**Shared leadership in a time of growing complexity: Moving from “me” to “we”**

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Shared leadership is a robust leadership strategy that is best employed when there are complex problems that require multiple stakeholders to come together in order to understand and address the challenges. These challenges are multi-dimensional, cross-institutional and not quickly or easily solved by simple fixes. They take time to plan, implement and execute. Impact may also not be immediately apparent, and the stakes are usually high (budget implications, political ramifications, workload changes, community engagement, etc.). Shared leadership involves the following (Kezar and Holcombe, 2017):

* Greater number of people involved
* Leader & follower roles are interchangeable
* Multiple perspectives and expertise is included
* Leadership is not based on position
* Collaboration across the organization is emphasized

Shared leadership is also an evidence-based approach to change leadership that offers practical leadership actions to build institutional capacity to solve complex problems.

It involves:

* A focus on identification of specific problems that need complex solutions
* A reflective study of the problem and identification and marshalling of the expertise needed to address it.
* A willingness to explore creative, unfamiliar options, and an openness to new ideas
* Inclusion of multiple perspectives and new voices.
* Provision of a supportive environment that encourages experimentation and risk-taking.
* Development of new patterns of interaction and communication that create capacity to solve complex problems.

Shared leadership is based on putting together teams of individuals who have the knowledge, skill and connections that will be needed in order to understand a problem, identify and then implement solutions that can work well within the context of a particular campus community, environment and goals. The members of a shared leadership team work together collaboratively and share leadership in ways that build capacity to understand and adapt to the complex environment within which colleges and universities now operate in order to sustain momentum on critical outcomes. The purpose of this exercise is to reflect upon the dynamics in a team, the conditions required for shared leadership, and the availability of a supportive environment for shared leadership at your institution.

**Notes on Shared Leadership:**

**Strategies for Developing the Conditions for Shared Leadership**

Use the strategy suggestions below to think about how you might address the gaps and increase the institution’s ability to employ a shared leadership approach. What other suggestions do you have (what is missing, what should be included in different boxes)?

