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Measuring the impact of the Victory Cup Initiative through Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)

Muniba Khan
mkhan@rollins.edu

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Abstract

The Victory Cup Initiative (VCI) is a pitch competition and accelerator for nonprofits in Central Florida. This work investigates the experiences of organizations that have participated in the program as well as the overall impact of VCI on the nonprofit ecosystem in the Orlando area. Our study is based on Ripple Effect Mapping (REM), a community-based participatory methodology that captures both the direct impacts and the broader "ripples" of a program over both short and long-term scales. Our results show that nonprofit participants benefitted from growing their storytelling skills, networking within the community, and advancing personally.

Muniba Khan

Executive Summary

Community programs are vital to maintaining the wellbeing of our cities. For this reason, it is important that we understand the impact that nonprofit development programs have on participating organizations and the greater nonprofit community that they operate in. The Victory Cup Initiative (VCI) is a nonprofit development program that supports the Central Florida nonprofit community. Each year, VCI selects eleven local nonprofit organizations to receive training and compete in a pitch competition for financial resources. Our team sought to measure VCI's impact on nonprofit organizations that have gone through their programs and the greater nonprofit ecosystem in Central Florida.

To measure VCI's impact, we first needed to collect stories from nonprofit leaders regarding the benefits their organizations observed as a result of their participation in VCI. To do this, we utilized a technique known as Ripple Effect Mapping (REM). REM sessions engage key stakeholders by asking them to personally reflect on their experiences, pair up with each other for interviews, and finally come together to visually represent a program's performance story in a mind map. The interview component of the session follows an appreciative inquiry approach (AI), which means that it focuses specifically on what is valued and good about the collective system. The artifacts that came from the REM session included individual reflections, interview notes, and notes from the REM session.

The dataset was then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis involves coding all of the significant fragments of the dataset, searching for themes that arise from those codes, and reviewing, defining, and naming the emergent themes. Our team identified approximately 140 codes, which resulted in 4 overarching themes. These themes were (1) building relationships between nonprofit participants, (2) building relationships with the community, (3) improving performance of nonprofit participants, and (4) increasing quality and outcome of nonprofit storytelling. These themes were then broken down further into subthemes in which coded data was sorted into.

The results from our analysis indicated three main conclusions. Our first takeaway is that the overall success of a nonprofit organization can be enhanced by providing nonprofit leaders with specialized training to improve the way they share their organization's stories. Our next takeaway is that there are far-reaching benefits of nonprofit organizations with for-profit organizations, members of the community, and other nonprofit organizations. Our final takeaway is that when nonprofit leaders develop personally, such as by learning new skills or gaining confidence, their growth can build their organization's capacity. These three ideas together make the case for creating and expanding nonprofit development programs like VCI. Existing initiatives aiming to increase their positive impact may want to consider creating opportunities for participants to build storytelling skills, grow their local network, and undergo personal development. Furthermore, initiatives can assess the impact of their own programs through the methodologies we have demonstrated.

Contents

1. Introduction

Healthy cities often rely on community programs to meet the varied needs of their residents. To assess the effects of such programs in their communities, previous studies have set out to measure the mission impact of nonprofit organizations (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001) as well as the social performance of funding organizations (Ebrahim, 2014).

However, there is still an opportunity to learn more about the impact of nonprofit development programs on both nonprofit leaders and their communities. This gap is a problem because nonprofit organizations do not exist in a vacuum, but rather as part of a greater ecosystem. For this reason, it is important to ensure that we are building and maintaining thriving ecosystems of nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and financial philanthropists. Our study therefore set out to qualitatively measure the impact of the Victory Cup Initiative (VCI) on the performance of individual nonprofit organizations as well as the Central Florida nonprofit ecosystem.

VCI is a pitch competition and accelerator in Central Florida that selects eleven local nonprofit organizations to receive specialized training to better tell their stories. These organizations then participate in the annual VCI Breakfast where they share their stories and receive cash prizes that range from $1,000 and $20,000, as determined by audience participation. To study the impact of VCI, we utilized a community-based, participatory impact evaluation method referred to as Ripple Effect Mapping (REM). We chose this methodology because it would allow key stakeholders like recent VCI finalists to reflect on the stories surrounding their VCI experience and collaboratively create a community mind maps of program effects. We then performed thematic analysis on the artifacts of our session to draw conclusions about VCI's overall impact.

The key result of this paper is that nonprofit organizations may benefit greatly from opportunities to develop storytelling skills, connect within the greater community, and increase their overall performance. Participants of our study shared in depth how these aspects of VCI's programming enabled them to improve the performance of their organizations. Nonprofit development initiatives looking to improve their practices may therefore want to consider expanding these aspects of their programs. Alternatively, development initiatives can perform their own thematic analysis with REM to see what aspects of their program are generating positive results and are thus candidates for expansion.

