

# Achieving Broadened Accountability in Nonprofit Governance

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*Knowledge of obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability (BA) in the nonprofit sector and possible paths towards overcoming them has lagged. This paper attempts to stimulate research and contribute to such knowledge by exploring the role that a Community of Practice (CoP) can play in avoiding governance dilemmas and developing grounded concepts around how certain relational practices contribute to the formation of a CoP. The study's ethnographic methods recorded and analyzed real-life interactions involving a board chair-CEO pair. The paper presents narrative description of these actions to convey its key contribution – a process model for overcoming obstacles to achieving BA.*

*Keywords: accountability, nonprofit governance, relational practices, Community of Practice*

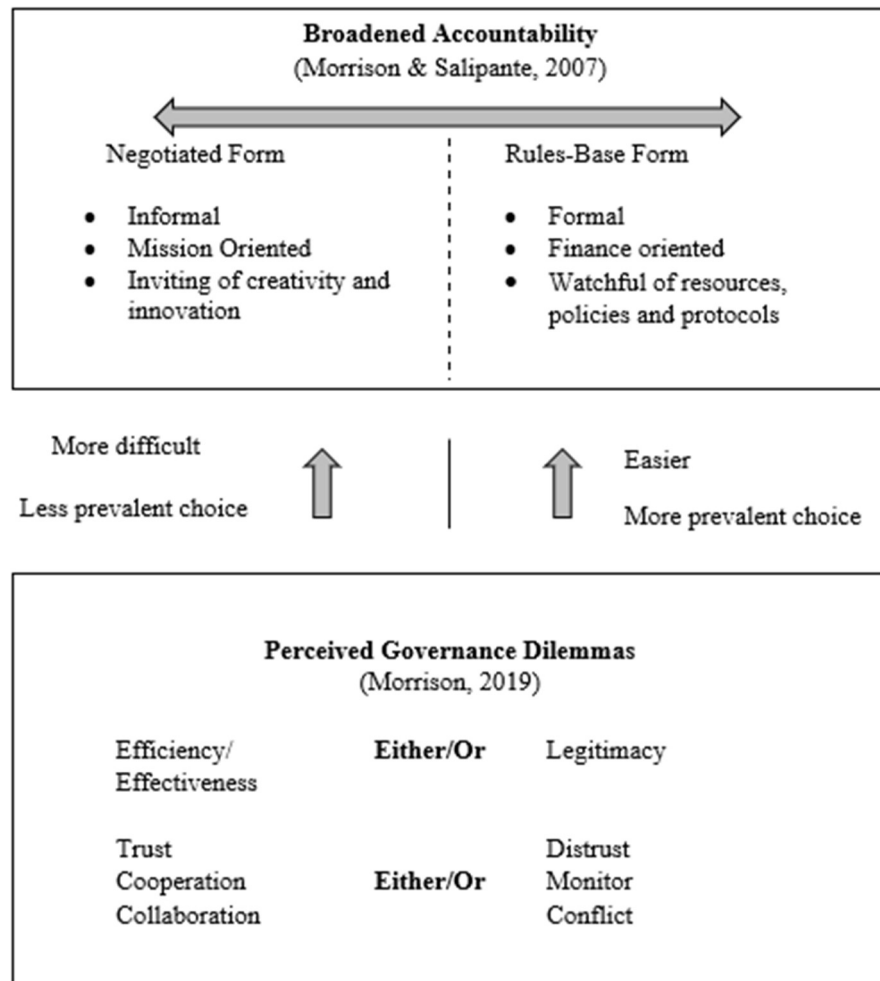
## INTRODUCTION

This paper extends an inquiry into how those charged with the governance of grassroots nonprofit organizations can effectively respond to increased public stakeholder demands for Broadened Accountability (BA), where BA means going beyond the traditional rule-based forms of accountability to include the newer forms of negotiated accountability (Morrison and Salipante, 2007). Leaders recognize a need to account for more than the explicit, objective dimensions of an organization such as finances, formal planning, HR and legal affairs (Kearns, 1996; Behn, 2001). They must also account for the more-or-less implicit, subjective dimensions such as how well the mission is achieved and to what degree multiple stakeholders are included meaningfully. This second form parallels the conception of nonprofit boards being socially constructed and of effective governance requiring serious and on-going engagement by the board in multiple directions: board – to – board, board – to staff, board – to stakeholders. Actions and criteria that achieve negotiable accountability through authentic and robust board engagement require far more creativity, attention and skill on the part of leaders than do those for rule-based accountability. Consequently the more complex and relational actions and criteria associated with BA and robust engagement are often ignored or minimized in practice due to the sheer difficulty in realizing them (Behn, 2001).

The origins of the present investigation are found in previous papers by the author. In the first of these papers (Morrison, 2019), a case is presented for the theoretical basis for boards falling short of such robust engagement. Leaders face a key obstacle as they work to achieve both dimensions of Broadened Accountability. This previous paper asserts that the difficulty is found in a pair of perceived governance dilemmas that can drive leaders into either/or choices between the two forms of accountability. Figure 1 depicts these perceived governance dilemmas as they relate to the two forms of Broadened Accountability. The figure illustrates how, within a narrow frame of mind, leaders perceive that only one-dimensional

accountability is available to them – with the more readily attainable rule-based form predominate over the less attainable negotiated form.

**FIGURE 1**  
**OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING BROADENED ACCOUNTABILITY (BA)**



The first dilemma echoes neo – institutional theory (Deephouse, 1996; Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Rowan and Meyer, 1977). It forces leaders to choose between governing towards legitimacy in the eyes of authorizing stakeholders especially funders such as United Ways *or* efficient and effective performance in the eyes of other stakeholders especially those served by the organization such as patrons, members and participants. Indeed, empirical research indicates that this dilemma is one with which many nonprofits in strongly institutionalized fields, such as social services, struggle (Alexander, 1999; Alexander, et al., 1999). A need to avoid tradeoffs in the face of this dilemma is beginning to elicit responses by nonprofit boards and CEOs that are revealing an expanded and integrated sense of organizational accountability.

A second dilemma pits governing towards distrusting, conflicting with and monitoring of management and professional staff *against* trusting, cooperating and collaborating with them. This dilemma centers on the seemingly mutually exclusive roles of monitoring and collaborating. The greater collaboration between board and management (Wesphal, 1999) that is required to achieve performance accountability properly has been shown to come sometimes at the expense of the board’s monitoring of management (Golden-Bidle and Rao, 1997). This monitoring is required not only to achieve process and financial accountability, but

increasingly to achieve performance accountability as well (Ettner, 2006). Boards that see collaboration and monitoring as difficult to achieve simultaneously must then choose which to emphasize, and one will be sacrificed. The result is that Broadened Accountability will not be achieved. The underlying problem is that a dichotomy is drawn between trust and distrust – they are seen as opposites (Lewicki, et al., 1998; Luhmann, 1979). The high trust required for effective collaborating is counter to the distrust understood as needed for effective monitoring. With this understanding of trust and distrust as opposite ends of the same dimension, the best that a board can do is to find some compromise point where it is able to achieve a limited measure of both collaboration and monitoring, doing a truly effective job at neither.

