

The Future of Leadership Development: It's Vertical!

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A new leadership paradigm seems to be emerging with an inexorable shift away from one-way, hierarchical, organization-centric communication toward two-way, network-centric, participatory, and collaborative leadership styles. Most of all a new mind-set seems necessary, apart from new skills and knowledge. All the tools in the world will not change anything if the mind-set does not allow and support change.

Grady McGonagill and Tina Doer

Leadership development is a \$30 billion industry in the US, and yet, according to Deloitte's 2016 Human Capital Trends survey, 40 percent of respondents believe that "their current leadership programs provide only 'some' value, while 24 percent report that they yield little to no value." (Wakefield, Abbatiello, Agarwal, Pastakia, & vanBerkel, 2016). So, why is that leadership development programs are failing so dramatically to produce a return on investment? And, why are they failing to prepare current and future leaders to navigate in a world that is increasingly characterized by the term VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity)? And, finally, what are the implications of these failures for community college leaders and their students?

Context: The State of the Leadership Development Industry

Prominent critics report that current leadership development programs are typically:

- Aimed at individuals, when the most important work that is done in organizations today is accomplished through highly diverse, self-managed, and often geographically distant teams and work groups
- Focused on a small number of "high potentials," when leadership skills and talent are now needed at all levels of the organization
- Offered in isolation from the workplace, making it difficult to engage the interest of those left behind, or to apply what is learned back on the job
- Organized around content that may or may not be timely, relevant or necessary to the real challenges faced in the workplace and beyond
- Owned by Human Resource, or more recently, Talent Development, departments, rather than by those with leadership responsibilities or by individuals and teams interested in their own growth and development
- Extremely expensive – limiting accessibility – and, often, dependent on outside trainers, coaches and consultants with prescribed approaches, rather than homegrown or highly adaptable to specific environments
- Short-term and intermittent, when the work of developing as leaders is a long-term and continuous process

The most serious and significant criticism, however, is that the vast majority of leadership development programs focus on *horizontal*, rather than *vertical* development. While the origins of the term vertical leadership development are uncertain, one early differentiation was made by the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) John McGuire and Gary Rhodes in their 2009 book, *Transforming Your Leadership Culture*. In their book, they argue that "Organizations have grown skilled at developing individual leader competencies, but have mostly ignored the challenge of transforming their leader's mindset from one level to the next. Today's horizontal development within a mindset must give way to the vertical development of bigger minds."

The contrast that McGuire and Rhodes drew between the two types of leadership development is further explained in a 2014 study of the issue by their CCL colleague, Nick Petrie, titled "Future Trends in Leadership Development." Petrie explains,

**If horizontal development is about transferring information to the leader,
vertical development is about transformation of the leader.**

In other words, horizontal leadership development focuses on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities, while vertical development focuses on advancing the leader's capacity for more complex and conscious ways of thinking, being and acting.

Implications for Community College Leaders and their Students

It is not only private industry and the public sector that are functioning in the new VUCA world. Today's community college environment is also rapidly changing, characterized by:

- Dramatic retirement rates of college presidents and key leaders
- Continual turnover in the governance structure
- An education/skills gap in the knowledge economy
- Competing demands of various college constituents
- Vacillating enrollment trends
- Needs of an increasingly diverse student population
- Demands for student outcomes and accountability
- Faculty shortages
- Dwindling resources

The authors of *Rethinking the "L" Word in Higher Education: The Revolution of Research on Leadership* (and others) have been calling for major changes in the field's leadership development approach for many years. In these times of change and challenge in higher education, the *Rethinking* authors write:

...pleas for leadership have become frequent. However, the type of leadership required within the new context (of globalization, demographic changes, technological advancement, and the questioning of social authority) may call for new or different skills than those acceptable in the past, requiring re-education among campus stakeholders if

they seek to be successful leaders in the future. Leadership has moved from being leader-centered, individualistic, hierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and emphasizing power over followers to a new vision: leadership that is process-centered, collective, context-bound, nonhierarchical, and focused on mutual power and influence processes.

Calls have also come forth regarding the transformation of leadership development programs from the major community college associations and others for many years, including the Chair Academy, AACC, ACCT, the League for Innovation, CQIN, and the Aspen Institute. Steps have been taken to redefine the knowledge, skills and abilities required to lead in a rapidly changing environment, and to refine and revise community college leadership development programs. And yet, as Pamela L. Eddy, the author of *Community College Leadership: A Multidimensional Model for Leading Change*, observes,

Although the four primary programs providing focused leadership development for community college presidents and presidential aspirants (Chair Academy, AACC, League for Innovation and Universities, for example, Harvard's Executive Education Program) have begun to address the leadership crisis, they frequently come up short. Most of the leadership development opportunities provided through these programs focuses on skill acquisition, which, although important, is not adequate for preparing individuals for the larger demands of leading complex organizations.

Calls for rethinking leadership development are also a major challenge in the community college responsibility for developing students for their future roles as leaders across industries and sectors. In a September 2016 article in the *Journal of Experiential Education*, titled "Assessing Vertical Development in Experiential Learning Curriculum," authors Kirsty Spence and Mark McDonald wrote:

For 30 years, management educators have supported competency-based management education (CBME). When applying CBME, educators stimulate students' "lateral development", known as the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and competencies that deepen their current perceptions and task performance. We contend CBME is necessary but not sufficient to develop future leaders in an increasingly complex world. Concurrently, educators must design curricula to stimulate students' "vertical development", described as "how we learn to see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality."

