

ABSTRACT

*A Social Psychological Study of Leadership
in Community-Based Voluntary Organizations -
An Evaluation of the Community Development
Process in Trinidad and Tobago.*

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This study embodies an evaluation of the decline in the functioning of community-based voluntary organizations in Trinidad and Tobago. It focuses specifically on the leadership within these organizations and generally on the community development process, through which voluntary organizations work in partnership with government or external agencies to bring about community improvement.

The evaluation is based on the theoretical premise that there is a relationship between the performance of the leadership role and the functioning of an organization. Before empirically evaluating the relationship, the theoretical and historical underpinnings of the study are outlined:

- (i) The Theory and Practice of Community Development;
- (ii) The Theoretical Review of Leadership.

In the review of leadership a dichotomy is made between voluntary leadership and professional leadership, the intention being to analyse community-based voluntary leadership incisively as a special type of voluntary leadership. The dichotomy also provides the foundation for the interconnection between the theoretical underpinnings and the empirical findings.

A variety of data collection methods were employed in a complementary manner. A sample survey of members of village councils was used to test two research hypotheses relating to leader selection which were generated from theoretical sources. Unstructured methods were widely used to capture the reciprocity of the interaction between leaders and followers.

The powerlessness of the leadership position and widespread dependency inherent in the followership were found to be crucial variables responsible for the decline in the functioning of voluntary organizations.

The major results of the study are:

- (i) A profile of the ideal leader of a village council as a typification of the leader of a community-based voluntary organization.
- (ii) The establishment of a dichotomy between professional leadership and voluntary leadership, central to which is the theory of cognitive dissonance.
- (iii) Recommendations for improvement in the community development process.