



# CASE-IN-POINT

A Taxing and Transforming Leadership Education Art Form

**By Chris Green**

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**THE KANSAS LEADERSHIP CENTER**

# KLC MISSION AND VISION

## **MISSION**

To foster civic leadership for healthier  
Kansas communities

## **VISION**

To be the center of excellence  
for civic leadership development

# CORE OBJECTIVES OF KLC PROGRAMS

## **INSPIRE**

We want to inspire participants to care more,  
engage more and risk more on behalf of making  
their communities healthier places.

## **EDUCATE**

However, we want to educate them on how to engage  
more effectively. We are not interested in creating martyrs,  
but instead citizens skilled at exercising leadership.

## **CONNECT**

And, we want to connect our participants together  
to create strong networks oriented towards improving  
the health of Kansas communities.

If you ever lose sight of our programmatic objectives,  
just remember **INSPIRE, EDUCATE** and **CONNECT**.  
It is really that simple.

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# FOREWORD

When I was a student athlete, my coaches always attempted to create practices that mimicked competition. Specifically I remember preparation for one grueling cross-country meet in the hilly terrain of Lawrence, Kansas. There was one long hill that was almost completely vertical, or so it felt as we were running up it. There were trees lining the path up this hill, and our coach found a similar hill for us to practice on over and over again in preparation for that meet. His objective was to create an environment that so closely resembled the meet itself that we would be better prepared for race day.

The same idea is present in football (full pad scrimmages), boxing (sparring), basketball (scrimmages) and countless other sports. Often times, the practices are even harder than the games.

One of my frustrations with leadership development has been the inability of teachers to deploy that same strategy used by athletic coaches.

I've had extensive experience in civic life. I've served as a state legislator, as an aide to a governor, and I've been involved in a number of local community initiatives. I've served as a member of boards of directors for a number of non-profits. I've been active in my community and state. One thing I have learned is that progress on deep, daunting issues facing our community and our state is difficult. And exercising leadership on deep, daunting issues is challenging, risky, consuming and not always fun.

Most leadership development experiences I have participated in throughout my career have done little to replicate the very difficult environment that is civic life. Instead, most leadership development programs I experienced have been relaxing, comfortable, risk-free and fun-filled. I wish more teachers of leadership would create environments in practice (the classroom) conducive for success on the field (civic life).

This idea was on our mind as we started the Kansas Leadership Center. We wanted to create leadership programs that would help prepare people for the very intensity they face as they exercise leadership to create a stronger, healthier and more prosperous state.

The way of teaching described here is called *Case-in Point*. We have incorporated it into most KLC programs precisely because it creates an intensity that mimics civic life in Kansas.

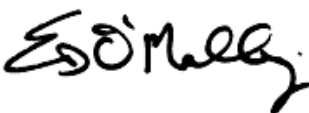
The first time I experienced it I was wide-awake, on the edge of my seat and fascinated with what was happening in the room around me. My experience as a participant in a classroom using Case-in-Point made me feel as if I was literally back in the Legislature, or back in the intense community meeting or back in the governor's office wrestling with a difficult issue.

For the last four years the KLC has been training a number of Kansans on this teaching method. I personally have taught undergraduate courses and KLC programs using *Case-in-Point*.

This guide written by Chris Green does a phenomenal job at describing the methodology of Case-in-Point. We asked Chris to write it to help our new and existing faculty, as well as others who teach leadership, better understand the method.

I hope you find it useful and I hope you begin to engage others with this teaching method. It will enhance your people's ability to exercise leadership.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed O'Malley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**ED O'MALLEY**

President and CEO  
Kansas Leadership Center

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I told people in the fall of 2010 that I was working to develop a guidebook explaining how to facilitate the Case-in-Point method to teach civic leadership in Kansas, the consensus opinion was that I had signed up for a very difficult task. After all, while the idea underlying the pedagogy can be explained simply, it is quite another thing to outline clearly how one might teach it effectively.

Because facilitating Case-in-Point requires recognizing and naming behaviors related to leadership in the "here and now," there is no single set of instructions that you can follow to do it effectively. Yet the difficult work of using such an experiential method is too challenging to attempt without some sort of framework to guide your approach. In trying to develop a facilitation aid, I was incredibly fortunate to have considerable assistance from many others. Without their guidance and insights, this publication would not have been possible.

I am deeply indebted to the core and affiliate faculty of the Kansas Leadership Center for their willingness to consent to lengthy interviews about their frontline experiences related to Case-in-Point and the art of facilitating it. The insights provided by Peter Cohen, Ron Alexander, Kevin Bomhoff, Lynette Lacy, David Chrislip, Julia Fabris McBride, Tim Steffensmeier, Jan Davis, Lynda Wilkinson, Seth Bate and Greg Meissen profoundly influenced the development of this publication. I feel extremely fortunate to have had the assistance of such talented, thoughtful and gracious individuals.

I am also extremely grateful for the assistance I received from participants who experienced Case-in-Point during the Kansas Leadership Center's faculty development program, the Art and Practice of Civic Leadership Development II. Davis, Wilkinson, Amy Delamaide, Mary Kay Siefers, Becky Wolfe, Lisa Perez-Miller, Darrell Hamlin and Matt Lindsey could uniquely speak about the pedagogy as both participants and experienced teachers or facilitators.

I greatly appreciate the comments that Robert Unger, a practicing psychoanalyst and psychotherapist for 35 years, provided about the initial draft of the guidebook. His input helped me better explain the group dynamics at play during Case-in-Point teaching.

