



TEN YEARS' TIME

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Masterclass supplementary:

Leadership and Governance

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Leadership and Governance

Why it matters


What is leadership and why does it matter?


Leadership is oft-referenced and oft-observed in our daily lives. There is so much research into leadership, resulting in many different definitions and theories. So much of the research and thinking on leadership is rooted in western thinking and often arises from the same few academic institutions in the US and UK. It is also likely to relate to research that has been designed for private and public sector contexts, and usually within US-centric operating models, and so is not necessarily relevant or easily applicable to a charitable or philanthropic operating model. Over time then, I have realised that defining leadership is less about saying here are a few lines of what it means to be a leader and go away and do that. Instead I now think about leadership and governance in terms of the challenges, responsibilities and opportunities that we need to respond to.

We are in the midst of a polycrisis, in terms of the climate and nature crises, entrenched economic inequalities, and social injustices impacting people, society and the natural world. This requires us to ask difficult questions of ourselves. Are we evolving rapidly enough? Are we being ambitious enough? Are we doing enough? Responding to these questions requires us to consider in depth the role of leadership and governance.

What do I think it takes to lead well?

I will start with how as leaders we must embrace and manage leadership paradoxes – be it the idea that a leader must be steady and stable, whilst also showing spontaneity and creativity. Perhaps the ultimate paradox we must reconcile as leaders within civil society is that we are both part of the problem and part of the solution.






This requires us to be proactive in identifying the ways in which we uphold problematic structures and systems, and work to improve or dismantle these. As leaders, we need to normalise things like operating with greater transparency and trust and the centring and empowering of people that have experienced marginalisation and that have lived experience with a clear recognition of their experiences as assets. This work requires long-term and sustained commitment. It is about leaders ceding their own power and privilege and recognising the power and expertise of people and communities who live and breathe the causes that we care about. It is about truly embracing the notion that applying an equity and justice lens to our work isn't just a nice to have or a tick box exercise, it is the essential thing for our organisations to do in pursuit of our own ambitions. The reality is that to deliver this well requires leadership at all levels of an organisation, especially at the Board and CEO level.


Increasingly I have realised that there are **four essential capabilities** that are required in order to lead well.

The first capability is committing to the art and science of sensemaking. This means seeking to understand organisational and systemic operating contexts. This is a continuous process where we will seek to develop a deeper understanding of our operating context, through observations, data, experiences, conversations and analyses. It also requires us to iterate and to be open to applying different and new frameworks or models.

The second capability is relating, which for me means building trusting relationships within and across organisations and networks and to understand the ways in which we are part of interdependent systems and sectors.

The third capability is about visioning and inventing and this This means creating a compelling picture of the future, becoming less linear in our thinking and embracing uncertainty and complexity, by building trusting relationships within and across existing and new organisations and networks, and creating spaces where diverse views and ideas can be shared, to understand the ways in which we are part of interdependent systems and sectors.






The fourth and final capability is about how we make judgements and decisions as leaders. This means moving to a place of confidence in the reasoning and judgements we make.

Leadership is personal.

I have long laboured under the notion that it was possible, and even my preference, to keep my ‘work self’ separate from my ‘personal self’. This is by no means a unique stance, as it has not always been the way that one was encouraged to bring their ‘whole self’ into the different parts of their lives, including at work. The reality is that for those of us working in civil society, the professional is so often personal too. We are drawn to the work we do because of our values, ethics and experiences.

Staci Haines’ Generative Somatics work considers the ways in which our core needs of safety, belonging, dignity and resources, alongside our emotions, conditioned tendencies, embodied responses and feelings, and inherited ancestry manifest in all that we do. It is a lesson to us all that our past informs our present and future, and that in reflecting on and understanding our throughline as individuals and within the different communities and spaces we have been part of, we can be part of the solution to the problems we see and experience.

Ultimately our whole careers are likely to be within systems, sectors and institutions that are in need of disruption and change. We commit to work in community with others to bring about lasting and meaningful change. Sometimes this is exactly what happens. Other times it isn’t.



What next?

If we are to be the leaders we need that can respond to the polycrisis, then this means that we must give ourselves the time, resources and support to succeed. We need to find our people, our networks, our supporters – the people we turn to in good times and bad for support. The people we can talk through our fears with. The people who help us see our talents and our abundance. We need to be unapologetic about investing in ourselves, including through courses and programmes like this one. As leaders, we need to back ourselves and have complete clarity on our purpose, vision and strategy. Current and future generations are facing crises and difficulties that are the direct result of our failure to prevent and/or dismantle a wide range of oppressive and extractive systems from arising in the first place. We can delay no longer, and must do all that we can now and in the coming years and decades to imagine and resource new ways of being for people, society and the natural world. And delivering on this vision requires leadership.

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Community of Practice Masterclass supplement 2024



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