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*KAREN TILSTRA, SHIRLEY FREED,  
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## **GROWING CREATIVE LEADERS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

Whatever you believe about Jesus, there has never been a leader who has had a greater impact on the history of humanity. Walking the roads of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, never more than 200 miles from home, He caught the imagination of large crowds that followed Him (e.g., see Matthew 20:29; Mark 3:7-9; Mark 5:21; 6:34; Luke 7:11 and 8:19). Even though He confounded the teachers of His time when just 12 years old (Luke 2:46-47), He never earned a degree (John 7:15). In fact, He never wrote a book; instead, He selected and trained a group of followers to become the leaders of a movement that would turn the world upside down. Despite His shameful death, His influence spread so powerfully that within a generation the movement had penetrated the household of Caesar (Philippians 1:12-14 and 4:22) and had spread to the far corners of the Roman Empire (Romans 15:19-24). More powerful than armies, every government in the world had to reckon with the influence of His message of a kingdom not of this world.

How did Jesus develop the leaders of this “enduring and history-altering movement” (Wolf, 2010, p. 1)? He obviously did not follow the scripts of conventional wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:20 and 2:16-10). When you look closely at the band of people Jesus selected for this uncommon training program, you are left with the impression that others would have never considered them “leadership material.” Jesus chose candidates from the common people which He could mold into a committed core of leaders. While He often seemed to be agonizing over their progress as leaders, in the end, most of them ended up committing their lives to carrying forward His revolutionary message despite many organized attempts to stamp it out.

Now, some 2000 years later, Christianity and its institutions in the West face a daunting crisis. Europe has turned mostly secular, leaving the churches empty. In the United States the situation is better, but “the most rapidly growing religious category today is composed of those Americans who say they have no religious affiliation,” rising from 8% in 1990 to 15% in 2008 (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). “While middle-aged and older Americans continue to embrace organized religion, rapidly increasing numbers of young people are rejecting it” (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Gary Hamel (2009) contends that “the problem with organized religion is that it is too organized,” and thus there is a growing sense that to change that trend will require a new type of leadership. In fact, “Religious institutions, like other sorts of organizations, need a management reboot.” But how do you develop this new type of leader?

In the world of business and organizations, the buzzword has become “innovation”—and for good reason. Never has the pace of change been so unrelenting and fast, confronting leaders with “make-or-break challenges” (Hamel, 2012, p. 44) that can’t be solved by conventional means. At the same time, the world has become an increasingly interconnected world that requires leadership that is relevant, flexible, and creative. Global environmental concerns, economic pressures, rapidly changing technology, and fierce competition in all sectors call for organizational leaders who have become masters of their imaginations, rather than prisoners of culture and tradition (Friedman, 2004). This new type of leader operating in an increasingly complex world must be committed to a leadership approach that is built around what Scharmer (2011) calls “the creative process.” Puccio, Mance, and Murdoch (2011) refer to this type of leadership as creative leadership.

## **Creative Leadership**

So what is creative leadership and how do you develop it? Scharmer (2011) believes that creative leadership mirrors what he calls the creative process. Creative leaders move beyond habitual ways of thinking and behaving. But to do that they first have to connect with their authentic self and identify their personal blind spots. This first step requires courage. Adler (2011) calls it the courage to see reality as it is. For Puccio, Mance, and Murdock (2011), it is a commitment to operate from a place of openness. But blind spots may be rooted deeper than most leaders are willing to go. Openness is easily boycotted by habits steeped in prejudice, cynicism, and fear. When Jesus called the leaders of His time “blind guides” it was precisely because they refused to see

how their own prejudices blinded them to the new reality God was creating among them (Matthew 15:14, 23:16; cf. 13:13). Similarly, the creative process calls for an open mind that rejects the voice of habitual judgment, an open heart that rejects the voice of cynicism, and an open will that rejects the voice of fear (Scharmer, 2011).

Moreover, creative leadership is a fundamental shift from traditional leadership theory. Early leadership researchers often looked for a set of traits or key behaviors that set leaders apart (Northouse, 2010). Recognizing the importance of situational factors helped the leadership theoreticians to formulate more sophisticated models to take into account some of the complexity leaders have to deal with. Take for instance, Gary Yukl's Multiple Linkage Model (2010), which takes into account situational variables as well as more immediate (intervening) variables to explain short-term actions as well as long-term actions leaders can take to increase performance. What all these theories have in common is a quest for efficiency and predictability. The problem is that the world has become increasingly unpredictable and complex, a fact which calls for a shift from seeing the world only as it is to an approach that organizes around new ways of thinking along the line of quantum physics and seeing the world as it could be (Heylighen, as cited in Goertzel, 2011). This approach philosophically rejects the three fundamental myths that have driven much of Western civilization: the observer and the observed are separate; rational linear reasoning is best; and no work or project can begin until everything is known (Arthur, 2010).

This new approach also rejects the limited notion that creativity is a scarce characteristic of just a few exceptional people. In contrast, the basic assumption of creative leadership is that everyone has creative capacity and leadership potential (Puccio et al., 2011; cf. Adler, 2011; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006). Leaders have an important role to create and hold space where the collective capacity and potential of the system can be discovered, released, embraced, and utilized (Scharmer, 2011). Creative leadership produces sustainable, relevant, and transformative results because it is organized around the creative process where complex problems are solved through the integration of convergent and divergent thinking (Osborn, 1963), tacit and explicit knowledge (Collins, 2010), and the balance of power and love (Kahane, 2010). Creative leaders intentionally build a collaborative culture that removes barriers to creativity and allows all within the system to operate from their highest future potential.

