A Seat at the Table: Implications of Structure and Diversity in Community Food Assessments

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ABSTRACT   Food insecurity associated with adverse physical and psychological health conditions is an issue faced by 12.5 percent of Canadian households. Current methods of food production and distribution serve to propagate rather than ameliorate these problems. A growing emphasis on the promotion of community food security aims to address not only the challenges of food security but also the underlying inequities and quality of life issues. Community food assessments are being employed in efforts to gain an understanding of the food system and its impacts. Conducted in conjunction with the Saskatoon Regional Food Assessment (SRFA), this study explores structures that contribute value and promote engagement among participants. While implementation is guided by best practices, currently the assessment process lacks theoretical grounding to allow a deeper understanding of the process. SRFA steering committee members were invited to participate in a two-stage interview examining their experience and perceptions of the process. Existing ideological perspectives of committee members played a significant role in their perceptions of the current food system and the effectiveness of implementing community food security approaches. Systemic change for enhanced community quality of life will require a highly structured collaboration and a strong central vision for participants to find common ground for mutual benefit.

KEYWORDS   community food assessment, collaboration, community food security, quality of life

The most recent statistics indicate that 12.5% of Canadian households, in participating jurisdictions, experienced food insecurity in some form over the previous year (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2015). Of this figure 4.1% reported marginal food insecurity, which is defined as worrying about running out of food or having limited food selection because of a lack of money or food (Tarasuk et al., 2015). Another 5.7% reported experiencing moderate food insecurity, which is a compromise in the quality and/or quantity of food due to a lack of money or food (Tarasuk et al., 2015). Yet another 2.7% experienced severe food insecurity, which involves missing

meals and experiencing reduced food intake, potentially for days at a time (Tarasuk et al., 2015). Household food insecurity is overrepresented in households whose major source of income is social assistance (68%), households relying on employment insurance or workers compensation (33.7%), Aboriginal households (29.2%), and low income households (30.4%) (Tarasuk et al., 2015).

Food insecurity is a barrier to adequate nutritional intake and has been linked to poor quality of life. Individuals of higher socioeconomic status consume a better quality diet, with higher quantities of fresh product, greater consumption of vitamins and minerals, and a more moderate energy density (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008). Conversely, those individuals occupying lower socioeconomic status levels and experiencing higher levels of food insecurity report consumption of more food with a high energy density, including more fatty meats, refined grains, and products with added fats (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008). Reduced access to healthy foods and poor diet quality is associated with increased rates of obesity (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008; Swinburn et al., 2011). Obesity is a major health concern and is an established risk factor for a number of change to health conditions; including type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, stroke, and cancer (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008; Minet Kinge & Morris, 2010; Popkin, 2006). Food insecurity has also been associated with long-term psychological consequences stemming from increased levels of stress and feelings of uncertainty stemming from concerns about food availability (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

Household food security is a prerequisite for disease prevention and promotion of overall wellbeing (Slater, 2007), but is limited in its ability to consider the broader food system and how it impacts quality of life. Community food security, defined as "a situation in which all community residents are able to obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" is an attempt to bring issues related to production (i.e. the broader food system) and consumption (i.e. household food security) together under one definition (Hamm & Bellows, 2003).

Community food assessments (CFAs) are being employed with increasing frequency as a first step in efforts to promote community food security and thereby improved quality of life. Community food assessments analyze the state of the food environment in a community, highlighting linkages between food system activities ranging from production to consumption (Pothukuchi, Joseph, Burton, & Fisher, 2002). These assessments look to identify how food is connected to the community and the implications of action of the food system (Pothukuchi et al., 2002). In efforts to address the multifaceted problems associated with community food insecurity, stakeholders from many organizations and sectors are integrated into the process (Pothukuchi et al., 2002; Ross & Simces, 2008). Each organization brings its own goals and desired outcomes to the assessment process (Pothukuchi, 2004; Pothukuchi et al., 2002). Identification of ways to engage and meet the needs of the various stakeholders will aid in recruitment efforts for and the success of CFAs in communities across

Canada and beyond.

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual model of underlying constructs guiding the CFA process. Specifically, the research aimed to document aspects contributing to value and promoting the engagement amongst participants so critical to success.

