Original Research

Our Gains, Pains and Hopes: Community Partners' Perspectives of Service-Learning in an Undergraduate Business Education

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Abstract

In assessing the impact of service-learning, most studies focus on its effects on students' learning than community partners and the communities served; leaving largely unanswered, the question of whether service-learning in business education still contributes value to community organizations and the wider society. This study investigates the impact of service-learning on communities through the perspectives of community partners from nonprofit and for-profit organizations in Canadian urban communities. Using semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis, the authors collected and analyzed data from 30 participants to confirm their perspectives of service-learning in an undergraduate business education. The study found that service-learning offered practical benefits to communities and presented challenges that impacted partners' experiences of service-learning. The penultimate sections of the paper provide recommendations for the improvement of the pedagogical practices of service-learning and advancement of community organizations. Key recommendations to maximize benefits for community partners include more faculty-community partners' collaboration and creating networking opportunities for community partners.

Keywords

service-learning, community partners, undergraduate business education, nonprofit and for-profit organizations

Introduction

Service-learning is noted as high-impact experiential learning that provides students meaningful connections with course content, hands-on experience, individual reflection, and community service (Blewitt et al., 2018; Stanton & Giles, 2017; Wang & Calvano, 2018) such that real service, not superficial or tangential service is provided toward community development (Stanton et al., 1996). Its pedagogical practices provide students opportunities to practically apply academic knowledge in real-world settings to enhance the learning experience of students and also meet the social and economic needs of the society (Celio et al., 2011; Kropp et al., 2015). Given the mutual benefits of service-learning to students and communities, it is interesting to note that several studies continue to elucidate the effects of service-learning to students (see Blewitt et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2018) in comparison to its impact on community partners and communities. Although it is assumed that community partners and communities both benefit from engaging in service-learning (Karasik, 2020; Vizenor et al., 2017), the experiences and perspectives of community partners of

service-learning have received less attention (Bennett et al., 2016; Stanton & Giles, 2017).

This study explores community partners' perspectives of service-learning to provide a dialectical view to understand the entire effects of service-learning (Tryon & Stoecker, 2008). The rationale is to assess if service-learning pedagogical practices in higher education still meet the intended outcome of contributing value to community organizations and the wider society. Adding the perspectives, experiences and needs of community partners in the discourse of service-learning is useful to provide further knowledge to enhance the pedagogical practices of service-learning and consequently contribute to the development of the society.

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In this article, we confirm and extend the few extant research that investigates community partners' perspectives of service-learning (see Blouin & Perry, 2009; Cronley et al., 2015; Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Karasik, 2020; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008) by presenting the experiences of community partners from both for-profit and nonprofit organizations that engaged in service-learning courses offered to undergraduates in a Canadian business school. We focus on business management programs given the increasing popularity of service-learning in business schools (Andrews, 2007) as a tool to increase students' understanding of the external environment (Steiner & Watson, 2006). Also, while research on service-learning and community partners' perspectives mainly focusses on higher education institutes in the United States (Stanton & Giles, 2017; Taylor, 2017), our study presents a Canadian context that is relatively new to service-learning in comparison to the U.S (Kahlke & Taylor, 2018; Raddon & Harrison, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015).

In the U.S, service-learning has been an engaged learning practice since the mid-1960s; widely supported by various levels of government, receives foundation and institutional funding, and has more dedicated conferences and academic journals that forms a national approach to the pedagogical practices of service-learning. Within the Canadian context, the nature of service-learning offered in institutes of higher education are differentiated, largely due to issues on funding and the institutional focus of post-secondary institutions (Kahlke & Taylor, 2018). These factors may influence the range of possible learning activities for students and communities; and the sustainability of service-learning programs in Canadian institutes of higher education. Thus, this study analyzes a Canadian context to provide both empirical contributions to the literature on service-learning and practical evidence of the impact of service-learning on urban communities in Canada. The current study incorporates the perspectives of community partners from for-profit organizations in urban communities that are seldom analyzed in related literature (see Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017). Cyr and Kemp (2018) expressed the dearth of research on the perspectives of for-profit organizations. This study addresses this concern by exploring the experiences of community partners from both for-profit and nonprofit organizations in Canadian urban communities. The study, particularly, presents the conceptualization of service-learning as a pedagogical practice that provides mutual beneficial outcomes to both students and local communities. Given the plethora of studies that explores beneficial outcomes to students (see Flannery & Pragman, 2010; Kenworthy-U'Ren, 1999; Volchok, 2017), this study provides an analysis on the impact of service-learning on community organizations indicating the benefits, challenges and prospects of service-learning in business education. The penultimate sections of this paper present guidelines for the pedagogical practices of service-learning to maximize benefits for community partners. Key recommendations include more faculty-community partners' collaboration on service-learning and creating networking opportunities for community partners to advance their organizations and the community at large.

Literature Review

Service-Learning

Students' disengagement from the social realities of life, and the need for higher education to contribute to resolving societal issues of poverty and widespread urban ills, led to the introduction of service-learning in U.S. universities and colleges in the mid-1960s. The intent was to promote students' active engagement in social issues through volunteerism with less emphasis on their cognitive development on subject matter disciplines (Hollander et al., 2017; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Taylor, 2017). However, with the retrenchment of higher education in the 1980s, a different model of service-learning that emphasized on its pedagogical value to students emerged (Stanton & Giles, 2017). Service-learning was, thus, conceptualized from an anti-poverty program to a pedagogical method that integrates traditional discipline-based credit bearing course with an element of service to the community (Pollack, 2015). As Lounsbury and Pollack (2001) noted, service-learning was then described as:

> ". . .a credit-bearing academic course with a written syllabus containing foundational readings and texts, but that also includes a related community service component. In this way, the overarching themes and theoretical constructs of the academic course becomes the guiding frameworks enabling community learning to be harvested and serve as an academic learning enhancer" (p. 332).

Emphasis on its pedagogical practices led to a plethora of scholarly research on the impact of service-learning on students and universities, cutting across several disciplines including arts, psychology, human services, philosophy, engineering, and health-related disciplines (Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Markus et al., 1993; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Business education was no exception, as community-engaged scholars in business and management disciplines joined to advocate for service-learning in business schools (Steiner & Watson, 2006; Zlotkowski, 1996). The rationale was to use service-learning to broaden students' perspectives, increase their understanding of the external environment, and address the insufficient analysis of societal dimensions in business decision-making. Research on service-learning in management education thus led to further studies on the impact of service-learning on the personal (Brower, 2011), academic (Aldridge et al., 2015; Kenworthy-U'Ren, 1999), cognitive (Salimbene et al., 2005), professional (Flannery & Pragman, 2010), social and cultural development of students (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Several studies have also indicated its impact on students' active citizenship, volunteerism, and civic engagement (Flannery & Pragman,

2008, 2010; Poon et al., 2011); as well as its contribution to students' readiness for the work environment (Jackson, 2013) with the provision of job opportunities (Driscoll et al., 1996; Volchok, 2017).

To date, studies on the impacts of service-learning have provided insights on its significance to students and have shed light on approaches toward the continuous improvement of service-learning to achieve its educational learning outcomes. However, the plethora of research with an overemphasis on students' learning outcomes continue to provide a one-sided view of the impact of service-learning, thus, presenting the notion that service-learning offers more benefits to students than communities (Beran & Lubin, 2012). Given the conceptualization of service-learning as a pedagogical practice that provides mutual beneficial outcomes to students and communities, further analysis of the effects of service-learning on communities should be explored (see Spear & Chapman, 2020). As evidential findings indicate, studies on the effects of service-learning to communities are limited in comparison to research on student outcomes, and while it is assumed that service-learning offers positive benefits to community organizations (Karasik, 2020; Vizenor et al., 2017), community partners' perspective of service-learning has received less attention (Bennett et al., 2016; Gerstenblatt, 2014; Stanton & Giles, 2017).