The literature sometimes portrays leaders as the key factor to turn situations and organizations around, ignoring the influence of many other factors that have contributed to the positive results. Creative leadership, in contrast, functions as an ecosystem rather than as an ego-system. Creative leadership recognizes the importance of the contribution of a community of action and seeks to benefit all stakeholders within the system, down to the most marginalized; traditional leadership, on the other hand, operates as an ego-system approach where decisions benefit top stakeholders at the expense of the remainder within the system. When ideas are welcome from anywhere in the ecosystem, the creative capacity and leadership potential of the whole group comes into play. Because of its collaborate nature, a key role of creative leadership is that of providing a space where deep collaboration can happen so new ideas are welcomed and can be experimented with (Martin, 2011).

### **The Genesis of Creative Leadership Development Programs**

Recognizing a shift towards creative leadership made us wonder how this new kind of leader is being developed. Just as we asked, “What can be taught and learned?” (Freed, Covrig, & Baumgartner, 2010), we began to ask, “Is it possible to develop leadership programs that result in creative leaders?” We decided to go out and see for ourselves where such programs existed and how the programs were developed and delivered. Our initial search resulted in a number of programs claiming to be creative leadership programs. We were looking for “positive deviance” (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010), that is, programs that were successful exceptions to typical leadership programs. We developed criteria that would help us delimit the large number of programs claiming to do “creative leadership” to a smaller purposively chosen sample of three institutes.

The following criteria were used to select the three institutes described in our study:

1. The institute is connected to a higher education institution by any of the following: offering undergraduate or graduate co-op/ internships, visiting faculty, or being a department or research site of a college or university.
2. Teaching faculty are degreed, published, and are currently involved in research related to creative leadership.
3. The leadership programs and the curriculum encompass both why and how leaders are effective.
4. The curriculum reflects research outcomes conducted by the institution.

5. The institutes' client bases are drawn from a broad array of organizations, including higher education, businesses, non-profit organizations, and/or government agencies.
6. College/university credit can be earned by attending the institutions' classes, workshops, or seminars.  
As we continued to refine our criteria, we noticed that some of the most respected institutes had a fairly long history. We wondered how that happened, since creative leadership is really still an emerging idea. It occurred to us that understanding the way the institutes evolved would be informative, so we added the last criterion:
7. The program has been in operation for more than 25 years.

### **The Three Creativity Institutes**

The three institutions that were chosen for this study were (1) the International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC), located on the campus of Buffalo State College at the University of New York, in Buffalo, New York, and founded by Alex Osborn; (2) the Banff Centre (BC), located in Banff, Alberta, Canada, and founded by Canadian senator Donald Cameron; and (3) the Leadership Development Institute (LDI) on the campus of Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, and founded by Dr. Peter Armacost, educator and president of the college at the time LDI was founded.

The data collected for this study were obtained from personal site visits to each of the institutes that lasted from four to twelve days. I (Karen) met with the program director, faculty and staff; attended faculty meetings; observed faculty lectures and classes; and watched participants engage in problem-solving design-thinking sessions. I was allowed to observe and participate in these sessions that included instructions and practice in developing empathy for the problem being solved, defining the problem, brainstorming, ideating, rapid prototyping, and establishing feedback loops. I also observed and participated in interactive learning experiences aimed at building competency in creative leadership that addressed conflict, feedback, and design thinking.

Additional data was collected through one-on-one interviews with institute directors, faculty members, and staff. During each of the site visits I had numerous opportunities to eat with faculty and staff, allowing me to visit on a more personal level. A review of documents, videos, and audio recordings was also part of the data collection process. I observed reflection and debriefing sessions aimed at participant evaluations of programs, faculty, and facilities. Additional information was gained through follow-up phone calls, reading of faculty books and articles, and information from faculty and institutional web sites.

## **International Center for Studies in Creativity (Buffalo, New York)**

The International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC) had its beginning in the 1950s when advertising executive Alex Osborn believed more creativity and imagination were needed in American education and business. Osborn began writing and speaking on the role of imagination and creativity in both work and play. Osborn enlisted two college professors, Parnes and Noller, to assist him in research on imagination, creativity and problem solving. Findings from this research led to launching the first creativity journal, the *Journal of Creative Behavior*, and later to the founding of the Creative Education Foundation. In 1967, the president of Buffalo State College at University of New York invited Parnes and Noller to begin teaching two courses on creativity. Research later showed how students who enrolled in the creativity courses improved academically, socially, and in leadership ability. The fledgling institute went from two courses to being a bona fide department at Buffalo State College with undergraduate and graduate course offerings. As the years passed, additional faculty and courses were added, and by the close of 20th century the department was offering degrees, both on campus and through distance programs serving an international clientele.

Early in the 21st century, faculty realized creativity training inadvertently included leadership development (Clapham, 1997). ICSC courses included strategies for leading small groups through Creative Problem Solving (CPS) processes and mastery of facilitation techniques and skills. Courses were designed to teach basic change leadership skills and the conceptual relationships between facilitation and change leadership. Faculty taught courses designed to develop students' skills in applying and facilitating advanced creative problem-solving tools that involved diagnostic, visionary, strategic, ideational, evaluative, contextual, and tactical thinking. The cognitive tools were drawn from various fields, such as quality improvement and strategic management, and included decision-making and various problem-solving models.

As ICSC's creative training program became more refined, leader development naturally morphed into the curriculum. The requirements for effective creative processes looked similar to those required for effective leadership; therefore, in 2008 ICSC launched a certificate in leadership and published a creative leadership textbook. Zacko-Smith (2010) believes ICSC came of age when the leadership program was included in creativity training, because this was an open acknowledge-

ment that creativity is core to leadership, and that those who become effective in the creative process have also developed competency in leadership.

