

Community College 2020

The Paradox of Leadership

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Change of Plan

Embedded in this presentation are ten themes woven together to create a future-focused conception of organizational vitality and leadership:

- * environmental turbulence
- * organizational vitality
- * culture
- * change
- * resource leveraging
- * paradox
- * strategic thinking
- * transformation
- * org. systems/structure
- * leadership

Prevailing Themes

- **Turbulence and change**
- **Organizational vitality and malaise**
- **Leadership: context and conceptualization**

Perspectives on the Future

- ***Unpredictable:*** shaped by turbulence, non-linear change and chance events
- ***Crisis-dominated:*** enmeshed in crisis through fated convergences between people and events

Institutional Vitality and Leadership

These perspectives coalesce into a crisis narrative conception of institutional vitality and leadership:

- **Institutions and leaders separate themselves from the mainstream through encounter and response to crisis (fated convergence)**
 - * *Lincoln and the Civil War*
 - * *FDR and the Great Depression*
 - * *JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis*
- **In the absence of crisis, organizations remain static and leaders remain custodians of potential**

Crisis and Leadership

- ***Crisis Narrative:*** We live in a world of continuing crisis fed by a 24-hour news cycle and multiple information streams
- ***Veneration of Leadership:*** Crisis generates a context welcoming to the emergence of unconventional leaders (Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders)
- ***Consequence:*** When moments of crisis appear larger than life, leaders—rightly or wrongly—become consequential

Accentuation of Crisis

We live in a world that accentuates the narrative of crisis and venerates leadership...

- **leaders are expected to make sense out of chaos and to impart a coherent vision of the future**
- **effective leaders do make the world more sensible, but generally not sensible enough**

Turbulence and Change

Mega forces are at work...

- *in the environment* that impact organizations and leaders
- *inside organizations* that affect their vitality

These forces shape the relationship between:

- **leaders and organizations**
- **organizations and community**

Environmental Forces

In the news...

- **Global warming:** extreme temperatures projected to cause an additional 11,000 heat-related deaths in U.S. by summer of 2030
 - * *ragweed pollen season 27 days longer now than 1995*
 - * *smoke from wildfires and increasing ozone levels will heighten respiratory problems*
- **Rising sea levels:**
 - * *3.5 ft. world-wide rise in sea level projected by 2100*
 - * *40 ft. rise by 2500 (without human intervention)*

Environmental Forces (cont.)

- **Erratic weather patterns:**

- * *drought in California / tornados and wildfires in Heartland*

- * *violent rainfall leading to flooding and contaminated drinking water*

- **Terrorism: episodic and systemic**

- **Mass displacement of population between nations**

TAKE-AWAY:

Amplification of crisis, strain on infrastructure and resources, and veneration of leadership to bring order to chaos in troubled times

Internal Organization Forces

From the experience of organizations...

- ***Stall out:*** most organizations eventually face a predictable crisis known as “stall out”
 - * *a sudden drop in growth and revenue and/or decline in market position*
 - * *stall out is not caused by an obsolete business model*
 - * *it is a function of complexity obstructing leader capacity to take swift action*

Stall Out

Organizations that successfully counteract stall out...

- *see themselves as **business insurgents*** (community colleges)
- ***simplify** structure, systems and strategy* (Perpetual)
- *have an **obsession with the front line*** (Home Depot)
- *instill an **owner's mindset** in staff* (Springfield Remanufacturing)

TAKE-AWAY:

Simplify and focus on the front line

Embracing Simplicity

Ask yourself...

- **What is our core business?**
- **How many businesses do we have?**
- **In how many of these businesses are we a market leader?**
- **How much of our budget goes to core vs. non-core businesses?**
- **What businesses do we need to eliminate to enhance vitality?**

Resource Fixedness

To cope with volatility and uncertainty, organizations typically respond by...

- *improving forecasting and increasing their agility*
 - *planning on the basis of fixed resources, systems and structure*
-
- *forecasts obsolesce quickly in times of rapid change, flexibility is costly to achieve*
 - *resources diminish as fixed costs rise, culture resists change*

Temporary Systems

Organizations can leverage resources by...

- *Creating and deploying **temporary systems***
 - * ***disposable** programs and services, structures, and partnerships (Orbitz)*
 - * ***temporary program:** staffed by contract workers, consultants and temp staff*
 - * *permanent staff hired if venture succeeds*

TAKE-AWAYS:

Budget constraints **are not** a satisfactory excuse for not doing something

Leverage resources through temporary systems

Weak Signals

In an unpredictable future shaped by non-linear change...

- *Signals of change* are often weak and cannot be readily seen
- *Attention to weak signals* can give rise to
 - * *fresh perspectives and non-linear thinking*
 - * *imagining alternative futures*
- *Hasbro*

Tapping into Weak Signals

Three questions leaders and staff in your college should ask...

- *What factors and conditions does our current success depend on?*
- *Which factors are already changing or might change over time?*
- *How can we prepare for these changes to exploit their impact?*

TAKE-AWAYS:

Pay attention to weak signals

Systematically engage the total college community in identifying disruptive industry shifts

Key to the Future

Paradoxical leadership

- Multiple goals and contradictory “businesses” have developed in community colleges over time
- Equilibrium must be maintained between businesses—**requires contradictory behavior by leaders**
- Equilibrium is maintained by *separating* businesses in conflict with one another while simultaneously managing *connections* between them

Paradoxical Leadership

Leaders will be torn between four tensions...

- Managing for *today* or *tomorrow*
- *Adhering* to or *crossing* boundaries
- Maximizing value for the *institution*
or *generating wider benefits for*

Paradoxical Leadership (cont.)

Community colleges will struggle to address *obligation paradoxes*

- * today *vs.* tomorrow
- * primary customers *vs.* community stakeholders
- * institutional priorities *vs.* community needs
- * long-term gain *vs.* short-term investment

Paradoxical Leadership (cont.)

Simultaneously contradictory demands are interdependent

Institutions and leaders can't...

- plan for tomorrow unless the institution is operationally efficient today
- meet student and staff needs without community support
- achieve long-term gain without short-term investment

Leaders need to reframe *either/or tradeoffs (zero sum)* into *ongoing both/and realities (paradox)*

The Paradoxical Mindset

Paradoxical leadership begins with a reexamination of assumptions:

- From consistency to inconsistency (**multiple and contradictory “truths”**)
- From scarce resources to abundant resources (**resources are both limited and generative**)
- From stability to dynamism and change (**regularity and non-linearity coexist**)

Achieving a state of dynamic equilibrium between opposing forces is the center of paradoxical leadership

Achieving Dynamic Equilibrium

Separating and Connecting

- ***Separating:*** *Pulling apart organizational goals and valuing each goal individually*
 - * separate financial statements and metrics for each goal
 - * how does a decision affect student success? how does it affect community?
- ***Connecting:*** *Finding linkages and synergies across goals*
 - * Establish metrics that depend on the success of the entire organization

Developing Paradoxical Leaders

Filtered and Unfiltered Leaders

- ***Filtered:*** leaders develop over time in a singular organizational type and are relatively interchangeable
 - * *colleges and universities and the military*
- ***Unfiltered:*** leaders do not move through vetting processes in a specific organizational type; they possess characteristics that may put them at odds with culture; and they carry risk
 - * Abraham Lincoln (unfiltered)
 - * William Seward (filtered)

Questions

Which leader type is best suited to manage fast change and paradox?

How many of the participants in this room would you estimate to be filtered leaders? How many are unfiltered leaders?

What would it take to merge the best attributes of filtered and unfiltered leaders to produce a new generation of leaders?