

Jordan's Quest for Decentralization

Transforming citizens' civic engagement via participatory processes

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I. Introduction

How can a community unleash the potential for collaboration if its members are not equipped and empowered for public dialogue and deliberation? Participatory dialogue, consensus decision-making, adequate civic spaces, and stakeholder engagement tools are crucial to fostering disciplined and structured collaboration in a community context. And yet, most people have little knowledge of these critical tools for democratic participation.

The essence of citizen involvement in decision making is that people support what they help create, and involvement gives people a sense of ownership in making decisions that directly affect their lives. When considering decentralization and participatory governance, who knows more about local development priorities—and about context-relevant, sustainable development strategies—than the people themselves?

A proposed decentralization vision was put forth by the government to include citizens in setting local development priorities. Due to the inefficiency of the council's work, a general distrust of local governments, and the lack of civic spaces for dialogue and deliberation, citizens have not experienced genuine democratic, bottom-up decision-making processes. Consequently, this has impeded Jordan's development aspirations, and, according to observers, the decentralization process is a failure.

To fulfil the vision of the decentralization law in Jordan, civil society organizations and municipal councils must work collaboratively to include citizens in bottom-up participatory decision-making processes, to catalyze citizens' democratic dialogue, creativity, and confidence for participation. To that end, I propose the creation of civic spaces for dialogue and deliberation, to cultivate stakeholder collaboration and leadership towards sustainable development work.

As a group facilitator, I have been passionate about group processes that foster a collective form of leadership in groups, organizations, and communities as a whole.

My passion has been fueled by the belief that people often need processes to enable them to cooperate and collaborate effectively and creatively. A wide array of group facilitation techniques will help unlock people's ideas by tapping into the power of engagement and participation. Participation in group processes helps unleash people's creativity and gives them a sense of value, respect, and appreciation. I have experienced that group facilitation tools empowers people to engage in dialogue and collective decision-making. So, I am enthusiastic about sharing my perspective and experience with those who wish to make a difference in Jordan's quest for a better democracy. I hope to bring in a development perspective for new ways of uniting the people of Jordan together to work towards common goals—particularly, a collaboration between government and civil society—so that we may face upcoming challenges collectively rather than individually.

This thesis will aim to invigorate a new spirit of inquiry and a journey of discovery for new collective leadership that may drive stakeholders into a quest for experimentations. The main argument and spirit of this thesis lie on one solid fact—that if people do not experience participatory dialogue and deliberation at a community level, they will not appreciate and understand the larger vision of the decentralization process. Safe spaces for citizen dialogue must be provided in different governorates. The collective effort must be led by citizens, civil society organizations, development practitioners, municipal councils and other stakeholders who can cultivate engagement and collaboration via social processes—to enhance the quality of people's civic dialogue, decision-making, communications, action planning, and long-term strategic planning for their communities.

II. The current reality (literary findings on the current problem)

A. A centralized government

The protests in the Middle East in 2011 acted against:

... the old ruling bargains between ruler and the ruled, whereby submission and acquiescence on the part of the people were rewarded by a regime's attempt to provide socio-economic security and political stability, have irreparably collapsed— The Arab uprisings demanded freedom, dignity, employment, and social justice. (Monshipouri 1)

Jordan has not been far away from these uprisings, and the Jordanian government indulged in a quest for decentralization to help give more space and freedom to citizens concerning setting local relevant development priorities. In the context of citizen participation in civic engagement, little has been done in Jordan (OECD Report 2017, 12). Jordan's past decades were dominated by a centralized form of government viewed by observers as a distant government that did not consult citizens nor sought their wisdom in making local, relevant decisions that impact their lives and their communities as a whole. This centralized model of governance has impeded Jordan's democratic capacity. The government was in a state of self-preservation, and it did not want to change its established ways of working with the people. In the meantime, Jordanian citizens across different governorates suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure such as well-paved streets, proper sanitation, water networks, electricity, and garbage disposal services. The current status quo is resembled by an indebted government (Jordan's Economic Outlook – April 2018) incapable of launching a national reform project that can re-instil hope in people's hearts. Amid the harsh realities that overshadow Jordan's society, is, for example, the high percentage of youth unemployment that stands at 40% (“Unemployment, Youth Total”). The government is faced with heavy public criticism, and as a consequence, there is prevailing citizen distrust in the government's approach to solving economic and societal challenges (Public Opinion Survey 2018, 10). The government

decided it can no longer take the blame and has realized that people's frustrations are mainly due to a lack of engagement in decision-making and the lack of transparency in revealing information to the public. The government recognized the urgent need to establish a system that fosters stronger local administrations to work with and meet citizens' local development aspirations.

In 2015 the Jordanian government enacted decentralization laws to transfer power to municipal councils to involve citizens in setting their development priorities (OECD Report 2017, 4). The intention was to change its centralized, top-down decision-making approach based on the belief that local people know more about their needs and future aspirations than an outsider. Since the onset of these decentralization laws in 2015, the government has entered a phase of reorientation. Serious reforms took place by laying the legislative framework to facilitate this bottom-up approach to development. But with little progress and no previous experience, the government did not achieve what it had hoped on the ground.

Municipal councils still need to acquire the means to harness citizens' effective participation and involvement in decision-making processes. Local council committees must first become aware of their role as an active council that is well equipped with the necessary tools to engage people in planning for their community's future. A recent public poll in Jordan showed that only 46 % of citizens in different governorates think that their priorities are reflected in decisions made by their local councils (Public Opinion Survey 2018, 73), and 78% of citizens in different governorates are unaware of their local municipality budgets, including how and on what the money is spent (Public Opinion Survey 2018, 91). All citizens have the right to know their municipal council budgets, democratically vote on how they wish to spend their council's money, and participate in setting local councils' long-term strategic plans. Before that takes place, dialogue spaces must be provided for the people to engender a strong foundation for democratic participation. These spaces must invite people to

express concerns and opinions and share experiences about matters vital to them. I propose that it is only with the establishment of safe spaces for dialogue and deliberation that citizens will understand what decentralization means. Safe and creative spaces for dialogue will harness citizens' creativity and collective leadership towards solving local challenges and setting plans. Later sections will elaborate further on this matter.

B. The current challenge

In August of 2017, the elections of new decentralization councils took place, committees were formed, and duties assigned ("Fiscal decentralization in Jordan"). Still, little has been achieved in terms of enriching citizens' experience in participation. Observers say that the process has been a failure. In 2018 the Karak Castle Center for Consultation and Training conducted a study that involved focus group sessions in twelve governorates and produced a comprehensive report highlighting challenges and recommendations. The report concluded with a list of recommendations for future courses of action to revive the decentralization process. Surprisingly, the list did not mention the need to include citizen participation in democratic dialogue and deliberation, but rather gave concrete advice on the separation of roles between governorate and municipal councils, the need to communicate a clear vision for the decentralization process and the requirement for changes to be made in legislation, along with other advice that is not relevant to human experiences in participatory processes (Mahadin et al 38). Some of the challenges facing the implementation of decentralization in Jordan are, vague visions and missions; poor communication between local councils and citizens; lack of role definitions and duties for governorate and council members themselves; clash of roles and lack of financial independence for governorate councils (Mahadin et al 7). But most importantly, it is the overlooked human development aspect that is related to lack of experience and awareness of community engagement techniques—In other words, proper ways to work with and seek people's input

democratically. I propose to work from the bottom up to cultivate individual transformational experiences, and this must start with people's personal experiences in dialogue and deliberation.

C. What is social poverty?

Poverty is a complicated social issue and affects all areas of life, such as the physical, psychological and spiritual elements. Bryant Myers highlights an essential aspect of understanding poverty. If missed, the poor will remain contextualized, framed, and understood in purely materialistic terms, such as a lack of clean water, sanitation systems, nutritious food, etc. Rather, poverty should be seen as something much more than an absence of resources. It is very much also the "lack of access to social power and lack of freedom to grow" (132). In other words, poverty is a result of not only a lack of physical commodities, but also a lack of involvement in making decisions that are directly affecting their lives. Empowering people to become active citizens will overcome social poverty in Jordan and set the stage for a genuinely democratic life for everyone to enjoy.

As a citizen of Jordan, I observe that my people view foreign intervention from bodies such as the World Bank as authoritarian entities who dictate what needs to be done in a top-down approach, and as not being concerned with people's aspirations at the grassroots level. National director and CEO of World Vision India, Jayakumar Christian, argues that such financial institutions hold on to principles, values, and systems that become what governs their thinking and doing. Thus, they stand as a barrier to transformational development (quoted in Myers 125). Christian goes on to argue that this approach doesn't seek God's truth and plan for the people of earth nor touches upon the root cause of problems. Christian amplifies the importance of understanding the importance of participatory social processes because it will enable us to "raise our view from physical need and the person to the social and cultural systems within which the poor live" (qtd. in Myers 134). John Friedmann also

argues that the “Lack of social organization and access to the political processes are keys to understanding why people are poor” (qtd. in Myers 118), which means that the lack of access to social power contributes to limiting the freedom for growth. In this context, Jordan has dwelled in poverty for many decades and has undervalued the human being as a constituent of society. The United Nations Development Report of 2015 for Jordan writes that "in terms of economic and social participation, over 42 percent disagrees that citizens participate in economic and social issues and over 40% of participants think that municipalities are doing little when it comes to social and economic development (“Jordan Human Development Report” 157). In other words, the government has always assumed that it knows better than anyone else, but there is a high cost when not consulting and involving citizens. The centralized system has made community development efforts and citizen engagement in decision-making absent. This means that Jordan did not enable the democratic participation of people in setting their development priorities, which in turn has made development at municipal level sterile. A culture of public meetings at local councils is not a norm in Jordan. Still, it only takes a passive form of informing people about predetermined decisions coming from the central government rather than seeking local people's input for the wisest decision possible and to reflect people's needs.

According to Bryant Myers, "Marred identity is the perceived inability to act because individuals have come to believe that they have neither the right nor the social space to do so" and he goes on to argue that the "net result of this lack of freedom is the eradication of hope" (127). I can observe that this marred identity has developed in Jordanian culture, particularly in the youth who have little influence over decision-makers in their communities (“OECD Report 2017” 16). Consequently, this has resulted in the absence of trust between people and decision-makers' ability to cooperate and to deliver their promises for change. In

other words, Jordan lacks space for citizens' dialogue and deliberation with decision-makers, along with the absence of institutionalized public participation tools.

D. The need for a new starting point via humble inquiry

The government should approach the quest for decentralization by humbly inquiring about people's hopes and aspirations by asking questions like: what experiences do we need to provide for people so that a new spirit of democracy and participation is cultivated through citizen participation? And what experiences are we looking to engender in communities to enable people to understand the spirit of the decentralization process? A recent public poll showed that only 10 % of citizens were well aware of the scope of decentralization (Public Opinion Survey 2018, 95). As a development practitioner, I have observed that proponents of the decentralization process are not asking the right questions to begin with. I observed that the individual experience of everyday citizens had been overlooked by the government and civil society organizations. Instead, too much emphasis has been put on observing legislative gaps and powers related to newly-elected decentralization and municipal committees' conflicting roles, particularly with regards to sovereignty over decision-making processes, linked to implementing local development priorities.

Eckhart Tolle writes that "if the structures of the human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up re-creating fundamentally the same world. The same evils, the same dysfunction" (22). To avoid wasted efforts, Jordan needs a new state of awareness and thinking that focuses on the human side of decentralization. From this standpoint, I propose to go from a different starting position and begin with the everyday citizen's experience in civic participation. Jordanian public policymakers need greater attention towards citizen participation in social processes that cultivate dialogue for positive social change. There is a need for designing participatory public meetings that engage citizens in discussing local challenges in safe spaces for dialogue and deliberation. This will foster new experiences of

collective consensus, exchange of ideas and opinions, and sharing of experiences towards common problems. This is where experimentation and creativity are cultivated.

When experimentation takes root, the government and civil society organizations can think and work in a bottom-up manner by learning from people's experiences, hopes, and expectations. In this sense, different bodies will extrapolate lessons learned and will help legislative bodies enact new laws to help facilitate and institutionalize success stories on the ground, rather than impose laws that prove to be inefficient and only impede progress. In brief, consideration of citizen's experiences must precede the legislative work, and this has not been part of the government's plan—rather an overlooked important aspect of democracy.

The diagram below suggests how this bottom-up approach can influence public policy:

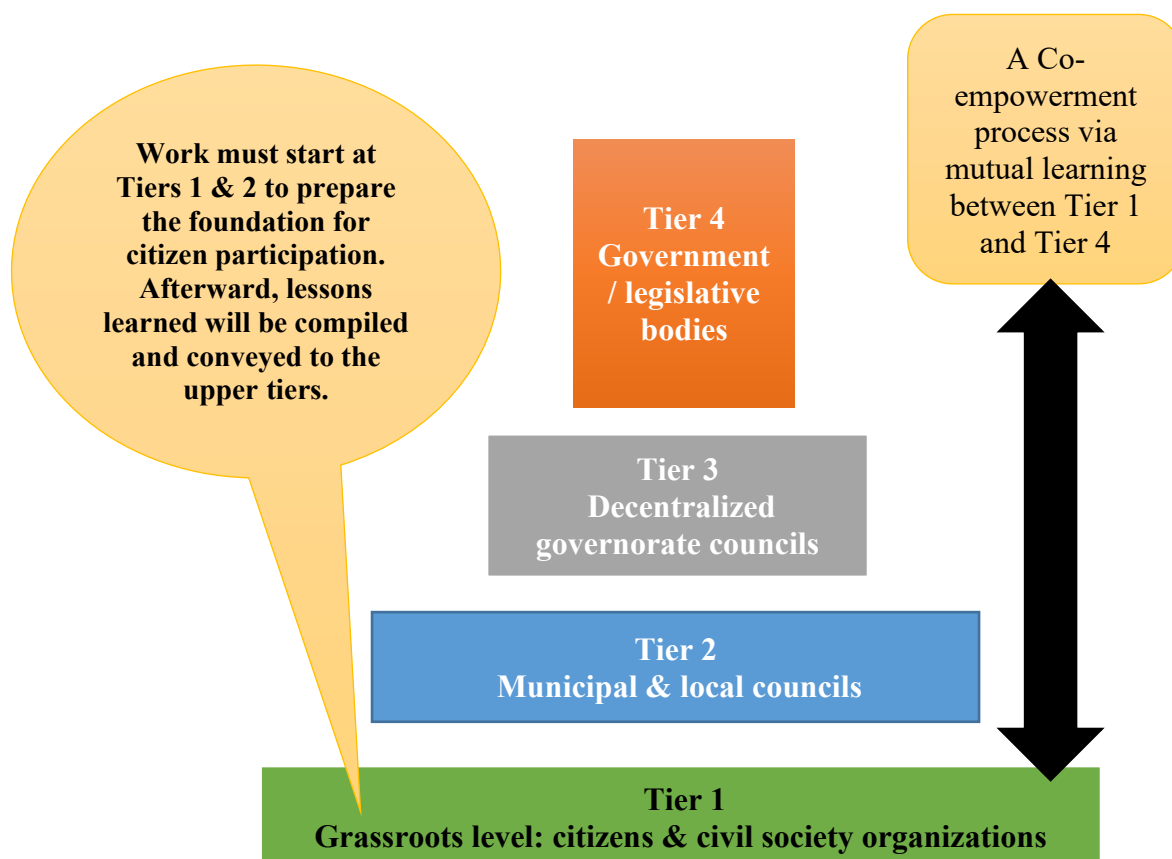


Figure 1: Extrapolating lessons learned from the public in a bottom-up approach

E. Current trends on social media platforms in an age of globalization

In this age of globalization, rapid advancements are being made in connectivity via new technology. With specific reference to social media platforms, Jordanians today are utilizing the internet because the government has failed to provide and welcome safe dialogue spaces for citizens to participate in civic life. The fast-paced connectivity of social media has given every Jordanian a new way to participate in civic life. Social media platforms played a crucial role in the Arab Spring uprisings, and have unexpectedly swept the region. In other words, the shortcomings of the Jordanian government have been mitigated by excellent technological innovation. In this context, Thomas Friedman writes, "these states are the least able to handle the age of acceleration. They are like caravan homes in a trailer park, built on slabs of cement, with no real foundations or basements" (256). Indeed, Jordan lacks any solid foundation for the democratic participation of people in decision making that directly affects their lives. This consequently has led people to leverage social media platforms to fulfil their needs fully. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have created a safe, virtual world for people to express their opinions, criticize decision-makers, and share their experiences and perspectives on diverse societal and communal matters. This has had a profound effect on Jordanian civic life. Scanning Facebook, for example, will reveal a wide array of Jordanian social activists, change agents and human rights advocates who are branding themselves as agents for social justice and change. This, consequently, has led people to use social media platforms to fulfil their needs fully.

