

Transformative Leadership

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In times of change, leaders must find organic methods of engaging, inspiring, and connecting to the fundamental motivators for continued growth. Major challenges facing leaders today are not technical but transformational, based more on modifying situations than fixing them. From adjuncts to deans, participants in our group discussed various strategies and supportive methodologies for developing transformative leadership. We concluded that transformation must involve a shift of attention from goals and outcomes to means and processes. Reverence for each moment that supports the pedagogical mission is needed when the demands are great and the resources are small.

Two important distinctions need to be drawn at the onset. First, we noted that change is inevitable, and how we respond to change is formational. Second, we realized that management and leadership are two different things. As John Kotter points out in *Leading Change*, management is the process of keeping complicated systems running smoothly, while leadership creates organizations or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future will look like and guides systems toward intentional outcomes.

At ThinkTank6, our group of 10 professionals focused on the structure and hierarchy of instructional labor with higher education and how roles are defined, perceived, and/or facilitated to limit or encourage leadership. We represented a diverse cross section of experience with differing roles, including adjunct faculty, full-time faculty both tenured and non-tenured, program heads, division chairs, and deans. Additionally, there was a wide representation of institution types, including community colleges, art schools, liberal arts colleges, small private and large public universities. Both teaching-centered and research-centered institutions were also represented.

Initial Questions

In our initial discussions we began dealing with some general questions on the beneficial qualities a leader should possess and how one should structure change. As this developed, we discovered an increasing pattern of how the environment and other external forces could shape the discussion, especially in times of limited resources. We found it necessary to retool our thinking to focus specifically on the goal of developing a resource guide for all levels of arts leadership in higher education. A list of essential questions follows:

- What makes a good leader within the arts in higher education?
- Is leadership a component of a job description or a quality of an individual?
- Are there leadership qualities appropriate for different types of change?
- Should the leadership differ in times of crisis?

The following considerations illuminated key factors surrounding the particular nature of arts and higher

education. They continued to surface as important topics throughout our discussions:

- Diversity and impact of labor types (contingent vs. permanent)
- Means of Defining Success (when no simple rubric exists)
- Structure of Power (regenerative or finite)
- Non-linear Hierarchy (both vertical and horizontal reporting)

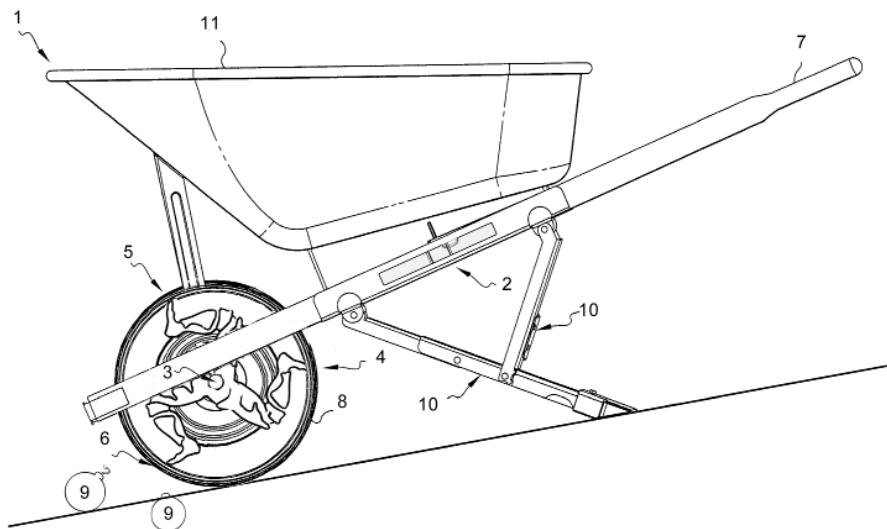
Seeking a visual representation for the complexities under discussion and led by Lynn Sondag we finally developed the following metaphorical diagram. The remainder of this report describes various aspect of our leadership wheelbarrow.

Vision without action is a daydream.
 Action without vision is a nightmare.
 Japanese Proverb

1. Vision (guidance system)

Leadership starts with a vision. As was pointed out in the pre-workshop session lead by Mary Stewart, leaders identify a need for change, then in consultation with various stakeholders, develop and implement a vision. Leadership is not limited to chairs, deans, and vice presidents. It is possible to create a culture of leadership, and a climate in which people feel empowered is critical to transformative leadership. Fostering a sense of autonomy and cultivating intrinsic motivation can create such a climate. Great ideas can come from all organizational levels, with both personal and group motivation contributing to the change process.

