The Art of Collaborative Leadership: A Comparison of Exemplary Practices and Disciplines[*]

Richard Gregory

Abstract

This article proposes five common elements or leader dispositions impacting the establishment of a culture of collaboration, innovation and inquiry. The dispositions of values/actions congruence, shared vision, questioning the status quo, collaboration, and systems thinking are examined through the lens of Kouzes & Posner's Five Exemplary Practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) and Senge's Five Disciplines (Senge, 2006). The writer offers an advance organizer (see Table 1), comparing and juxtaposing the essences of Practices and Disciplines within the context of artful, collaborative leadership. Other leadership literature (Bolman & Deal, 2008; English, 2008; Rosen, 2007) supports and provides relevance to the focus of this essay. All five dispositions, when working together in concert, may transform and improve organizational effectiveness through collaborative leadership.

1 Introduction

More than any other time in our history, the nation will be challenged with declining resources and unexpected consequences. Even with the huge sums of federal stimulus funds and strategic/political state and

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local budgetary choices, schools and districts will struggle mightily to advance reform and improve student achievement. Educational leaders, who have been conditioned to rapid growth and sustained funding, will now find a paucity of resources to sustain reform. Those leaders, who are scholar-practitioners and regular readers of the leadership literature, may encounter strength and gain strategies to offset the lack of dependable resources from state and federal governments. This essay explores the research of what collaborative leaders are doing now and in the future to empower constituents and include all stakeholders in advancing reform through collaborative leadership.

Given the current educational landscape of ambiguity and sometimes chaos, even the casual observer understands the need for collaborative leadership. Evidence-based collaborative practices and strategies are abundant in the leadership literature for those seeking to empower and inspire the organization through the art of collaborative leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2008; English, 2008; Fullan, 2003; Garmston, 2007; Hoy, et al., 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Northouse, 2007; Rosen, 2007; Senge, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2005).

During a recent international conference, the author presented a paper (Gregory, 2009) proposing five common elements/dispositions needed to practice collaborative and innovative leadership. The five common elements (See Table 1) were identified in order to juxtapose and compare the five exemplary leadership practices of Kouzes & Posner (2007) and the five disciplines of Senge (2006).

A Comparison between Kouzes and Posner's Five Exemplary Practices of Leadership and Senge's Five Disciplines

Element (Dispositions)	Kouzes & Posner (2007) (Practice)	Senge (2006) (Discipline)
Values/Actions/Congruence	**Model the Way:** Clarify Values/Align Actions with values	**Personal Mastery:** Clarify Personal Vision/Hold creative tension
Shared Vision	**Inspire A Shared Vision:** Envision Future/Enlist Others In common vision	Building Shared Vision: Unearthing shared pictures of the future/Commitment not Compliance
Question the Status Quo	**Challenge the Process:** Search for Innovation and opportunities/Experiment-take risks	**Mental Models:** Surface internal assumptions/Be open to scrutiny/Learningful conversations
Learning Together Through Collaboration	**Enable Others to Act:** Foster collaboration through trust & relationships/Strengthen and empower others	**Team Learning:** Suspend assumptions and enter into dialogue/Thinking together and learning as a team

Integration of the Whole/Systems Thinking	**Encourage the Heart:** Creation of a culture of celebration through individual & group recognition/Celebrate a Spirit of Community	**Systems Thinking:** Integrate all disciplines into a body of theory/practice/Whole exceeds the sum of the parts

Table 1

NOTE: Gregory, R. (2009) The Art of Collaborative Leadership: Practices and Disciplines.

Establishing a culture of collaboration, innovation and meaningful inquiry cannot be done without all five common elements/dispositions working in concert with one another. As Senge (2006) opines, all disciplines must develop together as an ensemble. The common elements or dispositions, whether one subscribes to Senge or Kouzes & Posner, will surely be present and alive in schools and districts that are surviving and sustaining reform in the face of declining resources. This writer believes that the Five Disciplines (Senge, 2006) and the Five Exemplary Practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) exemplify and demonstrate the core leader dispositions needed; buttressed with other relevant leadership literature.

