**A Short Primer on Shared Leadership**

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Shared leadership (SL) is a leadership strategy that exhibits the following characteristics (Kezar and Holcombe, 2017):

* Greater number of people involved
* Leader & follower roles are interchangeable
* Multiple perspectives and expertise are included
* Leadership is not necessarily based on position, and informal leaders can play a role
* Collaboration across the organization is emphasized

Further, it involves:

* A focus on identification of specific problems that need complex solutions
* A reflective study of the problem and identification and marshalling of the expertise needed to address it.
* A willingness to explore creative, unfamiliar options, and an openness to new ideas
* Inclusion of multiple perspectives and new voices.
* Provision of a supportive environment that encourages experimentation and risk-taking.
* Development of new patterns of interaction and communication that create capacity to solve complex problems.

It can be characterized as a shift from “me-based” leadership to “we-based” leadership. “Me-based” approaches are characterized by the leader defining the problem, assigning responsibility to individuals or groups, deciding how the problem will be solved, demands results and accountability by those assigned, and is in control of the process and the outcome. On the other hand, “we-based” approaches are characterized by the leader identifying the problem or area to be addressed then engaging a team in defining the problem in order to assign responsibility to a diverse team(s). The leader empowers and supports team to use multiple perspectives to come up with solutions, holds the team accountable and builds capacity for collaborative problem-solving.

Shared Leadership is not (for example):

* Establishing several task forces that involve lots of people without clear definition of the problem or development of shared goals
* Sending a team to a workshop or institute on a particular topic of interest to the university with no preparation, discussion or framing
* Deciding on an outcome, but before announcing the decision, asking people for their opinion and regardless of the input, moving forward with the original decision
* Conducting a survey to find out what people think about something

Shared leadership can take various forms that range from distributed models where various leaders are empowered across the organization, to a coordinated team effort to solve a systemic institutional problem, to a co-leader model. Ultimately shared leadership is a way of creating new collaborative structures to agree upon and more effectively achieve common outcomes, solve complex problems and reach shared goals.

**When Using SL is Most Effective**

Shared Leadership is best used for transformative change that involves complex challenges that require a significant expansion of individual and institutional capacities and new ways of working together (e.g., improving student success). It is best employed when there are complex problems that require multiple stakeholders to come together in order to understand and address the challenges. These challenges are multi-dimensional, cross-institutional and not quickly or easily solved by simple fixes. They take time to plan, implement and execute. Impact may also not be immediately apparent, and the stakes are usually high (budget implications, political ramifications, workload changes, community engagement, etc.).

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| **Type of Change** | **Description** | **SL Usefulness** |
| Routine | Challenges addressed by using well-practiced approaches (e.g., changes to policies to reflect easily solved problems) | Not necessary |
| Strategic | Challenges require planned out approaches (e.g., streamlining processes to remove unnecessary steps – LEAN) | Might be useful |
| Transformative | Complex challenges that require a significant expansion of individual and institutional capacities and new ways of working together (e.g., improving student success) | Definitely useful |

**Shared Governance and Shared Leadership Create a Balanced System**

Shared leadership and shared governance have inter-related, but different outcomes. Shared governance is typically aimed at setting institutional direction, making contributions to significant institutional decision-making, and collaborating on key policy development with authority delegated to different groups (e.g., faculty, administrators) and, in the end, holds institutional leaders accountable for reaching goals and following policy. Shared leadership may be viewed as a means to enact the policies and set a course for the direction. It is useful in implementation of university-wide goals, carrying out action across units, engendering shared responsibility for institutional priorities, making measurable progress on mission critical outcomes, and leads to significant institutional change and transformation.

Campuses may enjoy healthier campus climates when shared governance and shared leadership are operating effectively. Use of a SL model develops trust, promotes engagement in shared decision-making, takes a proactive approach and results in commitment by a broader group of stakeholders in meeting shared goals. SL may be a way to repair broken shared governance systems by engaging more faculty and staff in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving outside of the formal context of governance processes. That process builds trust and transparency, both of which are required for healthy shared governance. When SG is not healthy, it can result in a climate of skepticism, gatekeeping, reactiveness, and focus on compliance.

**Possible Outcomes & Benefits of Using SL**

*It may influence how people THINK and FEEL*

* Cognitive complexity (feel challenged)
* Increased individual satisfaction (feel valued)
* Stronger group cohesion (feel like they belong)
* Increased confidence and trust (feel positive)

*It may influence how people ACT*

* Increased social integration, brings new voices to the table
* Improved problem-solving
* Organizational citizenship behavior
* More constructive interaction styles
* Engagement across departments and levels of an organization
* Cultivates development of leadership capacity

*It may influence how organizations PERFORM*

* Improved managerial ratings of team performance
* Improved performance on specific work tasks
* Overall improved financial performance

*It may influence how organizations are LED*

* SL serves as a covert leadership development program by engaging emerging leaders in addressing significant institutional challenges
* If SL structures established, they may help buoy a campus in a leadership transition

**Potential Challenges in Introducing and Using SL**

* Can fail to address very real issues of conflict, power, and authority; need to address issues of faculty/staff rank amongst participants
* Bureaucratic organizational procedures or powerful groups within the organization can obstruct team progress
* Lack of structure or clearly defined roles and accountability can impede progress
* Individuals working together, particularly in close-knit teams, can develop groupthink
* Requires clear delineation of decision-making authority
* Takes time and resources to develop; may require shifts in workload as well as resource allocation models to support, in particular to sustain its use over the long term
* Not all members of senior leadership ranks use, understand or support an SL approach. This can lead to frustration by those in lower ranks or in informal leadership positions who are trying to use it.
* Often requires leadership from a positional or hierarchical leader (perhaps with a particular set of skills/capabilities) to get it going and to keep it going; takes persistence to maintain momentum; must be responsive to demands on time and effort of participants
* Requires some level of trust between the positional/titular leader promoting it and those participating in it
* Requires the establishment of shared goals, which takes time and collaboration to develop
* Training and education of faculty, staff and leaders to understand the approach and how to work within it; challenging to develop buy-in amongst faculty and staff participants

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