### **Banff Centre (Banff, Alberta, Canada)**

The Banff Centre began as a single drama course in 1933 through the work of Senator Cameron and the University of Alberta's Department of Extension, with a grant from the U.S.-based Carnegie Foundation. The course met with instant success, generating additional arts courses. Courses and faculty were added each subsequent semester and the Centre continued to grow and draw more students. Originally those attending the classes were local; however, within the second year of course offerings, students were also coming from around the world. In a short time the Centre became known for its arts programming, drawing both advanced and beginning artists with diverse backgrounds. Faculty began to realize artists and the artistic process had much in common with leadership, and that artists demonstrated significant leadership skills. In 1954 a leadership development program was introduced through arts-based learning, which continued to grow until the 1970s, when arts-based leadership was taught through stand-alone programs in its own center.

The Banff Centre's 65th birthday in 1989 was a milestone celebrated both on the Banff Centre campus and throughout Canada. It was a significant achievement, considering the Centre's humble beginnings. The Banff Centre's role is a specialized Leadership, Arts, and Culture Institution, providing non-partisan programming in the arts and creativity. Advancement efforts have been successful, giving the Centre the ability to grant as much as 70% tuition to qualified students, as well as to collaborate with the Department of Canadian Heritage, enabling Aboriginal participants to attend the Banff Centre's leadership development, mountain culture, and environmental courses (Fabbri, 2008; Hofstetter, 2009).

By the turn of the century, the conference facilities had become a popular destination, offering such programs as the learning vacation program called the Live & Learn Series. Today, along with extensive arts programming, the Centre also offers full certificated leadership development programming for First Nation leaders as well as leaders from all other sectors (Fabbri, 2008; Hofstetter, 2009). By the dawning of the 21st century, the Banff Centre had earned its place as a world leader in creativity, leadership, and the arts, and continues to draw



crowds from a wide range of artists and leaders (Bass & Stiedlmeier, 1999).

From its inception, the Banff Centre has continued to grow, expand, and support the artistic process across sectors in the arts, which includes leadership. The Banff Centre maintains alignment with Cameron's original mission, to bring arts to people from all walks of life so they can access their innate creative capacity and become the people they were intended to be. The Banff Centre has remained true to its core values of honoring the human experience and teaching people from all walks how to access their true creative self (Fabbri, 2008; Hofstetter, 2009).

### **Leadership Development Institute (St. Petersburg, Florida)**

The Leadership Development Institute (LDI) first opened its doors in 1980 on the campus of Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, as an official network affiliate for the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), which is located in Greensboro, North Carolina. Today, LDI has served thousands of leaders nationally and internationally, from Fortune 500 companies and government agencies to not-for-profit organizations (M. Watson, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

The LDI was the brainchild of Eckerd College's former president, Dr. Peter Armacost, while he was in office. Armacost had become increasingly concerned that rising tuition costs in the late 1970s were pricing potential students out of their dream of attending college. Armacost held that any qualified student desiring to attend Eckerd should not be turned away due to financial reasons; he believed that as the leader of Eckerd, it was his responsibility to look for alternative ways to generate revenue that would help support Eckerd's undergraduate scholarship fund. Armacost believed Eckerd had untapped resources that could help solve this dilemma and he was committed to discovering what those could be (M. Watson, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

Through the years, the community and college alumni asked Armacost to expand the college's continuing education and lifelong learning opportunities. As Eckerd's financial situation continued to be of concern, Armacost became convinced that the untapped opportunities for scholarship funding lay within the realm of what Eckerd was already doing, which was offering courses and teaching.

Armacost believed there was a need for a leadership development program, but he feared Eckerd did not have the experience or curriculum to offer a program that would attract the leaders needed to support such a program. He supposed, however, that with the proper infrastruc-

ture, a leadership development program on the Eckerd campus could have an appeal for leaders around the world. The draw would be further enhanced by Eckerd's location on Florida's Gulf Coast (M. Watson, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

Armacost organized a taskforce to explore viable opportunities and partnerships for such a venture, which ultimately resulted in the development of three businesses on Eckerd College's campus that are still in operation today: the English Language Institute for international students seeking acceptance into American universities; an Elderhostel senior citizen enrichment program; and LDI, a center for the development of leaders (M. Watson, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

While the taskforce worked, Armacost learned that the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, North Carolina, was looking to expand their leadership development program by creating several network affiliates. Thinking this to be just the opportunity Eckerd needed, Armacost contacted CCL to learn if Eckerd could qualify as one of the network affiliate sites. After undergoing a stringent application and approval process, and meeting CCL's rigorous criteria, Eckerd College was granted affiliate status in 1979. The college officially began its leadership program in 1980, offering CCL's flagship program, the Leadership Development Program. Today, over 5,000 leaders internationally have enrolled in and attended LDI's leadership courses (P. Hammerschmidt, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

### **Accidentally Creative?**

What is interesting to note is that each of the three institutes was founded by a man who was concerned about a specific situation that was perceived as a threat to current and future generations. Armacost was concerned that rising tuition costs were preventing undergraduate students from getting the education they desired. Osborn feared that the organizational structure of the American education system and of the work force was crippling imagination and creative problem-solving skills. Cameron was troubled by the limiting impact of the great depression of 1929 on Canada's education system, leaving a generation of rural children without knowledge of the arts or the artistic process.

These concerns were born of empathy that each of these founders felt for their fellow man. Without empathy they would most likely not have acted upon their concerns, which ultimately led to the launching of the three creativity institutes. Faculty and staff pointed out how each

founder was noted for his humanitarian and civic efforts. Thus empathy became embedded in each institution as a first step towards innovation and a reason for the discovery of relevant solutions.