Today social media platforms often host political debates between all political parties on the Jordanian political continuum. Despite standards of conduct being set and monitored by social media platforms, the online world remains untamed. It is not free from hostility and intolerance, particularly when it comes to differing views and perspectives on political issues. The virtual world also lacks mechanisms for reaching a consensus or common ground. This

often leads to social conflicts because of the spread of fake news or rumors, and the government has no way to deal with these issues. This has pushed the Jordanian government to recently enact the cybercrime law, which aims at limiting hate speech and privacy violation ("Jordan: Government should Withdraw Amendments"). Myers writes that "good relations can only be achieved by using tools of participation, community organizing, empowerment, and community ownership" (242). From this standpoint, I see that there is a need to address this problem not only via legislation but through a community-organized project that serves the public interest and is supported through well-researched frameworks such as the establishment and planning of public meetings for dialogue and deliberation. In fact, with the surge in social media trends, it has become paramount to foster new experiences for citizens via physical meetings. In physical meetings, human interaction experiences are genuine and heartfelt as opposed to the virtual world. The virtual world cannot become an effective substitute for physical meetings, but only a tool and a medium for fast and timely communication.

F. The essence of decentralization

In simple terms, decentralization means enacting laws to give independent local administrations more sovereignty to rule over and manage their local communities. But without giving the law effectiveness on the ground, decentralization will be confined to mere ink on paper. The political rationale of adopting a decentralized form of government is that "by transferring decision making to the more local level, people would be able to have a greater say in the decisions made about their service" (Willis 106). In other words, the premise of decentralization is to give people a sense of ownership in initiating the change they wish to see in their lives and lives of people around them. When citizens become part of the decision-making process, they will more likely support and embrace what they help create. In contrast, top-down approaches to decision making will only produce the opposite

effect and will foster distrust between people and their governments. Decentralization, as Katie Willis argues, is seen as good governance that serves development policies and interventions (106). James Creighton, the founder of the International Association for Public Participation, sees that the rationale for seeking the public's participation is that governments need not leave decision-making processes to experts alone. Not all decisions require technical expertise, as people's values and philosophies influence their engagement, and so justify people's engagement in directing a government's aspirations (15). Citizens' engagement is about allowing citizens values, morality to shaping the future of their communities. Yet decentralization does not go without challenges, which has been evident in developing countries like Jordan. To decentralize means that the government must consult and involve people at the local level. If the sole reason for participatory governance is to seek citizens' involvement for wiser decision making, then decentralization goes beyond legislation. It is about leveraging people's potential to contribute to making positive social and economic change.

If seeking people's wisdom is for helping the government overcome challenges that it is not capable of solving alone, then proponents of decentralization ought to ask questions such as: How do we empower citizens? What means and tools should the government provide to unleash people's potential to take action towards the welfare of their communities? From a social entrepreneurial and development perception, Bornstein and Davis write that "today our adaptive systems must keep pace, we have little time to fix things in a centralized manner. Solutions must be decentralized and integrated and deployed in real-time" (12). When time is of the essence, policymakers often make fast decisions, and these decisions "tend to be shaped by executive or legislative staff members who are removed from the details of implementation yet under intense time pressures to come up with comprehensive solutions or plans." As a consequence, "national policies are regularly based on assumptions

that get tested largely after they become law” (22). This, in turn, brings the case for embracing innovative means to empower citizens to become change-makers. Bornstein and Davis see that “democracy flourishes when a large number of citizens acquire the capacity to shape civic life” (41) and argue that democracy “is a process of continual adaptation, as citizens experiment in the building of institutions to meet their needs at different moments in history” (42).

In brief, there is a need to embrace a spirit of experimentation with a wide array of processes. Experimenting with social processes at the municipal level is about giving people the confidence and means to participate effectively. Processes will also provide a way for public meetings to become a hub for innovation and creativity and to harness people's collective leadership and wisdom for the welfare of communities. Therefore, to address the shortcoming of governments, "society needs to encourage and harness decentralized social experimentation on a larger scale and far more systematically than it currently does. Governments, in particular, would benefit by focusing more on spotting and supporting talented changemakers outside their walls" (Bornstein and Davis 37). In this context, I propose that local councils, along with partners from civil society such as community-based organizations who have a stake in achieving true democratic governance, should work hand in hand to experiment with a wide array of participatory tools to open a way for institutionalizing these tools at municipal level via legislation. I propose that decentralization is a long journey of experimentation. Figure 2. below suggests that decentralization ought to look at different domains to bring about a transformation that truly touches people's lives. This is followed by findings from my field research, insights drawn from relevant literature, and recommendations for a way forward.

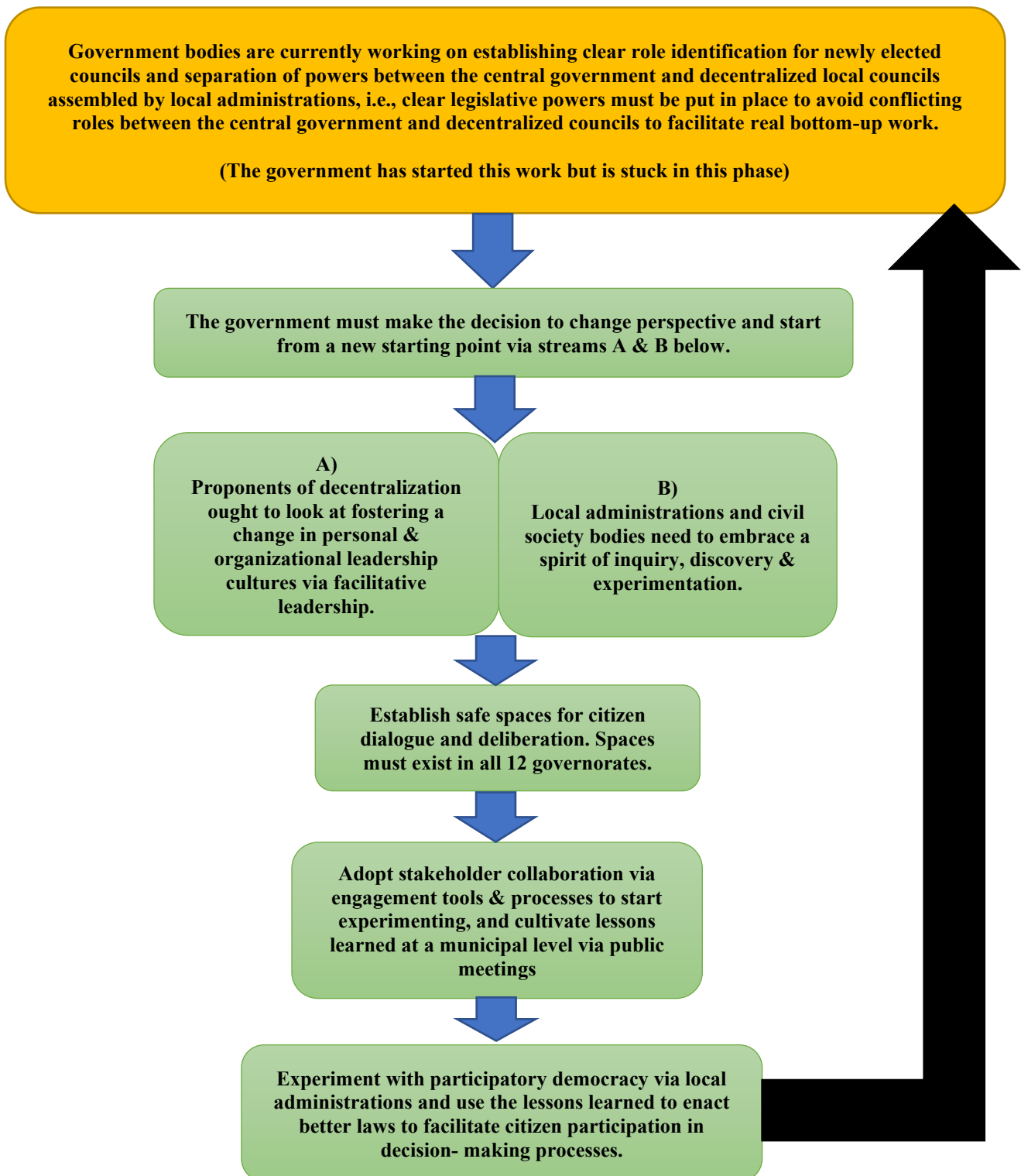


Figure 2: The proposed road to decentralization via local councils (Green colored boxes are the main domains discussed in this thesis)

III. Research Insights

My field research was concerned with observing the unique personal leadership traits of leaders in non-profit development agencies and the impact of facilitation via participatory processes for collective leadership and collaboration. The research connection to decentralization is that truly participatory democracy can only be achieved with the right sort of leadership, namely facilitative leadership. My research does not address all challenges facing the decentralization process in Jordan. These are challenges of a national scale, concerning a new democratic approach that has recently been embraced by the government and has never been tested previously.

Providing a comprehensive solution is beyond the scope of this paper. In this context, my research findings aim to serve as a human development perspective to help proponents of decentralization, particularly those working at the interface between government and civil society organizations, to look at the human side of decentralization – namely safe spaces for dialogue and group facilitation processes.

A. International Association of Facilitators (IAF) - Jordan Chapter as field laboratory

i. Purpose

In light of the lack of safe spaces for dialogue and deliberation in my community, I decided to establish the IAF - Jordan Chapter in 2017, as an affiliate of the IAF worldwide. IAF - Jordan is as a voluntary initiative aimed at promoting a culture of participation and engagement via facilitation tools in organizations and communities in Jordan, and to serve as my field laboratory to experiment with social processes. Facilitation is about process leadership. The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) endorses the following definition for group facilitation:

Facilitation is a process in which a person whose selection is acceptable to all members of the group, who is substantively neutral, and who has no substantive

decision-making authority diagnoses and intervenes to help a group improve how it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, to increase the group effectiveness. (Schwarz 5)

Facilitators are people with a unique set of skills that enables them to lead groups of people, whether small or large, in organizations or communities, via collaborative processes, such as helping them develop meaningful conversations about their concerns, challenges, or future aspirations. These conversations will lead to consensus on what people see as important to them and thus will help people move from diverging grounds into common ground. I desire to enable the people of my community to experience what it means to become part of a decision-making process, and I want them to learn facilitation skills as an essential leadership skill to change their perspective about what it means to lead people. I conduct monthly public meetups to invite people from all walks of life to come and experience what dialogue, participation, and engagement are all about. The objectives are: to promote facilitation skills to establish a community for local Jordanian facilitators; and to conduct action research to learn about what works and what doesn't in the realm of citizen participation in decision-making. In other words, my platform will serve as an experimental laboratory for the decentralization process.

My platform takes a qualitative approach in that “The product of a qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher learned about a phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell 17). Every session ends with a participant feedback survey to ask people about their experience and how it felt to work collectively in a group process. One of my regular attendants, Sari Awad, commented on his experience with the IAF platform, saying that “This is a place where I feel engaged, I regain my hope and enthusiasm for community work and I connect with other passionate people in my community.” In other words, this is action research. The essence of this platform is to

discover the impact of such social spaces by using a qualitative approach that aims to understand "...how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell 6). Social platforms like the IAF- Jordan will prove to be invaluable to understand what it means for people to become active and engaged citizens in their local communities.

Case in point

In 2015, social scientists Mariano Sigman and his colleagues conducted a TEDx experiment with more than ten thousand people in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The question on which they built their experiment was, "Are there ways in which democracy can be made more effective, egalitarian, plural, while also achieving some immunity from the mechanisms that hinder collective decision making?". Sigman and his colleagues were "inspired by the contributions of mathematics, psychology and political science," and "decided to investigate this question: would organizing discussions in small groups help improve collective wisdom?" They argued that their "exercises are an attempt to invert the trend of social networks and to promote collective deliberation on a small scale that better lends itself to effective communication." By setting up two rounds of questions, people were invited to answer the same questions individually and then in groups. What they found out is that "each small group gained wisdom through engaging in dialogue. Because the entities remained independent, they retained the variability and richness of human diversity." (ideas.ted.com). Their work has inspired me to work towards sustaining my platform for further experimentation similarly in my community. Likewise, local administrations must experiment with social processes.

Figure 3: The Mariano Sigman social experiment

ii- Action research

A spirit of engagement and participation drives action research, and because it is participatory, it is meant to be inclusive of people's voices, opinions, and stories, not only for the sake of consulting people but also enabling them to be part of the research process and thus become part of the decision-making process itself. Ernest Stringer writes that “as an evolving approach to inquiry, action research envisages a collaborative approach to investigation that seeks to engage subjects as equal and full participants in the research process” (14). In other words, action researchers take the role of facilitators and carry out a facilitative role, which can enhance the capacity of a group and thus help foster a collective form of group leadership, where all members contribute to providing solutions to challenges.

During my fieldwork, I conducted an action research workshop via the IAF - Jordan platform, where I took the role of the facilitator. A facilitator can be simply defined as someone who uses group processes to make the interaction more productive and tries to make it easy for participants to achieve goals. This action research workshop was invaluable; I hosted people from different local and international non-profits in Jordan. It was a clear indicator to me that not-for-profit organizations in Jordan do not fully embrace a culture of full engagement of team members; there is room for great improvement. The focus question used for the fieldwork workshop was, “*What are practical ways to help create participation for change & development in your organization?*” I used a powerful engagement process called the “focused conversation method” developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs, which specializes in participatory group methods. Results show people’s answers in four different stages of thinking. In summary, the workshop highlighted that there is a lack of adequate leadership skills amongst organizational project leaders. More research is required for further learning. (Please see Appendix A for sample questions used to elicit information from participants in four different thinking stages.)

