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The Imperative—and the Challenges—of Introducing a Citizen-Leader Development Program in an Undergraduate Liberal Arts Setting

Michael J. Fratanuono

Abstract

Leadership, especially that associated with collaborative endeavors, is important for addressing emerging, increasingly complex challenges. That development is relevant to liberal arts colleges that are dedicated to educating generalists rather than specialists. The author maintains that such an education helps young people cultivate three sets of individual characteristics: values, capabilities, and aspirations. As well, it provides young people opportunities to become involved in a six-part iterative process intended to promote positive change. In spring of 2019, the author's home institution Dickinson College launched a call for proposals from faculty, staff, and alumni that were consistent with the College's mission and strategic priorities; and would strengthen its competitive position and deepen its relationships with stakeholders. Over a two-year period, the author played a central role in (1) helping shape a proposal originated by two alumni and (2) with several Dickinson community members, translating the proposal to an implementation plan. The efforts fell short; but the author learned lessons about such an endeavor. A well-conceived plan must find the areas of intersection among the interests of key stakeholders. A plan must be of scale that enables organizational practicality and financial feasibility. Successful implementation hinges on the components of good collaborative leadership highlighted above. Explanation and launch of a plan must create excitement among sponsors and potential beneficiaries.

Keywords: Leadership Development, Liberal Arts Education, Relational Leadership, Case Study, Personal Stories, Personal Leadership Characteristics, Systems Insights

1. Introduction

1.1 Leadership: multiple interpretations; increasing relevance

The study of leadership has long been relevant to academic disciplines that span the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural and physical sciences; and all readers of this paper can point to artists, athletes, businesspeople, gurus, military officers, politicians, and others of every stripe who have been or are regarded as leaders. Nevertheless, there is not a simple consensus definition of the concept.

Yes, some experts do provide similar definitions. While Maxwell says, “... leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less ([1], p. 13),” Cashman ([2], p. 4) says “Leadership is courageous, authentic influence that creates enduring value.” Gardner defines leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers ([3], p.1). Pulitzer Prize winning historian Kearns Goodwin pushes back with a fundamental question: “What is the difference between power, title, and leadership ([4], p. xiv)?”

Meanwhile, over the decades, forces have been at play that have contributed to emerging challenges at local, regional, national, and global levels [5]. Contemporary challenges are complex and characterized by greater degrees of interdependence among humans and between human and non-human ecosystems [6].

Such developments have placed a premium on leadership, especially relational leadership. Relational leaders recognize their credibility is based not on a position they hold within an organization, but instead on the respect they have earned from others, and on their ability to understand the nature of a challenge, to articulate a purpose and a pathway for addressing circumstances, and to motivate others [7]. That brand of leadership is central to collaboration, an important way of addressing the complex realities of the 21st century [8].

1.2 Leadership and a liberal arts education

The author maintains, as do others, that for young adults a liberal arts education provides the strongest foundation for the development of relational leadership. Via a liberal arts education, undergraduates receive exposure to multiple disciplines and are encouraged to employ interdisciplinary thinking as they contemplate issues and learn to communicate ideas. Furthermore, since the typical enrollment at a liberal arts college numbers between several hundred to a few thousand, opportunities exist for all students to engage in groups to achieve a common purpose.

In a wonderful study of leadership written more than 30 years ago, Gardner eloquently makes the case.

“Versatility is built into the species, but the modern world diminishes it drastically through specialization. Young potential leaders would do well to hold on to their birth-right (Italics in the original). ... At the college level, the best preparation is the liberal arts education ([3], p. 164).”

Epstein [9] agrees with that line of thinking. He explains that in the current era, there is a stronger need for generalists than for specialists; nonetheless, there is a tendency in many arenas of human life to cultivate specialists.

Despite such advocacy, most liberal arts colleges do not have structured leadership development programs open to all their students.

2. Leadership concepts

2.1 A framework for conversation

In **Figure 1**, the author presents a framework of leadership concepts. He created the framework during the summer months of 2021 while writing this chapter. The framework draws upon a handful of studies about leadership and the insights garnered by the author over a two-year period. The author believes the framework will be useful to all persons, including students.