None of the founders set out to introduce a new leadership or creativity model. What they were concerned about was more simple and profound. It can be summed up in two questions: “Who am I? and What is my work?” In order to help people clarify these questions, they often have to strip away faulty mental models that hinder creativity. Ultimately they strive to reconnect people with their authentic self. How do they do this? At LDI, I (Karen) observed simulation activities that included individual reflection and group debriefing directed at identifying personal strengths and effectiveness. At ICSC, participants are taught how to become aware of their automatic responses by participating in creative-problem-solving groups. The BC uses an arts-based learning model in which each participant engages in artistic experiences followed by reflection. In all three sites, faculty stressed the importance of teaching individuals how to access personal creative capacity through the discovery of the authentic self.

### **Pervasive Core Beliefs**

Several core beliefs appeared to be omnipresent and remarkably similar in all three centers: (1) everyone has creative capacity and leadership potential; (2) creative leadership is a life-long journey that begins with a personal choice; (3) creative leadership operates from a living system approach; and (4) creative leaders lead from the emerging future.

### **Everyone Has Creative and Leadership Capacity**

Creative capacity and leadership potential are found in all humans and are not limited to exceptional persons. This assumption is powerful because it gives permission to all people to embrace and develop their innate creative capacity and leadership skills. It also hints at each person’s responsibility to take a hold of this gift and grow it. For this reason, all three programs were designed to bring awareness to personal ability and to teach specific ways to develop creativity and leadership skills. There was agreement that creativity and leadership skills can be developed only through individual choice and intentionality. Without decided effort, innate capacities remain benign. Simulation and improvisation, coupled with personal reflection and group debriefing, served as conduits for illuminating alignment to the authentic self. In

the end, each program expected that participants would begin to answer the two questions “Who am I?” and “What is my work?”

Learning was not restricted to actual time on campus. Each site began with pre-program assignments, assessments, and pre-reading. The submitted assignments provided faculty and staff with specific information to customize the program. The onsite program often used interactive learning activities, reflection, feedback, and the hands-on use of creativity models. Post-program support consisted of online chatting, working with learning partners, counseling, conversations, and global classrooms. Faculty believed that customization creates incentive to fully engage in the program. Without individualized programming, participants would miss the opportunities to apply learning from personal feedback and to give meaning to their subjective experience by remaining on a more sterile objective level (P. Hammerschmidt, personal communication, September 12, 2009; M. Jones, personal communication, November 22, 2009; G. Puccio, personal communication, November 3, 2009).

### Creative Leadership Is a Life-Long Journey That Begins with a Personal Choice

Each program stresses that leadership begins with a choice. If there is no choice, there is no leadership. Once the choice is made, the leader emerges through a variety of experiences that go from celebrated successes to downright failures. Leadership is a natural part of the human experience because everyone fills a leadership role at some point in their life. The key is to recognize that moment when the time is right to step into that role. Stepping into the leader role can feel quite threatening. For this reason, participants have to learn how to align their personal creative capacity, strengths, and true work in anticipation of the right moment to step in.

To help participants identify and understand where they are on the leadership journey, each of the institutes used specific techniques. LDI uses 360° assessments to teach the art of feedback management and how to both solicit and give feedback. ICSC uses a unique technique called the MQ30 formula to teach students how to embrace failure as part of any creative process and their development as a leader. (MQ30 stands for the expected daily mistake quotient. It is a way to give anyone entering into the creative process permission to make mistakes and see them as a positive contribution to one’s development as a creative leader.) ICSC faculty also provide time for reflection and feedback to

help students understand their personal growth, areas of strength, and areas to develop. BC uses art experiences to help participants identify and understand where they are in their growth journey as a leader. By understanding their own development in relation to a continuum of leadership experience, individuals are led to seek and accept support. Thus BC guides participants through artful encounters that are followed by outdoor reflection and indoor debriefing sessions with faculty, coaches, or peers, or individually; these allow participants to begin to understand their personal journey of growth.

### Creative Leadership Is Organized Around a Living System Approach

Each program approached creative leadership as part of a living system, similar to the way nature is an interconnected living system in which each part is connected and inseparable from other parts, serving one another, even if the connections are not always obvious. While the programs did not specifically refer to themselves as “living systems,” all three programs offered a leadership discipline that heightened the ability of seeing how leaders are part of the whole for the benefit of all within the system. Some have called this approach an eco-system approach to leadership (Scharmer, 2009).

To help participants function within an ecosystem approach, they were given opportunities to create and maintain a collaborated space. They were given permission to engage in activities, and then held responsible to do so. Each site offered learning experiences that provided participants with varying vantage points. Members of the group took turns learning, following, or supporting collaborative groups as well as non-collaborative groups. Every participant got a chance to see first-hand how the level of connectedness or involvement affected the level of care and responsibility. For example, in one exercise participants were required to create team spirit and collaboration. The catch was that each member was given immediate feedback by receiving a number indicating their present level of involvement. Participants had to continue to work to bring all members to a high level of connectivity. Participants were encouraged to give feedback to both the leader and those not engaging. Faculty also taught participants the value of doing “engagement” checks to allow each participant to rate how engaged they were feeling at that time on a scale of 1 to 10. Those with lower scores were asked to verbalize what they needed to reach a 10. The leader then invited the groups to make adjustments so all within the

group could be at a 10. This was a powerful, effective activity.

Faculty report that this activity is typically highly engaging, enlightening, and bonding. Those participants who persevere are successful in creating a highly engaged team. The principle taught through this and similar activities is that “people care about what they helped create and they are responsible when they care.” When people experience the positive strength of a collaborative space where the engagement of each person is vital to sustaining that space, they realize that their own caring for their own engagement and the engagement of their group members contributes to the whole.

