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Shared Leadership in Higher Education:

*Important Lessons from Research
and Practice*

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American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle NW
Washington, DC 20036

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Shared Leadership in Higher Education: Important Lessons from Research and Practice

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



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's higher education leadership challenges necessitate new forms of leadership. A volatile financial environment, the rise of international partnerships, greater accountability pressures, the need for new business models, new technologies, and changing demographics are just some of these challenges, which call for leadership solutions that are tested both inside and outside of higher education. Shared leadership consistently emerges as a key factor for organizations that were better able to learn, innovate, perform, and adapt to the types of external challenges that campuses now face.

Shared leadership is defined as moving away from the leader/follower binary; capitalizing on the importance of leaders throughout the organization, not just those in positions of authority; and creating an infrastructure so that organizations can benefit from the leadership of multiple people. Shared leadership is different from shared governance. Shared governance is based on the principles of faculty and administration having distinct areas of delegated authority and decision making. Shared leadership, by contrast, is more flexible and identifies various individuals on campus with relevant expertise. This allows multiple perspectives rather than those of a single decision-making body; for example, only faculty or administration.

In order to reap the benefits of shared leadership, organizations should ensure that shared leadership structures and processes are authentic and thoughtfully designed. Conditions that promote and sustain shared leadership include team empowerment, supportive vertical or hierarchical leaders, autonomy, shared purpose or goal, external coaching, accountability structures, interdependence, fairness of rewards, and shared cognition. Moreover, leadership development in higher education as currently designed is ineffective for fostering shared leadership. Most leadership development programs tend to focus on individuals who are already (or aspiring to be) in positions of authority. Few programs are designed to cultivate a broader number of individuals or the structures to support shared leadership, although this is starting to change.

This report examines how a changing environmental context in higher education requires new leadership skills and approaches, chief among them being the principles of shared leadership. We review the new leadership environment, the research on shared leadership, and the small body of research in higher education on shared leadership. We examine the significance of this research for leadership development, discuss challenges to this approach, and offer implications for practice on college and university campuses.

INTRODUCTION

New models of leadership recognize that effectiveness in knowledge based environments depends less on the heroic actions of a few individuals at the top and more on collaborative leadership practices distributed throughout an organization suggesting that a more dynamic relational concept of leadership has emerged. (Pearce and Conger 2003, cited by Fletcher 2004, 648)

The above quote captures how today's complex environments require new forms of collaborative or shared leadership to help campuses become nimbler and responsive to needed changes. Higher education leaders now face a very different set of challenges that necessitate new forms of leadership: for example, a volatile financial environment, the rise of global and international partnerships, greater accountability pressures around college completion and learning outcomes, the need for new business models, opportunities for innovation with technology, and changing demographics (Wallin 2010). While higher education has undergone periods of significant change in the enterprise, particularly after World War II when enrollments grew significantly, today's environment is unique in terms of the sheer number of areas that demand change. Additionally, most commentators suggest that current approaches to leadership are not effective for managing the scope of these changes (Wallin 2010).

Given this current era of significant change in higher education, there is growing attention to the importance of understanding the leadership required to guide campuses successfully, and a growing concern that existing approaches to leadership are ineffective.

Given this current era of significant change in higher education, there is growing attention to the importance of understanding the leadership required to guide campuses successfully, and a growing concern that existing approaches to leadership are ineffective. Historically, the type of leadership required for change in

the enterprise has shifted. Sometimes it has been largely enacted by presidents, at other times in consultation and collaboration with faculty, and more recently (though not exclusively) there have again been more top-down efforts by presidents to manage change on campus. Unfortunately, the current push for greater top-down leadership is counterproductive to today's higher education landscape and is in misalignment with research on effective organizations that demonstrates the need for shared leadership. While stakeholders and advocates will tell you that true change requires top-down leadership, it is also the case that change requires shared leadership.

Research also demonstrates that organizations need a stronger capacity to learn and adapt in this more complex environment, which also requires a different sort of leadership than in the past (Senge 1990; Wheatley 1999). Back in the 1980s, researchers identified how Japanese companies outperformed American companies because of their ability to innovate and change flexibly by using quality management processes; for example, by delegating authority to employees to make changes, creating a culture that supported risk taking, and working in cross-functional teams to manage work processes in more holistic ways (Kezar 2001; Wheatley 1999). In the ensuing years, researchers in the U.S. explored these principles in the context of American companies. Research studies over the following decades clearly identified the practices that make organizations more adaptable and the type of leadership that supports innovation: shared leadership (Senge 1990; Wheatley 1999). In fact, shared leadership consistently emerged as a key factor for organizations that were better able to learn, innovate, and perform (Senge 1990; Wheatley 1999).

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Among other attributes, many argue that shared leadership could make higher education more accountable to external stakeholders, as shared leadership enables institutions to create meaningful and lasting changes in organizations that address external challenges (Wheatley 1999). Shared leadership builds institutional memory and creates co-ownership over aspirational goals and strategies that could otherwise vanish with executive turnover. All studies are in agreement that the rapid social, political, economic, and technological shifts that are taking place are producing greater complexity and an increase in instability, which place major constraints on conventional top-down constructs of leadership (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). A recent ACE report—*Evolving Higher Education Business Models: Leading with Data to Deliver Results*—also makes the case that campuses need more networked and shared forms of leadership for budget decision making to address increasing complexity.

In summary, campus leaders face the challenge of implementing more changes than ever, in a shifting social, political, and economic landscape, shaped by complexity. Shared approaches to leadership that capitalize on the broader knowledge of the institution and foster learning are needed moving forward. While many campuses think they foster shared leadership through mechanisms like shared governance, we will demonstrate in this paper how our campuses are on the whole woefully inadequate in supporting true shared leadership. We also demonstrate how campuses can move forward to take advantage of and foster shared leadership.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S CHALLENGES THROUGH SHARED LEADERSHIP

While there are various definitions of shared leadership, they all share some common characteristics:

1. A greater number of individuals in leadership than traditional models.
2. Leaders and followers are seen as interchangeable.
3. Leadership is not based on position or authority.
4. Multiple perspectives and expertise are capitalized on for problem solving, innovation, and change.
5. Collaboration and interactions across the organization are typically emphasized.