2. Literature review

2.1: Measuring Impact

Because our team sought to measure the impact of VCI on the nonprofit ecosystem, we examined literature in which researchers developed methods of measuring the impact of service-based organizations. In one such study, Sawhill and Williamson detail how The Nature Conservatory began measuring mission impact (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). They created a model for measuring success that is divided broadly into the areas of impact, activity, and capacity. Impact measures assess mission success, activity measures focus on achieving goals and implementing strategies, and capacity gauges the degree to which an organization mobilizes the resources necessary to fulfill the mission. In their study, 30 nonprofit organizations were interviewed on how they measure performance in these areas. The biggest takeaway was the importance of using performance measures to link and reinforce mission, goals, strategies, and measures. Other lessons from the study include that measuring mission depends on measurable goals, measures should be kept simple and easy to communicate, measures are marketable, and that these measures should be used in the management of nonprofit organizations.

In another study, Ebrahim lays out a general framework for measuring social performance that involves clarifying the operational mission, specifying the set of activities to address that mission, and identifying the target size of the problem (Ebrahim, 2014). He also discusses what performance measures should be used in the social sector, explaining that all organizations should measure and report on their activities and outputs while also considering impacts and outcomes. He uses three cases of funding organizations to demonstrate the development of metrics in partnership with the operating organizations and the hypothesis of what the outcomes and impacts might be rather than actual measurement. In his research paper, he also argues that funders should apply the same standards to measuring their own performance because they are better positioned to measure systemic impacts, as impacts are rarely achieved by individual organizations acting alone.

Additionally, a manual written by Hakkola et al presents the Graduate Review and Improvement Process (GRIP), a student-centered process to create actionable steps to improve success of students in graduate programs (Hakkola et al, 2017). Committed to active engagement of students throughout the evaluation process, GRIP provides a case study applying qualitative analysis to determine outcomes and enhance a program. Topics covered include assessment readiness, evaluation design, data collection, data analysis, data reporting, evaluation management, and next steps.

These three studies were helpful in evaluating what is currently being done to measure the impact of various programs. However, our research is different in that we are not only trying to quantify the outcomes of independent organizations, but rather the widespread effects of an initiative within its local community. VCI benefits numerous Central Florida nonprofit organizations, and as a result, sets off multiple chain reactions. For this reason, we identified and researched qualitative methodologies that fit our needs, as detailed below.

2.2: Thematic Analysis

To identify the broad themes of VCI's impact, our team decided to use a technique known as thematic analysis. We referenced a paper by Braun and Clarke, in which they define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in data by minimally describing data in rich detail and interpreting various aspects of the research topic

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). In their paper, they go on to explain that analysis is a recursive process moving back and forth as needed between the following phases: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. They share potential pitfalls in thematic analysis, like failing to analyze data at all, using data collection questions as themes that are reported, and weak or unconvincing analysis. Criteria for good thematic analysis is outlined as well, such as ensuring that each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process and that analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic. Advantages of thematic analysis consist of flexibility, generation of unanticipated insights, and accessibility to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research while disadvantages include difficulty in developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis and that it has no particular kudos as an analytic method. We read another research paper by Maguire and Delahunt in which they draw on Braun and Clarke's framework and apply it in the context of learning and teaching research (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Their paper offers a practical guide to doing a thematic analysis using a worked example. They cycle through the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke, illustrating the nonlinear fashion in which thematic analysis is performed. These two studies helped guide our analysis and identify emerging themes from our dataset.

2.3: Appreciative Inquiry

However, before analysis, our team needed strategies for data collection. Because we were particularly interested in the positive impacts of VCI, we decided to use an appreciative inquiry approach. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods defines appreciative inquiry (AI) as an inquiry into what is valued and good about an individual or collective system (Given, 2008). It works under the assumption that systems are socially constructed by and through the influence of people and are thus open to change. AI generally involves the following four-phase process: (1) discovery, which focuses on identifying what already exists in the system that is good, (2) dream, in which an even better system is imagined, (3) design, where an infrastructure is created to support the ideal system, and (4) destiny, or the maintenance and sustenance of the new systems in a way that strengthens its affirmative capacity. A new cycle then begins with another inquiry into what makes the system good. Questions should be designed to elicit positive stories and should be adapted to suit the study. The encyclopedia also further elaborates on the primary types of questions asked, AI's relationship to other research methods, and the overall appreciative approach. Bellinger and Elliot applied AI to evaluate a new organizational structure to support social work students' learning around fieldwork practice (Bellinger and Elliot, 2011). In their paper, they share the research process in which AI was applied and discuss arguments for and against use of appreciative inquiry (AI) as a robust methodology. This is followed by an in-depth exploration of the conditions in which AI may make a distinctive contribution to social work knowledge and practice. These resources helped our team construct questions that gleaned from participants stories surrounding the benefits they observed and experienced as a result of VCI.

