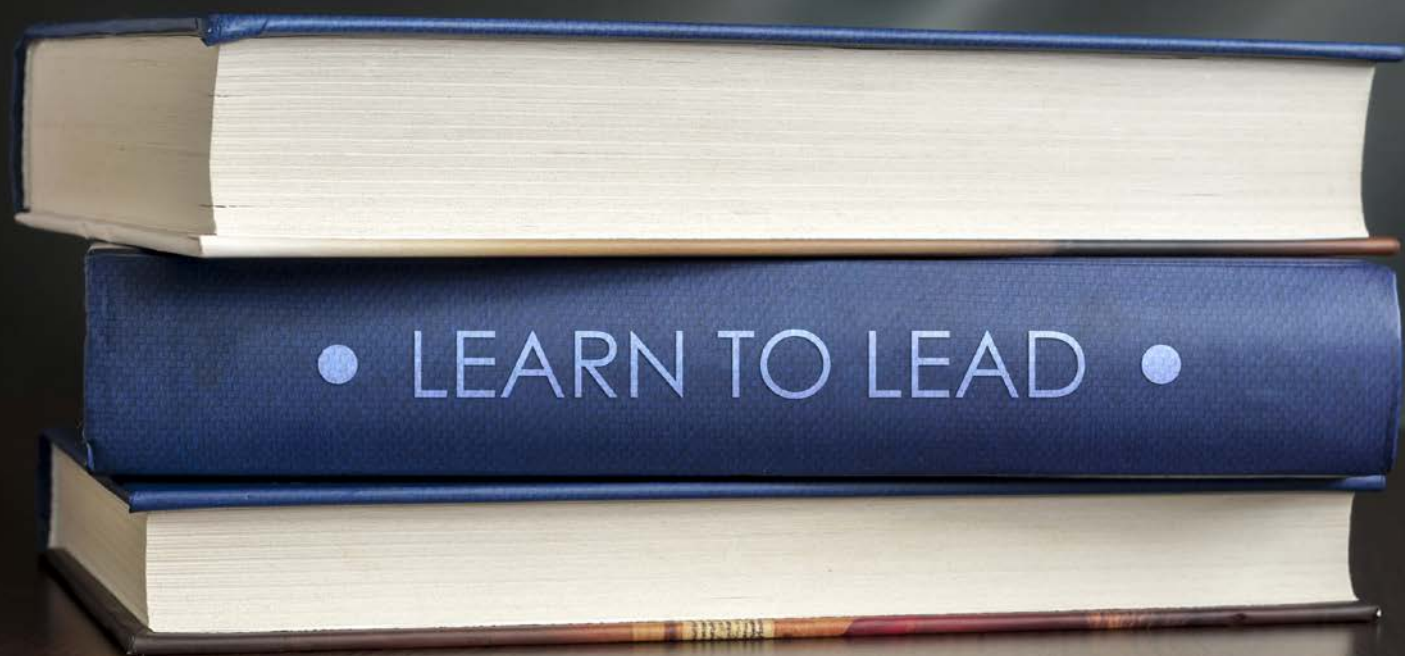


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INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN HIGHER-ED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS

“With retirements at the university projected at an annual rate of 23% over the next five years for faculty and staff, employee development and leadership development are critical.”

- Mekeisha Williams, Director of Learning and Organization Development, Duke University, speaking about her previous institution, Virginia Tech

Relative to the corporate sector, institutions of higher education have ironically underinvested in educating and developing their own people. Many in higher education believe, instead, that hiring from outside—especially for leadership positions—is a merit-based approach that will bring the best candidates to the institution.

The external search is engrained in the culture of higher education. In fact, in a recent survey conducted by Academic Impressions, only 30% of respondents reported filling more than half of their VP-level positions with internal candidates. Absent is an intentional and open conversation about whether this is actually the best approach for the institution.

According to *Harvard Business Review's* 2013 update of their global CEO scorecard, “insider” CEOs who advanced through the ranks of their own organization most frequently perform at a much higher level than outside hires.

