

Voluntary Sector Plays Key Role in Rural Community Leadership

What style of leadership most characterises rural Canadian communities? Which types of leadership do rural Canadians feel are most effective at supporting community efforts? While leadership is a subjective element for many, rural citizens have opinions about who provides effective leadership in their communities, and the general style of rural leadership.

only 28% of those from communities with lagging economic outcomes. Almost half of the respondents from these lagging communities felt that community leadership was controlled by a small group of people. In terms of communities which exhibit high capacity and those which exhibit low capacity, there were no differences in their perceptions about the style of community leadership. The survey also asked

community, with a rating of 4.29. Local business leaders also received a high rating, at 3.83. Elected officials received lower ratings, with mayors/reeves receiving a rating of 3.68, down to elected federal representatives scoring the lowest, at 3.13. These latter findings suggest that leaders who are working in the community on a day-to-day basis are likely more visible, and their efforts more tangible, to the general public.

The 2001 Rural Household Survey asked respondents to characterize the style of leadership in their communities. Close to half - 43% - felt that “a small group of people control things”, while slightly more than one-third - 37% - felt that “many people participate” in community leadership. Only 6% of felt that leadership within their community was controlled by one or two individuals.

In communities with leading economic outcomes, more respondents (48%) felt that many people participated in providing community leadership, compared with



respondents to rate the effectiveness six different people or groups who provide community leadership, in their support for the community, on a scale of one to five, with one being very ineffective and five being very effective. Collectively, rural citizens rated community or voluntary groups as being most effective in their support for their

There is a slight tendency for people in communities with leading economic outcomes to provide a higher effectiveness rating for “leadership” which is from within the community itself than those in communities with lagging economic outcomes. For example, voluntary groups, business leaders, mayors or reeves, and municipal councils all receive a higher rating in communities with leading economic outcomes. While still lower in terms of overall rating, elected provincial and federal representatives received a higher rating in communities with lagging economic

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outcomes than in those with leading economic outcomes. This suggests a potential correlation between effective local leadership and successful economic outcomes. Communities with lagging outcomes may have local leaders who are less effective, and thus there is a perception that elected provincial representatives, especially, are important in their support for these kinds of communities.

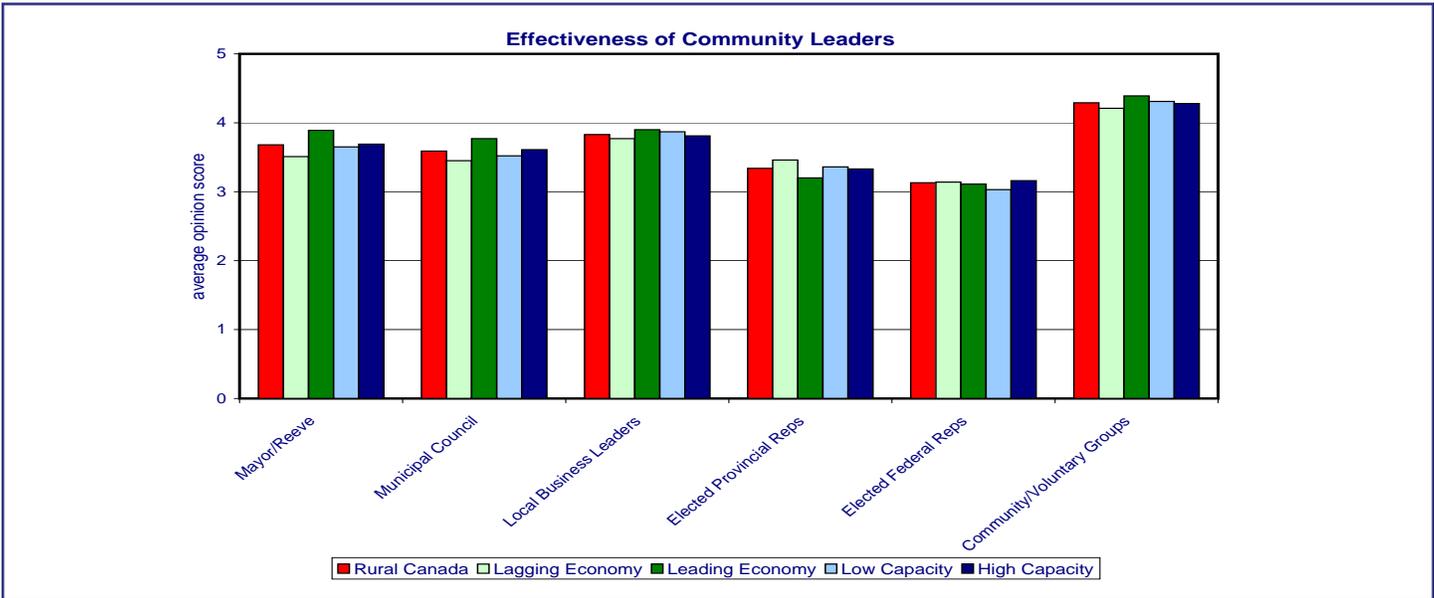
When we compare the effectiveness ratings based on whether or not the respondent is from a community with a high capacity or a low capacity, there are almost no differences for all leadership

types. However, elected federal representatives and municipal councils received higher ratings in high capacity communities than they did in low capacity communities.

These findings suggest some potential avenues for action. The first is that because local groups and local business leaders provide a great deal of leadership in communities, it is important for federal and provincial actors to find effective ways to partner with and work with them to achieve mutually desirable community outcomes. This means, of course, working on an equal footing with them and providing them with the necessary resource supports

to get the job done. The second is that in communities with lagging economic outcomes, there may be a need to look at leadership development issues and perhaps investigate the potential for introducing leadership development programs which over the long term may result in a new generation of effective leaders who help move these communities forward in the new rural economy.

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