I propose that if the government wants people to experience a new, inclusive democracy, it has to start researching what it means for people to participate and what, from a civil point of view, is needed to foster a foundation for civic participation. Put differently, governments should not rely on passing out surveys to produce numerical public polls. Rather the government must use a qualitative approach. In this context, researchers would focus on consulting citizens in different communities about their ambitions regarding the decentralization vision, and about practical ways to collaborate effectively with their local councils. The action research would also try to answer the question: how will the local councils engage citizens? What kind of citizen assemblies or dialogue forums are required? What are the ideal ages of the participants, given the demographic information available? This information should be harvested from community members and thus enable the action researcher to understand what is needed to allow for local councils to embrace a more democratic approach to local governance. Stringer writes:

A fundamental premise of participatory action research is that it commences with an interest in the problems of a group, a community, or an organization. Its purpose is to assist people to extend their understanding of their situation and to resolve significant issues or problems that confront them (14).

What is most important is to foster a sense of equality amongst the participants and to encourage a democratic atmosphere to “acknowledge people’s equality of worth” (14). This is an essential step for councils and all stakeholders to become learning entities and accumulate experience in citizen involvement in decision-making. In this manner, council and civil society organizations can enter into a phase of experimentation with the aid of action researchers to learn more about their local community’s expectations and future aspirations of participation in decision-making. More experimentation is needed.

Recommendations

The facilitation movement put forward by the IAF worldwide is about promoting the power of group facilitation as a way to involve all the people of an organization or a community in decision making (Work 124). Leadership expert Robertson Work writes that the "innovative leader uses group facilitation techniques and processes to enable people to engage in participatory conversations and planning" (129). From this standpoint, the government, supported by local administrations, must use group facilitation techniques to invite people to experience making decisions and reaching consensus collectively, so that they become acquainted with the principles of equality and transparency, and thus will produce wiser decisions. This, in turn, will foster a sense of belonging to their community and local administrations, and this will help shape their community's future. The essence of an experimentation platform is that grassroots work can inform policymaking and legislation in a bottom-up approach. If decentralization aims to change people's experiences, then this is very much about the people and so working upwards makes sense. The theory I propose is that transformation must start at the individual level.

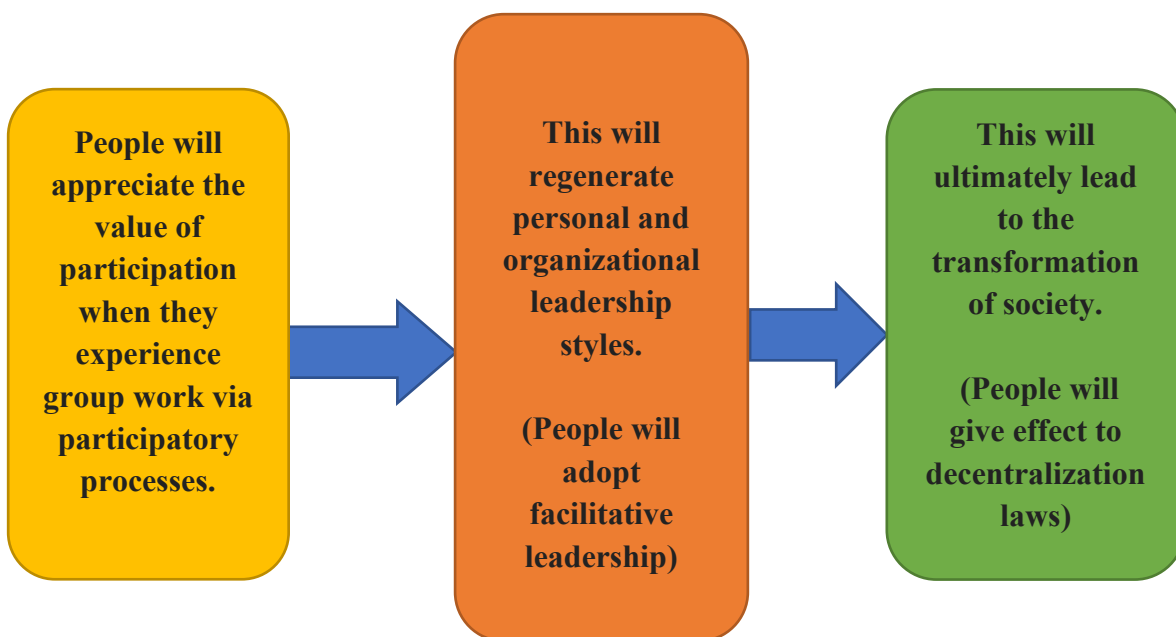


Figure 4: Individual transformation for social change

B. Organizational cultures and personal leadership traits

In my field research, I have observed various teams and personal leadership styles of project managers, team members and groups to learn how their attitudes influence organizational leadership. The thesis connection is that a democratic transition towards stronger local administrations is directly linked to organizational cultures that value inclusivity, participation, and employee engagement in decision-making processes such as action and strategic planning. For example, leaders of non-profit organizations in the development sector, such as the German Development Agency (GIZ) in Jordan, are committed to conducting yearly retreats to discuss general progress, directions and challenges in a participatory manner. The project manager and director include many people from all the working and different partner organizations to contribute to this dialogue in this two-day workshop retreat.

As a facilitator, I have led numerous workshops for the German Development Agency in Amman. All of my workshops were focused on fostering collaborative work for project participants, such as developing action plans and long-term strategic plans. In one workshop, I helped a team of twelve people develop an action plan for a project concerned with lowering CO₂ emissions from water and water utilities in Jordan. As I observed and inquired into the need for this engagement workshop, I interviewed the project manager, Salam Al Momani. She described the need as an essential part of GIZ culture and emphasized that "all strategies must involve team members' opinions and experiences towards implementing the project...a participatory workshop provides a chance for people to reflect on lessons learned from past projects, provides an opportunity to discuss challenges and to envision future courses of action" (Al Momani). This democratic approach towards decision-making at GIZ had become an integral part of who they are, and when I asked two members of the team about how they feel by being part of creating the plan for the project, they said

that "we feel respected and valued as part of this team regardless of our past experiences." (Balah). By seeking and hiring an external facilitator to provide the step by step engagement process, GIZ, has practiced facilitative leadership to ensure maximum engagement of team members for the best action plan possible. This has a profound effect on the outcome of the project action plan and the implementation phase.

Organizational development specialists, Schein and Schein, write that "The core of organizational longevity is in the interaction of social, emotional and cooperative whole human beings in various kinds of personal relationships to each other" (Preface x). This is true, because the essence is that if employees become part of creating the plan, it enables them to have a sense of ownership in the decision-making process. This, in turn, enables team leaders to become facilitative leaders. This is distinct from traditional vertical, hierarchal, coercive approaches to decision making. I propose that a transformational change in organizational cultures can change society and enable public institutions such as municipal councils to embrace participatory processes to involve local citizens in decision-making. The next section will present the hallmark case study of this thesis to elaborate further on the power and impact of group facilitation skills towards collaboration processes.

C. Stakeholder engagement workshop for The German Development Agency in Jordan—a Case Study

i. The context

I was hired by the German Development Agency in Jordan (GIZ) as an external group facilitator to conduct a stakeholder engagement workshop. This involved different bodies from the Jordanian local government and GIZ, who regularly partner together to work towards solving one of Jordan's toughest challenges relating to the infrastructure of water networks in Jordan. The water sector suffers from a wide array of challenges, one of which is a 45% loss of freshwater from networks due to reasons such as leakages in water pipes.

Frauke Neumann is the director of the German Development Agency (GIZ) in Jordan. She has championed inviting all stakeholders from different governmental bodies to take part in solving Jordan's water challenges. She decided to conduct a yearly retreat to engage people in conversations over past challenges and to decide collectively on ideal future courses of action. Neumann asked me to help GIZ to conduct this stakeholder engagement event by means of a two-day strategic workshop and retreat in late August of 2019. When asked about the reason for this workshop, she said: "such processes are invaluable and help unlock employee potential from different bodies; it maximizes their engagement and provides a chance for people to connect and harvest lessons learned" (Neumann). My job was to inquire about the prevailing issues related to teamwork and collaboration, and to get people together to align their efforts using a step by step engagement process.

For example, in an interview with Sameer Abded Al-Jabbar, a project manager who works for GIZ as an expert water engineer, he shared that "there is a need for better communication, engagement and trust between different stakeholders working to solve Jordan's water network problems and this requires a genuine interest in changing the status quo" (Al-Jabbar). In other words, someone needs to lead the transformation of relationships between different stakeholders. This engagement process required detailed attention to who needed to be there; to look at participants' know-how, cultural backgrounds, and the engagement process, to see how they would work together to solve this common challenge. In this sense, by seeking an external facilitator's step by step process for team building through group work and dialogue between stakeholders, Neumann was implementing a decentralized model of a participatory decision-making model. The following figure portrays the process I used to lead the different bodies involved through the two- day strategic workshop for the water sector in Jordan. See figure 5 below:

I was selected as a neutral and external facilitator to champion, leading the step-by-step engagement process for the different bodies involved. In this context, as a facilitator, I needed to foster a balance of power in a complex web of interests. I selected the right group process and, by acting as a neutral balancing agent, I led the group process and fostered a fruitful inclusive dialogue for all and helped stakeholders recommend future courses of action.

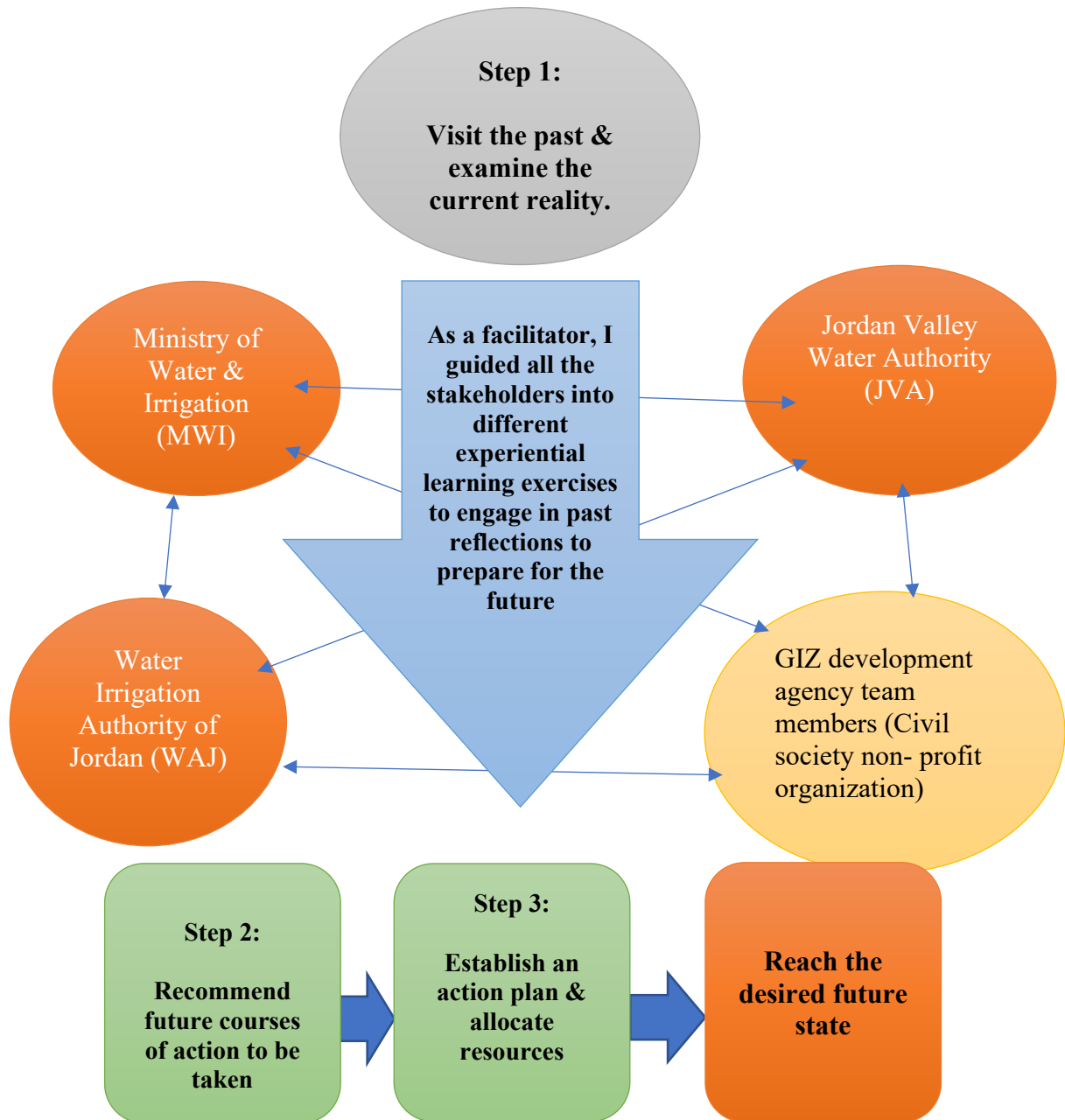


Figure 5: A decentralized model of engagement for GIZ & governmental bodies

The arrows in the figure above show the interlinkages between the different bodies working towards a common goal. In this sense, they are interconnected and interdependent. In actual terms, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) is the highest form of authority

in Jordan that oversees and manages all other bodies in the water sector, such as the (WAJ) and (JVA). In this context, the presence of the facilitator in the middle of Figure 5 indicates that there is no hierarchy between the surrounding bodies. Rather, the step by step process provided by the facilitator has eliminated the hierarchal structure and made the group of stakeholders cohesive and sitting on one level plane. The experiential aim of my workshop design was to get them to work collectively to experience teamwork, transparency, dialogue, exchange of perspectives and trust to foster a sense of collective achievement.

In this workshop, I led 25 people from different organizations, namely the Water and Irrigation Authority of Jordan (WAJ), Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI), Jordan Valley Water Authority (JVA) and GIZ, to recall past challenges and to discuss ideal future courses of action. This participatory workshop was designed based on two aims: experiential and rationale. The experiential aim was to enable them to experience participation, teamwork, and to build rapport. The rationale component was concerned with getting the group to establish a plan for the year ahead, by using different diverging group engagement processes, such as teambuilding exercises, dialogue, and past reflections, to answer questions regarding what worked well and what didn't. I divided the people into groups of five for maximum engagement and deliberation and then led the workshop in intervals by using different processes.

