Article

Transformational Leadership Qualities of Effective Grassroots Refugee-Led Organizations

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Abstract: This qualitative study investigates the behaviors and strategies of effective leadership teams within ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) operating in the United States that consist of leaders who are themselves former refugees. Through analysis of four focus group interviews, each with three to five leaders from local Bhutanese, Burundian, Congolese, and Syrian communities, we identified ways in which these leaders exhibit transformational leadership behaviors proposed by established frameworks. Results reveal that effective ECBO leaders exhibit strong transformational leadership qualities, such as empowering community members, modeling behavior, and projecting a community vision. The study emphasizes the unique context of ECBOs and their leaders, showcasing their thoughtfulness, competency, and profound awareness of community members' backgrounds. The implications include recognizing and valuing the skills of ECBO leaders and considering formal support mechanisms. This study contributes insights into the leadership exhibited within local community organizations serving refugee populations—enhancing our understanding of quality leadership among grassroots refugee organizations.

Keywords: community organizations; grassroots organizations; refugees; ECBO; leadership; transformational leadership

1. Introduction

While community organizers play crucial roles in mobilizing and empowering groups (Hailu and Sarubbi 2019; Szakos and Szakos 2007), their work is often undervalued. Notably, in 2008, Sarah Palin used the term "community organizer" as a punchline in a political speech, suggesting that such organizers lacked genuine responsibilities. Despite these occasional dismissive attitudes, community organizers—especially those recognized as community leaders—often serve as the driving force behind grassroots movements. Grassroots community organizers, in particular, are well respected within their communities, addressing local issues, amplifying marginalized voices, and driving meaningful change from the ground up.

Staples (2009) defined grassroots community organizing as "collective action by community members drawing on the strength of numbers, participatory processes, and indigenous leadership to decrease power disparities and achieve shared goals for social change" (p. 271). This definition aptly captures the essence of community organizing, emphasizing the pivotal role played by community members in driving positive change from within. Of particular interest are grassroots community organizations chartered to support refugees in the United States. Such organizations, commonly referred to as ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) are typically self-organizing and established by former refugees who intimately understand the needs, challenges, and aspirations of their communities. ECBOs can be a critical level of support for refugees as they attempt to adjust to new surroundings, particularly considering the overwhelming number of displaced persons across the globe, estimated to be around 114 million (UN Refugee Agency 2023).

Of course, the organizational structures and degrees of community involvement among ECBOs can vary widely based on their own missions, goals, and outlook. Some may operate under formal contracts with government entities to provide essential services such as language instruction, job placement, or legal assistance to refugees. On the other hand, some ECBOs may focus primarily on hosting occasional cultural events, creating spaces for community members to celebrate their heritage and build connections.

In all cases, effective leadership is pivotal to the success and sustainability of an ECBO. Strong and active leaders within these organizations play multifaceted roles, from representing their communities' interests to fostering collaborations with other organizations. As with any organization, effective leadership is a key to success (Turner and Müller 2005).

In this study, the focus was on characterizing leadership styles across four successful ECBOs. The definition of "successful" was that all four of these ECBOs actively collaborated with a large public university on a National Science Foundation (NSF) project to design, implement, and sustain activities for refugee families in their respective communities. The purpose of this multi-year project is to strengthen the college-going and STEM career aspirations of refugee families with students in grades 7–12. The ECBO leaders engage in a process that centers on the leaders recruiting and supporting a dozen families each year from their communities. The families are invited to take part in a series of Saturday workshops centered on "college knowledge" and STEM career pathways. The project's additional opportunities include the families attending field trips to college campuses, and the high school students pairing with e-mentors and participating in an online career guidance course.

The ECBO leaders play integral roles in this NSF initiative, which encompasses various responsibilities such as recruiting families, facilitating segments of the workshops, offering ongoing translation and interpretation services, addressing individual family needs, coordinating and attending field trips to college campuses, and recruiting mentors from within their communities to work with high school students.

Beginning with the project's initial planning stages in 2018 to the current state of early 2024, the project's university-based principal investigator (PI) engaged with leaders of eight ECBOs. Although the leaders of all eight ECBOs expressed great interest in the project, the leaders from four of the eight ECBOs either only minimally engaged in discussions about participating in the project and consequently did not follow through, or participated in only a perfunctory manner before withdrawing. Using the criterion of success defined as active and engaged participation in the family engagement project for refugee families, judgment is withheld regarding leaders of the ECBOs who did not meet this standard. The workload for ECBO leaders who participated in our project was not light; full participation necessitated ongoing support for families and frequent communication with university faculty. Therefore, the aim was to understand and describe the leadership qualities and strategies among the four fully engaged ECBOs that demonstrated notable vigor and initiative.