2.4: Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)

Another strategy that we used for data collection is Ripple Effect Mapping (REM). We decided to employ REM because it not only exercises appreciative inquiry to gather positive program impacts but also engages participants and reaches widespread community effects. We read a paper written by Kollock et al that describes REM as a method of conducting impact evaluation which engages program and community stakeholders to look back and visually map a

program's performance story (Kollock et al, 2012). It employs appreciative inquiry, mind mapping, and qualitative data analysis. REM also involves the following steps which are discussed in further detail: identifying the intervention, scheduling the event and inviting participants, appreciative inquiry interviews, mapping, and cleaning, coding, and analysis. Benefits of REM are that its simple and cheap, able to capture impacts of complex works, effective as a communication tool, and motivating. However, REM has a risk of bias in participant selection and data collection. According to the paper, this can be overcome by interviewing more stakeholders after the session to probe for such negative consequences. These insights by Kollock et al helped us plan and structure our own REM session to gather participant stories and map out VCI's impact in the Orlando community.

3. Methods

3.1: Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)

3.1.1: Overview

Our study utilizes Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) to qualitatively study the impact of VCI. REM is a method of conducting impact evaluation which engages program and community stakeholders to look back and visually map a program's performance story. This method notably employs appreciative inquiry, mind mapping, and qualitative data analysis. It was originally developed in agricultural extension work to investigate the impacts of interventions on entire communities, particularly second-order qualitative effects that could not be easily captured through traditional quantitative measures. The benefits of REM are that it is simple and cheap, capable of capturing impacts of complex networks, effective as a communication tool, and motivating for participants.

Group REM sessions take approximately two hours to complete and take place in a round robin fashion in a circle. Our session was structured as follows:
1. First, participants were provided with a brief overview regarding what they could expect throughout the REM session (about 10 minutes). At this time, participants were asked to sign a consent form which was discussed thoroughly by the facilitators. To see the full consent form given to participants, see 8.1.
2. A prompt was then provided for participants to write individual reflections on the stories surrounding their participation in VCI (about 10 minutes). To see the full individual reflection prompt given to participants, see 8.2.
3. Next, participants paired up to interview each other, asking questions about the specific ways VCI affected their lives or the successes they experienced as a result of VCI (about 20 minutes). The questions asked in this part of the session follow an appreciative inquiry model, meaning that they inquire into what is valued and good about the collective system. To see the full appreciative inquiry interview guide given to participants, see 8.3.
4. The core of the session involved group mapping to brainstorm and hierarchically map effects of the program (about 50 minutes). This step engaged all participants and provided an opportunity to make connections between different program effects. Each pair was asked to share what they discussed with flexibility to allow other participants to add to the story they told. As stories were shared, facilitators drew a mind map on a large paper in the front

of the room. Additionally, facilitators audio recorded and took detailed notes of this portion of the session.

5. The session ended with closing statements and a short discussion regarding how the findings of the study may be obtained by participants (about 5 minutes).

3.1.2: Participants

Our participant group included about 18 individuals, which comprised of approximately 13 women and 5 men. Most participants held either a permanent staff position or a long-term volunteer role in one of the nonprofit organizations that previously had been finalists of VCI. These individuals engaged with VCI programming as representatives of their organizations. For example, they took part in events such as the storytelling workshop, dress rehearsal, and VCI Breakfast. The research team selected this set of participants because they could join in critical conversation regarding VCI's impact by sharing their own perspectives and experiences with the initiative.

3.1.3: Summary of questions

The individual reflection prompt in step 2 of the REM session contained the following questions: "Write about one positive experience you had during your participation in the Victory Cup Initiative" and "Additionally, write freely about any takeaways you have from your participation. To see the full individual reflection prompt given to participants during the session, see 8.2.

The appreciative inquiry interview guide in step 3 of the session contained the questions listed below. To see the full appreciative inquiry interview guide given to participants during the session, see 8.3.

- "Tell a story about something that happened because of the Victory Cup Initiative that wouldn't have occurred without the program."
- "Tell a story about something that you learned through Victory Cup."
- "Tell a story about a connection you made because of Victory Cup."
- "Tell a story about how participating in Victory Cup has made a difference for those you served.
- "Talk about how you see your future work being impacted because of your participation with Victory Cup."
- "Tell a story about the Victory Cup workshop / pitch day."
- "Tell a story about why you decided to apply to Victory Cup."

3.1.4: Data Collected

The artifacts of the REM session formed a rich data set including 14 handwritten individual reflection prompts, 13 handwritten appreciative inquiry interview guides, comprehensive notes taken by one of the facilitators, and a 50-minute audio recording of the group mapping portion of the session. An additional output was a mind map which was organically and collaboratively created by participants in the group mind mapping portion of the session. It was initially hand-drawn on a large piece of paper and was then reproduced digitally by the research team using the program XMind ZEN as shown below. This mind map does not represent the results of our thematic analysis, but the participants' combined perspective regarding the impacts of VCI. For zoomed in images of each of the themes and their corresponding branches, see section 8.4.