Few studies that explore the perspectives of community members predominantly focus on communities in the U.S (Driscoll et al., 1996; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Karasik, 2020; Sandy & Holland, 2006). While some of these studies are outdated (Driscoll et al., 1996; Greene & Diehm, 1995), others are based on a single service-learning course (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Gibson et al., 2020). Some focus on other courses related to public health, sociology, liberal arts, and education (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Gerstenblatt, 2014) that often emphasize a more moral approach and practical training toward the amelioration of health, educational, and social problems. Few studies provide a general analysis without specifying the related service-learning course (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Gazley et al., 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008; Vernon & Foster, 2002); and even with the inclusion of business-related service-learning courses, there is no specific link of the business courses to stated outcomes (see Cronley et al., 2015; Karasik, 2020). The few exceptions of Cyr and Kemp (2018), Furlow (2010), Nikolova and Andersen (2017) and Vizenor et al. (2017) studies that explored the perspectives of community partners on business-related courses are limited in their selection of community partners and the number of service-learning courses analyzed. For instance, Nikolova and Andersen (2017) and Vizenor et al. (2017) based their analyses on few business courses and community partners from small community organizations predominantly based in rural communities, thus presenting a narrow coverage of community partners and business-related courses.

Nikolova and Andersen (2017) analyzed the perspectives of community partners from rural communities in Sydney that engaged with service learners (postgraduate students) on a management consulting course. While their study offered insights on the practical details of a project-based service-learning course and its actual benefits to community clients such as high-quality, independent advice, and useful deliverables to engage with external stakeholders; its narrowed focus on postgraduate students on a single project course, limits our understanding of the overall impact of service-learning offered in business schools. Vizenor et al. (2017) study, also using five project-based service courses, analyzed the perspectives of community partners from rural communities in the western U.S while Cyr and Kemp (2018) empirical analysis in a Canadian context focused on community partners from nonprofit organizations, with the exclusion of other types of organizations. While these studies (Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Furlow, 2010; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017), have provided some useful insights on the impacts of service-learning on community partners such as the provision of economic and social resources, their findings are based on a narrow focus of few business service-learning courses and limited selection of community partners. Beneficial outcomes of service-learning identified in these studies include resources saved (time and money); improvement in products, services and practices; new ideas and information generated; support with new skills; and new connections made (Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017). These studies also identified a few challenges in the service-learning process, including tracing challenges to students' limited knowledge of the industry, communication and scheduling challenges (Vizenor et al., 2017) and community partners' expectations (Cyr & Kemp, 2018).

Our review of the literature indicates the need for more research to explore the impact of service-learning in business education on communities. The state of business education, with a focus on delivering mainly technical skills, and the need to offer real-life experiential learning opportunities to develop the human skills of students and improve their understanding of the work environment (see Blewitt et al., 2018; Mckean, 2018), necessitates the need to explore the impact of service-learning as a form of experiential learning. Also, as employers are prioritizing work experiences over academic subject-knowledge (Mckean, 2018), and service-learning offers a form of work experience, it is pertinent to explore community partners' viewpoints on the impact of this experiential learning (Vizenor et al., 2017). Notably, scholars in business and management studies (Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017) have also called for further research to analyze the perspectives of community partners from different types of organizations and communities (urban and rural settings), engaged in several service-learning courses.

This study is designed in response to the need for further research that incorporates other types of community organizations in other contexts engaged in a number of courses. Thus, our study, along with other community-engaged research (see Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Karasik, 2020; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017), aims to contribute to the literature of service-learning in business education by (a) confirming the perspectives and expectations of community partners from nonprofit and for-profit organizations in urban communities and (b) based on community partners' perspectives, assessing the impact of service-learning in business education on the wider society.

Research Method

Institutional research ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection. We used qualitative research methods to understand the rationale and process of the subjective meanings of community partners engaged in service-learning. This is with the intent that a qualitative approach would produce rich empirical data on the shared experiences of community partners. In collaboration with administrators from the experiential learning unit of the university, we generated a list of community partners for the study. Participants were selected through a purposeful criterion sampling method based on three set criteria (a) participants were key decision-makers in their organizations, (b) participants' organizations were either nonprofit or for-profit firms that operated within an urban community in Western Canada, and (c) participants engaged in at least one service-learning course offered in the business school. We recruited research assistants to contact participants via direct emails and follow-up telephone calls. A total of 68 participants that operated within the community and engaged in service-learning courses in the 2018/2019 academic terms were invited to the study. We received 30 responses from community partners that engaged in 11 service-learning courses, with 14 community partners from for-profit organizations and 16 community partners from nonprofit firms. Of the 11 service-learning courses, 6 courses were offered to students in their fourth year of study, 3 courses to third-year students and 2 courses to second-year students. The size of each class ranged from 30 to 40 students (see Table 1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted within 3 to 4 months after community partners had completed a service-learning course to ensure participants' responses address the most recent service-learning experience. In addition, hand-written field notes were taken during interview sessions. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their information and invited to share their experiences in a friendly and conversational manner. Some of the guiding question in the interview sessions include: Do you think your engagement in service-learning opportunity was beneficial to you as an individual? Do you think your engagement in service-learning opportunity was beneficial to your organization? Are there any challenging issues in your engagement with service-learning opportunity? If any, can you share some specific examples? All interviews lasted between 30 and 80 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was performed to understand community partners' thoughts and experiences of service-learning in business education (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theoretical thematic analysis of the data enabled a more detailed analysis of the data to respond to the research objective of assessing community partners' perspectives of the impact of service-learning in business education. The analysis of data commenced during the first interview sessions from April to July 2019. This involved a sequential approach to identify concepts that emerged from conversations with community partners. Subsequent analysis to verify emerging concepts and identify further concepts continued from January to June 2020 while reading interview transcripts, analyzing documents and conducting further interviews. The process of concurrently analyzing and collecting data has been identified as a plausible approach to facilitate more in-depth data analysis until no new findings emerge (Bell et al., 2019; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles et al., 2020). All the data were entered into QSR-NVivo version 12 Pro, a computer software package that facilitates qualitative data analysis. NVivo is used for the systematic sorting and coding of data (i.e., assigning codes/labels of pieces of texts) from a variety of sources (Miles et al., 2020). Due to the large amount of textual data derived from interview transcripts, field notes and few documented reports from community partners, NVivo software assisted to organize, code, save and expedite data retrieval process of large amounts of qualitative data. Given the usage of the software for qualitative data analysis, NVivo is widely used in the social sciences and in the qualitative research on service-learning (see. Taylor, 2017). Following Braun & Clarke (2006) and Clarke & Braun (2017) and Miles et al. (2020) qualitative thematic analysis, further analysis of the data using NVivo took place in the following phases:

Reading and generating initial codes: We read all the interview transcripts and type-written field notes several times. Upon reflecting on the data, we conducted first cycle coding using attribute coding, a priori coding and subcoding (Miles et al., 2020). Attribute coding involved the notation of respondents' demographics, work setting, service-learning project, and the service-learning course(s) they participated in the business school: this enabled future management, content analysis and interpretation of the data. Next, we conducted a priori coding of data based on our review of related literature and research questions. A priori codes-deductive coding- enabled the development of a provisional "start list" of codes (Miles et al., 2020, p. 74). Using the nodes tool in NVivo, we coded phrases, sentences, and paragraphs from the data into symbolic meanings such as the value gained,