Agri-industrial Model

Following World War II a growing concern about rising rates of hunger directed attention to increasing food production (Clapp, 2011; Fitzgerald-Moore & Parai, 1996). These efforts helped usher in the Green Revolution (GR) of the 1960s (Clapp, 2011; Horlings & Marsden, 2011) fuelled in part by the desire to provide affordable food to feed a growing global population (Prabhu, 2012). The changes brought forward in the initial GR were able to reduce the retail price of food (Hayami & Herdt, 1977; Prabhu, 2012; Scobie & T., 1978) while also increasing the availability of food in developing countries (Prabhu, 2012). This success resulted in GR principles and approaches becoming established as the predominant focus of global food production (Horlings & Marsden, 2011). While the current agri-industrial model claims to provide safe food in quantities required to feed a rapidly growing population, it is not without cost.

Designed to alleviate the constraints of poverty and to improve wellbeing through large-scale production, the agri-industrial model has also been accompanied by a set of negative socio-economic consequences (Slater, 2007). One core economic threat involves the distortion of costs associated with production (Clapp, 2011). While dropping the price point benefits the consumer in the short term, it eliminated the market viability for many small-scale farming operations (Clapp, 2011; Fitzgerald-Moore & Parai, 1996; Horlings & Marsden, 2011; Patel, 2010). Additionally, while expansion of the industrial food system led to the distribution of large quantities of food, the quality of product is highly variable and its distribution highly inequitable (Prabhu, 2012). Individuals with less income will look to maximize their food dollars. This results in selection of food items that provide the most energy, and have a long shelf life (Burns, Cook, & Mavoa, 2013). These needs are met through procurement of cheap, heavily processed food items. These shortcomings have led to calls for change in the food system; working towards a food system that is sustainable and able to provide equitable access to healthy and nutritional food choices for all populations (Clapp, 2011; Prabhu, 2012).

Food Security

The definition and measure of access to food has been constantly evolving. Developed in the late 1960s, food security, for example, was defined as the ability to meet aggregate food needs in a consistent way. This definition gained momentum following the UN World Food Conference in 1974 where the expressed goal was to ensure that within a decade nobody would suffer from food insecurity (Simon, 2012). At this time emphasis was placed on food production, ensuring that the food supply

was reliable and capable of avoiding dramatic price fluctuations (Anderson & Cook, 1999). Food security was conceptualized from a global perspective, accounting for food surpluses and food aid contributions (Bellows & Hamm, 2003). This approach effectively served to reinforce the established industrial model of food production. During the early 1980s a global recession led to the establishment of charitable food assistance programs in Canada, such as food banks (Tarasuk, 2001; Tarasuk, 2005). Initially intended to function as temporary relief, these services remained in demand even with improvements to the global economy. Increasing use of the charitable food system since its inception has served as an indicator of food security gaps in Canada (Tarasuk, 2001; Tarasuk, 2005).

This increased focus on food security culminated in the refinement of the concept in a declaration coming out of the 1996 FAO World Food Summit in Rome (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 1996):

> Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, [social] and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

This expanded definition brought additional elements to food security; having access to food was no longer sufficient (Simon, 2012). Four commonly explored dimensions of food security—availability, access, utilization, and stability (Table 1) (Simon, 2012)—brought attention to the issue of environmental sustainability, to ensuring production of food does not exploit non-renewable resources, or compromise food security for future generations (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 1996).

Table 1: Four commonly explored dimensions of food security (Simon, 2012)

Dimension	Definition
Availability	Amount of food that is present in a country or area through all forms of domestic production, imports, food stocks and food aid.
Access	A household's ability to acquire adequate amount of food regularly through a combination of purchases, barter, borrowings, food assistance or gifts.
Food Utilization	Safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs. Food utilization is also related to clean water, sanitation and health care.
Stability	Access at all times. Deficits may manifest as chronic food insecurity, the persistent inability to meet minimum food requirements; or transitory food insecurity.

The definition of food security has continued to integrate additional elements as understanding grows. Consideration has been directed towards the psychological

consequences of food insecurity, for example (Hanson, 2011) . In addition, studies were conducted in efforts to identify underlying social determinants and their roles in contributing to the experiences of food insecurity (Che & Chen, 2001; Hanson, 2011; Power, 2008). This research has helped build an appreciation for the larger systemic factors that contribute to food security, at both the individual and community level.

