



Why Place-Based Rural Leadership Matters

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Common questions ...

- What are the characteristics of “good” leaders?
- Does leadership enhance quality of life?
- Is leadership the difference between successful and struggling places?
- Is leadership an attribute of a *person* or a *place*?

All communities have leaders, isn't that enough?

It is not the number of leaders, rather the leadership style.

It is not personal attributes, rather community norms of leadership.

Community leadership is essential to address 21st century rural challenges.

Need innovative solutions. Need local resources.



Shared leadership ...

- Based on the leader's process
- Uses their influence to achieve shared goals
- Provides guidance and engages in two-way communication

*Fosters creativity and self-direction. Suited for volunteers.
Takes lots of time ... for leaders, for the project to be completed*

Closed leadership ...

- Based on the leader's traits
- Uses their formal authority to achieve narrow goals
- Provides orders/rules to follow with hierarchical communication

*Allows for quick and efficient decisions. Suited to emergencies.
People become dissatisfied, have low commitment to project*

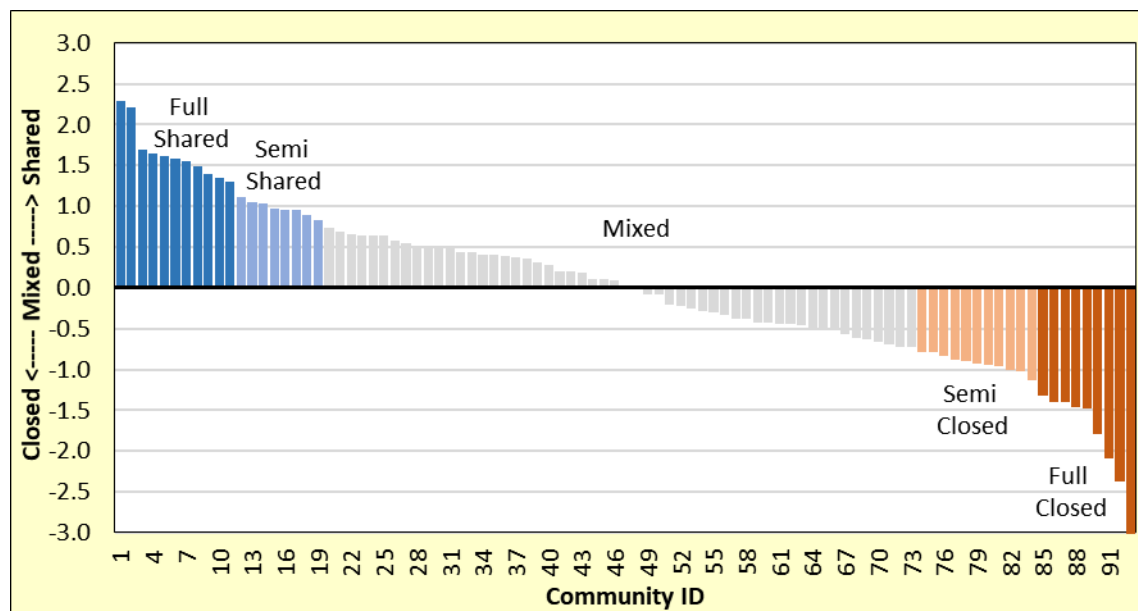


Data ...

- Iowa Small Towns Project 1994-2014. Decennial Census data 1990-2010
- n=91 small towns in Iowa (500-5,000 people, not adjacent to large city)
- Structured interviews in 6 towns (3 shared, 3 closed)

Measures ...