The choices to govern towards the first items of the governance dilemmas (legitimacy and distrust/conflict/monitoring) align more or less with achieving the rules-based form of accountability and often are the easiest and most likely paths pursued, while the choices to govern towards achieving the second items (efficiency and trust/cooperation/collaboration) align more or less with the negotiated form of accountability and often are the most difficult and less likely paths pursued (Morrison, 2019).

Importantly, there has been little empirical research on how nonprofit chairs and directors can escape the horns of these perceived governance dilemmas to achieve both dimensions of Broadened Accountability simultaneously. This current paper strives to produce new usable knowledge that can help practitioners transcend the key dilemmas that stand in the way of achieving BA, while at the same time contribute to theoretical understanding of this pressing unresolved problem of practice.

The study reported here, a portion of a larger ethnography, examines the actions of key leaders in a nascent grassroots nonprofit organization as they struggle to govern towards Broadened Accountability through robust multi-dimensional board engagement. The paper's analyses apply concepts little studied in the nonprofit governance literature, including notions of Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, et al., 2002) and relational practices involving face-work (Goffman, 1967), reflexive monitoring (Giddens, 1984) and skillful organizing (Hosking, 1991).

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

### **The Community of Practice Approach in a Nonprofit Context**

The concept of Community of Practice (CoP) has evolved considerably since its inception nearly three decades ago (Li, et al., 2009). Wenger and Lave (1991, p. 98) first defined CoP as “a system of relationships between people, activities and the world; developing with time, and in relations to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.” CoP was originally developed as an approach for examining and understanding situated learning among apprentices. The authors used the example of how midwives, meat cutters, and tailors learned their skills primarily on-site in shops during informal gatherings where experts and novices interacted, exchanged stories and problem-solved in unstructured ways. Through this process, skill deficiencies among novices are identified and remediated. At the same time, experts improve practice and innovate on approaches to persistent problems.

Wenger (1998) widened the focus of the original CoP concept beyond situated learning of instrumental skills to include socialization, knowledge creation and sharing, and individual identity development. Drawing from a case study of medical claims processing clerks, Wenger expanded CoP into an analytical framework comprised of three interrelated dimensions: *mutual engagement*, *joint enterprise*, and *shared repertoire*. Mutual engagement represents social interaction that leads to shared meaning and norms around key issues and problems. Joint enterprise is the process through which members are bound together by a common goal. Shared repertoire is the collection of communal resources that members produce over time that are used to negotiate meaning and facilitate learning. These include items such as language, routines, plans and stories. In addition to the three dimensions, Wenger went on to describe a set of attributes that signal the existence of a CoP. These characteristics, as well as interpretations of the representative dimensions (Li, et al., 2009) are presented in Table 1. Within this framework, a CoP in tacit fashion becomes “a way of talking about the social configuration in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

**TABLE 1**  
**WENGER'S INDICATORS FOR THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND**  
**LI, ET, AL.'S PROPOSED DOMAINS**

Wenger's Indicators	CoP Domains
1. Sustained mutual relationships - harmonious or conflictual	Mutual Engagement
2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together	Mutual Engagement Joint Enterprise
3. The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation	Mutual Engagement
4. Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process	Mutual Engagement
5. Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed	Shared Repertoire
6. Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs	Mutual Engagement
7. Knowing what others know, what they can do and how they can contribute to an enterprise	Mutual Engagement Joint Enterprise Shared Repertoire
8. Mutually defining identities	Mutual Engagement
9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products	Shared Repertoire
10. Specific tools, representations and other artefacts	Shared Repertoire
11. Local lore, shared stories inside jokes, knowing laughter	Shared Repertoire
12. Jargon and shortcuts to communications as well as the ease of producing new ones	Shared Repertoire
	Mutual Engagement
13. Certain styles recognized as displaying membership	Mutual Engagement
14. A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world	Mutual Engagement

\*From (Li, et al. 2009)

The focus of CoPs widened again. Wenger, et al., (2002) transformed CoPs from an *analytical lens* for understanding spontaneous situated learning in apprenticeships and for knowledge creation in social settings to a *management tool* for knowledge diffusion, innovation, and human resource management in organizations (Swan, et al., 2002; Bellini and Canonico, 2008). In a marked departure from previous iterations of the concept, which described CoPs as emerging organically, this version suggests that organizations can cultivate and leverage CoPs intentionally to gain and maintain competitive advantage. Furthermore, this expanded concept of CoP has been widely employed by scholars in the field of management and social sciences as a means of analyzing and improving learning and knowledge transfer in a wide array of private sector contexts including insurance, machine repair, corporate research, online commerce, healthcare and professional networks (Amin and Roberts, 2008; Roberts, 2010). Studies that are situated within the nonprofit sector have limited their focus to the sub-sectors of healthcare and higher education (Annala and Makinen, 2017; Li, et al., 2009), which tend to contain large complex organizations that behave more like private sector corporations than smaller grassroots nonprofits.

The research described in this paper investigates how leaders of smaller grassroots nonprofit organizations can overcome obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability. Rarely, if at all, has a Community of Practice approach been used to make sense of the actions and activities that facilitate such work. This investigation is unique in its application in a traditional nonprofit context of CoP in each of its three senses. The analytical framework employed in this paper includes CoP as 1) situated learning for

novices and experts, 2) a three-dimensional analytical lens consisting of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, and 3) a management tool. Thus, this paper strives to contribute to the growing CoP literature as well as to the practice of nonprofit governance.

### **Towards Overcoming Obstacles to Achieving Broadened Accountability: The Practice of Blended Strategizing**

The second paper from which this current study proceeds (Morrison and Salipante, 2007) asserts that nonprofit organizations can attend successfully to multiple dimensions of accountability. The observed experiences of a key leadership pair in a young organization the authors call “VLN” supported the view that multiple, complicating aspects of accountability can be achieved, and that the achieving can be actively attended to in the ongoing decision-making of committed leaders. That study suggests that one way to attend to Broadened Accountability is through emergent strategizing, periodically accompanied by deliberate strategic planning.

This earlier study also depicts one process, one set of practices, that shows how Broadened Accountability, in particular the negotiable aspects of accountability, could be achieved. The narrative describes how leaders can deal with the ongoing challenge of negotiable accountability through the practice of blended strategizing. This set of practices is conceptualized as involving the blending of deliberate and emergent strategizing. In the previous paper, the authors posited the following:

***Proposition 1:*** *Planning that blends and integrates deliberate and emergent strategizing enables leaders to address negotiable accountability effectively, particularly during periods of high uncertainty.*

***Proposition 2:*** *Blended strategizing that contributes to achieving negotiable accountability uses*

- a) *deliberate strategizing to meet the expectations of stakeholders by describing intended and accomplished outcomes, to assign internal priority to program aspects that are important to stakeholders, but not to generate new issues; and*
- b) *emergent strategizing to engage with stakeholders and improve the organization’s day-to-day processes and performance, demonstrating to them mission-related competence.*