I started the workshop by arranging a circular seating arrangement to infuse a spirit of intimacy and a sense of togetherness, rather than a typical "U" or square shape like a traditional business meeting with desks and chairs. In this sense, I wanted to break human-made barriers such as formality and any tensions to make a welcoming atmosphere. I invited team members to revisit their personal "Whys" as individuals working in the development sector. This served as a starter and an ice breaker to remind people of their roles and their connection with their team members. I then proceeded with the remaining steps 1 to 3 in the

process above. In summary, I guided the workshop participants to a converging path, where I invited them to recommend ideal future courses of action for the final consensus stage of the workshop. The model of diverging and converging processes is based on Sam Kaner's renowned model for participatory decision making.

SAM KANER – Diamond of Participation (Dynamics of Group Decision Making)

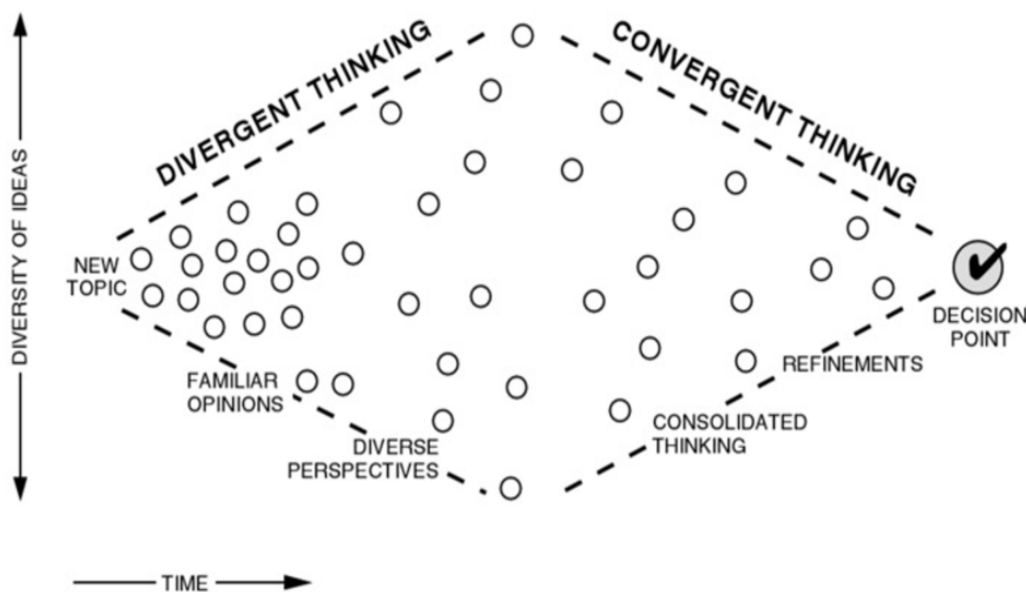


Figure 6: Diagram from the book titled *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory decision-making* by Sam Kaner.

The premise of the figure (9) is,

As people work and ideate together, they begin to understand one another's perspectives and opinions. Eventually, as one idea leads to the next, they come up with an alternative that no one had initially thought of. (Patterson 25)

Kerry Patterson describes this as a "pool of shared meaning", which is the "birth place of synergy" (25). Moreover, "when we generate options, it is called divergent thinking, and when we evaluate and select from among the options, it is called convergent thinking"

(Puccio 45). Gerard Puccio writes that the "hallmark of any creative process—the one principle that distinguishes creative thinking from everyday thinking—is the dynamic balance of divergent and convergent thinking" (46). When this model is used within groups, it will help to "align thinking, ensuring that everyone is pulling in the same direction" (66). In brief, this is how the power of group facilitation can tap into the wisdom of the group and thus unleash people's creativity.

ii. Lessons learned

Neumann and Sameer desired to harvest the wisdom from everyone in GIZ and other stakeholders from the government to solve Jordan's water sector challenges collaboratively. This is where facilitative leadership is most relevant to participation in organizations and across societal sectors. My observation was that people desire to see positive change take place in their organizations and communities, but they are often not sure how to start and where to seek help for better cooperation between stakeholders working towards a common goal. In this context, facilitators can bring people together by providing and leading them into the step by step engagement process. A facilitator is seen as a neutral partner, who can engender a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation between different people who aspire to give back to their community. Facilitators can promote the reconciliation of these relationships by carrying out humble inquiries that aim to learn about different stakeholders' opinions, visions, and experiences. For example, Lederach writes:

...authentic reflective feedback requires an honest exchange. If we speak only with those who agree with us, or who give us the answer we seek rather than evoke within us deeper reflection, we may not fully listen to our deeper inner voice or perceive the way God speaks to us. ("Reconcile" 53)

Had the leader of GIZ not had the will to bring people together in an informal, non-centralized method to discuss matters openly, communications, planning and efforts on

working towards a common goal between different bodies would have remained stagnant. I propose that it is this sort of facilitative leadership and humble inquiry that is most needed in the public sector, such as governorate and local municipal councils in Jordan. However, it is seldom that governmental bodies approach this type of collaboration nor possess an organizational culture that fosters this sort of leadership. Rather, this is manifested in international development agencies in Jordan such as GIZ. Participatory group processes enable team leaders to create a culture of inquiry and participation in their organizations and to maximize external stakeholder engagement and buy-in towards supporting their projects.

Recommendations

My learnings and observations from working at the interface between a development agency and different governmental bodies in the water sector are that safe spaces for dialogue and engagement processes must be provided and encouraged by the government—rather than waiting on an external development agency to do this job on their behalf. This means that there must be a will from government officials to partner with civil society to solve local challenges by seeking collaborative work through step by step engagement processes. From my experience as a group facilitator, I propose that proponents of participatory governance must start using similar approaches for community engagement efforts. In summary, to bring about new and lively experiences for citizen participation in decision making, we ought to look at the human side of decentralization, and this means we must focus on the leader's style of inquiry, the tools and strategies used, along with the details of human interaction.

D. Space and leadership: observations and learnings from Shams Community social enterprise in Amman, Jordan

The government and civil society must work together to strengthen the civic capacity of local communities. Simone Joyaux writes that civic capacity “is the ability of a community to identify its problems and fix them and identify its opportunities and take advantage of them”

and argues that “civic capacity depends on social capital and civic engagement” (28). She explains that “building communities relies on the ability of individuals and groups to connect to build bridges, to nurture relationships, and to work together for change” (29). In this context, I propose that the enhancing of a civic capacity requires a safe space for dialogue to foster citizen relationships that are based on mutual trust and cooperation for the common good. In the context of building the civic capacity of communities, Charles Vogl discusses the importance of the temple principle, in which he defines a temple as a “place where people with shared values enact their community’s rituals” (67). I present Shams Community social enterprise’s premises as a leading example of a temple and a space that nurtures citizens’ aspirations for dialogue and deliberation.

I have been an active volunteer at Shams Community for the past three years, I have facilitated numerous community dialogues and have observed their community meetings as an ethnographer. Shams Community is a social enterprise that hosts regular Monday night dialogues on different community and worldwide issues and challenges, such as racial inequity, social justice, and poverty. The diversity of people that attend makes this venue a unique place to meet different people and to engage in dialogue over dinner. What I observed as a distinguishing feature of this organization, is that it provides the ideal space to bring people together to experience a sense of community and belonging. Shams Community has made dinners over dialogue a Monday ritual, and by immersing people in this hospitable atmosphere, food plays the role of an ice breaker, brings people closer together, and thus helps people to connect. Charles Vogl explains that “space has a profound impact on any ritual experience” and that some “activities are more special if you do them in a particular space.” Vogl also contends that:

The environment in which an event occurs affects the tenor of the ritual and the emotions of the participants...when you consider rituals for your community, it’ll

make a difference in the impact of the ritual if you choose a space that's meaningful to your community. (69)

The premises of Shams Community are humble and basic: it is an old house that is composed of a hallway with four rooms and a small front and back yard. It is furnished with simple wooden tables and chairs, bookshelves, colored curtains, and old-style windows. The hallway serves as the buffet for the people. Upon entering the main door, people can smell the delicious feast of Arabic food set for dinner, mainly composed of vegetarian meals. I saw leadership in pioneering a creative space like this, which infuses a sense of comfort and enjoyment for people. Vogl writes that "any leader can create a temple for members to gather. We choose what and when to designate a place as a temple" (71). And in this context, Shams acts like a minor temple for people. Vogl simply defines the minor temple as:

a place where members gather and enact rituals that either is smaller than the primary temple or is used by a subcommunity, these minor temples allow smaller groups to know one another more intimately, have their style of rituals, and even differentiate themselves from the bigger, maybe global, community. (71)

This is exactly what Shams has championed in its community. They have set themselves apart to be different and a safe place for people to engage in dialogue over matters that are important to them. The ritual is best performed when people gather over dinner.

I interviewed Saeed Abul-Hassan, the founder of Shams Community social enterprise. When asked about why he founded Shams back in 2015, he said that "if people desire to work towards solving local challenges and become social entrepreneurs, they need to first start talking about the issues they see in their communities and this demands the right space for people to engage in conversations that matter to them" (Abul-Hassan). Abul-Hassan is a Jordanian citizen and a well-known social entrepreneur in my community. He championed creating this space to fill a gap for a rather hopeful community of youth who strive to be

heard and to connect with others in their community. In this context, this is how leadership is engendered, by creating a community of regular members who come in to enjoy the company of like-minded people to converse on different topics of interest. When I asked different people about why they attend Shams Community Monday dialogue nights, I received the following responses: "An opportunity to participate in something meaningful...it is a safe environment where one can speak openly and freely without limitations" (Tariq). Another participant said:

Shams provides a venue and the process to enable us to speak about topics of interest, to learn from international perspectives...they have good food, and to solve any problem you have first to start talking about it. I believe in dialogue because dialogue breaks the ice between people. (Mohammad)

I also interviewed Shams Community volunteer Yarob Karadsheh, who is a facilitator for the Monday dialogue nights. When asked about his reason for volunteering, he said that:

I want to help in directing people's opinions because often, the dialogue is not productive due to opinion clashes and people dominating a conversation. I believe that to be able to lead conversations, neutrality is important, and I believe that I can fulfil this role. (Karadsheh)

Voices like these and many others in my community strive to participate and air their opinions in spaces like Shams. But it is seldom that such spaces exist in my community. Moreover, I observed through leading dialogue on Monday nights that people enjoy facilitated sessions because of the discipline and structure that these processes have on group dialogue. People who possess facilitation skills are described as facilitative leaders, and scholars describe facilitators as process leaders. Because of their neutrality and expertise in group processes, facilitators can lead group dialogue effectively. This is another area of

leadership that I have observed in Shams Community activities, apart from the provision of physical space.

At Shams Community's premises, I observed people sitting in circular configurations, which portrays a compelling message in that "we are all in this together equally" and "we are ready to take part in engaging dialogue." Ingenuity in the physical design of meetings and the use of creative processes for deliberation will enhance people's capacity and confidence to participate, and unleash their potential for driving positive social change. Public participation expert James Creighton highlights the importance of developing interactive meetings that enable people to engage in dialogue, and not mere public comment meetings in which speaker after speaker stands up and makes a comment to the entire audience (149). Creighton speaks of a much deeper form of meeting, where people gather to engage in meaningful conversations with people openly and democratically, rather than a formal speech-like manner. He emphasizes the use of different tools that can be used for large group meetings, and they range from Samoan circles, world cafés, focus groups, advisory groups and the use of group facilitators, as well as highlighting the importance of meeting space design such as seating arrangement (116).

Development expert Robert Chambers contends that "seating arrangements carry coded messages about relationships. They put us in positions ranged between disciplined and chaotic, formal and informal, centralized and decentralized, hierarchical and egalitarian, exposed and private, and threatening and non-threatening (83). Space and meeting design are essential components of bringing people together to tackle challenges jointly. Well-designed settings can infuse a sense of collectiveness amongst people and can bring them together in a non-formal and non-confrontational manner. The objective of creating a safe space for dialogue is that "each of us enters conversations with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about a topic at hand. This unique combination of thoughts and feelings

makes up our personal pool of meaning. This pool not only informs us but also propels our every action" (Patterson et al. 24). Dialogue spaces become a field laboratory for intervening in culture and a better understanding of how to lead and engage people. This is about the collective wisdom and intelligence of people. In these spaces, there will be a chance to look at the psychology of communities, which tries to "understand the systematic political and economic factors that diminish human well-being and particularly the sense of identity" (Myers 121). This understanding would enable us to understand the root cause of problems of inequality and power. In this sense, the creation of dialogue spaces and experimenting with participatory processes will give voice and identity to those who seem to be neglected and less engaged in vulnerable communities.

Recommendations

I propose that this has been an overlooked aspect of true democracy in Jordan. My learning is that decentralization proponents need to be creative in designing public spaces to be different from traditional settings. In traditional settings, an audience stands before a panel, and there are only one or two minutes assigned for a question and answer session. The audience then hears an answer back from the panel of decision-makers. This is the dominant form of public meeting that many people in my community and I observe on television. For example, Al Mamlaka and Roya, local TV broadcasters, hold and air regular public meetings for citizens. Here journalists facilitate question and answer sessions on diverse community-related issues such as poverty, unemployment, and crime in vulnerable communities between an audience and a panel of decision-makers seated opposite. This traditional setting has to change, because it does not encourage dialogue and deliberation between citizens. This is a rigid form of public hearing that is not conducive to community engagement and development. Rather, citizens are turned into a passive audience of critics and consumers. In the context of local councils, organisers of stakeholder engagement workshops must pay

attention to the physical design of public meetings along with the group process. When both are taken into consideration and are integrated into the heart of public meetings, people will experience truly collective teamwork, creativity, brainstorming, and participatory decision-making in a creative, safe, welcoming, and disciplined manner. Block suggests that "the way we design our gatherings is the only way we can bring into existence the possibility of the community we want to inhabit" (94). If political and democratic life is to be enhanced in Jordan, it needs to start changing the way people meet with fellow citizens and decision-makers. In brief, we need to inject more life into public meetings, so that humanity is noticed via deeper human interactions. More experimentation is required in this context to enhance Jordan's civic capacity for participation. Below is a logical model I propose to local councils to enter into a phase of experimentation towards transforming people's experiences in participation.

