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This is an accepted manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in The Routledge Handbook of International Planning Education on 31 July 2019, available online:

http://www.routledge.com/9781138958777

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Planning and Leadership

Michael Neuman

June 23, 2017

Planning and Leadership

Planners are Natural Leaders

Planners are natural leaders. Their skills and qualities are becoming highly valued in management and politics. This is evident in their increasing numbers in local councils, legislatures, university leadership, non-profit entities, and corporations, as well as in other settings. This is largely because planners can *plan*. Planning is a caring and giving profession that is geared toward the betterment of places, people, and organizations; qualities commonly attributed to leadership and management.[1]

A case in point is Bloomberg Associates, a consultancy formed by former New York City mayor and businessman Michael Bloomberg to "help city governments to successfully tackle complex and difficult challenges to positively impact the quality of life of their citizens" (Bloomberg Associates 2017). Planners occupy key posts in this consultancy, and apply a distinctive brand of planning leadership honed in the planning cauldron of New York.

Planners have a distinctive take on leadership, well suited for today's world. It is "leadership of the collaborative and visionary type [that] emerges readily in a strong planning culture. … Planning is a leadership profession. This is due to the set of skills and knowledge that planners bring to their offices: a long-term horizon, a sense of the broader good, comprehensive consideration of the inter-relationship of complex and dynamic activities and their impacts, collaboration among disciplines, and reconciliation of conflicting interests. This set of skills also serves, in part, to articulate what characterizes a strong, positive planning culture" (Neuman 2007: 162).

Other traits of planning leadership include being strategic, future oriented, goal directed, vision creating, scenario shaping, and consensus seeking. The focus on places and spaces – a spatial disposition – and processes to shape and improve them – a temporal disposition – sets the planning profession apart. This critical value-added perspective places planning in a pole position in relation to many other professions in an increasingly interconnected world. In this global world, multiple interests, multiple scales, multiple time frames, multiple disciplines, and multiple stakeholders intersect and interact concurrently as they impinge in framing and understanding its complexity.

Because planners are trained to see the interconnection among multiple types of factors and their impacts on place and people into the future, as well as how to assess those impacts using multiple criteria; they are well equipped to understand and manage this level of complexity (Christensen 1999, 1993).

This chapter sets out five general elements of planning leadership.

1. *Future orientation* – goals, objectives, strategies, plans
2. *Situational awareness* – place knowledge, context, complexity
3. *Cultural awareness* – place cultures, organizational cultures, interpersonal differences
4. *Communications* – listening, dialogue, understanding, evidence, images
5. *Greater good* – public interest, commonwealth, general welfare

Note that these elements are about people. Leaders lead people, and people run an organization. A leader knows and can read the “mood” of the people in her charge, including constituents and others within her sphere of influence.

Typical scholarship about leadership and management delves deeply into decisions and actions. A leader is often seen as decisive, a “man of action”. This perspective focuses on the leader himself or herself, rather than the organisation, its mission, performance, outcomes, and its members. Yet savvy and effective leaders know that by focusing on *their* people, that is, taking care of, mentoring, and nurturing, including and especially subordinate leaders in her or his purview, they are most likely to attain effective performance and outcomes (Powell 2012).

It is worth noting the difference between leadership and management. Management has to do with the day-to-day, periodic, and recurring functions of an organization. Managers organize and direct people to accomplish those functions -- controlling. Leadership has more to do with direction setting, change, vision, the long term, and inspiring people to do, including lead themselves -- motivating. According to Zaleznik, “a crucial difference between managers and leaders lies in the conceptions they hold, deep in their psyches, of chaos and order. Leaders tolerate chaos and lack of structure… avoiding premature closure on important issues. Managers seek order and control and are almost impulsively addicted to disposing of problems even before they understand their potential significance” (1998: 87). Compare to Kotter, “Management controls people by pushing them in the right direction; leadership motivates them by satisfying basic human needs” (1998, 47). Leadership and management are different sides to the same coin. A well-functioning group, organization, institution, project, or process needs both.