There are a number of reasons for this. Insiders already know the organization’s culture and the people they will be working with, they are more likely to have the trust of key stakeholders, and they have a deeper knowledge of the organization’s history, constraints, and opportunities. Outside hires face an uphill battle.

By contrast, according to a 2012 study by the American Council of Education, not only are more college and university presidents hired from outside the institution, but 20% are hired from outside academia.

In our paper [*The Other Higher Ed Bubble*](#), we made the case that there is a crisis in higher-ed leadership and issued a call for bold decision-making and courageous conversations on campus to address adaptive challenges—challenges that will require innovation and questioning of longstanding assumptions. These adaptive challenges include increasing demands from students and government; changing demographics; structural fiscal challenges; and technologies that are disrupting how information and education is delivered. This crisis must be met with a commensurate effort to develop future leaders who are well equipped to address the challenges they will face—challenges that require new approaches and solutions.

Equally pressing, given the rapid retirement of our senior leaders, is the need to discuss the risk of a shallow talent bench and the opportunity to shift our thinking to regard in-house leadership development as a strategic asset.

If your institution is to ensure its sustainability and competitiveness in a rapidly changing industry, it will be critical to develop the internal capacity needed to lead your institution forward.

A RISING TREND OF IN-HOUSE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The culture of the external search is already beginning to change as an aging workforce forces institutional leaders to address issues of succession planning and leadership development. Across the country institutions are starting or increasing their investments in in-house leadership development programs.

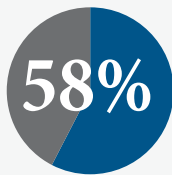
While the programs vary in size and scope, they all aim to develop the leadership capacities of those with high potential to lead their institution into the future. Most programs include some form of coaching and mentoring, stretch assignments, regular workshops that address key issues like managing change and complexity, and increased access to current institutional leadership.

In June 2013, Academic Impressions conducted two surveys to explore the current state of leadership development in higher education. The first was meant to identify whether institutions are investing in leadership development; the second queried specifically those institutions that offer in-house leadership development programs.

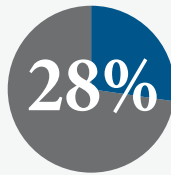
116 institutions responded to the first survey, and 129 responded to the second.

Here's what the study revealed:

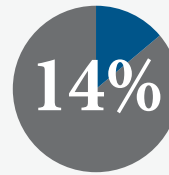
Are institutions developing in-house leadership programming?



YES

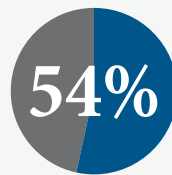


NO



PLANNING TO IN
THE FUTURE

Institutions with in-house leadership development that are planning to expand their program:



“Historically, we have hired and promoted people based on their tactical expertise, but our senior team recognized that it takes more than tactical expertise to move strategic initiatives forward. We needed to invest in developing leadership competencies.”

- Melanie Will, Manager, Learning and Organizational Development,
Wilfrid Laurier University

TOMORROW'S LEADERS WILL NOT BE YESTERDAY'S LEADERS

As the investment in these programs increases, it's critical that these programs avoid the risk of simply replicating current leadership styles and philosophies.

In our 2011 paper [*Developing Leaders in Higher Education*](#), we turned to Larry Goldstein, president of Campus Strategies LLC, and Pat Sanaghan, president of The Sanaghan Group, to help us define the leadership skill set needed to meet today's—and tomorrow's—adaptive challenges. Having consulted for decades with institutional leadership teams, Goldstein and Sanaghan are uniquely positioned to comment on what makes academic leaders effective.

Goldstein and Sanaghan, along with Clint Sidle of Cornell University, propose five critical skills for adaptive leaders:

1. Leaders need to be **systemic thinkers**, because the critical initiatives that will move your institution forward will involve multiple divisions of your organization.