Mind map — central node: **Victory Cup**

Storytelling
- Two people started a conversation through their work in Ethiopia
- Dress rehearsals helped to hone story while maintaining integrity
- Spark conversation
- Supporting practice
- Authenticity
- Everyone has an equal shot
- "Level sets"
- Homeless population doesn't often share
- Animals can't tell their stories, people have to
- Ability to tell a good story helps organizations gain resources
- Smaller organizations get a platform
- More opportunities, bigger network
- Evolution of story through workshop
- Delivery a voice for the communities they served
- Story, an emotion, themes

Intersections
- Finding intersections in interesting places
- Partnerships
- Learning how different organizations relate to each other
- Importance of each impact cross. "the work they do is important"
- Getting to know each other and then zoom in organizations are different

Knowledge
- Cumulative effect
- Awareness
- Gratitude
- Humbling
- Affirmation
- Seeing, the audience's response
- Share your love and your story. No one knows your story like you do
- The first meeting the mayor
- Seeing organizations grow over time
- It's important to "not operate in a vacuum" and to know about other similar areas and organizations
- 1:1 nonprofits. Jobs individuals. Collaboration.
- Not a lot of places in Central Florida that have people of privilege take a dark place and then bring them hope

Faith
- God can make listening folks to help make the world better
- "Someone out there, someone is praying"
- Doing a job you didn't think you could do
- I love the organization vision
- Answered prayers
- Hope

Youth Initiative
- Students were inspired by the process
- Opportunity to get them involved at an early age
- Learning about professionalism
- Learning about intersections in impact areas
- Students asked a lot of questions.
- Best success is creating successors and helping them change the world.

Community Building
- More people reaching out for services.
- Conversation with the city.
- Not the only one - other people share the same obstacles.
- Organizations helping each other out.
- "It's not easy" Commonality.
- Community created between the 11 nonprofits that matter this year. An anchor for each other.
- Folks that are never "community" first
- What it takes nonprofits special
- Never cutting each other down.
- Makes you reach higher. All of the organizations are so important and inspirational.
- Organizations sharing best practices.
- An easy to read dashboard with results was created by an organization. They shared their template with another organization.
- Consulted about plan to maximize opportunity.

Growth
- "Thriving bigger" and "casting a wider net"
- "Where do we go from here"
- "Where we don't see it, yet, the impacts are there and they add"
- Warming up and "maturing of organizations and the community"
- Sharing of resource opportunities.
- Credibility.
- 11+ organizations involved so far.
- Feeling more prepared.
- Outcome based evaluation.
- Students in the youth initiative had the opportunity to interview the mayor
- Resource collaboration between Rollins College and Chance to Dance.
- Multiple organizations worked together to get out the identification of someone being served.
- "Love on me" effort.

Resources
- Larger network, calling each other (circle)
- People in the audience are VCT researcher
- Leadership
- VCT helped organizations get board members
- Financial donations
- New strategy
- Feedback.
- Services.
- More children / younger people getting involved.
- Volunteers.
- Sharing names of donors.
- Create better feedback during communication
- contact learned.

Top of page:
- Feedback provided, including questions like "how did this happen?"
- Questions were asked which helped organizations think a bit bigger "how can change our story"

3.2: Thematic Analysis

As previously discussed in 2.2, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in data by minimally describing data in rich detail and interpreting various aspects of the research topic. After our team collected the dataset described in 3.1.4, we performed thematic analysis on individual reflection prompts, appreciative inquiry interview guides, and detailed notes from the REM session. This process involved moving back and forth as necessary between the phases listed below.

1. Familiarizing ourselves with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Thematic analysis took approximately one month and resulted in the emergence of key themes and smaller subthemes in our dataset. These themes represent the significant, positive impacts of VCI on participating nonprofit organizations and the greater nonprofit ecosystem. In the following section, we describe and share evidence of these themes and subthemes.

4. Results

4.1: Summary of results

The outputs of the REM session were combined to form the initial dataset. Open coding and collating of the dataset resulted in a list of approximately 140 identified codes. Analysis was then refocused at the broader level of themes. Codes were combined into candidate themes which were then refined, resulting in the themes and sub-themes outline below. Relevant coded data extracts were then collated within the identified themes.

4.2: Building relationships between nonprofit participants

The first theme involved the relationships between the nonprofit participants of VCI. As a result of the program, organizations learned about each other, created strong connections, developed true camaraderie, and utilized new connections to increase their impact.