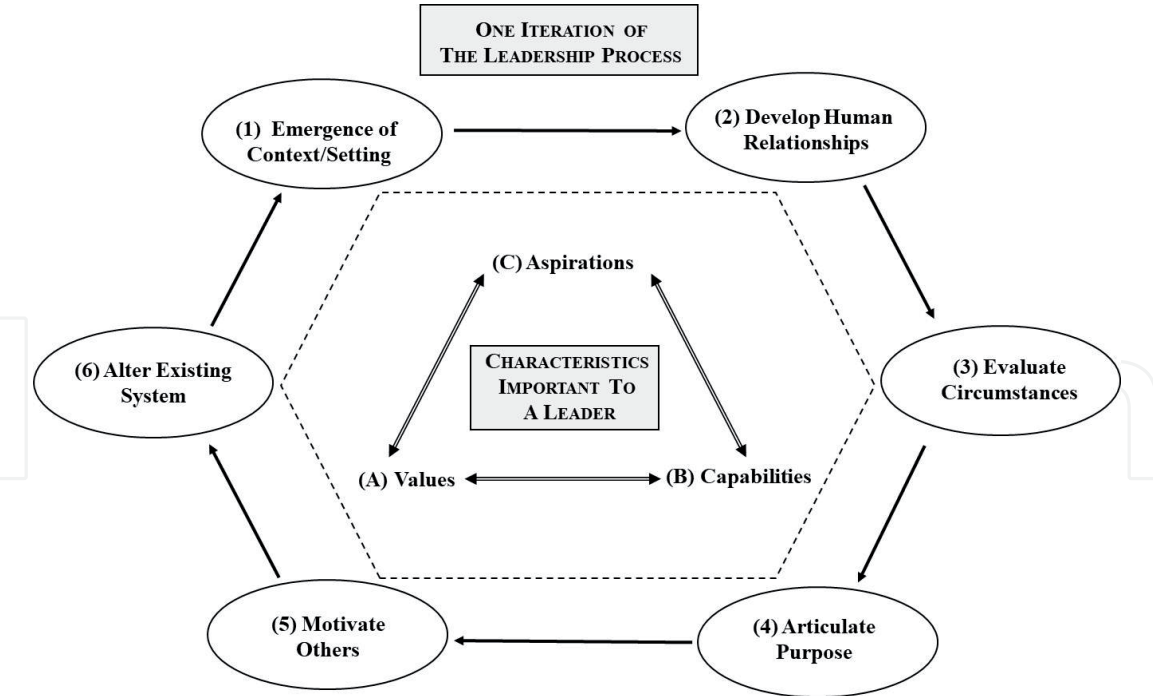


Figure 1.
Characteristics of a leader and the leadership process. Source: Created by author.

The interior portion of the model focuses on three sets of characteristics important to a leader: values, capabilities, and aspirations. The dual headed arrows suggest the reciprocal interdependence among the three sets.

Using systems jargon nicely explained by Meadows [10], each set of characteristics is an intangible stock. At any point in time, each has magnitude that can—at least in theory—be measured. Over time, a stock’s magnitude can rise or decline, due to the influence of flows and feedback loops.

The exterior portion of the model highlights a six-step leadership process for addressing circumstances to create benefits for stakeholders. As suggested by the numbered sequence of steps and the action-words used for labels, the process is dynamic: it involves *flows* of activity. Furthermore, complex challenges may call for repeated iterations of the process. That idea is consistent with Kolb’s “Cycle of Experiential Learning” [11], which calls for students to engage in iterative rounds of (a) experience, (b) reflection, (c) conceptualization, and (d) experimentation.

The dotted boundary in the interior of the model suggests the interdependence among the three stocks and the outer flow of the unfolding process. Existing characteristics of the leader will influence the outcome of a round of steps. In turn, the outcome and the insights garnered provide feedback that influences the magnitude of the leader’s characteristics.

2.2 Linking the framework to the literature

When contemplating the best way to link the leadership framework of **Figure 1** to literature about leadership, the author wrestled with two approaches.

The first approach was to select a representative sample of literature, to briefly summarize each source, and to ask the reader to trace the ideas included in each summary back to the diagram. The author rejected that approach because it placed burdens on the reader and in many instances, sources were relevant to more than one component of the framework.

Instead, the author chose the second approach; that is, to provide an example of one or more sources pertinent to each concept. Although this adds more

precision, it does make the explanation choppy, and leads to some sources being referenced on more than one occasion.

2.3 Characteristics important to a leader

2.3.1 Values

In the eyes of many experts, the best place to start a conversation about leadership is values. Komives, Wagner, and Associates [7] explain the “Social Change Model of Leadership Development”. The first version was created in 1996; yet it has stood the test of time. The model proposes individuals should gain clarity about three personal sets of values: individual values (consciousness of self, congruence, commitment); group values (collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility); and community values (citizenship). Once they do so, they are better prepared to engage in “relationship-based leadership.”

Based on decades of research involving surveys, personal narratives, and case studies, Kouzes and Posner [12] identify practices of effective leadership. The first practice, “Model the Way” (pp. 47–70), and the first two commitments embedded in that practice, involve (a) clarifying one’s own values to help affirm shared values and (b) setting an example by living shared values and helping others to do so. They go full circle: in the last practice they described, they call for celebration of values and victories after any initiative.

2.3.2 Capabilities

The author regards capabilities as a broad concept that incorporates others such as skills, abilities, and knowledge. Capabilities can evolve over time.

Maxwell [1] emphasizes that leadership is a collection of skills that can be cultivated over time. In contrast to management, which focuses on maintaining existing systems and processes, leadership is essential for moving the organization in new directions. Others report that across time and countries, two of the four most important attributes followers seek in their leaders are the abilities to be (a) competent and (b) forward looking ([9], pp. 30–31); that the range of skills important to a leader include agility to adapt to ever-changing circumstances [2]; or that because social change is organic and occurs in systems, there is a need for adaptability [3].

In the current era, collaboration is an increasingly important process that is based on the ability to build relationships, and then to effectively navigate interests among groups of people within an organization, across organizations, and even across for-profit, non-profit, and government sectors [13].

2.3.3 Aspirations

Kearns Goodwin [4] describes the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson. She addresses the coming of age of each young man; difficult life-experiences that forged their resilience of character; and finally, as President, their ability to successfully respond to their respective challenges. At the outset, she poses a range of questions, including “Where does ambition come from?” and “Is leadership possible without a purpose larger than personal ambition (p. xiv)?” To get things started, she quotes Lincoln at the age of 23, when he announced his intention to run for the state legislature (p. 3):

“Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. ... I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition is yet to be developed.”

Although Lincoln and the other three presidents depicted are a special case, the author of this chapter maintains that helping undergraduates develop a sense of aspiration—even if aspirations may change over time ([7], pp. 51–52)—is an extremely important outcome, one central to early-stage leadership development.

2.4 The leadership process

2.4.1 Emergence of context and setting

Some analysts, especially in the current era, start discussions about leadership by emphasizing context. Hull, Robertson, and Mortimer [6] are first and foremost concerned about sustainability in this, the Anthropocene era, characterized by interdependence between human and non-human systems and the emergence of “wicked problems”. Efforts to address problems call for system awareness. They are certainly not alone. Stroh [14] for one insists that social entrepreneurs must be adept at understanding system interactions.