Community Food Security

Food security is measured at various levels, ranging from the individual to the larger community (Hanson, 2011; Power, 2008). Community food security is an expansion of food security that directs emphasis at community level variables. This approach builds on the concept of food security, looking to integrate and address aspects of health, wellbeing, and social equity in addition to food access (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). Inclusion of these additional concepts requires that the community food security approach adopt a more systemic perspective, exploring long-term and comprehensive solutions to food security challenges (Slater, 2007). This broad perspective explores how hunger-related problems are enmeshed in the structure of society (Bellows & Hamm, 2003). Community food security approaches often promote community development, address economic inequities, and work to ensure equitable access to food; rather than simply dealing with hunger at the household and individual levels (Lezberg, 1999; Winne, Joseph, & Fisher, 1997). The community food security process is designed to elucidate the linkages in the current food system and ultimately provide communities with more sustainable alternatives (Pothukuchi, 2004). Community food security frameworks focus on rectifying the underlying factors that drive this inequity, working towards self-reliance, empowerment, and autonomy, rather than charity (Bellows & Hamm, 2003). A central aspect of community food security is the emphasis directed at returning a level of control and influence to individuals at the local level, working to promote engagement and ownership of the food system (Pothukuchi et al., 2002; Ross & Simces, 2008). This includes, for example, developing equitable local agricultural practices to maximize the relationship between local production and consumption (Bellows & Hamm, 2003). This move away from traditional avenues of food access is intended to meet the needs of all members in the population.

The community food security frame may be perceived as occurring along a continuum (Hanson, 2011), which begins with short-term relief and moves towards systemic changes that work to improve the economic, ecological, and social sustainability of the food system (Kalina, 2001). The first stage involves initial modifications to the food system. These changes have a short-term perspective and operate within the context of the current food system, providing immediate and temporary relief to hunger and food issues (Lezberg, 1999; Maxwell & Frankenberger, 1992; Tarasuk, 2001; van der Werf & Petit, 2002). Examples of changes at this level include food banks and soup kitchens, approaches that are designed to alleviate the immediate symptoms of a larger systemic issue (Kalina, 2001; Slater, 2007). These services continue to be used with increasing frequency, despite the initial vision that

they would be used only to provide temporary relief (Kalina, 2001; Slater, 2007). The second phase is defined as food systems in transition. Strategies employed during this phase aim to strengthen community capacity and build potential alternatives to the current agri-food system (Kalina, 2001; Slater, 2007). Examples of action taken during this phase include collective kitchens and community gardens (Slater, 2007). Establishing networks and innovative approaches that address more environmental concerns should be a focus at this stage (Boyle & Holben, 2010; Kalina, 2001; McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo, & Costello, 2005; Slater, 2007). The third and final stage—the redesign of the food system for sustainability—requires long-term commitment from stakeholders throughout the food system. Changes at this level are designed to address the underlying situations responsible for the observed disparities, for example, of socioeconomic disparities (Slater, 2007). Efforts at this stage take action by altering the existing policy environment (Boyle & Holben, 2010; Kalina, 2001; McCullum et al., 2005; Slater, 2007).

Collaboration
Collaborative approaches rose to prominence during the 1980s as efforts began to shift away from individual behaviour change towards community health promotion (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). Collaboration brings organizations together allowing them to leverage resources and increase their capacity for change (Backer & Norman, 2000; Backer, 2003; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Himmelman, 2001; James Bell Associates, 2011; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). As a result, it is now common practice for funding agencies to request that applicants establish diverse collaborations prior to submission (Backer, 2003). Articulation of a clear mission for a specific collaboration is essential because it allows participants to reconcile the pursuit of individual goals with a common purpose (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993). Partners are selected on their potential to contribute their knowledge, skills, and resources to the process (Lasker & Weiss, 2003) and diversity is integrated to promote pressure from a greater number of sectors, thereby increasing the potential for change (Hays, Hays, DeVille, & Mulhall, 2000). When working towards systemic change, it is especially important to integrate representation that extends beyond the sectors typically involved (Hays et al., 2000).

   Collaborations are not ubiquitous and vary in structure (Backer, 2003) in ways that impact their potential to generate synergistic advantage (Butterfoss et al., 1993). Collaborations that operate with a higher level of formalization have greater potential to generate synergistic outcomes than those operating with looser forms of association (Butterfoss et al., 1993). The chosen structure depends on the projected longevity of the process; collaborative ventures established to accomplish a specified short-term goal and then disband may function with a loose form of collaboration (Backer, 2003; Rabinowitz, 2014). Conversely, collaborations looking to attain change at a systems level require a higher level of association among participants (Backer, 2003; Rabinowitz, 2014). The degree and kind of structure should support the vision driving the process. Various mechanisms may be employed to increase the

structure associated with the process. Some commonly employed examples include these: promoting member accountability through detailing and reporting actions or inaction, implementing mandatory resource commitment, and imposing attendance requirements on the membership (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001).

