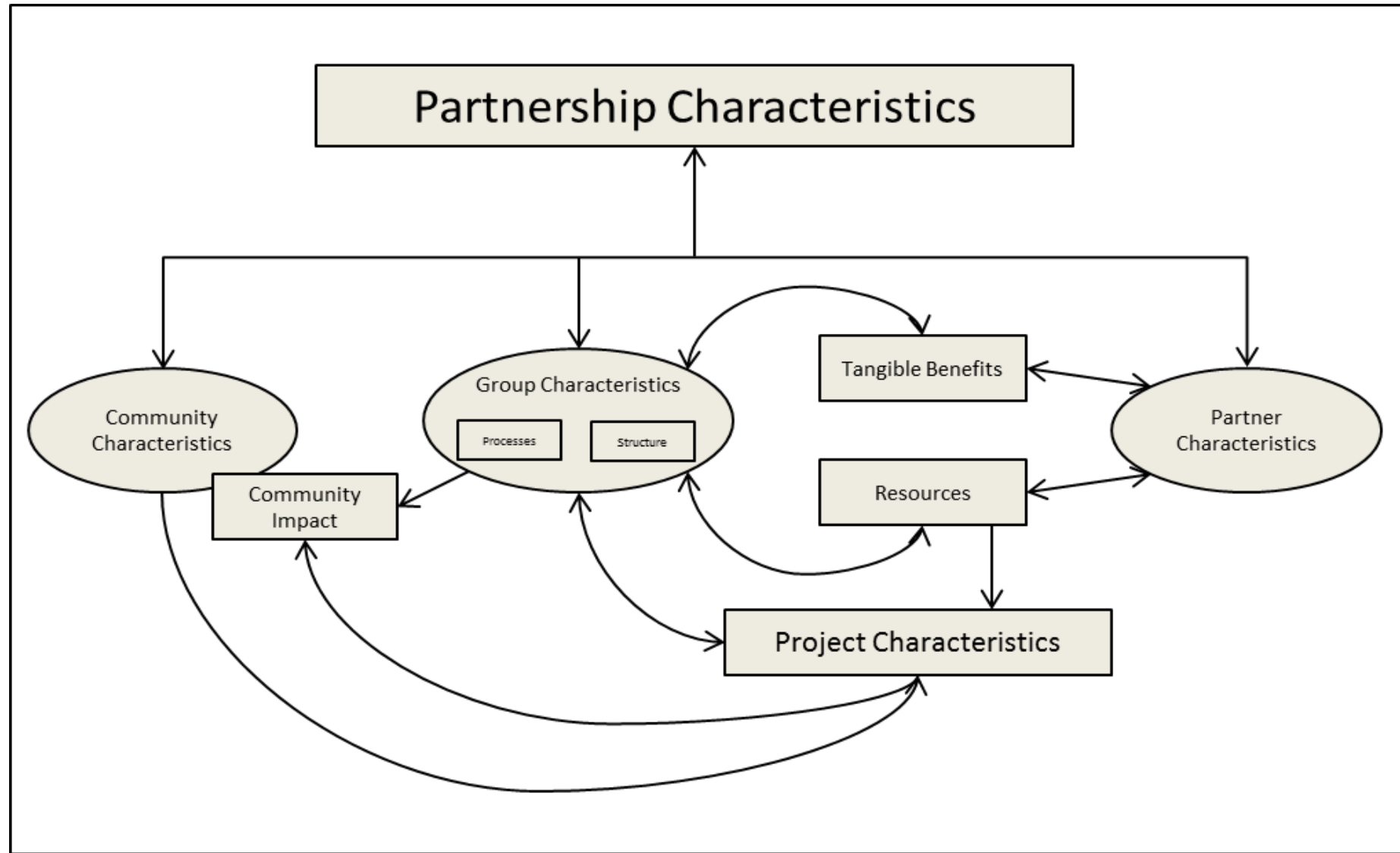


Phase III: Grounded theory analysis

- Substantive theory development
- Implications for research & practice



III. Results



I. Group Characteristics (coalition, CAB, steering committee, alliance)

Group Structure	Group Processes
Core membership Diversity of membership Representative of community Partnership capacity (existing skills, knowledge, expertise) Defined roles Subcommittees Leadership Program champions	Regular meetings (face time) Assessment Strategic planning Understanding of the community Formative research Importance of data-based strategies Concrete goals, expectations Multiple projects Change through policy Continual expansion Building on success Momentum Dissemination (sharing results)

Group Structures & Group Processes

We felt pretty strongly that this couldn't be a loose confederation of people that just showed up. They needed to have a structure so that - they went through, like I said, a fairly lengthy process of developing bylaws, membership criteria, that kind of stuff that was what they're doing. (PRC_031_032)