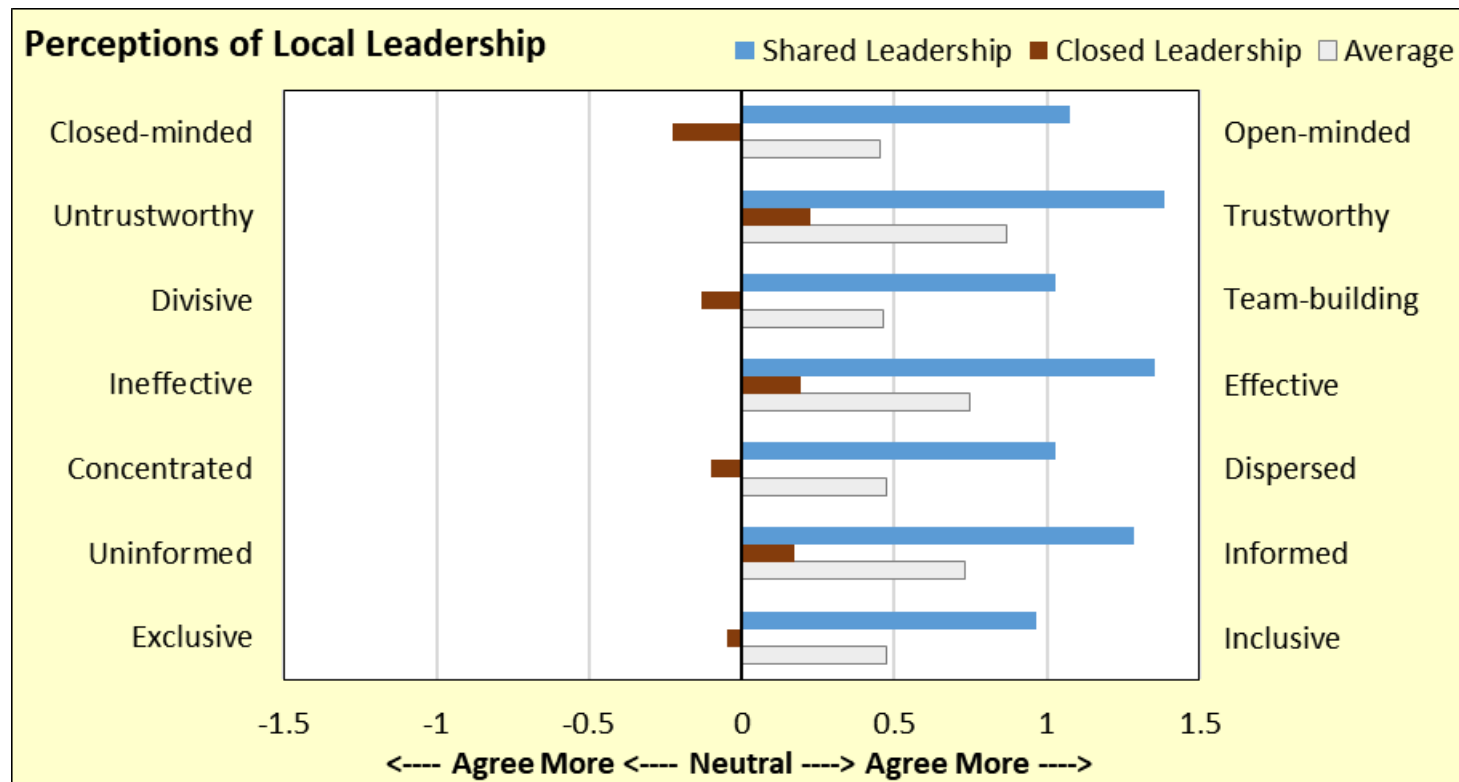
- Scale of 7 leadership items, based on Northouse (2010)
- Jenks method to identify natural breaks





Characteristics of shared leadership towns ...

