

## A REFLECTION ON THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON CAMPUS-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD EVALUATION CAPACITY IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA AND URBAN CAIRO

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*In recent years funders have increasingly demanded that community programs demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions through evaluation. Many community-based organizations have difficulty meeting this demand because they lack the necessary training and resources. This difficulty provides universities with an excellent opportunity to partner with community-based organizations by assisting them in building evaluation capacity. This paper describes evaluation capacity-building initiatives that were developed through partnerships between a university and a community collaborative board in a rural area of the United States and between a university and urban non-governmental organizations in Cairo, Egypt. Cultural factors in each setting that impacted the implementation of these initiatives are examined. These factors included communication and interpersonal norms, collaboration, accountability, social integration, role flexibility and openness to new approaches, political and economic factors, and commitment to evaluation capacity building.*

**Key words:** *evaluation capacity building, campus-community partnerships, cross-cultural training, Egypt, rural.*

### 1. Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing demand from funders that programs demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions through evaluation (Adams & Dickinson, 2010). Many community-based organizations have difficulty meeting this demand because they lack the necessary training and resources (Bakken, Nunez, & Couture, 2014; Kegeles, Rebchook, & Tebbetts, 2005; Garcia-Iriarte, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, & Luna, 2011). At the same time, universities are increasingly interested in community engagement and are looking for ways to exchange knowledge and resources with community partners (Beere, 2009; McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009; Ishisaka, Sohng, Farwell, & Uehara, 2004). Evaluation capacity building (ECB) provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for universities and community nonprofits to

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collaborate (e.g., Scrafford, 2012), one that may be especially helpful to underserved rural communities (Brown et al., 2013), and developing countries.

While much has been written about both ECB and university-community collaboration, there has been little cross-cultural comparison. How does the cultural context, including its social, organizational, historical, economic, and political aspects (Kral et al., 2011), impact the ECB process and university-community collaboration? To examine this question, we reflect on our experiences with ECB initiatives in two diverse cultural contexts: a partnership between a university and a community collaborative board in a rural area of the United States, and a partnership between an American university and urban NGOs in Egypt. These ECB initiatives included trainings, linkages, internships, resource development, appreciative inquiry, and community-based learning. While we found that the types of ECB initiatives and strategies were transferable across the two cultural contexts, cultural differences at the individual level (communication patterns, interpersonal norms), institutional level (collaboration norms, outsider status and commitment to ECB), and societal level (political and economic circumstances) impacted their implementation.

## **2. Background and Context**

Capacity involves knowledge, skills, and decision-making capabilities (University of Wisconsin, 2008). Applied to evaluation, capacity building can be defined as “an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation” (Labin, Duffy, Meyers, Wandersman, & Lesesne, 2012, p. 308). The need for ECB is growing (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Clinton, 2014; Suarez-Balcazar & Taylor-Ritzler, 2013) as nonprofits seek to meet accountability demands. Rural areas tend to be underserved, under-resourced, and under-researched (Webster, Thomas, Ong, & Cutler, 2011), and so may be especially in need of ECB support. Developing countries too, are in need of ECB, as the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and other international organizations are pushing to switch from the use of outside expertise to national ownership of monitoring and evaluation (UNICEF, 2009; OECD, 2010)

Campus-community partnerships are generally seen as highly desirable relationships between a learning institution and the community (Ishisaka et al., 2004). Community-based or service learning has been described as a high-impact educational practice that is likely to help students learn more and achieve higher levels of personal development (Kuh, 2008). Building campus-community partnerships provides new educational environments for students and bridges the research-practitioner gap by providing community partners with student volunteers who have some theoretical background in their area of study. While campus-community partnerships may take time to develop and may present some challenges, they have the potential for great rewards for both the community and the university (e.g., Haeffele, Hood, & Feldman, 2011; Ishisaka et al., 2004).

In recent years there has been growing attention paid to the role of culture in evaluation (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Samuels & Ryan, 2011), and in community psychology (Kral et al., 2011; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Trickett, 2011). In this paper, we see culture as an aspect of context (Fitzpatrick, 2012), one of many environmental factors that can

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impact the process and outcome of ECB. Culture can be defined as a system of meaning and shared understanding common to a group of people, accumulated over time and passed on through socialization practices, norms and institutions (Trickett, 2011). Cultures are learned and socially constructed, dynamic, and operate in the politics of power and privilege (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009). While there are a variety of terms used to describe evaluations that attempt to respond to the issue of culture, we use the term “cross-cultural” here as suggested by Chouinard and Cousins (2009), to highlight the interaction between the culture being evaluated and the culture of the evaluator. A cross-cultural approach to ECB requires that we be thoughtful about our own social and cultural locations, respect and learn from our partners’ perspectives, and practice inclusion of partners in planning and delivery of ECB initiatives (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Kral et al., 2011). This self-reflexive approach is aware of the ways that power and privilege are maintained and challenged through culture, and is guided by questions such as “What about culture are we trying to understand, to what end, from whose perspective?” (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011, p. 204).