Michael Johnstone, along with Maxime Fern, both of Vantage Point Consulting, have written one of the most illuminating papers about Case-in-Point that I've read on the method. I am thankful not only for that contribution to the literature about Case-in-Point, but also for Johnstone's willingness to share further thoughts about the pedagogy in an interview. I am also indebted to Marty Linsky, author, faculty member at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and co-founder of Cambridge Leadership Associates. Not only was Linsky one of the instructors who helped fellow CLA co-founder Ron Heifetz pioneer Case-in-Point at Harvard, he has also taught the method here in Kansas. I greatly appreciated the perspective he provided in his interview, as well as his assistance in connecting me with Johnstone.

I am only familiar with Heifetz through his writings on leadership, but I am thankful for the body of work he has created over the years related to leadership. The books he has completed on his own, as well as with Linsky, heavily influenced me as I developed this guide. By giving a name to this method and allowing it to be replicated by others, he has made a significant contribution to bolster leadership education and development worldwide. I was also heavily influenced by *"Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World"* by Sharon Daloz Parks, which vividly portrays how Case-in-Point is used by Heifetz and others to teach leadership.

The idea for the project originated from an e-mail that Ed O'Malley, the president and CEO of the Kansas Leadership Center, sent me in the spring of 2010. I am grateful for his support throughout, his thoughtful interview on why The KLC chose Case-in-Point as its primary pedagogy and his willingness to entrust me with such an important endeavor for helping the teaching of civic leadership in Kansas. I hope this publication will add to the understanding of this challenging teaching method and be a useful tool years into the future for teachers, participants and other Kansans interested in Case-in-Point.

**CHRIS GREEN**

Director of the KLC Case Initiative

# PART 1

## Introduction: A View of Case-In-Point Facilitation from the 'Balcony'

Inside a brightly lit meeting room, a facilitator stands before a group of about two dozen participants scattered around four round tables. Flanked by a pair of flip charts, she can feel the tension rising during the first full day of a leadership development program. The experienced teachers, coaches and facilitators from within Kansas have begun a hour-long discussion of how they might serve as a case study for the theory, principles and competencies of civic leadership.

If one could watch from a balcony just above room, it would quickly become clear that something very different is going on here, compared with the usual classroom learning experience. The facilitator is far from the only one talking. She frequently makes observations about what is happening in the room and asks probing questions, allowing silence to fill the room as the participants gather a response. Through it all, she remains composed, thoughtful, curious and, sometimes, challenging.

A few participants seem confused or frustrated while a handful jump in and drive the conversation. The groups' members also interact with one other, playing off not just the facilitator's observations, questions and interpretations but also one another's interventions, those

times when they act to influence the group. The mood grows tense at times. The participants find areas of significant disagreement. It quickly becomes clear that there are several different factions in the room desiring different things from the session. Not everyone feels their needs are being met.

When a heated moment occurs among members of the groups, the facilitator does not shy away from the conflict, nor does she allow it to burn out of control. Instead, she tries to manage it to productive ends, jumping in at times to reframe the debate or question assumptions and interpretations.

She presses the "pause button" at especially interesting times, asks, "What is going on here?" and invites participants to do the same. "What does it say about this group that only three people are doing most of the talking?" she might ask. Or, "I notice that Robert has jumped in several times to defend other members of the group. What role is he playing for the group, and how is that role helping or hindering our progress?"

Sometimes participants aim their fire at the facilitator, criticizing her approach. Sometimes those concerns become a "Case-in-Point" of their own, as she makes her decisions open



to scrutiny. She may introduce a principle or competency of civic leadership, when relevant, or relate a story, but her focus remains squarely on how the group and its dynamics and interactions in the "here and now" illustrate the challenges of exercising civic leadership.

If you could see both what is going on inside the room and inside her head as this all occurs, you would see two conversations going on simultaneously. One is an external conversation, which she is having with the class, as she intervenes with observations, questions, interpretations or even silence. Running parallel to that, is the one that she is having with herself. In the midst of the action, she is mentally ascending to the balcony to gather data about what is going on with the group and how she is fulfilling her role, interpreting what that data means and exploring options for what to do next.

Despite her accumulated wealth of knowledge about leadership and teaching, her focus remains on what is happening in the moment. Sometimes things don't always go as she expects. A question falls flat. An interpretation about who belongs in one group's factions proves flawed upon being tested. In the face of failure, she remains flexible and persistent. She ascends to the balcony again, diagnoses

the situation and intervenes again, based on the new data she has acquired.

From time to time, one of her faculty colleagues in the back of the room will intervene, perhaps highlighting an avenue that she failed to see.

All the while, she attempts to manage herself by holding steady in the face of conflict and ambiguity, being mindful of her capabilities, vulnerabilities and triggers, not confusing her role with who she is, and experimenting beyond her comfort zone. She works to do what is necessary to keep the group engaged and in a zone where everyone can learn from one another. When the time allotted for the session comes to a close, she may simply acknowledge the time boundary and end the discussion, allowing the debrief or next session to occur.

# PART 2

## CIP: What is it? What is its purpose?

The situation unfolding on the previous pages provides a snapshot of what a CIP facilitation could look like from the balcony, the metaphorical place where we expand our view of situations we are normally too near to understand. This incredibly demanding methodology, the primary pedagogy at the Kansas Leadership Center, rests on a simple yet provocative idea. Leadership, although difficult to teach, can be learned in a dynamic classroom setting when participants experience, in the moment, some of the very conditions that make exercising leadership so challenging and dangerous in the public sphere.

The thesis underlying CIP is that one cannot simply learn how exercise leadership more effectively, particularly in today's increasingly complex and interdependent world, through traditional methods alone. Rather, the challenges of leadership must be experienced in real-time and reflected upon in a classroom laboratory conducive to taking risks and experimenting with new behaviors outside of an individual's current repertoire.

Pioneered by Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky and others at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, CIP requires one to view a group as something more than a collection

of individuals. Instead, the class is explored as a social system of its own, one whose dynamics and interactions tend to "mimic patterns" in the larger social environment.<sup>1</sup> Operating under those assumptions, then, it stands to reason that individuals attending a Kansas Leadership Center program or other leadership classes in Kansas will, in many ways, reflect both the state's promise and its larger, persistent problems.