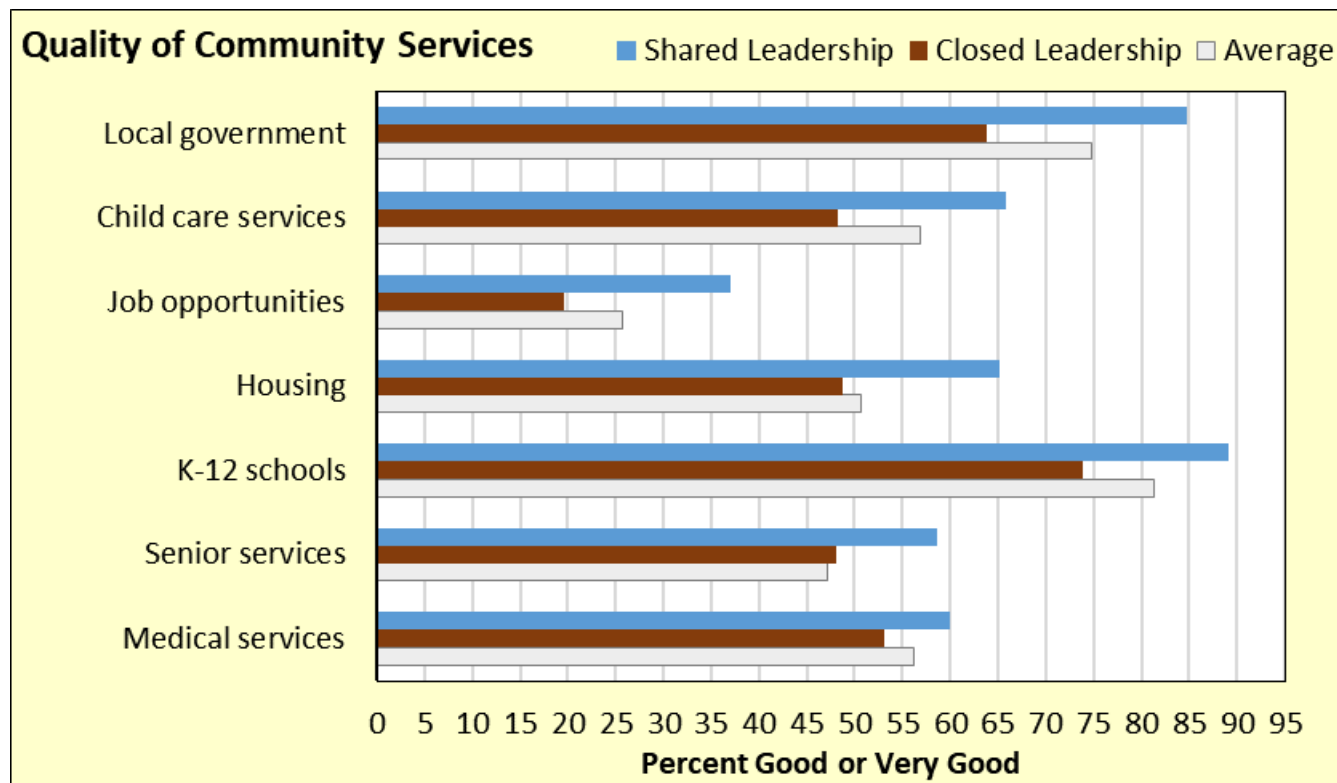
- 11 shared leader towns score high on all metrics
- 10 “closed” towns score neutral. Other towns lean toward shared leadership.
- Openness, trustworthiness, team building, and effectiveness important!





Shared leadership linked to high quality local services ...

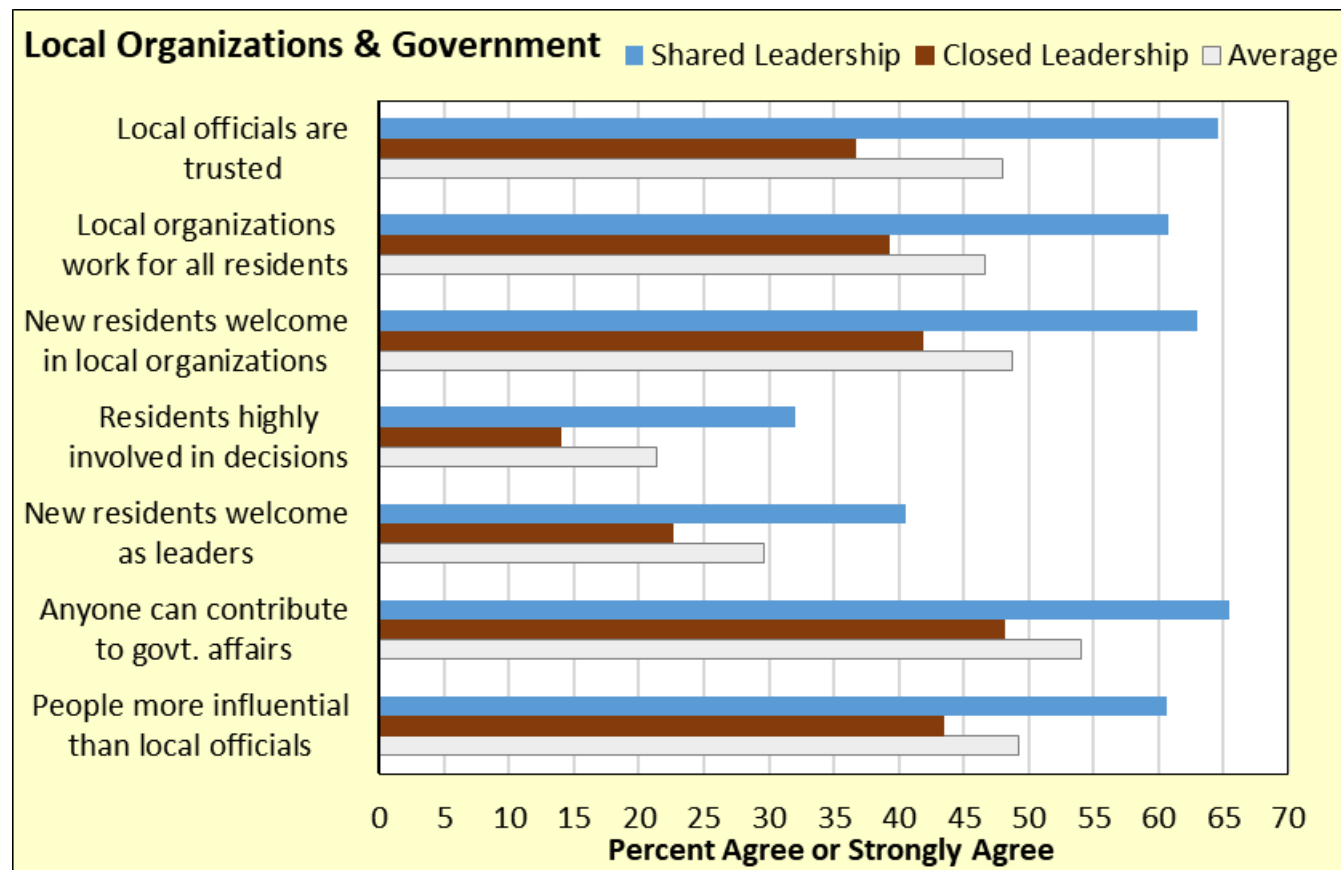
- Shared leaders have more control over locally-managed services
- Less control over services requiring large facilities, skilled labor, regulations, and outside management.