The following sections address the five elements of leadership listed above in turn. It interweaves the decision and action components of leadership into them. This embedding of decision and action, often separate in the past, provides the context and scope by which to evaluate the quality of decisions and actions. By situating decision making and action taking in places, cultures, structures, and processes – imbued with values and norms as they are – we can better explicate criteria by which to evaluate the quality and efficacy of decisions. When these criteria are transparent, not only does it promote greater accountability, it further enables all members of an organization to better assess their own and their peers’ decisions and actions, regardless of location in the chain of command. In this way, when decision and action criteria are transparent and widely shared within an organization, it turns all its members into leaders. With this embedding in mind, let’s turn to the five elements.

Future Orientation

Future orientation is the most definitive and perhaps most decisive of the leadership qualities of planners. Even as traditional master plans or comprehensive plans that look twenty or more years into the future are, in some places, less central compared to other tools, the view toward the future is robust in other means. Scenarios, plans, forecast, projects, designs, and images are among the tools employed to convey futures (Hopkins and Zapata 2007). Their roles have transformed from fixed representations of the future of a place, such as a city plan map, to a wide range of means used by actors, agents, and stakeholders that convey possibilities, illustrate consequences, and coalesce consensus. Images of the future in whatever media motivate and inspire. This shift, from fixed form to malleable media, has led to a transformation of the planning profession into a more active and engaging process-

orientation. This shift has been central to planners occupying roles of greater influence in public, private, and not-for-profit realms; and especially in forums and arenas composed of mixed realms.

This aspect of planning leadership has a long history. In many nations, starting in the 19th century, visionary planners occupied key roles in society and politics, from Haussmann in Paris and Cerdà in Barcelona to Burnham and Tugwell in America, planners led with plans. From its earliest manifestations in the middle of the 19th century, urban planning traded on plans that contained visions of the future, usually conveyed in maps (Choay 1965, Hall 1989, Neuman 2011b). "Images of the future are the cornerstone of planning practice, central as they are to scenarios, plans, and projects. Images are also implied in forecasts. How planning cultures and images are created and used by individuals and institutions (that individuals also create and use) are" central to planning (Neuman 2007: 155). Hopkins captured the visionary power of planning leadership in his phrase "engaging the future" (Hopkins and Zapata 2007:1).

There is an implicit aspect of future orientation in the planner's leadership arsenal that is worth making explicit. In order to be able to plan for a better future, one must believe a better future exists. This aspect offers even more legitimacy and topicality to planners today in the midst of many citizens' responses such as withdrawal and cynicism to a "post-truth", "post-political" world. Planners' visions counteract these responses with a positive message of hope and possibility of a better future. Planning for a better future confers hope.

Situational Awareness

A seminal attribute of urban planning is its sensitivity to and sensibility about place, time, and context. This can be called *situational awareness*. When these three sensibilities come together, they endow a degree of savvy that comes from the immersion of "being there", of local knowledge situated in broader contexts in order to better understand them and therefore better act on them (Christensen 1993). In the twin arenas of politics and policy in which planning often occurs, city planning can exert leadership in shaping their agendas and guiding their decisions due to situational awareness and savvy (Hoch 1994; Forster 1999).

Conversely, how often do professionals in other disciplines, or politicians and policy makers, propose or take courses of action based on ill- or under-informed analyses, and / or propose a limited set of solutions (usually one) that are not comprehensively nor comparatively evaluated? In my experience, legitimate (fair, balanced, transparent) that are informed by an acute situational awareness yield better results, and are appreciated by time-strapped politicians and policy makers. "Truth is a power that renders itself true by prevailing" – Nietzche's adage becomes more insistent in post-truth politics.

What might be called *situational leadership*, whereby a leader adjusts her style / approach in accordance with the needs of the situation, takes situational awareness to the next level. Situational leadership embedded in, and is abetted by, the situational awareness that planners are so skilful using. Situational leadership occurs when a leader or leadership group analyses the decision / action arena in a manner analogous to the way a planner analyses a place. The parallel phrase is "survey before lead", taken from Patrick Geddes's "survey before plan".

Situational leadership requires knowledge of time and timing as well as of place and context. Knowing if, and when, to make a decision are two essential precursors to making any

decision. Moreover, timing is an essential part of strategy, a precept that comes from military strategy and the waging of battles and campaigns. The criticality of timing as a leadership trait has been documented as far back as Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching* – "when in action, watch the timing" (Lao Tsu 2011, chapter 8).