### Creative Leaders Lead from the Emerging Future

All three leadership development programs taught that effective leaders lead from an emerging future instead of the predictive past. Such an approach requires a leader to be mindful and open to what is emerging (P. Hammerschmidt, personal communication, September 14, 2009; M. Jones, personal communication, November 23, 2009; G. Puccio, personal communication, November 25, 2009). Embedded within all three programs were the constructs that leading from an emerging future requires a leader to simultaneously manage the present, envision the future, and selectively forget the (habitual) past. Ultimately, leadership is about creating new realities, which is a balancing act between the known and the unknown.

Faculty explained that often the idea of leading from an emerging future appears counter-intuitive because we typically lead on the basis of what we have learned in the past; however, research supports that focusing on what is emerging creates relevant and sustainable solutions. Leading from an emerging future requires one to move beyond habitual ways of thinking and acting and become attuned to what is happening or what is about to happen. It requires leaders to observe reality with fresh eyes and commit to seeing what is actually happening rather than what one thinks is happening.

Activities that supported this concept involved participants working in groups of five to solve specific problems. No solutions were allowed to be discussed until the group had completely studied the problem and gained empathy as to what the end user was experiencing. Participants interviewed, observed, and photographed end users to learn the nature of the problem. Only when the group was able to identify the problem could they begin offering solutions. Brainstorming or

ideation sessions followed the empathy-gathering phase. Participants were required to listen to the ideas of others and rapidly prototype ideas to obtain feedback. Prototypes were tweaked as feedback was received. Everyone was asked to “fail fast and cheap” to learn as much as possible about the prototype.

The purpose of such an exercise was to give participants the opportunities to solve a problem or discover opportunities in a problem by totally emerging themselves into what the end user was seeing, feeling, and thinking. Participants’ eyes were opened as they saw problems from a whole new vantage point; they often remark how transforming such design-thinking activities are. Through simulation and debriefing activities, they actually experience examples of how leading from the emerging future takes a group beyond interdependence to wholeness, to the place where an understanding of what needs to be done emerges. This leads to the experience of actually doing it.

In a simpler but equally effective example of leading from the emerging future, BC and LDI asked participants to gather in a circle and count to 50 by each individual calling out the next number without interrupting another. During first attempts at this exercise, individuals were rushing to be the one to say the next number, hence interrupting; however, as people became mindful of one another, they were able to count to 50 and beyond. Another example was a group collaborating on assembling a block structure blindfolded. At first there was pandemonium, but soon the group fell into sync and completed the project. Other activities included alignment to a jazz band or creating an impromptu dance, drama, or song. Faculty shared that as their groups experienced alignment, participants were able to experience what it was like to move beyond interdependence to a place of wholeness, where each knew what needed to be done and they did it.

BC faculty gave another illustration that compared the idea of “leading from the future” to the London Underground signage to “Mind the Gap” that reminds travelers to be mindful of the gap that exists between the tracks and the platform. Travelers adjust their steps while embarking and disembarking. Yet another way to understand the idea of leading from an emerging future was cast at each site as participants were provided with the experience of seeing that that which is invisible is more powerful than that which is visible. BC taught this through the metaphor of an open mind, an open heart, and an open will: (a) the open mind is the capacity to suspend habitual judgment; (b) the open heart is the ability to redirect personal perspectives from “my” view-

point to that of someone else, and especially those who are marginalized within the system; and (c) the open will is the ability to let go and let come (Scharmer, 2011). The ultimate goal of each program was to help participants access their authentic selves and move to deeper insights, beyond voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear, allowing new levels of understanding to emerge.

## **How the Programming Was Organized**

In all three institutes, we found four patterns that characterize how the programming was organized: utilization of creativity models, intentionally created culture that removes barriers to creativity, shared language, and engaged faculty.

### **Utilization of Creativity Models**

Each of the sites used a specific creativity model. The Leadership Development Institute developed the creativity model called the Feedback Intensive Program (FIP), which uses a process of assessment, challenge, and support to raise participant awareness to personal blind spots and how to connect with their authentic self.

The International Center for Studies in Creativity used the Thinking Skills model (TSK) or Creative Problem Solving model (CPS), in which the creative process is a cycle that moves through divergent and convergent thinking phases. During the divergent phase, ideas and understanding are sought, gathered, and welcomed from a wide array of sources. In the convergent phase, those ideas are sorted, selected, and tested for usefulness. The more skilled an individual becomes at initiating and managing each phase, the better the quality of the creative process. ICSC holds that all good creative processes move from divergent thinking to convergent thinking and back again. This process is dynamic and must be kept moving. Once a system or leader becomes stuck in either divergent or convergent thinking, the creative process has ceased to exist.

The Banff Centre used the Arts-Based Learning approach as a way to teach participants creative leadership. Through this approach participants experience firsthand how engaging in the artistic process, coupled with direct reflection, deepens awareness of personal leadership strengths and weaknesses. In one session, the objective was to create a clay sculpture. Each participant was seated in the potter studio blindfolded and was asked to create an animal of his or her choice. Participants worked silently until everyone was finished, after which



they reflected on their thoughts and actions while creating the animal. As participants shared their thoughts and feelings about what they had learned, the group was invited to give feedback and offer other perspectives. The group then discussed how the experience illuminated both weaknesses and strengths in their own leadership approach. In the process, the group also discussed and practiced the “yes and” theory. “Yes and” is agreeing with what has been said and offering new information. It is a dynamic way of creating high engagement and trust, allowing members of a group to become honest and able to deal with the truth. In this way “yes and” creates highly effective and relevant environments and group dynamics.