As The KLC has observed through intense listening, Kansas' default civic culture – marked by "usual" voices dominating the discourse, "unusual voices" not participating and a pervasive "us" versus "them" mentality – is not equipped to address the deep, daunting, adaptive challenges facing the state and its communities.<sup>2</sup> To make progress on creating truly healthy communities here, Kansas needs individuals willing and able to exercise a "more provocative, engaging and purposeful" civic leadership.<sup>3</sup> This is the kind of leadership that depends less on the possession of formal authority and more on skill and personal credibility. It is one in which individuals demonstrate the flexibility and inner fortitude to strategically weather the storms of conflict, human emotion and loss in purposefully pursuing adaptive solutions to deeply rooted community challenges.

Through the rigorous application of CIP methodology, a facilitator helps orchestrate confrontations that bring the group's expectations, assumptions, interactions and behaviors into contrast with their aspirations or ideals. Groups are not only forced to confront the ways in which their own behavior reflects or contributes to the "mess" as it exists in Kansas (or its communities, organizations, etc.), but also explore the adoption of behaviors that represent a new way forward. This way of being, as expressed through The KLC's principles and competencies of civic leadership, seeks to increase an individual's capacity to successfully intervene and mobilize others in realizing adaptive changes in Kansas.

However, guiding a group of participants through such a difficult learning process is no easy task. Faculty members who have taught the method have relayed a number of challenges that have tested their mettle while working in the front of the room. Many of these challenges have been outlined in Sidebar 1.

The most central challenge is that participants are essentially being asked to leave behind some of what they know and hold dear. Many of the individuals who pass through KLC's programs tend to represent the very best of

### Sidebar 1

#### **COMMON CHALLENGES OF FACILITATING CIP**

- Keeping the focus on the "here and now."
- Staying in a diagnostic mentality and modeling it for participants.
- Violating participants' expectations that they can rely on authority for the answers.
- Frustrating participants' thirst for technical solutions, tools and tactics.
- Fighting against one's own teaching defaults, such as disseminating content.
- Making hidden issues, assumptions and interpretations transparent and testable.
- Directing attention to conflictual, systemic interpretations.
- Being able to read the situation and design interventions in the moment.
- Holding steady when participants express discomfort or hostility.
- Resisting the urge to pander or provide closure.
- Focusing on systemic conflicts rather than the individual and benign.
- Making conscious choices about which cases to pursue and which to let pass.
- Knowing when to be persistent and when to let go of a case.
- When, whether and how to accept "casualties" among participants.

*Compiled from KLC faculty interviews, Johnstone and Fern paper.*

## Sidebar 2

**DIAGNOSIS IN CIP**

- Continually move between the "dance floor" and "balcony," collecting new data and interpreting it.
- Observe patterns at four different levels of attention: (1) individual; (2) relationship; (3) group or system; and (4) context.
- Formulate multiple interpretations of unfolding events to create choice points for testing interpretations.
- Focus the work on those interpretations that are adaptive, conflictual and systemic in nature, rather than the technical, individual and benign.

what Kansas has to offer and are used to success. Having one's behaviors exposed and challenged – not to mention being prodded to aspire to a different way of being and risk periods of failure – tends to make individuals feel confused, uncomfortable or even angry.

As a result, teaching through CIP represents an adaptive challenge, a problem that resists

an easy solution and requires new learning to address. As such, the method requires the facilitator to skillfully exercise leadership from the front of the room. Doing so compels an instructor to use – and to a large degree, model – the very competencies of civic leadership that she or he is trying to teach. It requires teachers to be more purposeful, provocative and intentional in their interventions as they guide participants through a process for which there are no easily arrived at answers. It also means that a facilitator must be willing to give a significant portion of her control and authority to allow participants to effectively work the issues in the room.

This very act, perhaps the fundamental intervention in CIP teaching, tends to profoundly disturb participants, who are so oriented to expecting protection, direction and order from the authority figures standing before them. It also represents a significant stretch for many facilitators, particularly those who are used to assuming more traditional teaching roles. It is generally not the role of the facilitator to provide answers or closure, but to stimulate deeper thinking and facilitate a holding environment where the group's members can work together in learning a new approach to civic leadership.

# PART 3

## The Mindset of 'Diagnosis'

Because of the challenges involved, CIP requires one to work in a heightened state of awareness, one in which an individual can observe, question and interpret what is going on in the room in the midst of intervening. A facilitator must also know her or his own strengths and weaknesses and be able to stomach the considerable conflict and the ambiguity that comes with teaching when one does not know the answers. The facilitator must intervene in ways to push the group forward while giving the work back to participants and energizing them to make progress. In short, it requires the very competencies of civic leadership that The KLC uses CIP to teach.

In CIP, everything that happens with the group potentially becomes *grist for the learning mill*,<sup>4</sup> or the source of material for learning about civic leadership. Being able observe those opportunities, recognize their implications and make conscious choices about which ones to direct attention to, lies at the heart of the work in this method. *Diagnosing the situation* through observation and interpretation in the midst of the action is critically important for CIP. A facilitator must be able to observe and recognize patterns of behavior in the group, as well as be cognizant of her own feelings and impulses and how they affect her behavior and the group's progress.

To make sense of the events unfolding in the classroom, it is vitally important for the facilitator to continually move from the "dance floor" to the "balcony" during the session, in an attempt to take a more detached view of what is happening with the group. From that metaphorical vantage point, facilitators should be able to interpret data and recognize patterns of behavior in the room that could be a civic leadership "case" for the class to study.