Recognizing how effective leaders of refugee communities make decisions, weigh values, and determine actions is key to grasping their abilities to effectively mobilize community members for impactful endeavors. In this study, we conducted focus group interviews with leaders of four effective ECBOs to determine the types of behaviors and dispositions they exhibit and compared those to tenets of transformational leadership to understand leadership mindsets and actions more effectively. This framework was applied to address the following research question: *What are the key leadership behaviors and strategies employed by successful ECBO leaders for supporting refugees?*

2. Background

This study is embedded within an NSF-funded project and its origins trace back six years to informal discussions between the project's eventual PI and the leaders of the Burundian community in the Phoenix metropolitan area. What started as simple conversations regarding the urgent needs of refugees in the United States, encompassing

aspects like housing and help with transportation, evolved into extensive discussions about subsequent needs. Specifically, the community leaders impressed that beyond basic subsistence requirements there should be heightened focus on what was termed "next-level needs".

Discussion of next-level needs converged on ideas for leveraging community and university assets to help refugee students in grades 7–12 pursue and attain college and career ambitions. The community leaders stressed that any such efforts should not entail what Liou (2016) referred to as the "destructive nature of pity". Simply put, prioritizing empowerment and showing respect for families was crucial, and it was essential to engage parents in the process.

Our initial proposal to the NSF, which involved only the Burundian community, was not funded. However, the reviews were strong and encouraged expanding on our ideas while including more communities in a larger project proposal. This led to meetings with leaders from several other ethnic communities to assess interest and to gain their ideas about how to best imagine and design the project. It was during this early round of soliciting partnerships that research ideas regarding the distinctions among ECBO leadership began to emerge. In our second attempt, the four-year project was funded, and by design piloted by the Burundians in Year One. Beginning in Year Two, we scaled to include four ECBOs (Judson et al. 2023). However, it is noted that there was some flux in participation, as leaders of one of the ECBOs participated in a perfunctory manner for only one year. The project design placed ECBO leaders front and center to collaborate with university faculty and staff to design and implement the following major project activities:

- Developing and facilitating workshops for parents and students focused on (a) college knowledge (e.g., setting goals, financial aid, and understanding U.S. college and university systems) and (b) STEM career paths;
- Planning and leading field trips for parents and students to college campuses;
- Recruiting and supporting e-mentors from the communities to support high school students;
- Designing and implementing an online career guidance course for students.

While community leaders and university personnel collaborated in co-designing and co-facilitating family activities, the division of responsibilities placed most of the logistics duties with the university personnel. This encompassed the university personnel charged with tasks such as securing necessary classroom spaces, coordinating field trip visits with different colleges, scheduling various special presenters for workshops, and maintaining registration logs. Concurrently, community leaders played a crucial role in the enrollment and support of families. Their responsibilities included conducting face-to-face visits and phone calls to explain the program to families, multi-language support by providing translation of documents and interpretation of presentations, and recruiting appropriate mentors from their respective communities. The amount of time community leaders invested in the project fluctuated over the year, with an approximate commitment of two to four hours per week. The most significant time commitments occurred on days when workshops were conducted and when college/university field trips took place.

Through the grant funding, the ECBOs received nominal remuneration for their work. However, it is noted that the leaders of the four successful ECBO chose not to pay themselves directly for their service; instead, the community leaders opted to direct the grant funds to their ECBO treasuries and earmarked those monies for future projects and community needs.

As noted, including the founding Burundian community leaders, leaders of eight ECBOs expressed great interest in the project. The leadership structure of seven of these ECBOs relied solely on volunteerism, i.e., all of these ECBOs essentially operated from the homes of individuals who had "regular" jobs besides their ECBO responsibilities. One of the eight ECBOs was more formally structured. This eighth ECBO maintains office space, receives funding from various grant sources, and has full-time and part-time employees. Additionally, though the eighth ECBO is rooted in the ethnic identity of its

founders, it assists refugees of all ethnicities in various ways such as literacy training and citizenship classes.

As previously stated, leaders from four of eight ECBOs either only minimally involved themselves in discussions regarding project participation and ultimately did not proceed, or they engaged in a superficial manner before eventually withdrawing. This differentiation of engagement among the ECBO groups, particularly in terms of their leadership, served as the focal point of this research study. Informally, a noticeable distinction was observed in the dynamics of the engaged ECBOs compared to those that cursorily engaged and/or withdrew. While the enthusiasm among leaders of all eight ECBOs was impressive, it was the engaged ECBO leaders' exemplary qualities of leadership and organizational skills that seemed to propel them towards success.