The authors also noted in this previous paper that the concepts of blended strategizing and negotiable accountability echo neoinstitutional theory and associated obstacles to achieving BA. To gain legitimacy and enhance survival, organizations in highly elaborated institutional environments conform to expectations of social actors that have the standing to confer legitimacy (Deephouse, 1996; Rowan and Meyer, 1977). In VLN's institutional field, these include funding agents (Galaskiewicz, 1985) such as United Way. The resulting isomorphism in organizational practices is not only coercive but also mimetic (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983) in that VLN's leaders adopt deliberate strategizing as a way to cope with organizational uncertainty. Although a display of expected, front-stage practices enhances legitimacy, Meyer and Rowan (1977) claim that these practices hamper efficiency and effectiveness. The concept of blended strategizing suggests this need not be the case; however, organizations such as VLN must engage in back-stage practices such as emergent strategizing to achieve performance. As professionalism among nonprofit managers increases, there is greater risk that coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism will lead to the visible front-stage, formal, instrumental structures being widely adopted without the needed, less visible, informal, relational, back-stage practices, norms, and social arrangements that must complement them to achieve performance (Fletcher, 1992; Blair and Kochan, 2000). Nonprofit leaders in high accountability environments sorely need more knowledge about how to couple front-stage with back-stage practices to attend to both rules-based and negotiated forms of accountability.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

This paper’s exploratory investigations proceed from the propositions of the author’s previous work by extending considerations to include how a Community of Practice approach might shine light on the

problem of achieving Broadened Accountability. In particular, more needs to be known about what those charged with governance, especially board chair-chief executive pairs, can actually do to transcend key governance dilemmas, and in doing so, build on the practice of blending strategizing to balance and integrate a full spectrum of often-conflicting goals, demands, views and perspectives from a full array of diverse stakeholders. This need leads to the following research question: How can nonprofit organizations employ a CoP approach to deal with the perceived governance dilemmas that impede achieving BA?

## **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND PRESENTATION**

Empirical work by the author (Morrison and Salipante, 2007; Morrison and Salipante, 2006) was based on rigorous ethnographic methods (Van Maanen, 1983) that grounded findings in the realities of practice, the routinized carrying-out of everyday activities (Bourdieu, 1977; Reckwitz, 2002). The particular ethnography (Morrison, 2002) – from which those earlier studies as well as this current one is derived – systematically probed the lived worlds of leaders who were struggling to satisfy the wide array of demands of a full set of stakeholders.

The development of grounded theory is perhaps the most widely used interpretive strategy in the social sciences today (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The author's use of Glaser and Strauss's (1999) method of comparative analysis involved two generally accepted interrelated processes: theoretical sampling and constant comparison. Real-life interactions involving a board chair-chief executive officer pair were recorded and analyzed. The original ethnography and subsequent papers present detailed narrative descriptions of these actions, to convey key concepts such as blended strategizing. This current paper presents a particular episode from that original ethnography that provides detailed description and analysis of how one particular chair-chief executive pair deals with overcoming obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability.

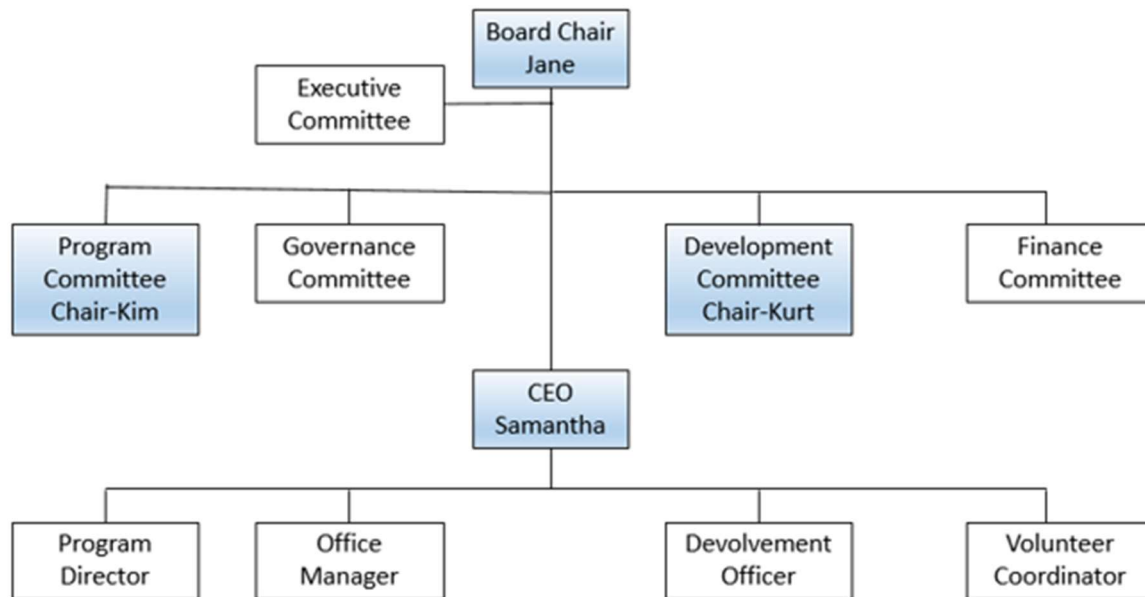
The analyses presented in the series of three papers that concludes with this current paper focus on the seemingly mundane actions and decisions taken by nonprofit leaders as they pursue their governance responsibilities. To convey how these repeated practices produce a pattern over time that is significant, participant observations are presented as short narratives. This form of presentation was chosen because it is an ideal structure to express complex, dynamic human experience. It portrays the multifaceted pressures and demands that the participants felt over time. Adhering to the scholarly traditions of ethnography (Emerson, et al., 1995; Geertz, 1973; Pentland, 1992) description and analysis are not separated. Interpretations that emerged from many hours of analysis and constant comparison are presented to the reader in a fashion that gradually builds these interpretations through interplay of narrative and analysis.

## **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **An Episode of Governance in an Organization Seeking Broadened Accountability**

The setting of the episode is VLN – a small grassroots nonprofit operating in a midsized US city with an annual operating budget of approximately \$1M, full time staff of five and 15 part time volunteer executive coaches. The board consists of 15 members with a traditional officer and committee structure. VLN enjoys a high-profile board composition with many members occupying publicly visible leadership roles across all sectors and many industries in the city. Most of its funding is provided by the United Way, two local private foundations, three corporate foundations and board member contributions. A modest level of revenue is generated through fee-for service for board development programs offered to nonprofit executive teams and boards. VLN's mission is to build the leadership capacity of the city's nonprofit sector especially for small grassroots organizations. Key actors in the episode are Jane (Board Chair and founder), Samantha (CEO), Kim (board member, Program Committee Chair, and strategic planning facilitator) and Kurt (board member and Development Committee Chair). Figure 2 represents the organizational chart for VLN.

**FIGURE 2**  
**VLN ORGANIZATIONAL CHART WITH EPISODE ACTORS HIGHLIGHTED**



The complication that animates the core narrative about a board chair and chief executive began to take shape only after Jane, an active volunteer leader, noticed an unresolved problem in her community—namely that nonprofit board members were not as effective as they could be and that not enough capable citizens were finding their way to board membership. She took the initiative to articulate the cause and others swiftly joined forces with her. A bona fide organization, termed VLN in this paper, formalized over time, and soon staff was hired to fulfill a mission to build stronger nonprofit boards of directors. Several programs were designed and implemented around recruiting, training and placing new board members in local community organizations. In no time the organization (now in its fifth year of existence and with Jane as the volunteer chair of the board and Mary as the chief executive) was faced with a key demand of a burgeoning collection of stakeholders – board, staff, volunteers, funders and clients. Each in their own unique way voiced a need to know the action plan and how it was formed. Each in varying degrees of urgency also voiced a right to participate in the process, as is increasingly the case in American communities (Chaskin, 2003).