The need to pay attention to cultural context becomes especially apparent when working in international settings (Fitzpatrick, 2012), but even within the United States, we were outsiders working in an unfamiliar rural culture. Our work in Egypt led us to see that as Americans, we brought our own cultural biases to our ECB, which impacted our ability to form trusting relationships, influenced our choice of topics, and informed our teaching methods. Similarly, working in an unfamiliar rural culture in the United States sometimes caused us challenges with building relationships, professional boundaries, and confidentiality (Oetinger, Flanagan, & Weaver, 2014; Murty, 2014). Across both settings, it was necessary to be sensitive to the cultural context of ECB, and an advantage of using campus-community partnerships to do this work was the inclusion of local students who were often able to provide us with an insider’s perspective (although they too, sometimes had different life opportunities and/or experiences than the larger community).

### ***2.1. ECB Partnerships in the Rural United States***

In the United States, nonprofits have increasingly been asked to meet accountability requirements (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013), and ECB has been seen as a way to assist nonprofits in meeting these demands (Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2011). The rural context of campus-community partnerships and ECB has not been studied much in the United States, although some articles have been written on ECB in rural areas of other countries (e.g., Díaz-Puente, Yagüe, & Afonso, 2008; Lennie, Hearn, Simpson, & Kimber, 2005). In general, rural communities share the characteristics of low population density, remoteness, and limited resources (Henness, Ball, & Moncheski, 2013). There is also a shortage of rural-specific research and services (Daley & Avant, 2014; Eberhardt & Pamuk, 2004; Oetinger, Flanagan, & Weaver, 2014; Murty, 2014). The low population density in rural areas can mean that there is a lack of people who possess needed specialized skills, such as evaluation (St. Lawrence & Ndiaye, 1997). However, this lack of specialization can be an advantage in ECB as rural professionals are usually generalists who are accustomed to being responsible for a wide variety of tasks (Hickman, 2014). As a result, they may be more likely to be open to ECB’s demand that they learn new skills. The low population density can also mean that the same small group of people is on every nonprofit and local government board and makes most of the decisions. If this group supports ECB, it can be

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an advantage, although if they do not, then ECB is likely to be difficult (Burdine, Appiah, Clark, Hollas, & Shea, 2012).

The ECB initiatives described in this paper involved the first author in a nine-year partnership with a county-wide community collaborative board in Western Pennsylvania. This rural county, part of the Appalachian region, has a population of about 55,000, with a 15.8% poverty rate. Compared to the rest of the state, the county has higher rates of incarceration (3<sup>rd</sup> highest in the state), drug abuse, school dropouts, and other social problems (Venango County Human Services, 2012). The collaborative board was formed to address the well-being of children and families in the county and was composed of about 75 representatives from schools, churches, nonprofits, county agencies, local government, and interested community members. One of the collaborative board's goals was to increase evaluation capacity in county agencies and nonprofits, and the campus-community partnership was part of this effort. The university was a branch campus in the state system, small and accessible to the community, and many of the members of the collaborative board had been students there. This helped facilitate the partnership.

## **2.2. *ECB Partnerships in Egypt***

Evaluation capacity building in Egypt is growing in popularity but is a relatively new concept outside of international aid agencies. There are approximately 2800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Cairo (UNDP, 2008). In general, these organizations lack funding, are in need of training, and rely heavily on volunteers (UNDP, 2008). Egypt is currently undergoing a major political transition that began with the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution in 2011. Even before the revolution, the state's relationship with civil organizations in Egypt was complex and included a heavy measure of control, interference, and oversight (UNDP, 2008), and this situation continues. The ongoing political transition has affected the economy, leading to ups and downs in foreign aid and assistance. NGOs and community-based organizations continue to struggle to fund their programs, with few resources available to pursue evaluation practices. While a desire does exist in many organizations to measure the success of their programs and initiatives, the knowledge of how to go about such a task, and the resources to do it, are lacking. In addition, there is little collaboration between organizations, so building capacity on a larger scale can be difficult as educating individual organizations about ECB is not likely to produce widespread results. Finally, while international funders may demand monitoring and evaluation, and the government on occasion will fund evaluation, there is no governmental evaluation and monitoring mandate.

The ECB initiatives described in this paper involved both the first and second authors working at a private American university in Cairo, in a four-year partnership with about 10 community-based organizations. Approximately 9 million people live in Cairo, and it is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the country in terms of development, with an adult literacy rate of 80.7%, 51.7% of the population having secondary or higher education, 11.9% unemployment, and 7.6% living in poverty (UNDP, 2010). Refugees contribute to the cultural diversity of Cairo's population, and many nonprofits work with refugee populations. In 2014, according to UNHCR, there were 253,245 refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt.