The Metaphorical Wheelbarrow (a toolkit for transformation)



1. Vision
2. Alignment
3. Strategic Plan
4. Communication
5. Building "A" Case
6. Resources
7. Power
8. Rewards
9. Obstacles
10. Staffing
11. Environment

Defining Vision

Defining a vision is a creative act. It begins with seeing the big picture. A meaningful vision needs to be intentional, combining an understanding of organizational identity with clarity of purpose. Creating such a vision starts with identifying current and potential strengths, then understanding what needs to change. A path of action can then be created and all that is left is analyzing the results. Vision drives and directs all the decisions made in the process of transformation.

Vision is, in essence, a philosophy – a way of thinking about the organizational mission, how departments and institutions function, and what people do. A vision needs to define the identity and values of the school or department and reinforce its purpose. It also needs to be both forward-looking and sensitive to organizational history. Vision can be revolutionary by re-imagining and redefining the questions by all involved parties. At the same time, it may need to evolve over time, becoming more responsive to its audience and environment. Above all a vision needs to be achievable, feasible and specific to its context.

To Make a Vision Work

Understanding of context and organizational identity combined with a sense of purpose are the defining qualities of vision. All three are essential to transformative leadership. Visionary leaders with these qualities more readily earn the confidence of their audience and establish credibility. Understanding who is served by the vision is critical to its success, while knowing who benefits is critical to building consensus. An effective leader seeks what is feasible as well as what is desirable. He or she knows when to accelerate, when to slow down, and when to change direction.

2. Alignment (balance)

To move in any direction with sustained momentum, it is necessary to have proper alignment with the rest of the institution. Just like a vehicle that drifts off the road and into a ditch, departmental leadership efforts will be derailed if they are not properly aligned with the larger institutional mission. Additionally, the process of alignment must be continually checked and adjusted to ensure effective progress.

Alignment within an academic institution can take many forms. Historical alignment ensures that the future will connect with the past, even if there is a sharp change in direction. Institutional alignment ensures that a change in departmental vision and mission is connected to the entire college or university. Academic alignment ensures that the curriculum is reinforcing the labor and resources that are being leveraged in order to make progress.

Lastly, community alignment ensures the stakeholders are connected to and believe in the direction being taken. Alignment should occur both vertically and horizontally, so that every action can reinforce and encourage the overall structure. Leadership decisions can then be vetted through this prism, making the allocation of resources, administrative structuring, and other associated strategies more clear.

"Whether you think that you can, or that you can't, you are usually right." - Henry Ford

3. Strategic Plan (axle)

Strategic planning is the formal consideration of an organization's future course.

What do we do?

For whom do we do it?

How do we excel?

Without a plan to guide decision-making, each and every issue will have a multitude of options and will become a source for endless debate or strategic filibustering. The smallest decision can spin out of control and sap energy. The strategic plan creates an anchor point from which progress radiates.

4. Communication: Connective and Constructive

(wheel part 1 of 3)

We concluded that communication was the key to effective leadership. When all members of the faculty (both fulltime and contingent) are able to communicate their aspirations and concerns to the leader, the most immediate program needs become clear. When leaders communicate their vision and concerns to the faculty, a "big picture" understanding of possibilities and problems begins to emerge. And, effective faculty-to-faculty communication is essential when leadership is shared. Faculty members must be able to disagree with each other without dismissing each other, avoid narrow-minded territoriality, and conduct committees effectively.

Our discussions illuminated the following aspects of communication.

First, to be effective, communication must be non-violent. All members of the group must be able to speak with the confidence that they will be heard and listen with a willingness to be changed. The simple act of letting each speaker finish a sentence without interruption is a good place to start. Non-violent communication begins when all participants enter the conversation with a willingness to support multiple viewpoints and consider new initiatives.

Second, physical and philosophical proximity tends to simplify communication. Informal conversations between faculty members in adjoining offices can alleviate tension and expand understanding. Since communication is easier when there is general agreement, working from a shared philosophical position simplifies matters. When very different philosophical positions are expressed, communication is much more difficult. In these situations, it may be necessary to acknowledge the range of differences, and then begin the change process with a workshop on non-violent communication. When the distance to be traveled is great, the group may need to take more steps in the change process.

Third, it is important to find a balance between the value of opposing views and the need for action. Seeking complete unanimity can squander faculty time and energy. In extreme cases, the faculty is exhausted by the time a decision is finally reached. This may leave too little time and energy for implementation, and the process of change will stall. On the other hand, running roughshod over minority viewpoints insures resentment and limits support. Our most active adversaries are the people we most need to hear, convince, or redirect.

