Leadership Learning Community

Learning from the Past and Future:
Leadership for a New Era

Mission Statement: *Our aim is to transform individuals and society by connecting the learning, practice and resources of those committed to leadership development.*

What must change in our current approaches to leadership development if we are to provide the scope and quality of leadership needed to address the significant social problems of the 21st century?

"You cannot solve problems with the same level of consciousness that was used to create them." Albert Einstein

The Leadership Learning Community (LLC) believes that it is important to ask ourselves what in our current consciousness about leadership needs to change if we are to tackle the problems that we all care so deeply about. For the past eight years the Leadership Learning Community has engaged hundreds of leadership development funders, program staff and researchers in learning about how to cultivate leadership that is inclusive, rooted in community values, action-oriented and focused on results. We have identified the need for a much broader and more culturally inclusive approach to cultivating and sustaining leadership that focuses on nurturing and supporting teams, networks, and communities; and prepares individuals to lead collectively with others whose leadership cultures and practices differ from their own.

The events of the past year, most notably in the US the presidential elections, have demonstrated the power of a more democratic approach to leadership using social technology to unleash new levels of civic engagement. At a time of intense global conflict the recent election of an African American president who raised public discourse about race has created a new climate in the US for beginning to acknowledge and cross lines of difference. As new possibilities emerge, we are also facing a global economic crisis that has created an imperative for strong leadership action with the reach, connections and strategic problem solving and mobilizing power to have an impact social, economic and political equality.

As the economic and social divides widen, the nonprofit sector is being called to a new level of leadership. Many organizations serving poor communities that are at the greatest risk during an economic downturn will not survive the current crisis without developing new collaborative approaches. Many of these organizations are building the leadership capacity of people of color who have been excluded from leadership positions; and transforming the conditions that sustain dominant approaches to leadership that are inadequate for addressing the grave social inequities. PolicyLink has

documented that supporting people of color to take on advocacy and leadership roles within their communities is a prerequisite for reducing poverty and disparities.[1] In a study on why people of color are not moving into leadership positions within the nonprofit sector, LLC found that leadership culture and organizational practices devalue the contributions of people of color.[2]

There are several opportunities for radically changing the leadership status quo.
- The anticipated transfer of leadership[3] creates an opportunity to diversify the sector; however, without a more inclusive leadership culture the under-representation of people of color could worsen.
- The election of Barack Obama demonstrated a new leadership landscape with a massive mobilization using decentralized self-organizing strategies, unprecedented levels of civic engagement and the election of our first African American president.
- The development of new social technologies presents unique opportunities to connect leaders to reach new scales of influence; however, realizing this potential requires a much deeper understanding about how leadership emerges within networks and communities of learning and practice.[4]

In order to take advantage of these opportunities, and reach the scale and scope required to support systemic change, we will need to transform how we develop and support leaders with a new consciousness about leadership.

What are the limitations of the current model?
The dominant thinking about leadership places a very strong emphasis on the individual's role in change. Often an individual's contribution takes on heroic proportions causing us to lose sight of leadership as a dynamic interconnected process that relies on many individuals. We focus on this question because we believe that the current heroic, individual model of leadership does not:

- Recognize and appreciate the leadership of people of color who exercise leadership aligned with different cultural traditions and values that are often less directive and more collective and community-focused;

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[1] Policy Link, "Leadership for Policy Change," http://www.policylink.org/Research/Leadership/
[2] Leadership Learning Community, "Multiple Styles of Leadership: Increasing Participation of People of Color in Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector" currently being revised for publication. http://leadershiplearning.org/node/95
[3] See CompassPoint, "Daring to Lead," www.meyerfoundation.org/downloads/4DaringtoLead2006d.pdf and Up Next: Generation Change and the Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations Annie E. Casey Foundation; Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={4756F522-E7B4-4940-ABB3-BDA345917235}
[4] Allison H. Fine, Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age, Jossey-Bass: SanFrancisco, 2006.

- Develop our understanding of how to support leadership as a collective, community or network process;
- Learn about how leadership is fostered and expressed in communities; and
- Understand the implications for leadership in the move from organization-centric to network-centric approaches to change.