These art experiences are followed by deep reflection and debriefing. Each participant charts personal progress. The purpose of an arts-based learning model is to raise awareness of personal leadership barriers, fears, judgments, and cynicism. Following each art experience, the group would engage in simulation learning in which they were asked to apply personal learning.

### Teaching the Creativity Models

Sternberg’s findings (2007) suggest that those leaders and teams who become competent in managing creativity models raise the quality of problem solving and innovation within their organizations. Each of the three programs taught that creative models enhance leadership rather than drive or dictate leadership or the creative process. Creativity models create a framework or space where participants understand and visualize the creative process. For this reason participants were given opportunities to experience how creative models work. These models emphasized the importance of creating a space for the group to obtain feedback and then go back and revise the prototype. When properly managed, creativity models raise the quality of the innovation or solutions.

Faculty agreed that dozens of creativity models exist, many of which are highly effective. A creativity model’s effectiveness rests on the level of the leader’s personal presence, awareness, and mindfulness, and that leader’s ability to maintain a balance between tacit and explicit knowledge (M. Fox, personal communication, November 4, 2009; N. Nissley, personal communication, November 3, 2009; M. Watson, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

While creative models are presented in steps, the creative process itself is non-linear and non-sequential and is tied less to mechanics and more to human dynamics. Ultimately, even the best creativity model

cannot trump the human element (N. Nissley, personal communication, November 23, 2009; G. Puccio, personal communication, November 4, 2009; M. Watson, personal communication, September 15, 2009).

### Intentionally Created Culture

The goal of each site was to create a culture that would translate into a space that supports the creative process. Perhaps the cultures at each of the sites could best be compared to the way friendship works; it cannot be mandated, only entered into as a shared experience. Creating a culture starts with faculty intentionally removing barriers to creativity in the physical space, in group work, and during social times. The presentation of food and materials, the arrangement of chairs and tables, the use of lights and other visuals, and the creation and display of information are all used to help participants feel supported and connected.

Another vital element of the open mind, open heart, and open will philosophy was forgiveness. The faculty taught that forgiveness opens the way for the creative process and access to the authentic self. This included both forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others, because failure and success make up both sides of creativity. Failure and success contribute equally to learning. Without forgiveness, failure is viewed as a negative event that should not happen and leadership becomes focused on failure prevention. This focus skews and stifles both creativity and leadership, preventing either process from becoming established within a group. Forgiveness, on the other hand, seeks to see the learning element of failure, allowing leadership to stay focused on the creative process.

Another aspect of the creative culture was the need for all participants to commit to taking a risk to be involved and to participate. All three programs make it very clear that everyone was included; all were invited to participate, and were expected to do so. Faculty invited participants to contribute to the culture by asking them to clarify the level at which they intended to participate. Faculty then granted permission for all participants to fully exist within the culture. Each was held responsible both to become engaged and to help others do the same. Activities such as improvisation games, learning partners, shared reflection times, eating together, interactive games, sharing feedback, storytelling, and group problem solving were included in each program.

In each group, regular engagement checks were taken, requiring everyone to share on a scale of 1 to 10 how engaged they were feeling. If they were not engaged, faculty and group members would ask what

they needed to become engaged. The necessary arrangements were made and faculty reported increased participation in almost every situation. Other cultural aspects were introduced by faculty that allowed each member of the group to lead, provide feedback, and be listened to. Faculty at LDI asked participants to provide feedback to fellow participants after specific simulation activities and encouraged those receiving the feedback to view all feedback as a gift; BC participants were asked to find meaning in one another's art; and ICSC taught participants to embrace mistakes. Faculty and staff reported that participant engagement was not hard to get or maintain due to the highly interactive nature of the programs.

The leader's role in developing a creative learning space has already been discussed. Faculty invited participants to become responsible caretakers of that collaborative space. Participants maintained the culture's integrity by demonstrating both verbally and behaviorally how the space is maintained through deferring judgment, tolerating chaos, managing risks, acknowledging feedback, consciously moving between the known and the unknown, offering forgiveness, becoming mindful, and embracing future possibilities.

This granting of permission and expecting responsibility was a way to both inspire and evoke participants to act on a level that would sustain the creative process. Faculty expressed that the act of giving permission and expecting responsibility to participate in and maintain that space often appears artificial or controlling to incoming participants; however, faculty found this act of both inviting and evoking participants to participate preemptively removes any excuse not to and often results in instant collaboration and high levels of responsibility.

A major role of the faculty was to teach participants how to maintain the integrity of the culture by knowing how or when the space was being intentionally or unintentionally "hijacked." Hijacking happened when a group member's attitudes, behavior, or words blocked, stopped, or diverted the creative process. This occurred when a group member interrupted the collaboration or stopped the information flow by engaging in what BC calls unintentional blindness, or "the voice of judgment, voice of fear, or voice of cynicism." LDI calls this being "unintentionally unaware"; ICSC refers to it as "robbing from the outcome" or being "fixated on the outcome." In other words, hijacking took place when a group member destroyed the creative space by operating from what faculty and staff referred to as a personal "blind spot." Blind spots, according to all three sites, exist within each person and,

when unidentified, result in behaviors, attitudes, and actions that destroy creative culture or collaborated space and bring about negative unintended consequences. Artifacts such as a gong, bell, or other musical instruments were sounded if someone felt that the creative culture was being compromised. Usually such “whistle blowing” resulted in laughter.