2 Values/Actions Congruence

It is evident that leader values and actions congruence is of profound importance in gaining credibility in the organization. We know that values are personal and are the essence of the central beliefs of the individual. Milton Rokeach (1973) identified two types of values: instrumental values, and end values. Rokeach (1973), as many believe today, stated that people need both types of values. These values guide our actions, inform our decisions, drive our commitment, and help us focus on the present as it impacts the future.

Fullan (2003) makes the case even stronger through his work on the moral imperative for school leaders. Fullan believes that, while many aspects of being a principal do not pertain to moral purpose e. g. high test scores, public relations, competent manager; all of these capacities should be in the service of moral purpose (p.30).

What is clearly at stake here is the ability of leaders to clarify their values and act in congruence with the values. This is the bedrock for building credibility in the organization and inspiring others to listen and follow. Equally important is the ability to articulate the values so that others know the essence of personal beliefs. Acting out the values daily in the school affirms and sets the example for all observers and participants. The leader teaches and reinforces through symbols, artifacts and metaphors; the props in the drama and performance that is art in the truest form (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

In a similar vein, Bolman & Deal (2008), discuss how the Symbolic Frame of leadership shapes the culture, gives purpose, and provides organizational drama. "Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends." (p. 253)

Johnson (2009) provides another leadership metaphor that is instructive for leaders building capacity for collaboration and innovation in the school or district. Johnson (2009) approaches the question of values and ethics through a metaphor he calls "Casting light or shadow." We can cast light by building ethical capacity in our future and present leaders with clear ethical outcomes (sound ethical reasoning, strong character, follow-through, ethical climate, ethical decision making, and others) in the workplace. Leaders also can cast shadows in the workplace through abuse of power and privilege, deceit, disloyalty, and inconsistency, among others.

Fenwick English (2008) reminds us that educational leadership is an applied profession. While educational leaders are prepared in a curriculum defined by research, English (2008) opines that educational leadership is always an art form involving performance and storytelling. These beliefs are strikingly similar to the works of Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Senge (2006).

Senge's (2006) discipline of Personal Mastery aligns well with the congruence of values and actions. According to Senge, one of the essences of holding Personal Mastery is through personal vision clarification

of the leader. Senge (2006) believes the leader clarifies personal values in order to finally arrive at the personal vision. As this discipline becomes a part of the daily repertoire of the leader, Senge (2006) believes two underlying movements are set in motion. The first movement is continually clarifying what is important to us. The second movement is the continual learning required to see current reality. Senge (2006) calls this movement "creative tension," generated by the juxtaposition of vision with current reality.

Holding creative tension during the second movement is the real challenge of the leader of a school or district. Senge explains that most people have difficulty talking about their visions even when they are clear. He suggests that most people are aware of the gap between current reality and the vision, and this creates tension. This gap can engender hopelessness and it can also be a source of energy. Senge calls this gap "creative tension" and believes this is indeed a source of energy and a central principle in Personal Mastery (2006, p.140). Creative tension is the force that appears as we realize the gap between visions and current reality. It is basically neutral tension that helps bring current reality to the vision. The danger, according to Senge (2006), is not controlling negative emotions that may accompany the process, known as emotional tension. Emotional tension lowers the expectations of the vision, possibly bringing everything back to current reality.

That is the challenge of the school leader: to have the ability to recognize when emotional tension is overriding creative tension. In dire economic times, it is creative tension that moves the school or district forward to the vision of reform and increased student achievement. Visions fail even with adequate resources in a stable economy. More schools will surely fail in tough downturns without Personal Mastery of the leader.

