

Strategies for Categorical Change: Participatory Governance

Report of the Participatory Governance Focus Area Sustainable Communities Conference 2004 JULY 15 – 18, 2004

Sustainability Leadership: Co-Creating Sustainable Communities through Purposeful Conversations and Actions (Excerpted from the full report)

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The Sustainability Leadership Working Group explored the leadership required to make sustainability efforts effective and long-lasting in a community context. We uncovered inherent challenges of leading sustainability efforts and examined an expanded view of leadership that is particularly applicable to sustainability work.

People involved in creating more sustainable communities are required to engage community members in making decisions and taking actions that continually move them toward their goals. The complex nature of the integrated solutions required, and the complex dynamics of how people, organizations and communities change, call for a radically expanded view of leadership and a broader set of capabilities. Whole-systems thinking, enlarging the base of individual leaders of all kinds, engaging others in the process of generating unprecedented solutions within continually changing dynamics of everyday life are examples of the leadership practices required of the people seeking to co-create sustainable communities. Developing and applying these, and other, leadership capabilities will help to ensure a more successful journey for those within communities who are

pursuing solutions that result in sustainable economies, recovered ecologies and vibrant community life.

Background

Our working group, consisting of over 40 leaders and practitioners involved in sustainable community development, identified a wide range of leadership challenges that validated the degree to which leadership is a key factor in achieving successful results. The challenges we identified include the following:

- Creating a common vision and communicating that vision across a community is difficult.
 - We do not speak with a united voice on sustainability issues.
 - People have strong opinions but don't delve enough into the other side; instead, they tend to categorize people as "evil," whereas, we are just well-intended, mistake-making humans. Fighting anger with anger just doesn't work.
 - Finding common ground for the truly evocative/generative conversations that need to happen is a challenge – even when people *want* to talk about sustainability but don't know how to get conversation going.
 - It's hard to bring complementary but different interests together into an organization.
- Working towards sustainable initiatives often requires people and organizations to make significant changes in their operations, supplier and customer dealings.

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- Funding agencies tend not to understand the “real people” they are dealing and the issues they face at the local level.
- Our public agency’s “zero waste” plan is long-term which will require new roles/culture internally.
- It is difficult to express one’s own leadership style in a conservative hierarchical organization.
- Designated leaders do not always lead effectively for a variety of reasons.
 - Public leaders don’t always understand their role as conveners as well as policy makers.
 - Boards are comprised of individuals with varied interests and agendas.
 - Existing leaders don’t perceive the need for, or value of, their own and others ongoing leadership capacity development
- Orchestrating efforts towards common goals in a city or community is challenging.
 - Working across multiple organizations and agencies is difficult.
 - Community stakeholders and goals are diverse; at the same time, agencies’ goals require evidence of private/public cooperation.
 - Insuring appropriate continuity of sustainability initiatives over time requires vigilance.
 - Too many initiatives are great ideas but are not well coordinated with other great initiatives, thus can compromise optimal results.
- Organizations and businesses can have the best intentions, but struggle because of limited resources.

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- Stepping out of core business activities to learn new things creates “voluntary” overload and needs selective evaluation of what new can be taken on with optimal impact.
- Notable sustainability results are coming out of small- and medium-sized enterprises. But these efforts are disorganized, often working in remote areas (i.e., rainforests) and have difficulty accessing funding resources designated for such aid programs. The challenge is for SMEs to organize themselves for greater funding potential.
- Even when a CEO commits to addressing the livable/sustainable communities challenge, the decision creates multiple organizational issues, i.e., the application of the high level concept is difficult when members want the work justified.
- Developing leadership capacity in communities is challenging.
 - Community leadership means different things to different people.
 - While being in a “leadership” role I chafe at being looked to as “the leader” when, in fact, I want people to take up their own leadership roles.
 - It’s hard to feel confident as a leader of a new venture outside one’s profession....even though I know its ok to not know all the answers.
 - Communities have all the sustainability challenges but no tools for dealing with them.
 - Socially challenged people need help taking responsibility and becoming leaders.