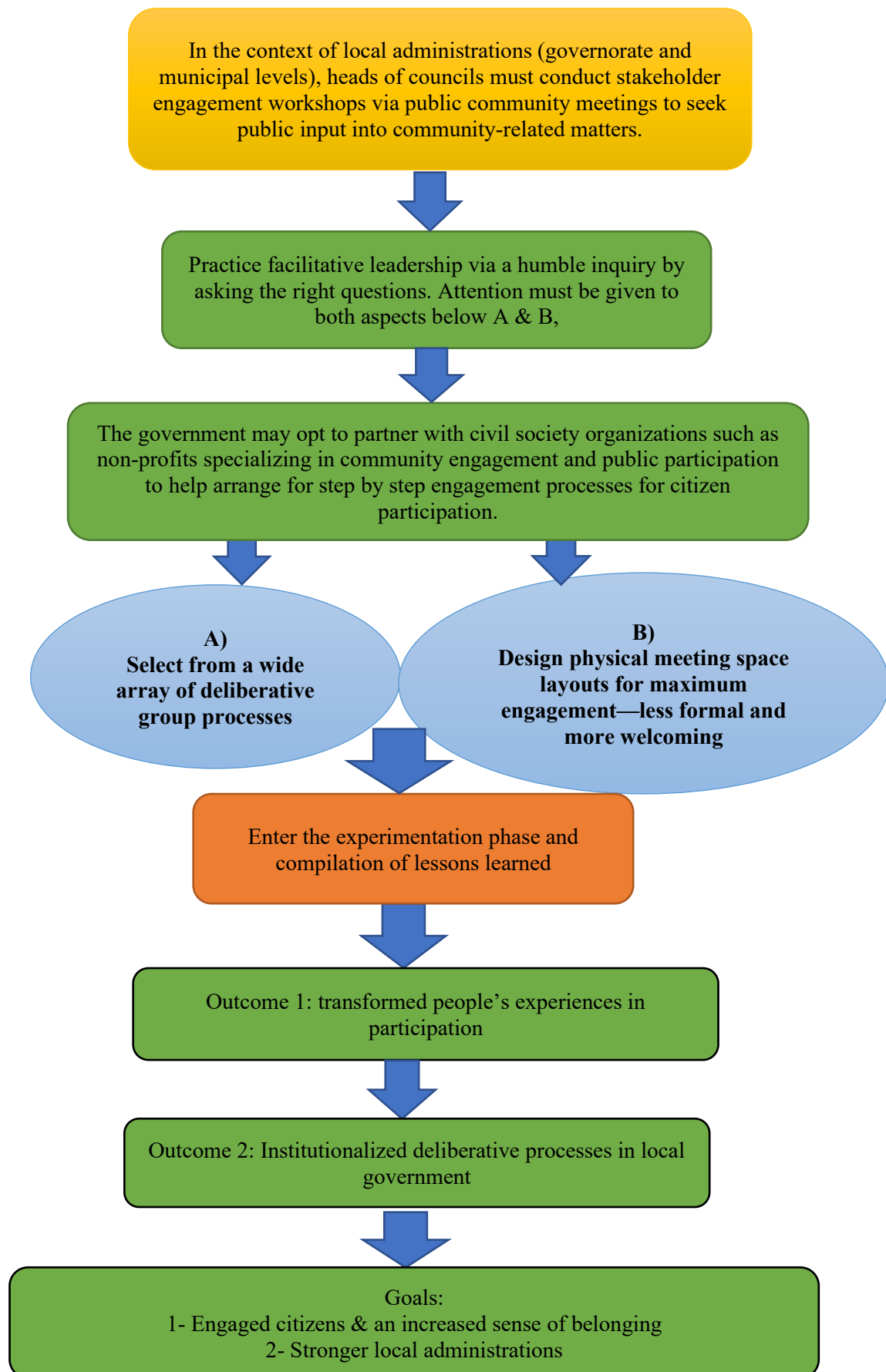


Figure 7: A logical model for transforming citizen's experiences in public meetings

E. Reconciliation via Contact Theory

My observation is that the most profound impact which the presence of facilitators and safe spaces for dialogue brings, is a rather interesting aspect of uniting people to work collectively. This is reconciling broken relationships via contact theory.

Brenda Salter McNeil writes that contact theory suggests "relationships between conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an extended period" (33). McNeil goes on to argue that "this contact must occur in a mutually beneficial learning environment and involve multiple opportunities for the participants to have cooperative interactions with one another" (33). This, according to the theory, "decreases the hostility between groups because animosity is typically fueled by stereotypes that result from limited exposure" (33). Contact theory makes sense and is very appealing to anyone who works with community engagement, peacebuilding, group development and public participation. In this context, contact theory is manifested in facilitation processes used with groups in areas such as team building, consensus decision-making, brainstorming, action planning, long-term strategic planning, and conflict resolution, which are relevant to citizens' experiences in participation. Jim Everett writes that the "positive effects of intergroup contact occur in contact situations characterized by four key conditions: "equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities" (Everett).

As a facilitator, I tailor my interactive workshops in a manner where all participants come in as equals so that they may voice their opinions freely. Below is a set of commonly used inspirational messages I refer to when setting the context for participation. See Figure 8 below:



Figure 8: Workshop spirit

The benefit that contact theory brings is that it contributes to better social cohesion between people of different social classes and ethnic backgrounds in one community.

Recommendations

I attach Appendix B for a proposed workshop design based on John Lederach's process of reconciliation with reference to Brenda McNeil. The workshop design views decentralization as a process of reconciliation. The objective is to re-establish faith in Jordanian public institutions by reconciling citizens with their local administrations. The workshop is based on a series of questions that can enable stakeholders to work collaboratively to revisit the past to prepare for the future. I prescribe this step by step workshop methodology to inspire municipal councils and all decentralization proponents who

wish to work collaboratively to change the current cultural narrative of citizen participation in Jordan.

F. Conclusion of field research: a shift in individual leadership style for participatory governance

Earlier sections proposed leaders of GIZ in Jordan, such as Salam Al Momani, Frauke Neumann, and Sameer Abdul Al-Jabbar, along with the founder of Shams Community social enterprise, Saeed Abul Hassan, as facilitative leaders. According to the figure below, their leadership style matches the green quadrant. The question that arises is: does the public sector in Jordan have a suitable leadership attitude to engage in this democratic transformation? Figure 9 below portrays four different leadership styles that must be recognized as having an immense impact on organizational cultures. If the individual understanding of leadership remains confined to the blue, gray, and orange-colored quadrants, it cannot foster a true democracy where everyone feels a sense of belonging to his or her community. I propose the green quadrant as the ideal style for a new transformed leadership style in Jordan.

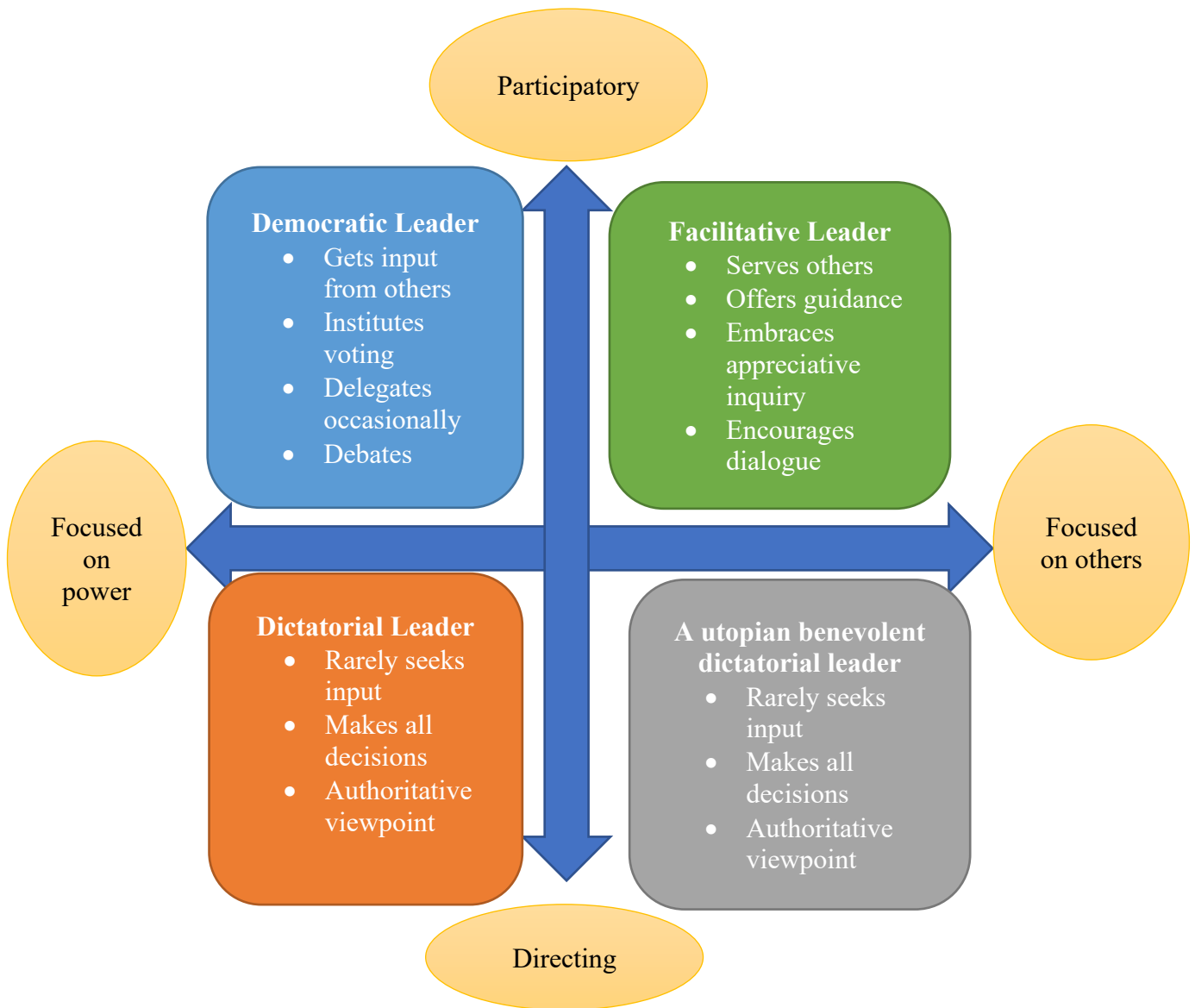


Figure 9: A shift in leadership style for a truly decentralized government

Facilitative leadership is defined as “a people-centered, quality and results-driven process of developing and supporting culture in the workplace, that facilitates goal achievement through effective relational processes” (“Facilitative Leadership”). In other words, it is about maximizing input and contribution from others. Leadership experts such as Schein and Schein also contend that “the process of leadership can be conceived of as distinct from traditional vertical hierarchy and individual “heroic” performance” (Intro.). In other words, leadership is not about individual victory and glory. Rather, it is about lifting people by fostering positive and transformational relationships between leader and followers. This

type of leadership correlates with one of the teachings that exist in the Bible in the book of Matthew, where Jesus Christ teaches that “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Bible Gateway). This teaching conveys a humble approach to leadership, where it is about enabling others to lead and to live to their fullest potential. Collective leadership specialist, Petra Kuenkel, wrote that "by showing authentic interest in the person we want to engage...by appreciating people's expertise, by being open to learning from others we can foster genuine connectivity with others and build healthy relationships” (95). Facilitative leadership invites people to take action, and it understands that groups and communities are an interconnected web of knowledge and experiences; that if tapped and aligned together, they will reveal the wisdom that lies within people and thus cultivate collective action for change. I ask my readers to think about the following question: How can decentralization become a success if leaders are not interested in their followers, nor believe in the diversity of human talent, skills, expertise and perspective on diverse matters? In other words, leaders must believe in human worth and dignity, and must learn to express their love and concern for their people by using engagement processes.

In conclusion, leaders such as Neumann, Al Momani, Al-Jabbar and Abul Hassan believe in the value of uniting people to work collectively to achieve common goals in their communities. I would describe them as champions of collective leadership. Leaders in the public sector, such as council members, must start by acknowledging their roles as more than mere public duty, but a humble service towards helping people to live to their full potential, and this is a first step towards creating change in organizational cultures. Leaders must believe in human worth and the need for the alignment of efforts towards solving shared

challenges and serving the common good. Leadership is not a solo journey, but rather a collaborative effort made up of many people, groups and organizations.

Recommendations

I propose facilitation skills as a necessary set of skills for all development practitioners, change agents, visionaries, council heads, managers, community leaders, and anyone interested to serve Jordan's development aspirations via collective leadership. Facilitative leaders will help people envision their future by engaging people in planning for taking real action for change. Development practitioners, in particular, are well placed to take the role of facilitators in providing participatory transformative tools to help aid the decentralization process in Jordan. Facilitators, in general, are in an ideal position to work at the interface between government and civil society organizations. The role of the facilitator can be described as someone who performs the functions presented in Figure 10 below. The next section presents international bodies that can help inspire and foster a collective form of leadership in organizations and communities.

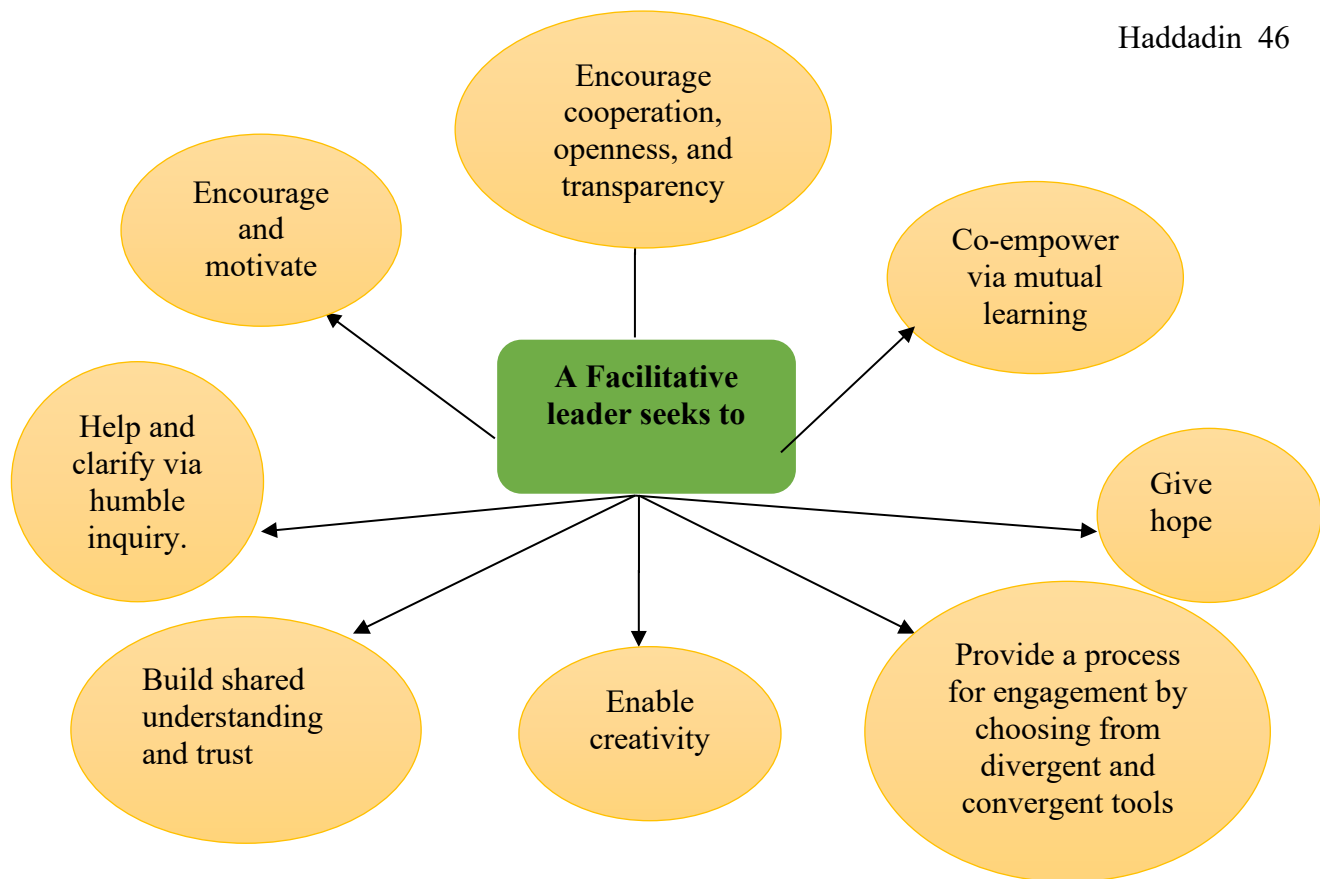


Figure 10: The facilitative leader's approach to group work

IV. Engagement frameworks and tools for a better humanity

A. International bodies for creative engagement processes

International bodies such as the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), and the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) possess a wealth of knowledge in participatory processes for engagement and collaboration in organizational and communal contexts. They are well embedded and deeply anchored in civil societies across the world. As opposed to government aspirations, these bodies are primarily concerned with the human development aspect which participatory processes can bring in to enhance the quality of human life, namely fostering a sense of ownership and belonging in organizations and communities as a whole. They are also able to provide training courses, interventions for stakeholder engagement workshops, dialogue, and a wide array of participatory decision-making tools as

a reference for anyone who wishes to work towards participatory governance. Willis writes that "when the state or markets fail to provide a solution to a problem, NGOs can have the answer for development" (108) and writes:

