Leadership has many definitions, and most people have their preferred definition. These definitions can range from motivating others to guiding others to serving others. In general, there is agreement that leaders provide vision and motivation while they recognize that it will take the talent and ability of others to make that vision a reality.
Those of us who have been employed in higher education for several years or more can point to our own experiences with leadership. Many of those experiences have left us looking for more—a search that can often shape our decisions about the type of leader we would like to work for in our next endeavor. Often, we do not consider how each of us can lead from where we are within our organizations, nor how we role-model leadership skills and qualities for others.

Let's take a look at some of the more common leadership models. First, in competency-based leadership models, people are promoted based on what they know. The critique of competency-based models is that they do not take into account the entire person (including soft skills, creativity, motivation, etc.) and that there are many examples to demonstrate that promoting the wrong person (based solely on competency) can lead to the downfall of organizations. Promoting based on competency risks devaluing all other aspects of the aggregate roles of people in an organization and thus sends the wrong message about what is important. One example of a competency-based model is the “Nine Competency Clusters” from Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU).

Collective or shared leadership models, in contrast, refer to the ways in which authority, responsibility, and accountability are more broadly distributed to create opportunities for participation in the leadership of the organization by a greater number of its staff. Collective leadership is often practiced in organizations whose leaders believe that the structure better aligns with the values of the organization. Collective models also develop leadership throughout the organization, engage more staff with new levels of responsibility, distribute accountability to those doing the work, and increase aggregate creativity. The New Leadership Paradigm from the National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health is an example.

Collaborative leadership models refer to bringing together the appropriate people in ways that facilitate the sharing of good information in order to create authentic strategies for addressing shared concerns. This model is less structured than the collective model and more informal in process. That being said, the actual process is the critical component of this model. For example, the group considers the issue and decides what to do, and then the leader paves the path to implementing the decision. The leader leads the process.

Lastly, compassionate leadership models focus on moving from “I” (the leader) to “we.” These models take into account social well-being and emotional well-being and posit that these are important components of successful employees and thus organizations. Understanding people, empathizing with them, and wanting to help them creates favorable conditions for the greater good, as opposed to conditions focused on the success of an individual. Favorable conditions are seen as a requirement for employees to build confidence and take their performances to the next level.
All of these models have pros and cons. The reality is that in today's rapidly changing environment, leadership is often a journey. That journey focuses on emerging talent pools as well as on components of internal and external development for the leader. One model that captures all of this is the Future-State CIO, developed by members of the CIO Executive Council (http://council.cio.com/programs/the-future-state-cio-journey/). This model depicts the change from an internal to external leadership focus and from a service provider to a peer orientation in terms of relationships. The leader's role is to ensure the credibility of his/her area through consistent delivery and team development. Once that has been accomplished (and accomplished does not mean simply that it was done one time), then the next level of leadership focuses on results, collaboration, and change in order to influence business processes and customers and to enhance global agility. With proven results, the leader is positioned to be a game changer for the organization through strategic innovations, business intelligence, and decision making.

The joint Jisc-EDUCAUSE working group on the role of the CIO presented its findings at the 2014 EDUCAUSE Annual Conference and has also published a report. The model developed through this collaborative effort is a visual representation of the CIO leader's roles and how those roles connect with and influence each other. This model complements the Future-State CIO model discussed above. One major difference is that the Jisc-EDUCAUSE model focuses on the journey of an individual and his/her talents and characteristics whereas the Future-State CIO model focuses on competencies and derived value.

Whatever the model or journey, if you are a leader, you have an extremely multifaceted job. You are dealing with enterprise systems, customer service, staff development, relationship building, and crises while also trying to figure out how to learn and reflect and to be able to bring your team along in this new globalized demographic and societal age with a commensurate growth in stakeholders. This can definitely be overwhelming, even before needing to deal with the now infamous “do more with less” paradigm.

On top of this environment, one of the critical challenges facing leaders is how best to build competencies in team members. As the above models show, competency has quite a few dimensions. Competency can encompass character qualities as well as work ethic, energy level, and how time is spent. Everyone has a story about asking team members to take on a new project while they still need to get the “day job” done. Remember, a leader's most important task is to encourage team members to spend time on professional development so that you, the leader, are continuously developing other leaders. As a leader, you need to understand your strengths and build your team around the strengths you don't have so that you can cover the range of necessary skills.

In developing other leaders, you also need to challenge them. This involves reflective practice. Of course, it is very difficult to take the time to do this. Some people go through the exercise in their head, but it is better to write it down. Encouraging your team members to reflect on what happened during the course of their day and asking questions of them can be a significant growth opportunity.

Another strategy for challenging team members is job rotation. This can encourage people to stretch beyond their normal duties. Encouraging future coming leaders to expand their horizons and putting people in unfamiliar circumstances stresses the importance of increasing agility and building relationships.

Becoming a leader is not necessarily about having positive experiences; thus, challenging your team to understand what has happened when they don’t have positive experiences is important. Even more important is educating your team members on how to react to negative experiences. Debriefs and feedback sessions can help develop these perspectives. Being able to value constructive feedback is critical to a developing leader.

Overall, what does a “leaderful” education encompass? It includes conflict resolution, team building, delegation skills, listening, facilitating, coaching, and goal setting. In addition, during the course of my career, I have developed a “Top 10” list of tips to remind myself that what I do is as important as what I say and that role-modeling “leaderfulness” is critical:

1. Really listen.
2. Encourage and empower your team members and others to give you feedback.
3. Understand the implications of body language.
4. Play nice in the sandbox.
5. Remember that you’re only as successful as your team and your organization.
6. Try new things.
7. Be present and aware.
8. Embrace ambiguity and uncertainty.
10. Don’t forget about your own professional development needs.

As you embrace your leadership journey, you will develop your own model and your own style. Remember that authenticity is critical and that the journey will inevitably be a messy one. My model includes the following variables:

- **Sense of Self**: Be your own best self.
- **Vision**: Set the way forward so that everyone is on the same page.
- **Relationship Building**: Do whatever it takes so that when the going gets tough, you have team members who understand one another on multiple levels.
- **Communication**: Walk the walk; encourage and facilitate feedback.
- **Innovation**: Give team members room to work beyond the task and project.
- **Improvisation**: Have a Plan B and a Plan C, and document them (often, even the best Plan A does not work out).
- **Work Ethic**: Be a role model.
- **Results Orientation**: Show that results equal credibility.
- **Fun**: Foster a pleasant work environment.
- **Design Thinking**: Ask yourself: What can I give my team? What does my team value? What does this mean for my work?

I look forward to the ongoing journey and to the evolution of my model. I would love to hear about the model or models that work for other IT leaders as we continue to engage the rapidly changing higher education ecosystem.

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