Our ECB work took place during and after the 2011 revolution (from 2010-2014), and the continual transition occasionally disrupted the typical work schedule and created distance

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between organizations and the university due to political concerns, such as perceived affiliations with foreign entities. The university is also physically removed from the communities served by the NGOs we worked with, and although some NGO staff had attended the university, many only knew of it by reputation. The university houses a civic engagement center on campus that helped facilitate some of the partnerships.

### **3. Evaluation Capacity Building Strategies**

Preskill and Boyle (2008) argue that the goal of ECB should be change in evaluation knowledge, skills, and attitudes. ECB participants should acquire an understanding of the evaluation process, the skills to carry out an evaluation, and should believe that evaluation leads to useful information, is important, and must be integrated into programs. Incorporating multiple types of strategies into ECB initiatives—training, evaluation participation, and technical assistance—is associated with changes in evaluation knowledge and behavior (Labin et al., 2012).

In their multidisciplinary model of ECB, Preskill and Boyle (2008) list 10 evaluation capacity building teaching and learning strategies. The ECB campus-community partnerships in both Egypt and America used six of these strategies: 1) written materials, 2) technology, 3) appreciative inquiry, 4) training, 5) technical assistance, and 6) involvement in the evaluation process. An additional strategy, not described by Preskill and Boyle, was 7) creating linkages between organizations that supported evaluation. The written materials and technology primarily focused on understanding the process of evaluation, while training, technical assistance, and involvement in the evaluation process gave community partners a chance to practice evaluation skills. Throughout all of the initiatives, an emphasis was placed on the benefits of evaluation and on incorporating evaluation into programming. While creating linkages did not directly increase knowledge, skills or change attitudes toward evaluation, it supported the ECB process.

#### **3.1. *Written Materials and Technology***

Using written materials and online resources to learn about evaluation are two approaches to building evaluation capacity (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). While many materials exist on the topic of evaluation, nonprofit staff may not be aware of the most helpful materials, and may not have the time to look for them. Therefore, addressing the issue of accessibility is a first step in assisting organizations in building evaluation capacity through written materials and technology. Additionally, the sharing of resources is one way to equalize power in a community, as universities are often seen as having an understanding or expertise that is not always disseminated to the public.

In the United States, accessibility was accomplished by the university and a local foundation providing small grants to the first author to buy books on evaluation so that a community resource library could be created on campus. This library provided materials on how to design surveys, lead focus groups, prepare a logic model, plan an evaluation, analyze data, and other evaluation basics. This collection was put on display in a special section of the library and was available to any community resident with a community library card. This resource provided

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interested organizations with access to evaluation materials that they otherwise would have needed to locate themselves using much time and energy. A bibliography of these materials was handed out at meetings of the collaborative board so that organizations were aware of the resource. Creating this collection was also a way to bring community members onto campus and to demonstrate university support for the community.

In Egypt, due to the size of the city, the amount of traffic, security regulations on campus, and restrictions on library use, visiting the university can be both time consuming and difficult and library use may not be possible for those unaffiliated with the university. For these reasons, technology was a key to making resources accessible to nonprofits. As part of a class, community psychology graduate students created a website ([ngotoolbox.org](http://ngotoolbox.org)) to provide a single place for organizations to access written resources on evaluation. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2010) recommends building evaluation capacity by developing a list of country-specific resources. Therefore, particular attention was paid to finding materials written in Arabic and relevant to Egypt. This website provided links to a wide variety of evaluation materials, including needs assessment, appreciative inquiry, focus groups, survey design, logic models, strategic planning, and evaluation and monitoring. A reception was held on campus to introduce community-based organizations to the resources available on the website. Seventeen attendees representing 10 different organizations attended, and graduate students made a short presentation on the new resource. As in the United States, this was an opportunity to bring community members onto the campus and to show university support for the community.

### **3.2. *Appreciative Inquiry***

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an evaluation tool that uses “an assets-based, collaborative, narrative approach to learning about evaluation that focuses on strengths within the organization” (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 447). Appreciative Inquiry can take a number of forms, but the typical format is to have a workshop where participants tell stories of their peak experiences with an organization in order to identify strengths, spend time in small groups envisioning a dream for the future of the organization, and then work together to develop a plan for achieving this dream by making use of the organization’s strengths (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). This approach may be especially helpful in ECB as it helps reduce anxiety about evaluation by focusing on strengths, promotes capacity for learning and change, and requires collaboration (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). The AI approach was employed in both contexts and proved to be useful in assisting organizations with the evaluation process. In the United States, the collaborative board held a training on AI led by Hallie Preskill that was free to anyone interested in attending. The first author attended this training and then conducted several evaluation workshops that used an AI approach, both with local nonprofits and with the collaborative board as a whole. These sessions were used to develop mission statements, logic models, and strategic plans.