NGOs are beneficial to non-material aspects of development in particular processes of empowerment, participation, and democratization because of how NGOs are embedded in local communities, it is argued that they have to be accountable to the local people. (109)

This means that when the government delegates the responsibility of providing engagement processes to civil society, they enable the civil sector to become owners and creators of the change they wish to see in their communities. I interviewed Jonathan Dudding, the director of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) in the UK, a non-profit organization concerned with human development via participatory methods. He has worked as a facilitator, consultant, and trainer for over thirty years all around the world in the development and governmental sectors. When I asked him, "Why participation?" Jonathan explained to me:

I think what drives me is that I have a deep belief in the potential of human beings and that I believe human beings are capable of much more than we are currently demonstrating. I think that facilitation is one of the ways in which that potential which everybody has can be released both individually but also collectively. By working together, we can achieve something greater than we can achieve individually, and facilitation is something that helps to achieve that. And I also believe that as I get older, I think more and more of legacy in terms of what I want to leave behind. And so, I'm not just interested in being a facilitator by using the methods myself, but to help others learn the techniques and use them effectively. (Dudding)

Moreover, in the context of international experience, I interviewed Goli Ahmadifard, a young Iranian social activist and the director of the Iranian Institute of Facilitators and affiliate of

the IAF. Goli is passionate about promoting a culture of participation in her community. When I asked her about why she has a passion for helping people via the practice of facilitation, she said, "I feel that I exist when I do this sort of work, and I want people to fulfil their existence through facilitation. I want them to enjoy their lives" (Ahmadifard). Dudding and Ahmadifard present a good example of facilitative leaders who have a deep passion to bridge the gap between government aspirations and local citizens through facilitation strategies. I propose that this is a unique trait of the NGO sector worldwide, namely, a deeply vested interest and concern for human dignity and worth. In other words, passion and purpose drives the NGO world as opposed to government aspirations of the acquisition of power and control.

Recommendations

In light of the lack of previous experience in collaborative processes, I propose that all stakeholders and key players who are taking an active role in Jordan's quest for decentralization, whether they be organizations from civil society or the newly elected local council committees, must refer to previous and accumulated experience in group facilitation tools, with specific reference to public participation techniques. The government, comprised of local municipal councils, must partner with civil society organizations who can take the role of facilitators to provide step-by-step engagement processes and work at the interface between government and civil society.

B. Enhancing municipal councils' capacity for participatory democracy

To delve deeper into tools and methods for engagement, I'd like to use the concept of "Gap Analysis" in project management as an example. The concept is used for organizational development purposes. The process starts with identifying different elements of the current state of an organization and then the envisioning of the future desired state. The gap analysis process invites the team members of an organization to work together to bridge the gap between the current state and the future state. They would identify all necessary resources and activities to move forward towards the desired future state. Jeff Ball writes that gap analysis "can help understand and prioritize business needs by helping identify any deficiencies or shortcomings that need to be overcome...give decision-makers a comprehensive overview of the entire company and to determine whether the organization has the resources to meet their mission and goals" (Ball 2018). Similarly, municipal councils should embrace this principle to strengthen the civic capacity for citizen participation in decision-making.

I would argue that municipal councils must collectively engage in past reflections as a means to conduct an organizational life review. An organization is a learning entity and ought to embrace continuous improvement. When employees of an organization or members of a local council decide to conduct an organizational life review together, it will enable them to create their missions as one. Figure 11 is a suggested simple model for collaborative process via gap analysis, led by a neutral facilitator. This model aims to help local councils and local community members to work together to envision the future of their communities. A sample focus question for this process can be "*how do we overcome high poverty and unemployment rates in our community together?*"

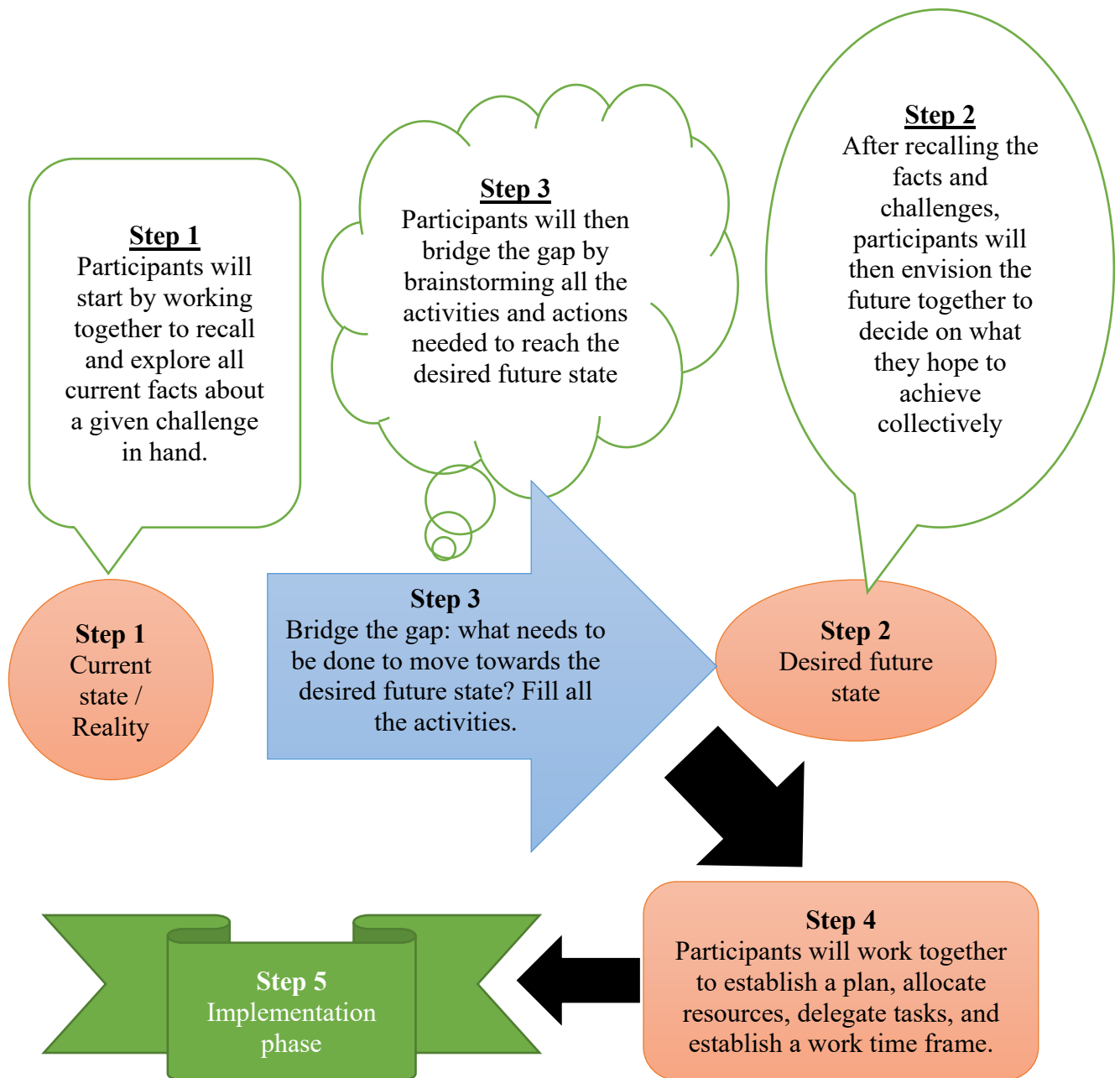


Figure 11: Sample participatory process for engagement

When local administrations embrace a process for reflecting on the current reality by extracting the current facts collectively, such as challenges related to poverty or unemployment, it enhances the collective leadership and capacity of people. At the municipal level, if such a process is led in a participatory manner, it will give people a sense of direction and ownership in creating their community's mission and vision. Concerning organizational mission statements, Leddin and Moon write that the "mission should be the collective voice of the people in your organization, not just a leader's voice" (103) and in this sense "a mission

statement is supposed to express the passion of the people who are on the mission” (99). They go on to argue that when “people don’t know what it all means...they don’t much care. There is nothing for them to engage with” (100). Leadership expert Simon Sinek writes that "only when individuals can trust the culture or organization will they take personal risks to advance that culture or organization as a whole" (104) and that "with a WHY clearly stated within an organization, anyone within the organization can make a decision as clearly and as accurately as the founder" (168). In this context, a participatory approach to creating missions can enhance the local administration's capacity for participatory governance.

A simple model of engagement such as this will enable council members and citizens alike to understand and appreciate what participation means. This will allow both to become aligned with and passionate about serving their council's mission. This is an experiential learning process and requires extensive experimentation with different methods. In brief, this is a necessary component to a successful decentralization process and, without it, councils cannot fulfil their duties, nor will they be motivated to seek citizen involvement. See Appendix C.1 and C.2 for a list of processes recommended by the International Association for Public Participation, which local administrations can use to involve citizens in decision-making processes.

Recommendations

To sum up, practising facilitative leadership is paramount to successful participatory democratic governance at the municipal level. The model below proposes how participatory processes can contribute to a truly decentralized municipal council that is close to citizens' aspirations.

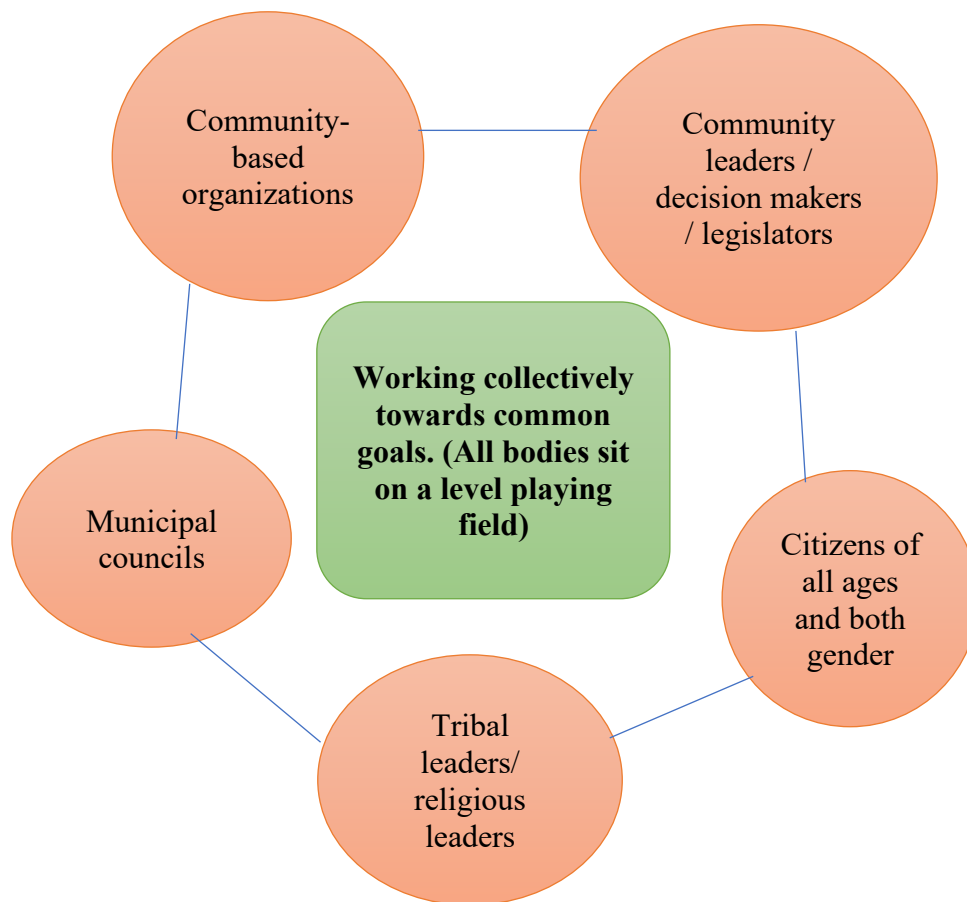


Figure 12: A decentralized model of engagement for municipal councils and local community members.

In this sense, municipal councils are interconnected and interdependent, and it places the council on a level playing field with other community members, while working collectively towards solving common challenges. Whereas the current, centralized model looks as follows in the figure below:

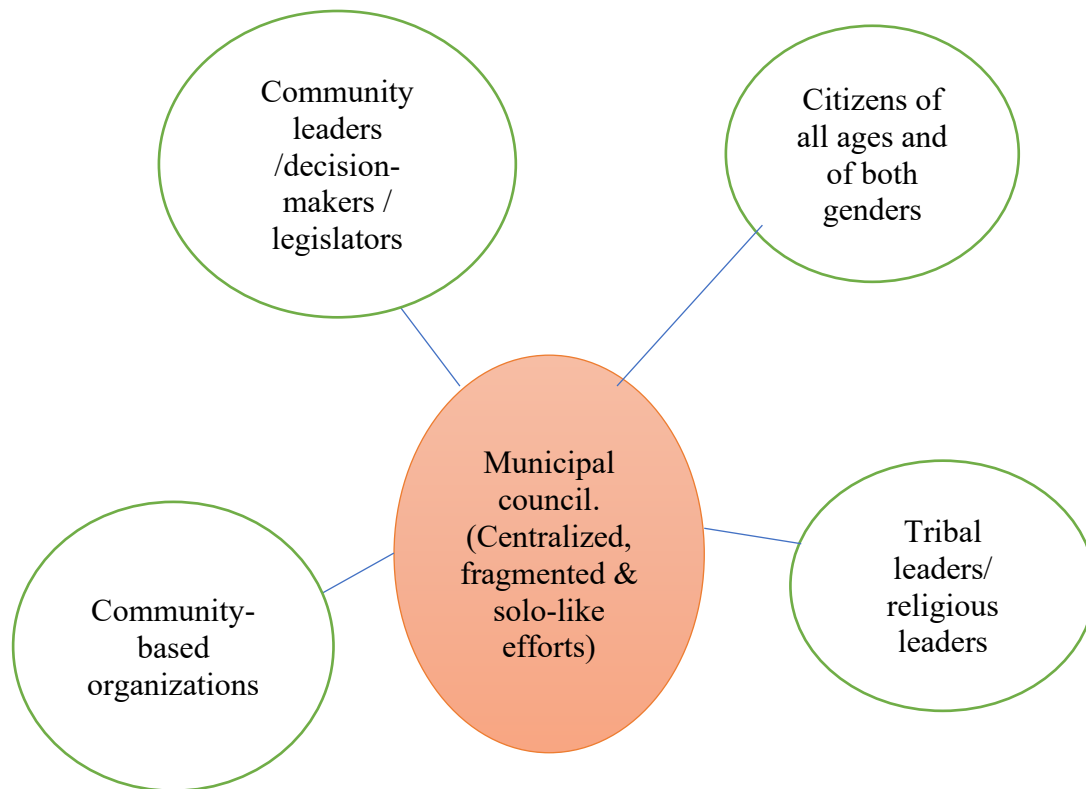


Figure 13: The current centralized model of engagement for municipal councils and local community members.