Faculty reports were similar in that participants arrived eager to engage in the programs; however, as participants took turns leading, offering feedback, and working through problem solving, most realized they lacked skills in the art of collaboration and were not used to the level of open feedback. By mid-session, however, faculty reported that students independently began to realize how the program opens the way for new levels of awareness, personal understanding, and knowledge of how creative leadership actually works. Somewhere mid-stream in the program, there were conscious shifts of understanding, awareness, and state of presence. For both faculty and students to discover this type of knowing and knowledge, each must trust their own senses, experiences, and insights, all without knowing where that journey will lead. Each had to intentionally choose not to judge (called “refraining from judging” by LDI; identified as “suspending judgment” by ICSC; called “downloading by BC”). A process each site labeled as a block to creativity was when participants bring past expectations, beliefs, and attitudes to a present situation and prevent new insights, learning, or process from emerging.

## Shared Language

Shared language was considered vital to each institute and the culture. A shared language defines elusive qualities that exist within a culture and make it possible for that culture to be articulated and understood. A shared lexicon provides the way for something to be asked for, thought about, or disagreed with by name. Such a language makes both the tangible and intangible aspects of the culture understandable and emphasizes what is important.

Each site drew upon different words of their shared language. LDI used such words as feedback loops, conflict competent, assessment-challenge-support, transparency, and awareness. ICSC used words such as divergent thinking, convergent thinking, MQ30, brainstorming, pluses-potentials-concerns, and creative process. BC used such words as artistic process, design thinking, authenticity, creativity, presence, mindfulness, and organic thinking. Each word or phrase carried different meanings or no meaning to participants until the faculty clarified

what that word or phrase meant in that program. Faculty from each site believed that participants needed education and experience in the institute's shared language, because without developing competency in a shared language participants would not fully grasp what was core to the creative process.

For example, LDI's term "conflict competent" refers to an individual who is skilled at managing conflict. "Feedback competent" refers to a leader or team who has developed the skills to both give and/or take feedback from any sector of the system at any point in time. ICSC's term "MQ=30" means "mistake quotient=30," which is the fun and easygoing manner in which the faculty embraces mistakes. Everyone at ICSC is granted 30 mistakes daily. If more are needed, one only needs to ask. Those not knowing the meaning of MQ30 might be put off or confused by the light way mistakes are referred to and handled. BC uses the term "artistic process" as a way leaders can learn to lead. A person unfamiliar with this meaning may feel intimidated when being told they are going to engage in the artistic process.

Each site was intentional about introducing the participants to shared language right from the start of the program. All three sites had similar methods in creating a shared language and making this shared language known. For example, all three sites used their specific shared language in brochures, web sites, and in admission processes. At the start of all three programs, faculty introduced participants to their shared language and then invited participants to use the language. Faculty demonstrated the shared language by using it throughout all sectors of the program.

Faculty placed the responsibility for integrating and perpetuating the shared language on the participants' shoulders. Faculty explained that shared language becomes alive and relevant as participants learn, understand, and use it through simulation activities, role-playing, problem solving, debriefing sessions, peer-to-peer feedback, and personal reflection. For example, LDI had daily debriefing session in which group members offered feedback to other members in the group. Sentences such as "it felt to me" or "the way I experienced it" were examples of a shared language that was learned and used to offer feedback.

ICSC taught participants to engage in brainstorming by asking such questions such as "What would it look like if . . . ?" "How might we . . . ?" or "In what ways could we...?" as a way to fully engage in brainstorming and move the group along with a shared language. BC took participants through nature experiences or artistic experiences

and used directed follow-up reflection times for participants to use language such as “presence,” “mindfulness,” and “authentic” to process how each had related to the artistic or outdoor experience they had just encountered. All three sites used these processes in shared language to drive home their main point, which is that everyone can fully embrace creative leadership and be more intentional at becoming a creative leader through shared language.

Faculty explained that in many cultures/environments/systems the specific aspects of the creative process call for vulnerability, flexibility, or openness. A shared language can serve to normalize those aspects that are considered too risky. For example, LDI faculty explained that feedback loops or suspending judgment are not tolerated in some cultures, systems, or environments because leaders do not know how to manage such communication; however, having a shared language provides a way for everyone within the system to learn and understand how feedback loops or the process of suspending judgment lead to more trust, truth, and strength. A shared language aids a group in managing necessary conflict, change, and new levels of thinking. Faculty at all three sites believed participants were able to move to high levels of creativity and creative process because of the existence of a shared language.

## Engaged Faculty

Engaged faculty were clearly the underpinning at each of the institutes. Faculty openly shared that an engaged faculty was essential to leadership development. They also expressed a sense of satisfaction and joy at being able to help others develop into creative leaders. In addition to personal commitment to the individual programs, there was evidence of collaboration, teamwork, support, and healthy relationships among the faculty and staff.

There was also an observable level of admiration and respect among the faculty and staff. They were quick to point out some recent successes or significant research project a colleague had completed or was in the midst of conducting. A sense of fun and camaraderie was apparent between faculty and staff at each of the sites, yet a high level of professionalism was also present. For example, there was friendly, supportive conversation between faculty and staff in the hallways, between classes, in faculty meetings, and after the close of the day’s session. Personal artifacts, cartoons, and artwork hung on bulletin boards and doors, depicting shared history, funny situations, or personal characteristics of the various faculty and staff. Stories were shared that depicted faculty and staff working together.

In short, each of the sites was a living example of their own creative leadership pedagogy. The result was a faculty and staff who viewed themselves as part of a strong team, involved with an effective program, and making a significant difference with the participants they were teaching.

All three directors shared that participant evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and that most included positive comments about the level of faculty engagement. Directors believed that highly engaged faculty was a significant strength of their program (N. Nissley, personal communication, November 2009; G. Puccio, personal communication, November 2009; M. Watson, personal communication, September 16, 2009).