Organization and sector	Years of existence	Official position of interviewee	Community requested service	Service-learning course/levels
Nonprofit Organizations				
Nonprofit Organization 1 Agriculture Services	86 years	Executive Director	Expansion to more international markets	International Marketing (400 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 2 Construction/ Housing Services	11 years	Office Manager and Assistant to the Executive Director	Requested for supervisory skills for younger age new hires to enable the new hires manage subordinates of the same age-group	Learning and Development (300 Level)
		Director of Finance and Administration	Required help with some accounting entries using a computerized accounting software	Government and Not-for-Profit Accounting (300 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 3 Agriculture Services	7 years	Director of Education	Support in marketing the services of a conservation aquarium	Marketing Research (300 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 4 Educational Services	30 years	Executive Director	With dual responsibilities and overlapping roles between the executive director and the assistant director, requested for clear and simple descriptions of job roles and responsibilities.	Strategic Human Resource Management (200 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 5 Immigration Services	36 years	Chairman Board of Directors	Due to limited funds, requested a change plan to merge with a similar nonprofit organization in Alberta	Managing Change (400 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 6 Health Care and Social Assistance	6 years	Communications and Development Coordinator	Need support with succession plans and improvement with human resources policy to increase employee engagement and event attendance	Strategic Human Resource Management (200 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 7 Sports/ Recreation Services	99 years	Senior Director, Governance and Programs	A change management project to redesign the physical structure of the workplace to accommodate new managerial personnel, moving from a closed office to an open office plan	Managing Change (400 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 8 Arts/ Entertainment	35 years	Producer	Due to construction work in the center of the city, required a change plan to move the annual street arts performance to a different location, with a plan to inform all stakeholders	Organization Effectiveness and Change (200 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 9 Natural Health Care/Health Sector	31 years	Manager, Membership and Credential	Organizational change plan on how to find and include new organization partnerships as previous approach was considered not sufficient	Managing Change (400 Level)
		Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Registrar		
Nonprofit Organization 10 Arts/ Entertainment	6 years	Co-Founder and Director	Due to shortage of staff, needed support with financial entries using an accounting software package	Government and Not-for-Profit Accounting (300 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 11 Educational Services	16 years	Executive Director	New leadership structure to suit the expansion of operations from 3 to 7 educational centers	Organizational Effectiveness and Change (200 Level)
Nonprofit Organization 12 Educational Services	48 years	Manager, Organizational Development	Practical approaches to encourage workforce engagement and recognition	Learning and Development (300 Level)
		Educational Developer	Ideas on team building	
Nonprofit Organization 13 Recreation Services	17 years	Human Resources Coordinator	Succession planning to replace the older managerial personnel	Learning and Development (300 Level)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Organization and sector	Years of existence	Official position of interviewee	Community requested service	Service-learning course/levels
For-profit Organizations				
For-profit Organization 1 Health Care and Social Assistance	4 years	Vice President Operations	A market research on top five insurance companies in the country to identify best insurance plans for patients' medical use of cannabis	Business Consulting (400 Level)
For-profit Organization 2 Legal/Information Technology Services	4 years	CEO and Co-Founder	A market research on the products and pricing of competitors in the market, assessing the similarities and differences of the legal technology apps of competitors in comparison with what the community partner offers	International Marketing (400 Level)
For-profit Organization 3 Agriculture/Manufacturing	4 years	CEO and Founder	Currently working with consultants in Europe but need assistance to search for overseas market with the potential of high sales	Managing in an International Environment (400 Level)
For-profit Organization 4 Manufacturing	25 years	Vice President, Sales and Marketing	Refocusing marketing to a couple of different countries and need support with marketing research to make an informed decision on marketing to India or Brazil.	Managing in an International Environment (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 5 Financial Services	3 years	Founder and Financial Planner	How to market services offered and create a financial literacy program within SWCU	Business Consulting (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 6 Health Services	27 years	Owner and Physiotherapist	Requested a transition plan to new management team with tools to assess that the new managers are meeting key performance indicators; and a plan to assess organizational members are self-completing training requirements	Managing Change (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 7 Sports / Recreation Services	2 years	Director of Business Operations	New professional sports team in Alberta seeking for ways to market services in the region	Marketing Research (300 Level)
For-Profit Organization 8 Legal/Information Technology Services	21 years	President	In the past, the company was engaged in reselling software packages for law firms but plans to build their own software and sell it. Requested assistance to rebrand their services and review the current marketing strategy	Business Consulting (400 Level) Business to Business Marketing (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 9 Aviation / Air Transport Services	49 years	Director of Human Resources	Changes to support recruitment of new flight crew, and visibility of services through social media	Managing Change (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 10 Commercial Equipment Leasing and Financing Services.	17 years	Founder and CEO	Due to the effects of the economic recession, requested a change plan to keep employees motivated, engaged, continue operations and find new product lines and good opportunities to grow again.	Managing Change (400 Level) Business to Business Marketing (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 11 Real Estate	9 years	Owner & Director of Operations Office Manager	The need to organize company policies and procedures into an employee handbook Requested for an organizational -wide plan to transition into the use of a new property management software	Organizational Effectiveness and Change (200 Level) Business Consulting (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 12 Sales and Marketing Agency	9 years	Director of Marketing	To create more visibility of services and expand services from the cities in Alberta to other cities in Canada and the US.	Service Marketing (400 Level)
For-Profit Organization 13 Manufacturing and Building Construction Services.	2 years	Chief Executive Officer	Market research of product to international markets, particularly assessing market entry into India or Dubai	Managing in an International Environment (400 Level)

Note. Organizational partners that participated in the study were involved in a total of 11 service-learning courses offered in the 2018/ 2019 academic terms (Winter, Fall). Service-learning courses offered to 400 level students were capped at 30 students per class; 300 and 200 level courses were capped at 40 students.

challenges encountered and future expectations of service-learning. These codes (i.e., labels) were later expanded into several in vivo subcodes (such as innovative ideas, future reference, connections, group dynamics, and control) to provide details of the general broad categories and enabled a nuanced analysis of the data. Thereafter, initial reflective notes on the first cycle coding were written using analytical memos in NVivo. Analytical memoing enabled us to gain a descriptive summary of the data, articulate the meanings derived from the codes, retain reflective analysis and interpretation of the codes. This process of memo writing continued through the second cycle coding of the data and the development of themes.

Searching, developing, and reviewing themes: We conducted second cycle coding to identify themes that presented more meaningful units of the analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, this phase involves an examination of the coded and collated data extracts to identify potential themes of broader significance. In this second phase, we revised, regrouped and relabeled some codes that reflected identified themes. This resulted in three categories on the value gained (personal development, organizational improvement, and positive social impact); three categories on challenges encountered (the level of students' interactions, interests and engagement; faculty delivery method; and community partners' commitment) and two categories on future expectations (faculty-community partners collaboration, and community partners networking opportunity). Figure 1 shows a thematic array of different classification codes and the number of respondents. Exemplar quotes that reflected the sub-themes and main themes are presented in Table 2. The constructed themes helped provide explanations on the shared meanings and expressions of participants on service-learning in business education.

Research Context

Prior to presenting our findings, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the research context and highlight the rationale for service-learning in the case organization, herein referred to as the South-Western Canadian University (SWCU). SWCU was established in the 1970s as a teaching-focused university to cater to the learning and educational needs of both international and local students in the province of Alberta, Canada. The province of Alberta, where SWCU operates, is known as Canada's largest oil-producing province providing about 78% of the country's oil production in 2014 (Alberta Government, 2015b). Statistical data indicates a 4.4% increase in the economic growth of the province in 2014 making it the highest provincial growth rate, and the highest average hourly wage paid province in Canada from 2006 to 2014 (Alberta Government, 2015a, 2015b). However, in 2014, the province was heavily impacted by a drop in the price of crude oil leading to an economic recession in the region (Alberta Government, 2015b). There were massive losses in the energy sector with closures of businesses and

redundancy of workers (Austen, 2015). While the provincial government makes attempts to improve the impact of the recession, tagged the worst recession in the province, the spiraling effects of the economic downturn has created a need for businesses to seek additional resources and support (see Klingbeil, 2017; Krugel, 2018; Morgan, 2016).

The SWCU's service-learning program that offers practical education to students and support to local businesses in the region started with the establishment of a central administrative office, the Academic Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQAA) unit. Administrators in the AQAA initially provided academic resources, consultation and services on curriculum planning, development and evaluation to faculty members. They also assisted faculty members with work-integrated learning, offering more than 40 programs with practical/clinical placement, practicum, internship, cooperative education work placement and field experiences. Over the years, the AQAA team evolved to include community service-learning, offering both placement (field) and project (classroom) based learning opportunities. The transformation led to a rename of the AQAA office to the office of Experiential Learning and Career Development (ELCD) to reflect its actual purpose.

In support of the different experiential learning programs across the university, the ELCD expanded its services to offer support to faculty members and community partners. The main services introduced include a university-wide annual event on engaged scholarship, a regular experiential learning matchmaking event, and one-on-one consultation support to faculty members. The annual engaged scholarship event creates a forum for community partners, faculty members and experiential learning administrators to discuss ways to improve and sustain university partnership to advance local businesses and development of the province. The experiential learning matchmaking event connects faculty members with community partners through a speed-date style of networking to identify learning opportunities that will be mutually beneficial to students and community partners. Staff at the ELCD also offered one-on-one support on experiential learning practices to faculty members across the university. However, it is at the discretion of individual faculty members to attend the annual events or use the support services of the ELCD office. Thus, some faculty members operated autonomously in the design of their courses and engagement with community partners, while others used the support services of the ELCD. Through both approaches, the university continued in its attempt to contribute to the learning experiences of students and development of the local communities in Alberta province.