V. Leadership and Spirituality

A. Leading with compassion

This thesis discusses the need to approach the process of decentralization from a human development stance rather than the legislative framework. This means looking at the human side of decentralization, which is largely about safe spaces for dialogue, coupled with engagement processes by practicing facilitative leadership. Decentralization, from a humanitarian stance, can be described as the government's love for people's growth and well-being. Put differently, the government must express compassion for the people via inclusive processes for positive change. Proponents of decentralization must learn to work across societal sectors and bring people together to solve challenges in a creative manner.

Decentralization, when translated into layman's terms, is no more than respecting and honoring people's worth. Leaders must approach working with people from a humane stance full of empathy to sustain the dignity of human life. In this sense, decentralization is an invitation for leaders to embrace humble leadership in the service and glory of their people. The spirit of this thesis emphasizes that decentralization is not necessarily about leveling the field of politics between citizens and government, but rather it is about uplifting and reclaiming people's worth.

John Townsend writes that "it's the leader's duty to create a context in which people are not only trained, resourced, and given clarity about their roles but also feel they belong and matter" (192). In this sense, leaders must reflect on their daily conduct with the people, groups, organizations and communities they work with. How can a government truly transform into a democratic state when leaders have not sought to understand who they are as leaders and what their purpose is? How can decentralization become an authentic and genuine process of change to touch people's lives, if leaders do not possess the will to make it a success nor reflect this conduct on the ground? What good do the laws of man bring if a man does not honor and give effect to the law? There is a spiritual dimension to decentralization. Spirituality, in this sense, means that "leaders need not only the technical skills to manage the external world but also the spiritual skills to journey inward toward the source of both shadow and light" (Palmer 79). This means that leaders need to scan their behavior and become aware of their role as caretakers of their people. Their primary concern is people's wellbeing and growth. Spirituality is also "recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion" (Brown 45). When this love and compassion are translated on the ground, it becomes visible. In other words, when leaders embrace "mutual support, we enhance one another's strengths...because

the competencies mutually reinforce one another if we give them attention (Kuenkel 115). In summary, decentralization is an invitation to turn to one another.

B. The quality of presence

Jordan's quest for decentralization is a challenging domain that requires behavioral change, and this takes time. In this sense, patience, hope and faith are required, but these must also be coupled with the quality of presence in a leader's approach to working with his or her people. John Lederach writes that "When we approach the challenge of reconciliation, we tend to ask for the steps, the model, the process, the toolkit and the techniques. This is true whether we find ourselves personally embroiled in the conflict or providing help to others in deep conflict" (*Reconcile* 45), and argues that the quality of presence we bring into our relationships makes all the difference. This is in the way we choose to be present in a relationship, and in the company of others. Lederach writes that the key to this type of presence is the "capacity to notice the humanity of others, especially those most invisible and neglected" (47). In this context I'd like to propose that:

worldly power is motivated by pride, greed and uses fear, lies, hatred and violence to subdue and control others. Spiritual power, however, is animated by goodwill and uses affirmation and peaceful means to help others realize their true nature; its essence is truth and love, wisdom and compassion. (Work 203)

As proposed in earlier sections, change must start with a belief in human value and right to participate, and if leaders acknowledge this right, then this is the first step towards creating compassionate leaders who can transform their organizations and communities where hierarchy and social status is no longer relevant when working towards the common good.

Decentralization is really about expressing a genuine interest in people and to convey this interest, community leaders ought to work with people from a stance of humble inquiry. In other words, politicians, legislators, governorate and municipal council heads need to look

beyond their suits and briefcases and all the formal settings that create barriers to forging genuine human relationships.

VI. Conclusion

I have brought a development perspective into the realms of citizen participation in decision making. I invite my readers to look upon decentralization as a process of humble inquiry that is about uplifting people's worth by giving them the confidence they need to participate effectively and wholeheartedly in shaping their community's future. In summary, societal transformation happens when people are enabled to participate effectively and to create the change they wish to see in their lives. Development practitioners and organizations that intend to partner with local councils and all stakeholders to achieve a true democracy must provide people with adequate engagement processes. Tools and techniques, however, are not enough to change the cultural narrative of citizen participation in Jordan. The "terrain for the human heart is an infinitely vast mystery, with unlimited capacity for good and for evil" (Groody 12). If leaders do not bring the quality of presence into the realm of citizen participation in decision making, decentralization proponents will not be able to notice humanity in others nor show genuine care for those who have been disconnected. In other words, citizen engagement will lack a transformational spirit and will remain confined to mechanical processes that do not bear fruit.

Appendices

Appendix A

Action Research Workshop Methodology

The Institute of Cultural Affairs focused conversation method is a powerful engagement process of different questioning stages. Brian Stanfield wrote in his book titled *The Art of Focused Conversation* that the four stages are Objective, Reflective, Interpretive & Decisional (18)

Objective level: Question about facts and external reality

This level will activate all human senses, such as: see, hear, taste, feel, and smell.

Reflective level: Questions to call forth immediate personal reaction to the data, an internal response, sometimes emotions or feelings, hidden images, and associations with the facts. Whenever we encounter an external reality (data/objective), we experience an internal source.

In this level, emotions and feelings stir, associations are made, memories rise to the surface.

Interpretive level: Questions to draw out meaning, values, significance, and implications.

In this Level, people will make conscious connections, thoughts, and ideas form.

Decisional level: Questions to elicit resolution, bring the conversation to a close, and enable the group to make a resolve about the future.

In this level, people will consider actions, decisions, choices, what to do, how to respond, how to rise.

Workshop Design

The focused question of my fieldwork workshop was, "*What are practical ways to help create participation for change & development in your organization?*"

Objective Level question: *What do you notice in your organization about how decisions are made?*

Reflective Level question: *When were you or your colleagues most frustrated? How did you feel?*

Interpretive level question: *What are the factors that contribute to this?*

Decisional level question: *What are you going to do about it?*

Appendix B

Decentralization is a process of reconciliation with citizens

(adapted from Brenda McNeil and John Lederach's model for reconciliation)

To foster a new relationship with citizens, the government "must be able to envision something in order to pursue it...reconciliation must be fueled by a shared vision of what it can look like so that we can grow in our belief that it is indeed possible" (McNeil 61). The vision of a successful decentralized system must be created by all stakeholders and not one entity, such as a legislative body or a legislator. According to John Lederach, transformation's guiding question is "how do we end something not desired and build something we do desire" (*Little Book* 30). Therefore, for this democratic transition to become a transformational experience for Jordan and restore citizens' trust, we have to look at the human side of decentralization. There is a need for the people to work with their local councils to co-create a unified vision for local communities.

I propose the following workshop design to serve as a platform taking the form of community-facilitated workshops. In other words, citizen assemblies that would include a representative population from different governorates in Jordan. I propose to use this participatory process with all stakeholders and proponents of decentralization for a fresh start and to revive the democratic process once again. The key here is to ask the right questions to stimulate crucial conversations for a meaningful outcome. A typical workshop would invite and include: civil society organizations such as the Jordanian National Center for Human Rights, women, and youth empowerment agencies assembled by local NGO's, activists, higher education principals, public policy-makers, judges, tribe leaders, active youth and any interested citizens. The premise of this is to engage in dialogue and to speak openly about what decentralization means to Jordanians and how different stakeholders wish to participate in decision-making processes without limitations.

The objective is to share different experiences, perspectives, and opinions, and to reach consensus on issues such as current challenges, strengths, and opportunities. To create a platform, a task force must be assigned to lead a dialogue amongst community stakeholders. But this platform shouldn't be for talking and engaging in conversations only, but rather must be a platform where people get involved in developing action plans and long-term strategic plans in a participatory, inclusive manner by including all stakeholders. This stakeholder community workshop will be based on past reflections to serve as a reminder of the catalytic events that took place during the past decades. The workshop will invite people to engage in storytelling to remind stakeholders of different events and milestones related to Jordan's democratic capacity. McNeil writes, "we need chaos for transformation to take place" (52). McNeil further argues that if a "catalytic event occurs when there is little sense of safety, individuals and groups can experience a form of trauma that shuts down their creative capacity, and they will revert to a place of alienation and preservation" (52). To move into greater awareness of the current reality, McNeil says that "this understanding of reality and a sense of our relatedness to that reality leads us to own the truth, and the impact of it, for ourselves" (57). In the context of citizen participation, many grievances can surface during testimonials from citizens, youth, community-based organizations, women's rights, and human rights activists. Therefore, to create a safe place for all, the threat level must be lowered, and there must be a commitment to civility (61). To create a safe place, McNeil argues that "we must first acknowledge and validate the wrongs that taken place between us to move away from the limiting roles of oppressor, victimizer versus victim" (61).

According to Lederach, a transformation framework comprises three inquires: the presenting situation, the horizon of the preferred future, and the development of change processes linking the two. He argues that "The movement from the present toward the desired future state is not a straight line. Rather, it represents a dynamic set of initiatives that set in

motion change processes and promote long-term change strategies, while responding to specific immediate needs (*Little Book* 38). In a nutshell, my plan constitutes a series of engagement workshops tailored specifically for local councils to address the question of “*How do we bring about a sustainable long-term change into the current cultural narrative of citizen participation?*” This needs to be led in an open manner and in a safe setting where people feel motivated to air all grievances and then move collectively towards proposing jointly-made solutions. The premise behind this series of workshops is that they create processes and spaces so that people can engage and shape the structures that order their community life (Lederach, *Little Book* 22). Dialogue is needed to provide access to give people a voice and a chance to not only become a part of solving the problem but to understand how they are part of the problem itself. Please see figure 14 below.

A neutral facilitator should be selected to champion leading the change process. In this context, the facilitator faces a balancing act in a complex web of interests. He or she must adopt the right group process and, by acting as a neutral balancing agent, he or she will lead the group process and engender a fruitful inclusive dialogue for all. This will set the stage for a true transformation towards a new democracy.

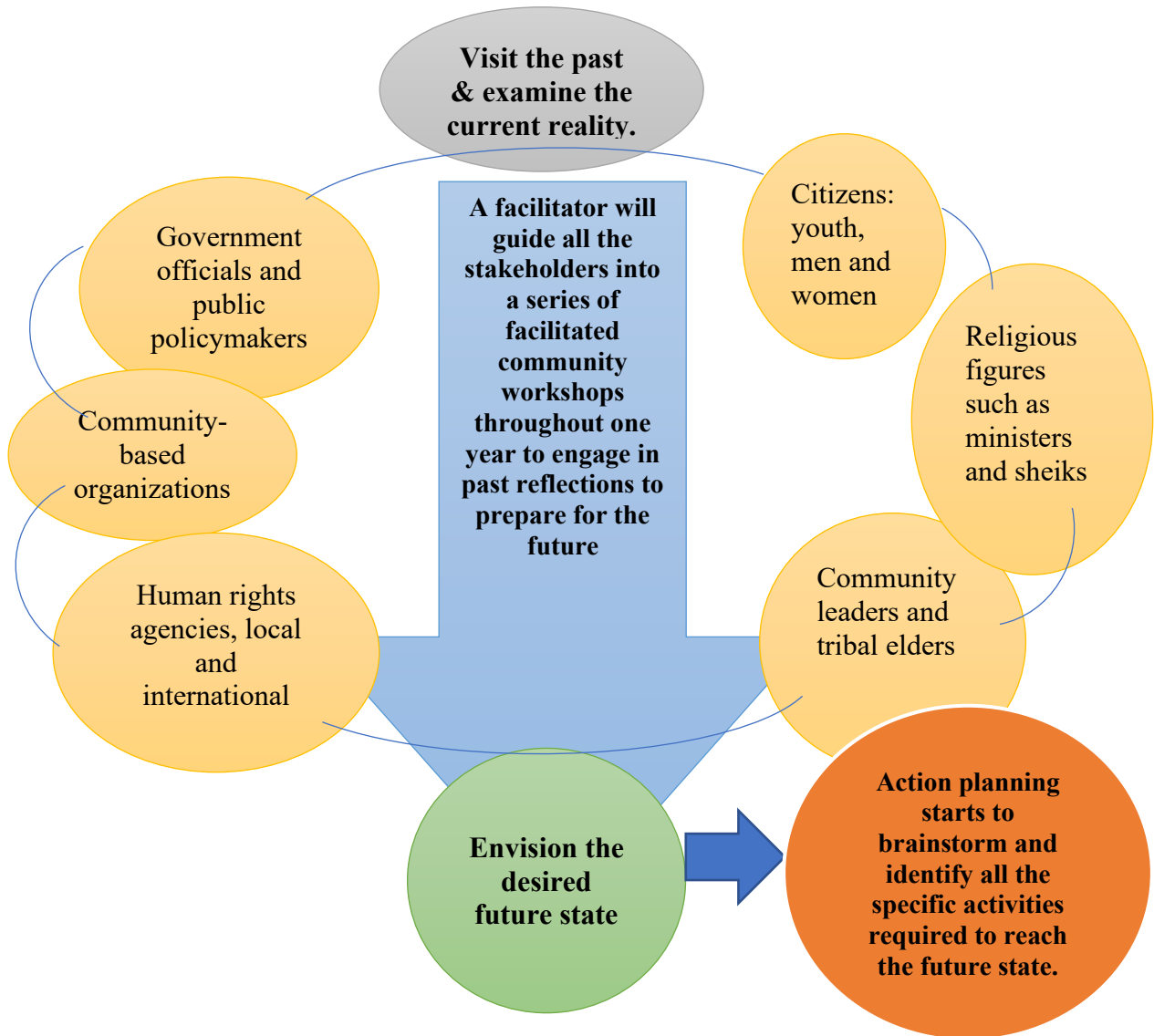


Figure 14: A proposed decentralized model for engagement to reconcile public institutions with local community members¹

¹ A collaborative model adapted from John Lederach’s book entitled *Little Book of Conflict Transformation* and from the Institute of Cultural Affairs International (ICA) Historical Scan ToP Method and with reference to Brenda Salter McNeil’s book entitled *The Road to Reconciliation*.