In the episode offered in this paper, we join this leadership pair after Mary’s first months on the job. They are engaging in the first of a half dozen meetings that took place over five months, and that brought together various groupings of VLN board members to address the task of making strategy. This first episode depicts in real-life/real-time the multidimensional practice of blended strategizing and how Jane and Samantha employ it in a matter of fact manner to overcome governance obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability. Additionally, we begin to see how Jane and Samantha, through tacitly striving to achieve BA through blended strategizing become competent at creating a bona fide Community of Practice around nonprofit governance.

*Blended Strategizing to Overcome Obstacles to Broadened Accountability: Dealing With Perceived Governance Dilemmas*

Jane is standing outside of the building that houses the United Way office at 6:30 A.M. on a bright, chilly spring morning. The doors are locked. However, inside, the coffee “barista” is scurrying to ready her espresso cart for the start of the day. Jane taps on the window to gain her attention to signal that she needs to be let in. Clearly, the busy attendant looks a bit put off, but she hurries over to crack the door. Jane slides in with a smile and quick thank you despite the gruff treatment. The doors will not be unlocked until

seven, the same time that the special VLN board meeting is supposed to start in a fourth-floor conference room. Jane walks the short distance to the bank of elevators. Nothing happens when she pushes the button. They won't open till seven either. She turns towards the smell of fresh coffee. "Sorry, I won't be ready till seven too." the attendant announces flatly. "Well, that does seem to be the magic hour", Jane says with resignation.

In just a few minutes several other board members arrive. Jane lets them in, and they all stand around grumbling mildly about the inconvenience. Samantha, the new VLN Executive Director, pops out of the stair well. She has been upstairs preparing with Kim, a newly appointed board member and the facilitator of today's meeting. Samantha apologizes and assures everyone that the elevator will be working momentarily. She joins grumbling and chuckling over their awkward predicament. Samantha, as always, is concerned about making good use of the limited amount of time that busy board members have to offer. She apologizes to no one in particular again. Jane shares Samantha's concern and begins to look a little less patient with the situation as she glances at her watch and sighs. The elevator doors finally open. Minutes later everyone enters the small conference room. Jane and Samantha sit next to each other in their usual seats. Kim stands at the head of the table next to a flip chart stand with a pad full of neat, multi-colored writing.

The first hour of the meeting is occupied by a presentation by Kim about her approach to strategic planning. She diligently works her way through components of the process that the group will take up over the next several months. She scribes an agenda list,

- Approach
- Mission/Vision
- Situational Analysis (SWOT)
- Priorities
- Work plan
- Budgets
- Evaluation/Adjustments
- Roles
- Timetable

She explains that the approach will be based on the ideas of James Collins and Jerry Porras found in their book Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies. Central to their work is the concept of the Yin of preserving the core and Yang of stimulating progress. Kim explains that the processes of making priorities, work plans and budgets, and doing evaluation are strait forward mechanical actions once the Yin and Yang are clarified. It is the Yin and Yang part that is tricky. This requires more time, commitment and "stick-to-it-iveness."

The process that Kim lays out and that eventually is taken up, largely for rhetorical purposes by the board of VLN, tracks a classic formulation of strategic management (Mintzberg, 1994) – one that is characterized by an elaborated, rational process that is controlled principally by the CEO and produces fully developed, generic positions ultimately achieved through detailed attention to operational objectives. The members of the group are quiet, tentative, looking for a cue. Then Mary, a life-long friend and colleague of Jane's, breaks the ice abruptly,

I really don't think that we need to get into that values stuff and the vision and the other. We know who we are, what we are doing, and probably what we should be doing pretty much. My experience is that that takes a whole lot of time and it gets you nowhere or at best right where you started. At worst it gets you somewhere where you don't want to be. It's too airy... too much mumbo jumbo if you know what I mean. I have done that too many times. I suggest that we skip that and get right down to what we already know...to what we are doing right now... Do others agree?

Several members nod and mumble in agreement.



Mary is expressing a shared sense that formalized deliberate planning gets in the way of real work. She has observed that a formal process such as the one described by Kim runs the risk of pointing the organization in a wrong direction. She prefers to focus planning on the here and now, on real problems, rather than an ideal image of a future state, abstract concepts. Mary is not much interested in planning for rhetorical purposes. Kim replies politely but without enthusiasm, “Well yes, ok we don’t need to do that, but it may hinder progress later.”

During a period of silence, Jane begins to shift in her seat a bit. She glances around the table with a warm smile. Others begin to look expectantly at her and Samantha who is seated next to her. Sitting up straight, leaning forward Jane then focuses on Kim, and says with care,

I tend to agree with Mary. Let’s not get bogged down in values talk and the process overall. I am partial to getting to work on our list of stuff... But maybe a little about mission may help. I mean to get us on the same page in black and white before moving forward... and to actually go through much of the process is reasonable... to do the thing right... But we need to get to the substance relatively quickly.

Several members then offer consenting comments.

Jane begins to display a pattern of expressing two minds towards the prospect of formal, deliberative planning. On the one hand she agrees with her fellow board members about the need to be careful not to go overboard with the process. On the other hand, she recognizes the value of the process. Jane takes up a point of view that recognizes the need “to do the thing right”. This means that she recognizes that they are expected by outside constituents to produce a strategic plan, whether it has operational value or not. By displaying this perspective to other board members she means to persuade them to consider the possibility that there is some value in the formal process even if actually doing it is onerous, and the product is mostly rhetorical, perhaps even counterproductive in respect to “doing the thing right” or achieving performance effectiveness.

After some thought Kim offers,

OK then we don’t have to do the values thing if we don’t want to... However, I suggest work on the other part of clarifying our mission, which means defining core purpose and the business we are in. Once we do that, we’ll be prepared to move on to creating a vision... Collins calls this ‘the Big Hairy Audacious Goal’ or BHAG... We need to create a vivid description of a future state. One that evokes passion, emotions and conviction... for example Henry Ford’s BHAG was ‘to democratize the car’.

After another period of silence, someone offers jokingly, “Look where that got us – the L.A Freeway!” Kim laughs along while still standing in front of the group. She shifts her feet a bit, looks down seeming to gather her thoughts, and then says,

Yes, well one person’s big hairy audacious goal or dream is another’s nightmare, I guess. That’s why we need to talk about it... Let me relate this problem to a sailing problem. If we are all a fleet of boats wishing to head to the same location, we will all need to have the same compass heading. If we are off even slightly, then we will end up at very different places over time. A small error makes for big differences over time on boats... We all need to have our compasses pointed to the same objective, so that in several years we will arrive together at the same place... In fact, the key to this whole process will be to align the enduring core purposes with the envisioned future... aligning our compasses if you will.

Kim fails to understand the point of the previous exchange about Mary’s negative view of formal planning, that it is impossible to know enough about the future to accurately predict the long-term consequences of today’s actions. Flexibility is desirable, not rigidity. Kim is operating from a set of

principles that places faith in being able to analyze well enough to arrive at a firm long-term objective that is attainable by vigilantly maintaining a strict compass bearing over time regardless of shifting weather conditions or hidden shoals.