Shared forms of leadership dispense with the idea of a leader/follower binary, maximizing the contributions many more individuals can make to solving difficult problems (Gronn 2002; Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2001). Shared leadership also recognizes the importance of leaders in positions of authority, but focuses on how those in positions of power can delegate authority, capitalize on expertise within the organization, and create infrastructure so that organizations can capitalize on the leadership of multiple people. Leadership is a process—not an individual—and can be supported by professional development, access to information, team-based work, and incentives.

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Furthermore, shared leadership is included in virtually every new leadership model, such as adaptive leadership by Heifetz (1994), leadership for complexity by Wheatley (1999), systems leadership by Allen and Cherrey (2000), connective leadership by Lipman-Blumen (1996), and situated cognition practice (Spillane, Reiser, and Gomez 2006). All these new models are focused on how leadership best operates in a complex environment, and shared leadership emerges as a central concept to managing and addressing complexity. Lipman-Blumen (1996) notes: “the changing context of leadership, a world where cultural and social differences are more prominent and where multiple, complex forces such as changing demographics, technology, faster decisions, and greater competition require leaders and organizations to abandon outdated scientific management techniques and enact new leadership processes that emphasize interdependence and adaptability.”

For example, complexity leadership frameworks demonstrate that traditional scientific management principles of leading—bureaucracy, authority, predictable leadership behaviors, and social control—are unsuccessful strategies in times of environmental turbulence (Allen and Cherrey 2000; Wheatley 1999). In stark contrast to these traditional views, complexity leadership theorists acknowledge the ambiguous, multiple, and ever-changing realities of organizations operating within modern global societies. They instead advance a leadership framework that posits achievement of global, system-level stability through support for autonomy, flexibility, creativity, and adaptability at the local level. The implementation of strict organizational rules applied without consideration of context, centralized decision-making mechanisms, and the differentiation of tasks associated with organizational hierarchy (all hallmarks of traditional leadership) serve to cement structures and practices incapable of responding to the constant fluctuations and shifting priorities that characterize chaotic and complex organizations.

In order to thrive in the midst of complexity, organizations should embrace organizational processes that prioritize collaboration, shared leadership, and local decision making. Decentralization and the promotion of local autonomy increase the adaptability of organizations and allow them to creatively and quickly respond to changing environmental conditions (Heifetz 1994; Wheatley 1999). In complexity and system leadership theories, team and collaborative leadership processes challenge organizations to look beyond individual skills and achievements and instead focus their energy on cultivating environments that emphasize interconnections, a shared vision for the future, and collective accomplishments. O’Conner and Quinn elaborate: “When leadership is viewed as a property of whole systems, as opposed to solely the property of individuals, effectiveness in leadership becomes more a product of those connections or relationships among parts than the result of any one part of that system (such as the leader)” (2004, 66).

Shared leadership, collaboration, and creativity are also critical components of adaptive leadership (Heifetz 1994). Heifetz critiques traditional models of leadership for their preoccupation with resolving routine, technical issues instead of mobilizing leadership efforts to tackle the complex, adaptive challenges confronted by global organizations operating in a constant state of flux. Heifetz describes a model of adaptive leadership that embraces complexity and ambiguity and actively pursues innovative solutions via organizational learning, creative problem solving, experiments, and collaboration. Higher education needs to better respond to outside pressures for change, and the research on shared leadership suggests that it will enable campuses to create changes that are sustainable with more authentic buy-in.

Some argue that shared leadership not only meets today’s challenges, but also is a better fit for higher education.

Shared leadership is also seen as complementary to long-time situational and contingency models of leadership (Bolden 2011). Because shared leadership can capitalize on varied leadership traits, behaviors, styles, and processes, it is seen as more adaptable to varying situations and contexts. Contingency models of leadership have long suggested that leaders cannot use the same behaviors or approaches in varying situations. A crisis versus a more ongoing change process will utilize and require different forms of leadership to be successful.

Lastly, some argue that shared leadership not only meets today's challenges, but also is a better fit for higher education. Historically, colleges and universities have operated under principles of shared governance and collegial decision making (Macfarlane 2014; Middlehurst 2012). By capitalizing on this historical commitment, shared leadership can be a more natural fit in higher education than in businesses and corporations that have long been characterized by top-down structures. It is important to point out that shared leadership is different from shared governance, even though they both ascribe to principles of distributed decision making and collective input. Shared governance is based on the principles of faculty and administrators having distinct areas of delegated authority and decision making; faculty typically have responsibility for curriculum and administration typically oversee budgeting. Shared leadership is more flexible in identifying expertise, noting that various individuals on campus might have expertise in budgeting or curriculum. All perspectives are drawn in and decisions are not delegated purely to a single group; rather, collaboration across groups in decision making is emphasized. Shared leadership is also associated with adaptable and flexible decision structures, rather than the fixed structures common to shared governance such as faculty senates. Instead, shared leadership structures tend to look more like task forces or cross-functional teams set up to address issues in real time as they emerge.

SHARED LEADERSHIP: MODELS FROM ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

DIFFERENT WAYS OF CONCEPTUALIZING SHARED LEADERSHIP

As mentioned above, shared leadership has been defined and studied in a variety of ways across a variety of disciplines. While we refer to it in this paper as shared leadership due to the predominance of that term in the United States (Bolden 2011), this form of leadership is also known as distributed leadership (Gronn 2000; Spillane 2006), collective leadership (Contractor et al. 2012), or collaborative leadership (Rosenthal 1998), among other terms. These different terms are sometimes (though not always) associated with slightly different models or processes of sharing leadership across multiple individuals. We briefly review these different models of shared leadership before describing related research (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Key Features of Shared Leadership: Three Models