Finally, it is important to focus more on actions we can take than on the sources of inaction or failure. References to failed initiatives from the past or trying to blame others for inaction are common hazards. Focusing on what we can do ourselves rather than on what others should do improves communication and can empower innovation. As a result, in our diagram, communication becomes one of the three spokes of the wheel. When connected to resources and a sense of mission, it translates power into movement and helps the unit realize its vision.

5. Build A Case (point 2 of the wheel)

When building a case, the most important thing is to remember to build a case not simply to build your case. Making it “a” case instead of “your” case makes it inclusive and removes any personal aspect from the idea. Building your case can heighten ego and may cause people to put on blinders and reject the idea before they hear it.

The following steps can help your build your case.

Research

Research your idea to the fullest extent making the most of potential learning outcomes and benefits while anticipating any potential obstacles. Contextualize your idea: What are the needs? What is already in place? Are there gaps? Many ideas stall or fail because people do not anticipate possible dilemmas. If there are potential problems, have solutions ready. Having solutions ready can make a

Chair, Dean or anyone who has the power to approve an idea much more easily.

Sequential Understanding

The acronym *P.R.O.S.E.E.* can serve as a helpful tool in building a case. It stands for Problem definition, Research, Objective, Strategy, Execution and Evaluation.

When using *P.R.O.S.E.E.*, there are several factors to consider:

- Rank priorities within alternatives
- Know the difference between need and want
- Define constraints with benchmarks
- Assess potential liabilities and risks
- Know when to compromise and know when to walk away
- Avoid unrealistic expectations

Build a Posse

Seek advice from both students and colleagues for input and approach them with outline thinking rather than paragraph thinking. Outline thinking is flexible and can allow for more fluid decisions to evolve. Paragraph thinking indicates a rigidity that might be resistant to change and criticism. Seeking input isn't only about buy-in. It is about achieving solidarity and showing colleagues the benefits they gain from a new initiative.

Seek Info not Ammo

Empathize and listen to others and sell them the benefits of the case and not simply the features. Show your team what is in it for them and help them see the big picture. It is essential to avoid seeking ammunition to *sell* an idea or overpower colleagues resistant to a proposal. Don't exclude minority voices but let them be heard as they sometimes have valuable advice and concerns. They may become part of the solution rather than what is perceived as part of the problem. Allowing minority voices to be heard can also mitigate a toxic current or negative resistance to an idea. If done correctly, building “a” case can transform into “our” case, creating a vision that propels the whole group forward.

Pilot the Idea

Seeing success rather than hearing about it can be a powerful motivator for a vision. Start small, demonstrate success and allow others to join in for the next step.

6. Resources (point 3 of the wheel)

The most important realization surrounding resources, whether in physical terms of dollars, space, time, or in virtual terms of energy and dedication, is that they are relative and limited. One of the principle tasks of effective leadership is the allocation of these limited resources in

a manner that will build community while maintaining alignment throughout the institutional structure. This becomes particularly difficult in times of change, when the allocation of resources may shift power structures and historical standing. It is best to couple tangible resources with benefits striving for as much balance as possible. Most importantly, resource allocation should be openly communicated with all stakeholders to ensure clear understanding of any shifts and how they relate to the mission and vision of the program, department, or college.

7. Power (measured force)

Power is the “force” of movement and the rate at which “work” is done. In leadership, power may include the ability to control an environment by directing the actions of multiple participants within a system. However, higher education presents a unique environment for the concept of power. Effective academic leaders tend to use and distribute power equally in order to keep things aligned. Empowering faculty is generally highly valued. This proportional relationship can both provide and create authority necessary for change. Therefore, truly effective power does not exist in isolation but is instead created through mutual respect. It is reciprocal.

Through the Looking Glass

Our group discovered one of the primary issues related to power in current academic environments deals with transparency. This has become a buzzword in academia to represent the need for honesty from above, and unfortunately the term itself may misrepresent the spirit of the intent. What is most needed is credibility, which is the appropriate balance between transparency and opacity. Credibility provides the means of developing trust by sharing details of the bigger picture while simultaneously respecting the confidentiality of the individuals. This one aspect of power and balance is pivotal to sustaining the force needed for effective change.