Jordan has a high score of 70 in the Geert Hofstede Power Distance cultural index (PDI), which means Jordan has a hierarchical society where:

people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy in an organization is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat. (Hofstede Insights)

Hofstede also writes that in the context of organizational cultures, there is limited dependence of subordinates on bosses in small power distance countries, whereas in larger power distance countries superiors and subordinates consider each other as existentially unequal (“Cultures and Organizations” 73). In this sense, using a neutral and external facilitator as a power balancing agent in stakeholder engagement workshops is paramount. The facilitator will provide the process for engagement by bringing in different experiences to the meeting and will clarify goals by using a process to steer them safely to revisit the past to prepare for the future. Different stakeholders will bring with them different expectations and experiences to the table and reach a consensus on future courses of action with regards to citizen participation in decision-making.

The premise of the proposed change process model above is that a transformational approach requires us to build an ongoing and adaptive base, or platform, at the epicenter of conflict (Lederach, *Little Book* 45). Lederach describes a platform as a scaffolding-trampoline: it gives a base to stand on and jump from (45). The platform “includes an understanding of the various levels of the conflict, processes for addressing immediate problems and conflicts, a vision for the future, and a plan for change processes which will move in that direction” (45). In the context of Jordan, these conflicts are likely to manifest in people’s clashing perspectives of what participation ought to like in Jordan. This, in turn, will enable the possibility of generating processes that create solutions to short-term needs and

work on strategic long-term constructive change in systems and relationships (45). Following Lederach's transformational platform (46), the episode and epicenter of the conflict must be laid out clearly for stakeholders to react proactively to the conflict. Therefore, the design of the workshop is focused on re-visiting the past to prepare for the future. The workshop will conduct a historical scan of all events and milestones related to citizen engagement in different communities across Jordan in the past 30 years, and stakeholder engagement workshops will be held in every local council across the 12 governorates of Jordan.

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Rationale: experience democratic participation, dialogue, teamwork, and collective leadership.

Objective: envision and future to establish an action plan to prepare for citizen participation.

The workshop process design would be focused on the following overarching question that is “*How do we bring about a sustainable long-term change into the current cultural narrative of citizen participation?*”

Context: 30 people max. / workshop divided into groups of 5. The neutral facilitator will guide the groups of 5 to answer the following questions through two different lenses:

- **Episode lens: (Milestones and Events) first round of group dialogue**

The group must establish a timeline presented on a visual wall that is broken into intervals of 5 years, starting from 1990 until 2020. This will set the context of “issues, content, controversy expressed in discrete time” (Little book 46). Groups will be invited by the facilitator to engage in 30 min. In-group dialogue to recall all milestones and major events related to citizen participation in Jordan. The facilitator will invite them to write down the facts on A5 index cards (one event per card).

Afterward, groups will be asked to hang all their cards on the wall as a visual aid, which will portray a series of events related to citizen participation across a clear linear timeline. The facilitator will then ask all participants from all groups to come close to the visual wall, take 5 minutes to read the all the cards on the wall and then open up the discussion by asking the following questions (20 to 30 min. open dialogue)

- What patterns do we see in Jordan's democracy over the past 30 years?
- What is significant about events related to the local council's role and citizens in participation?
- Is there a need to revisit the government's past strategies in informing and consulting citizens about local context development matters?
- Is there a need to agree on what the local community's responsibilities are to make people aware of means for participation in their local communities?
- Is there a need to raise awareness of alternative ways to engage citizens in influencing local policymaking?

These questions will help set the context for the next resolution stage of the workshop.

- ***Epicenter lens: (Envision the future) second round of group dialogue***

After participants answer the questions above, the facts will become clear to all, and the answers will manifest into the epicenter, which will portray the "relational context and patterns visible over time" (Lederach, *Little book* 46). In the first round of dialogue, everyone will have heard different perspectives and opinions from different bodies and individuals. In the second round, the facilitator will invite people to go back into groups again and think about the following questions. (30 min.)

Questions to address:

- As a result of the patterns we see in the episode over the past 30 years, can we discuss and develop an action plan that can specify responsibilities for different stakeholders to respond to the current reality? (This question will help wrap up the conversation and lead it into a converging path- no documenting is needed here)
- What is our vision for our community? What does victory look like to us five years from today? (This is a resolution type of question- participants document their visions on white-colored A5 index cards)
- What mechanisms can we establish to make decentralization an ongoing learning curve? (This is a resolution type of question- participants document their actions by using verbs to allude to actions, use yellow-colored A5 index cards)
- **Final resolution stage:** the facilitator will then ask each group to hang their cards on the wall and ask all participants to work collaboratively to cluster similar recurring themes together and give a title to each clustered group of cards. The result is a clear image of people's hopes and aspirations. The outcome will hopefully portray the way forward. (30 to 40 min.)

The outcomes of this session can help build an action plan and a timeframe in which different community stakeholders can work collectively to build a new understanding and consensus about citizen participation in their communities. The principle here is about asking the right questions. Through contact theory, regular workshops over a lengthy period can build trust and rapport between different stakeholders and will enable them to establish a long-term strategic plan for their communities. Using a process like this can help reconcile broken relationships between local governments and their citizens.

Appendix C.1

The International Association for Public Participation list of techniques for bringing people together

Deliberation can strengthen community capacity "to communicate, collaborate and solve problems, and have greater satisfaction with and willingness to support and assist in the implementation of public decisions" ("Foundations in effective public participation" 104). Experimentation with deliberation is paramount enhancing local administration's capacity for participatory governance. The following techniques are listed in the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) manual titled *Techniques for Effective Public Participation*. Civil society organizations and local councils can select from a wide array of deliberative tools. See the figure below.

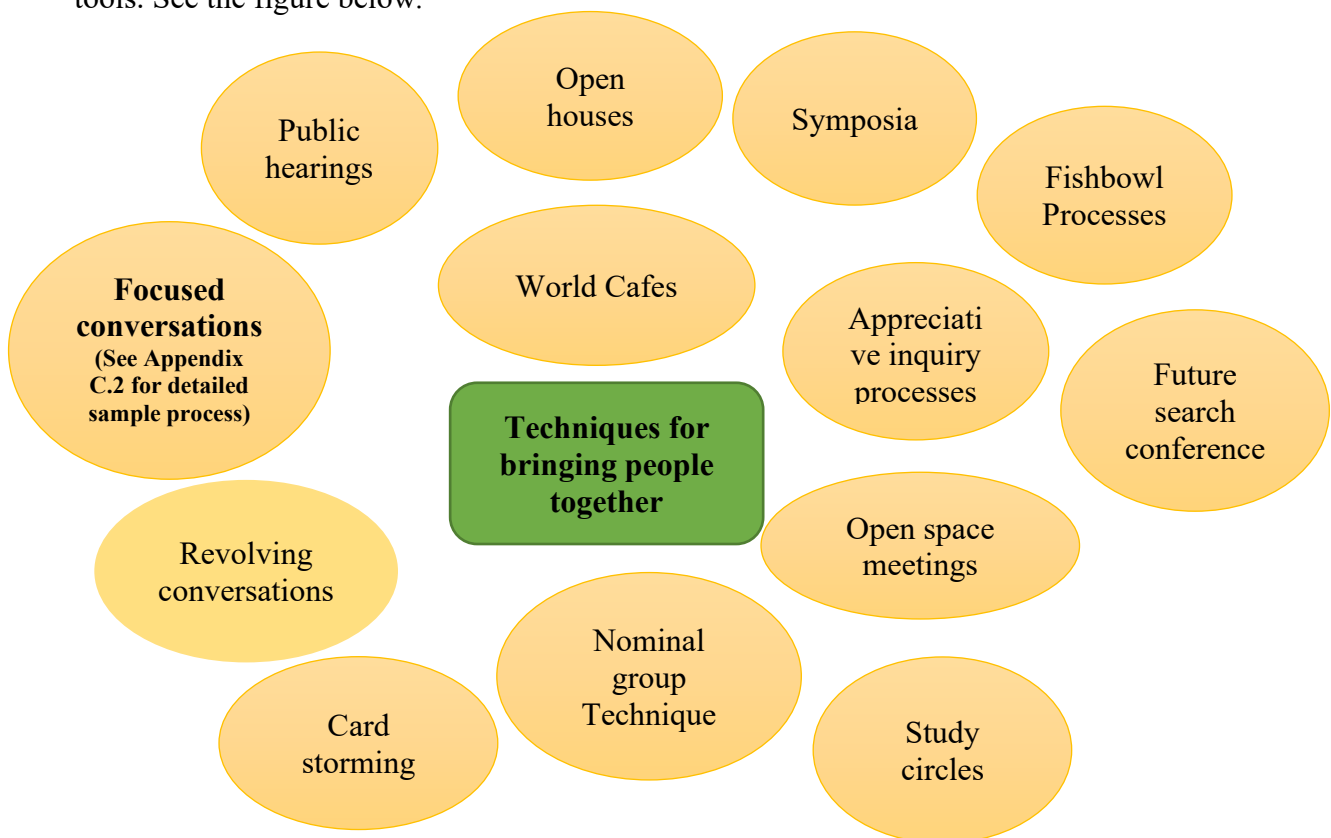


Fig 15. IAP2 techniques for bringing people together in an engaging manner via deliberative processes

Appendix C.2

ICA's Focused Conversation Method in the context of local administrations Public meetings

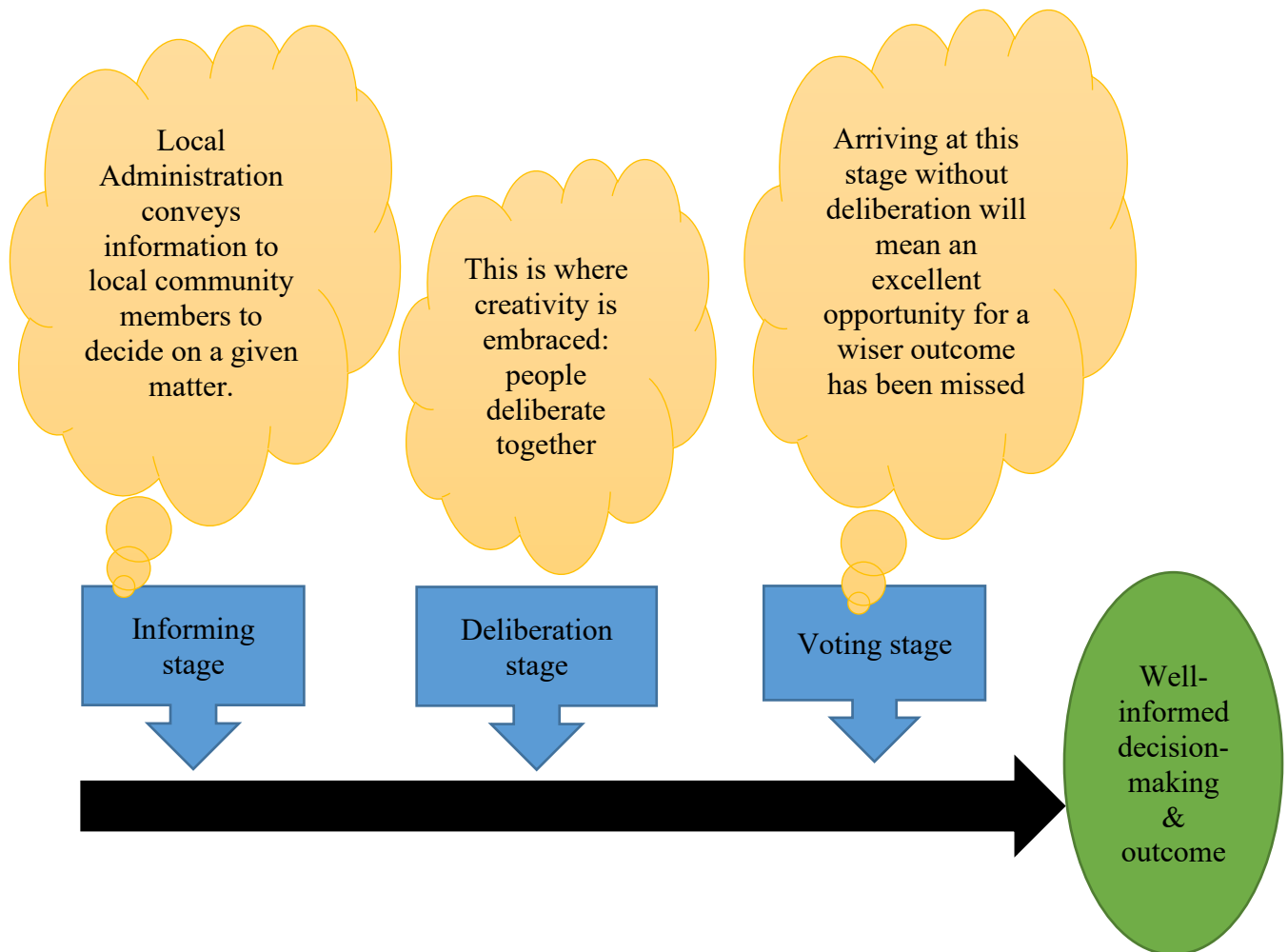


Figure 16: The case for deliberation

The figure above proposes that instead of opting directly for the voting stage to decide on a given matter, local administrations must engage community members in dialogue and deliberation for the wisest decision possible and to foster a sense of ownership in the workshop outcome. The focused conversation method is one example of a powerful process that can engage citizens in a decision-making process. Below is the process in four different thinking stages designed for maximum participant engagement.

Sample questions for the four-stage group thinking levels—Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional (ORID).

The ICA’s Focused Conversation Method (ORID) in the context of local council’s public meetings: (council heads can use these set of questions to engage citizens in a decision-making process concerning a problem, challenge, or a new proposed community project)

“Objective level: Questions about facts and external reality

Reflective level: Questions to call forth immediate personal reaction to the data, an internal response, sometimes emotions or feelings, hidden images, and associations with the facts.

Whenever we encounter an external reality (data/objective), we experience an internal source

Interpretive level: Questions to draw out meaning, values, significance, and implications.

Decisional level: Questions to elicit resolution, bring the conversation to a close, and enable the group to make a resolve about the future.” (Stanfield 18)

Objective Questions (Stanfield 19)

1. What words or phrases do you remember from the presentation?
2. What were some key ideas or images in the presentation?

Reflective Questions

3. Were you surprised?
4. What was a high point of the presentation for you?

Interpretive questions

5. What was the talk saying? What was it about?
6. What issues does this dialogue bring up for you?
7. What are some deeper questions we could ask the presenter, or explore ourselves?

Decisional questions

8. What can we do here about these issues? What actions can we take?
9. What would be our first step?

The sample process above is taken from Brain Stanfield’s book titled the Art of Focused Conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace.

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