Findings

Our findings suggested that community partners, that engaged with the business school, presented their organizational and community-based projects to student groups with very minimal involvement in the training, mentoring or supervision of students. The final research reports and
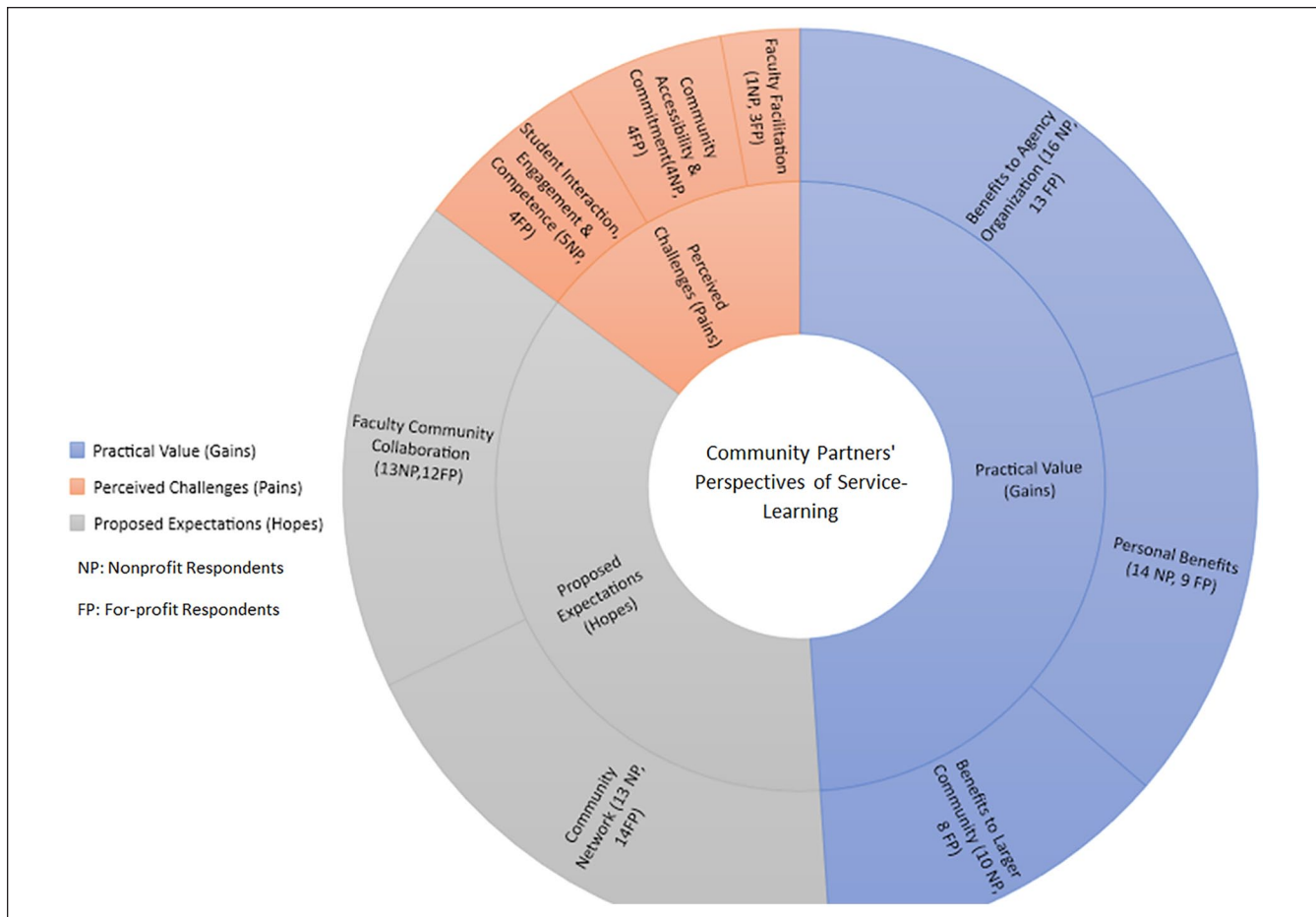
Figure 1. Sunburst graphic of the main themes, subthemes, and number of respondents.

services of students were mainly the result of the students' collective effort and teamworking skills. Based on participants' interactions with students and faculty members, and the subsequent deliverables of service-learning projects and placement services, agencies expressed their perspective of service-learning offered by the business school. We categorized their shared perceptions of service-learning into three broad themes: perspectives on practical value (gains), perceived challenges encountered (pains) and proposed expectations (hopes). In addition to presenting the main themes, we provide key exemplar excerpts from our interviews with community partners. Each excerpts provides a succinct description of community partners' perspective and insights that address our research objective (see Figure 1 on number of respondents and Table 2 for additional exemplar quotes from respondents).

Perspectives on Practical Value (Gains)

In articulating the benefits of service-learning, most participants recounted its benefits to agencies (personal benefits), their organizations, and the wider society.

Personal Benefits: Personal benefit to agencies is defined in this study as the personal gain(s) to the particular individual that engaged in the service-learning, rather than benefits toward matters directly connected to their organization, other organizational members or the general public. On personal benefits to agencies, most community partners indicated that the service-learning process improved their personal and professional development and brought intense feelings of joy and excitement. For instance, participants recounted the benefits of service-learning in developing their communication skills when interacting with students. As a senior director of governance and programs noted:

> . . .it was a good lesson for me in better ways to communicate with students, which is a carryover lesson for when we work with summer students and when we do more community service-learning type of work (Nonprofit Organization 7).

In addition to improving their communication skills, managers acknowledged that the service-learning enabled them to update and improve knowledge related to their profession. Interestingly, our findings revealed that community partners

Table 2. Exemplar Quotes as Supporting Evidence of Themes in the Findings.

Subthemes	Exemplar quotes
Factors that contribute to practical value gained.	
Personal benefit to agencies	
• Personal development on skills and knowledge	...it was a good learning experience around communicating to people coming from different approaches. So, it was a good lesson for me in better ways to communicate with students (Nonprofit Organization 7).
	Definitely. It has allowed me to gain insight into how others view business in general and to provide ideas/thoughts from a theoretical point of view (For-Profit Organization 11)
• Derived pleasure (joy and satisfaction)	it was really good to see how they approached things and the energy and presentation they came with was invigorating for us too when you're looking at the world of work being up to your eyeballs' (Nonprofit Organization 12)
	As an individual, it was really fun to work with them. They were fun to talk to and chat with... I'm not that old. I'm like thirty-one. But, to see what twenty-year old's are doing, that was fun. I enjoyed talking to them (For-Profit Organization 2)
• Mentorship	I didn't know going in what it would be, but basically it turned into I was helping mentor them (Nonprofit Organization 2).
	And then one of the girls was in the group that I worked with... she organizes the mentorship program so she afterward actually asked if I would be willing to mentor a couple of marketing students. So that is actually what I am doing right now. ... (For-Profit Organization 12)
• Networking opportunities	I got to meet some great people (Nonprofit Organization 10)
	I had about half of them [students] connected with me on LinkedIn (For-Profit Organization 12)
	the community service program is an excellent way to build connections with others from a variety of backgrounds (Nonprofit Organization 13)
Benefit to agency's organization	
• Added knowledge to improve services and products	...we learn something, and my board thought it was fantastic. They were really excited about it. ...it's had a pretty big ripple effect where I think it's bigger than any of us at the beginning were thinking, so it's been shared in a lot of different areas and more broadly than with just our own group, so it's been more beneficial (Nonprofit Organization 1)
	...they took all of our processes and policies that were everywhere in our server and put them into one. Then, interviewed certain members of the team and then build additional processes and put it into one workbook. So, we use that workbook and continue to add into it. It's been good for us. (For-Profit Organization 11)
• Market research	the ideas that get generated out of this university in terms of marketing and research and all that kind of stuff are absolutely hands down fantastic. ...they [students] did marketing surveys across three demographics, which we are using for our city proposals. So, they surveyed 300 participants around the capital region, and from that information we were able to gain that 85% of the population supports our project (Nonprofit Organization 3).
	The students were fantastic. I actually paid a consultant $10,000 2 years ago to help me with this company project and it was garbage. The students did a much better job. ... they gave me a proposal on how I can put a financial literacy program in collaboration with the university and their existing resources. It was feasible and realistic, and they did market research and they surveyed 200 students (For-Profit Organization 5).
• Saved financial resources	Yeah, for us and for organizations to receive such an offer for free, because nonprofits usually don't have the money or probably if there were a certain fee, we wouldn't be able to afford it probably (Nonprofit Organization 5)
	...we don't have reams and reams of profits that we can just, you know, start writing cheques to people, but you know I'm sure it's saved us money (For-profit Organization 9).
• Gained valuable work time	It saved our organization time and money (Nonprofit Organization 6)
	...researching different types of programs and showing different options and then coming up to a reason why they picked this one, that saves me a lot of time and that is a premium for me, not only because I am running the business but also because I am working in it, so that was a big time benefit, time saving, for sure (For-Profit Organization 6)
	Saved us time? Oh yeah. If I had to go research everything that we got from then then, I just don't have the time. It's like doing it off the side of the desk because I have my real job I gotta do, right? Hiring people, processing paperwork and all that stuff (For-Profit Organization 9)
Benefit to the society	
• Supported agency's community development	...we work with condominium owners and boards. We help manage where they live. The better our company does for them, the better their homes. ...
	Small changes that we do in our office affects them, in that the advice we are giving them is good. ...We do some volunteer stuff too; it allows us to give some money back (For-Profit organization 11)
• Students learning and development	making sure they {Students} go out and they're successful and growing so that was a really good intangible reconnect for a bigger purpose too (Nonprofit Organization 12)
	I mean I expected to get something out of it, and I did, but also it was a nice way to give young students a chance at something (For-Profit organization 2)