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| **Condition** | **Strategies for informal leaders** | **Strategies for positional leaders** |
| **Understanding the nature of the problem:** complexity; urgency and commitment to addressing | * Review institutional strategic plan and look for synergies with your project; * Use/ask for data to inform understanding * Focus on opportunities and/or existing work instead of threats. | * Leverage institutional strengths and goals; * Be sure data is available and transparently available to all stakeholder groups; consider new methods of collecting data including student surveys, direct assessment of learning, etc. * Ensure project goals are lined up with major institutional goals and desired outcomes; * Use existing campus projects and expertise as a catalyst; * Send a team to an institute/conference and/or offer support of external facilitation to help the team develop a vision and shared goals |
| **Support from positional leaders (dean, provost, president):** tangible support with resources, time, attention | * Be sure your supervisor knows about the project; * Frame it in the context of institutional goals; * Present the work as a solution to a problem that you know keeps leaders up at night as opposed to a problem that you need your supervisor to solve; * Take your dean (provost, president) to lunch to get to know them and understand their priorities, listen to/read public comments by administrators to learn about priorities; * Seek external funding where possible, don’t just ask for institutional resources; * Consider how existing resources can be leveraged or redeployed | * Give permission to innovators by providing support; * Bring project goals and outcomes to upper level leaders (deans council, cabinet) in the context of institutional goals; * Show up to project events even if for a drop in; * Include project goals and results in other relevant meetings (with department leaders, faculty senate, other units across the organization) * Identify institutional funds that can be used to catalyze and support project goals; * Assist teams with support for external funding proposals (provide matching funds or grant-writing support); * Offer administrative support for meetings (logistics, food); * Attend conferences with team when possible; * Invite teams for post-conference/PD program follow up meeting; * Be a role model |
| **Assembling the Right Team:** Diversity, knowledge, expertise, influence, appropriate units represented | * Examine units that may have an impact or influence on the goals; * Think outside your unit & ask around to find out who is doing something that might be related; * Invite others to the conversation; * Engage as many people as possible but be sure you have the knowledge and expertise and appropriate departments and units represented, including students (hold campus open forums or other meetings, present your project at campus events) * Work to make connections to scholarly projects already in progress * Leverage external stakeholders and include them as relevant to project goals | * Challenge project leaders to reach out across the institution to units that are outside their normal exposure; * Suggest particular units or people that you know are engaged in related work, might be interested & helpful, and/or might be a good contributor based on your understanding of cross institutional projects and expertise * Leverage existing SOTL or other scholarly projects focused on project goals * Connect to external partnerships that may be helpful (alumni, donors, NGOs, community organizations, industry, etc.) |
| **Team Function:** leadership; empowerment; autonomy; accountability | * Be deliberate about the choice of the team leaders (they need certain capacities); * Consider inviting senior or external colleagues to be a project mentor, champion or sponsor; * Invite people to come to campus and lead workshops, conversations about the issues; * Be explicit to the team and institutional leaders about what the team needs to be successful; * Identify ways the team can function autonomously but also in context within the institution; * Be sure to have clear outcomes and measures defined and agreed upon with institutional leadership; * Look for opportunities to attend conferences or professional development activities; advocate for team to attend desired professional development opportunities * Identify campus policies and/or procedures that may be barriers to success; suggest changes * Be patient and persistent | * Thoughtfully attend to selection and development of team leaders; * Meet with team leaders on a regular basis and meet periodically with the entire team; * Give clear guidance regarding expectations and outcomes; * Define specific measures of success and provide tools required to obtain the evidence or data; * Ask questions of the team, help them connect to the broader, institutional perspective; * Ensure timeline expectations for meeting team goals; * Leverage existing institutional reporting, accreditation and program review reporting mechanisms; * Facilitate policy review and revision to enhance project success * Think about incorporating project goals into relevant position descriptions; * Support team attendance at conferences and workshops to develop empowerment and autonomy |
| **Team Dynamics:** Team member roles clearly defined; equitable contributions; collaborative environment (as opposed to competitive); team member interdependency (as opposed to independence) | * Make sure there is at least one person to convene the group and track meeting progress; * Have a system for building timelines, equitably assigning tasks, tracking progress, deadline reminders, etc.; Establish meeting processes that foster a welcoming, collaborative atmosphere; * Establish smaller collaborative teams to work on specific subgoals and outcomes * Focus on shared purpose and goals that cross unit, department and divisional lines; * Be sure unit, department, divisional leaders are aware of cross unit challenges or barriers | * Hold leaders accountable for team goals and outcomes; * Ask who is contributing and how (and who is not); * Recognize those who are involved in a variety of ways (in groups, to individuals, etc.) * Convene periodic cross unit, department and divisional conversations; * Create a formal program that will foster collaboration related to institutional goals (e.g., leadership academy); * Reach out to and meet with other unit, department, divisional leaders to discuss the project; * Remove cross unit barriers by convening people across units with the goal of solving cross institutional problems; * Discuss how unit resources might be contributed from different sources to support project goals and outcomes |
| **Organizational Learning:** support for a scholarly approach to studying the problem, identifying evidence-based solutions with appropriate professional development | * Identify scholarly sources of information about the issues and bring resources to team members and leadership * Bring your disciplinary approach to the team to understand the problem and develop responses to it; * Be open to other disciplinary approaches to problem-solving; * Bring scholars to campus to give seminars, workshops; * Write papers, grants, etc. | * Create and/or support campus events and/or speakers to come to campus; * Identify existing structures that may be barriers to project success and work to remove them * Ensure professional development capacity on campus is supportive of team goals and functions, including mentoring programs * Leverage new or existing campus opportunities (events, programs, other projects) to integrate project goals, outcomes and results * Encourage conference presentation and publication of results * Model organizational learning in leader actions |

**Homework -- Do you have the capacity for using a shared leadership approach?** (Modified from Kezar & Holcome, 2017)

* 1. Does your project team have support from positional leaders, those with titles who have decision-making authority and budget responsibility (dean, provost, president)? If so, who and in what ways are they providing support? (This could be as a champion, executive sponsor.)
  2. Who is on the team(s)? What are their roles? Does the team have a single leader or do the members of the team share leadership based on shared goals and the expertise needed to address the problem?
  3. Is your team diverse (ethnicity, rank, role, responsibility, students, staff, faculty, perspective, expertise, etc.)? Do you have people from divisions across the institution (academic affairs, student affairs, administrative affairs, etc.) that need to work together to implement the project? Do team members reach out to others outside of the team when new expertise is needed?
  4. How is the team empowered (and given permission) to set goals and take action? Does the team have the autonomy it needs to take ownership, make decisions, and make progress? What specific autonomy does the team have, what decisions can it make? How is the team held accountable? On what measures, by whom and on what timeline?
  5. Do team members work together interdependently (as opposed to independently)? Are roles clearly defined? Does everyone contribute? Is the environment collaborative (as opposed to competitive)? Provide an example of interdependent action.

**Reference:**

1. Kezar, Adrianna J., and Elizabeth M. Holcombe. 2017. *Shared Leadership in Higher Edu­cation: Important Lessons from Research and Practice*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.