	Co-Leaders	Teams	Distributed
Description	Pairs or small groups of people share leadership	Leadership functions shared among team members	Leadership dispersed across multiple organizational levels or even organizational boundaries
Structure	Often built into formal structure of top executive role	Flexible configurations that change based on the problem	Flexible configurations that arise during particular projects or times of change
Roles	Roles of co-leaders are specialized, differentiated, and complementary	Leadership shared vertically and horizontally across teams based on relevant expertise	People across different organizational levels or boundaries assume leadership as problems arise
Settings	Found in organizations with multiple complex purposes such as health care, the arts, and K-12 education	Studied in business, organizational or social psychology settings, and linked with positive organizational outcomes	Studied in public administration, K-12 education, or through a sociological lens

Scholars have identified several major models of shared forms of leadership (Denis, Langlely, and Sergi 2012). A first way in which shared leadership has been conceptualized is more narrowly as *co-leadership* or *pooled leadership*, in which small groups of people share leadership in the formal top executive function. In these situations, shared leadership is built into the structure of the top executive role. Often, this type of leadership is put in place in organizations with multiple complex purposes, as in health care, the arts, and K-12 education (Greenwood et al. 2011); the roles of the co-leaders are specialized, differentiated, and complementary (Hodgson, Levinson, and Zaleznik 1965). In this model, leadership is generally not shared beyond a few co-leaders at the top of the organizational hierarchy.

The second approach—*team leadership*—is typically associated with the mutual sharing of leadership functions among individuals within teams. Pearce and Conger (2003) define team leadership as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one

another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (1). It involves both vertical or traditional top-down influence and horizontal, lateral, or peer influence and is “broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralized in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of superior” (Pearce and Conger 2003, 1).

Team leadership is relational or interdependent, as group members depend on one another to take charge on different tasks and achieve results. It is seen as something that is embedded in social interactions and that occurs as a result of networks or relationships (Fletcher and Kaufer 2003). Team leadership is also contextual and flexible, meaning that configurations of leadership change based on the situation or problem at hand; this flexibility ensures that people with the most relevant expertise assume leadership roles at the most appropriate moment (see Yammarino et al. 2012, for example). This contextual nature is sometimes referred to as an emergent process in that different leaders emerge at different times based on the needs of the group or team (Pearce and Conger 2003).

A third stream of research on shared forms of leadership is known as *distributed leadership*. Unlike leadership sharing that occurs within top executive roles as in the first area we described, or in teams as in the second area, in this conception leadership is dispersed across organizations or even across organizational boundaries (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2001; Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). Different individuals at multiple levels of the organization cross organizational boundaries to exert influence during particular projects or times of change. Scholars of distributed leadership often focus on leadership as embedded in relationships and situations rather than in individuals (Huxham and Vangen 2000). Often used in K-12 education (Spillane 2006), distributed leadership is also commonly studied in the context of public administration or through a sociological lens (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012).

The models described above define shared leadership in different ways and at different levels, focusing variously on individuals, teams, organizations, or relationships within organizations. Regardless of how scholars conceptualize shared leadership, however, they all take on the traditional notion of the solitary heroic leader and examine ways of expanding the notion of what leadership is. As we will see in the next section, empirical studies of shared leadership have demonstrated largely positive outcomes irrespective of the particular model of shared leadership or level at which it was studied.

OUTCOMES OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

Researchers have examined shared leadership across a variety of contexts, finding positive outcomes in attitude, cognition, and behavior by individuals at varying levels and across many types of organizations. Positive outcomes have been identified at different levels (i.e., individual, team, organizational), as well as in different categories/foci (i.e., attitudinal/cognitive, behavioral, effectiveness) (Wassenaar and Pearce 2012).

In terms of *attitudes and cognition*, for example, shared leadership has been found to produce increased satisfaction among team members (Avolio et al. 1996; Shamir and Lapidot 2003; Robert 2013), stronger group cohesion (Balthazard, Howell, and Atwater 2004; Bergman et al. 2012), increased confidence at both the individual and group level (Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi 2003; Guzzo et al. 1993), and increased trust among team members (Drescher et al. 2014; Bergman et al. 2012).

Behaviorally, researchers have found that shared leadership is associated with increased social integration, problem-solving quality (Pearce, Yoo, and Alavi 2004), organizational citizenship behavior (Pearce

SHARED LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

Liberal Arts College (LAC) has decided to implement a new strategic initiative around supporting sophomore students. While LAC has had a successful freshman year experience program for over a decade, it has seen consistent drops in retention for its students after sophomore year. The president's cabinet meets to discuss who should be involved in leading this initiative. After debating several possibilities, they decide that a project team in which leadership is distributed among team members will likely be the best approach to such a complex initiative. Based on the many issues they know need to be addressed when supporting sophomores, the cabinet decides that this group needs representation from the provost's office, faculty teaching sophomore courses, residential life, student activities, health and wellness, counseling, academic advising, and financial aid. Two members of the cabinet serve as co-chairs to begin the planning process. However, once a direction is decided upon, the co-chairs step back and let the project team members manage development of the various initiatives. In this way, the practitioners who are most familiar with the various challenges and needs of sophomore students end up taking most of the responsibility for creating support structures.

and Herbig 2004), and a more constructive interaction style (Balthazard, Howell, and Atwater 2004). Klein et al. (2006) examined shared leadership in emergency trauma settings and found that it fostered improved skill development for junior staff, as well as better coordination of activities and higher task reliability. In K-12 schools, shared leadership was associated with higher levels of information exchange among teachers (Khourey-Bowers, Dinko, and Hart 2005).

Perhaps most important, shared leadership has been consistently associated with *positive team performance or increased effectiveness*. Scholars have examined performance and effectiveness in a number of different ways, including managers' ratings of team performance (Hoch, Pearce, and Welzel 2010), performance on specific tasks (Engel Small and Rentsch 2010; Drescher et al. 2014), and overall financial performance (O'Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler 2003; Ensley, Hmieleski, and Pearce 2006; Hmieleski, Cole, and Baron 2012). Such performance outcomes have been seen across a variety of organizational settings, including change management teams, virtual teams, research and development teams, and firms as a whole (Pearce and Sims 2002; Carte, Chidambaram, and Becker 2006; Olson-Sanders 2006; O'Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler 2003; Ensley, Hmieleski, and Pearce 2006). Heck and Hallinger (2010) examined shared leadership in elementary schools in one of the few longitudinal studies that has examined organizational change. They found that shared leadership led to changes in organizational processes and structures, which in turn led to improvements in student learning.