The Costs of Our Current Leadership Thinking: If we do not broaden our thinking and leadership practices beyond the current models, we believe there will be certain costs. We believe that the current model of heroic individual leadership will not enable us to:

Support the Leadership of People of Color: People of color will continue to be under-recognized for their leadership contributions and will be under-represented in leadership positions without more culturally inclusive leadership models. Many people of color interviewed by LLC explained that their leadership is rendered invisible when they do not conform to the dominant leadership norms that privilege a directive style of leadership even when they are actually accomplishing more through a facilitative style that unleashes team capacity.[5] The leadership values of love, equity, justice, and community, which are critical to leadership success for people of color, are often not supported within the dominant leadership models. If we continue to privilege the dominant model about what leadership is then people of color will not have influence at policy tables, in designing community based solutions, and in addressing disparities along a number of political and socio-economic dimensions.

Strengthen Collective Leadership Capacity: James MacGregor Burns, often considered the father of the leadership development field and author of the seminal leadership book *Leadership*[6], was asked in a recent interview about the next frontier for the field of leadership. Without hesitation he answered, "We need to better understand leadership as a collective process." There is a growing recognition that individual leaders need to be trained to work more effectively to unleash the collective leadership capacity of a group; and to better understand how diverse groups, especially those representing multiple organizations and stakeholders, identify shared purpose and vision and create capacity for coordinated action.   Some programs have expressed concern that the selection and recognition of individuals may actually undermine the collective process and diminish the work of teams who share responsibility for achievements.

Build and Sustain Cross Sectoral Work: Solving community problems requires an integrated cross-sectoral leadership approach focused on systems-wide change rather than individual leadership that tackles problems as isolated special interests.[7] Focusing

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[5] See the LLC study on "Multiple Styles of Leadership: Increasing Participation of People of Color in Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector" currently being revised for publication. http://leadershiplearning.org/node/95

[6] James MacGregor Burns, Leadership, Harper: New York, 1978.

[7] See the study by Dr. Jeanne Campbell and Tom Adams on "Grassroots Leadership: Growing Healthy and Sustainable Communities," www.wkkf.org/Pubs/CCT/Leadership/GrassrtsSptFndrs2PC_2003_01_21.pdf

on the individual leader does not support an integrated, community problem-solving approach. The fragmentation of the non-profit sector persists with most leadership programs focused on organizational improvements that are not able to address sector-wide problems with systemic thinking and solutions.

Leverage Current Network Trends: Current technological developments and organizing trends are rapidly increasing the potential of ad hoc groups and networks to lead change work. If the current assumptions about the power of the individual to exert influence (usually in an organizational context) persists, we will continue to maintain the leadership status quo and undermine the change processes that are needed to solve complex problems in the current environment.

Enhance Leadership within Communities: Leadership is deeply embedded in relationships and communities, a fact that is often overlooked when individuals become the focus of leadership development. Developing the skills and capacities to work effectively with others in communities is not accomplished by pulling people out of place and away from their community connections. Place-based leadership development strategies have demonstrated success in more effectively addressing and solving community problems because they engage a broad cross-section of leaders and are more responsive to the community's needs.[8]

Create Social Equality: Most leadership programs work at the scale of individual and organizational change. We are seeking fundamental systemic structural changes in the conditions that have created a tremendous wealth gap and disparities in access to education, health, employment, housing, quality of life and safety and well being. Until our leadership thinking and practices are strategically connected we will not be able to create the political will or muscle to create social equity.

Conclusion
We believe that the lessons from current leadership work and the learning on these many fronts can be integrated to generate a new body of theory, practice and evaluation results that can shift the current leadership paradigm to exponentially increase the amount and sustainability of social innovation and systemic change that contributes to social equity.

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[8] See "The Collective Leadership Framework:A Workbook for Cultivating and Sustaining Community Change" http://www.ethicalleadership.org/publications/publications which was developed for and used by the Kellogg Leadership for Communtiy Change program. See also the Policy Link report, "Why Place Matters: Building a Movement for Healthy Communities," www.policylink.org/documents/WhyPlaceMattersreport_web.pdf