3. Literature Review

Qualities of leadership have been well studied but leadership research customarily examines formal organizations within industry and government settings, including for-profit and nonprofit entities. Studies focused on ECBOs and ECBO-type organizations more customarily concentrate on the types of welfare assistance they offer (e.g., Gonzalez Benson 2020). Nevertheless, the extant research related to community organization leadership coupled with literature dedicated to understanding exceptional organizational leadership was quite useful in guiding this study.

3.1. Community Leadership

In a study of nonprofit community organizations, Boehm and Staples (2005) focused on volunteer community leaders believed to possess "extraordinary abilities" (p. 77). Key findings included that outstanding community leaders learn from both successes and failures through cycles of action, reflection, and discussion with others; possess abilities to develop strong community vision through long-term goals that are aligned with actions; and prefer to collaboratively make decisions. This is similar to what Onyx and Leonard (2011) concluded in stating successful community leaders retain "a broad vision for what is possible in the future for the community. They are able to articulate this vision and identify a path to achieve it" (p. 505). However, merely expressing a vision is inadequate to drive a community forward. What holds greater significance is a leader's capacity to effectively convey and clarify this vision to followers in meaningful and relatable ways that will rally support and affect community ethos (Schmid 2006).

Contrary to formal organizations characterized by stability and the orderly transition of formal leadership roles, authentic grassroots community organizations, especially those aimed at assisting refugees, require persistent and determined leadership (Lacroix et al. 2015). This resolute leadership is frequently evident from the founding of ECBOs, often established by individuals who were refugees themselves. These founding leaders typically strive to unite individuals based on shared cultural bonds and address issues that are inadequately tackled by established government or religious organizations (Bolton and Spence 2006).

The reception of a community leader's communication, whether it is considered to be transparent, collaborative, or even persuasive, significantly influences the degree of support and commitment garnered from community members (Folta et al. 2012). This is akin to what occurs among neighborhood-based community leaders. ECBOs in the United States do not necessarily represent traditional neighborhoods, defined strictly by geography, because an ECBO may work to bring together community members spread across a large metropolitan area. Such were the cases in this study. In a sense, the ECBO leaders of this study worked with localized diaspora "neighborhoods". However, like traditional neighborhoods, refugee communities do tend to develop their own gravity wherein most members live in the same general area of an urban or suburban area—sometimes with several families from the same home country living in the same apartment complex or within a few blocks of one another (Singer and Wilson 2006). According to Oropesa

(1989), competent leadership plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of such organizations, surpassing both the significance of membership quantity and the affluence of the community.

Effective and longstanding community leaders are particularly known for their strong commitment to social justice and genuine care for their community members (Boyte et al. 2007). These foundational traits are integral among ECBO leaders who establish and maintain their organization and often register it as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. In contrast to more formalized organizations, leaders within ECBOs seldom receive compensation and generally operate without a centralized office (Gonzalez Benson and Pimentel Walker 2021). Consequently, the level of dedication and drive required to be an ECBO leader is substantial. While it is generally recognized that effective ECBO leaders demonstrate dedication and effective communication of their vision to their community, little research has explored the specific qualities that set apart successful ECBO leaders. In the following section, the exploration of the application of the framework of transformational leadership to ECBOs is undertaken with the goal of gaining a better understanding of what constitutes effective leadership within these organizations.

3.2. Transformational Leadership Tenets Applied to ECBOs

Effective leadership is often identified as transformational, which is frequently juxtaposed with the concept of transactional leadership. Transformational leaders are able to help shape and define a group's purpose and are able to rally individuals to be motivated about shared objectives (Ferozi and Chang 2021). By leveraging interpersonal skills, relationships, personal experience, and charisma, transformational leaders are able to inspire and intellectually challenge group members. Transformational leadership is comprised of four tenets (Cetin and Kinik 2015): charismatic leadership or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

The charismatic or idealized influence aspect of transformational leadership implies such leaders are respected and often seen as role models due to reasons such as strong moral values and clear vision. Transformational leaders then inspire by clearly communicating expectations and demonstrating dedication to shared goals and visions (Bass 1999). Regarding intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders tend to not *tell* members what to do, but instead prompt others to think for themselves and develop new ideas. Finally, individualized consideration means that leaders show respect and care for each person's feelings and needs within the organization. They pay attention to individuals and how they feel, valuing each person's unique experiences and perspectives. These aspects of transformational leadership counter traditional transactional leadership which centers around formal exchanges and ensuring compliance, often utilizing rewards and penalties as motivators and means of managing.

Podsakoff et al. (1990), later elaborated on by Carless et al. (2000), delineated the principles of transformational leadership into distinct behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders:

1. Identifying and articulating a vision and inspiring others with such vision;
2. Encouraging empowerment;
3. Providing an appropriate model (leading by example);
4. Fostering development of group goals;
5. Demonstrating respect and concern through individual support;
6. Promoting intellectual stimulation (challenging people to re-examine and rethink situations).