Many of these studies and others suggest that shared leadership is especially beneficial in complex environments that require frequent adaptations (Feyerherm 1994; Pearce and Sims 2002; Pearce 2004). For example, Ensley, Hmieleski, and Pearce (2006) found that shared leadership predicted success for start-up ventures, which inherently face an uncertain environment and a variety of complex and interdependent

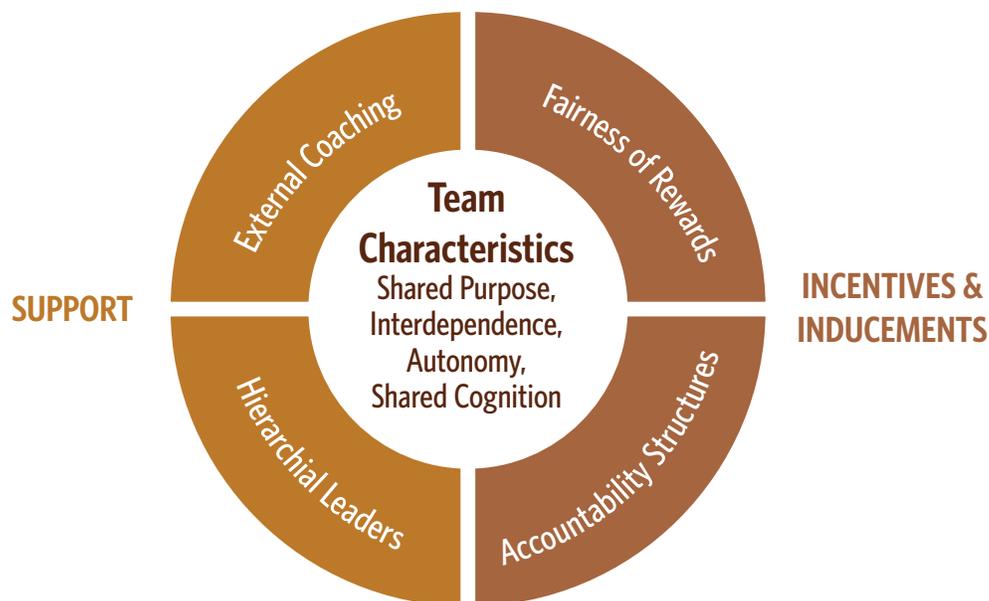
challenges. O’Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler noted several examples of organizations that successfully implemented shared leadership after facing “challenges so complex that they require[d] a set of skills too broad to be possessed by any one individual” (2003, 254). Shared leadership has also been characterized as an “adaptive response to either internal or external demands . . . imposed on the team,” as team members alternately capitalize on their diverse strengths to solve complex problems (Burke, Fiore, and Salas 2003, 104). Shared leadership promotes organizational learning, which allows teams to continuously adapt to their multifaceted environments by applying their new knowledge in different and creative ways.

Shared leadership has been consistently associated with *positive team performance or increased effectiveness.*

CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR PROMOTING SHARED LEADERSHIP

With so many studies indicating positive results of shared leadership, what actions can organizations take to foster more shared forms of leadership? What conditions are necessary for shared leadership to thrive? Researchers have investigated a number of antecedents or conditions that promote and sustain shared leadership. These include team empowerment, supportive vertical or hierarchical leaders, autonomy, shared purpose or goal, external coaching, accountability structures, interdependence, fairness of rewards, and shared cognition. We discuss these conditions in more detail below, and they are captured in figure 2.

Figure 2. Conditions to Enable Shared Leadership



Supportive vertical or hierarchical leaders

While shared forms of leadership by definition advocate for a broader conception of leadership and run counter to more traditional, hierarchical styles, numerous scholars caution that shared leadership and vertical leadership are not mutually exclusive. Rather, specific types of vertical leaders are often necessary in order to help foster shared leadership. Fletcher and Kaufer refer to this as one of the paradoxes of shared leadership: “hierarchical leaders are charged with creating less hierarchical organizations” (2003, 24). Sveiby (2011) referred to this type of leadership as “benevolent hierarchical” leadership, in which positional leaders support the spread of leadership across a team or organization (in Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012, 266). Additionally, Fausing et al. noted the benefit of a “team leader who encourages and empowers the team members to provide and accept leadership in a team context in order to facilitate the sharing of leadership” (2005, 281). Barnes et al. (2013) also noted that those in shared leadership configurations must work in conjunction with vertical leaders in order to effectively navigate intra-organizational conflicts and struggles for resources and power.

Team empowerment

The importance of team empowerment for fostering shared leadership is referenced throughout the literature. For example, Grille, Schulte, and Kauffeld (2015) noted the importance of psychological empowerment for the emergence of shared leadership. They described empowerment as a combination of individuals’ perceptions of the meaningfulness and impact of their work, their own competence, and their levels of self-determination. As individuals reported higher levels of psychological empowerment, teams were more likely to display measures of shared leadership. Vertical leaders can help create cultures that foster psychological empowerment by creating structures within organizations that allow employees to express their opinions and make key decisions.

Autonomy

Van Ameijde et al. (2009) found that teams with more autonomy were more likely to develop shared forms of leadership. Autonomous teams have less intensive oversight from external decision makers or hierarchical leaders and thus manage their own processes to a much greater degree. Greater autonomy allowed teams to be flexible in their decision making and coordination of activities, as well as foster a greater sense of ownership over team activities and outcomes.

Shared purpose or goal

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of a shared purpose or common goal for the successful formation and persistence of shared leadership. For example, Pearce (2004) noted that a clearly defined goal or vision is essential for the development and continuity of shared leadership. Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) found that a clearly defined goal is most effective when it is shared across team members. A shared sense of purpose “exists when team members have similar understandings of their team’s primary objectives and take steps to ensure a focus on collective goals” (Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone 2007, 1, 222).

External coaching

External coaching by a manager or someone external to a team or organization, such as a consultant or an executive coach, has become an increasingly popular strategy to support teams and leaders (Wassenaar and Pearce 2012). External coaching has also been found to support shared leadership. Morgeson (2005) notes that teams receiving external, supportive coaching were more likely to develop shared leadership through the encouragement and specific feedback that coaches provided.