Situational awareness and situational leadership also refer to organizational settings, including inter-organizational and institutional settings. It goes beyond knowing the people in the organization, to knowing those outside its boundaries in multi-organization settings. It entails knowing group dynamics, organizational and inter-organizational politics, and institutional cultures and traditions. In these challenging contexts, the leadership principle of "alignment" – aligning people and processes to goals and visions – is well suited to the planning leadership approach. By focusing on alignment to goals, values, and ethos; a leader will let the details of a procedure and adapting it over time fall to subordinates, as long as values and goals are adhered to / aligned with. Aligning in this way leads to empowerment and flexibility of all members of an organization, as well as its constituents – in this instance, the planning public.

Cultural Awareness

"While the phenomenon of leadership is widely considered to be universal across cultures, the way in which it is operationalized is usually viewed as culturally specific" (Dorfman and Howell 1997: 233). The term culture is contested in social sciences, especially anthropology. Numerous definitions abound. One that serves our purposes calls culture a "set of processes which are characteristic of human processes which involve acquisition and accumulation of information and its transmission by non-genetic means, mainly through the use of learned symbols, from one human being to another, from one society to another and generation to generation." (Boyden, et al. 1981).

There are several qualifiers of the word culture that specify its meaning in various settings. Here we distinguish leadership culture, organizational culture, planning culture, and place culture. A simplified view of leadership culture posits that it exists in an organizational setting, including inter-organizational networks and institutions, when there is widespread delegation, where accountability is devolved to the lowest level possible, so that individuals can exercise initiative without seeking permission from above. An attitude of confidence and accomplishment pervades, and members / employees are seen as peers and collaborators, regardless of which level or position they formally occupy. The pervasive quality in which these characteristics and behaviors are learned, passed along, and imbued in the organization so that they become customs and traditions is what makes it a leadership *culture.*

Leadership culture is distinct from how leadership varies across cultures and across organizations. Much has been made of the difference between, say, Asian and "western" leadership approaches. Researchers have elaborated distinctions among "universal" and culturally situated leadership styles (Dickson, Den Hartog, Mitchelson 2003).

Leaders establish and model cultural norms, whether in society as a whole, such as Martin Luther King or Donald Trump, or in organizations, such as Jack Welch Jr. at General Electric or Martin Winterkorn at Volkswagen (Cremer 2017). In urban planning a strong leader, such as a city planning director, can be instrumental in changing bureaucratic and governance cultures towards a long-term perspective in which public and common interests are balanced with individual and private interests, for example. A good leader is a "cultural architect" and

cultural gatekeeper whose influence can pervade. Culture is an umbrella term that casts its own meaning on a leader knowing his people.

We can go so far as to name a *culture of leadership* that can go a long way to empowering not only employees or members, but if the net is cast widely amongst stakeholders outside the leader's or leadership group's immediate entity, a wide cast of characters, that themselves can empower and inspire others, so that an entire constituency or public can be aligned with and buy in to the leader's / entity's vision. Within an organization this approach often leads to higher performance.

An organizational culture, simply put, refers to the culture extant in any organization. This recognizes that organizations themselves exhibit distinct cultures compared to societies, groups, and other social entities. It further distinguishes that different organizations, even in the same country/culture, can evince differences in organizational cultures. These develop, evolve, and change over time; in response to external changes (society, movements, fashions) and internal dynamics (leadership changes, training, success/failure). A leadership culture, for example, is a type of organizational culture. An architectural and design firm may have a creative culture, whereas an engineering firm may exhibit an efficiency culture. An organizational culture is embedded in the culture in which it sits, with the caveat that the culture of large multi-national firms may sit alongside or hover above the national culture in which a branch office is located. There are many permutations and combinations of these factors, arguing for awareness, sensitivity, and cultural malleability.

"A planning culture forms the crucible in which planning activity occurs". Moreover, a planning culture "posits the norms that guide planning activity and measure its efficacy". "A planning culture is a composite of social, political, institutional, and place cultures in which the multiple practices of planning occur" (Neuman 2007: 155). Moreover, "planning culture refers to a milieu that supports planning activities and manifests the planning idea throughout society. How widely is planning for the future betterment of the place accepted by society at large? Which sectors of society are responsible for planning better urban places, and how long into the future do they peer? Planning culture is distinguished from while related to the institutionalization of planning via its insertion into mainstream organizations. A society exhibits a robust planning culture when urban planning is a daily topic of conversation, the media, business, education, art, and entertainment – in short, any aspect of social life.