2.4.2 Develop human relationships

Developing human relationships is crucial to the leadership process. There are many types of interpersonal interactions that provide opportunities for genuine leadership to be demonstrated, and therefore to build trust and respect in the eyes of others [1]. Cashman [2] emphasizes that good leaders must be good coaches, helping member of the organization grow. Kouzes and Posner [12] indicate that followers want leaders who are honest and inspiring; and in turn, they advise that effective leaders must enable others to act. Kearns Goodwin relates in touching terms the genuine humility and sincere relationships FDR formed with his fellow “polios” when learning to deal with the affliction in Warm Springs Georgia ([4], pp. 171–174).

Chaleff [15] breaks new ground and concentrates on the follower. He asserts that the leader and follower are united by purpose. He elaborates the “courage”—the breadth and depth of character—needed for a person to “assume responsibility”, “serve”, “challenge”, “participate in transformation” and “take moral action” in an organization.

2.4.3 Evaluate circumstances

Adner [16] tells innovators from the business world they must be mindful of the roles of all stakeholders in an ecosystem. Why is that? Other companies in the supply chain may bear “co-innovation risk” if they too must create new products or processes to help launch the initiative. Other companies downstream may face “adaptation risk” if they must adjust products or processes to accommodate the initiative. Thus, the risk and possible success for the innovator is contingent on risks confronting other stakeholders.

2.4.4 Articulate a purpose

MacMillan and Thompson [17] focus on the social entrepreneur who seeks to introduce an innovation dedicated to creating social wealth for multiple stakeholders. That effort calls for both individual ingenuity and the ability to navigate and align networks of stakeholders. Nonetheless, as indicated by the title of their Chapter 1, they stress that the very first step for such an entrepreneur is to “articulate the targeted problem and substantiate the proposed solution.” Worth noting

is that each entrepreneur must achieve their own clarity of purpose and feasibility before making efforts to convince others (pp. 3–4).

2.4.5 Motivate others

Cashman stresses that a leader must be able to demonstrate “Story Mastery”; that is, a leader must be able to draw upon personal stories that genuinely touch others, thereby enabling the leader to inspire others to engage in a common purpose ([2], pp. 45–57). Gallo [18] believes that if done with honesty and skill, storytelling is recognized by people from all arenas as a powerful way of connecting with, inspiring, and unifying groups of people to achieve a common purpose. Additional advice is that leaders must be able to “Inspire a Shared Vision and “Encourage the Heart” [12].

2.4.6 Alter the existing system

System alteration has long been and continues to be a part of discussion about the process of leadership [3, 6, 14]. Meadows [10] provides an excellent introductory overview of concepts. She identifies six system traps (archetypes) and introduces twelve leverage points of increasing impact—but numbered in descending order—that may be used to alter an existing system. The author places the leverage points of Meadows into two groups. Alterations 12 through 6 are undertaken to *modify* an existing system by changing the magnitude of stocks, the volume or direction of flows, or the influence of feedback loops. Alterations 5 through 1 are undertaken to *transform* a system by taking steps to change the rules, membership, or goals of a system, or even to develop new high-level perspectives about the purpose of the system.

3. Case study—the first iteration

As stated in the description of **Figure 1**, the processes of both leadership development and leadership process are iterative in nature. That has been the experience for the author.

3.1 Launch of an initiative

In spring 2019, the author’s home institution, Dickinson College, announced with flair The Revolutionary Challenge (Challenge). It had four objectives. First, to solicit ideas that could, if implemented, contribute to the mission of the College. Second, to create stronger bonds between internal members of the College community and external members including alumni, parents of current students, and so forth. Third, to help the College achieve competitive advantage in the liberal arts sector by introducing a new competency [19]. Fourth, to attract contributions from stakeholders who had not previously been active donors.

Essentially, the Challenge was a call for proposals from combinations of faculty, staff, and alumni. To provide appropriate lead-time and indicate seriousness of intent, the announced deadline for proposal submissions was October 4, 2019.

Proposals were asked to address a series of related questions. While some were process-related, others were more intriguing. (1) What are the central concepts in your proposal? (2) What steps will be associated with implementing the proposal. (3) How does your idea relate to or support the college’s strategic framework? (4) What partnerships, on campus and off campus, do you envision? (5) How

will your idea positively affect the education of Dickinson students? (6) How will your idea positively impact the world beyond Dickinson's campus? (7) If your proposal is selected as a finalist, what resource needs do you anticipate for preparing a detailed proposal?

The start-up process for the Challenge called for formation of a team of judges, The President's Panel on Innovation (Panel). The Panel would consist of members of the board of trustees, administrators, and selected faculty. In mid-spring, the author was nominated by a colleague to serve on the Panel and was subsequently elected to serve. The membership of the Panel was also announced in celebratory fashion.

3.2 A request for assistance

In late August of 2019, the author was invited by the then VP of Development to attend a meeting with two alumni whom he had met a few years prior, Dr. Robert Paull (class of 1962) and Mr. Paul Kovach (class of 1971). The two alumni had maintained a long-time and dedicated relationship with the College and had for some years been strong advocates of a College-wide leadership development program. When the Challenge was announced, they had started to develop a proposal they titled "Leadership for 21st Century Revolutionary Challenges" (Leadership Proposal or Proposal).

During the meeting, the author listened to the preliminary thoughts of the men and appreciated their ideas. Then, as a bit of a surprise, the author was asked by the VP if he might help the alumni fine-tune their Proposal. Since the author had already been named to the Panel, he asked if guidelines could be put in place to prevent conflict of interest. He received an appropriate answer as to how that would be ensured from the VP, who would also serve on the Panel. He therefore agreed and worked the next two months to help the two men further shape and write their Proposal.

3.3 Key features of the leadership proposal

The Leadership Proposal had four important features. First, it attempted to respond to what the two men—the co-originators—perceived as a threat to the College and to the liberal arts philosophy of higher education. They observed that while "the liberal arts were once perceived as providing appropriate guidance and opportunity to develop the knowledge and maturity needed to enter adulthood and the world of work ...", in the current era "... much of the public questions the value of a liberal arts education and perceives it as expensive and lacking strong, focused preparation for employment."