2. Leaders need a **diagnostic mentality**; they need to be able to ask the right questions.
3. Leaders need to be adept at **cross-boundary collaboration** and prepared to engage varied stakeholders in inclusive planning.
4. Leaders need **creativity**; they must be willing to experiment and learn—even from mistakes.
5. Leaders need to be **willing to take measured risks** and make the courageous decisions.

Learn more about this changing skill set in *Developing Leaders in Higher Education* (Academic Impressions, 2011): <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/developing-leaders-higher-education>.

3 INNOVATIVE PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM

A high-impact leadership development program is much more than just a workshop: it is a concentrated investment in developing the capacity of your leaders over time. It's critical to set such a program up for success and ensure that you see measurable return on it. Both the goal of the program and its desired outcomes need to be clear and specific.

This paper will review 3 innovative practices that institutions can learn from to make their programs more effective in cultivating high-potential leaders:

- Creating ***individual* leadership development plans** by identifying the “sweet spot” between leaders’ strengths, passions and interests, and your institution’s need
- **Involving senior leadership** in the program, from inception to completion
- Focusing on **action learning**, where participants develop leadership skills by tackling real projects that will have an impact on their institution

Our practices are drawn from in-depth reviews of existing programs across dozens of campuses, and are commented on by experts in the field of leadership development. Some of the programs we will discuss are new, while some have been operating for years. All of them offer some critical ideas as you shape your own in-house effort.

AN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPING LEADERS

“When a leader elevates to a certain position because they did well in their previous position, and then doesn’t do well in the new position, we can only point the finger at ourselves. How did we prepare that person?”

– Mekeisha Williams, Director, Learning and Organization Development,
Duke University

Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario has attempted something noteworthy in the design of its new Extraordinary Leader Program (ELP). This program establishes an individual leadership development plan for each participant, based on:

- A 360° assessment
- A strengths inventory
- Dialogue between the program’s facilitators, the participant, and (optionally) the participant’s supervisor.

INTERVIEWING YOUR EMERGING LEADERS

Consider interviewing the leaders you hope to groom, to:

- Discover their passions and interests
- Invite them to self-identify their development needs, and
- Assess the extent to which they feel supported and prepared for their position or for a future position.

Combining these interviews with a 360° assessment and a strengths inventory can provide a fuller picture of the passions, interests, competencies, and opportunities for developing your leaders.

FINDING THE LEADERSHIP “SWEET SPOT”: PAIRING INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY AND ORGANIZATIONAL NEED

What’s especially useful about Wilfrid Laurier’s approach – and what offers a key lesson for other institutions creating in-house leadership programs – is the emphasis on crafting individual development plans that target the “sweet spot” where three factors meet:

- The organization’s need (“What does the institution need from me? What is going to have the biggest impact within the institution?”)
- A leader’s strengths (“What are one or two strengths I could build on that are a good match for the organization’s needs?”)
- A leader’s professional passions and interests

The Zenger-Folkman Extraordinary Leader Program, which provides the foundation for Wilfrid Laurier’s leadership program, is designed to help leaders self-identify this “sweet spot” and specific actions they want to take to cultivate specific strengths. That forms the core of the individual development plan.

“You want participants to identify goals that are important to them personally and that are also important for their job. It has to be both in order to generate the motivation and the accountability needed to follow through on an individual development plan.”

- Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park Fellows Program, Johnson School of Business, Cornell University

Sidle adds that at Cornell’s leadership development program, participants create a two to three page individual learning plan. To do so, participants:

- Create statements of their personal mission and values
- Identify two sources of support:
 - Peer coaches within their cohort in the leadership development program
 - “Learning partners,” professionals in their own office or department who are willing to offer regular feedback

- Answer a series of questions:
 - What actual activities will allow you to apply and develop your leadership strengths?
 - Who is going to support you and give you feedback?
 - Who does this well, who can serve as a mentor for you?
 - What books can you read or workshops can you attend to learn more?