Assessing for the presence of these behaviors is a valuable way to determine leadership qualities of supervisors and other types of administrators (e.g., Asgari et al. 2008; Farahnak et al. 2020). What is less known is how transformational leadership behaviors present among community organization leaders. Understanding these behaviors as identifiers can be useful in the context of community organizations, where it is believed that transformational leaders can motivate individuals to share a common vision and

develop positive community identity. Purdue (2001) referred to community leaders acting in transformational ways as *social entrepreneurs* because they demonstrate capacity to apply their charisma and interpersonal skills to act as change agents. Such leaders often serve as bridges between their community and others to access resources and establish partnerships. This compares to community leaders in transactional roles acting primarily as community representatives focused on well-explained tasks and relaying information within and between groups. Through a quantitative investigation into leadership styles among 23 grassroots organizations, Fisher (2013) discovered statistically significant correlations between transformational leadership traits and outcomes such as leader satisfaction and the willingness to exert additional effort for a leader. Along this same vein of inquiry, in this qualitative study, we delved into understanding how leaders of successful ECBOs personally identified with aspects of transformational leadership.

4. Methods

Focus group interviews were conducted with leaders of four ECBOs in the fall of 2023. As mentioned, these four ECBOs were productively collaborating on a multiyear NSF project that focuses on parents and students of refugee families learning how to successfully transition from high school to college and promotes interest in STEM careers. Each focus group was comprised of three to five leaders from the same community. The leaders were from the Bhutanese, Burundian, Congolese, and Syrian communities of the Phoenix metropolitan area, and these communities are comprised largely of individuals who immigrated to the United States as refugees. The ECBO leaders had been in the United States from 5 to 23 years and ranged in age from early 20s to late 60s. All of the community leaders are either employed full-time in a variety of occupations (e.g., social worker, rideshare driver) or are full-time college students, and receive no remuneration for the time they dedicate to their respective ECBO.

The key objective of this study was to determine the ways and the extent to which transformational leadership behaviors, as identified in the literature, are apparent among effective ECBO leaders. Consequently, the interview questions in Table 1 were created in alignment with the six identified transformational leadership behaviors (Carless et al. 2000; Podsakoff et al. 1990). For each of the six behaviors, the protocol included one to three questions. The interviewer had the flexibility to pose additional questions for clarification and to delve deeper into respondents' perspectives.

Table 1. ECBO Leaders Interview Protocol.

Leadership Construct	Interview Questions
Vision	How do you envision the future of your community? What are the opportunities you see for the community? How do you communicate this vision to your community members? How do you feel you communicate with passion and develop a sense of purpose to your community?
Empowerment	What do you see as the most effective ways to help others in your community?
Modeling	Could you provide examples of your own behaviors or actions that you believe set a positive example for your community members? In other words, ways that you lead by example.
Foster goals	How do you bring members of the community together to have mutual goals? Can you share a time when people in your community worked together as a team to reach a goal?
Individual support	How do you show that you care about each person in your community feels and what they need? Within your broader community or just within your ECBO structure, how do you handle problems or disagreements while also considering how people feel?
Intellectual stimulation	In what ways do you stimulate the minds of your community members? This might include getting people to think differently about their place and role here in America.

The interview questions were shared with interviewees five to seven days before their scheduled focus group. Sharing the interview questions in advance allows for thoughtful

consideration and can lead to enhancing the depth and quality of responses by affording participants the opportunity to reflect on the topics and formulate their thoughts beforehand (Lawson 2016). Sharing the questions before the interviews also allowed interviewees to identify any concerns regarding understandability of questions. Focus group interviews lasted approximately 40 min and were audio-recorded. Inductive analysis (emergent coding) was initially applied to organize the interview results. The coding categories were grouped and compared back to the key behaviors of transformational leadership to ascertain if and how the ECBO leaders' considerations reflected that framework.

Interview transcripts were coded following a two-stage process as described by Saldaña (2016). Inductive analysis (emergent coding) based on concept coding was initially applied to organize the interview results. For example, if a community leader discussed directly mentoring a community member, this was coded under the category of "mentoring". In the second cycle, coding categories were mapped back to the six key behaviors of transformational leadership to ascertain if and how the ECBO leaders' considerations reflected that framework. Following the mentoring example, depending on the content and framing of the community leader's statement, the statement could be aligned to the behaviors of empowering others, providing individualized support, and/or modeling.

5. Findings

Analysis of the focus group interviews revealed that five of the six behaviors of transformational leaders were clearly evident among the ECBO leaders. However, the expression of these behaviors among the ECBO leaders deviated at times from what is typically witnessed in more formal or structured organizations. Notably, the behavior of fostering group goals was not as evident as the other five themes. In the following section, the themes that were aligned with transformational leadership behavior are presented in relative order of their perceived strength as gleaned from the data, beginning with the most prevalent.