Second, it was conceptually relevant. Dickinson College was founded in 1783 by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a key figure in the American colonies' efforts to win independence. Dickinson's mission statement is informed by his writings.

"Dickinson College was created explicitly for high purposes—to prepare young people, by means of a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences, for engaged lives of citizenship and leadership in the service of society."¹

Although the College has graduated thousands of successful young men and women over its 235-year history, it has never created a commonly agreed framework for helping all students appreciate leadership components and practice leadership methods.

¹ https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20184/academic_offices_and_resources/1953/information_about_dickinson

Third, it was innovative, perhaps to the point of being considered radical. The co-originators asserted that each student's leadership capability was being shaped in all aspects of their four-year liberal arts experience, via engagement in individual and group projects undertaken in academic classes, internships, study abroad experiences, sports teams, the performing arts, student government, student life, public service, etc. The missing piece was a mental model of leadership development that helped students recognize and appreciate commonalities in "interleaved projects" [20] that spanned domains. To shape such a model, faculty, staff, and administrators would need to share ideas about the projects they assigned and supervised in their respective roles as educators, supervisors, mentors, and coaches. The purpose of such gatherings would be to create a common vocabulary, a "linguistic scaffolding". If members of the community had a common vocabulary, then when they assigned projects and provided feedback, they could prompt students to think about how leadership capability would be cultivated during efforts to complete the project.

Fourth, the proposal included a vision statement. If students repeatedly thought about their contributions to projects, then they would be able to write and speak in clear and convincing terms about the commonalities across a liberal arts education, the responsibilities they had fulfilled in generating positive outcomes, and the roles they were prepared to play in future endeavors: That ability in turn would resonate with potential employers, graduate school admissions officers, collaborators, or others.

3.4 The proposal is named a finalist

By the October 4 deadline, 49 proposals had been submitted. A few days later, all were posted on the College web site. Over a period of roughly two weeks, more than 3,500 interested parties reviewed the proposals and shared their likes. Their preferences, as well as the scores assigned by members of the Panel during their first reading, narrowed the field to twenty.

In the final weeks of October, Panel members more carefully reviewed the top twenty proposals. On October 25, members met, talked about those twenty, and then voted to reduce the proposals still under consideration to eight. For a few more hours, the Panel engaged in further detailed conversation and then voted again. Although the author did participate in conversation about various proposals, as agreed in late summer, in neither round did the author vote for the Leadership Proposal. Nevertheless, it was named one of the four finalists selected. Two of the other finalists respectively called for a new academic major and construction of a new facility. The fourth, a Foresight Thinking Proposal, also a bit radical, called for development of skills among students, such as systems analysis and scenario planning.

3.5 The author takes on new responsibilities

Guidelines for the Challenge called for (1) submission of written implementation plans to the Panel by mid-April, and (2) a public pitch to a live audience on May 2, 2020. Near the end of the meeting, members of the Board of Trustees stepped forward to respectively serve as mentors for one of the four finalist proposals. As well, faculty or administrators who were members of the Panel volunteered to serve as facilitators among Panel members, mentors, and one of the four sets of originators.

Of note, of the four finalists selected, the Leadership Proposal was the only one that had been originated by alumni. Therefore, unlike other originators, who were

staff or faculty, the two alumni could not, for logistical reasons, directly engage on a regular basis with members of the internal college community for the purpose of converting their Proposal into an implementation plan (Leadership Plan or Plan). Therefore, given the investment already made, the author agreed to serve both as facilitator and internal coordinator for the Plan. The author understood there was much work ahead.

3.6 From proposal to implementation plan

3.6.1 Efforts to understand context

Over the winter months, the author took some important steps. First, he talked at length with staff in the Division of Student Life who explained the scores of opportunities for student leadership at the College. As well, he heard for the first time about the Social Change Model of Leadership Development developed by Komives, Wagner, and Associates [7]. He also learned the Model was strongly advocated by many members the Division, and that it was the foundation of a national survey. In fact, every two years, staff administered the survey to the Dickinson student body and forwarded information to a national clearing house, and in return received the national survey results for internal use.

The author also spoke with several other members of the College community and heard impressive and fascinating ideas. For team building, coaches had student-athletes complete community service projects prior to a season; or engage in self-reflection and then share personal stories with teammates. Faculty in the performing arts asserted the importance of teamwork and leadership by students in department endeavors. The Director the College's renowned Center for Global Study and Engagement described opportunities and activities to help students cultivate intercultural competency and life skills.

As the weeks passed, some parties with whom the author spoke admitted they did not know about leadership approaches used by colleagues in other domains of the College, and sometimes, not even by colleagues in their home department. The absence of general awareness within and across domains suggested to the author the existence of silos and an opportunity for the Leadership Plan to add value to the College community.

Furthermore, the author was encouraged, as many of those with whom he spoke agreed they had the time and interest of serving on an Implementation Team (Team) to shape the Implementation Plan. By the start of the semester, twelve members of the community, representing the offices of admissions, development, student life, athletics, and academic disciplines had agreed to serve.

3.6.2 A senior seminar

While contemplating the focus of his spring 2020 senior seminar about Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the author decided that conversion of the Leadership Proposal into a Plan would provide an important example of an initiative intended to create social value. Influenced by conversations over the winter months and to gain greater insight about leadership theories, among other readings such as the Strategic Plan of the College and material related to the Challenge, the author included in the syllabus the books by Komives et al. [7] and Kouzes and Posner [12]. As well, the author required students to write reflective essays about their personal values and growth over four years, even as they engaged in their individual commentary about the Plan.

3.6.3 Managing the team

During the spring 2020 semester, the Implementation Team met on a bi-weekly basis. The central topic was the content of the Proposal and the notion of leadership as it pertained to their respective domains. The most significant intellectual challenges were (1) translating the emphasis in the Proposal on participation in projects to development of leadership characteristics, and (2) imagining the appropriate organizational structure needed for having community members shape a common vocabulary. As end of the semester neared, the author heard words of frustration among members of the Team: e.g., “What are we trying to accomplish?” The author now recognizes that the question and implied criticism were justified. The Team had spent most of its time, without resolution, on task (1) and much less on task (2).