Exploring the World of Vertical Leadership Development

Vertical leadership development draws on the research of various theorists who have studied the developmental pathways we follow throughout our lifetimes to expand our understanding of ourselves and the world. The well-known work of Abraham Maslow, for example, proposed that we develop over time by meeting our needs for safety and security, self-esteem,

belonging, self-actualization and, eventually, self-transcendence. Adult developmental theorists Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, in their most recent book, *The Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberatively Developmental Organization* (2016), describe a pathway through “three plateaus in adult mental development,” which they call the socialized mind, the self-authoring mind, and the self-transforming mind.

One particularly elegant and graphic way of describing the perspectives of those who have traveled these developmental pathways is offered by researcher Susanne Cook-Greuter:

The metaphor of climbing a mountain can serve as an illustration of what it means to gain an increasingly higher vantage point. At each turn of the path up the mountain I can see more of the territory I have already traversed. I can see the multiple turns and reversals in the path. I can see further into and across the valley. The closer I get to the summit, the easier it becomes to see behind to the shadow side and uncover formerly hidden aspects of the territory. Finally at the top, I can see beyond my particular mountain to other ranges and further horizons. The more I can see, the wiser, more timely, more systematic and informed my actions and decisions are likely to be because more of the relevant information, connections and dynamic relationships become visible.

In a 2015 book, co-authored with my wife, Carole, titled *The Transformative Workplace: Growing People, Purpose, Prosperity and Peace* (2015), we described this gradual elevation of perspective taking as a movement from Selfness to Otherness to Wholeness:

Selfness includes those early developmental challenges where we begin to realize a sense of our own individuality and who we are in relationship to our families and those closest to us. At this stage of our development we are most concerned about biological, safety, and survival issues, as well as seeing to our need for recognition and self-esteem.

Otherness includes development of a sense of who we are beyond our immediate relationships and surroundings. It includes an increased valuing of other people, groups, and communities in our lives. Otherness also includes a concern for meeting the needs and expectations of others, as well as our own.

Wholeness refers to an expansion of consciousness that includes an awareness and concern for all living things. A wider embrace of all life leads to decisions and actions that lead to a more sustainable and peaceful way of living.

Approaches to Vertical Leadership Development

In his research calling for a greater focus on vertical leadership development, CCL’s Nick Petrie suggested that, “There are no simple, existing models or programs, which will be sufficient to develop the levels of collective leadership required to meet an increasingly complex future. Instead, an era of rapid innovation will be needed in which organizations experiment with new

approaches that combine diverse ideas in new ways and share these with others.” In later reports, he identified a number of innovations currently in play including the:

- Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey approach to working directly with the beliefs and assumptions of leaders, using a four-column “change map.” The map helps leaders identify goals for their own improvement; actions that distract them from reaching those goals; “hidden” commitments that lead to these distractions; and, the “big assumptions” or deeply held beliefs that must be challenged to move forward.
- John McGuire and Gary Rhodes top-down approach to culture change, working with the beliefs and assumptions that underlie the organization’s business strategy, and then developing top level executives as models for new ways of thinking. Through this approach, executives are expected to identify, emulate and cascade down through the organization a more appropriate leadership culture.
- Jane Weber and Roelien Bokxem (of the PresenceAtWork consultancy) body-based approach to collective leadership development. The pair uses a body-based assessment that helps individuals identify their primary strengths, preferences and talents, which leads to group insights about how to leverage each person’s strengths to improve overall performance.

The Practicing Wholeness Approach

“We are what we repeatedly do.”
Aristotle

Practicing Wholeness is an innovation in the field of vertical leadership development that is designed to address each and every one of the inadequacies in traditional leadership development approaches listed at the beginning of this paper. It is:

- Aimed at highly diverse, self-managed, and often geographically distant teams and work groups
- Focused on voluntary formal and informal groups, teams or communities of practice at any level in the organization who are committed to increasing their effectiveness
- Offered in the context of the group or team’s regular work life, ensuring that all members are engaged in the same shared experience
- Organized around the real challenges faced in the workplace and beyond
- Owned by those with leadership responsibilities or by individuals and teams interested in their own growth and development
- Highly accessibility and adaptable to specific environments, often using homegrown facilitators
- A long-term and continuous process, meant to move participants to greater self-awareness, stronger relationships and heightened perspectives

Practicing Wholeness is a practical guide to vertical/collective leadership development that is meant to be used in any environment where there is a recognition that developing more highly conscious people who can work together to find innovative solutions to increasingly complex problems is the key to creating a world that works for all. It is an approach that is based on the idea that it is possible to advance one's capacity for more complex and conscious ways of thinking and being by *acting as if* one has already become more highly developed. In other words, the focus is on engaging in practices that are already the hallmark of highly conscious people.

Practicing Wholeness is organized around a process of engaged conversations among two or more people who commit to being together for a minimum of twelve meetings of 90-120 minutes. Each of these twelve conversations focuses on a practice or discipline designed to deepen self-awareness; strengthen relationships with others; and, heighten perspectives. They include:

Deepening Self-Awareness

Presence
Courage
Authenticity
Integrity

Strengthening Relationships

Truthfulness
Forgiveness
Compassion
Generosity

Heightening Perspectives

Humility
Unity
Equanimity
Celebration

Resources available to groups or teams working with these wholeness practices include:

- A. A pre-reading that describes the practice, along with references to additional and optional readings and resources.
- B. One or more questions or conversation starters for individual and group reflection
- C. Suggestions for taking the practice into participants' daily lives

Facilitating the Practicing Wholeness experience does not require group facilitation expertise, but familiarity with dialogue and circle processes for engaging participants in productive conversations is very useful. Toward that end, helpful resources are also available to facilitators, including a set of guidelines for facilitating a circle; resources for helping groups function effectively; and, a suggested outline for facilitating each meeting of the Practicing Wholeness circle.

The author's 2018 sabbatical will organize Practicing Wholeness experiments with partners interested in accessing and using these resources in their own environments. To explore participation, contact David Schwinn at schwinn@lcc.edu

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