Collaborative processes involve balancing costs and benefits. Commonly cited costs include the loss of autonomy and unilateral control of outcomes, conflict over goals and methodology, loss of resources and competitive position, and delays in solving problems (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). These costs are offset by benefits of involvement including serving as a venue for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and strategies; maximizing the potential of individuals and groups to induce change; and providing a venue for organizations to get involved in broader issues without assuming full responsibility. If the benefits of involvement are greater than associated costs, members will remain engaged. The level of structure imposed has a distinct impact on the costs and benefits, with higher levels of formalization associated with increased cost. Synergistic outcomes, the potential to achieve a higher level of outcomes, is a commonly cited reason for involvement in a collaborative process (Backer & Norman, 2000; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). Operating in conjunction with other organizations brings additional advantages: they provide access to resources and facilitate the establishment of new networks, generating value that continues beyond the process (Nowell, 2009). New networks can support future endeavours, for instance (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). In many instances the benefits of collaborative approaches take time to manifest given the time investment to build up levels of trust for organizations to fully engage and for relationships to become a valuable part of the process (Nowell, 2009).

Despite a number of distinct advantages, the collaborative process also has challenges in three broad, generic categories: time, trust, and turf (Himmelman, 2001). Time signals the required commitment from an organization to become involved in the process. Trust is the ability of an organization to believe other members will deliver on their commitments, thereby facilitating success. Turf pertains to the interaction and overlap of organizations in the operational realms of the other partners (Himmelman, 2001). As the collaborative process becomes more structured, the impact associated with these challenges increases. The cited costs become more pronounced as the level of structure and formalization is increased (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Nowell, 2009). Working to mitigate these costs where possible and ensure adequate benefit to membership is an important consideration when building a collaborative process. Connecting involvement to a strong central vision is fundamental to maintaining a level of association and promoting ownership (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009; Butterfoss et al., 1993; Rabinowitz, 2014).

The Saskatoon Regional Food Assessment (SRFA)
The prevalence of food insecurity in the Canadian population has been gradually

increasing since it was first monitored in 2005 (Tarasuk et al., 2015). Opinions on how growing rates of food insecurity should be addressed vary greatly; the SRFA brought together two prevalent perspectives grounded in divergent ideological underpinnings. Proponents of the current agri-industrial model felt that opportunities provided through technological and economic gains would provide the means to feed all members of the population. Proponents of change supported a more holistic view of the food system and noted that current practices of production and distribution have failed to address the growing rates of food insecurity, and have been associated with further propagating the observed disparities and inequities. This perspective places emphasis not only on the provision of food but also on returning a level of control and autonomy to the local population. These views brought together by the SRFA process had little existing rapport or common ground. This divergence represented a distinct challenge when looking to structure a collaborative process.

Understanding the extent and implications of these divergent ideological positions becomes a critical step in structuring a collaborative process. Collaboration is not a given; the structure employed should coincide with the desired outcome of the process. While increasing structure can lead to increased capacity to elicit outcomes, such as systems change, participants must draw commensurate value from the process to remain engaged. This value is often derived from the establishment of a shared central vision guiding the process. In the context of collaboration for CFAs there may be distinct differences in the desire for change sought by different key stakeholders in the process. This represents a core challenge in the community food assessments process, effectively integrating partners with differing views on the challenges within the current food system. Developing an understanding of how value can be gained by all stakeholders, and the level of structure that might be needed for this, is a critical step if synergistic outcomes associated with collaboration are to be obtained.

Methods

This research was conducted in conjunction with the Saskatoon Regional Food Assessment (SRFA). Working closely with steering committee members, the study was designed to document their experiences and perceptions of the process. A constructivist grounded theory approach was employed in order to begin to elucidate appropriate theoretical constructs (Charmaz, 2006). An ethics exemption for this study was obtained from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on the grounds that the study is a program evaluation used exclusively for assessment, management, or improvement purposes.

The target population for this study included all steering committee members involved in the SRFA. A potential conflict of interest resulted in one participant being excluded from consideration. Invitations to participate were sent to the remaining eight steering committee members following initiation of the assessment process. Of these remaining members, one individual declined to participate, for a total of seven participants in the initial interview process. All members who participated in the initial interview were

invited to be involved in the second interview phase following the completion of the assessment. Prior to the second interview, two members resigned from their positions on the SRFA steering committee, reducing the number of interviews to five.