Shared leadership goes hand-in-hand with open governance ...

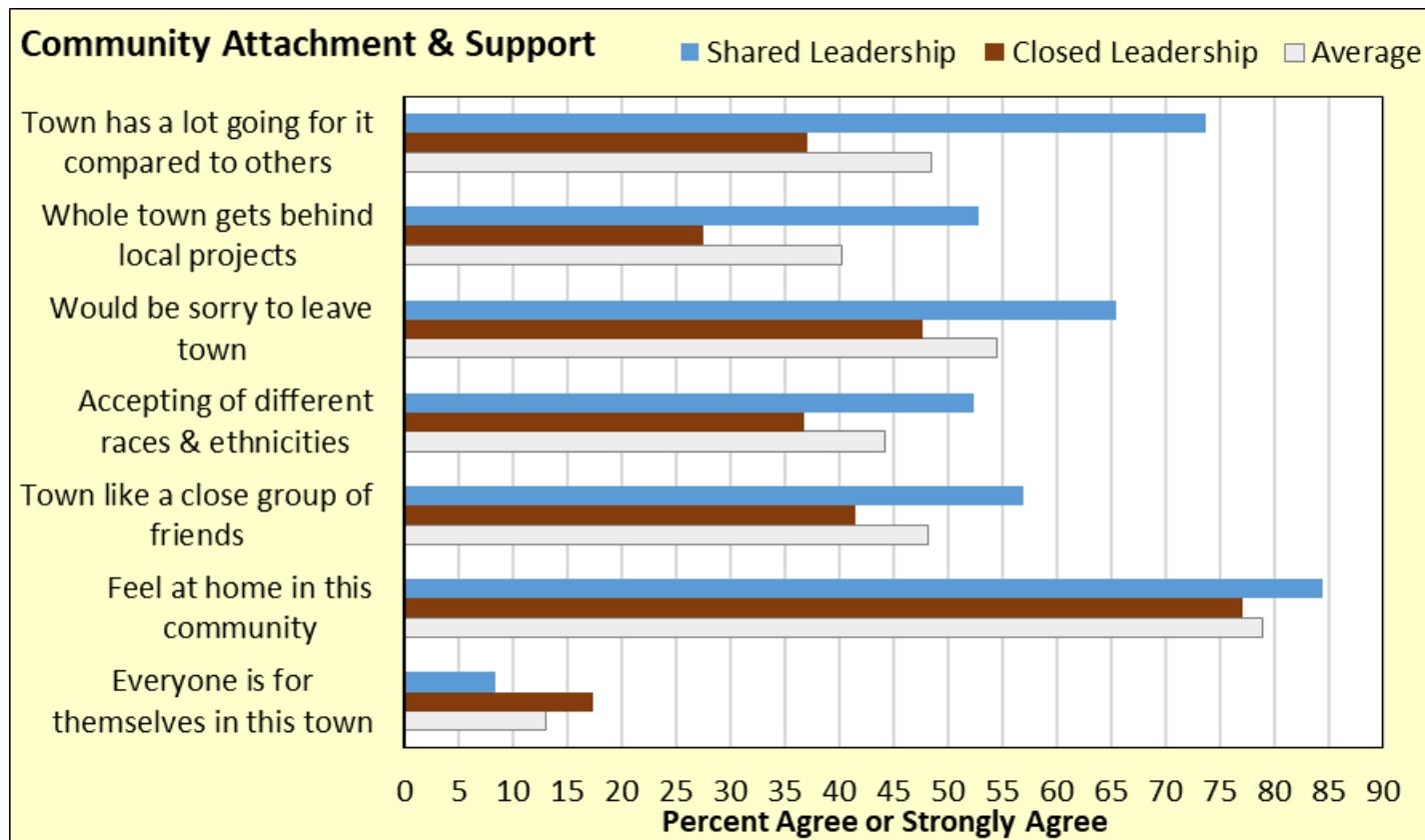
- Involved residents helps identify true community needs
- Involved residents contribute time and money
- Minimizes conflict and generates long-term commitments