An alternative to Kim's sailing metaphor is Herbert Simon's (1996) ant, used by the author to illustrate the concept of bounded rationality:

We watch an ant make his laborious way across a wind-and wave-molded beach. He moves ahead, angles to the right to ease his climb up a steep dunelet, detours around a pebble, stops for moment to exchange information with a compatriot. Thus, he makes his weaving, halting way back home... Why is {the path} not straight; why does it not aim directly from its point to its goal? In the case of the ant (and for that matter us) we know the answer. He has a general sense of where home lies, but he cannot foresee all the obstacles between. He must adapt his course repeatedly to the difficulties he encounters and often detour uncrossable barriers. His horizons are very close, so he deals with each obstacle as he comes to it; he probes for ways around or over it, without much thought for future obstacles" (p. 52).

Kim may have been better served if she had adjusted her sailing image to accommodate Simon's ant. Kim could have described a boat that tacks up wind and around hard to see shoals instead of directly towards a far-off destination and almost certainly into trouble. A more effective way would be to determine a general destination then bump along using different short-term coordinates derived by close attention to local feedback loops, as suggested by Simon and his ant. After a while, the actual destination may shift as the crew learns more about the environment on route. Only attention to local, real-time experiences will produce the information necessary to determine those local corrections, thereby keeping the voyage going in the overall desired direction. However, at the same time, it is possible to image that the backers of any such voyage would require some convincing representation of a firm, long-term destination or outcome, however rhetorical it might be. The planning process that Kim offers seems to be more attuned to responding to the external backer than to the internal professionals.

The members of the board of VLN, however, instinctively know that one needs to keep the horizon short and stay locally grounded in order to assure effective performance. Looking too far ahead is counterproductive. Better to focus on what is immediately in front of you. At the same time, largely as a result of Jane and Samantha's interactions, the members are able to keep in mind the far-away concepts, ideas, and destinations. There is recognition that one must not abandon the rhetorical, theoretical, the abstract, and the far away that is represented by Kim's concepts of mission, vision and 'big hairy audacious goal'.

At this point in the narrative, Jane and Samantha are fully embroiled in dealing with a governance dilemma (legitimacy vs. efficiency and effectiveness) that impedes achieving Broadened Accountability. On the one hand they feel obliged to conduct a formal process for display to external funders so that VLN can legitimately claim their support. On the other hand, they must respond to the legitimate mandate to apply a more emergent approach to strategizing- one that focuses on achieving performance effectiveness through close attention to current projects. We see how the board members of VLN, led by their Chair and CEO, behave in these two seemingly contradictory ways at the same time. This dual mode of behavior can be conceptualized as a single coherent practice of blended strategizing.

The stage is set for the full development of how the key protagonists successfully navigate the tension between deliberate and emergent modes of strategy formation and the closely associated tension between the two horns of a perceived governance dilemma that impedes the achievement of Broadened Accountability. The episode continues.

### **Blended Strategizing as a Building Block of a NP Governance CoP**

Jane and Samantha turn to each other and in a rather dramatic exchange express how “right on” the sailing metaphor seems, even though it is not completely so. They turn to Kim. Samantha offers a thumbs up. Several other thumbs fly up. Jane then suggests a break is in order.

Here Jane and Samantha work together to protect Kim. They display approval to one another and draw on the other members to participate in a gesture of acceptance if not wholehearted approval. In addition to helping Kim save face, Jane’s enthusiasm for the sailing metaphor is an effort to show that the deliberate, formalized process may have rhetorical value.

Samantha gathers Jane and Kim and they retreat to the hall where they check in privately “backstage”. Jane and Samantha encourage Kim. They say that they think that it is going all right. They recognize that there is resistance and that important adjustments in the process may be necessary, but that the adjustments will make it better in the long run. Kim expresses appreciation for the support, but that she is worried about the level of resistance. She says that she would not like to see the process adjusted too much; otherwise the results will be less than ideal. The break ends and they return to the boardroom where the rest of the group is waiting.

This exchange shows how Jane and Samantha use a backstage setting to work out their agenda. They exit a formal stage of interaction and enter an informal setting in the hallway. This is a place where they can make more focused interventions free of formal constraints of the boardroom. They check in with Kim. They support and encourage her even in the face of serious friction. Jane and Samantha appear to want the formal process to go forward even with vigorous push back; but they also want Kim to adjust the process. This way of thinking further illustrates the way Jane and Samantha view the formal process as both valuable and dangerous. It must get done, but in a careful way so as not to alienate board participants who are skeptical of the rhetorical value and prefer to focus on performance effectiveness. Jane and Samantha seek a balance. At this juncture we see them working together to shape a moderated version of formal strategic planning that is blended with an emergent mode.

Jane and Samantha sit while Kim makes her way to the flip chart. She begins,

Now in order to make this process more efficient I am suggesting that we create a “Mars Group”. This is a group of 5-7 people that represents a slice of our population, or that can be seen as containing our genetic code. If we were to send our race, the race of VLN, up to Mars to recreate ourselves there. This group will meet relatively frequently in order to analyze and synthesize the work of the whole group... and report back.

Kurt, the high-tech executive, weighs in, “This is an actual group made up of 5 of the 10 of us who will get together a lot in addition to the 2 planning days?” Kim says, “Yes.” Kurt asks, “How often?” Kim answers, “About every two weeks for the whole planning process. Kurt responds, “Why?” Kim says, “In order to achieve effectiveness and efficiency through representation of the whole group.”

This tense exchange is followed by another period of silence. In time, Jane turns to Samantha and says, “So in other words, the Mars group needs to come back to earth – to reconnect with the rest of the group eventually? I see this as potentially very helpful.” Samantha quickly interjects in a way that appears to complete Jane’s thought, “As long as we come back to earth! And as long as we earthlings keep doing our work down here while the space travelers are having all the fun!”

This previous set of exchanges is a prime example of how Jane and Samantha work as a unified force. They combine their comments to make a single statement. This way of demonstrating a unified front, face or line of thought is highly consistent with how they interact on a routine basis. And this routine that is characterized by one of them beginning a statement and the other finishing it seems to create a sense of security and confidence among the members of the group, even in the face of difficult conflictual incidents. This tacit sense of ontological security is fundamental to the creation and re-creation of a coherent and sustainable community of nonprofit governance at VLN.

As stated earlier, Wenger (1998) describes a Community of Practice as being characterized by three dimensions. First is *mutual engagement*. To elaborate further, this means connecting:

participants to each other in diverse and complex ways. The resulting relations reflect the full complexity of doing things together. They are not easily reducible to single principles such as power, pleasure, competition, collaboration, desire, economic relations, utilitarian arrangements, or information processing. In real life, mutual relations among participants are complex mixtures of power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helpfulness, success and failure, authority and collegiality, resistance and compliance, anger and tenderness, attraction and repugnance, fun and boredom, trust and suspicion, friendship and hatred. Communities of practice have it all (p. 77).

As Jane and Samantha work to help the board of VLN to formulate strategy and transcend key governance dilemmas, they are creating an environment within which members are engaging with each other in increasingly complex and diverse ways. The challenge of making strategy affords an opportunity for members to engage with each other in the ways that Wenger describes. We can see this complexity and diversity develop and the ways that Jane and Samantha encourage it in their routine interactions with each other and the entire group.