4.2.1: Growing awareness

One way in which built relationships between nonprofit participants was expressed was through growing awareness of other impact areas, nonprofit organizations, and community programs. When asked to write about a positive experience she had during her participation in VCI, participant #4 responded "Learning about all the deserving nonprofits that were selected. Their mission statements were inspiring. So much good work is being done in the community for positive change." Participants went so far as to mention specific nonprofit organizations and impact areas that they learned about. For instance, according to interview notes, when asked to tell a story about something she learned through VCI, participant #2 mentioned two of the other nonprofit finalists along with their impact area. This response shows that the participant not only grew aware of other nonprofit organizations in Central Florida but

learned about the critical issues that they tackle and the core services through which they benefit the community.

4.2.2: Forming connections

Participants emphasized the numerous relationships, both organizational and personal, that they formed with other nonprofit leaders as a result of VCI activities. In reflections and interviews, they often mentioned specific individuals and organizations that they connected with. Participants found value in opportunities to form such connections. As an example of participants valuing opportunities to connect with other nonprofit leaders, participant #9 said in his reflection that "[he] especially liked the happy hour after the storytelling event. It was nice to interact more freely with the other organizations and connect with them a little in a more personal environment."

4.2.3: Discovering intersections and developing camaraderie

Not only were strong connections formed, but they often developed into true camaraderie as nonprofit leaders discovered meaningful intersections. They often went out of their way to create new opportunities to foster relationships within their cohort. Participant #11 said in her reflection, "I learned that I wanted to know more about many of my cohort group, so I decided to invite them for breakfast in our studio to see possible intersections and where they may cross." In addition to building on these relationships and looking for critical intersections, nonprofit leaders supported each other throughout their VCI participation even though they were in competition with one another to receive funding. According to an interview with participant #3, "Being last to present, the 'butterflies' were strong, but everyone encouraged and rooted for each other. The support and camaraderie was really heart-warming." One sentiment which was discussed in the REM session is that for participants, knowing that they are not in a vacuum feels good. They all aim to create positive change and it is important that they can call on each other. For that reason, the camaraderie that was fostered between nonprofit leaders and the critical intersections that they discovered through VCI were incredibly significant.

4.2.4: Utilizing connections

New relationships between nonprofit organizations enabled them to work together. As discussed in the REM session, being part of a VCI cohort led to a "lean-on-me" effect in which collaboration was fostered. Connections formed through VCI made a difference, for example by allowing human trafficking victims to receive immediate help obtaining ID's. Nonprofit participants even shared best practices and resources with each other. For instance, one nonprofit organization created a dashboard for board members, and shared the template to another organization. Ultimately, the connections formed through VCI were utilized in ways that expanded the capacity and increased the overall performance of individual nonprofits.

4.3: Building relationships with the community

Another big theme which emerged from the data revolved around the relationships that were built between nonprofit participants and the Central Florida community. VCI presented the

opportunity for organizations to spread the word about their community programs. This, in turn, led to greater community engagement as people grew inspired to get involved.

4.3.1: Expanding exposure and credibility

Through VCI, nonprofit participants share their stories at the annual VCI Breakfast in an effort to receive votes from the audience and gain funding for their organizations. In the REM session, participants discussed the credibility added to their organizations as a result of the stories that they shared. They noticed that word of their participation with VCI really spreads. One participant said that a board member of their organization got a call from someone that attended the VCI Breakfast congratulating him about their win. In the REM session, they also discussed connections that were formed between participating nonprofit organizations and for-profit organizations at the breakfast. One example included a local health organization becoming involved with organization G. These types of connections were made possible because of the growing exposure and credibility of nonprofit organizations resulting from VCI.

4.3.2: Increasing community engagement

VCI also enabled nonprofit participants to get members of the community involved with their programs. For instance, through VCI's youth initiative, film students from local middle schools teamed up and partnered with nonprofit finalists. Their goal was to produce a short film to share the organization's story with the community. In the process, student teams worked together to plan, conduct interviews, film, and edit their short film. They worked directly with a nonprofit organization and ultimately grew invested in local impact areas. In the REM session, participants shared that the students were poised, smart, and professional. They chose which organizations they wanted to work with and were touched by the experience. VCI participants strongly felt that by getting involved at a young age, these students may develop into adults who can change the world. Members of the community also got involved with nonprofit finalists independently of the youth initiative. For example, participants mentioned in the REM session that attendees of the VCI Breakfast reached out to them about getting involved with their organizations. According to an interview with participant #18, "a recently graduated college student was inspired to sign-up immediately to help at [organization B]." In ways like this, community engagement with nonprofit finalists increased due to their participation with VCI.

4.4: Improving performance of nonprofit participants

Nonprofit organizations involved with VCI improved their overall performance and grew their capacity to create positive change. This occurred through a combination of new resources, strategic thinking regarding their vision and strategies, and improved internal relationships.