"Furthermore, a planning culture goes beyond rhetoric and routinely enters fields of decisions and actions in activities as disparate as government, business, and personal and family life. This deep social embeddedness provides a truer, fuller test of the import that planning exerts on a populace then mere institutionalization. For inverse evidence that supports this claim, we can point to city plans that have been prepared in accord with the mandates and strictures of the law by a small group of professionals that end up 'sitting on the shelf collecting dust' unused, precisely because of the lack of a planning culture" (Neuman 2007: 157).

A "place culture is an important precursor to a planning culture. A place culture exists where residents closely identify with their hometown (or city, metropolis, or region). They recognize, enjoy, and cultivate qualities that make the place special, and that make it their own. The qualities that distinguish a special place and form a basis of the person-place relationship at the heart of a place culture can be readily identified by residents and visitors alike" (Neuman 2007, 159).

A key challenge to planning leadership emerges from these considerations. While some universal traits such as confidence, charisma, and supporting subordinates cut across cultures; cultural awareness and flexibility is essential for a leader to know and understand his or her charges, constituents, clients and overall socio-cultural setting; in order to be able to connect with them to greater effectiveness.

Communications

Effective communications – clarity, legibility, mutual understanding, is often regarded as a cornerstone for planning practice, as in any field of endeavor. This is especially valid for problem solving for complex situations in complex environments where collaboration is central – that is, just about every urban planning activity. Literatures analysing organisational failures and disaster responses often point to communications problems as the smoking gun to which a chain of causation is attributed (Hall 1982, Vaughan 2016).

Negotiations, consensus building, conflict resolution, and related approaches to contemporary planning processes all stress the importance of many aspects of communication (e.g. Forster 1999, Susskind 1987, Moore 2014). Deliberation, the thoughtful mutual dialogue or multilogue among many parties, takes time to achieve. It requires trust, legitimacy, clear communication and other prerequisites that are earned over time in order for careful deliberation to occur. Deliberation is considered to be essential to advance complex debate on policy, planning, and the futures of a place (Forster 1999).

In planning and design professions, images of all kinds are core to communications. They are central to building meaning, attaining clarity, and developing consensus. Critically, an aspect of the use of images in planning processes that is not widely understood and therefore underused is to build and maintain an institution., images. This way, images become in part political tools to shape and maintain power as exercised through an institution, for example a governance institution (Neuman 2012, 1996).

The reason that communication is central to so many facets of planning, including and especially leading these activities, and the leadership quality of planning itself as an activity, is that communication is embedded deeply into the “sinews” of individual behaviors, organizational behaviors, and interpersonal relations of all kinds. Moreover, language and communications are central to cultural identity. Communications affects motivation, knowledge, skills, agreements, understanding, risk, uncertainty, which is to say numerous important realms of action (Gudykunst 1993).

The Greater Good

To focus on the greater good corresponds to the origin and enduring ethos of the city planning profession. It is a distinctive source of strength of the profession. Unfortunately, this is being increasingly lost in the face of the onslaught of neoliberalism. Yet to focus on the greater good is to place a broader frame around, and greater social / societal meaning to, individual interests that often conflict and thus splinter planning processes and their outcomes. Communities and their places from villages to city regions suffer from the focus on individual interests, and often benefit and coalesce from the focus on collective interests.

Focusing on the greater good places a premium on relational acuity that targets caring and nurturing of places and communities. The greater good, sometimes referred to as the public good, the public interest, the common good, common weal, commonwealth, and so on, has

the further advantage of placing planning squarely back into the center of politics and policy (Meyerson and Banfield 1955). The greater good provides an avenue by which to go beyond position-based and interest-based negotiations and deliberative planning processes.

Long ago, infrastructure and public or common lands were known as the Public Trust. Another historical term for the material public trust was commonwealth, wealth that was held in common, by the people who were its owners, through the *trust* placed by them in their *representatives* in government. How different it is today. In recent decades, there has there has been a steady, incremental, drip by drip erosion of the Public Trust, meaning public lands and public works. This is but one consequence of neoliberalism.