3.6.4 Impact of the pandemic

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 at the mid-point of the spring 2020 semester, the College closed its doors, students returned home, and faculty pivoted to zoom-delivered online education. Those developments were emotionally and physically draining for all. Among other adjustments, including zoom-based administrative meetings, the author altered requirements for the students in the senior seminar.

As the Board and the Administration scrambled to develop new arrangements for events, including graduation, they wisely decided to extend the due dates for Challenge-related implementation plans until October 2020. From the author’s perspective, the five-month extension on due dates for the Challenge turned out to be a good news/bad news development. It provided much needed time to further shape ideas; but it also implied that efforts would continue under less-than-ideal conditions. That is, COVID continued its grip throughout the summer; but that was not the end of the story. The College did not attempt to reopen for the 2020–2021 academic year.

3.6.5 Mixed messages

As the end of the spring semester drew near, the Panel asked internal coordinators to submit drafts of their respective plans. In mid-June, the Panel held individual sessions to provide feedback to each of the four teams. In each session, one Panel member asked attendees high-level questions that focused on both instrumental and intrinsic concerns, with an emphasis on the former. “Does this plan fill a societal need?” “How does this initiative help with recruitment and retention of students?” “What are the current strengths of the College, and does it build on those?” “How might *we* make this plan distinctive relative to those offered by rival colleges?” (*Italics in the last question added by author.*) The phrasing of the questions reminded the author of the Board’s sense of purpose and ownership of the Challenge.

During the session dedicated to the Leadership Plan, the author took handwritten notes. Some opinions were consistent with the original Proposal; but were then countered by other voices. For example, “The plan should be relevant to all students.” versus “It should target a particular segment of students.”; or “A common language is important.” versus “A common language should not be imposed.”

Others present offered a range of assertions or questions. “The Plan cannot stand alone—it must explicitly focus on diversity and inclusivity, and on ethics.” “The Plan must draw upon the resources of the College’s existing Centers”.² “The Plan must include the opportunity for more senior students to serve as mentors to other

² In addition the Center for Global Study and Engagement, the College also has a Center for Sustainability Education and a Center for Community Engagement.

students or must include opportunities by alumni to mentor current students.” “Will this Plan include a statement about leadership for a particular purpose such as global engagement?” “Will it emphasize experiential learning and reflection?” The follow-on questions and opposing positions were not debated—they remained hanging in the air for the author to take back to the Implementation Team to resolve.

3.6.6 Additional signals

Shortly after the June 15 meeting, the author sensed concerns about the Plan were emerging, when one of the early advocates of the Proposal seemed to lose interest.

To complicate matters, along with the other boundaries included in the call for proposals and the comments from the June 15 meeting, the author heard additional opinions about what the plan should/could not or should/could be. To illustrate one line of conversation, the Plan should not be the central topic in multiple First-Year Seminars offered in autumn of each year. The Plan should reflect degrees of accomplishment over four years but should not call for either a new Major or a new Certificate Program at the College. The Plan could result in a Transcript Notation.

During the summer months, mindful of the mixed messages, the author did his best to reconcile differences as he drafted iterations of the Plan, and shared each draft with the co-originsators, mentors, and other members of the Implementation Team.

In the late summer of 2020, during an interview with a representative of the College’s daily on-line forum, the author explained that the Proposal included an invitation to members of the community to meet and talk about projects they assigned or monitored in hope of creating a shared leadership vocabulary. Shortly thereafter, the Provost informed the author some senior faculty had told him they rejected that idea.

Later that summer, matters became worse. Another initially strong supporter asked to meet the author in person and appeared to represent the consensus of the Panel when he suggested the author follow one of two pathways: Cease effort and try again, perhaps in a year; or turn over all material to the Team working on the Foresight Thinking Plan.

The author rejected both recommendations for a few reasons: much effort had been invested; the author was agent of the co-originsators; handing over intellectual property created to date was an unfair request; completing the Plan might change minds; and reaching the finish line, even in a dead-last position, was better than quitting, as lessons might be learned.

3.6.7 The plan receives qualified acceptance

In autumn semester 2020, the author remained in contact with co-originsators and members of the Team; took input; and continued to shape the final, comprehensive written Plan. Drafts during the autumn included ideas for organizational structure, timelines, and budgets. The final Plan called for a core group from the Implementation Team to create the content for a two-day workshop for “Ambassadors”, who would share ideas about their projects. As well, they would learn to facilitate similar workshops for “Participants”. Participants would share insights with department or office colleagues and begin to use common vocabulary with students. The start-up process would unfold over two years and would call for substantial fees to provide stipends for all parties.

The author received coaching about developing a “pitch” from a member of the consulting firm hired by the College to help manage the Challenge. In his November

2020, zoom-based, six-minute presentation, despite the warning from the Provost, the author summarized the idea of an invitation—not a mandate—to members of the community to shape a common vocabulary. He emphasized the words “encourage”, “empower”, and “enable” to describe each students’ leadership development process.

Nearly forty of the people who tuned-in to the event submitted opinions about the Leadership Plan. Some reactions consisted of a single phrase or sentence, others a lengthy paragraph. Content wise, they covered a broad spectrum, as indicated by excerpts. “I still don’t really understand what this is.” “This seems overly focused on the issue of language.” “This proposal was the most amorphous, the least well defined.” “I think this is really the only one of the options that’s worth doing for a liberal arts college.” “I think this is the clearly best choice.”

In a subsequent formal meeting, the Panel, the Board of Trustees, and College Administrators, including the President, voted to approve the Plan for a new major and the Plan for a new facility. Donors had stepped forward to fund both. Meanwhile, the Leadership Plan and the Foresight Thinking Plan both received qualified approval. Essentially, that meant that both efforts needed more work, and neither could receive full approval and funding without addressing some key issues.