The second dimension of a genuine Community of Practice is *the negotiation of a joint enterprise*. According to Wenger, this process is:

(1) the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement; (2) defined by the participants by the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control; and (3) not just a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of practice (pp. 77-78).

Wenger goes on to say that the third characteristic of practice as a source of community coherence is *the development of a shared repertoire*. This means that:

Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates sources for negotiating meaning... The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice (p. 82).

Jane and Samantha's way of interacting in a routine fashion with the board of VLN can be viewed as fundamental activity that precipitates in a rather matter of fact way the creation and recreation of these three dimensions of a CoP. Many indicators that define a CoP are present and/or in formation in this episode including sustained mutual relationships that are both harmonious and conflictual; forming of shared stories, inside jokes, and knowing laughter; a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world; mutually defined identities; quick set up and resolution of agenda items, problems and resolutions; and rapid flow of information and innovation. Viewed this way, the leaders tacitly fulfill their responsibilities to the degree that they are able to bring about the creation and sustainability of a viable community of nonprofit governance practice that consists of mutual engagement, negotiating of a joint enterprise and the development of a shared repertoire. Jane and Samantha's interactions give us a glimpse of how this happens for them.

### **Becoming Competent Agents by Organizing a NP Governance CoP**

The following exchange illustrates relational practices employed by Jane and Samantha to encourage the on-going development and maintenance of a coherent Community of Practice for the board of VLN. In the process of practicing blended strategizing, they utilize tacit ritualized routines, such as face-work (Goffman, 1967), reflective monitoring (Giddens, 1984), and networking for understanding and influence

(Hosking, 1991). We begin to see how actions and discourse of these kinds enable Jane and Samantha to play a key role in mobilizing themselves and other members to be competent social agents in a nonprofit governance setting –and in doing so cultivate a genuine CoP that provides a mechanism to solve governance dilemmas that stand in the way of achieving BA.

Jane extends the humorous riff from the previous exchange. She says, “But who has time to go to Mars? Besides, I hear Mars is a pretty inhospitable place. Doesn’t sound like much fun to me. Why go anyway?” Everyone laughs. Kim is smiley and adds, “Yes, exactly. Very good points for us to consider” Her statement seems to conclude this exchange in a way that avoids losing face. A period of silence follows that seems to relieve and calm the group.

Here Jane and Kim work together to safe face all around. Humor is used to express that the group still doesn’t like what is happening, but will play along any way - perhaps partly because they don’t wish to threaten Kim’s face, and partly because they accept Jane and Samantha’s line that the process has some rhetorical value. Kim grants the group its point. Relief is achieved, and they move on.

Kim spends the next several minutes explaining the benefits of investing the time and energy to go through the process. She writes as she talks,

- Connects concepts to work plans
- Formulation of shared understanding of long-term goals
- Stretches goals and aligns objectives

Jane interrupts,

I hear about HP and Sony and the others. They can do this internally, without connecting to outsiders. But we nonprofits are connected with collaboration with wide groups. We need to keep in tune with the outside worlds in a different way... Our way is different. We are small, new, and part of the community in a different way.

Again, Samantha seems to complete the thought, “Maybe we need to adjust how we are going about this.” Kim responds by explaining how the process that she has outlined works for all kinds of organizations. Even though it was developed within the private sector, it is not private sector specific. She references Collins and Porras as making this claim. She points to the situational analysis as a part of the process that will help the process take into account the unique aspects of the nonprofit sector and VLN’s unique local context. She goes on to say that a thorough situational analysis that consists of interviews of all stakeholders will achieve the broad and meaningful connections and responsiveness that Jane seeks for VLN. The group seems to be satisfied.

Jane concludes by saying, “I am very glad that we are talking to all of our stakeholders in a real way, otherwise this would not work for me. Good job.” Samantha reminds Kim that they are far behind schedule. Kim responds almost immediately, “So what do people think overall? Is this a process that we can commit to?” As people look at their watches consent flows, “Sounds great.”, “Makes good sense.”, “I’m on board.”, “This sounds ok.”, “The sailing metaphor sold me.” Kim, appearing to think that hers would be the final word of this episode, “Yes, right on! The vision must be shared and clear.” But it is Samantha who concludes this exchange with words of support for and concern about the process,

Now I am very impressed with the process and I think that it will work nicely. In reality the smaller group will do much of the work I think I hope, and it will be important to know who is in this small group. Plus, it’s important to be realistic about the fact we have regular work that needs to continue to get done while the process is moving forward. We may not be able to wait on some of these things. How do we stay on both tracks at the same time? The strategic planning and the regular work. I don’t know. I am worried about being held up too long on certain projects. There is a worry around going forward and waiting till the process is done.

Kim then leads two exchanges in which the group decides swiftly and easily who is on the Mars group and who will do interviews of stakeholders for the situational analysis. Jane and Samantha end needing to coerce people gently and humorously to commit.

In the previous exchanges, all members of the group demonstrate in a tacit way that they know how “to go on” in their particular circumstances, how to create *reciprocating action* (Giddens, 1984). Their routine know-how is about being able to interact with co-participants tactfully and with respect in order to protect and maintain social continuity. For example, members know how to use humor in a matter of fact way to express their lack of support for the process without expressing lack of support for Kim. They also know how to follow Jane and Samantha’s line of participating in the process for rhetorical reasons. At the same time Kim knows how to accept the group’s face-saving maneuvers and move on in a way that allows the group to continue with the process more easily.

Kim then moves the group into another exchange, “Now it wasn’t too long ago that we identified several top issues that VLN staff and board are currently dealing with. It is important to keep these in mind on a going forward basis.” She displays a flip chart:

1. Unmet customer needs: Matching corporate clients to boards faster!
2. Product and services improvement: Consulting to Nonprofit boards! More and better trainings!
3. Diversity: Recruiting prospects from diverse communities!
4. Keeping expectations in check. Statewide expansion!
5. Real/ perceived competition. State Association of Nonprofits!
6. Why aren’t more nonprofits and firms jumping on-board? Expand corporate clients!
7. State of funding – Must get Mega Foundation grant!
8. Space considerations-relationship w/ United Way
9. Role of board vs. CEO. Get board members more involved!
10. Walking the Talk – VLN doing SP and Board Del!

Jane jumps in, “This is very good. The group went through this list, built it last time... These are what we are working on now. Where do we play these things into the process? Not till September. Don’t these things affect what we’re doing here, I mean right now?” Another member builds on Jane’s thought, “Why can’t we just delegate these issues to a smaller group right now? To help work them out now as Samantha and Jane are really wrestling with them? We could get on with it that way.” Kim responds, “I strongly suggest that we don’t really move on until we do core purpose and vision, and the situational analysis. Doing that will affect the way we look at the issues, how we adapt them... But keeping them in mind is helpful... more important is that we need to step back a bit.” Samantha joins in, “Is there anything we can do... to push the process forward more swiftly, in light of the list of issues and our hunches about what to do about them? Do the planning process and work on the issues together... Not wait.” Kim responds, “Great, yes.” Jane suggests, “Yes, it is helpful to get information out in advance. ... and maybe we can have one more meeting before the full board meeting in July in order to get to the issues faster and be ready for that meeting with substance.” Samantha offers the last words of this exchange, “Yes, otherwise we may become paralyzed with analysis or however the saying goes.” She then reminds everybody that time has run out.