It is revealing to note the terms regarding infrastructure in use today — *capital*, *asset* and *investment* — that have replaced what was called the Public Trust. The term has changed over time from commonwealth to public trust to public good to public investment to public capital and public asset. Note how private sector language dominates the terminology now.

Another facet of public trust is that it serves as glue holding messy democratic processes together. This aspect of trust is embedded in social and political capital that keeps people engaged meaningfully and constructively over the long periods of time needed to accomplish infrastructure planning and financing. This glue consists of two inter-related ingredients: trust and transparency, fairly applied. Otherwise, no matter how carefully constructed the process, how civil the proceedings, and how carefully selected the stakeholders, any process could, and likely would, fall apart without public trust. Interpersonal trust is insufficient. Polity-wide civic trust needs to be rekindled. The erosion of this facet of the public trust has been most damaging to our collective responsibility to plan and finance infrastructure, and to ensure its services and impacts are equitable. It is not incidental that good planning leadership abets the public trust. Inversely, focusing on the public trust and the public interest aids planning and positions it as a leadership profession.

To focus on the common good provides a positive means to address many seemingly intractable issues that have come to the fore as a result of neoliberalism. It also and importantly removes the focus on personal / private interests. In this way, the common good enables us to tap in to a bigger energy and a broader purpose, providing a rationale for planning that embeds it deeply in the community.

The Dark Triad of Leadership

Yet, as with almost anything, there are two sides (or more) to every story, including leadership (Beycioglu and Pahsiardis 2015). For every perception of a leader as visionary and bold, there is a corresponding perception of a tyrant. For each perception as a decisive and clear minded leader, there is another of an autocrat or dictator. And so on. These qualities can be embodied in the same person, to greater or lesser degrees. They correspond to types and to archetypes.

Psychologists Paulhus and Williams refer to how certain "socially aversive personalities" form the "dark triad of leadership": psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (2002). "Despite their diverse origins, the personalities composing this 'Dark Triad' share a number of features. To varying degrees, all three entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness" (Paulhus and Williams 2002: 556). While there are other types of negative personality traits

and disorders that impinge on leadership, and these three were selected as illustrative. Guarding against and counteracting them can be abetted by strong organizational and leadership cultures, giving "power to the powerless".

This brief note on the dark side of leadership cannot do justice to its complexity and its ramifications. It is merely a place holder to remind us that blind faith in leadership, especially certain types and traits of it, can have deleterious consequences. Fortunately, the planning profession's style of leadership, by being collaborative, consensus-seeking, and participative, and by incorporating the traits indicated in this chapter, has the potential to neutralize the "dark side".

Specific Forums and Arenas of Planning as Leadership

Many of the myriad predicaments and crises contemporary that societies and cities face, such as inequity, climate change, public health, infrastructure inadequacies, housing affordability, food security, "natural" disasters, pollution, and so on have urban roots and / or urban manifestations. Given this, the urban planning and design professions are uniquely placed to make a difference in their resolution. This is particularly so at the local and regional scales, closest to home.

In this regard, designing and managing the forums and arenas where the definition, analysis, debate and resolution of these issues take place is vital (Bryson and Crosby 1993). This is a job for urban planning and design because the practices of planning and design bring together place and process, form and function in ways that have been identified as process design and institutional design (Innes 1995, Neuman 1996). Designing and managing planning, policy, and political processes and the forums, arenas, and institutions in which they occur reveals planning's leadership role.

Five realms in which planning plays particularly strong leadership roles are in infrastructure, sustainability, place-based quality of life, public health, and design. These five are related. For example, the greatest contribution to urban sustainability is via infrastructure (Neuman 2011a). For another example, active living and active transport, along with sustainable urban farming, are correlated with quality of life. This points to another aspect of planning leadership, "connecting the dots" in order to expand possibilities, enhance sustainability, and achieve efficiencies. The next paragraph sketch how each of the five enhances planning's leadership role.

Infrastructure leads because it shapes urban development in the most direct and long lasting ways. As the sums of money allocated to infrastructure dwarf other aspects of local and regional urban planning budgets, focusing on infrastructure offers a degree of leverage and impact not normally accorded to planners. Urban planners are beginning to recover protagonist roles in the development of infrastructure, as they did in the founding generations of the urban planning profession in the mid-late 19th century (Neuman 2009, 2011b). Infrastructure is a key element of the "greater good" basis for planning and its leadership as argued above.

