Learning and Empowerment: A Social Network Analysis of Fellowship Participants
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Introduction
• This study examined how a group of Fellows viewed their empowerment through the lens of peer networks versus program staff and community leader networks.
• Empowerment can be an important determinant of individual success. Page and Cruba (1999, p. 3) define empowerment as a “multi-dimensional social process that help people gain control over their own lives... fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people for use in their lives, their communities and in their society by acting on issues they define as important.”

Method
• Social Network Analysis (SNA) is the broad methodological approach. SNA examines networks between individuals, assuming that networks rather than specific individual characteristics, influence decision making, learning, and behavior in controlled groups.
• To visually represent the connections, we developed sociograms that illustrate the centrality of particular Fellows, program staff and community leaders. Commentary on this centrality is outlined in the Discussion section.
• Participants consist of 24 African Fellows in a six week professional development program in the fields of Business and Entrepreneurship, Civic Leadership, or Public Management. Fellows’ ages range from 25-35 years old, and 12 participated in the survey.

Results
Figure 1: Fellow to Fellow Network Connection Graph. This graph consists of 20 Fellows. Each directed line indicates that a Fellow sent a connection to another Fellow. Fellow 02 is central to this network because 02 sent and received numerous connections, compared to other Fellows.

Figure 2: Fellow to Program Staff and Community Leaders Network Connection Graph. This graph consists of 12 Fellows. Each directed line indicates that a Fellow sent a connection to a core staff member. SSS, CDL, and GR are central to this network because they received numerous connections, compared to other staff members.

Observations
• There was no identifiable pattern by language, region, or professional background.
• There were an equal number of male and female participants.
• Persons in authority roles were more frequently identified as contributors to Fellows’ empowerment and learning than other Fellows.
• Despite the many interactions, with over 75 program staff and community leaders, only a limited number were considered central to the empowerment and learning of the Fellows.
• Though the selected program staff and community leaders all held positions of power and authority, they made efforts to be approachable, which resulted in the connections Fellows received.

Discussion
Although Fellows were exposed to many people, only a few were considered central and important. The reasons associated with this centrality is unknown, but it may be due to expertise of each program staff and community leaders, as well as their approachability. This speculation can be tied to two theoretical implications:
• “Experience Economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) – asserts that individuals are more willing to pay for an experience than goods. We concluded that Fellows may remember the experience of the interaction more than the content itself, which can speak to the numerous connections between the Fellows and the program staff and community leaders.
• Novelty of small power distance (Hofstede) – asserts that individuals in cultures with high power distances adhere to the instituted hierarchy of power. Fellows may have been impressed with the reduced power distance among accessible program staff and community leaders. This contrasts to the Fellows’ respective countries high power distance structure and culture.

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