5.1. Empower Others

A prevailing sentiment among the four ECBO leadership groups was their recognition that the most crucial role they can play for their community members is to empower them, fostering greater independence. In their efforts to empower others, the leaders articulated a deep commitment to enhancing the skills and self-efficacy of community members, aiming to create resilient and self-sufficient communities. The leaders actively translate their commitment to empowerment into tangible actions. These actions range from informal one-on-one interactions to broader formal initiatives.

The leaders related that empowering others often took the form of helping people to connect to resources and promoting independent use of those resources. This premise of helping others is more fully described under the heading of the following theme: *provide individualized support*. However, empowerment was described to be more than just providing immediate aid. The leaders clarified that providing specific guidance, such as teaching someone how to use public transportation, was intricately linked to the broader objective of energizing community members to experience a heightened sense of self-determination.

Some of the leaders expressed that the concept of empowerment is more pronounced in the United States as compared to their home country and prior refugee camp situations. Therefore, the leaders are attentive about promoting awareness among newcomers and encouraging them to recognize and utilize their rights and capabilities. This was well expressed by a Syrian leader who said. . .

> *Here, it is kind of equal opportunity to everybody, not like in our country. . .and when they see that they are equal here in front of the government, in front of others, they know that their role here is not just being like neutral. They can act and proact, not react. So, they can get what they want.*

The leaders acting as advocates for community members to develop their own plans for the future was a recurring premise of empowerment. Such was the case when a

Congolese leader reflected that "I'm feeling like I'm helping people in my community to reach their goals and to open their minds, to think about different opportunities…to think about their role and what they have in the community here in the United States".

The dispositions regarding empowerment among the ECBO leaders varies from the traditional business context of transformational leadership. In the business context, empowerment may typically involve a manager sharing information, allowing for some job autonomy, and involving employees in shared duties, such as committee work. However, for ECBO leaders, the emphasis shifts towards supporting individuals who have arrived as refugees to develop a sense of agency and self-sufficiency. Or, as a Burundian leader said when thinking about their community members, "They have barriers to successfully adjust or acculturate in this country, so our role is to empower others so they can reach their higher level."

5.2. Provide Individualized Support

Closely related to the concept of empowering others, the leaders of all four of the ECBOs emphasized that a crucial aspect of their organization, and consequently what they saw as integral to their leadership positions, involved offering personalized assistance to their community members. As expected, the community leaders mentioned that a significant portion of their assistance was directed towards newly arrived refugees. However, they emphasized their ongoing commitment to offering individualized help to all community members, including those who have lived in the United States for several years. Broadly, support was expressed as occurring in two main forms: establishing connections to resources and providing material support. Facilitating connections to resources included a wide range of activities, such as helping people establish accounts with utility companies, aiding in job applications, partnering with nonprofit organizations to channel donations to community members, and assisting individuals as they work through bureaucracy. The value and need of connecting community members to resources was illustrated by a Congolese leader who shared the following:

> When we come here [United States], we can feel lost or feel we don't have a sense of direction, and sometimes you just need that one person to tell you this or that…and for many people knowing someone, especially someone who came through the same path, is very important.

While the community leaders recognized and valued the contributions of formal organizations, especially resettlement agencies that assign case workers to aid newly arrived refugees, they recognized that refugees still often lack access to key information. In contrast, the ECBO leaders emphasized their ability to more effectively, and more personably, connect people to suitable resources and information. They attributed this capability to the trust and respect their members placed in them.

The ECBO leaders noted that individualized support occasionally entailed offering direct material assistance. For instance, the Burundian leaders have established a small treasury, from which they draw to contribute to covering expenses related to significant life events, like weddings and new births, for members of their community. It was also noted that ECBO community leaders tend to reach into their own pockets to help their community members to move through unexpected events, such as funeral costs. These forms of support, involving connecting individuals to resources and providing material assistance, are not frequently mentioned in descriptions of "individualized support" within the framework of transformational leadership. Typically, the concept of individualized support is associated with a leader coaching or motivating a team member. However, what ECBO leaders engage in is notably more personal and arguably more beneficial. By offering specific targeted assistance, the community leaders strengthen a person's position and contribute to alleviating challenges of life.

5.3. Model Behavior

The manner in which the community leaders of this study model behavior expands beyond simply shining a light on themselves. In addition to being cognizant of their own conduct acting as models of behavior, the community leaders work toward highlighting the accomplishments of others in their community to act as role models.