In making a diagnosis, there are four "levels of attention" that provide data for the facilitator and create avenues for the raising of a Case-in-Point.<sup>5</sup> The first level, *individual behavior*, focuses on patterns related to a single participant, such as whether a person's comments hold the attention of the group. Another level involves *relationship* patterns that occur during exchanges involving two or more participants. This may take the form of certain participants agreeing or disagreeing with an individual nearly every time he or she speaks.<sup>6</sup>

There are also patterns that emerge in the *group and system* as a whole, such as how the group responds to the absence of authority. The fourth level, context, explores issues related to the composition of the group or the setting or circumstances under which it has been operating.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the facilitator

## Sidebar 3

**EXAMPLES OF FREQUENTLY OBSERVED PATTERNS**

**Reliance on authority.** The group (or members of the group) demonstrates a dependency on authority to provide the answers or reacts negatively to a lack of protection, direction and order.

**Taking the conversation out of the room.**

The group or certain members resist using themselves as the source of data.

**The silent half, the vocal few.**

Most participants remain silent while a handful of participants dominate the conversation.

**The substitute authority.** A participant steps in to restore protection, direction and order by calling on others in the cohort or appointing a facilitator.

**The rescuer.** When a participant takes on the role of explaining away the disequilibrium of others or defending their actions.

**Lack of trust and security.** A sentiment that the group members do not know one another well enough to explore how they function as a system.

**The time boundary.** The response of participants to the time boundary of a session, such as inserting comments near boundaries because they are less likely to be challenged.

**Taking it to the parking lot (Kansas nice).** When concerns or conflicts do not arise during the session but are discussed afterwards, often by members of the same faction.

*Compiled from faculty interviews.*

may be curious about what it means that a group largely made up of nonprofit executive directors seems skeptical of the idea of "leadership without authority."

Despite the intense pressure that comes with diagnosing situations in the moment, it is extremely important for facilitators to work at holding and testing multiple interpretations of the patterns they see emerging. Being able to comprehend the multiple possible meanings of an event at hand creates choice points for the facilitator to test the data coming from the room. It may also allow the pursuit of alternate tacks in a more rapid fashion. In observing patterns, it is important to be mindful of systemic and conflictual interpretations, rather than the individual and benign (see Figure 2, p. 20, KLC Field Guide).

Moving beyond issues centered on a particular participant can be especially difficult for facilitators, particularly because exploring them can be intriguing, as Michael Johnstone and Maxime Fern note in their paper on Case-in-Point.<sup>8</sup> "It is, therefore, useful to consider that individual and interpersonal issues emerge in groups because they represent something in the group about one of four things: their common purpose (or lack thereof); the pace and focus of the work; the assumptions and values held individually or collectively; and the needs and fears that people hold."<sup>9</sup> Such issues might take the form of alliances, scapegoating, competition for attention and other behaviors.

There are certain patterns which tend to be observed quite often in KLC programs, some of which are named in Sidebar 3. In attempting to make sense of these patterns, as well as

others that might be occurring, it may be helpful for a facilitator to consider how they mirror problems in the larger civic culture that the group represents. It should also be noted that the list is far from comprehensive and should be seen as an aid to help sharpen one's diagnostic skills in looking for patterns rather than a substitute for them.

Furthermore, it can be tough to even identify patterns within a group if one does not know what to look for. Sidebar 4, adapted from existing literature on CIP, provides several questions that can help guide a facilitator's observation and interpretation of how the group is functioning as a system.

#### Sidebar 4

### **QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DIAGNOSIS**

**(Adapted from Page 10 of the Johnstone and Fern paper)**

#### **Who commands attention? Who doesn't?**

Who speaks (or does not speak) when, about what, to whom, how often and with what effect?

#### **How well is the group functioning as a social system?**

How are they harnessing the whole group versus advocating independent positions?

#### **Are they moving toward integration, heterogeneity or homogeneity?**

What patterns do the group's interactions take on?

#### **How well are participants' primary social needs being met?**

How robust are the group's interactions? What are the tendencies involving inclusion, control, acknowledgment or recognition of others?

#### **What roles are individuals fulfilling for the group?**

What responses do participants have to raising the heat in the room?

#### **How do participants respond to act of leadership? Expressions of feeling? Differing viewpoints?**

#### **What indicators are there of work avoidance?**

#### **How is authority used? What is the response?**

How do participants interact with the facilitator? How dependent or reactive are they?

#### **What is unstated within the group? What are the untested assumptions?**

#### **To what extent do individuals or the group fight or flee?**

#### **At what levels do participants intervene? Self, relationship, group context, organization or global?**

#### **How does the facilitator help or hinder the discussion?**

# PART 4

## Creating a Holding Environment for Change

While reaching a heightened level of systemic awareness represents a key aspect in successfully facilitating CIP, it is certainly not the only ingredient. To build a bridge between herself and the participants and to hold steady in the midst of fire, a facilitator must also be able to access a strong presence. This quality can be easy to know when you see it, but difficult to explain. It involves fully deploying one's self in a poised, purposeful way which can help hold a group – as well as the facilitator – through difficult, contentious change.

In *Leadership Can Be Taught*, Sharon Daloz Parks describes presence as imagining "one's self as a resonant and responsive node in a dynamic network or field of energy and an agent of emergent possibility and progress."<sup>10</sup> In CIP, where the facilitator does not possess the answers, a strong, "well differentiated presence,"<sup>11</sup> as Johnstone and Fern describe it, inspires trust in the process from participants in the face of danger and uncertainty. It also creates the space for a facilitator to avoid being swamped by their emotions as well as her own.

In being present, it is important for a facilitator to be able to manage self. This, of course, requires an understanding where one's strengths lie, as well as one's vulnerabilities and triggers. Facilitating CIP carries considerable risks for any facilitator. So many choices that must be made during facilitation are value-laden. For many, provoking discomfort and hostility from participants or appearing incompetent in front of a large group while in an authority role feels terribly risky. In addition, because of the "in the moment" nature of CIP, which defies the use of a structured "game plan," some faculty members fear not knowing what the next intervention should be.