As stated by different parties at the meeting, the Leadership Plan was not conceptually convincing, did not properly establish ownership or organizational structure, and did not fully satisfy the concerns of various stakeholders.

4. Case study—the second iteration

Over the winter months of 2020–2021, the author decided to not abandon effort on the Implementation Plan. He incorporated it into a spring 2021 senior seminar: this time a seminar in Business Strategy. It too would be taught via zoom.

4.1 A senior seminar in business strategy

In keeping with Department expectations, the author planned to navigate a textbook and analyze case studies with students. As well, he designated the Plan as the “consulting project” for the course; that is, the team of seven students would provide advice to the co-originsators—and as well to the author who had served as internal coordinator—about how the Plan could be improved.

To create context, the author once again assigned as reading pertinent documents, such as the Strategic Plan of the College, the original Proposal, progress reports, and the written Plan. As well, the author scheduled zoom-based visits with some senior members of the Administration. His rationale was that the team was attempting to offer constructive criticism of an innovation intended to bring value to the College, and he wanted students to hear strategic-level perceptions about current College challenges and opportunities from leaders.

Very early on, the two co-originsators had a zoom conversation with the students. The students quickly understood and appreciated the co-originsators’ determination, dedication to the College, and fierce advocacy of a liberal arts education. During the conversation, the author said he and the students would provide two deliverables to the co-originsators.

4.1.1 Deliverable 1: an assessment of the plan

The first deliverable would be a formal assessment of the Plan according to the seven steps of strategic management explained in the textbook [21] and a corresponding set of strategic recommendations. Unfortunately, for a few reasons,

a formal assessment that navigated all seven steps proved too ambitious. Instead, analysis and conversation remained focused on strategic vision, and yielded three key points.

First, the students surprised the author when they said that as presented, the Proposal and Plan were developed in top-down fashion: they would be imposed on students by others who thought this was “the next best thing.” The author recognized that he owned responsibility for that shortcoming, since he had not recruited any student leaders to serve on the Implementation Plan Team.

Second, informed by class conversations and a segment in the textbook that referenced the work of Kotter [22], students developed an alternative vision statement for the Plan, on grounds it was more student-focused and better adhered to Kotter’s criteria³ than did the statement in the original Proposal. Their statement:

“Self-aware students compellingly describe their experience-informed values, capabilities, and aspirations, and their contributions to collaborative endeavors.”

Third, the students suggested there were two unarticulated tensions in the Plan: (1) between a student’s individual development and growth in group efforts; and (2) between evaluation of performance by others and by one’s self-evaluation. The insight led the students and the author to create early drafts of the two-by-two matrix of **Figure 2**. Each cell in the matrix includes generic questions that an individual student may ask themselves about their progress over time.

The first tension is depicted on the horizontal axis. Individual development and relationship-based engagement are each an objective of the four-year liberal arts experience.

The second tension is depicted on the vertical axis. Evaluation by others and self-evaluation by individuals of activities and outcomes both take place during an undergraduate education. When evaluated by others—the two cells in the lower tier of the matrix—students receive recognition of individual contributions and group success. When evaluated by self—the two cells in the upper tier—students gain awareness of their emotional and social intelligence.

The author fine-tuned the content in summer 2021—more work remains—and numbered the cells from 1 to 4. He speculates the sequence represents increasingly more sophisticated combinations of objectives and evaluations. That is, keeping leadership in mind, the ability of an individual to accurately assess the quality of their engagement in group projects (cell 4) represents the highest level of development.

4.1.2 *An inspirational story*

As a second deliverable, each student would make a recording that explained how their leadership characteristics reflected the power of a liberal education, given characteristics were the byproduct of (1) the common features of projects encountered in all domains of a four-year experience and (2) their awareness of how those common features had contributed to their leadership potential. Those stories would provide examples of “proof of concept” for the Proposal as imagined by the co-originators.

In this case as well, the seniors did not deliver what was promised. In seminar, the author once again encountered unanticipated lines of conversation initiated

³ An effective vision statement is *Graphic* (paints a picture); *Directional* (forward looking); *Focused* (specific enough to provide guidance); *Flexible* (permits adjustment to developments); *Feasible* (within the realm of what can be achieved); *Desirable* (makes sense); and is *Easy to Communicate* (can be explained and is amenable to a slogan).

This list is the summary of Table 2.2, pg. 18, GPT.