Leveraged Pressure

Change is accomplished with pressure and over time We noted that power can become intoxicating. The greatest threat to effective use of power is “micro-mis-management”. Ironically, the realization that power is not about the individual, but about the leader as a force for change is one thing that can keep a leader from being derailed into a manager.

Power Points

- Developing budgets that are aligned to the mission
- Strategic changes that gradually shift power structures as needed
- Hiring of new faculty and/or the removal of faculty

- Develop self-assessment models
- Answer yes immediately, but be cautious when saying no

8. Rewards (inflation)

One of the most important motivating factors in the current economic climate is money. Clearly, in industry, the if/then reward system of the carrot and the stick is extremely effective to keep workers tuned into the larger system of mass production. But in creative endeavors, the need for intrinsic motivations increases exponentially.

One of the most significant rewards in academic life is autonomy. Autonomy transcends the structural hierarchy of higher education. At the core of academic freedom is the implied value of a system that thrives upon the personal capability of each faculty member to work toward the common good. By embracing these self-directed contributions, a transformative leader can create an inclusive community through praise and now that rewards.

However, financial rewards still can increase productivity when they are directly connected to the product. Research grants, increases in funding for facilities or equipment, release time, or additional resources for support of operational tasks including assistantships, are highly effective measures to inflate the wheels of change. The transformative leader can encourage development of both teamwork and self-reliance, thus creating a strong motivating force that enables faculty to follow through with a project or goal to its successful conclusion.

9. Obstacles

In the simplest of terms, an obstacle is anything that impedes progress. Obstacles can exist both as external factors and internal barriers. Obstacles will always exist and a transformative leader must identify and address these obstacles purposefully, as opposed to ignoring them and hope they do not become an unmanageable minefield. The group identified the following as common impediments to change.

- Community:
 - o Philosophical differences among peers
 - o Philosophical differences between faculty and administration
 - o Conflict of interest: programs vs. departments, research vs. teaching, etc.
 - o Lack of shared vision

- Personal:
 - o Complacency or apathy
 - o Silos and territories
 - o Individual agendas and excessive emphasis on specializations
 - o Communication gaps, and miscommunication
- Cultural:
 - o Fear of change
 - o Fear of both failure and of success
 - o Resistance to learning new skills or embracing new ideas
 - o Fear of being “out of control”
- Institutional:
 - o Limited resources
 - o Market and economic pressures
 - o Bad timing for great ideas

10. Staffing

Faculty expectations and the implied roles of different faculty classifications play a significant role in any change process. This seemed to be an issue that was neither an obstacle nor an asset for change in and of itself. It simply is part of the structure of higher education that transformative leaders must address. The use of contingent versus permanent staffing enables change and movement to occur, but simultaneously obstructs movement when high turnover reduces commitment and continuity. Our concern is not the individuals in themselves, but with the position types and the resulting limitations on full faculty contributions to the change progress. The greater the divide between staffing types, the more difficult the process of change.

11. Environment (protective shell to carry Change)

Lastly, the need for a vessel to carry this transformative change is critical. In higher education we found some key areas where leaders can focus energy to create an environment that supports change.

- Build trust. Provide more information than necessary, in an honest and respectful manner while protecting the confidentiality of individuals.
- Focus on teaching and learning. Within the struggles of everyday decision-making, a more global view of the educational principles and the university mission may be forsaken. An increased focus on and recognition of the success of students and faculty can bring us all back to our core responsibilities.

- Insist on civility. Create an environment of tolerance and respect regardless of how heated an issue may become.
- Engage adversaries. Professional and non-threatening language addresses the oppositional views directly, keeping adversaries in check while validating their perspectives.
- Use emphatic decision-making to advance change.. Work to build consensus through faculty votes as the process evolves. As a result, most faculty (but rarely all) will understand and agree with each choice along the way. Better to weigh alternatives, vote, and move on than to pursue the nearly impossible goal of complete unanimity.
- Establish a role for dissenting voices: Dissenting voices are as important to transformation as those in the coalition. Make sure to create enough room for them while also keeping them in alignment with the overall plan.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the metaphorical wheelbarrow presents various tools that can be leveraged to promote transformative leadership. But beyond the individual parts, the group believed that the symbol itself represents a vision of a leader as a blue-collar agent to serve the masses.

We believe it is important to debunk the notions of a leader as a white-collar post sitting behind a desk or computer screen, disconnected and detached. A transformative leader is a peer who rolls up his or her sleeves and does as much heavy lifting as anyone. We aspire to empower everyone on the team with appropriate responsibility, authority, and autonomy and continually seek to align our visions with our actions.