Dealing with these uncertainties requires a facilitator to be mindful about maintaining a separation between self and her role. When participants express frustration, anger or hostility at an instructor during CIP, they are responding to the role that the facilitator is playing, not who he or she is. By defying people's expectations of authority and attempting to lead them through an adaptive process, a facilitator's role involves creating and managing distress. In some cases, the heat becomes too high for some participants and the facilitator can become the focal point



of their anxieties. In these situations, it is important to be able to hold steady and not take such attacks personally because they represent a symptom of systemic distress.

Facilitators must also be able to increase their tolerance not only for the conflict that CIP can wreak, but also the uncertainty and ambiguity that comes with it. One way of dealing with not knowing the answers is to understand that all the data a facilitator needs is already in the room, waiting to be unearthed and interpreted. It means trusting the underlying idea on which CIP is based: that the group will, to a large degree, be reflective of the larger system it represents.

However, this does not mean that facilitators will not make mistakes or misinterpret data; in fact, it is likely that a facilitator must consciously choose between being effective or "perfect" at this sort of teaching. Working outside of one's comfort zone requires making mistakes and being open to new learning. If one accepts the premise that every participant group represents an adaptive challenge, then being able to learn from unsuccessful interventions is an important aspect of this work. The interventions that a facilitator undertakes in

CIP represent a series of experiments based on observations and interpretations of the available data. When an intervention does not go as planned, increasing one's tolerance for uncertainty means accepting the data that comes from mistakes and using it to inform subsequent interventions.

#### Sidebar 5

#### **MANAGING SELF IN CIP**

- Be fully present by deploying one's self in a poised, purposeful manner.
- Distinguish self from role in heated moments.
- Focus on the data in the room rather than one's "game plan."
- Treat mistakes as data for subsequent interventions.
- Use's one self as a barometer in regulating the heat.

# PART 5

## Moving the Group Toward Progress

As in the exercise of civic leadership, the facilitation of CIP requires instructors to make conscious choices about whether, when and how to intervene, as well as how to do so most skillfully. To accomplish this, facilitators should have an understanding of the options at their disposal and the level of risk associated with each type intervention they may take.

In most cases, a facilitator will intervene during a session in one of four ways: (1) by making an observation; (2) by asking a question; (3) by making an interpretation; or (4) by taking a provocative action. These are the same "short and straightforward" interventions which "constitute the tactics of leadership" and are, in practice, often paired together.<sup>12</sup>

In making an observation, a facilitator simply makes a statement that directs attention to behaviors, dynamics or existing conditions in the room ("I observed that many people were looking around the room, checking their cell phones or talking to someone else while James was speaking."). This intervention, typically less risky because it merely represents a "snapshot" of the group's interactions,

essentially calls a timeout and shifts participants to the balcony, where they can explore the meaning of what has been observed.<sup>13</sup>

Observations can be used to create a space that can be filled by the group or, in many cases, they can lead to questions ("What does it say about this group that James was not able to hold everyone's attention?"). Questions can be used to gather data and serve as a way of "giving the work back" to the group to explore the deeper meanings of an interaction or event. Because of this, questions asked with a curious mindset hold a particularly crucial place in the facilitation of CIP, and may often serve as the most frequent activity by a facilitator during a session. When used skillfully, provocative questions can direct attention to systemic or conflictual dynamics that participants might not be able to see at first glance.

Interpretations, which attempt to explain why certain patterns are occurring, tend to be "inherently provocative" and "raise the heat"<sup>14</sup> ("One interpretation might be that older, experienced participants in the group doubt the credibility of younger members, like James."). Conflictual interpretations of events

can often serve to make hidden issues more transparent and testable, but they can also prompt strong adverse reactions because people "by and large do not like to have their actions interpreted (unless they like your assessment)."<sup>15</sup> One type of interpretation that can be particularly effective is when the facilitator "names the factions" within the room. This creates opportunities for participants to discuss the accuracy of the facilitator's interpretation and allows them to offer competing interpretations.<sup>16</sup>

Within the context of CIP, it usually useful to express interpretations as hypotheses<sup>17</sup> by indicating that a particular interpretation is only one of many that could be made ("One interpretation is ..."; "I am curious about whether this means ..."). Doing so is likely to lower the stakes for someone to challenge a facilitator's interpretation and "create more space for others to weigh in."<sup>18</sup> Facilitators should encourage participants to model the same approach, encouraging them to "rent" rather than "own" interpretations as a productive way of helping the group wrestle with uncomfortable explanations for events and to more thoroughly vet hidden issues.

Actions tend to represent the most risky intervention that facilitators can make in CIP teaching. It can mean "hitting the pause button" on the action to ask questions and explore a potential case. Or they may take the form of requests that are designed to enrich a discussion by jostling participants out of their comfort zone. This might involve asking participants to divide themselves based on whether they are liberal and conservative, for example.

Requests such as these can be useful for raising the heat on participants but can also run the risk of being seen as an artificial. Facilitators may also intervene by interrupting participants, cutting them off at a time boundary or even choosing not to respond to their questions or comments. While actions should remain an option within the facilitator's repertoire, they should be done in especially conscious and purposeful ways. The more that a CIP session centers on the actions of the facilitator, the fewer opportunities there are for participants to work on the issues in the room themselves.

Because of the need for participants to address the dynamics at hand, it can often be useful to deploy silence as an intervention. The act of being fully present with the group, yet saying nothing, may allow the gravity of a question or interpretation to sink in. It may serve the purpose of giving the work back to participants, by providing them a space to fill. It can also raise the heat by disturbing people's expectations and increasing the pressure on them to fill the void themselves.