4.4.1: Increasing resources

One of the ways in which performance of nonprofit participants is improved upon is through an increase of resources. In the REM session, participants discussed opportunities to receive resources such as additional funding. For example, organization J and organization C won award money from VCI, but they also received checks from individuals that attended the event. However, resources gained through VCI were not

limited to financial resources. When participant #15 was asked in his interview to share a connection he made because of VCI, he mentioned a connection "with a new board member from [a local health organization]." Other nonprofit finalists also gained board members, as well as spaces to meet and more. These newfound resources were made possible because of the connections formed through VCI, and they helped participating nonprofit organizations to keep growing.

4.4.2: Forming vision and better strategies

Another way that nonprofit participants improved their performance was through critical planning. Participant #5 mentioned in his interview some of the ways that his organization is changing their strategy. His organization now aims to "act as a business," and they consider questions such as, "do we expand outside of Central FL?" The participant also mentioned that his organization is exploring potential for growth, creating a marketing plan, and considering their strategy for the next few years. In the REM session, other organizations also mentioned how they are using tactics that they learned from VCI. For example, participant #15 mentioned during the session that his organization is implementing VCI strategies by holding a workshop to create better feedback loops within their organization.

4.4.3: Strengthening relationships within nonprofit and with stakeholders

Nonprofit participants were also able to strengthen relationships within their organizations and with stakeholders. For example, in participant #6's interview, he shared that he "connected with the director of his organization more." As a result of VCI activities, he learned his director's story much better. Additionally, participant #13 said she anticipated VCI impacting her future work because she can "encourage volunteers through storytelling." She explained that "Telling [her organization's] stories will engage more volunteers and broaden [their] reach." In ways like these, nonprofit finalists strengthening their internal relationships within their organization as a result of their VCI participation.

4.5: Increasing quality and outcome of nonprofit storytelling

The final theme identified through the dataset is the increased quality in stories told by nonprofit participants and the significant outcomes of these stories. A key component of VCI is the training which it provides to participants to prepare them for the VCI Breakfast. At the breakfast, each organization has two and a half minutes to tell their story to attending members of the community. In reflections, interviews, and the REM session, participants had a lot to say about how VCI's emphasis on storytelling benefited their organizations.

4.5.1: Realizing the NPO's mission

As part of the process of preparing their stories for the VCI Breakfast, nonprofit participants had the chance to think introspectively regarding their organization's mission. When asked to write about a positive experience he had during his VCI participation, participant #6 said "As a new staff member at [organization D], as of December, I was still (and am still) learning [organization D's] story - who we help, how we help, what we do... the people! The Victory Cup served as an opportunity to learn more of these things. It granted me an entire perspective on the community of people

with disabilities - with [the director's] story acting as a catalyst." In this way, participants learned more about the organizations that they represent and continued to develop their perspectives. Additionally, they thought critically about how they might change their story. In the REM session, participant #5 said that the VCI dress rehearsal inspired his group to cast a wider net and elevate the vision of their organization. In this way, they not only reflected on their organization's mission, but took steps towards developing it.

4.5.2: Improving storytelling

VCI participation enabled nonprofit leaders to learn the elements of a good story and make their stories more intriguing through feedback and advice. When asked to share a positive experience she had during her VCI participation, participant #13 responded "The storytelling workshop - I enjoyed learning from [VCI] about the importance of telling a story and what that looks like - visual images - painting a picture to the person that's listening and leading up to a final thought or climax - having a beginning, middle, and end. Show don't tell. Paint a picture." Participant #5 mentioned the dress rehearsal in his interview, saying that "feedback was spot on." The training VCI administered through these events was well received by nonprofit finalists and was ultimately successful in helping them improve their storytelling.

4.5.3: Inciting an inspirational or emotional response

Nonprofit participants did not simply tell a story but captured their audience and incited inspirational and emotional responses. Participant #4 said in her interview that "the day of – every organization told a story that you could connect with. Every story had a connection. Everyone was touched." By connecting on this level with their audience, participants were able to inspire action towards positive change. However, nonprofit participants themselves were also touched by the VCI storytelling experience. Participant #10 said in her reflection, "Taking first place in the VCI Breakfast was a shocker for me. To be judged by 500 people on the work I have given my life to was so overwhelming. It has been hard to raise money for a cause that people did not know existed." The opportunity to share her organization's story and the response from the community incited such an emotion response that it even resonated with her faith, and she added "this experience reaffirmed my call from God that I am on the right path!"

4.5.4: Increasing NPO's impact through storytelling

As a result of improved storytelling skills and the opportunity to share their polished stories with members of the community, nonprofit participants were able to increase their organization's impact. In the REM session, participants discussed the importance of sharing the stories of the communities that they serve. For example, families that have experienced homelessness rarely want to tell their stories because they want to forget that part of their lives. However, by telling a compelling story, nonprofit leaders can gather support from the community. Participants including participant #15 recognize the potential in this newly developed skill. He shared in his interview that he sees VCI impacting his NPO's future work by "developing so many relationships because of [his] ability to tell stories and draw support."