Table 2. (continued)

Subthemes	Exemplar quotes
Perceived challenges encountered (pains)	
Students: Interaction, engagement and competence	
• Reliance on self-assumptions	. . .student I gave that task to, he had no idea what it meant to reconcile a bank statement, but he didn't tell me that, so he did what he thought was reconciling, but it wasn't . . . then we had one student, he couldn't care less if he was there or not and did just enough to get by. And they knew that, they knew all they had to do was show up (Nonprofit Organization 10).
• Pursuing self-interests	The fellow who was in charge of the group was an entrepreneur, he went into a different direction. . .they needed a little bit of redirection, but the problem with that group in particular, is the group was not that involved, it was just this one gentleman who would filter information to the group. You could tell they looked pretty miserable. . . So, unfortunately, we just had one group that didn't perform as expected out of the three (Nonprofit Organization 3)
	it didn't feel like they paid enough attention to the specific context (Nonprofit Organization 7).
• Disengaged	Not much emailing and then the presentation was not that aligned to what we do and we spotted mistakes. But the leg of communication was the issue (For-Profit Organization 4).
	then the B to B group was similar in that there wasn't much engagement with the group (For-Profit Organization 10).
Faculty members' facilitation of service-learning	
• Different skilled-based support to students	So, it worked well in the first project, but I didn't really like the second one. Because there was only a couple of meetings and the project was less detailed than the first one. . .. So, it depends class by class. So, maybe if we can have the professor to describe some topics with real life experience (For-Profit Organization 5)
• Methods of students' assessment	If students end up spending a lot their time figuring out how to do presentation, that is less time than they spend thinking about the project. . .If there's more emphasis on how the consultation should work, the deliverables and less emphasis on the final report, then that shifts where the focus is for them' (Nonprofit Organization 12).
	When students could not attend the group meeting, they asked me to assign two hours of tasks for them . . . those tasks were not completed in most cases. Again, there was no accountability for the students' work. . ..(Nonprofit Organization 11)
	In my reporting to the instructor, there was no assessment required of student performance. All that he requested was "where the students there?" I think if I was asked for performance-based feedback, it may have made a difference' (Nonprofit Organization 10)
Community members' accessibility and commitment	
• Accessibility	. . .when I was halfway through, and I was in the place where I was meeting with both the groups independently, and I think it was around the time of the second-class participation, I was kind of feeling this was a lot. . .I just didn't think I was prepared, that I had understood how much work it was going to be (Nonprofit Organization 7)
	Yeah, so I believe that the students, you know they are young adults and should be able to manage their time, but in an environment where I have such limited time, it creates a level of difficulty for them (For-Profit Organization 6)
• Time commitment	It was challenging to find a time and space for all of us to consistently meet (Nonprofit Organization 11)
Proposed expectations (hopes)	
Students-related	
• Student engagement	I suggest encouraging students to get more engaged and ask more questions for directions and clarification. . . just encouraging students to reach out more. . . because it's better to have clarification earlier rather than just go in the wrong direction (Nonprofit Organization 6)
	. . .they could have done a walk through with one of us or with myself and kind of get a feel for how we work, and how the structure is and the types of kind of atmosphere that it is. It wouldn't have hurt, definitely wouldn't have hurt. . . I think going in any project, the more information you have on the backside will give you better success on the frontside of it. So as much information you can get on what we need is always going to be a good thing, so the end result is a success (Nonprofit Organization 2).
	There was not a whole ton of communication during their report building process. So, it was kind of that one meeting and then they went away and did their work. So, it would be nice to have more communication during the process (For-Profit Organization 7)
• Quality of deliverables	I expected it to be a little more in depth and it wasn't, it was a nice overview, it reminded us of some things, but it could've been a little meatier, if that makes sense (Nonprofit Organization 2)
	When I got those documents, there were lots of grammar errors, spelling errors, formatting errors. . .so that's definitely low hanging fruit in terms of if they're going to move into the business world (For-Profit Organization 10).

Table 2. (continued)

Subthemes	Exemplar quotes
Faculty-related: Collaboration with community partners	
• Stated student-community expectations	*I'd probably encourage an agreement between the students and the client. . .so the students provide in writing what they believe the process will be, similar to consultants' contract proposal, and then the client agrees and signs off and they're able to work. That should be a fairly quick and easy method of keeping everybody lined at the offset (Nonprofit Organization 3)*
	. . .talking about the individual elements and total estimated time commitment over the project might have made me realize more of the total time I was going to be putting in (Nonprofit Organization 7).
	Maybe if I'd known what their skills were, what courses they completed, something like that, that might have helped in my expectations (Nonprofit Organization 10).
• Review students-community involvement	*I suggest setting times for project milestones and delivery (Nonprofit organization 11) because we have a good idea of what we are doing well, but not what we are doing bad. One thing that might be value to both people is that in the middle of the study is to come back together with us and students to do a review (For-Profit Organization 3).*
	So, if they [students] are able to provide that and say the more important thing to me is the one of two things we can improve on, I would be open to that. . . I am super open to any comments that the students or professors have. . . (For-Profit Organization 11).
	I think that really would hit home if we could get a draft of what they were presenting and then maybe give some comments to them to help (For-Profit Organization 13).
• Review completed service-learning	*a phone call or email two months later saying after these two months, how have you found implementing the information has gone? Right? Because it's easier to comment on after how it's working as compared to the specifics of the session (Nonprofit Organization 2).*
	when they do present to us these great ideas, it would be great to have the opportunity to work with that group afterwards whether that be an internship or a follow up meeting to discuss it down the road (For-Profit Organization 7)
	We can do these types of questions more frequently on every single course and then follow up six months later to see how the implementation went (For-Profit Organization 11).
	After we finished implementing these things of changing our webpage, consistency in our branding, we would like to have the same group come back or a different group to audit what we have done to make sure we are going the right direction. . .. Another thing that could continue to build good relationships is that after these students graduate, if they made a point of sending me an email saying something like thank you for your contribution and here's what I am doing now. Wow, that would be nice to hear back. Now that person is in my contact list with his new email just in case something comes up in the future (For-Profit Organization 8).
• Direct connection with community partners	*there was no contact from the professor. I don't know if it was a man or a woman. There was no contact with me anyways with that person for the entire process. . .I think that would've been nice, but I don't know if it would have helped, it would've just been a nice factor (Nonprofit Organization 1).*
	So, if I were you, I will try to have a weekly or biweekly meeting and have the students in the company so they can see our products and the process. So, we can come multiple times to try and create a real connection with the university (For-Profit Organization 5)
University authorities	
• Community partners' network platform	*Just more networking . . .At work I am the only human resource person, so, I am always looking for other people in this field to share ideas and we can build off each other's. (Nonprofit Organization 13)*
	Having a technological forum makes it more accessible for people rather than show-up for this wine and cheese. That kind of mingling is hard for some people. . .So in an online forum, you can get everyone to participate (For-Profit Organization 8)
	Creating like a network of that would definitely be beneficial (For-Profit Organization 11)
• Recognition of community partners	*On another note, one more benefit I see for participation with the university on this project is a recognition letter which will help with future business relationships for our company to showcase that we are involved in the community, that would be much appreciated (For-Profit-Organization 13).*
• Visibility of community engaged learning	*put it [service-learning course] online so when we go online to look at the course we can actually see what it's engaging . . .And maybe give some examples of what kind of organizations you have worked with before, what kind of organizations you have a relationship with (Nonprofit Organization 5)*

also benefited from the theoretical postulations the student groups presented. They noted that it enabled them to increase their knowledge of business theories that they were not familiar with. In addition to the value added to their personal development, many managers commented that they derived joy and satisfaction from the service-learning process. Words and phrases such as "fun to work with," "it was fun," "very interesting," "it was terrific," "really satisfied," "thrilled," "cool," and "enjoyable" were used to express their emotions. Our findings also indicated that community partners derived joy and satisfaction from the enthusiasm and eagerness expressed by some students during the service-learning process. A number of participants reported that the students' keen interest to learn, follow directions and inquire more information from them accounted for the joy they derived.