Data collection

Data for this study were obtained through the application of an intensive interview process that aims to elicit an in-depth exploration of participant experiences, placing an emphasis on acquiring emergent information (Charmaz, 2006). It uses open-ended questions to facilitate an examination of desired content while affording participants an opportunity to influence the direction the interview takes (Charmaz, 2006). Interviews were conducted during two distinct phases of the SRFA process.

The first interview was conducted to obtain initial perspectives on the SRFA process. For the purposes of this interview a question frame was developed on the basis of themes identified in a preliminary examination of collaboration and CFA literature. A second round of interviews following completion of the assessment examined the process as a whole and perceptions of the SRFA report. This interview was conducted in a less structured manner. Rather than develop a set of specific questions, the interview was oriented around further exploration of themes emerging from analysis of the initial interview phase.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded using a Livescribe Echo™ smart pen. Audio files were uploaded into the NVivo 10 software application and transcribed. Transcripts were subjected to an initial line-by-line open coding process. While rigorous and time consuming, this approach helped develop codes closely connected to the collected data (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2011). A second phase of coding was conducted. Throughout the analysis, codes were placed into theoretical categories and subjected to comparative analysis (Birks & Mills, 2011) to help establish analytic distinctions (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006).

Results and Discussion

Throughout analysis, a number of themes emerged. In an effort to create coherence, themes were distilled into four overarching constructs (Figure 1). The first construct is labeled *organization* and integrates existing perspectives on the food system brought to the process by SRFA steering committee members. This construct includes the level of action in the food system, ranging from local to national, that participants favoured. This construct is positioned below the others in the model to indicate that these views were brought to the process prior to initiation of the SRFA. The second construct is *vision* integrating themes pertaining to the organizational lens through which the SRFA process and other steering committee members were perceived. The third construct—*value*—embodies perceived points of value participants reported from their involvement in the SRFA process. The final construct is *engagement* and it

embodies the different perceptions and themes presented by SRFA steering committee members regarding the role of engagement in the assessment.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of emerging themes from the SRFA process.
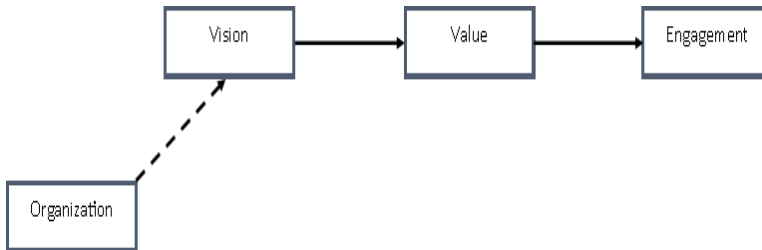
The developed constructs were ordered to provide the greatest consistency among responses from study participants and prevailing themes in academic literature. While these core constructs may provide insight into short-term collaborations, specific aspects addressed in the context of each construct are unique to the SRFA and are not necessarily transferable. While this process attained a level of theoretical saturation for the current sample size, it is important to note that this study did not include interviews sufficient to safely assert the validity of these constructs for a more general application of this model.

Organization
The organization construct encompasses pre-existing views and perspectives brought to the process by those participating in the SRFA. These views were distilled into two general categories, operating with either a business or community food security focus. Business-identified steering committee members subscribed to a worldview that further production and economies of scale should be employed to resolve issues of Food Security (Howard & Edge, 2013). Their counterparts operating with a community food security perspective placed emphasis on promoting the viability of local production, social justice, and community engagement in the food system (Food Secure Canada, 2011).

The SRFA was initiated when members of the Saskatoon Food Coalition approached the City of Saskatoon. These founding members brought with them a strong vision for the food system in the form of the Saskatoon Food Charter (Saskatoon Food Coalition, 2002). For these members the process was a continuation of community food security work in the city. While there was diversity amongst these original members, they were able to unite under the central vision provided by the Saskatoon Food Charter document. An important part of this vision was the desire to return control to community members, thereby increasing their ability to shape the

direction of the food system—and, importantly, their quality of life:

> What we are probably trying to accomplish and achieve through this work is that there is a greater level of food security amongst Saskatchewan residents… . But that there is greater opportunity for people to have a sense of ownership over their food production.