In Egypt, appreciative inquiry was used to assist a local learning center for Sudanese refugees that was interested in refocusing their mission. To provide the board with a sense of how the school was succeeding and to identify areas of improvement, an AI session was conducted by faculty and graduate students who were learning the technique as part of their coursework. The results helped board members develop a mission statement and assess the school’s progress. A

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second AI assessing employment initiatives in Cairo was conducted as a thesis project by a graduate student. Egyptian NGOs working in the area of employment came together to identify what programs were being offered, examine the strengths of those programs, and to envision the future of unemployment programs (Fahmy, 2012).

### **3.3 Training**

Training includes “attending courses, workshops, and seminars on evaluation” (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 447). Workshops and courses on evaluation were offered in both contexts and were well attended. In both contexts, assessments of training needs were conducted prior to the development of the workshops and courses so that community needs were reflected in the ECB offerings.

In the United States, the university’s continuing education program, in partnership with the collaborative board, offered a one-year evaluation program for public and nonprofit agencies. The program consisted of day-long classes once a month over a year and a half period, and taught basic program evaluation skills. Upon completion of the program, participants received a certificate in program evaluation. Scholarships were offered by the county and approximately forty participants representing fifteen community-based organizations participated. Participants surveyed at the end of the program reported that they acquired a better understanding of the logic of evaluation and that it increased their ability to incorporate evaluation activities into their programs. The first author taught one day of this course, and also offered several evaluation workshops to individual organizations and to the collaborative board as a whole.

In Egypt, workshops on evaluation, including ones on evaluation logic, survey design, and qualitative research were held in collaboration with the campus civic engagement center, some taught by university faculty, including the first author. These workshops were held off-campus to facilitate attendance by community organizations, and included a lunch provided by the center. A graduate student in the community psychology program did her internship at the civic engagement center and as part of that internship, was responsible for doing a training needs assessment and organizing the workshops.

### **3.4 Technical Assistance**

Technical assistance refers to “receiving help from an internal or external evaluator” (Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 447). In addition to a lack of evaluation expertise, community-based organizations are also hindered by a lack of staff to conduct evaluation activities. Technical assistance was provided in both contexts by faculty members and undergraduate trainees in the US, and faculty members and graduate internships in Egypt. By assigning undergraduate students and graduate students to do some of the evaluation tasks with support from faculty, evaluation was made possible for programs. It also gave students the opportunity to experience the challenges of evaluation in the ‘real world’.

Again, funded by small grants from the university and a community foundation, a ‘Collaborative Board Evaluation Trainee’ program was set up in the US to train and support undergraduate students in working with a community-based organization on evaluation projects. The undergraduate trainees received forty hours of training in program evaluation by attending

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county-wide workshops and periodic training sessions with a faculty member (the first author). In addition, the faculty member worked with local agencies to develop evaluation tasks for the trainees, and each trainee spent forty hours doing these tasks. This included projects such as survey design and data analysis, setting up Excel spreadsheets, and assisting with logic model design. Trainees received a certificate and \$250.00 for completion of the program, and were featured in the local newspaper.

As a follow-up to this program, a number of undergraduate student internships and independent research projects that focused on evaluation were set up. Student interns and researchers analyzed data, conducted interviews, created surveys and spreadsheets, and helped community-based organizations move their evaluation efforts forward. Both the students and the organizations said that they benefited from these efforts.

In Egypt, technical assistance was provided through community-based learning courses, and graduate level internships that incorporated evaluation tasks. For example, a student worked with the ministry of health to assess drug and alcohol use on campus in her internship placement. Additionally, students in a consultation to nonprofits class were required to spend 15 hours a semester working with partnering NGOs, and many of these consultation hours involved evaluation tasks. In a course on prevention, students worked in teams with NGOs to write grants for prevention programs, including needs assessments, logic models, and evaluation plans. They presented their proposals to a panel of judges from local foundations, and the winning team's NGO was awarded \$500 by the university's community-based learning program to support implementation of the project.

### **3.5. *Involvement in the Evaluation Process***

By participating in the design and implementation of an evaluation project, individuals and groups can improve their evaluation skills (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; OECD, 2010). Faculty and students collaborated with nonprofits to conduct evaluations in both the United States and Egypt.

In the US, the collaborative board had for several years, been tracking data on a variety of outcomes in the county. They decided to pick one of the outcomes that showed a particularly poor countywide performance (smoking during pregnancy), assess needs, and then target it with a coordinated effort. The Partnership to Help Pregnant Women Stop Smoking was formed. The first author and two undergraduate students helped the Partnership develop evaluation capacity by collaborating with them on the assessment projects. These projects served as a guide for the Partnership as they developed smoking cessation interventions. The first project was a survey of health care providers in the county to see if they were using evidence-based smoking cessation interventions with their patients. A second project, a service gap analysis, was used to see what health care providers and social services agencies were currently doing concerning smoking cessation during pregnancy. A third project, supported by a small university grant, surveyed pregnant women and their family and friends at a local women's health organization to assess the level of support for smoking cessation during pregnancy.