Accountability structures

Some scholars have suggested that as leadership is distributed, more accountability structures need to be put in place because of the likely miscommunication and lack of consensus over values (Spillane and Diamond 2007). The concept is that as more people are invited to be a part of a leadership process, new structures are necessary to help people understand what is at stake in their decision making. These structures can range from strict performance measures and regular reporting to mutual performance monitoring, which “involves team members taking account of each other’s activities and offering feedback, help, or suggestions when needed” (Van Ameijde et al. 2009, 775).

Interdependence

Interdependence refers to the degree to which team members must depend on each other to complete their tasks and achieve their goals. For example, individuals who require information or action from other team members in order to complete a task have an interdependent relationship. Teams with higher levels of interdependence are more likely to see shared forms of leadership emerge (Pearce and Sims 2000; Fausing et al. 2015).

Fairness of rewards

Perceived fairness of rewards, including salary, job security, career options, and appreciation, has also been positively associated with shared leadership. Individuals who perceive fairer reward structures may be more open to assuming or continuing in shared leadership roles (Fausing et al. 2015). Employees are much more likely to do the extra work of contributing to the overall organizational goals and objectives such as implementing changes and supporting collective problem solving when they feel those efforts are rewarded by the organization. The rewards can vary from promotion to salary increases to involvement in decision making.

Shared cognition

Burke, Fiore, and Salas (2003) developed a model of the key cognitive constructs that enable the enactment of shared leadership in teams. This model has four foundational concepts: metacognition, mental models, situation assessment, and attitudes. The first element, meta-cognition, describes how team members are aware of their own cognitive processes and are able to understand and manipulate them. In other words, they need to be aware of their own biases and perspectives, be open to others, and be able to shift their view as new information is provided. In terms of mental models, the authors describe the importance of creating shared cognitive structures containing knowledge around two key factors the team and the situation. Members of a leadership team may differ greatly on any number of mental models; however, as long as they believe that the group has the same goals and as long as they can agree to the

situation that exists (situation assessment), then other differences are likely to be worked out. However, if they cannot agree on these two foundational issues, it is unlikely that they will be able to move on to complex cognitive thinking. The authors also suggest that shared cognition is more likely to happen when there are some generally shared attitudes such as collective efficacy and a collective orientation to problem solving. These shared cognitive factors create a foundation that allows shared leadership behaviors to emerge.

The positive outcomes of shared leadership, as well as the conditions for effectiveness in sharing leadership, are well documented. However, scholars point out that conditions for success often differ by sector and that research needs to be carried out within different organizational environments to examine whether different antecedents and conditions might be necessary.

SHARED LEADERSHIP IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AT A UNIVERSITY

Consider a student activities team within student affairs in University X. When the team was formed, the four team members (a director and three assistant directors) were each given responsibility for managing different elements of the student activities portfolio. The director managed the overall strategic plan, goals for the department, and compliance issues, while each of the three assistant directors managed leadership programs and student government, social and cultural activities, and community service programs, respectively. A new director was hired last year, who brought a new perspective on leadership and collaboration to the team. She observed that many of the tasks and responsibilities of each assistant director had significant overlap, so that work was often duplicated, and the knowledge and expertise of one staff member was not always shared across the team. For example, the assistant director for leadership programs and student government often worked with students in leadership positions on community service projects, but rarely took advantage of the partnerships that the assistant director for community service programs had already developed. The new director had learned about shared leadership principles and felt that her team would function better if leadership on projects and tasks was more shared. With the assistant directors, she created a matrix of all the projects and tasks that their department was responsible for. They also had several meetings and professional development sessions to discuss their strengths and areas of expertise as well as to brainstorm structures that would help them be more flexible and collaborative when working on projects. When they sat down to create their strategic plan for the next academic year, the team used what they had learned about themselves, each other, and their shared goals to reassign leadership of certain projects and tasks. In some cases, two team members jointly owned different elements of a project or event. The team continues to meet weekly to check in on their progress and ensure that they are communicating and completing the tasks necessary to move each project forward.

RESEARCH ON SHARED LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

On a conceptual level, the notion of shared leadership seems well aligned with notions of collegiality and professional autonomy which have traditionally been characteristic of higher education leadership, while also recognizing the wider institutional needs for effectively managing the challenges that turbulent environments impose on Higher Education institutions. (Van Amejide et al. 2009)

Much of the literature on shared leadership in higher education has been descriptive, with many arguments for the benefits of shared leadership drawn from the studies previously described. Nonetheless, a small body of empirical research exists that supports the value, benefits, and design of shared leadership within higher education. Robert Birnbaum's (1992) seminal work as part of the Institutional Leadership Project (ILP) (1985-89) was one of the first studies to allude to the importance of shared leadership in identifying the limitations of presidential leadership, in particular.

After five years of studying the presidency, Robert Birnbaum and colleagues Estela Bensimon and Anna Neumann determined that teams and cabinets were essential for campus leadership and that individual leadership did not provide the cognitive complexity and expertise needed to effectively manage college campuses. Birnbaum asserted, "when leadership is shared, a college has multiple ways of sensing environmental change, checking for problems, and monitoring campus performance. Shared leadership is likely to provide a college with a more complex way of thinking" (1992, 187). The study examined cognitive complexity for decision making among presidents and found that few used the kind of multi-frame thinking that is aligned with better decision making. This research suggested that presidents need to work with others to be effective and that multi-frame leaders were relatively rare. Leaders tend to analyze situations in simplistic ways using only one or two organizational frameworks (Bensimon 1989) or mental models. The ILP project also identified the need for more organizational learning among leaders to make better decisions, which was facilitated through a shared leadership processes (Bensimon and Neumann 1993).