The meeting closes abruptly after about two hours. Jane, Samantha and Kim stay behind and converse privately. The core of the discussion is that Samantha is very concerned about how the strategic planning process may get in the way of regular work and may divert attention from what is most important. Jane says that she must move on to another meeting, so the post-meeting ends too.

### **Relational Practices for Competence**

With the conclusion of this episode, we see how it is possible to frame Jane and Samantha’s discourse and action around blended strategizing as tacit routinized behavior that is critical to the competent creation and re-creation of a coherent Community of Practice in a nonprofit governance setting. Further analysis suggests the presence of additional relations practices.

Goffman (1967) describes in detail a set of ritual elements in social interaction that he calls “face-work”. By face-work Goffman means to “designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is

doing consistent with face” (p. 12). In social interaction, every person is challenged to defend one’s own face and to preserve the face of the other, regardless of how one actually feels or thinks about what is going on. “Face-work serves to counteract incidents – that is, events – whose effective symbolic implication threatens face” (p. 12). Goffman stresses the prevalence of ritualistic tact in the production and reproduction of social structures. Face-work is what one does mostly in a tacit way to shore up the strains in the social fabric and to establish and sustain trust. The processes of defending and preserving your own and other’s face play a key role in the struggle to sustain social coherence.

Jane and Samantha’s face-work is prevalent in this episode and continues to be so throughout each episode of the entire ethnography. They work hard to maintain their own faces as leaders and to preserve Kim’s face as well as the faces of other members, in order to preserve the social continuity of the group. Preserving the social continuity of the group in this way becomes a foundational element to the successful creation and re-creation of a coherent Community of Practice for the board of VLN.

Giddens’ (1984) stratification model of agency, whereby reflexive monitoring, rationalization and motivation of action are embedded sets of processes through which agents achieve competence, extends our understanding of Jane and Samantha’s struggle to achieve competence. Emphasis is given to the first and deepest of the three processes that make up the stratification model – reflexive monitoring of action – as the most important dimension of achieving competence:

The reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others. That is to say, actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of contexts in which they move (p. 5).

Jane and Samantha are seen throughout the narrative to be learning how to monitor their own activities reflexively as well that of others, especially as they do face-work. This “self and other awareness” that Giddens emphasizes in competent agents enables actors such as Jane and Samantha to do the kind of face-work that Goffman describes, and asserts is so essential to maintaining social coherence.

The concept of reflexive monitoring is even more helpful in illuminating how Jane and Samantha become competent actors when it is linked to Giddens’ idea of practical consciousness. He describes three layers of consciousness - discursive, practical and unconscious - in the following way:

The mutual knowledge incorporated in encounters is not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors. Most such knowledge is practical in character: it is inherent in the capability to “go on” within the routines of social life. The line between discursive and practical consciousness is fluctuating and permeable, both in experience of the individual agent as regards comparisons between actors and contexts of social activity. There is no bar between these, however, as there is between unconsciousness and discursive consciousness. The unconsciousness includes those forms of cognition and impulsion which are either wholly repressed from consciousness or appear in consciousness only in distorted form... Between discursive and practical consciousness there is no bar; there is only the differences between what can be said and what is characteristically only done (p. 4).

Giddens suggests that the interaction skills that actors develop together and that enable the production and reproduction of social encounters are anchored in practical consciousness. Actors act knowingly. Yet they are unable to say much about their practical knowledge. Their knowledgeable ability is expressed in the doing of things not in the talking about the things that are done.

Knowing how to do reflexive monitoring, which we have seen is so central to Jane and Samantha’s efforts at establishing and maintaining a coherent social environment at VLN, is accomplished in the

practical rather than discursive or unconscious realm. Jane and Samantha develop and display the sort of competence or know-how that is defined by reflexive monitoring in the realm of practical consciousness.

The concept of skillful organizing (Hosking, 1991) extends our understanding of how Jane and Samantha learn to be competent agents in a nonprofit setting. Like Giddens, Wenger and Goffman, Hosking is primarily concerned with how organizations are created in action and how leaders do this skillfully. Hosking's basic argument is that people organize for action in relation to issues that are important to the actors. Networking for understanding and influence is the chief way that organizing around important issues is accomplished. Organizers or leaders (formal and informal) emerge and gain efficacy through engagement in key social processes such as networking.

In the core narrative, Jane and Samantha can be seen to be learning how to be competent agents in a nonprofit governance setting from within a CoP framework supported by the use of specific mutually sustaining relational practices such as blended strategizing, face work, reflexive monitoring and skillful organizing. At bottom, the core narrative is about how a leadership pair that achieves the status of competent social agent in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others becomes, without much intentionality, the keystone to the social system (CoP) of the governing board of the organization. Through becoming and being socially competent agents in an unconscious way, the chair/chief executive pair is able to affect the governance environment in such a way that a genuine Community of Practice is created and re-created. This means that the chair/chief executive pair, performing in routine ways, becomes a singular and primary force in organizing production and reproduction of a stable yet continually emerging community of robustly engaged governing practice. Ultimately, it is within this recursively established governing Community of Practice that generation and enactment of concrete, instrumental strategies and successful escape from key governance dilemmas is made possible.

#### *Towards Resolution of the Narrative Tension and a Perceived Governance Dilemma*

Several meetings and months later a critical moment occurs that represents a resolution of the narrative tension generated by a perceived governance dilemma. Jane and Samantha utilize blended strategizing to realize a form of organizational legitimacy that encompasses rhetorical *as well as* performance dimensions. The entire episode that contains this central resolving moment for the protagonists is described and analyzed in detail in the full ethnography (Morrison, 2002), which is the broader study from which this and other papers are derived. In keeping with (Franklin, 1986), who says that the resolving focus of a true sort story ends the tale in a way that should "read breathlessly fast" (p. 79), what follows is a brief summary of this full episode and its resolving moment.

The full board of VLN meets to conduct the core of its formal strategic planning process. The initial sessions are positive for the participants in respect to operating as a coherent Community of Practice while discussing abstract issues of mission, vision and long-term goals. After roughly one-quarter of the planned sessions, two influential members engage Jane and Samantha "back-stage" during a break. They indicate that they are "ready" to utilize personal networks to lobby outside funders to support VLN because they can report that "enough planning" has taken place. Jane and Samantha are delighted and proceed to act in ways that initiate the process of ending the formal planning process, thereby bringing down tension brought on by a governance dilemma. Ultimately critical funding is acquired representing conveyance of legitimacy by external constituents, and the organization's internal stakeholders (staff and board members) proceed with a more fully emergent mode of planning allowing them to attend more robustly as a board to effectiveness issues, thus overcoming a powerful perceived governance dilemma and, ultimately, achieving a degree of Broadened Accountability.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The interactions of Jane, Samantha, Kim, Kurt and other members of the board enable VLN to manage one particular governance dilemma – legitimacy vs effectiveness – in a fashion that involves integration, rather than compromising, of dual goals. The relational practice of blended strategizing pursued by this Community of Practice produces a rhetorical product that is well-grounded in the realities of key external