In practice, a facilitator is likely to use all the interventions detailed above in different combinations throughout a session. Determining which interventions represent the proper course is an experimental process driven by one's diagnosis of what the group needs in the moment to make progress.

Throughout it all, a facilitator must be mindful of regulating the heat of a given session to put the group into a zone of productive work, that place where there is enough heat to keep the group engaged and learning but not enough that they reach their limit of tolerance for an extended period and shut down. In attempting to manage the distress of the given group, it is often helpful to use one's self as a barometer of what is happening inside the room. A facilitator, as a part of the system with participants, is likely to be able to make testable interpretations about the temperature in the system based on his own gut feelings, as well as a diagnosis of the data in the room.

#### Sidebar 6

### **INTERVENING SKILLFULLY IN CIP**

- Make conscious choices about intervening.
- Questions asked with genuine curiosity give the work back to the group in an obvious way.
- Express and treat interpretations as hypotheses.
- Naming the factions can be useful.
- Use silence as an intervention.
- Use one's self as a barometer in regulating the heat.

#### Sidebar 7

### **ENERGIZING OTHERS IN CIP**

- Transfer energy with an authentic curiosity.
- Protect those who raise uncomfortable issues.
- Orchestrate dialogue between factions.
- Make ground rules for confidentiality and respect clear.
- Encourage participants to make internal interpretations and assumptions transparent for the group.
- Ask participants to remain curious in the face of anger and confusion.

# PART 6

## Building Trust, Transferring Energy

There really is no one particular style or approach that facilitators must embody in endeavoring to lead participants through a session in CIP. Some instructors may tend to be on the provocative side, relishing the thrill of challenging interpretations and assumptions, while others seem more contemplative or disquieting, prompting discomfort with profound questions and silence. The most effective facilitators probably maintain some degree of balance between extremes, doing what the moment calls for, rather than adopting a manner that makes them abrasive or predictable and, thus, easier to sideline or ignore.

Yet how a facilitator approaches this work is crucially important to creating the space for others to make progress and inspiring them to do so. After all, while this section has devoted extensive attention to how a facilitator might effectively use this method, the work of CIP ultimately rests with the participants, not the person standing at the front of the room.

One way that a facilitator brings to energy to the process is by entering the room with an authentically curious mind.<sup>19</sup> In the words of Ron Alexander, KLC core faculty member, "an absolute prerequisite for anybody is a real, honest desire to absolutely be curious." That means being curious not just about what is

happening, but also about what is happening inside the facilitator, with the group and with interactions between the two.

Curiosity and the expression of it through observations, questions and interpretations represent an important way to build and transfer energy to participants. Curiosity is a way to infuse the work with purpose, and inspire others to be just as inquisitive about "what's going on here?" It is also one of the factors that makes facilitation of CIP an expression of artistry rather than a sequential process that can be easily replicated.

When it comes to exercising leadership, artistry implies a "willingness to work on the edge," to engage in an "interdependent relationship" with the group (the medium) and a "capacity for creative improvisation."<sup>20</sup> Regardless of whether facilitators can sculpt, paint or write, they can aspire to artistry by leading a group (and themselves) to a new way forward that bridges some of the gap between reality and aspiration.

However, the pursuit of artistry alone is not enough to lay the foundation for addressing the adaptive challenge of teaching about civic leadership through this method. Because of the unusual, provocative nature of CIP there must be some clearly understood ground

rules to build a trustworthy process that can help hold the group through the stresses of learning.

Confidentiality is a core ground rule and implies that whatever occurs in the room stays with the group and does not make its way outside of the holding environment. Maintaining confidentiality is particularly important in a state like Kansas where the distance between social circles is often quite small. Unless participants can be assured that both facilitators and the cohort will honor confidentiality, it will be difficult for participants to muster the willingness to be authentic. This is crucial, because for CIP to be effective, participants need to begin making their internal assumptions and interpretations about the group and civic leadership, even the uncomfortable ones, transparent and testable for the group.

When a participant raises an uncomfortable or difficult issue, it is not unusual for the group as a system to attempt to explain away the insight or ignore it. Thus, one key aspect of energizing others for the facilitator is protecting those voices that raise such issues for the group. A facilitator can do this by intervening in ways that force the group to confront an uncomfortable interpretation rather than hide it away again. Those who publicly deviate from the group's norms can play an incredibly beneficial role in fueling creativity by forcing the group to confront ideas or assumptions that the system may be working to keep hidden.

Another guideline is that any time the group is using a case study, it should be solely for the purposes of learning about civic leadership, and facilitators and participants should hold relentlessly to that purpose. CIP should never be done for sport or to make any individual look good or bad (including the facilitator). Participants should also be encouraged to listen to one another and be respectful but also value purposeful authenticity over politeness.

Facilitators should also be upfront with participants by warning them that CIP will be different and more heated than what they are used to. Participants should be encouraged not to take the conflict that emerges in the room personally, no matter how difficult that might be at times. Still, no amount of written or verbal explanation may fully prepare participants to experience CIP, and navigating a group's distress is an essential aspect of facilitating the method. In the face of such disturbance, KLC faculty have often requested that participants attempt to remain curious in the face of anger, frustration and confusion to make the most of their learning opportunities.

# PART 7

## Partnership in CIP

Another important aspect of CIP that has not been raised is that it should be collaborative work. In most cases, the intense and difficult nature of CIP means that front-of-the-room facilitators should never go it entirely alone. To do otherwise, would be to reinforce a "lone warrior" model of leadership inconsistent with CIP's capacity-building objectives.