SHARED LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While the ILP study pinpointed the way shared leadership creates greater cognitive complexity and innovation, it also identified other outcomes. Team leadership processes create vehicles of peer support in times of challenge and crisis and serve to increase accountability within organizations, given that team members can hold each other responsible for carrying out designated roles and responsibilities (Bensimon and Neumann 1993). Additionally, research has shown that women and certain cultural groups (e.g., Native Americans, African Americans) demonstrate a preference for collaborative leadership (Astin and Leland 1991; Kezar 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Kezar and Moriarty 2000; Rhode 2003), so the adoption of team leadership may be an essential step toward cultivating inclusive organizational environments that tap into the unique perspectives and experiences of historically marginalized social groups. Finally, shared leadership ultimately improves the implementation of organizational decisions since members dedicate time and energy up front to fostering a shared vision and collective ownership in organizational actions.

Some studies have continued to demonstrate the benefits of cognitive complexity found in the original ILP studies and its follow up. For example, Bauman (2005) demonstrates how *cross-functional campus teams* of faculty and administration identified performance gaps between white students and students of color and developed solutions and interventions for low-performing students. However, despite the ILP project and its follow-up studies of teams, research on shared or distributed leadership in higher education is still somewhat rare, especially in American contexts. The main challenge becomes: how does one study a phenomenon that largely does not exist? Campuses continue to have mostly top-down leadership with minimal delegated authority. Colleges are being urged to distribute leadership but because it is not a common practice (or is hard to identify), higher education literature tends to be conceptual about the need for shared leadership rather than empirical. Given the limitations of being able to conduct empirical studies of distributed leadership of whole systems, the most common type of research is of leadership teams or cross-functional teams as a proxy for distributed leadership.

Even in contexts where shared leadership is purported to exist, some higher education scholars have found limited evidence that it functions in optimal ways. For example, one study of how faculty and staff perceive distributed leadership at 12 universities in the United Kingdom (UK) found that shared forms of leadership tended to be more rhetorical devices rather than authentic sharing of leadership tasks and responsibilities (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2009). Faculty and staff described conceptions of distributed leadership that ranged from formal structures (i.e., delegation of budgeting authority to departments) to incremental shifts (i.e., progressive leadership opportunities such as chairing committees or projects) to cultural changes (i.e., “leadership is assumed and shared organically such as in the development of a collaborative research bid”) (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2009, 9). The majority of participants expressed that notions of distributed leadership on their campuses were most commonly used by vertical leaders as rhetorical devices to promote images of collegiality that did not necessarily align with actual practices. In the few places where shared leadership existed more authentically, participants noted that it fostered improved teamwork and communication, greater responsiveness to student concerns, and increased incentives for innovation—the same outcomes found across other types of organizations using shared forms of leadership.

In Australia, a group of researchers examined distributed leadership structures within project teams that arose as a part of a national project called the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Programme (Jones, Harvey, et al. 2014). Though not the original intent of the project (which was designed to promote leadership in teaching and learning), distributed leadership came to define several of the most successful campuses’ initiatives. These institutions were able to effectively create changes to teaching and learning practices because they engaged both academic and administrative staff with a broad range of expertise (Jones et al. 2012). The researchers involved in this project created a tool for other campuses to assist them in developing distributed leadership structures called the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT).¹ In addition to helping campuses create shared leadership structures, the ASERT also established benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness and authenticity of existing shared leadership structures (Jones, Hadgraft, et al. 2014). The ASERT includes dimensions and elements of distributed leadership, as well as antecedent conditions necessary for its effective development (some of which we describe in more detail below) (Jones, Harvey, et al. 2014). While this tool was created specifically to foster shared leadership in teaching and learning, the researchers point to its potential use in other areas of higher education.

1 Links to the action framework and self-enabling reflective tool that make up the ASERT can be found here: <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/distributedleadership/?q=node/21>.

SHARED LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Research University (RU) began its experiment with shared forms of leadership in its College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). After CAS participated in several projects to improve teaching and pedagogy in their undergraduate programs, RU's leadership came to believe that a more dedicated leadership commitment was necessary in order to make high-quality teaching as strong a priority as high-quality research. They decided to pilot a co-leadership structure in the dean's office in CAS, with one dean focused on managing research functions and the other focused on initiatives and policies to improve teaching on campus. The co-deans work together on strategic planning and budgeting to ensure that each of their areas gets the necessary resources. They also worked to ensure that existing policies apply equally well to both areas, and worked together to revise policies and structures that previously deemphasized teaching. While the areas they manage are clearly delineated and somewhat separate, the co-deans meet at least weekly to discuss issues of shared concern, and they work cooperatively in areas such as promotion and tenure cases.

In summary, research to date shows strong promise from the use of shared leadership on campuses. It creates greater cognitive complexity, innovation, and peer support in times of challenge and crisis; serves to increase accountability within organizations; improves the implementation of organizational decisions; and leads to diversity among leaders as woman and racial and ethnic minority groups often express a preference for this approach. Limited shared leadership existed historically in higher education, making it difficult to fully understand the potential.

CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER SHARED LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While little empirical research exists on the outcomes of shared leadership in higher education, there is slightly more work on the antecedents or conditions that promote its development. These align with the multidisciplinary research base and include support from vertical leaders, resources, developing supportive cultures through relationship building and professional development, clear role definition, autonomy, shared goals, key internal expertise, external feedback, information sharing, accountability structures, and inclusiveness (Bensimon and Neumann 1993; Jones, Harvey, et al. 2014; Van Ameijde et al. 2009). We describe a few of these conditions in more detail below.

Support from vertical leaders

As in the broader shared leadership literature, support from vertical leaders was found to be an important condition for functional shared leadership. For example, Van Ameijde et al. (2009) noted the importance of support from both the wider organizational community and key decision makers in positions of authority.

In their study of shared leadership on *project teams* in UK universities, they found that support from key vertical leaders ensured “a flow of information and resources needed by the team,” as well as the autonomy necessary to “make important decisions at the team level” (Van Ameijde et al. 2009). Similarly, Jones, Harvey, et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of formal leaders’ encouragement of involvement in shared forms of leadership.

