

## Artifact: Leadership Development Grant

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Through my work at Roberts Wesleyan College, I submitted a grant proposal to establish a formal program of leadership development, something the college has never had and has never felt it could afford. Through a convergence of learning, research, and professional opportunities, I was able to collaborate with an internal team and submit a proposal that if funded will impact the college for years to come. The first part of the process fulfills DEL Outcome 1, illustrating the ability to sense and shape opportunities for our organization, and part two of the process demonstrates DEL Outcome 4, modeling scholar-practitioner practices.

### **Part One**

During DEL 760, we learned about leadership development, which is what I focused on as I worked to implement a formal leadership development program at the college. It is important to note the distinction between leader and leadership development. As quoted by Bolden (2011), Day stated leader development is an investment in human capital and leadership development is an investment in social capital (p. 14). This means leader development is really an investment into people and individuals in which skills, personalities, and individual abilities are developed, and leadership development is an investment into how these leaders interact to strengthen organizations.

In other words, the focus on the social capital in an organization means taking a look at how people interact and how we strengthen the whole. Leadership development lives in the space of social interaction – how we shape each other, how we relate to our environment and the

people around us, and how we use day-to-day conversations and interactions to build trust (Boies, et al., 2015, p. 1083; 1090) in order to work together to accomplish the mission of the organization. For me, this includes looking at the organizational or overall impact of a leadership development program even as you work to develop individual employees, including every level across the organization (Day, et al., 2009, p. 20).

It occurred to me that my organization didn't seem to have a very strong development plan; however, after some thought and a CAD writing exercise, I realized that while we didn't have a formal leadership development program, we did have a pretty strong informal plan with mentorship, stretch assignments, and other opportunities to learn and grow professionally.

At the same time, I was working on a paper focused on employee retention (how long employees stay) and intention (the level of effort employees put into their jobs) and found that the number one reason employees stay longer is the availability of career development, including leadership development opportunities (Mahan, et al., 2019, p. 14).

As a smaller college, Roberts has never been able to pay employees top dollar and often sees turnover. It was surprising to me to learn that most people do not leave for the money but leave for the lack of professional development opportunities. This was both good and bad news for our organization; good because we did not have the fiscal ability to increase pay across the board significantly, especially during the pandemic, and bad because we didn't have the leadership development in place and in a way that employees could readily recognize.

Concurrent with my scholarly research, I was engaged in foundation research in the course of my job, and I realized there was a foundation that specifically focused on small, private, liberal arts colleges and that had a special interest in leadership. And by tying this opportunity together with my research, I sensed the perfect opportunity to potentially secure the

funding the college needed to implement a program of formal leadership development, which could lead to better employee retention and intention, both of which could positively impact the college's bottom line and positively impact morale.

DEL Outcome 1 encourages us to, "Sense and shape opportunities for, and threats to, future growth and development through embedding scanning, creative, and learning processes into organizations, communities, or institutions" (DEL Learning Guide, 2020, p. 32). By tying together my DEL classwork, my observations of my institution, and my work to find funding, I was able to sense an opportunity that could add to the growth and development of my organization.

## **Part Two**

After being given the go ahead to explore the project, phase two commenced in which I was able to assemble a team, cast the vision, create buy-in across campus and with the President, and apply for funding. During this phase of the project, I leaned heavily on the concept of practical judgment as I explored it through DEL 810 on Complexity. Practical judgment goes by many names, including, practical wisdom, managerial wisdom, prudence, intuition, and evaluative judgment among others (Bachman, 2017; Tai, et al., 2018; Morris & Cunningham, 2013), but it has its roots and basis in Aristotle's concept of phronesis. In talking about sensemaking and organizational decision making, Madsbjerg (2017) defined phronesis as the "artful synthesis of both knowledge and experience" (p. 6). And Flinn (2018) and others directly connected phronesis with practical judgment (p. 74; Bachmann, et al., 2018, p. 147; Kane & Patapan, 2006, pp. 712-713). What's interesting is Madsbjerg's (2017) inclusion of the phrase "artful synthesis" in his description (p. 6), as it implies a combination that is more than a formula and potentially produces more than the sum of its parts.

As I worked to assemble a team and pitch the idea of a formal leadership development program, I had to implement a bit of practical judgment into the process. During our meetings, I was surprised at the depth of excitement and encouragement for the idea and in the breadth of ideas for how to accomplish this. Out of the discussion, two distinct ideas emerged: a traditional offering of leadership courses and an out-of-the-box model that included student housing communities made up of diverse students and led by trained staff and faculty with the intent of better race relations across campus.

Now, typically in a grants meeting, I would have tried to steer people toward an idea I thought was best in order to hit deadlines and keep control of the project. But employing a bit of practical judgment and thinking of Shaw's (2002) idea of conversation creating culture and generative learning through intuition, I decided to sit with the problem of what one participant termed "two separate grants". Through the process, I sought feedback from a couple of trusted advisors and ultimately decided to write a brief that included both ideas along with a list of questions for a now-expanded team to see where they might land in either merging the ideas or choosing one over the other.

Ultimately, I was able to advance my and the team's ideas and gain approvals to submit the Leadership Development grant. In another layer of complexity, not only did I use practical judgment in the process, but I was also able to incorporate practical judgment into the concepts we would teach employees if the grant were approved. In my research for the in-depth paper, I found the literature supported the idea that practical judgment could be taught and learned. Beyond life experience (Kane & Patapan, 2006; Stacey, 2012; Morris & Cunningham, 2013; Tai, et al., 2018), practical judgment can also be learned through studying bios and case studies (Thiele & Young, 2016; Paes, et al., 2019). But some of the most powerful lessons come through

conversation, including mentoring and feedback. Research shows these areas to be very strong in teaching practical judgment as long as the mentor or supervisor is experienced (Stacey, 2012) and that the feedback includes reflexive inquiry (Stacey, 2012) and diverse points of view (Thiele & Young, 2016).

DEL Outcome 4 states we are to, “Model, design, and implement scholar-practitioner practices and processes to develop ethical leadership in organizational, community, or institutional contexts” (DEL Learning Guide, 2020, p. 35). It was gratifying to me to be able to both model and implement aspects of my scholarly research, especially in such a recursive project. By both modeling the behavior learned in the DEL to patiently allow for others to generate their ideas and for all of us to come to consensus for the good of our institution and by implementing those same principles into the proposed curricula, I was able to lead the team to a project that would expand our ethical capacity to lead.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond demonstrating DEL Outcomes 1 and 4, I truly believe that each person who is developed in an organization not only is personally and professionally strengthened but also makes the larger organization stronger. This goes back to the literature on leadership development and also the literature on retention and intention. It is important to me that my research and modeling of concepts enabled us to come to consensus, gain approvals, and submit a grant that could lift the college on many levels.

As an update, the first foundation we applied to did not catch our vision and declined to allow for a full proposal. Through further research, I was able to identify a second foundation with similar interests, and we have re-submitted the grant for consideration. Though I have left

the organization, I truly hope they receive the grant and can carry out the work to benefit my former coworkers and college.

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