Shared leadership sets a “can-do” and welcoming tone ...

- Confidence in the future. Spirit of cooperation.
- Attached to the town, but also welcoming of newcomers.
- Also better kept-up (64% v. 23%) and more open to new ideas (36% v. 1%)





Shared leadership towns small in size, but growing!

- *Population boom ... 8.1% gain vs. -4.0% loss*
- *Growing workforce age 25-64 ... 16.6% vs. 1.1% gain*
- *Baby boom of 17 and under ... 7.8% gain vs. -10.3% loss*
- *Shrinking elder population ... -6.0% loss vs. 3.7% gain*
- *More full-time / full-year jobs ... 55.6% vs. 48.9%*
- *Lower poverty ... 9.8% vs. 14.2%*
- *Strong agriculture sector ... 5.2% with 1.8% gain vs. 2.8% with -0.5% drop*

... but less diverse in terms of race/ethnicity.

- Some are exurbs 45-60 minutes away from cities
- Others are returner “boomerang” towns
- Others “white flight” towns from larger meat packing communities



Multiple leaders who collaborate

- City, social, foundations. Doing different things, but in cooperation.
- *Versus all city, top-down planning by 1-2 persons.*

Creating spaces for new leaders

- Openness to younger/newer/women residents.
- *Versus all male long-term leaders (some 30+ years!).*

Grooming the next generation

- Mentoring of new leaders, sharing credit, lending gravitas.
- *Versus maintain existing leadership structure, shut-out new leaders.*

Accept risk of new ideas

- Trying new ideas, accepting some may fail.
- *Versus reject new ideas for fear of failure = no action.*

Leadership for 2022 versus 1952

- Social media, web signups, shorter shifts, childcare and food.
- *Versus assuming everyone has the time*



Leaders without vested interests

- Typically persons without formal power, but with high social capital.
- *Versus the power elites.*

Being a champion for the town

- Community's biggest cheerleader. Optimism is contagious!
- *Versus giving up or talking about "ghosts". Apathy is contagious!*

Being a convener for the community

- Ability to bring diverse people together, inside and outside the town.
- *Versus lone eagles who are insular.*

Finding the "right" leaders and making it happen

- Businesses allowing leaders on "company time". City paying to get good staff.
- *The right leaders are the ones already there. They are in control.*



Shared leadership is both a *person* and *place* attribute ...

- ✓ *Data suggests leadership is part of QoL and social capital*
- ✓ *Leaders make a difference, but only successful with community support*

Shared leadership community norms important ...

- ✓ *Reciprocity: keep leaders accountable, but residents must be engaged*
- ✓ *Institutionalized: leaders come and go, but the norms remain*

Questions or comments?



Is good leadership part of the person or the place?

Should we be training individual leaders, or training the community about leadership ... or both?

Is good leadership really part of social capital or QoL?