3 Shared Vision

Developing simultaneously with the congruence of values and actions is the need of the leader to build and sustain shared vision. Kouzes and Posner (2007), similar to Hoyle (2007) indicate that leaders have visions and dreams of what could be. It is these dreams that allow visionary leaders to invent the future as they gaze across the horizon of time. Leaders, following this line of reasoning, can create a new future or destination, where no one has gone before (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

However, as Kouzes and Posner (2007) state, these visions of the future are only images of the future until they are shared. Hoyle (2007) opines that this action allows "futuring," which makes the vision happen. The leader cannot command commitment to the vision; it is only through inspiration that those followers will get onboard the vision train to the future. We are long past the typical vision/mission review in many schools, motivated by the upcoming Regional Accreditation or NCATE accreditation visits. Using Personal Mastery, the school leader must frequently re-visit and affirm the values and the vision in relation to the current reality of difficult economic times. Holding creative tension is of paramount importance in defending against the very human behavior of insisting we do not have enough money or time to accomplish the task.

Peter Senge's discipline of Building Shared Vision is based also on commitment of constituents and not compliance from the top. He believes that, "when there is a genuine vision, people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to." (2006, p.9) This is basically Theory X leader (authoritarian) versus a Theory Y leader (participative) perspective (McGregor, 1960). In addition, Senge, like Kouzes and Posner, believes the personal vision must be translated into the shared vision to impact the organization. The shared vision is the rudder that keeps the learning process sustained and on course when problems surface in the organization. By acquiring Personal Mastery, the foundation is there for developing the shared vision (Senge, 2006).

Senge (2006) uses the metaphor of the hologram, a three-dimensional image created by interacting light sources. If one divides up the hologram into smaller divisions, the individual images remain, combining to display the whole image which is the shared vision (Senge, 2006). This is a powerful metaphor that has stood the test of time, appearing in Senge's first edition of *The Fifth Discipline* in 1990.

According to Senge (2006), spreading the vision throughout the organization requires enrollment and commitment in the process. The act of enrolling is a free choice option, but commitment requires a greater investment of energy and passion to make the vision a reality. This construct reminds one of the old story of the ham and eggs meal and the roles of the chicken and the pig. The chicken is enrolled, but the pig is

really committed, based on the contributions of each. A simple story but it exemplifies Senge's thoughts on enrollment and commitment to the shared vision.

The reader has now been exposed to two of five disciplines and two of five exemplary practices. As the remaining disciplines and practices, and the related leadership literature are shared, it should become evident that all of the common elements or dispositions are required to establish a culture of collaboration, innovation and inquiry. The next common element or disposition is the ability of the organization to question the status quo.

4 Questioning the Status Quo

Appropriately named, the Kouzes and Posner (2007) leadership practice of Challenge the Process, does indeed question the status quo. The essentials of this practice include searching for opportunities and experimenting and taking risks. Searching for opportunities involves seizing the initiative through personal challenge and what is called "whitewater" change. Kouzes and Posner (2007) use the metaphor of fast water change and riding the rapids of change; putting forth one's best personal leadership effort.

However, this is not just about initiative in the leader; it is about encouraging initiative and change in others within the organization. Simply stated, it is leadership that is proactively challenged with purpose, not money or rewards. Another Kouzes & Posner metaphor that exemplifies this best is the mountain climber scaling peaks. This challenge is not about position; it is clearly about attitude and desire in the face of obstacles. The meaning comes from inside, the clarified values and the belief system. While the job may very well be about economics and technology, work is the expression of our soul and spirit; it is unique and creative (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This creative spirit allows us to innovate and deal with change and future challenge.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) found that innovation requires looking outside the organization for new ideas. This action requires sending everyone out looking, deep listening on the part of leaders, and then balancing the outside with the internal insight. As the status quo is questioned, teams are renewed, work becomes more fun, and meaningful challenges are engaged (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Imagine how empowering this could be for teachers and staff who are conditioned to one-shot professional development planned by someone at district office. A local school leader, empowered by that same district office, could have numerous options to consider with teachers, all generated by professionals who know the community landscape.