5. Discussion

One takeaway from our research is that the way that nonprofit leaders communicate their organizations' stories can make a difference to their overall success. VCI participants recognized the importance of specialized training and feedback administered through the program's storytelling workshop and dress rehearsal. They utilized these skills not only at the VCI Breakfast, but in various interactions where they introduced their organization to someone unfamiliar with it. Additionally, participants attributed new connections, resources, and achievements in part to their growing ability to tell an engaging and emotional story. These observations show the importance of good storytelling abilities for nonprofit leaders.

Additionally, there was emphasis on the connections which were created and strengthened as a result of VCI. Nonprofit participants did not only connect within their cohort of finalists, but with local for-profit organizations, members of the community, and VCI itself. All of these newfound connections proved beneficial as participating nonprofit organizations created networks from which they can now call on for support. In their responses, participants discussed how this growing network enabled them to secure vital resources like board members, meeting spaces, templates, volunteers, donors, and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, the connections that were formed between participants developed into camaraderie. They felt strongly about being able to relate with likeminded leaders in the community because they could support and inspire each other. All of this suggests that nonprofit organizations can benefit from opportunities to build their local networks.

The last takeaway from our analysis is that participants experienced a large degree of personal development throughout the VCI process which they then brought back to their organizations. For instance, participants learned more about impact areas, nonprofit organizations, and community programs in Central Florida. They also began to think more critically about strategic planning of their organizations, such as by creating better feedback loops and making goals for the future. Some participants even noted a boost in their confidence. The aforementioned advancements enabled nonprofit leaders to continue to improve the performance of their organizations.

Together, these observations make a strong case for creating and expanding programs like VCI. Nonprofit development initiatives looking to improve their practices may want to consider creating opportunities for their participants to learn storytelling skills, connect within the community, and develop on a personal level. Alternatively, if a city does not yet have an initiative like VCI, this is a good starting place to create a program that truly benefits nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit development initiatives may also want to consider performing similar appreciative thematic analysis, such as through Ripple Effect Mapping, to identify what is working in their own programs.

6. Conclusion

Our study set out to qualitatively measure the impact of VCI, a Central Florida nonprofit development initiative, through a methodology called Ripple Effect Mapping (REM). In our REM session, participants reflected personally on their VCI experience, paired up for Appreciative Inquiry interviews, and finally came together to create a community mind map of VCI impacts. Thematic analysis was then performed using artifacts of the session. Our findings indicate that storytelling skills, networking, and personal development can help nonprofit leaders improve the performance of their organizations in various ways. Furthermore, nonprofit development initiatives like VCI may want to emphasize these matters in their programs. However, one limitation of our study is that most of our participants were recent finalists of VCI. As a result, the impacts observed in our analysis were short-term and medium-term impacts. Future work may include holding a Ripple Effect Mapping session with participants a few years after their VCI participation in order to assess the longer-term impacts of the program.

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8. Appendix

8.1: Consent form

Dear potential participant,

We are conducting a group study to learn about the Victory Cup Initiative's impact on the success of participating nonprofit organizations and within the greater community. We are inviting you to participate in this study. To participate, you must be over the age of 18, and must have previous experience working with the Victory Cup Initiative.

Participation involves engaging in a group session with student researchers from Rollins College. This session will last approximately two hours and will be conducted in-person at a predetermined location. This participation is completely voluntary. There is minimal risk to you, however sharing your experiences may become uncomfortable. Please be aware that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without an explanation. You are not required to answer any questions if you do not wish to and may request that researchers remove any of your words from the final report.

The broad benefit of your participation is that it will help us understand the holistic impact of the Victory Cup Initiative. Results of this study may help Victory Cup improve their programming by pinpointing what is currently working within the program, and by potentially securing future funding and resources. Furthermore, results may encourage support for similar programming in Central Florida and beyond. Participants will be briefed on findings via e-mail through the presentation of a document prepared with the leadership of Victory Cup. Additionally, you may personally benefit from this research through an opportunity to reflect on your stories and successes which directly or indirectly resulted from your participation in Victory Cup.

Confidentiality will be provided to the extent possible. By agreeing to participate, you consent to having your voice recorded. We will ensure you are unidentifiable by using pseudonyms instead of your name and by saving all files on a password protected computer that only we (researchers from Rollins College) can access. Results of this research study may be disseminated to other researchers via conference presentations, journal articles, or book chapters, but your name will not be attached to these results in any way. Upon completion of the study you will be given the opportunity to learn about our findings.

If you have questions or concerns about the project, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers by phone or email at the contact information provided below. You can contact the chair of the Rollins College Institutional Review Board, Dr. John Houston, by email at jhouston@rollins.edu, or by phone at the number 407-646-2099. To participate in the study, please fill out the following details and return a signed copy of this form.