While their expressed joy was linked to their engagement with students, we discovered that for other participants, their joy was also traced to the youthful expressions and reasoning of students. The youthful expressions of students during the service-learning process offered some managers relief from their tedious work routines and the negative psychological impact of the economic downturn. For instance, a manager recounted how his business was negatively impacted by the 2014 economic recession in western Canada that caused several changes from cutting costs, laying off staff, to a rapid move from a larger office with a group of people to a virtual operating space with only four employees. The opportunity to engage with students on a service-learning course had a positive effect on him:

> . . .the last couple of years have been really negative, and it's just getting into a classroom environment where they're quite positive and the energy levels are higher. It's a shot in the arm, a bit of a fix for selfish reasons (For-profit Organization 10).

Other added value to managers included professional opportunities such as mentorship and networking with students via social media platform (e.g., LinkedIn).

Added Value to the Agency's Organization: Our findings indicated that managers gained more practical benefits toward the advancement of their organization than personal benefits. Three broad benefits toward their organizations that were commonly shared by participants included (a) the added knowledge and opportunities to improve people management, marketing of services and products, and overall business operations, (b) financial resources and (c) valuable time saved. Most participants noted that their organizations saved financial resources and valuable time from the service-learning opportunity. There was a large consensus that it also gave them opportunities to market their services to students and faculty, gain access to market research on their business, and organizational analysis of their operations. For most nonprofit organizations, this was a significant value as they often have little knowledge about business operations, lacked skilled human resource personnel to conduct management research and have minimal access to academic resources.

Our findings also revealed that few for-profit firms (3) that lacked core skills in online marketing, found the deliverables from the student groups beneficial, significant and practical to their organizations. For instance, a manager recounted how his firm benefited from the students' market research reports in applying for government funding and used the recommendations from the reports as a reference point to challenge suggestions from business consulting firms:

> When we applied for government funding, they wanted to know if we did a market study and we just pulled this (students' report) off the shelf and said, here you go. The quality of the report is detailed. We used a number of consultants. Between three consultants that we have used, none of them provided details that was provided by students. When you look at all this, we can challenge the consultants. . .we can't just accept everything that consultants say (For-profit Organization 3).

The data also revealed that participants gained value on people management skills as the student groups provided hands-on activities and project reports with evidential management theories to support their recommendations. Activities on topics such as "*active listening*," "*meaningful recognition*," and "*engagement of existing staff*"; and documented reports on "*succession planning*," "*employee replacement chart*" and "*employee handbook and training manual*" were specific examples participants used to demonstrate the added knowledge gained from service-learning. Participants noted that the practical activities and documented reports from the students made it easy to apply the recommendations when working with employees.

An insightful finding of the contributions of service-learning to the management of employees is the students' design of anonymous employee surveys and, in particular, how the application of these surveys helped managers averted huge organizational mistakes. For instance, a student group, in response to an organizational change issue presented by a community partner, conducted an anonymous employee survey to gain further understanding to resolve the change issue. The community partner attested that the feedback from the students' "employee survey" provided valuable information on employees' perceptions about the proposed change and helped improved manager-subordinate interactions.

Benefits to the Wider Society: In analyzing the added value of service-learning to the wider community, our findings indicated that there was no direct benefit to the wider community. The shared positive experiences of community partners were linked to participants' notion that a positive impact of service-learning on their organizations indirectly (a) created a positive impact on the communities or clients they served, and (b) supported their philanthropic acts toward the wider society. As a community partner explained:

> . . .we work with condominium owners and boards. We help manage where they live. The better our company does for them,

the better their homes. . .Small changes that we do in our office affects them, in that the advice we are giving them is good. . . We do some volunteer stuff too; it allows us to give some money back (For-Profit Organization 11).

It was interesting to note that while the manager in the above quotation linked the positive impact of service-learning on his organization to indirectly influence his ability to contribute to improving the wider society, most managers from for-profit organizations considered their involvement with students as a valuable contribution to the society. They noted that their involvement contributed toward the personal development, learning experiences, career options, business connections, and provision of jobs to students, regardless of the students' social class, educational and racial background. The managers considered their ability to provide students with hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for networking an added value to the development of society:

> . . .it was a nice way to give young students a chance at something because school and career are two different things. . . being a student gives a lot of great foundational skills but being in the real world helps hone the skills that they need (For-Profit Organization 2).

Perceived Challenges Encountered (Pains)

Despite the positive impact of service-learning on community partners, our analysis indicated that there were key challenges in the service-learning process that resulted in poor deliverables of some students' projects and negatively impacted community partners' experience of service-learning. These main challenges are linked to the level of students' interactions, interests, and engagement; faculty members' delivery method of service-learning, and community partners' commitment.

The Level of Students' Interactions, Interests, and Engagement: Evidence from our interviews and type-written field notes revealed that there were student-related challenges that negatively impacted the service-learning experience of community partners. These challenges include a reliance on self-assumptions to complete assigned projects, pursuing self- interests, and being disengaged from the learning process. The data indicated that some students, keen to complete the assigned projects, worked on their assumptions on how to complete the tasks, without getting clarification from community partners. On further review of our discussions with participants, we discovered that students worked on their assumptions when they were uncertain on what questions to ask community partners, if they needed to ask questions or just focus on resolving the assigned problems. There was a bit of uncertainty if they had to work on their own or relate with community partners to complete assigned projects. Other students decided to pursue their interests on how to complete and submit the research projects. For instance, one manager expressed his disappointment with a

student group who outrightly dismissed his request for their final report:

> . . .they (student group) came across like they knew it all. We asked them to send us a copy of the report that they were going to submit to the teacher, and they were like "oh no. We've already submitted it. We do not need your input'. Well, are we not the subject case here? . . .For this group, I would not recommend them to anybody because of that arrogance. You do not bring that into a business conversation. . .So, had we only been exposed to this group, we would be done with this process (For-Profit Organization 8).

Another participant reported that one student communication lead, pursuing his interest, had control over other group members such that group members rarely communicated with the community partner and solely relied on the information from the student communication lead:

> . . .it was this one gentleman who would filter information to the group. You could tell they looked pretty miserable that they were doing this presentation. This is unfortunate because there were some very bright people in that group who I was looking forward to hearing from. So, unfortunately, we just had one group that didn't perform as expected (Nonprofit Organization 3).

Other participants recounted that some students were less engaged and uninvolved despite the substantiate efforts of community partners in providing clarification of expectations and encouraging student engagement. As one executive director clearly described the students as "keeners," "in-betweens" and "slackers," noting that "it was challenging to try and motivate the slackers" (Nonprofit Organization 10). In subsequent conversations with the director, it was observed that the course instructor had no summative assessment of the students' performance on the community-based project or required feedback from the community partner. This accounted for the students' disinterest and disengagement with their community-based projects. Data indicates that the issue of poor interactions, self-assumptions, differing interests, and disengagement of some student groups created quite an unpleasant experience of service-learning for community partners. It also led to deliverables that were substandard to community partners:

> When I got those documents, there were lots of grammar errors, spelling errors, formatting errors. . .so that's definitely low hanging fruit in terms of if they're going to move into the business world (For-Profit Organization 10).