In Egypt, students and staff collaborated with several NGOs on evaluation projects, including a large-scale assessment of a health education intervention. Necessary connections for setting up internships and research opportunities with NGO administrators were made through the campus civic engagement center, the students' own efforts to find placements, and in a few cases, by NGO staff contacting the university. For her internship, one graduate student returned to a

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former workplace, an international nonprofit organization, to do an evaluation of one of their education and employment programs. She took a utilization-focused, participatory approach to the evaluation, formed an evaluation team that included program participants as well as all levels of staff members, and worked with them to prepare the logic model, design the evaluation, implement it, and interpret the results. Other students worked with a local NGO to design and implement a qualitative evaluation of a regional collaborative project for musicians, and with an international agency to conduct a photovoice needs assessment in a Bedouin community. In both cases, the interns educated staff members about evaluation, and involved them in the process of evaluation design, data collection, and interpretation of results.

### **3.6. *Linkages***

An additional ECB activity, not mentioned by Preskill and Boyle (2008), is creating internal linkages between community members and organizations, and external linkages with governmental agencies, foundations, and other resources (Burdine et al., 2012). In both Egypt and the US, the campus partner facilitated linkages to funding sources (e.g., applying for small university grants, writing letters of support for grant applications), to other university departments (e.g., continuing education, civic engagement center) to experts in the field (e.g., instructors and speakers), and to other nonprofits. Community partners did the same, providing guest speakers to classes and linking students and faculty to conferences and workshop opportunities. These reciprocal exchanges helped to strengthen the partnerships by creating spaces of shared power and mutual support, while also widening the network of university-community connections. The funded programs and educational activities that resulted also helped to build evaluation capacity for both the community partners and the university faculty and students.

## **4. Cultural Factors that Impacted ECB and Campus-Community Partnerships**

In a discussion of the role of context in evaluation practice, Fitzpatrick (2012) argues that conducting international evaluations sensitizes evaluators to the effects of cultural norms on evaluation (for example, norms around communication, conflict, decision making, and tolerance for ambiguity). Further, such experience makes evaluators more aware of how contextual issues such as culture and politics may impact evaluations in their own country. The same holds true for the process of ECB. While the ECB strategies we used in Egypt and in the rural community in the United States were largely similar, we found that a number of cultural factors affected both the process of capacity building and the creation of campus-community partnerships. These factors occurred at the individual, institutional, and societal levels and included communication and interpersonal norms, outsider status, collaboration and commitment to ECB, and political and economic circumstances.

### **4.1. *Individual Level Factors***

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In an empirical synthesis of the ECB literature, collaboration was found to be at the core of successful ECB efforts (Labin et al., 2012), and a key recommendation made in a study of ECB with community-based organizations was that it was important to build collaborative relationships based on trust and respect (Kegeles, Rebchook, & Tebbetts, 2005). The same holds true for campus-community partnerships. Collaboration improves outcomes (McNall et al., 2009), and reciprocity, trust and mutual respect are important to success (Malm, Prete, Calamia, & Eberle, 2012). We found that as we worked to build collaborative relationships both in Cairo and in rural Pennsylvania, communication norms and interpersonal styles affected our ability to create trust and reciprocity.

*Communication.* It can be relatively easy to make the connections necessary to form partnerships in the United States, particularly in a rural area where the small size of the community and the existence of university-linked networks such as the Cooperative Extension facilitate contact (Spoth, 1997). In the rural Pennsylvania community, a university dean introduced the first author to the director of a local foundation who facilitated contact with the collaborative board, and that connection facilitated contact with local nonprofits. In urban Cairo however, it often took longer to link up with organizations. For instance, there are no voicemail boxes on cell phones or office phones. Therefore, if a contact did not answer their phone, there was no way to communicate the reason for the call, which resulted in a slower pace of communication. Additionally, Egypt is a high-context culture that views time in a polychronic way, meaning that in general, the focus is on relationships and not on tasks, and communication is more formal with a slow response time and little concern about task deadlines (Holtbrugge, Weldon, & Rogers, 2013). We found that Egyptians might also be reluctant to openly refuse a request, and simply not answer our e-mails or calls, and it was difficult to know sometimes if the lack of an answer was due to slow response time or a negative response. These communication norms were especially problematic when internships or class projects were involved and student needed to meet hour requirements and collaborations had to take place in the timeframe of a semester. We had to learn to be flexible and to think on our feet as projects were dropped and deadlines were moved.