Sincerely,

Daniel Myers, PhD   Muniba Khan, Rollins Honors Student Email:
dmyers@rollins.edu   Email: mkhan@rollins.edu

Phone: 407-646-2146   Phone: 407-666-7665

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age, am a finalist or alumnus of Victory Cup, and agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant (please print)

_____

Signature of Participant

_____ Date:_____

Signature of Principal Investigator

_____ Date:_____

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audiotape your responses.

Signature of Participant

_____ Date:_____

8.2: Individual Reflection Prompt

Name: _____

Write about one positive experience you had *during* your participation in the Victory Cup Initiative.

Additionally, write freely about any takeaways you have from your participation.

8.3: Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide

Interviewer: _____   *Interviewee*: _____

1. ***Tell a story*** about something that happened because of the Victory Cup Initiative that wouldn't have occurred without the program.

2. ***Tell a story*** about something that you learned through Victory Cup.

3. ***Tell a story*** about a connection you made because of Victory Cup.

4. ***Tell a story*** about how participating in Victory Cup has made a difference for those you served.

5. Talk about how you see your future work being impacted because of your participation with Victory Cup.

6. ***Tell a story*** about the Victory Cup workshop / pitch day.

7. ***Tell a story*** about why you decided to apply to Victory Cup.

8.4: Mind Map Generated from the REM Session

Community Building

- More people reaching out for services.
- Connection with the city.
  - Students in the youth initiative had the opportunity to interview the mayor.
- Organizations helping each other out.
  - Research collaboration between Rollins College and Chance to Dance.
  - "Lean on me" effect.
  - Multiple organizations worked together to get back the identification of someone being served.
- "It's not easy." Comradery.
  - What makes nonprofits special.
  - Folks that are served "comradery first".
- Not the only one - other people share the same obstacles.
  - Organizations sharing best practices.
    - Consulted about gala to maximize opportunity.
    - An easy to read dashboard with graphs was created by an organization. They shared their template with another organization.
- Community created between the 11 nonprofit finalists this year. All rooting for each other.
  - Makes you reach higher. All of the organizations are so important and inspirational.
  - Never cutting each other down.

Faith

- Answered prayers.
- "Somewhere out there, someone is praying."
- Doing a job you didn't think you could do.
- How the organization began.
- God commissioning folks to help make the world better.
- Hope.

Growth

- Credibility.
  - Word spreads fast; winners congratulated by members of the community.
- Sharing to maximize opportunities.
- "Warming up" and "maturing" of organizations and the community.
  - 51+ organizations involved so far.
  - Feeling more prepared.
- "Where do we go from here?"
- Even if you don't see it yet, the impacts are there and they last.
  - Outcome-based evaluation.
    - Create better feedback using communication tactics learned.
- "Thinking bigger" and "casting a wider net".

Intersections

- Partnerships.
- Learning how different organizations relate to each other.
- Importance of each impact area, "the work they do is important."
- Getting to know each other and share even if organizations are different.
- Two people found a connection through their work in Ethiopia.
- Finding intersections in interesting places.

Knowledge

- Cumulative effect
- Affirmation
  - Grattitude
  - Humbling
- Awareness
  - Share your love and your story. No one knows your story like you do.
  - Seeing the audience's response.
  - Children meeting the mayor.
  - Seeing organizations grow over time.
  - 11 nonprofits, 500+ individuals at breakfast.
  - It's important to "not operate in a vacuum" and to know about other impact areas and organizations.
  - Not a lot of places in Central Florida that take people of privilege into a dark place and then bring them hope.

Resources

- Larger network, calling each other (scale).
- Leadership.
- VCI helped organizations get board members.
- Financial, donations.
- People in the audience at VCI breakfast donated to various organizations.
- Feedback.
- New strategy.
- Services.
- Volunteers.
- More children / younger people getting involved.
- Sharing names of interns.

Storytelling

- Sparks conversation.
- Authenticity.
- Questions were asked which helped organizations think a lot bigger. "We can change our story."
- Feedback provided, including questions like "how did this happen?
- Dress rehearsal helped to hone story while maintaining integrity.
- Opportunity to practice.
- "Level-sets."
- Smaller organizations get a platform.
- Everyone has an equal shot.
- More opportunities, bigger network.
- Evolution of story through workshop.
- Ability to tell a good story helps organizations gain resources.
- Homeless population doesn't often share.
- Being a voice for the communities being served.
- Animals can't tell their stories, people have to.
- Story arc, emotions, themes.

Youth Initiative

- Learning professionalism.
- Learning about intersections in impact areas.
- Students asked a lot of questions.
- Opportunity to get them involved at an early age.
- Real success is creating successors and helping them change the world.
- Students were moved by the process.