Faculty Members' Delivery Method of Service-Learning: Our findings indicated that there were not much identified issues related to faculty members in comparison to student-related challenges. Also, the faculty-related challenges identified were not commonly shared by most participants. However, it was noted that the few challenges identified

influenced the performance of students and students' interactions with community partners. The two main faculty-related issues that emanated from our findings are (a) different skilled-based support to students and (b) methods of students' assessment. For instance, a manager recounted in his interactions with two student groups from different instructors and different academic terms, stating, that the first group expressed how their instructor was influential in their engagement with service-learning and inspired them to present professional reports:

> They were professional and introduced themselves in an email. When they said they would contact me, they contacted me. . . they gave me a proposal. It was feasible and realistic. . .One thing I know is that the professor for the first group. I think his name was *XT*. He's not teaching this term. I feel like he had a big impact on the group because the students were telling me how big an impact he had, and he is a consultant and works (teaches) part-time. . .The first group did amazing. They said their names and sent their bios, roles, and expectations for each person (For-Profit Organization 5).

Interestingly, the manager recounted that for the second group with a different instructor, the student group was 100% different and "not nearly as proficient as the first group." While the performance of the second student group may be influenced by the competencies of group members, it was interesting to note that the community partner associated the deficiencies of the student group to the skill-based support and work experience of their instructor.

Another key challenge was faculty members' emphasis on the summative assessment of students' formal presentations and reports. Our data suggest that when some instructors focus on evaluating the final presentations and reports of students, students would be less concerned about the interaction process with community partners and concentrate on delivering their final presentations and reports. In a conversation with a community partner, he explained this problematic issue in assessing the performance of students:

> . . .in our case, they (student group) had to do a presentation. One thing we know about anybody is if there's going to be a presentation, they're going to put in a lot of their time and effort into that: dressing appropriately, making it pretty flow, figuring out who's saying what. . .If students end up spending a lot of their time figuring out how to do presentation, that is less time than they spend thinking about the project. . .If there's more emphasis on how the consultation should work, the deliverables, and less emphasis on the final report, then that shifts where the focus is for them (Nonprofit Organization 12).

These findings suggest that the different skilled-based support and level of influence of faculty members, and their summative assessment of students' performance indirectly impact student-community interactions and subsequently, affect the quality of the final deliverables of some students' projects.

Community Partners' Commitment: The level of commitment from some community partners was identified as the third broad challenge that negatively impacted the performance of students, deliverables of their projects, and service-learning experience of community partners. Some participants explained that it was challenging to commit adequate time to discuss with the students due to their busy work schedules. They noted that their priority over their business interests affected the performance of student groups. The low level of commitment from some community partners was considered a setback of the service-learning experience to other community partners. For other participants who could commit their time and effort, they found it quite demanding as they were not fully cognizant that the service-learning process would require more time than they expected:

> One challenging issue is obviously time, to be able to find the time to do all this. So, the more independent the team is, the better. If they can be more self-independent, if they can be able to figure out most of the research themselves. . .or do their own homework and then come back to us, that helps (Nonprofit Organization 5).

Proposed Expectations (Hopes)

Given the identified benefits and challenges presented in this study, participants proposed several suggestions to university authorities to improve the service-learning experience. Most of the suggestions to mitigate the identified challenges were specifically toward faculty members. Other recommendations for university authorities (administrators) were considered avenues to improve the service-learning experience of community partners. While most of the suggestions to improve service-learning are linked to the identified challenges (e.g., faculty delivery method of service-learning; and assessment of students) and some re-echoed the continuation of practices considered beneficial (e.g., students' engagement and quality of deliverables), other recommendations were distinct but nonetheless insightful. Two main recommendations from community partners that appear significant in improving the service-learning experience for community partners are (a) faculty-community partners' involvement and collaboration, and (b) community partners' networking opportunity.

Faculty-Community Partners' Involvement and Collaboration: Community partners advocated for more involvement and collaboration with faculty members on three key issues: (a) the preparation of what is expected from community partners and students, (b) the assessment of community partners and students' performance and (c) a follow-up on the implementation of community projects and students' success. On the preparation of what is expected from both entities, aspects such as the total estimated time commitment and project expectations from community members were considered valuable information to ensure that community partners were prepared to commit to the

service-learning demands with students. Community partners proposed using a project contract or charter to provide clear expectations to both entities; presenting prior information on the skillset of students to prepare community partners to work with the students; and advocated for more involvement in the ongoing assessment of the performance of the students. They perceived that the assessments of students would position community partners as a form of authority, facilitate the successful progression of community projects, provide a better account of the performance of the student groups and ensure accountability of both entities to meet expectations.

In deciphering their preferable forms of students' assessments, most participants opted for formative than summative assessments based on the notion that formative assessment is a better approach to extract more value from the project deliverables of the students. Others perceived that formative assessment would provide more value toward the career development of students. They considered summative assessments a bit problematic on the basis that they were not confident in their ability to grade students, worried about being objective, and uncomfortable knowing that their decision may impact the overall results of students. As a director of governance and programs explained:

> I don't know how honest it might be if I was worried about it impacting their grade (Nonprofit Organization 7).

Interestingly, in subsequent discussions with the director, he acknowledged that students would be more motivated to complete assigned community-based projects if it had portions of summative assessments. However, he concluded that it would be valuable if there is a combination of formative and summative assessments of students' performance:

> I think the conversation we had around the grading of the project was valuable in a summative way in generating a graded activity which is really what's going to motivate them while they're a student; because while I was a student, I didn't particularly care about real-world applications of what I was learning. . .it didn't mean anything to me. So, if we know that qualitative evaluation is one of the ways they'll receive feedback in the real world doing this kind of work, exposing them to that, as another point of data they're taking might be valuable.

Community partners also discussed the need for faculty members to follow-up with the implementation of proposed recommendations from student groups. They perceived that a follow up assessment would inform students and faculty members of the viability of the students' recommendations. Also, it would create opportunities to connect students to contribute to the full implementation of proposed recommendations in situations where community partners may require further support.

In addition to the request for a follow-up process, some community partners expressed the need for faculty members to provide the contact details of the students they worked with and their career trajectories to enable partners to contact students for further business relationships. This request was mainly raised by community partners who could not, personally, connect with students via social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn). While their request was not directly linked to the improvement of the service-learning process, it was considered an important factor that could improve the businesses of community partners and the career prospects of students.

Community Partners' Networking Opportunity: A common expression from community partners is the need to create a network for partners to interact with each other to build business relationships, learn professional practices and discuss on topical issues that could contribute to the university and the community. While some partners advocated using live networking platforms, others suggested using online networking platforms to participate in discussing relevant business issues. A partner explained:

> . . .having a technological forum makes it more accessible for people rather than show-up for this wine and cheese. That kind of mingling is hard for some people. . .So in an online forum, you can get everyone to participate (For-Profit Organization 8).

Given that the university provides an annual live session to discuss improving community-engaged scholarship, the above extract illustrates the need to include a virtual platform to foster accessibility and contribution of each community partner. It also indicates community partners' need for more formal sessions than an informal social setting. Other salient aspects community partners identified to improve their service-learning experience include making community engagement services more visible on the website of the university and providing formal recognition of the participation of community partners. The visibility of community engagement services was considered significant to easily register on service-learning courses either as a community partner or a prospective adult learner. The aspect of formal recognition was deemed important to showcase the involvement of community partners in service-learning and help build future business relationships for their organizations.

Discussion

Our research aimed to explore the impact of service-learning in business education on community partners and the wider society through the perspectives of community partners from both for-profit and nonprofit organizations in Canadian urban communities. The empirical findings support related literature (Cronley et al., 2015; Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Karasik, 2020; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017) by identifying some valuable benefits of service-learning to agencies, community organizations and the wider society as well as challenges community partners encountered in the service-learning process. The current study indicates certain benefits of service-learning that are commonly shared by

community partners such as time and financial resources saved, new ideas generated, and improvement of products, services and practices (Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Vizenor et al., 2017). This indicates that service-learning in business education offers similar benefits to community organizations within urban communities, regardless of the type of organization, industry sector or national context. Also, our study indicates specific benefits to community partners that are not identified within related literature on business education (Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Furlow, 2010; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017), and thus provide insights on the value of service-learning such as the theoretical knowledge gained and service-learning projects used as a basis to engage with external stakeholders, particularly, for-profit firms use of the project deliverables to evaluate proposals from other business consultants.

In contrast to Nikolova and Andersen's (2017) study where service-learning was found to be only beneficial to small and nonprofit firms that often lacked the financial resource to buy professional consulting advice, our study indicates that service-learning was also beneficial to for-profit firms that could afford business consulting services, as it helped informed their business decision-making. This indicates that service-learning in business education can offer high-quality and practical advice for different types of organizations. The implication of these findings is that community-engaged scholars should not only focus on small and nonprofit organizations toward the development of communities but include for-profit organizations as the success of these organizations can lead to the advancement of the wider community.