The philosophy driving both the established program at Cornell and the new program at Wilfrid Laurier is that the leadership development program facilitator’s key role is to help participants identify specific areas of strength, establish objectives for building on and applying those strengths to real projects, and develop an individual plan with clear and actionable steps.



CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK AT YOUR INSTITUTION

Clint Sidle notes that there are risks in interviewing high-potential leaders at your institution to assess your organization's needs for leadership development programming.

“When you do a leadership development needs assessment,” Sidle remarks, “typically the big buckets are always the same. People need to know how to build a team, how to motivate others, and how to manage change or resolve conflict.”

The critical and often-neglected step, Sidle suggests, is to ask the deeper questions:

- **To cultivate truly adaptive leaders at our institution, what new competencies do we need to be developing?**
- **As we develop this program, where is there a need for us to shift our thinking from only developing tactical skill sets (such as conflict management and team-building) to also coaching the skills needed for adaptive leadership (such as calculated risk-taking, communicating and planning across boundaries, data-gathering and sensemaking)?**
- **Are the assessment tools we are using focused on adaptive skills? Can we evaluate how leaders take risks, how they make sense of complex situations, etc.?**

INVOLVING SENIOR LEADERS IN YOUR PROGRAM

When Academic Impressions surveyed 129 institutions that offer in-house leadership development programs, we asked them to what extent the president or chancellor is personally invested in their program and in developing the next generation of leaders.

Most replied “None or very little.”

A few mentioned that the president gives a presentation as a part of their workshop or leadership academy.

Less than one sixth of respondents noted significant involvement.

“The effort has to be sanctioned by senior leadership. If it’s only HR driving it, then the program is done from the start.”

- Pat Sanaghan, President, The Sanaghan Group

“In my experience, there is always skepticism about a new leadership development program. The effort will be most successful if the executive group has not only sanctioned the program but has also experienced the program or at least aspects of it.”

- Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park Fellows Program, Johnson School of Business,
Cornell University

IT STARTS WITH THE PRESIDENT

Contrast the response to our survey with the leadership development program at Northern Arizona University, in which:

- The university president reviews applications for participation in the program.
- The president participates (as a “peer in the realm”) in a two-day, off-site retreat with each cohort in the program.
- The president and key leaders (including the chairman of the Arizona board of regents, the provost, the senior vice president for enrollment management and student affairs, the vice president for intercollegiate athletics, the chief financial officer, the vice president for university advancement, and others) across the institution participate in each of seven additional monthly sessions.
- Participants engage the president, provost, and chief financial officer in conversations about how and why particular decisions have been made.
- One of the regents dedicates a full day to talking with each cohort about

his role on the board of regents and his own journey in developing as a leader over the years.

“Commitment from the president is key, and it is demonstrated by his presence.”

– MJ McMahon,
Executive Vice President, NAU

“If you have a high-impact, effective president, you want them involved. But make sure the president isn’t just serving as a talking head. It’s critical for the president to be deeply involved and embedded in the process, but this shouldn’t be in a directive capacity. The president needs to be available for Q&A and deep mentoring. They need to be willing to be asked the tough questions about how they make decisions.”

– Pat Sanaghan, President,
The Sanaghan Group

A COHORT OF SENIOR LEADERS

Wilfrid Laurier University, which is just beginning the second year of its new in-house leadership development program, is enrolling institutional leaders in the program in annual cohorts, using a cascading approach. The senior leadership of the institution just completed last year. This coming year, associate vice presidents will take the program. The next year, middle managers will take the program.

TWO APPROACHES

Wilfrid Laurier University separated its senior leaders and middle managers into separate cohorts. What makes sense for your institution's culture?

“I actually advise mixing them up. Get the VP and the middle managers in the same cohort. A diverse slice will allow you to achieve real work together, encourages deep mentoring, cross-boundary dialogue, build capacity.”

- Pat Sanaghan, President, The Sanaghan Group

“There are trade-offs here. My experience suggests some of the senior executives won't mix openly with the junior leaders, and vice versa. Ideally, I would kick off any institutional effort with the top layer(s) of executives and then cascade down and mix later on.”

- Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park Fellows Program, Johnson School of Business, Cornell University

That means that the senior leadership of the institution has gone through the entire program first, so that they will share a vocabulary and an understanding of leadership competencies with those managers whom they will be mentoring and evaluating.

“The senior team has to walk the talk. If they are dedicated to doing deep mentoring, then that will become an institutional value. And the people at the top need to be the ones mentoring the middle managers. Look to Cornell and Notre Dame for examples of this.”

– Pat Sanaghan, President,
The Sanaghan Group

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Wilfrid Laurier’s program also includes a 360 assessment, in which each participant collects feedback from peers, direct reports, and others. These assessments are not shared with the participant’s supervisor, though participants are encouraged to do so. Note that it is critical, when using a 360 assessment, to provide adequate coaching and support to ensure that your participants can respond to the results effectively.

The president at Wilfrid Laurier decided to set an example by sharing his own 360 report—which included constructive feedback—with a wide array of stakeholders to engage in dialogue about his development as a leader.

Clint Sidle at Cornell University notes that often, top leaders are reluctant to “go first” with a 360 assessment “because they are afraid of the vulnerability that goes with it.” However, Sidle advises that this practice can be highly effective if it is facilitated by an external or neutral coach.



CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK AT YOUR INSTITUTION

“Selecting people is critical,” Pat Sanaghan advises. “If this is seen as a political game, it will also be seen as ineffective from the start.”

It is important at the outset to ensure that your in-house leadership development program isn’t seen as an opportunity to nominate “problem” managers for remedial training:

- **How will we communicate both the goals and the anticipated real impact of the program on the institution?**
- **In what ways will we involve senior leaders in the design, involvement, and promotion of the program?**



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NOT JUST A CLASSROOM: REAL-WORLD LEADERSHIP TRAINING

The most effective and innovative leadership development programs stand apart not only because of their targeted approach to developing leadership competencies and involvement of senior leaders, but also because of the intentionality behind the structure of the curriculum and the learning work in which participants will be engaged.

“In order for the program to have any real impact, I believe it needs to get beyond the ‘talking heads syndrome’ and work with a cohort model and a designated facilitator.”

- Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park Fellows Program, Johnson School of Business,
Cornell University

IN IT FOR THE LONG TERM

An occasional, in-house leadership development workshop has its uses, but effective leadership development involves problem-solving, creative decision-making, and mentoring over a sustained period.

For example, Northern Arizona University’s cohort-based model includes:

- A two-day, off-campus retreat to begin developing participants as a cohort, connect them with the president, and set the tone of the program (emphasizing that the program’s presenters and its participants, regardless of their title, are all peers learning together)

- Eight monthly sessions supplemented by an online learning management system (with selected readings and facilitated discussion during the month); this helps build and maintain momentum
- A reception at the end of each session to allow participants in the program to connect informally with university and local leaders
- The opportunity to shadow an institutional or community leader (these opportunities often evolve organically into mentoring relationships)
- Attendance at local, city, and state leadership meetings (MJ McMahon, NAU's executive vice president, notes that this "gives a sense that the university is larger than the institution itself. We are in a community working to move education forward in our region. It's crucial to give participants a sense of that").

“Also, set the expectation that what these participants have learned will be shared with the larger cohort.”

- Pat Sanaghan, President,
The Sanaghan Group

“I always work with the cohort model and I think it is essential.”

- Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park
Fellows Program, Johnson School
of Business, Cornell University

Sustained investment in future leaders is critical. “To make it work,” Clint Sidle notes, “that cohort needs a consistent facilitator for much of the program. For that cohort to continue learning, developing, and supporting each other beyond the length of a series of workshops, you will need broader institutional support.”

ACTION LEARNING: MOVING BEYOND CASE STUDIES

The Center for Creative Leadership has identified embedded work as the most effective vehicle for leadership training. Accordingly, NAU and several other leading programs take a step further and focus on identifying opportunities for action learning. They do this by pairing the leadership development course with actual work to solve real challenges facing the institution.