Sustainability leads because it is one of the most important concepts and practices that can safeguard planet Earth and its ecosystems and species, including humans. This confers legitimacy and topicality (urgency) to planning. Sustainable practices share many qualities with urban planning. Both use approaches that are long-term, comprehensive, balanced,

holistic, and integrated. Given these shared characteristics, implementing sustainability can easily be led by planners. In sustainability, planners can lead sustainability efforts by responding to local needs and desires, to which more removed levels of government or the private sector don't respond.

Place-based quality of life is arguably the biggest contribution to cities by the planning profession in recent decades. In this formulation, planners can exert leadership by highlighting the *place-based* facet of quality of life, and by providing a broader set of criteria for quality of life, expanding it beyond material well-being and consumption. By enhancing public, sustainable and active transport, for example; and by promoting the public health and local sustainability, all common sense, everyday aspects of life, planners respond to basic needs. Planners lead other professions, such as public works, transport, and health, for example, by linking what they do into a coherent, placed-based plan.

Public health is closely related to place-based interventions, sustainability, and design One could say that all urban planning has public health consequences. This was made explicit, for example, nearly one century ago in the legal justification for planning statutes in the United States – "health, safety, and welfare" – encoded in the U.S. Department of Commerce's Standard Enabling Acts for planning and zoning (U.S. Department of Commerce 1926, 1928). Public health undergirds all of planning, and moreover extends its reach in to domains and professions previously not connected – active living, active transport, public health, medicine, healthcare, schools, education, sports and active living, to name a few.

Design

Design leadership refers in part to the creative aspect of planning, the ability to envision, create, and bring to life better places. It also refers to designing processes and institutions in which urban planning and design take place. In this latter way, planning bolsters governance and democracy by making policy making more transparent and participative. Planning has, since the 1960s in numerous countries been at the forefront in advocacy, pluralism, and participation by citizens in their government because of its ethical stance in favour of expanding grassroots democracy and due to its ability to design and redesign processes of participation to enable it (Davidoff 1965, Arnstein 1969).

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that in the realm of urban planning and its related disciplines, along with urban governance, the common attributes ascribed to leaders, such as command, authority, and decisiveness, are not necessarily the most appropriate in complex arenas adjudicating multiple issues and interests. Rather, being attuned to the five general elements of planning leadership give planners an edge in leading policy and political processes intended to improve the public domain and citizens' lives.

This is not to say that the five elements of leadership are antithetical to the common attributes of leaders mentioned above. Much of the leadership literature in the last decades has been rewritten to incorporate the empathic, interpersonal, and relational aspects of leadership. Moreover, gendered approaches to leadership have proliferated, suggesting that there exist differences in leadership styles and methods between women and men. These two camps are starting to break down barriers between the genders, as have many female leaders in practice. The scholarship surrounding these gendered and gender-aware practices have begun to

emerge, even as leadership character traits that are stereotypically perceived as male are still seen more favourably in practice (e.g. Powell 2012).

Thinking broadly about the intersection of planning and leadership in the ways put forth here suggests that leadership is a nuanced skill that can be learned, developed, and enhanced. Moreover, one size does not fit all. Instead, leadership is about mastering specific situations and their contexts, and bringing influence to bear on them so that resources and people can be marshalled to get things done.

Relational leadership approaches become critical if not paramount in a globalizing world where networked societies flourish (Castells 1996) and network based social media have massive impact (Castells 2009). Added to this, increasing calls for openness, transparency, deliberation, and participation in government, which helps transform government to governance (Klijn and Koppenjan 2016) also mitigate for a relational approach to planning (Healey 2007) and therefore its leadership.

Planning leads due to its unique ability to craft visions of and creative solutions for better futures. This quality endows planning with a positive outlook imbued with hope, which inspires citizens to action in the midst of their indifferent or cynical responses to politics and business as usual. Planning as a leadership profession cannot underestimate or take for granted its ability to generate hope – the greatest leadership attribute of all.

[1] Thanks to Professor Terry Lamb, Director of the Centre for Teaching Innovation, University of Westminster, Gil Dove, President of Gil Dove Associates; and Martin Meyerson, Gary Hack, Peter Hall, and Ed Blakely – planning leaders and mentors.

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