Experimentation and taking risks is conducted within the parameters of generating small wins and learning from the experiences. Kouzes and Posner (2007) indicate that incremental steps with small wins are the key to accomplishing the larger goals. Alcoholics Anonymous and Weightwatchers are provided as two prime exemplars of the power of small wins. The recent Democratic primary elections provide another exemplar. Obama focused on the power of the Internet and small contributions, while Hillary Clinton continued with traditional, large contributions. The Clinton campaign ended in loss and deep debt. Through this process, risks are measured and not foolhardy, establishing a safe environment and a climate for learning by all.

The discipline of Mental Models also requires meaningful conversations and the surfacing of internal assumptions (Senge, 2006). Senge defines mental models as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action." (2006, p. 9) Working with mental models requires one to turn inward and learn to unearth the internal pictures we have of the world. Senge (2006) like Schein (1985) believes that we must surface these unquestioned assumptions and subject them to vigorous scrutiny. Rusch (2005) found that the power of silence is an institutional barrier blocking organizational learning in many school systems. The Mental Models discipline requires one to practice "learningful" conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy (Senge, 2006). This all happens as people explore how they think effectively and in turn, make that thinking open to the influence of others.

Several considerations are always present with mental models. Senge suggests that, in most situations, mental models exist below the awareness of people and are therefore implicit. The Detroit automakers are a prime example of how mental models can hold the status quo and not institute needed change. As Senge (2006) shares in this example, the automakers mental model of the car styling being all people cared about

resulted in declining car quality and market share with foreign automakers. By not recognizing the mental model in practice, Senge (2006) believes the efforts to foster systems thinking go unattended. The translation to schools and districts: surface faulty mental models and question the status quo before being forced by outside forces. Reflective practice and generative learning will serve schools well as they challenge the status quo in their respective communities across America.

In practice, mental models are usually incomplete, nonsystemic and based on unearthed assumptions in individuals and the organization (Senge, 2006). Reflective practice first developed by Schon (1983), allows the practitioner to reflect on thinking while acting. Senge believes that the early work of Argyris and Schon (1974) is the basis for reflective practice today and the foundational essence of mental models. It is through reflective practice and interpersonal learning skills that people become generative rather than reactive. Generative learning, according to Senge (2006) requires people at all levels that can surface and challenge their mental models before external forces require them to do so. It goes without saying that, until practices in educational leadership emphasize this skill set, little will change in American education to prepare our leaders to question the status quo.

As learning progresses in mental models we observe gaps in espoused theory and theory-in-use. Senge believes this in not necessarily a bad thing unless one does not have personal mastery and cannot ascertain the truth about the gap. Again, we see the necessity of the disciplines developing in concert and supportive of one another. Moreover, this requires an organizational commitment to the truth which is an outgrowth of personal mastery. We must understand that we may never know the whole truth and there may be many mental models existing, all at the same time. However, if leaders and schools can practice the next common element/disposition of Learning Together through Collaboration, our capacity is increased through more productive conversations and learning together as teams.

5 Learning Together Through Collaboration

Senge (2006) reminds us that the discipline of Team Learning is a collective discipline. As such, there is not an "I" in the learning of this discipline; only "We" or the team. Sports teams and musical groups are perhaps our best metaphors for this discipline. There has never been a greater need for mastering team learning in organizations than there is today. And yet, there is only sparse evidence in business, public and non-profits including education, that team learning is being used effectively today. Team learning continues to be poorly understood according to Senge, and until we can clearly describe this phenomenon, it will remain mysterious.

This collective discipline requires mastering the practices of dialogue and discussion. In dialogue, the team members suspend their individual viewpoints (assumptions) and enter into free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, deeply listening to one another, while suspending their personal views. In discussion, different views are presented and defended and the search is for the best view to support the impending decision. Senge offers that, while dialogue and discussion are complementary, most teams are not capable of distinguishing between the two or moving effectively from one to the other. This action adds to a defensive nature of the dialogue or discussion resulting in lost opportunities for systems thinking about an issue.