“Case studies show you how to think, not how to lead. You can read all the case studies you want—you don’t learn how to lead by reading case studies. You learn to lead by actually doing things, by pulling together a task force and facing challenging decisions.”

– Pat Sanaghan, President,
The Sanaghan Group

“Leaders need to understand the institution as a whole, need to understand the full impact of a decision. And when you develop an individual manager’s understanding of how the institution makes decisions, the institution benefits, not just the individual.”

– MJ McMahon,
Executive Vice President, NAU

For example, Virginia Tech’s Executive Development Institute, developed by Mekeisha Williams (who also developed leadership institutes at UNC Chapel Hill), includes a seven-month program followed by a mentoring phase.

During the seven months, a cohort of twenty-one participants are grouped into action learning teams. Each team consists of four or five individuals drawn from across the campus. A department chair may be working alongside a business officer, for example. The idea is to encourage innovation, cross-silo collaboration, and a holistic perspective on leadership-level challenges by bringing together managers who, otherwise, would not work closely together.

“Our ‘Leading Cornell’ program takes this approach as well. But what’s critical to note is that if your action learning approach does not have executive support—if executives are not committed to actually act on recommendations—then this approach will fall flat.”

– Clint Sidle, Director, Roy H. Park
Fellows Program, Johnson School
of Business, Cornell University

One action learning team at Virginia Tech addressed the issue of retaining high performers in the veterinary school. The team conducted research internally (surveying faculty, reviewing data on faculty retention, engaging in dialogue with the business office) as well as externally, surveying other veterinary schools. They worked together on various challenges and scenarios for retaining star faculty. At the end of the seven months, the team presented a concept paper to the president, the provost, and key stakeholders.

Their suggestion of an incentive and rewards program for faculty was implemented, with real results, so the project benefited not only the action learning team but the larger institution. Nationally, veterinary schools have been struggling, but over the past few years, Virginia Tech has been able to reward and retain its people.

INTERVIEWING YOUR EMERGING LEADERS

Consider interviewing the leaders you hope to groom, to:

- Discover their passions and interests
- Invite them to self-identify their development needs, and
- Assess the extent to which they feel supported and prepared for their position or for a future position.

Combining these interviews with a 360 assessment and a strengths inventory can provide a fuller picture of the passions, interests, competencies, and opportunities for developing your leaders.



CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK AT YOUR INSTITUTION

- **What experiences (job rotations, shadowing leaders, action learning) can you incorporate and how? Do we have executive support at our institution for acting on recommendations made from a case or action-learning approach?**
- **What opportunities can you identify for participants to work with others from across the institution? From leaders external to your institution?**
- **Is there executive support for a holistic and integrated approach to leadership development?**

CONCLUSION

While there are times when bringing in a leader from the outside is the best decision for an institution, choosing to select a leader from the outside simply by default—because there aren't qualified internal candidates—is not. Internal leaders, when given the proper opportunities and experiences to develop their leadership capacities, are usually more effective because they know the institution's strengths, culture, and people.

Investing in such programs, however, is not without its risks. Programs that don't have executive support and are seen as having political motivations ultimately don't serve the needs of the institution and can backfire. The thoughtful design and implementation of such programs is critical to their success.

Institutions need to craft a program that:

- Meets the specific needs of the institution's future leaders and is driven by the institution's core values; a cookie cutter approach will not be credible
- Is driven by a sound leadership development model or framework
- Has the right structure, format, and facilitators to support the program's goals
- Has an integrated and relevant curriculum that incorporates the right blend of assessments, reflection, coaching and mentoring, and real-life experiences
- Has high levels of executive support and buy-in, with appropriate involvement from senior leaders

Much has been written about higher education's response, or lack thereof, to immediate and pressing challenges. For many institutions, their very survival is at stake. Given these challenges and their potential significance, you cannot afford not to invest in your people in ways that position them—and your institution—for success.

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