Another communication norm that can impact relationship building and ECB is the tradition of courtesy in Egypt, which can make it challenging to be open about contentious or status-related issues that are potentially embarrassing (Carrillo & Forden, 2013; Treven, Mulej, & Lynn, 2008). When issues arise, blame may be assigned to others in order to avoid responsibility (Shahin & Wright, 2004). Seefeldt (1985) found that because of these kinds of issues, Egyptians sometimes preferred informal discussion over formal reports, and while we did not have anyone make this request of us, we did find that we had to learn to communicate less directly and more formally. In working with a rural area in the US, the challenge was more one of multiple relationships that sometimes muddied social and professional boundaries (Oetinger, Flanagan, & Weaver, 2014) and made honest communication and confidentiality more difficult. For example, both the staff and participants in programs were frequently former (or sometimes current) students. In our work both in Cairo and rural Pennsylvania, we found that appreciative inquiry approaches, which focus on strengths in an organization, helped to overcome some of these communication issues, and were a good fit for Egyptian (Bechtold, 2011) and rural (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, 2010) contexts.

Language was another challenge to our ECB efforts in Egypt. While evaluation terms can be confusing for all newcomers (whether they are English speakers or not), most evaluation

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literature is written in English, and therefore even less accessible for Egyptians. As we were not fluent in Arabic, we could only work with Egyptians who spoke English, and had to rely on our students (most of whom were fluent in both Arabic and English) to translate in the few circumstances where only Arabic was spoken. Even when using translation, difficulties sometimes arose due to the connotation of a certain word in Arabic that did not exist in English. Translating evaluation terminology accurately can be incredibly difficult, as can translating evaluation findings (Wehipeihana, Davidson, McKegg, & Shanker, 2010). Further, because both rural and developing countries are under-researched, finding culturally relevant examples to bring evaluation concepts to life was sometimes problematic.

*Interpersonal Norms.* While it is recommended that community partners should be actively involved in evaluations as equals in order to strengthen capacity (OECD, 2010), and shared power and trust are essential to effective university-community collaborations (McNall et al., 2009; Ishisaka et al., 2004; Shalabi, 2012), this balance can be difficult in Egypt where formality and hierarchy structure relationships (Brown & Ataalla, 2002; Shahin, & Wright, 2004; Shehata, 2003). Professors and the university are respected, so community partners may be reluctant to question a faculty member's judgment and to treat them as equals (Shalabi, 2012), and we found that the status and respect given to us as university professors sometimes made us feel uncomfortable. In rural areas, where there is less stratification (St. Lawrence & Ndiaye, 1997), and where community members have a strong sense of independence and a distrust of outsiders (Crosby, Wendel, Vanderpool, Casey, & Mills, 2012; Murty, 2014; St. Lawrence & Ndiaye, 1997), ECB may be especially attractive as it enables communities to take charge of the evaluation process. In our particular case, the collaborative board had already taken charge of the process of ECB, so while some outreach and trust-building was necessary, the university partner did not need to assume a leadership role. One of the key factors to the success of evaluation and ECB is administrative support (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013), and the leaders of the community collaborative board provided this, creating a situation where the university and the community shared power and were involved as equals.

#### **4.2. Organizational Level Factors.**

Bourgeois and Cousins (2013) list four types of organizational factors that contribute to the success of ECB: (1) external accountability requirements that motivate organizations to develop ECB; (2) organizational structures that allow for interaction, collaboration, communication and role flexibility; (3) organizational culture that encourages questioning and experimentation with new approaches; and (4) organizational leadership that supports ECB. Cultural impacts on these organizational processes can have an effect on the success of ECB initiatives.

*Collaboration, accountability and social integration.* In the United States, even in rural areas, collaborative boards and coalitions are so common that community partners are quite likely to have had a negative experience with them. This may result in a reluctance to enter into an ECB partnership, particularly if the university partner is not well known or if it is well known and has a poor reputation due to past ill-conceived community actions. In contrast to the US, Egyptian community partners are likely to have had little or no experience with coalition building and collaboration, but this too may result in a reluctance to enter into an ECB partnership, and a lack of collaborative skills. For example, Cairo's high population density can mean that several

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nonprofits work in a relatively small physical area, but with little coordination, and with each seeking to preserve its own power.

We found however that there were also forces that motivated organizations to collaborate in both settings. State and county demands for evaluation in the rural area and international and private demands for evaluation in Egypt contributed to a desire for ECB. Within organizational structures too, there could be more of a push for interaction and collaboration that supported ECB. Egyptians prioritize social integration in the form of cooperation and coordination (Shahin, & Wright, 2004) and have a more collectivist orientation (Bechtold, 2011), while there is generally a strong sense of community in rural areas (Crosby et al., 2012; Daley & Avant, 2014), and tight knit, dense social networks (Brown et al., 2013; Murty, 2014), all of which can serve to facilitate collaboration. In our case, the rural collaborative board was well-established and respected before it began the process of ECB and the university partnership, so there was little resistance to collaboration. In Cairo, there was a reluctance to enter into large-scale collaboration (such as coalitions), but in general, organizations were open to our smaller-scale initiatives.