Developing supportive cultures through relationship building and professional development

Bensimon and Neumann (1993) in studies of presidential cabinets describe the importance of creating a team culture through building relationships and trust over time. They found that teams do not have to shift to think alike to work effectively, but need to feel that there is a safe and productive culture in which to conduct their duties. This work suggests the importance of group processes that can make shared leadership more successful, from carefully choosing people to participate in the shared governance process and having orientation sessions, to spending time on group development, developing relationships, and thinking prior to making decisions. In studies of project teams working to improve teaching and learning, Jones, Harvey, et al. (2014) also identified the importance of supportive institutional structures and professional development for fostering a culture of respect and trust for shared leadership.

Clearly defined roles help team members capitalize on their expertise and more effectively coordinate shared tasks.

Clear role definition

Van Ameijde and colleagues (2009), in studies of project teams and committees in the UK, note that clearly defined roles and responsibilities for team members are critical for successful shared leadership. Clearly defined roles help team members capitalize on their expertise and more effectively coordinate shared tasks. Bensimon and Neumann (1993) also highlight roles that people can play to support shared leadership processes within presidential cabinets. For example, successful processes often have an individual who serves as the task monitor; this person strives to remove obstacles to the team’s thinking and keep them on task. Teams also have an emotional monitor who helps maintain the interpersonal relationships developed through teambuilding. There is someone who elicits and synthesizes diverse perspectives of the group, working to achieve consensus. Successful teams also have a critic who redefines and analyzes issues so that the shared process does not end up in “group think.” One major difference that these researchers saw between effective and ineffective teams is that effective teams have members who are sensitive to the fact that different people are likely to see the same reality in different ways. The teams are not afraid of the conflict that can be inherent in cognitively diverse teams. Thus, individuals who shape shared leadership processes such as college presidents need to articulate their appreciation for different viewpoints, and they need to model this behavior in their interaction with people during shared governance processes.

Inclusiveness

Several scholars also noted the importance of inclusiveness for the development of successful shared leadership in higher education. Inclusiveness occurs when team members are “actively seeking to involve one another in the process of sense-making and decision-making” (Van Amejide et al. 2009). Inclusiveness also involves being open to new ideas and encouraging and acknowledging peers’ contributions (Jones, Harvey, et al. 2014). Through inclusive behaviors, team members develop a sense of ownership over their shared tasks and goals, which fosters continued participation in shared leadership processes (Van Amejide et al. 2009).

While there is evidence in higher education research that shared leadership can lead to more effective campuses and some documentation about conditions for creating shared leadership, there is also some literature from the corporate sector that suggests that shared leadership can be difficult to design and fraught with challenges.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS RELATED TO SHARED LEADERSHIP

In order to reap the benefits of shared leadership, organizations must ensure that shared leadership structures and processes are authentic and thoughtfully designed. For example, as described briefly above, Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling (2009) noted the absence of authentically shared leadership in the departments and schools of most of the British universities they studied. Instead, shared leadership was primarily a rhetorical strategy used by vertical leaders to give the impression of inclusion and collaboration. Without attention to clear role definition or differentiation of tasks, shared leadership can devolve into conflict and uncertainty.

In addition to challenges with the design and authenticity of shared leadership, it is important to understand some critiques of shared leadership in order to navigate problems that may arise. The most prominent critique of shared leadership is that it often fails to address very real issues of conflict, power, and authority (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). As more stakeholders are brought into decision making and leadership, differing interests and politics are more likely to emerge. The fears and sometimes, the realities of differing interests and values dramatically slowing down leadership has led many campus administrators to shy away from including a broader array of people in authentically shared leadership. In fact, these fears have led to a decrease in input from stakeholder groups in higher education in recent years (Bensimon and Neumann 1993; Kezar and Eckel 2004).

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Research suggests that status differentials and power can make shared leadership difficult (Denis, Langley, and Sergi 2012). Often, when shared leadership is attempted, power and authority structures lead to the reemergence of traditional hierarchical leadership (Pearce and Conger 2003). Bensimon and Neumann (2003) suggest that a key part of any shared leadership model is addressing such power and status differentials. If presidents do not delegate authority among their cabinet and ensure that team members feel open to voice opposing views, shared leadership will be thwarted. Part of the group development process needs to be an acknowledgment of the fact that certain individuals hold privileged positions by virtue of their power, authority, expertise, or membership in the dominant group. As a result, positional leaders may

not understand how less-powerful members may feel alienated or disempowered, or they may their own privilege and how they see the world differently as a result.

Some of the cases that Jones, Hadgraft, et al. (2014) studied also highlighted the fragility of effective distributed leadership and its vulnerability to powerful actors or processes within the organization. Examples of this include cases where team members reported ceasing to actively contribute to the process of leadership due to more senior team members exerting authoritarian influence over decisions that concerned the team as a whole. In other cases, repeated obstructions to team progress resulting from bureaucratic organizational procedures or powerful groups within the organization caused teams to give up their efforts to actively contribute to project outcomes.

Shared leadership is best understood or studied with an appreciation of the organizational values of higher education, such as shared governance (noted earlier), institutional and professional autonomy, and academic freedom. Many of these characteristics that have defined higher education often prevent shared leadership, even though they may appear complementary at first glance. As noted earlier, shared governance (as well as academic freedom and autonomy) focuses on the distribution of authority rather than collaboration. And yet it is collaboration that is key for creativity and cognitive complexity (Bensimon and Neumann 1993; Senge 1990; Wheatley 1999). Autonomy and academic freedom also rest on principles that professionals as experts have delegated authority, but there are often no clear accountability structures for that authority. Shared leadership focuses on establishing distributed accountability structures. Thus, one of the reasons campuses often experience difficulty establishing shared leadership is that while it is related to these historic structures and complementary, it also differs in core respects.