Among the community leaders who were interviewed, the four Burundian community leaders were the most senior, all of whom had adult children of their own. For the Burundians, this position of "elder statespersons" yields particular respect in their community, as noted when one of the Burundian leaders said, "We are among the wise people in our community and most of them are younger than us. And when there are conflicts, they come to us for advice". Yet, the Burundian leaders were also mindful to not assume a position of direct authority. Instead, they are very thoughtful about empathizing with community members when attempting to lead by example:

> We have been there, you know, so if we can be in their shoes we don't have to think twice, because those are shared experiences that we have lived. So, we have the moral and societal obligations of our culture to respond, because we believe in the call of social support.

Other community leaders were similarly attentive about humbly highlighting themselves as models for their community members. The Bhutanese leaders particularly pointed out that any attempt to model behavior had to be done in a gracious and respectful manner, so as to not trigger any antipathy if they were viewed as being too proud. This attitude of humble leadership was apparent among all of the ECBO leaders. Respectfully, and even quietly, modeling behavior exemplifies mutual respect between leaders and community members across all four of the ECBOs. While mutual respect may be an aspect of all their cultures, it was evident that it is an asset particularly regarded by the ECBO leaders. As a Burundian leader highlighted, though the leaders would like their "good actions to be contagious," attempting to showcase themselves as role models in a heavy-handed way might not be well-received by the community; therefore, the leaders approach this responsibility with tact and sensitivity. Similarly, a Bhutanese leader reflected on the responsibility of being a role model, "People can look at me, and then see the exact character that they want to make from myself. So, I want to be careful to be the good role model".

Deliberately sharing the successes of community members was also found to be a common strategy among the ECBO leaders. For instance, the Syrian leaders consistently use social media to update their community on the achievements of secondary and post-secondary students in their network. The Burundians and Congolese actively integrate successful young adults from their community into program activities and leadership roles. Likewise, all of the community leaders invited community members who had careers or were college students in STEM fields (e.g., information science, healthcare) to attend specific workshops of our project to share their stories. These were considered valuable opportunities for community members to engage with and learn from those who share similar backgrounds and are forging paths in these fields.

5.4. Project and Communicate Vision

In the context of business, the application of the transformational leadership concept of vision suggests that leaders formulate a vision for the future of their organization and effectively communicate this vision to guide and inspire employees (Carless et al. 2000). The ECBO leaders conveyed that projecting a vision is crucial within their communities but might be somewhat less straightforward compared to more formal organizations. The visions that ECBO leaders in this study projected were multifaceted—crossing dimensions of education, mobility in the United States, family relationships, and cultural inclusivity. The community leaders emphasized that they hold vision as dear and fundamental to achieving community development; as one Congolese leader said, "we need our vision to empower, to connect, and to transform the community from chaos to beauty".

Across all four ECBOs, the leaders underscored their dedication to projecting a vision for their community that specifically emphasizes the importance of education, regardless of

an individual's age. For instance, the Syrian leaders highlighted their focus on promoting the value of studying for both children and adults as a means of achieving personal and communal goals, stating, "We have people studying everything, some engineering, some people nursing, everything they're studying, and that's who will build our community, and that is what we need to share, to show how we can be".

Though the Congolese and Bhutanese have posted formal vision statements on their websites, in practice, communication of vision among ECBO leaders more prevalently occurs in other ways. It is a continuous process occurring through interpersonal communication in everyday conversations and, on occasion, more formally, such as during our project's workshops led by community leaders or speeches given at cultural events. Vision is intertwined with other concepts of transformational leadership, such as acting as a role model and fostering common goals. The need for underlying vision was pointed out by a Burundian leader when reflecting particularly about newcomer refugees, "They are very scared, they are even pessimistic, but with the encouragement of the community through the leadership,. . .you see that they succeed". This sentiment was echoed by a Congolese leader who expressed, "We have to be there to encourage and explain ways that could really guide them to a better future, a better place than where they are at right now".

5.5. Promote Intellectual Stimulation

Leaders from all four of the ECBOs disclosed that one way they strive to promote intellectual stimulation among their community members was by advocating for educational opportunities. Education, especially higher education, was highly regarded by the ECBO leaders as a means of generational benefit. To illustrate, the Congolese leaders facilitate interactions among several of their community members with a free college access center operated by the city government that helps people earn a GED, enroll in college, seek financial aid, and find internships. The Bhutanese make efforts to connect high school students to mentors of Nepali descent who have professional careers. Likewise, the Syrian and Burundian leaders had recently organized and led educational workshops for their communities on topics related to legal rights, healthcare, parenting, and scam protection. These initiatives go beyond connecting community members to resources, as the leaders actively facilitate and work alongside community members, guiding them to reshape their perspectives in the direction of intellectual growth.