*Role flexibility and openness to new approaches.* Both ECB and campus-community partnerships require flexibility and a willingness to assume nontraditional work roles (for example, a teacher who must take on the role of a student) (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013; Malm et al., 2012). This may be challenging in the high context culture that characterizes both Egypt and rural areas of the United States. In high context cultures, relationships are central, people behave in predictable ways, and roles are clear (Treven et al., 2008; Lawrence & Ndiaye, 1997). In rural areas, relationships are personal, long-lasting and based on “who the person is” rather than what they have accomplished (Daley & Avant, 2014). Similarly, in Egypt, interpersonal relations are seen as highly important in the workplace, and *Wasta* (using your connections) is crucial for getting things done (Brown & Ataalla, 2002). Maintaining harmony is important (Shahin & Wright, 2004), and loyalty is valued (Brown & Ataalla, 2002). The preference for maintaining predictable social structures and preserving relationships may make it more difficult for organizations to experiment with new approaches and question organizational processes, conditions that are central to the success of ECB (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013). We found that using a participatory, strengths-based approach helped to overcome some of these barriers as they seemed to make community partners more comfortable with the evaluation process and more willing to engage in self-reflection.

Universities are often seen as outsiders in communities, and this can be detrimental as it may discourage organizations from participating in ECB. As Americans in Egypt, we were likely to be regarded with some distrust by the NGOs with whom we partnered (Shalabi, 2012), although the university’s long history in the region and respected status was helpful to overcoming this. Similarly, newcomers to rural areas in the US are likely to be seen as ‘outsiders’ for many years, and trust can be an issue as it is more likely to be based on familiarity than expertise (Vissing, Salloway, & Siress, 1994). It was therefore helpful that the first author had been teaching in the community for ten years before she became involved in the ECB projects.

In a study of community-based learning at a university in Egypt, Shalabi (2012) found that perceived differences between the university’s academic orientation and the NGOs’ practical orientation were a barrier to partnership. This tension between orientations can also be found in rural areas in the US as university researchers are more motivated to look for generalizable research findings, while rural communities are more focused on meeting local needs (Spath, 1997). In general, we have dealt with this in both settings by putting aside traditional academic interests and focusing our work on the more practical needs of the local partners. This of course

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has potential consequences for tenure and promotion, and like most faculty who make the decision to work in communities, we sometimes struggle to legitimize its value within the university.

Egypt is characterized by a rigid centralized bureaucracy that can be very time consuming to navigate (Shahin & Wright, 2004), and can impede campus-community partnerships (Shalabi, 2012). Jreisat (2011) characterizes Arab administrators as relying more on the preferences of higher level authorities than on their own judgment based on an understanding of evidence from their own organization and the preferences of the communities that they serve. There is a lack of participatory management and a tendency for authority to outweigh the free exchange of ideas. This can work against ECB initiatives, which are designed to help create an environment of “systematic self-assessment and reflection” that leads to organizational learning (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013). This bureaucracy and dependence on authority did frustrate us on a few occasions, as we had to work our way through the hierarchy and gain approval from authorities. However, in general, this was limited to the larger organizations, as smaller Egyptian NGOs tended to be more informal and less hierarchical.

*Commitment to ECB.* Across both contexts, we found that a commitment to ECB and community service by community and university leadership was essential. Prior relationships, motivation, and commitment to form a campus-community partnership make it more likely that this type of ECB initiative will work (Eckerle Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan, & Farrar, 2011; McNall et al., 2009). Both in the United States and Egypt, the participating universities valued and supported service to the community. This support was not only stated in their mission statements, but also in programs designed to encourage partnerships. Community leaders too played a vital role in creating and maintaining ECB initiatives. Much of the impetus for these initiatives came from the rural collaborative board in the US, and when approached, NGOs in Egypt were open to the possibility of working with the university to implement ECB in their organizations.

Responsiveness in both settings was essential to building commitment to ECB from community partners. It was important to tailor the initiatives to the differing cultural contexts (Mackay, 2002). For example, evaluation needs differed across the two settings, and before ECB began, surveys were distributed in order to assess ECB needs. Given the lack of evaluation experience, Egyptian NGOs typically were more in need of assessment ECB, while nonprofits in the US were more interested in process and outcome evaluation ECB because of their use of evidence-based programs.

### **4.3. Societal Level Factors**

Evaluation, and therefore, ECB, is influenced by and influences politics and economics because programs arise and are funded through political processes, and evaluation results feed into political and economic decision-making (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). The political and economic situations in Egypt and in the United States thus clearly impacted ECB.

*Political Situation.* Fitzpatrick (2012) argues that cross-cultural comparisons help bring to light the influence that governments have on evaluation. This influence becomes apparent when we look at ECB in the United States and Egypt. In the US, evaluators have focused on accountability, outcomes and benchmarks because many Americans distrust government programs and want to limit the government’s role (Fitzpatrick, 2012). In Egypt, the government

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is highly centralized and bureaucratic, and if needed, obtaining permission for evaluation projects can be difficult. Unlike the US, the impetus for evaluation in Egypt has come more from international development agencies and international NGOs. We found that the political situation in Egypt affected ECB by increasing the length of time that it took to build a relationship with an organization due to disruptions from protests, curfews, and unrest, public opinion around foreigners, and whether organizations felt it was prudent to associate with an American organization (Shalabi, 2012). Additionally, while the government has never played a major role in funding NGOs, the lack of a stable government meant that government funding was more unpredictable, even for organizations that received it in the past.