While the tenets of community food security provided a strong central vision for the founding members, the integration of additional participants began to diminish its capacity to act as a unifying force. At the behest of the funding organization, business-identified representatives were recruited in an effort to expand the breadth of perspectives at the table. Such a request is common in the context of the CFA process, as current best practices promote diversity of membership (Pothukuchi et al., 2002; Ross & Simces, 2008). Business-identified representatives brought additional insight to the process, but they also brought an alternative ideology. Attempting to integrate divergent ideologies can lead to complications in the collaborative process (Hanson & Terstappen, 2009). The implication of amalgamating these two divergent ideological positions was erosion of the central vision guiding the SRFA during its formative phases.

In conjunction with these divergent ideologies there was a noticeable difference in the scale of operation steering committee members sought to influence. For founding members, operating with community food security identification, there was a concerted focus on the recentralization of the food system and operating on a local scale. This perspective placed ownership of subsequent action in the hands of the municipal actors in particular. The founding members argued that it was primarily through coordination by local government agencies that members of the community would be able to regain agency over food production and distribution practices. For business-identified committee members there was limited appeal to working towards change at the municipal level. These members believed that local production would be unable to generate economies of scale and compete with the current global marketplace. Business-identified members were not aware of the breadth of issues associated with food insecurity in Canada and operated with the perspective that the best means to provide the food required was attained through the current system of production and distribution. As previously indicated, a holistic focus was not inherent to this particular world view. These individuals were interested in action on a larger scale and perceived a process operating with a local emphasis as largely ineffectual:

> Municipal has very little impact on something like that. They can encourage rooftop gardens and they can do the little lots that they have on their street and all the other things. But that's really still not addressing the whole issue of feeding with locally produced product, the masses… So then you need to take it to the next level of provincial, federal. You need that support.

In the SRFA most of the business-identified representatives operated within the agri-industrial model. For these organizations there is limited economic potential to be found in small scale local production. These participants placed greater value on interaction with governments at the provincial and federal levels.

In the SRFA there was one representative who operated a business predicated on local retail. Because of its more localized perspective, this business-inclined participant indicated higher levels of interest in examining local issues than counterparts looking to act at regional levels and beyond. The greater connection between this business member and the original aims of the charter document is noticeable. Establishing uniformity amongst organizations with such diverse orientations is extremely challenging. Recruitment of members that do not identify with the vision guiding the process, even in efforts to increase diversity, may ultimately limit the potential synergy attained by the collaboration. Looking to establish a balance between diversity and potential collaboration synergy should be a point of consideration when targeting potential members. In the example above, the local business owner was able to identify with aspects of the existing vision for the SRFA process. In this instance a level of diversity was gained while not completely disregarding the central vision. Selection of members that are able to identify with the core elements of the process will reduce the work required to develop and promote a unified approach and expedite the potential for successful collaborative outcomes.

Vision

The vision construct is shaped by organizational traits and influences the perception of the assessment process by committee members at the table. Community food security-identified participants emphasized the strengths of the process in relation to previous work in the food system. For these members the integration of business-identified participants under the auspices of community food security endeavours was perceived as adding considerable rigour to the assessment and its findings. Building connections with these business-identified participants was frequently communicated as a strength of the SRFA process:

> I know from what I have seen with Food Secure Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Food Coalition that production side of things just isn't there.... Pretty proud that we were involved and able to include that on the steering committee.

Community food security-identified participants emphasized the strengths of the assessment process and its potential to elicit subsequent action in the food system and brought a long-term vision that involved change at a structural level

Business-oriented participants did not share the perspective that the assessment served as a continuation of existing work. For these participants it provided a single examination of the food system from an alternative perspective. A different ideology served to shape these participants' perspectives of the recommendations

brought forward by the community food security-identified participants. This was illustrated by the term *real* being raised by business-identified participants. Further investigation revealed that *real* meant putting financial considerations at the centre of discussion. There was a lot of discussion regarding an absence of costing or financial consideration associated with recommendations from the community food security-oriented participants. Business-identified participants frequently reiterated the SRFA process failed to adequately address this component:

> The people around the table had a goal in mind, but the end result did not consider the financials. I raised that at every meeting and on every response…. it was never really taken into consideration.

Business participants did not associate collaboration with these community food security participants with a high degree of value. The perceived failure was largely associated with the absence of fiscal consideration and accounting for the financial "realities" associated with operating in the current agri-industrial model:

> And, they are very valuable input, very valuable ideas there, but neither university nor government works in the real world and knows the dollars and cents of it. And it's a lot of theory and nothing practical comes of it.