## **Developing Creative Christian Leaders**

So what does all this mean to Christian leaders? First, leaders might have to confront their own readiness to buy into the necessity for innovation in their organizations. If they work in the church, a good starting point might be Gary Hamel's recent talk to the 7000 church leaders at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit. After the summit Hamel (2009) highlighted some of his main points in his *Wall Street Journal* blog:

1. Churches are losing ground in attracting and keeping new believers. Since 1990, the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled, and the number of people who describe themselves as atheist or agnostic has quadrupled—this according to the 2009 American Religious Identification Survey (Meacham, 2009).
2. The same survey reveals that two-thirds of Americans believe religion's influence is waning in our society, and just 19 percent say it's growing. And the proportion of Americans who think religion "can answer all or most of today's problems" is now at an historic low of 48 percent (Meacham, 2009).
3. On an average weekend in 2005, just 17.5% of the population attended a Christian church service, down from 20.4% in 1990. And this downward trend has been accelerating. If it continues, only 1 of 7 individuals will be attending church regularly in 2020 (Olson, 2008, p. 36).
4. In 2006 there were 91 million more Americans than in 1990—and 70 million of them were under the age of 17. Yet over this time frame, church attendance stayed flat (Olson, 2008, pp. 35-36).
5. The Christian "brand" has also taken a beating, particularly among young people. When polled, around half say they have a neutral view of Christianity, but among those who feel more strongly, the ratio of negative to positive views of "Christianity" and of those who are "Born Again" is 2:1. And when asked about "Evangelicals," the ratio of negative to positive jumps to 16:1 (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2009, p. 25).

Christian leaders today face the same problems as many corporations who have lost their relevance “when the rate of internal change lags the pace of external change” (Hamel, 2009). When churches no longer are able to hold their own youth beyond the time of mandatory attendance or attract new members, what is really needed may be nothing less than creative leaders who are willing to set their churches and organizations on a new path. But how does one become a leader like that?

The findings of this study suggest several things that should be viewed in a hopeful light. First, leaders may have to get rid of the widely-held assumption that creative leadership is a special hereditary gift. Instead, leaders need to embrace creativity as an important leadership asset at this time of earth’s history that can be learned and taught. Our study shows that there is no one way to learn creativity, but it needs to be an intentional pursuit.

Second, many of the core concepts of the DNA of creative leadership are not unfamiliar to Christians, because they have serious scriptural underpinnings. But these concepts need to be reconfigured into a new way of approaching leadership:

1. The idea of the blind spot that needs to be confronted to create an openness to creativity and change is akin to the Christian concept of metanoia or conversion.
2. The notion that creative leadership starts with authenticity, which leads to answers to one’s deepest questions about who we are and what we are here for, is clearly answered in the Scriptures (e.g., Psalm 139; Matthew 28:18-20).
3. The notions of participation, empathy, collaboration, and community are early church ideas and visible in the way churches were organized.
4. As communities work together to move into new spaces, it seems inevitable that mistakes are made and relationships strained. Yet the central reality of forgiveness is powerfully embedded in the heart of Christian community. It was part of Christ’s teaching (Matthew 18:21-23) and Paul’s instruction to new Christians (e.g., Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
5. Jesus practiced an inclusive leadership approach.
6. Notions of “rest” are embraced by all Christians (e.g., Matthew 11:28; Exodus 20:7-9).

Third, perhaps the most helpful sign is the fact that Jesus approached the development of His disciples as a holistic task. Interestingly, He did not create any institutions Himself nor did He rely on the institutions of His day to furnish the leaders He needed to establish the community of His kingdom. Traditional models, including today’s university model, seem to be good at stabilizing movements. But Jesus trained them for rapid multiplication and change using a



“just-in-time” approach with ongoing coaching. Once selected into the inner circle of followers, they lived with Him and observed His life while experiencing His ministry to others firsthand. They had access to Him without barriers, even though they did not always understand the full importance of their actions. Despite their shortcomings, Jesus created a learning space that allowed them to grow in anticipation of fuller insight and deeper commitment (e.g., Matthew 20:20-28).

Thus Jesus’ leadership development approach was built on a universally replicable pattern of discipleship, resulting in an “unsurpassed record in transformation for those who come under its instruction” (Wolf, 2010, p. 12; cf. Schmidt, 2001; Stark, 2001, 2008). While its foundational values of justice, mercy, and integrity (Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 13:13) provided new believers with a new identity (Ephesians 4:22-24) and the movement with a strong spiritual DNA, the way its message was lived out as a “life of love” (Ephesians 5:1) and shared with others was dependent on the circumstances and was up to the creativity of its members (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Open to all social strata (cf. Ephesians 6:5-9) but imbued with a unique identity that was termed “Christian” by watchers of the movement (Acts 11:26), it spread around the Mediterranean Sea and beyond during a time of great political and religious ferment and found its way into the most powerful families of the Roman Empire during the first generation of Christians (Philippians 4:22).

Christian institutions of higher learning have struggled to figure out how to preserve the spontaneous and viral quality of the Christian life that resulted in multiplying members and leaders. Their focus on preserving the integrity of Christian theology and Biblical truth is without question a great accomplishment. But Christian leaders are faced with increasingly complex social contexts for which their training is not preparing them. While Christian leadership programs are multiplying, we have to ask if they are simply trying to shore up Christian institutions doomed by the inevitable organizational life cycle (Moberg, 1984) or if they are truly developing creative leaders able to face the basic questions people around the globe are asking. Already the 21st century has seen a great deal of surprising social ferment that indicates that the longing of the human spirit for freedom and dignity is still alive and well. Thus, how we develop creative Christian leaders is one of the most urgent questions that needs to be asked if we are to rise to the challenge to lead with integrity in this context of mind-boggling change.

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