*Economic Situation.* In both Egypt and the United States, recent downturns in the economy and shifts in funding priorities have impacted ECB activities. Cuts to human services funding in Pennsylvania limited the money available to finance evaluation training and student internships. However, increased emphasis on results-based management has meant that there is continuing pressure to measure success in programs (Bourgeois & Cousins, 2013) although the focus is often more on performance measurement to the neglect of formative components and long-term outcomes (Hatry, 2013). Political instability in Egypt has also contributed to an economic decline that has impacted private donations. The resulting financial stress on organizations creates a focus on survival rather than capacity building. In Egypt, there is little pressure from the government for evaluation but international organizations and foundations may ask for it, and grants may require it. Ironically, these economic factors make ECB more necessary as dwindling resources mean that evaluation tasks are more likely to be handled in house.

We were able to overcome these economic challenges to ECB in both contexts by utilizing the low-cost evaluation capacity building strategies previously described, and by offering pro bono services. In instances where additional funding was necessary to supply refreshments or pay for Internet domain names, it was possible to find funding through small grants from the university partners or local donors. This helped make the partnerships more attractive to community organizations, and because the focus was on ECB rather than just offering services, we avoided the problem of organizations becoming dependent on our assistance.

## **5. Factors that Impacted Success**

Across both settings, there were several factors that appeared to be important to the success of these initiatives. First, there was willingness on both sides to engage in a partnership. Both universities had a stated commitment to community service, and provided some financial support to the initiatives. On the other side, community organizations in both settings saw the universities as valuable sources of expertise and were willing to work with students. Second, building relationships was fundamental to success in both settings, and finding a variety of ways to collaborate was essential to building these relationships. Through offering training, providing resources, joining coalitions, participating on nonprofit boards, and inviting community groups to present to classes, faculty members built positive relationships with community partners and were on hand to respond to collaboration opportunities when they arose. A long-term commitment on the part of faculty was also important to sustaining these partnerships as students were temporary and staff fluctuated. Third, the evaluation-capacity building initiatives required very little money and did not require extensive resources, making it easier to obtain institutional

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commitment on both sides of the partnerships. Small grants, Internet webpages, pro bono work by faculty, and use of undergraduate and graduate assistance, can make a big impact.

## **6. Lessons Learned**

It was very rewarding to participate in campus-community ECB initiatives across two different cultural contexts. Reflecting on the effects of these cultural contexts has helped us to appreciate the complexity of creating sustainable campus-community partnerships, and to better understand the challenges of providing effective evaluation capacity support. It is apparent from these experiences that relationship building is essential, and that patience and time are needed to learn about a community's culture (Trickett, 2011). Flexibility, openness, and a willingness to learn are key to both ECB and university-community partnerships. The relationships formed from participation as a member of the rural community collaborative board over many years opened doors for ECB partnerships, and ECB initiatives were created and sustained because the faculty member was responsive to opportunities that came up in meetings and informal conversations. Humility and a sense of humor are also vital. Because we were still learning Egyptian culture and were not familiar with Arabic, our reliance on our Egyptian students for guidance regarding some aspects of interacting with the community partners was necessary and incredibly valuable. While it can be humbling to rely on students' socio-cultural and cross-cultural competence, it is often necessary to consult "the experts" when presented with unanticipated challenges.

Kral et al. (2011) argue that culture should become central to the training and practice of community psychologists. Teaching American community psychology and evaluation in Egypt has meant that culture is always at the forefront of our training and practice, sometimes to the neglect of other forms of context. It is often necessary to remind ourselves and our students that culture intersects with gender, social class, urbanicity, and other aspects of difference, and is not a static concept. On the other hand, cultural issues are far less likely to come up when teaching community psychology and evaluation in a rural American community characterized by homogeneity. In this case, it has been necessary to remind ourselves that our work with rural communities can also benefit from an examination of culture.

Finally, as we stated in the beginning of this paper, systems of power are embedded in culture (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011). As Americans in Egypt and as academics, our knowledge is often privileged, and the concept of evaluation "capacity building" implies that community organizations lack capability that must be addressed by us, "the experts". As we do this work, it is vital to remember that ECB works both ways; our community partners have much to teach us (Trickett, 2011). Further, we also bring our own cultural backgrounds to the ECB process, and they become part of the context of ECB. It is not enough to simply be aware of the ways that the community partner's culture can impact ECB, it is also critical that we become aware of the ways that our own culture, including the culture of science (Trickett, 2011), affects our practice and plays a role in the success or failure of our university-community partnerships and the work of building evaluation capacity.

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