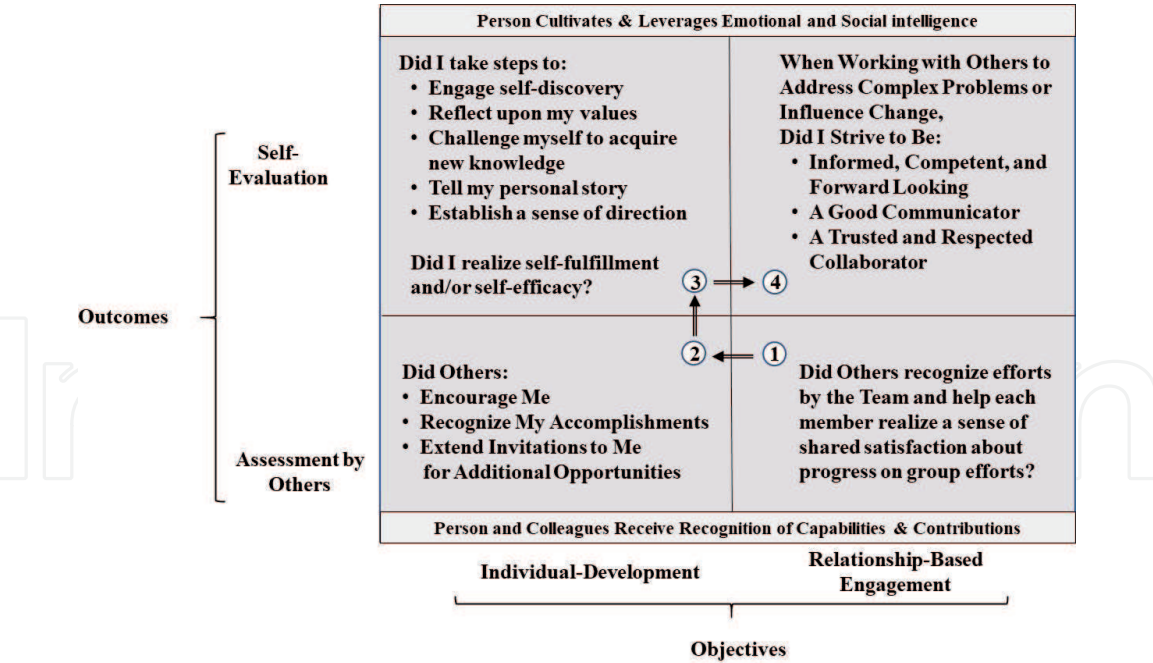


Figure 2. Objectives and outcomes during the process of leadership development. Source: Created by undergraduate students and author.

by the students. Over four years, a student certainly could have a powerful experience; but the various support systems and safe spaces provided by the College were required to enable the student to properly process the experience, and thus be able to share at a more general level the outcomes and implications of the experience. Any story shared had to first and foremost benefit the student. A student should not be expected to tell a story for the purpose of promoting a proposal or a plan: that could be viewed as exploitative.

The author kept those concerns in mind and recognized that trust by students in him, in one another, and in the process was essential. To avoid feeling exploited, students had to have final say as to whether or with whom their stories would be shared.

To provide a rationale for a story, the author and the students turned to Cashman [2], especially his chapter about the need for a leader to be able to tell a personal story to inspire others. To help appreciate the power of a story, the author and students watched expert Simmons [23] make her TED talk case.

Over a two-week period near the end of the semester, students first created outlines and then drafts of their stories. During class time, groups of two or three students went to breakout rooms and shared stories with one another. In another class session, each student delivered a non-recorded dry-run story to the rest of the group and took supportive comments. Finally, each student created a five-minute story on their cell phone from the comfort of their home and submitted it on the final exam date.

The author realized that despite the course being taught via zoom, students had in fact decided that in the senior seminar, the mutual support they received from each other and the organizational culture of the seminar enabled them to talk about some transformative episodes. The author was impressed by all and “blown away” by a few. He thanked each student for giving him the gift of sharing their respective stories.

The author now wonders if stories, informed by the content of **Figures 1 and 2** might be the appropriate vehicle for providing evidence of the students’ growth as leaders.

4.2 Conversations about key stakeholder groups

In the spring of 2021, the author had two one-on-one conversations with administrators who reminded him that an innovation had to connect with key stakeholder groups.

The VP of Admissions explained that even if a program created genuine value for students, if outcomes were nuanced and did not result in clearly demonstrable outcomes, the program would not resonate with students and families who were engaged in the college search process.

The new VP of Advancement gifted the author a copy of Langley [24] and explained the current realities. Higher education is a participant in a highly competitive marketplace. In the higher education sector, 80% of the contributions come from 1% of the givers. Today, the primary rationale of donors is no longer giving “to” a college based on loyalty; instead, it is giving “through a portal of purpose” that permits the donor to be a steward of an initiative that will deliver impactful outcomes.

4.3 The leadership plan and the foresight thinking plan revisited

After both the Leadership Plan and the Foresight Thinking Plan received qualified approval, the author once again heard the plans should be merged. This time, the message came from the Office of Advancement. Therefore, near the end of the spring 2021, the author asked to meet the co-originators of the Foresight Thinking Plan.

The author’s counterparts explained that their Plan emphasized systems thinking, environmental scanning, system mapping, and scenario planning. They also asked the author if he thought that leadership was on an equal footing with those capabilities. The tone of the question implied that they did not. The author said Yes and quickly became defensive and antagonistic. Simply speaking, the conversation was not fruitful.

5. Reflections

The opportunity to submit this Chapter for consideration helped provide focus for the author during the summer of 2021, as he reflected on events of the past two years. He engaged in further study about leadership concepts and gained the clarity needed to create and explain **Figure 1**. As well, he managed to strengthen and fine-tune the underpinnings of **Figure 2**, an outcome of the joint work completed with students in the spring 2021 semester.

5.1 Conceptual and operational challenges

While the Leadership Proposal was *about leadership*, translating it to a Plan *called for leadership* within the context of a collaborative endeavor. That made things tricky for a few reasons.

First, as previously described in more detail, the Proposal envisioned a process whereby members of the community developed a common vocabulary about students’ engagement in projects as the key to leadership development; but it did not identify the characteristics important to a leader. Furthermore, despite a good foundation of interdisciplinary knowledge and engagement in many initiatives, the author did not have deep knowledge about leadership concepts (**Figure 1**, Characteristic B): that served as a limiting condition. Taken together, those two

factors contributed to the struggle on the part of the Implementation Team to move much beyond the Social Change Model of Leadership Development and Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning as the central theoretical components of the Implementation Plan. That was one of the reasons the written Plan failed to impress the Panel, Board of Trustees, or Administration: they regarded those models dated and not innovative.

Second, on the positive side of the ledger, the author did organize an Implementation Plan Team of twelve people who represented important domains of the College; did facilitate conversations that encouraged participants to describe their interests and ideas; and did incorporate in the Plan those ideas and interests that represented the greatest square-footage of common ground. On the negative side of the ledger, the author did not do a good job of sharing responsibilities for the Plan or for writing drafts of sections of the Plan: in short, the author tried to maintain too much control. That was a shortcoming of relational leadership that resulted in an inadequate sense of ownership among other team members, and less than satisfactory communication with the co-originators. The processes depicted in **Figure 1** inform those self-criticisms.