For many sessions, partnership with faculty in the "back of the room" is critically important for enhancing the learning of participants, the effectiveness of front-and-center faculty and for preserving the integrity of the holding environment. By the very nature of being human beings, facilitators have blind spots that serve to impede their effectiveness, no matter how well they endeavor, to diagnose situations and achieve self management. Having a faculty partner to closely observe the action, identify missed opportunities or interesting learning moments and purposefully intervene when compelling or necessary is vitally important.

Back-row interventions tend to be most effective when they occur purposefully and with the intent of raising the heat or giving the work back to the learning group. These interventions can take the form of compelling observations about what is occurring in the group, conflictual interpretations that show a flip side of a participant's benign take or the naming of factions that seem to

be taking shape in the room. Offering these interventions as a question tends to be the most effective approach, since questions tend to be less likely to undercut the main facilitator and be less disruptive to flow of the group.

Partners can also be an invaluable resource after a session has ended by helping the front-of-the-room instructor debrief the session. Because so much of teaching CIP involves helping others reflect on their leadership actions, it only makes sense that a facilitator should also make time for reflecting on her actions. Having a partner who can remain on the balcony and provide feedback on how the facilitator played her role in the system and debrief her choice points can be a valuable way of further developing one's ability to think systemically in facilitating CIP.

### Sidebar 8

#### **PARTNERSHIP IN CIP**

- CIP is best facilitated collaboratively.
- Back-of-the-room faculty should closely observe the action and intervene skillfully.
- Questions are often the most effective back-row intervention.
- Partnership should involve post-session debriefs.

# PART 8

## Building a Balcony

Although this method provides enormous potential for increasing the capacity of individuals in Kansas to exercise civic leadership, it is very difficult to prepare for facilitating CIP through a written guide. While a discussion of the concepts that underlie CIP, the purpose of the method and orientation to thinking about facilitating it can be helpful on some level, it is a poor substitute for the actual work of facilitating. Yet, considering the demanding nature of the approach, it seems less than advisable to expect facilitators, particularly those new to the art, to attempt to do it without some guidance.

One important aspect to keep in mind is that preparing facilitators to engage more effectively in CIP will require more purposeful integration of the method into how we think about our daily interactions. CIP should not be seen only as a teaching method that one brings into the classroom. If we want participants to better understand themselves – and how they function

as socially embedded human beings – in order to exercise leadership more effectively, then systemic awareness also needs to be a constant aspiration for those who teach this method.

As KLC Director of Faculty Development David Chrislip has observed, individuals learning the CIP method often do not reach a heightened level of systemic awareness immediately. Rather, it often appears that participants and facilitators alike struggle through a series of developmental stages until they reach a point where they can be effective (at least some of the time) at diagnosing how a group is functioning as a system and intervening to influence it.

At first, individuals may have only an academic understanding of the method but have difficulty translating it into practice. Then, some of the pieces start to come together. An individual may be able to ascend to the balcony enough to notice obvious patterns of individual behavior



or interactions between a couple of members of the group. He or she may experiment with intervening or raising the heat but struggle with effectively influencing a group. As one's ability to climb to the balcony and descend back to the dance floor improves, an individual will likely be able to notice more of the subtleties of a group's interactions and more quickly connect them to ideas about exercising civic leadership. He or she will also become more skilled at recognizing the group's collective work, the individual needs and purposes of each group member and the interplay between them.

In the end, the work of becoming adept at facilitating CIP lies both inside and outside of the classroom. While a classroom might be the place where teachers most obviously practice CIP, the trust test of understanding comes from the extent to which they are able to integrate into their lives. That means training one's mind to be better at assessing

the systems in which one lives, works and serves. It means diagnosing how they are functioning, looking for opportunities to intervene skillfully in them and energizing others to influence the system. In short, we should endeavor to seek greater systemic awareness in as many aspects of our lives as possible, so that we may be more effective at our roles and advancing the purposes we care most about. After all, this is exactly the sort of behavior that instructors ask participants to aspire during each CIP session, so it seems appropriate that facilitators should ask no less of themselves.

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# **APPENDIX**

**Handout for Participants****WHAT TO EXPECT FROM CASE-IN-POINT  
AT THE KANSAS LEADERSHIP CENTER**

*In the spirit of creating an environment for you to learn deeply about your leadership behaviors and potential, the Kansas Leadership Center uses a teaching method designed to engage and challenge you, perhaps in ways more intense than other classroom environments you have experienced. This handout describes the method and may help orient you to your upcoming experience.*

**What is Case-in-Point?**

Case-in-Point is the primary teaching method at the KLC. It was pioneered at Harvard University and aims to help participants bolster their capacities for making progress and withstanding the stresses of leadership. It does so by having them experience leadership challenges in the "here and now," rather than simply discussing leadership concepts.

**Why does the KLC use it?**

Civic leadership is difficult, and there aren't many lower-risk environments where Kansans can experiment with becoming more effective at it. Football players prepare themselves for the intensity of games through hours of off-season training and practice. Case-in-Point provides a grueling "practice field" for the

exercise of civic leadership. Participants learn and practice competencies necessary for making progress while working within the intensity of a group setting.

**How does it work?**

In Case-in-Point, you, your cohort and the facilitator serve as a "case study" for discussing civic leadership in Kansas. The method is based on the idea that the learning group will reflect many of the same leadership issues that affect Kansans generally (Hence the name, Case-in-Point). The discussion will focus on such things as how the group works together, the various roles participants are playing and what assumptions are being made about leadership. Through the method, participants will become more skilled at seeing how groups function as "systems," an understanding important for addressing challenges within their own communities.

**What is the experience like?**

Case-in-Point can be quite challenging for participants at first. The facilitator will not be lecturing the group, providing the answers or even doing most of the talking. Because participants share the responsibility of leading

the discussion with the facilitator, they play an important role in helping direct the group's learning. It is also common for facilitators to ask provocative questions and challenge the interpretations being made by participants. This is done solely for the purposes of helping the group learn by fully exploring its ideas and approaches to leadership.