Both dialogue and discussion are critical to generative learning that is on-going within the team. The purpose of dialogue is to go beyond any one individual's understanding of the matter (Senge, 2006). In contrast, discussion is all about winning the day by getting your viewpoint accepted by the team. School and district teams must be trained in the use of entering into dialogue, as most already know how to use discussion. It will take time to have school teams practice dialogue, but the results could be well worth the time invested.

We all win in dialogue if we do it right. The paradox is to suspend assumptions while freely discussing them at the same time. That is how the team gets the full range of experience and thought onto the table. In dialogue, people become observers of their own thinking (Senge, 2006) Through both the use of dialogue and discussion, different views are first presented, analyzed and perhaps a new view is discovered. A deep trust is developed that provides carryover into discussion where the purpose is to make the decision. Ultimately, the team is learning powerful lessons on generative team learning and creating inroads to systems thinking

where it all comes together as a whole.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) developed the practice of Enabling Others to Act based on leadership traits admired by constituents in the workplace. This practice is based on fostering collaboration through trust and relationships and strengthening others through empowerment. Kouzes and Posner (2007) like others (Bolman & Deal, 2008; English, 2008; Garmston, 2007; Rosen, 2007; Senge, 2006) believe that turbulence and ambiguity in the workplace today requires more collaboration than ever before.

Rosen (2007) further defines the culture of collaboration through ten cultural elements and new strategies for curing silo syndrome and top down management. Rosen, who has consulted with national and international companies, offers practical and timely considerations for a collaborative culture. Perhaps one of the most interesting exemplars is the discussion of the corporate business battle between Boeing and Airbus for the market on the new super class of airliners, through the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and the Airbus 380. While this is a business model of getting to market with a quality product, educators can learn much from strategies focusing on cultural collaboration. (Rosen, 2007)

Because trust is the basic essence of relationships, leaders must undertake trust-building activities in the workplace. Unfortunately, Kouzes and Posner (2007) indicate that we have many examples in our culture today of the lack of trusting relationships. The current *Survivor* television hit teaches the wrong things about interdependence and teams. In the real world, most people could not "survive" in the manner portrayed in the program.

In the school workplace, leaders should structure the work to encourage and support collaboration and cooperation. This is done through cooperatively developed goals and roles, with structured tasks so that each team member contributes to the end result (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Through fostering this sense of mutual benefit or reciprocity, collaboration, cooperation and relationship-building are supported. In addition, knowing that individuals must meet face-to-face, this tempers actions to cooperate now and in the future. Kouzes and Posner (2007) provide a number of strategies to foster collaboration including: collaboration audits, jigsaw groups, gains focus, use of alternative currencies, and creating opportunities and places for informal interactions.

The job is not done with collaboration alone, however, there is a need to concurrently strengthen and empower people in the workplace. The essences of this action involve enhancing self-determination and developing competence and confidence. Under this practice the leader generates power all around by empowerment of people and creating a sense of control on the part of people. While traditional thought believes power is a fixed sum, Kouzes and Posner (2007) propose the paradox of giving away power to constituents, actually gives the leader more power.

Developing competence and confidence requires an up-front investment in developing people. As Sergiovanni (2005) proposes, this empowerment and strengthening of the heart allows schools and systems to lead and learn together. In addition, it requires giving people a voice in how the organization is run through team problem-solving training for effective decision-making. Kouzes and Posner's research data indicate that, as people are empowered and holding each other accountable for performance, confidence grows and matures in the organization.