Third, as previously described, while the author did submit a start-up budget and set of timelines to the Panel by the required due date in November of 2020, most of the funding was dedicated to workshops to form the common vocabulary over a period of two years. That was a long lead time before students would become the target stakeholder group.

Fourth, in the presentation to the public in November of 2020, the author had not yet absorbed the lesson of including in the pitch an inspirational story [2, 18, 21] intended to provide a unifying image to the Panel, Administration, Board members, and potential donors. When the next opportunity for trying to win approval arises, either the author or another representative must develop a story that excites constituents about the overarching purpose and envisioned outcomes.

5.2 Finding compromise while preserving identity

Returning to the end of semester conversation with the internal coordinators for the Foresight Thinking Plan, each side had, after much work, received qualified endorsement. Each side in the conversation was possessive of its respective plans. The tone and outcome of the conversation suggested the potential for the system trap of Accidental Adversaries: "While each group had been conceived as part of an overall system whose actions would benefit all, each group had come to focus on its individual responsibilities and success ([14], p. 20)." To avoid the trap, the first step would be to "Clarify or remind both groups how they can benefit from partnering with each other (p.153)".

The author agrees that foresight thinking is essential to leadership—extensive surveys have demonstrated that to be the case ([7], p. 30–31). In recent years those capabilities have and continue to become an increasingly important part of Individual Characteristic B, and are directly pertinent to Process Steps 1, 3, and 6 of **Figure 1**. The author regards foresight thinking as only one of three leadership characteristics, and therefore does not equate foresight thinking with leadership, since the latter also incorporates values and aspirations. As to whether values are on the same footing as capabilities, the author's answer is an emphatic Yes. Indeed, many scholars—e.g., [2, 3, 7, 12]—assert that values represent the first and most important building block of effective leadership.

Additionally, consistent with the vision of the co-originators of the Leadership Proposal, the author maintains that leadership occurs in all domains of the four-year experience and often involves the ability to influence others—sometimes even

in short-run time horizons—by virtue of the leader’s established human relationships and capacity to motivate and even inspire others.

The author understands that he must make another effort to talk with the internal coordinators of the Foresight Thinking Plan, and recently offered an apology for his contribution to an unsuccessful spring conversation. The author speculates that unless both sets of parties demonstrate some form of effort toward collaboration, both plans may once again encounter barriers, including concerns about feasibility, questions about funding, and non-acceptance of concepts by the broad-based community.

The author is aware that collaboration can lead to two possible outcomes. One is the opinion conveyed by the College Office of Advancement: the Leadership Plan and the Foresight Thinking Plan should be merged and brought under one structure in the organization of the College. The author finds that potentially troubling, since the central premise of the Leadership Proposal and Plan are directly linked to the stated mission of Dickinson College. The author favors an alternative: finding a way to make the two plans complementary to improve the relationship among the parts of a larger system ([14], p. 86) while preserving the identity of each part.

5.3 The need to be mindful of multiple goals

As previously noted, the co-originators of the Leadership Proposal had clarity about challenges to the College and even to the liberal arts model of education. While working to shape the Plan, however, especially in the six months from November 2019 to mid-summer 2020, the author and Implementation Team primarily gave thought to translating those broad ideas to more refined leadership concepts, rather than to issues of operational feasibility.

Following the November judgment of qualified acceptance, the author revisited the multiple goals of the Challenge: to create intrinsic value for students; to shape identifiable outcomes; to help the College be more distinctive among peers; to attract new students to the College; and to attract new sources of funds from donors.

Stroh helps provide clarity. He describes a system archetype, “Competing Goals”. He provides advice for the case when there are only two competing goals: “look for a higher goal that encompasses the competing ones”; “if achievement of both goals is mutually exclusive, commit to one”; or “if not, determine different corrective actions that lead to the accomplishment of both goals ([14], p.155).”

For the Challenge, goals were not inherently exclusive; nevertheless, the author believes more thought must be given to simultaneously achieving all.

6. Looking ahead

As originally envisioned, the Leadership Proposal was difficult to implement because it called for members of the Dickinson community to contribute to a commonly agreed leadership vocabulary regarding projects that existed in various domains of the College. As explained in the narrative, some vocal members of the faculty rejected that idea before hearing any details. That represented a formidable sociopolitical barrier that calls for special efforts for finding common ground ([17], pp. 57–75).

In fairness to all, however, such an undertaking would have required a new organizational structure via which ideas would be shared; and more important, a new way of thinking among members at the College. Each of those steps called for system alteration via utilization of leverage points [10]. The author would go so far as to say that introducing new ways of thinking represents system transformation.

Based on two-years of experience summarized in the case study, the conceptual frameworks developed for this chapter, and leadership relevant systems insights, the author's position is that putting in place a leadership development program that builds on the strengths of a liberal arts experience and is open to all students cannot be launched via the encompassing top-down fashion included in the original Proposal.

Instead, next efforts must draw upon systems-thinking concepts [10, 14] to avoid traps and find opportunities for collaboration. Ironically, given the original rationale of the Leadership Proposal, such efforts require a hardnosed and pragmatic approach to project management [17]. As well the next iteration of the Plan must be operationally feasible and financially affordable.

From the outset, the next effort to launch a Plan must be smaller in scale and more bottom-up in nature. It must seek contributions from students, who should be encouraged, empowered, and enabled to play a role as project managers or participants. It must be fun for students and must result in outcomes that are demonstrable, worthwhile, and that elicit emotional reactions among observers. Efforts must result in a platform that can be sustained over time, so that ever more participants are attracted to outcomes of the Leadership Plan. Finally, it must attempt to address the multiple goals of the Challenge and the vision of co-originators Paull and Kovach.

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Author details

Michael J. Fratantuono
Department of International Business and Management, Department of
International Studies, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA, USA

*Address all correspondence to: fratantu@dickinson.edu

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