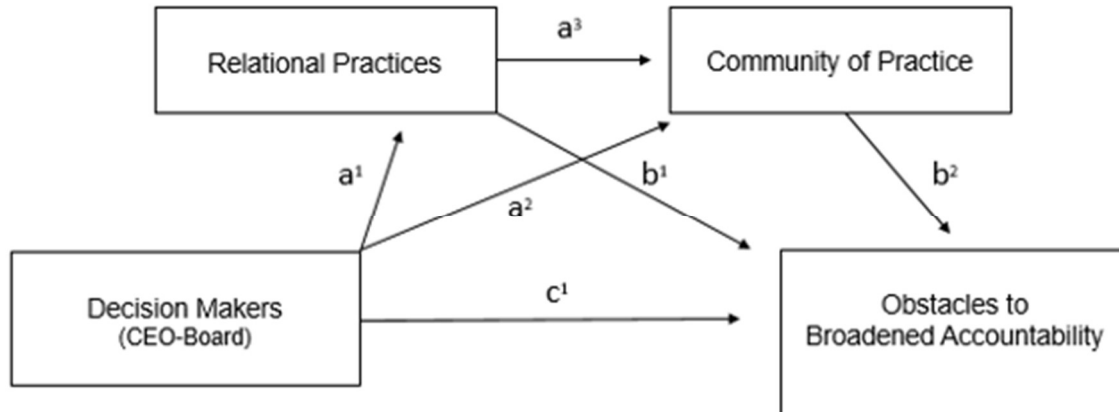


stakeholders, and is thereby useful in building VLN's legitimacy, its institutional capital (Bresser and Millonig, 2003). At the same time, it produces short-term actions that build the effectiveness, the performance, the resource capital of the organization. Through the development of their skills as competent social agents, Jane and Samantha negotiate effectiveness with board members, the key internal stakeholders. At the same time, the deliberate strategic planning uses a process and produces a rhetorical product that facilitates negotiation of legitimacy with key external stakeholders.

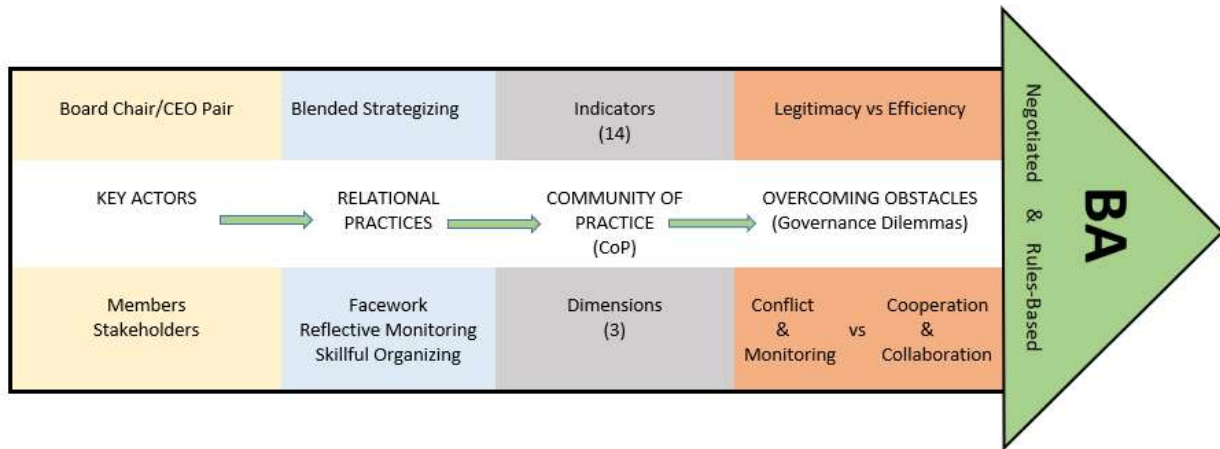
Jane and Samantha achieve their competence as social agents through relational practices of blended strategizing, face work, reflexive monitoring, and skillful organizing to pursue effective robust engagement and negotiation with key stakeholders. Through the employment of a particular set of relational practices, they help to create a unique Community of Practice in the board, a community that governs in a way that is able to overcome obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability.

Figure 3 depicts and integrates the theoretic propositions derived from this study in the form of a serial multiple mediation model while Figure 4 does so in the form of a process model. Both represent how the behavior of decision makers such as CEO's and key board members may affect overcoming obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability (BA) via utilization of relational practices and creation of a Community of Practice (CoP). Both suggest the need for further study that seeks to understand the relationships between decision maker actions, relational practices, Communities of Practice and achieving Broadened Accountability.

**FIGURE 3**  
**SERIAL MULTIPLE MEDIATION MODEL: EFFECT OF DECISION MAKER BEHAVIOR (CEO AND KEY BOARD MEMBERS) ON OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO BROADENED ACCOUNTABILITY (BA) VIA UTILIZATION OF RELATIONAL PRACTICES AND CREATION OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP)**



**FIGURE 4**  
**ACHIEVING BROADENED ACCOUNTABILITY (BA) PROCESS MODEL**



### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS AND MANAGERS**

At the outset of this inquiry a question was posed: How can nonprofit leaders and managers employ a Community of Practice (CoP) approach to deal with the governance dilemmas that impede achieving BA? This study's interpretations suggest this is possible to a high degree and in a particular manner. Taking up a CoP approach can assist leaders in the difficult task of mobilizing a board to engage in the robust fashion required to overcome the persistent obstacles to achieving Broadened Accountability. This study's findings suggest a refining of the concept of Community of Practice, one largely in keeping with Wenger's (1998) emphasis on a specific set of CoP dimensions and indicators, and the concept's utility as a management and organizational development tool. The study points to a set of relational practices bundled around social competence that reflect CoP indicators, facilitate the development of central CoP dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, and activates CoP's management tool utility. This social competence aspect of CoPs is seen to be complimentary to the practice of blended strategizing, comprised of high levels of face-work, reflexive monitoring and skillful organizing, and relevant to the practice of nonprofit governance especially as it relates to achieving Broadened Accountability. A social competence view of governance relates directly to emerging conceptions of nonprofit effectiveness and accountability as negotiated.

### **LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE FUTURE WORK**

The method of this study emulated the set of direct research activities outlined by Mintzberg (1983), such that the research was as purely descriptive as possible; relied on the simple, "inelegant" strategy of very small sample sizes to pursue an understanding of complex, multivariate situations; was as purely inductive as possible yet systematic in nature; and was measured in terms meaningful to organizational members. As a result, the study's findings, however useful they may be as unique descriptions of how one set of managers solved a consequential problem of practice in a single organization, are limited especially concerning generalizability. This inductive study utilized grounded theory to generate a set of propositions reflective of the experience of leaders in a single grassroots nonprofit. These propositions are represented in complimentary serial multiple mediation and process models, which suggest next steps that may involve deductive theory testing and broader generalizability to include other like cases and perhaps to a broader set of organizations in and beyond the nonprofit sector. Additionally, standing alongside traditional examinations of nonprofit governance as dependent on role definition and governance structures, the

relational competence perspective presented in the findings of this study opens new possibilities for governance research and practice.

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