Business-identified participants expressed a desire that work undertaken provide a clear pathway to "realistic" action within the current food system, rather than leading to an alternative system. From the business perspective, there was nothing in the developed report or the assessment to facilitate a transition from theory to reality. For these participants any proposed initiatives at a local scale would need to develop a clear financial case for operation. They argued that business would be willing to engage with economically viable initiatives, but would be less inclined to participate with efforts lacking this type of perceived financial grounding.

Value

For community food security-identified participants the perception of the assessment process as a continuation of previous food system endeavours led to a high degree of value being ascribed to the process. Specifically, the process was viewed as building on the Saskatoon Food Charter, which was adopted in principle by Saskatoon City Council in 2002 but has not had the desired level of impact on expanding municipal efforts to increase community food security (Engler-Stringer & Harder, 2011). For these participants this progression was reflective of other municipalities as they progressed to the development of Food Policy Councils (FPC) and the promotion of community food security:

> It was a good first step in exposing a bit more about an idea around assessment, the idea around different food policies, so there is some buzzwords that at least

we can say, "Hey remember in 2012 and 2013 when we …" You can use that as building history, right? People may say, "Yeah, but that didn't go anywhere," but you know what, we expanded the conversation from the Saskatoon Food Charter … and Saskatoon Food Coalition.

Community food security-identified participants also valued the establishment of relationships with new partners in the business sector. Failing to integrate a diverse group of business representatives was identified as a shortcoming of prior initiatives. This perspective mirrors one of the commonly touted advantages of collaborative approaches: the ability to network and establish connections with new partners (Nowell, 2009). The absence of previous interaction was something that was important for some community food security-identified participants, especially in relation to other municipalities with a more pronounced infrastructure supporting community food security initiatives:

> We had other food assessment pieces from other jurisdictions, but it also seemed like those alliances had been in the works for some years beforehand. Here it was fairly obvious that we didn't have those alliances.

For business-identified participants this process was not associated with previous work. These partners became involved in the process to gather information and not necessarily to modify their current practices. The final report was viewed as an opportunity to obtain additional insight rather than as a catalyst for subsequent action:

> So, this is just a piece of that puzzle. So the local industry is high on our initiatives, but this is a piece of that puzzle. They are all involved; this isn't going to be significantly higher than the local. The local is the peak of this and that falls under that.

Perceptions of value were also diminished by the recommendations put forward by the SRFA, which were viewed as impractical within the context of the current agri-industrial model. For business-inclined members leveraging opportunities within the current system of food production and distribution provided the only effective means of increasing local production.

Engagement

Because community food security-identified participants associated the assessment process with the potential for systemic change, these participants had higher expectations regarding commitment of assessment participants. To these individuals the limited engagement by their business counterparts was communicated as a core weakness of the assessment. This is consistent with the collaboration literature, which recommends a greater degree of structure for initiatives targeting higher level

outcomes (Nowell, 2009). Limited commitment from business-identified participants was perceived as adversely impacting the potential of the assessment process to attain its desired outcomes. They expressed limited value in their involvement, despite being afforded an opportunity to help shape the assessment:

> If they say, "Well this doesn't have any value for us," what will happen to you then and why and you did have opportunity … they did. They were still on the distribution list. Why didn't they send their feedback? They had opportunity to either be present in meetings or provide feedback, via e-mail or whatever if they needed to and I don't know if they did.

Business-identified participants expressed little concern regarding the potential implications of limited engagement. While there was an expressed desire to have been more involved in the process, their limited involvement was not perceived as having a significant impact on the process or its outcomes. These organizations viewed the SRFA as a process that could be accomplished by the project coordinator. As business-identified participants did not associate the process with structural change or some other more significant end point, they viewed a loose association as sufficient collaborative structure to attain the desired end (Backer, 2003):

> You've got to wait for the outcomes and let the consultant do the work and get it done. Then look at the report. I know we have reportings and that people who are on that committee are very knowledgeable and to ensure that the project is moving forward as per the contract.