In eliciting the benefits of service-learning expressed by community partners, our study shows that community partners' prior expectations of service-learning influenced their articulation of practical values gained, as some partners approached service-learning opportunities with pre-determined notions of what they intend to gain (see Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006). Also, the benefits identified were associated with the deliberate and unintentional actions of students such as the students' professional conduct, youthful expressions and practical deliverables of community-based projects (see Karasik, 2020; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Vizenor et al., 2017). On the youthful expressions of students, our study highlights the value of service-learning in enhancing the well-being of community partners that actively interacted with students. While few studies (Cronley et al., 2015; Gerstenblatt, 2014; Greene & Diehm, 1995; Vizenor et al., 2017) have indicated the pleasure agencies and community members derived from the energy students brought into the learning experience, our study indicates that the experience of interacting with students relieved community partners from the pressures and psychological strain of their work context. The information realized from this analysis is that community partners' basic involvement in service-learning can improve their psychological well-being.

Regarding the effects of service-learning on the wider community, our study suggests service-learning in business education offers mostly an indirect impact on the wider society through the deliverables presented to community organizations. Specifically, our study shows that a positive impact on community partners and their organizations may influence the capacity of community partners to contribute to the development of the wider society. While this may not provide students opportunities to directly participate in democratic and civic actions against poverty, inequality and injustice, it demonstrates that students, through service-learning, can contribute indirectly to the social development of the society. Additionally, our study shows that when community partners include their engagement with students as a form of contributing to society, service-learning offered a direct impact on students. In providing undergraduates with the opportunity to have real-world experiences through their organizations, our study suggests that service-learning can lessen the social problem of disproportionate opportunities in learning and engaging with organizations.

With regards to the identified challenges from community partners perspectives, our findings are consistent with other studies that highlighted barriers to service-learning associated with student-related issues (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Blouin & Perry, 2009), faculty-related challenges and community-partner challenges (Cronley et al., 2015; Karasik, 2020). Specifically, issues on students' disengagement; faculty poor skilled-based support; and community partners' limited time commitment to service-learning were identified as obstacles. Our study also contributes new knowledge by highlighting the issue of faculty members' assessment of the performance of students during service-learning. This suggest that assessments of students solely based on their presentations and documented reports may adversely impact their performance in interacting with community partners, such that students pay less attention to the actual engagement with community partners. This indicates that adding behavioral assessment of students' interaction with community partners in the assessment of students might improve students-community partners' interaction during service-learning, and subsequently enhance the experiences of community partners. Albeit, in the use of behavioral assessments, formative and summative, students should be pre-informed prior to the service-learning as prior information on expectations may enhance students' performance on service-learning (see Ferrari & Worrall, 2000).

Most issues identified as challenging factors in service-learning are often traced to unclear and uncertain expectations of community partners and students (Cronley et al., 2015; Cyr & Kemp, 2018; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008; Vizenor et al., 2017). The issue of self-assumptions and self-interests of students; and the time commitment and availability of community members in this study are exemplar illustrations of the challenges of unclear and uncertain expectations. Thus, this indicates the need for

ongoing interactions between all entities to provide clear expectations and guidelines of service-learning courses. Ongoing interactions that focus on expectations, needs and roles of each student group, faculty member and community partner (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Cronley et al., 2015; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017), and also highlight factors that facilitate successful service-learning, can provide mutually beneficial outcomes to students and community members. Pedagogical practices of providing clarity of the objectives and benefits of service-learning, as well as expectations of all parties may reduce the issue of students' disinterests, disengagement and ambiguity of expectations. Commonly shared pedagogical practices include establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for all parties (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Poon et al., 2011; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008) with details on the profile, roles and expectations of community partners, student group and faculty instructor; deliberate preparation of students to complete assigned tasks with emphasis on the course learning outcomes (Karasik, 2020); conducting ongoing assessments of the progress of community-based projects; and subsequent follow-up to assess the implementation of deliverables and general progress of community organizations (Cronley et al., 2015).

In addition, our study indicates the need to address the specific expectations for each entity as expectations may differ for each community partner, student and faculty member. This includes the availability of time to commit to the service-learning (weekly or biweekly) course and project; requirements for more or fewer student-community interactions; the level of content focus on theory and practical applications; and more faculty-community partner collaboration and involvement. Others include the sharing of student contact details upon completion of the service-learning course, inclusion or exclusion of partners in a live or virtual networking platform, and the formal recognition of community partners. In addressing the specific expectations and roles of each entity, particularly community partners, business schools in higher institutes of learning would contribute to the valuable knowledge on management theories, practices and skillsets of community partners.

In addition, addressing specific expectations of community partners would assist in building a hub of ongoing development projects for community partners to enhance their organizational capacity and services to the wider society. For instance, satisfying the expectations of community partners for a follow-up assessment of the implementation of proposed recommendations offers a high potential for the continuation of community-engaged learning and service to community organizations. However, it is pertinent to note that the process of addressing the roles and expectations of each entity (partners, students, and instructors) is time-consuming and would thus require commitment from all entities (see Nikolova & Andersen, 2017; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008). In addition, it would require training sessions for all entities

on service-learning. The training of faculty members engaged in service-learning, particularly, is prerequisite to ensure consistency in applying commonly accepted practices. Consistency in pedagogical approach may reduce community partners' mixed impressions of the experiences and competencies of faculty members. Regular training and subsequent discussions amongst faculty members are necessary as instructors play a fundamental role in the preparation and supervision of students (see Karasik, 2020).

Limitations and Further Research

Our study, in analyzing a diverse set of business-related courses offered to different types of organizations across different sectors in urban communities, has provided additional insights to the personal, social and economic value of service-learning to community partners. Also, it has provided further information to improve the pedagogical practices of service-learning that offers maximal benefits to community partners. However, we noted that our research approach also provides some limitations. Using a single case study of a Canadian business school constitutes a limitation as it reflects an institutional and discipline specific teaching model that may defer from other educational models in universities and colleges. Other universities may be research-focused, may or may not include the creation of a central office to coordinate service-learning, or include service-learning in the curriculum. Also, some business-related courses may offer a long-term service engagement through cooperative education, internship, or post-graduate research service (see Poon et al., 2011). We, therefore, recommend further research to include multi-programs on business education across different universities to explore a range of service-learning impacts in communities. Also, while our study has indicated the need to include behavioral assessment of students' interaction with community partners as a means to improve student-community relations, and, thus, enhance the experience of community partners, further research is required to demonstrate the direct impact of students' behavioral assessments on the experiences and perceptions of community partners.

Conclusion

Based on limited research that investigates community partners' perspectives of service-learning in business education, this study explored the perspectives and experiences of community partners from both for-profit and nonprofit organizations in Canadian urban communities. Our study indicates that service-learning offered benefits to community partners; and also created challenges that impacted the experiences of community partners. Identified challenges were traced to unclear and uncertain expectations of community partners and students. Issues on student disengagement and reliance on self-assumptions, faculty members'

poor skills-based support and community members' limited time commitment and availability are pertinent issues that emerged from unclear and uncertain expectations. To mitigate these challenging issues, regular discussions on service-learning, with emphasis on the specific expectations, roles and needs of each student, faculty member and community partner are required.

The facilitation of ongoing interactions would require training each entity on commonly recognized practices of service-learning including drafting a memorandum of understanding, deliberate preparation of students, conducting ongoing assessments of the progress of the service-learning course, follow-up assessments on the implementation of the deliverables and the general progress of community organizations. Training sessions on the specific expectations of community partners such as determining the extent of faculty-community collaboration, requirements for more or fewer student-community interactions and creating networking opportunities for community partners is necessary to maximize benefits toward community partners and the wider community at large. The training of faculty members is prerequisite to ensure consistency in the pedagogical approach of service-learning, more so within a Canadian educational context where the teaching practices of service-learning are differentiated without a national institutional approach to the delivery of service-learning.

Authors' Note

The interview guideline can be obtained from the authors on request. Further information on the list of codes identified in the interview transcripts can be obtained from the authors.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Ethics Statement

This research project was approved on ethical grounds by the MacEwan University Research Ethics Board on January 1st, 2019, File No. 101594

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