Beyond this, the ECBO leaders emphasized that, as part of their leadership roles, they occasionally assist individuals in reframing their thinking. In this capacity, leaders guide individuals through a process of reconsidering their perspectives and sometimes aid in conflict resolution. Although these actions, which are tied to ethos, may not be as clearly defined as other specific measures, they undeniably contribute to the reinforcement of a cultural mindset. For example, the head of the Syrian ECBO outlined that they have a three-pronged approach to ameliorating issues, and this is to emphasize the value of community support (i.e., others are there to help you), culture (reminding people that misbehavior is not accepted by the collectivist culture), and allowing religion to provide guidance (e.g., using examples from the Qur'an).

In alignment with this, a Burundian leader underscored their efforts to assist individuals in recognizing their worth, emphasizing that the leadership was "in their corner". The Bhutanese leaders also stressed their availability to offer guidance as needed among community members. Further emphasizing the need to stimulate thinking, the head Congolese leader conveyed, "If you are not part of the solution, that means you are part of the problem. So that is our philosophy; we help people understand every problem is temporary".

5.6. Foster Common Goals

Related to developing and promulgating vision, transformational leaders aid in helping their team members to develop and work toward common goals as opposed to focusing primarily on scattered and discrete objectives (Pasovska and Miceski 2018). Although promotion of vision was obvious, regarding the establishment and fostering of organizational

goals, this aspect was less apparent in the interviews. This can be attributed to the unique nature of ECBO leaders, who work with a collective of individuals and families sharing a common heritage, as opposed to conventional organizational leaders overseeing teams of employees.

While all of the ECBO leaders indicated they uphold strong and positive community visions, organizational goals are largely set by the leadership teams. However, this is not to say that this behavior is absent among the ECBO leaders, merely just not as pronounced. An example of the leaders getting community members involved in goal setting came from a recent initiative of the Burundian leaders, who organized a meeting involving approximately 25 community members to address health issues and explore ways to better engage youth in their ECBO organization. A broader perspective on goal setting, as a framework for advancing a community toward improved conditions, was also notably emphasized by one of the Bhutanese leaders. Recently inspired to explore the value of systematic goal setting for personal growth, this leader was planning to convene a community meeting to collectively establish specific goals. This leader's aim was to focus on "how we want to envision our community after one year, and after five years, and after 10 years—to do that, we need to make specific goals together".

6. Discussion

The findings of this study shed some light on the unique manifestations of transformational leadership behaviors in the context of ECBOs. This discussion attempts to interpret and describe the significance of these findings in relation to existing knowledge on leadership, particularly within the realm of community organizations and transformational leadership. Key findings are explored related to how the community leaders empower others, provide vision and support, and how they thoughtfully act as role models. Subsequent to this exploration, a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study is presented.

6.1. Key Findings

The emphasis on empowerment among ECBO leaders aligns with existing literature on community leadership, where fostering self-sufficiency and resilience is crucial (e.g., Boehm and Staples 2005). The unique context of refugees and their adjustment to the United States adds depth to this discussion. Effective ECBO leaders not only address basic needs but also navigate the terrain of "next-level needs", particularly focusing on education and career aspirations. The commitment to empower community members underscores the transformative role ECBO leaders can play in facilitating a sense of agency among individuals who have experienced displacement.

The way ECBO leaders in this study project community vision and offer support extends well beyond conventional volunteerism models. While their dedication of time and personal resources reflects the grassroots nature of ECBOs, their emphasis on fostering intimate and mutual trust and respect elevates their actions beyond the conventional role of leaders merely guiding a group. These effective ECBO leaders focus on inspiring and motivating community members by emphasizing a shared vision, fostering personal development, and encouraging intrinsic motivation. To accomplish this, the leaders leverage personal and relational dimensions between themselves and community members, which is integral to their effective leadership. Their attributes and behaviors align with the constructs of transformational leadership but also that of social entrepreneurship (Purdue 2001). Functioning as social entrepreneurs, they concentrate on fostering community development and well-being, which they accomplish through the establishment of trust, effective management, and a steadfast commitment to iterative problem solving.

In exhibiting the multiple behaviors of transformational leadership (Podsakoff et al. 1990), the ECBO leaders of this study engage in a type of role switching dynamic (Kovács 2020). That is, these effective leaders, due to both necessity and devotion, find themselves

moving across diverse responsibilities ranging from the most commonplace, such as showing someone how to use a public bus system, to establishing a long-term community vision.

As might be expected among effective leaders of communities composed largely of former refugees, this study reveals that these ECBO leaders possess a profound awareness of where people "are coming from". This involves a perceptive awareness of common backgrounds, allowing for a deep empathetic connection with community members based on shared experiences and shared culture. Their humility, careful role modeling, and the acknowledgment of community members' perspectives contribute to a transformational leadership style that is deeply connected to the cultural fabric of their communities (Schmid 2006).