6 Integration of the Whole/Systems Thinking

For Senge (2006), the Fifth Discipline of Systems Thinking integrates all disciplines into the whole and a coherent body of theory and practice. It is no accident that Senge names the fifth discipline Systems Thinking. He believes that, "it is vital that the five disciplines develop as an ensemble (p.11)." Without a systemic orientation, there is no motivation to see how the disciplines are interrelated. It keeps them from becoming the latest organizational change fad. Each discipline enhances and relies on the other, reminding us that the whole can exceed the sum of the parts (Senge, 2006).

According to Senge, systems thinking is a discipline for seeing the structures that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high and low leverage change (Senge, 2006, p.69). Moreover, it is the cornerstone that supports and enhances all of the five learning disciplines. Senge argues that in order for one to move from seeing only parts in linear fashion, one must undergo a shift in mind that allows us to see the whole.

This allows members of the organization to become active participants in shaping the future rather than being helpless reactive people.

Within the school and district, this discipline is perhaps the least understood and utilized. Given the continual exchange of leaders at the superintendent level, rarely does one observe an attempt to discern long-term consequences of a new initiative. In fact, the leader beginning the implementation is rarely still at the helm when the long-term effects are evident. As will be explained, most leaders today view change in a cause-effect, linear model. Simply stated, if this cause/event happens then in the future, we will see this effect. Our school and district leaders today must begin to view change as circles of influence and interaction, some of which can be understood through recurring structures or what Senge (2006) call archetypes.

The essences of this discipline involve the shift of mind to see interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and see the processes and dynamics of change rather than snapshots (Senge, 2006). By understanding a new definition of feedback, we can see how actions can reinforce or counteract one another. Through continual learning and observing the processes of feedback, we can see and recognize the recurring structures. However, because we are so predisposed to linear and straight-line thinking due to our language constructs, Senge opines that we cannot view reality as circles. This is a key understanding for beginners with systems thinking because the systems diagrams and archetypes are built on this premise. Once we understand and learn the new language, we can see the forest and the trees (Senge, 2006).

The practice of Encourage the Heart is the summative practice that ties all parts together in using the Kouzes and Posner (2007) transformative model. The purpose of this practice is to create a culture of celebration through recognition of excellence and celebration of the values and victories made possible by employing the five practices. This is all realized by expecting the best, personalizing recognition, being personally involved and creating a spirit of community (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) believe that high expectations shape our behavior and lead to high performance in the organization. These expectations focus the energy and allow goals to drive the organizational work. Feedback and encouragement keep us focused on the goals and needs of the organization under this practice. Feedback is always thoughtful and personal, contextual and special; departing from the routines of the past. Praise, thank you, and mentoring become the norms of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The leader is present, in close proximity, paying attention while building trust with teams and individuals.

In creation of the spirit of community, public ceremonies, recognitions and celebrations are planned. Again, they are contextual, reinforcing the shared values and outcomes of the organization. This also provides public support of "Do what we say we will do." (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p.313) In congruence with the Bolman & Deal (2008) strategies, stories are perpetual in recognizing organizational role models; teaching, motivating, and mobilizing members of the organization. Leaders at all levels in the organization are setting the example by Modeling the Way. Kouzes and Posner (2007) believe that the cycle of practices is hereby realized and regenerated again with Modeling the Way, allowing all five Exemplary Practices to enhance one another in developing effective leadership in the organization. Conclusions

The intent of this essay was to define and discuss five core leader dispositions that, when working together in concert, may enhance the establishment of the collaborative culture and improve organizational effectiveness. The author supported this thesis with the comparison of the evidence-based Five Exemplary Practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) and the highly regarded Five Disciplines (Senge, 2006). In addition, other leading perspectives in the leadership literature were included as appropriate and relevant to the discussion.

With the current global and national recession impacts on school district budgets, the economic health will continue to provide serious challenges for school organizations. Now more then ever it will be necessary to develop cultures of collaboration in our schools. School and district leaders modeling the five dispositions within this essay will certainly be advantaged over leaders using directive, top-down strategies. In the final analysis, it will be up to the reader to ascertain how this targeted research may fit within their school or district.

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