A final concern related to shared leadership is that individuals working together, particularly in close-knit teams, can develop groupthink. Groupthink, originally conceptualized by Janis (1982), is characterized by a kind of “extreme consensus-seeking” in which alternative viewpoints are quashed, criticism becomes impossible, and poor decision making results (Turner and Pratkanis 1998). While this concern is legitimate, many studies have found that team cohesion generally does not lead to groupthink and instead usually facilitates groups’ relationships, interactions, and performance (Ensley and Pearce 2001). Additionally, if shared leadership is developed to truly capitalize on a broad range of skills and experiences, as it is intended to do, groupthink becomes less likely.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Most leadership development programs tend to focus on individuals who are already (or aspiring to be) in positions of authority (Kezar and Carducci 2009), often bringing in individual leaders rather than teams. Additionally, traditional leadership development programs tend to focus on traits, skills, or behaviors that help an individual in a position of authority to enact leadership. Trait-oriented programs attempt to identify and cultivate specific personal characteristics, such as integrity, commitment, intelligence, and trustworthiness, that contribute to a person's ability to assume and successfully function in positions of leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum 1989). Probably the most common model of leadership development is focused on skill development and tasks associated with leadership, such as planning, fund-raising, or negotiation (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum 1989).

Both the trait- and skill-based perspectives of leadership rely solely on individual leaders for developing leadership. Instead, programs should be redesigned to bring in leadership teams and should focus on more than just skills for individual enactment. Such programs should help teams work together to create strategic plans or a broader environment of trust. Also, when recognizing leadership is a process, not a person, people can be trained in ways to facilitate that process. This training should include attention to institutional context and culture so that leaders can better create a process that is effective for their environment.

With this shift in perspective in mind, shared leadership models underscore the need for leadership development programs to shift their sole focus from the identification and cultivation of individual leadership skills to an examination of the organizational structures, relationships, and processes that promote shared leadership and collaboration. ACE's recent report *Looking Back and Looking Forward: A Review of the ACE Fellows Program* provides examples of how ACE is building more shared leadership approaches into its leadership development efforts. Organizational members cannot successfully build networks and forge collaborative partnerships if their surrounding environments do not provide the conditions essential for the survival and growth of these relationships. Organizations that focus on skill building to the exclusion of developing these supportive conditions are likely to find "frustrations and inhibited effectiveness and engagement" among those tasked with sharing leadership (Van Ameijde et al. 2009). These conditions include a culture of decentralized decision making, open communication, trust, autonomy and empowerment, clear goals and roles, and respect for divergent perspectives among others (Bensimon and Neumann 1993; Tierney 1993; Wheatley 1999). Training for positional leaders interested in fostering shared leadership on their campuses should focus on how leaders can create the structures and processes that foster these conditions. Positional leaders also need to learn how to empower employees and diffuse authority so that individuals at multiple levels do not feel hindered to act as leaders.

Another way of rethinking leadership development for the shared forms of leadership necessary to manage today's complex environment was recently developed by Nicholas Clarke (2012) in the UK. Clarke suggests several ways to support leadership development as teams go about their work, including changing work structures to facilitate interactions, autonomy, and team empowerment; helping individuals learn how to manage conflict; encouraging disagreement to facilitate development of a culture that supports diverse views; fostering social connections and exchanges; supporting shared meaning-making through sense-giving; helping leaders learn how to work through "coordinating and coaching

rather than controlling” (141); and identifying barriers to the flow of information necessary for effectively sharing leadership. These suggestions allow leadership development to occur within actual working contexts, so that it is practical, immediately applicable, and connected to team environments. Similarly, Bensimon’s and Neumann’s (1993) work on leadership teams offers suggestions for ways leaders in positions of authority can build better teams (for example, presidential cabinets).

Leadership development in higher education as currently designed is ineffective for fostering shared leadership. We are aware of very few programs that help leaders create shared leadership environments. Yet, ACE’s recent report on the ACE Fellows Program showcases the potential of shared leadership and describes the ways the program will be building in more opportunities for developing shared leadership. Kezar and Lester (2009) provide detailed advice for leaders on how to create a shared leadership environment; this work could be used to design or enhance leadership programs, along with Kezar (2009), which describes elements of leadership development programs that facilitate shared leadership aligned with current needs.

Training for positional leaders interested in fostering shared leadership on their campuses should focus on how leaders can create the structures and processes that foster these conditions. Positional leaders also need to learn how to empower employees and diffuse authority so that individuals at multiple levels do not feel hindered to act as leaders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

How can existing leaders in higher education promote more collaborative and shared forms of leadership on their campuses? Leaders should start by *identifying critical complex challenges* at their institutions—thorny issues that have not been well-served by traditional or existing strategies. Examples of some of these complex issues have been interspersed throughout this paper but could also include such areas as doing away with courses that result in high attrition, supporting transfer student success, implementing new assessment mechanisms, or creating new academic programs to meet a community need. Once such challenges have been identified, *pull together a cross-functional team of leaders from across campus*. When creating such a team, think about how to bring in knowledge from across the institution—for example, faculty, student affairs, institutional research, registrar, library, centers for teaching and learning, facilities, and more. There are potential untapped reservoirs of expertise in unexpected places that could help solve problems.

This *expertise might not always come from individuals in positions of hierarchical leadership*; for example, an academic advisor or faculty member who works with students on a regular basis might have different insights into high course failure rates than an advising director or a dean. After a team or group has been established, it is critical for vertical leaders to *establish support structures and delegate authority so that the team is empowered to think and act creatively to solve the problem*. Support structures could include professional development for the team, clearly specified roles for team members, and explicitly defined channels of communication and accountability. The support of vertical leaders is crucial for the success of shared leadership initiatives—but it is just as crucial for them to know when it is time to take a step back and empower the team to push the work forward. Vertical leaders must be prepared to grant the team autonomy and meaningful input into decision making so that team members remain motivated and incentivized to continue their engagement with shared leadership processes.

For colleges and universities to truly reap the benefits of more collaborative forms of leadership, institutional decision makers should be willing to thoughtfully reexamine their own conceptions of what it means to be a successful leader.

For colleges and universities to truly reap the benefits of more collaborative forms of leadership, institutional decision makers should be willing to thoughtfully reexamine their own conceptions of what it means to be a successful leader. If a president or provost continues to think of leadership as a solitary, heroic pursuit, any efforts to establish shared leadership structures will inevitably prove to be merely lip service and will not create meaningful change. Campus leaders are right to couple their external support for shared leadership efforts with internal reflection on how leadership can and should work in an increasingly complex higher educational system. If leaders are willing to experiment with these new approaches, their institutions stand poised to meet these complexities and challenges head-on.

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