6.2. Context of Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The transformational leadership style exhibited by the leaders in this study stands in contrast to the tenets of transactional leadership commonly observed in traditional organizational structures or, in the context of community organizations, sometimes referred to simply as "community representatives" (Purdue 2001). While transactional leadership often relies on formal exchanges, rewards, and penalties to ensure compliance and task completion, the ECBO leaders who were interviewed prioritize inspiration and motivation. Their commitment goes beyond the typical models, as they invest not only personal resources but also emphasize building close and reciprocal relations. This difference in approach challenges conventional leadership roles by actively inspiring and motivating community members through shared vision, personal development, and intrinsic motivation.

Unlike transactional leaders who may prioritize immediate needs and specific tasks, ECBO leaders delve into the complexities of the lives of resettled people, addressing both individual necessities and community wellness. This difference in leadership approach underscores the dynamic nature of effective ECBO leadership, especially emphasizing the extended time and relationship building needed to adeptly navigate the distinctive challenges presented by the refugee context. Moreover, the ECBO leaders' profound awareness of their community members' backgrounds adds another layer of credibility and respect to their leadership style, differentiating them from transactional leaders who may not prioritize such cultural intricacies. Their perceptive understanding of shared experiences and cultural particulars allows for a deep empathetic connection with community members.

6.3. Implications

This study's findings contribute to the understanding of leadership in community organizations, particularly ECBOs. The unique qualities observed among effective ECBO leaders present a distinct perspective on transformational leadership. Three particular implications are noted that have significance for researchers and those working in the field of community organization. First, effective community organizers, and perhaps particularly those spearheading grassroots efforts to help former refugees, demonstrate a high degree of thoughtfulness in their actions. A simplistic view of ECBOs might consider their leaders as kind individuals who have volunteered to act as spokespeople. Certainly, among less effective ECBO direction, leaders are merely figureheads or representatives at best. But transformational leaders of refugee communities emerge as catalysts for change, deeply engaged in empowering their community members. It is crucial not to dismiss the competence of ECBO leaders based on their part-time roles or limited formal leadership training. These leaders demonstrate a unique set of skills, acquired through lived experiences, which contribute significantly to their effectiveness. In essence, ECBO leaders may achieve what others cannot because, as one ECBO leader said,

> *We come from places where many things are done through collective effort and once we are here, we find ourselves alone. And we don't want to suffer from the isolation and separation from our own. We know the community that we serve. In this support, we share the values, we share those norms and cultural beliefs.*

Though it is not presumed that every ECBO leader demonstrates transformational behaviors, among effective leaders, their commitment, empathy, and ability to navigate complex community dynamics make them highly competent. Recognizing and valuing these leadership skills of effective ECBO leaders is essential for the establishment of valid and successful partnerships with their organizations.

Second, the consideration of formal support for ECBO leadership is raised. The ECBO leaders in this study all "emerged" through various paths to become leaders in their communities. Such organic emergence is a marvel and something to be truly admired. Yet, so as not to rely primarily on organic emergence of ECBO leaders, policymakers and organizations interested in fostering the development of effective ECBO leaders should explore avenues for providing structured support. This might involve helping to find funding, peer mentoring among different ECBOs, or access to resources that enhance organizational skills.

6.4. Limitations

While this study provides some insights about the unique leadership positions of ECBOs, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The focus on four ECBOs in the Phoenix metropolitan area limits the generalizability of findings. Additionally, this study relied on focus group interviews for data collection. While this method provides valuable qualitative insights, incorporating diverse research methodologies, such as surveys or observational studies, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of ECBO leadership. Finally, the relationships that existed between researchers and leaders before conducting this research should be addressed. While the rapport and familiarity established with the ECBO leaders were invaluable in facilitating open and candid discussions, it is important to recognize that personal acquaintance with interview participants may introduce an element of bias. This potential bias should be considered when interpreting the study's findings, and future research may benefit from employing external researchers to minimize concern of such biases.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

This study applied restricted parameters for examining ECBO leadership; therefore, recommendations for future research that can expand on breadth and depth are provided. First, considering our recommendation to provide structured support to ECBOs, future research should consider whether support that contributes to the formalization and codification of an ECBO may have unintended consequences. That is, movement toward institutionalizing an ECBO might potentially diminish leaders' ability to demonstrate community connections if their relationships become too formalized and therefore, more distant.

Further research could also provide a comparative analysis of leadership styles in ECBOs with those in other types of community organizations, contributing to a broader discussion on effective community leadership. Likewise, future research could expand the scope of this study to include a more extensive range of ECBOs across various geographic locations. Shifting the focus to community members' perspectives about their leaders would also add to understanding the outcomes of ECBO governance. Additionally, exploring the longitudinal impact of leadership strategies on community outcomes would deepen our understanding of the sustained influence of ECBO leadership.

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