Differences in expected engagement appear to be associated with the divergent ideological perspectives present in the SRFA. Community food security identified participants were operating from the perspective that the assessment process was a component of the larger continuous process promoting the transition away from current practices of industrial food production and distribution. The business-oriented members did not share this ideological view, and rather saw the system as one needing change, but not systemic change. Because of their interest in systems change, the community food security identified participants perceived that collaboration required a very engaged and dedicated membership. Conversely, the business identified participants viewed the assessment as a singular examination of the Saskatoon food environment, a task that they believed did not necessitate a high level of engagement from steering committee participants. Because of the ideological differences between the two groups the SRFA process was unable to provide business identified participants with strong enough sense of value, to levels that would mirror that of community food security identified participants, something required to foster and promote an increased level of engagement.

Conclusion

The SRFA was conducted in accordance with current best practices (Ross & Simces, 2008). Efforts were made to integrate diversity and capture the perspectives of individuals operating throughout the food system. While the assessment was able to attain its specified outcomes, an examination of dynamics amongst committee members revealed tensions permeating the process, attributable to the integration of divergent ideologies. The conceptual model developed provides a means to explore core components of harnessing collaboration in efforts to develop systematic change and promotion of community food security.

The collaborative process may take on many different configurations, with structure dictated by the desired outcome (Backer, 2003). A transition away from the agri-industrial model would require a level of systemic change. Additionally, a community food security focus would also necessitate addressing not only the availability of food but the larger societal inequities that fuel food insecurity. To attain these outcomes the collaboration would require a high level of accountability and formal organization. This would place a higher cost of involvement on participants, increasing the level of value that must be attributed to participation.

Collaboration literature identifies a strong central vision as foundational to associate value with a process (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009; Butterfoss et al., 1993; Rabinowitz, 2014). The integration of business-identified participants did come at a cost, specifically the erosion of a strong central vision that had guided previous efforts to establish community food security in Saskatoon. The failure of the SRFA to re-establish a shared central vision and provide value to participants served to mitigate the future potential of the group in efforts to elicit systemic change and promote community food security.

The breadth of ideological viewpoints exhibited around the SRFA table highlights challenges faced in efforts to promote community food security. Efforts to obtain collaboration synergy eroded the strength of the central vision that previously guided action in efforts to promote community food security. Integration of diversity should be accompanied by a thorough examination of the process to ensure the foundation exists to maintain the desired level of collaborative structure. Application of collaboration without considering these core components appears to have significant potential to negate potential advantages of the collaborative process.

Limitations

This study was conducted with a limited sample population. Efforts were made to integrate all individuals meeting the inclusion criteria for the study, but ultimately only 12 interviews were conducted. In grounded theory this number would normally be considered insufficient to attain the level of theoretical saturation required. We acknowledge this limitation and make no definitive claims with regards to findings and the developed conceptual model. Additional inquiry is required to further elucidate elements of these constructs and to further strengthen the findings. At this point the

findings reported in this study serve to provide a preliminary examination of the food assessment process and elements influencing the interaction between groups involved in short-term collaborations such as a food system assessment.

This study explored the expectations and experiences of steering committee members involved in the SRFA. As a result of the localized nature of this study, it may be subject to contextual elements that are unique to this process within Saskatchewan. These attributes may range from previous interaction between and among members, to experiences operating within the current infrastructure of the food system. In any case, these contextual elements serve to limit the potential to transfer these findings to other regions and assessment processes. They should be taken into consideration when looking to extrapolate the findings.

Future Research

It will be important to identify how contextual elements influence the structure of the CFA process. A loose collaboration structure proved adequate for the purposes of the SRFA. This process was conducted with no firm commitment to act on recommendations presented in the report. What differences would be observed if the assessment was conducted for an existing food policy council, or had obtained financial commitment to act on recommendations? In addition, a level of attention needs to be directed at the composition and dynamics of participants integrated into the assessment process. Current best practices emphasize the integration of a diverse membership from various sectors throughout the food system. While these participants are able to provide an array of perspectives, they also come to the process with divergent ideologies. Could these divergent perspectives be accommodated in a more structured process? Correlating membership composition with intended outcomes would prove beneficial for guiding subsequent assessments.

The role of community ownership and involvement in the CFA process also requires further consideration. Is the aim of the process to promote a level of awareness in the community, or is it perceived as a tool to develop capacities and partnerships that will provide a continued and lasting connection to the community and grassroots action? Finally, what level of importance should be placed on promoting community ownership in relation to reconciling the differences observed amongst committee participants coming to the process with divergent ideological perspectives? There remains a great deal to learn about this type of short-term collaborative process within the food system, and moving forward there is an opportunity to shape the process into a valuable tool for the promotion of food secure communities.

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