II. Partner Characteristics

Diversity of partners

Patience

Flexibility

Continuity

Relevance to community needs

Expertise

Credibility

Proximity

I fully endorse the importance of the partnership approach and I would say I think you'll want a multidisciplinary representation of your community thinking about all the different constituencies to provide guidance to the overall project. So, you'd want to put that together. Doing that at inception is great. This would be church leaders, and school leaders, and business leaders, and political leaders, and business owners, people who live here and know what it feels like to be part of whatever it is we're calling community. (PRC_027)

III. Community Characteristics
Community capacity Community ownership Competition for resources Disparities (SES, education, health) Community values Community need
Community impact Intended results Unintended results

The one thing, I think, that's facilitated [our project] is that there is a very strong vision of community activism in the community that we worked with. Historically, there have been very proactive organizations that have attempted to address the community needs and then the community with many economic challenges. So in a lot of cases, it's these community organizations that have tried to take off the slack where the institutions have not been able to provide the level of services or infrastructure that might be available in a more affluent community. So, I think that's been a contributor to the success of some of our projects and then obviously, it's a challenge, too. (PRC_014)

IV. Partnership Characteristics

CBPR

Mutual respect

Empowerment

Communication

Group dynamic

Cohesion

Division of labor

Reciprocity

Synergy

Trust

Shared vision

Commitment

Transparency

Being aware that conflict is going to emerge, but that doesn't mean the partnership is failing. How do you deal with that? If you want a sustainable relationship with anything, you will have conflict. You have to understand different perspectives. You have to make sure the environment is comfortable for everyone to air their issues and move on.

(PRC_029)

V. Tangible Benefits	VI. Resources
Technical assistance (capacity building) Information New relationships, linkages Opportunities Recognition Compensation	Funding Infrastructure Institutional support Existing relationships Experience/history working together Time Paid staff Volunteers

VII. Project Characteristics: Sustainable, Feasible, Efficient

Just making sure if you're living towards developing some kind of intervention or something new that's going to be in place, making sure that you're designing from the very, very start with a view to feasibility and sustainability from the very beginning. You've got to build something that isn't so complicated that it could never have roots on its own, building upon the assets that are already in your community to help with that. How can we – if it's a health issue here, how can we make improvements on that in a way that plan sustainability from the very, very beginning, having the right partners in place, having people that would implement the program, be there at the table, the end users, people who actually – the recipients of this program there at the table, making sure that there's inclusivity from the very beginning and with a view to sustainability from the very beginning. (PRC_020)

IV. Implications for Community-Based Health Promotion Partnerships

Sustainable coalitions tend to be:

- Structured
- Diverse
- Representative
- Patient
- Communicative
- Engaged in strategic planning and capacity building (technical assistance)
- Reliant on local data & regular assessment
- Reliant on existing infrastructure & resources
- Engaged in continual expansion (building on success)
- Focused on feasible, efficient projects

Implications for Researchers

- Partnerships require funding & tangible benefits.
- Data-based strategies should be implemented with flexibility & patience.
- Researchers should not insist on fidelity to the original project.
- Unintended results should be sought out & documented.
- Community impact builds trust & credibility, maintains momentum.
- Tasks and decision-making should make sense and maximize skills.





Significance of the Study

- ✓ Theory development can improve research & practice
- ✓ Documenting factors provides a basis for measurement
- ✓ Documenting factors can inform strategic planning
- ✓ New strategies may improve group functioning
- ✓ New strategies may increase group effectiveness

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory involves taking comparisons from data and reaching up to construct abstractions and then down to tie these abstractions to data. It means learning about the specific and the general—and seeing what is new in them—then exploring their links to large issues or creating larger unrecognized issues in entirety. An imaginative interpretation sparks new views and leads other scholars to new vistas. Grounded theory methods can provide a route to see beyond the obvious and a path to reach imaginative interpretations.

~Charmaz, 2006

People wanted stuff that was lasting and not just a one-off kind of project. They wanted us to give them infrastructure that they could use forever for this kind of work. That way, if it doesn't succeed as a project, it has succeeded in developing capacity and infrastructure to then try something else. (PRC_011)

Part of what makes something sustainable is having the funds to fund the work. It takes a considerable amount of time and commitment, and we need to be able to fund people to do that. So, the community-based folks – just like us, we get paid to do work. To think that there is someone who would spend the amount of time and commitment and do it solely on the goodness of their heart for a long period of time – that will only work for a while. In order to talk about sustainability, I have found that partnerships are most sustainable when there's some kind of funding to help sustain the relationship. People can't just volunteer their time for long periods of time. (PRC_017)

V. Future Research

- Theory development is the 1st step
- Theory will inform quantitative instrument
- SEM analysis will triangulate data