### **How do I make the most of learning through Case-in-Point?**

Most KLC participants ultimately find learning through Case-in-Point to be a rewarding, beneficial experience. However, many do not feel that way at first. It is common to feel confused, frustrated or even upset at times during a program taught using Case-in-Point. Feeling disoriented is a natural part of the learning process as we wrestle with incorporating new ideas into our lives. In those moments where you feel uncomfortable, the KLC encourages you to attempt to remain curious and open to new possibilities.

Here are some other suggestions that may help:

#### **Use both the "dance floor" and the "balcony."**

Getting the most of out of Case-in-Point means talking some of the time and listening some of the time, but never doing either one all the time. Both take part in the action and be a careful observer of what is going in the group.

#### **Make assumptions transparent and testable.**

Bringing to the surface what is normally hidden or taken for granted can be an important source of learning for the group.

#### **Press the "pause button" when appropriate.**

Anyone, participants and facilitator alike, has the authority to stop the action and ask, "What's going on here?"

#### **Be respectful and purposefully authentic.**

Show consideration for others but be willing to raise and discuss difficult issues to benefit the group's learning.

#### **Raise and explore multiple interpretations.**

Be willing to ponder explanations that you do not agree with and offer up "educated guesses" that may not be "right" or represent your own beliefs. It is OK to say: "One interpretation might be ..."

#### **Respect confidentiality.**

To allow all participants to be fully candid, it is important to not let the personal data being shared by others to leave the room.

#### **Be willing to "play" with it.**

Case-in-Point represents an opportunity to stretch yourself by trying out new approaches on the "practice field" rather than the "playing field." It is hard to learn anything from it until you are willing to try something new.

#### **Enjoy the ride.**

Despite having differing opinions and backgrounds, participants tend to be united by their aspiration to build healthier Kansas communities. The chance to be in the room and discuss how to make progress on important community issues represents a precious opportunity to both take advantage of and enjoy.

## **Quick Reference Guide for Facilitators**

# **KLC COMPETENCIES AND FACILITATING CASE-IN-POINT**

### **DIAGNOSE SITUATION**

- Continually move between the "dance floor" and "balcony," collecting new data and interpreting it.
- Observe patterns at four different levels of attention: (1) individual; (2) relationship; (3) group or system; and (4) context.
- Formulate multiple interpretations of unfolding events to create choice points for testing interpretations.
- Focus the work on those interpretations that are adaptive, conflictual and systemic in nature, rather than the technical, individual and benign.

### **INTERVENE SKILLFULLY**

- Make conscious choices about intervening.
- Questions asked with genuine curiosity give the work back to the group in an obvious way.
- Express and treat interpretations as hypotheses.
- Naming the factions can be useful.
- Use silence as an intervention.

### **MANAGE SELF**

- Be fully present by deploying one's self in a poised, purposeful manner.
- Distinguish self from role in heated moments.
- Focus on the data in the room rather than one's "game plan."
- Treat mistakes as data for subsequent interventions.
- Use's one self as a barometer in regulating the heat.

### **ENERGIZE OTHERS**

- Transfer energy with an authentic curiosity.
- Protect those who raise uncomfortable issues.
- Orchestrate dialogue between factions.
- Make ground rules for confidentiality and respect clear.
- Encourage participants to make internal interpretations and assumptions transparent for the group.
- Ask participants to remain curious in the face of anger and confusion.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Green

"How much of a difference does telling a story make?" It's a question that Chris Green has faced often over his years working as a writer and journalist documenting civic life in Kansas.

His earliest subjects were the neighbors living near his childhood home in rural Sedgwick County. Years later, he would find himself working inside the Statehouse covering the politics and decision-making in the Kansas Legislature.

Along the way, he's found the stories that matter the most are the ones that allow readers to truly see the world through someone else's eyes. Because of that, he considers the Kansas Leadership Center's case studies series the most important work he's ever done.

Green's professional writing career began at the age of 17, when he began filing stories on high school sports for the daily afternoon newspaper in Manhattan, Kansas, where he attended high school.

However, his love of storytelling developed long before that, having grown up immersed in the printed word. When he wasn't reading books, he was thumbing through the pages of the newspaper each morning. Well before he became a teenager, he was already editing and publishing his own neighborhood newspaper.

By the time he began attending at Baker University, journalism had become an important way for Green, admittedly an introvert, to connect with people and interpret their insights to the world in story form.

He rose to become the editor-in-chief of the college's weekly newspaper, *The Baker Orange*, helping establish a reputation for national excellence that has continued for more than a decade.



After graduating in May 2000 with a degree in mass communication, Green became a full-time reporter covering education for *The Hutchinson News*. Two years later, he ventured abroad to attend graduate school at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, where he lived and studied with people from around the world and traveled to nearly a dozen different countries.

He returned to storytelling a year later, digging up award-winning scoops as an investigative and government reporter at *The Hutchinson News*. By 2005, he'd become a Statehouse Correspondent for Harris News Service, which covered Kansas government and politics for newspapers mostly clustered in central and western Kansas.

It was under the dome that he saw firsthand the sheer difficulty of the issues facing state policymakers. He covered daunting issues as varied as poverty, rural depopulation and education funding, all of which defied easy solutions. In many cases he felt as though his reporting was doing little to help Kansans address these difficult problems.

Since the spring of 2009, Green has had the opportunity to research and write the series of case studies on civic leadership for the KLC, which are included in this volume. For him, they represent the most profound storytelling he has been able to do in his career.

These stories possess the capacity to be difference-making because they've been written not just to be read, but for Kansans to discuss and learn from. It is Green's hope that the view of the daunting challenges facing Kansas communities that emerge in these stories will serve to help more Kansans make lasting progress on what they care most about.







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