- People trained from especially vulnerable groups slip into “bossing people around” practices and seem to lose their ability/willingness to put new leadership learning into practice.

In addition to uncovering the inherent challenges of leading sustainability efforts, the group also examined different organizational systems perspectives that affect our views about how the world operates, and how people change and, therefore, what leadership practices are most effective. An excerpt from one of the assigned readings (Ferdig, 2004) provides some background.

Implied in our traditional view of leadership are assumptions about how people and organizations change and the role a leader plays in the process of change. Traditionally, we view change as a linear process, moving from one state of equilibrium (the old way), through a period of disequilibrium and turbulence (transition), to a different state of equilibrium (the new way). We assume that, if the change process is managed well, the end state and the steps required to get there are defined before the changes are initiated, thereby, minimizing the disruptive effects of the transition period. This model of change management is grounded in early theories of scientific management derived from Newtonian physics, in which human systems are modeled after machines. Organizational structures are designed for optimal control of each component. Specialization and efficiency are engineered into work processes. And, a good leader (or leadership team) manages change; well-managed change is *planned, rational, top-down* and

expert-driven. This view of leadership and change makes sense in reasonably predictable internal and external environments.

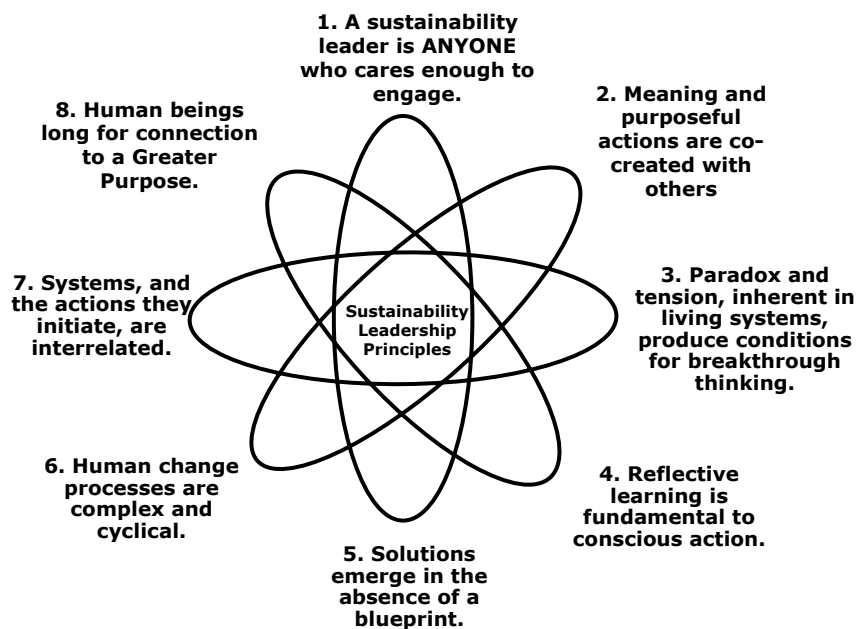
Today's world is growing increasingly less predictable. Accelerated changes and uncertainty have become the norm in our everyday experiences. Most of us can describe the various "systems" of which we are a part (i.e., our families, workplaces, professional organizations, communities, local and national governments) as increasingly complex. Often, the more tumultuous our experiences, the more we grasp for leaders with certain and clear answers, and the more we tend to cling to the rational models of managed change that have served us in the past.

Newer models of leadership and change are grounded in discoveries in quantum physics, chemistry, and biological research. Scientists are learning that systems are much more fluid, unpredictable and complex than traditional mechanistic models have assumed. Instead of stable entities that function according to rational, linear patterns of movement toward relatively predictable outcomes, scientists now know that physical, biological and social systems are dynamic, paradoxical networks of interdependent subsystems that cannot be controlled or predicted with any degree of certainty. Change at any level of a system or subsystem is described as continuous, self-organizing and adaptive. Incremental, and sometimes radical, transformations are triggered by changes in a system's internal and external environments. It is the diversity and paradoxical behavior of system components that creates disequilibrium or "heat" (sometimes referred to as

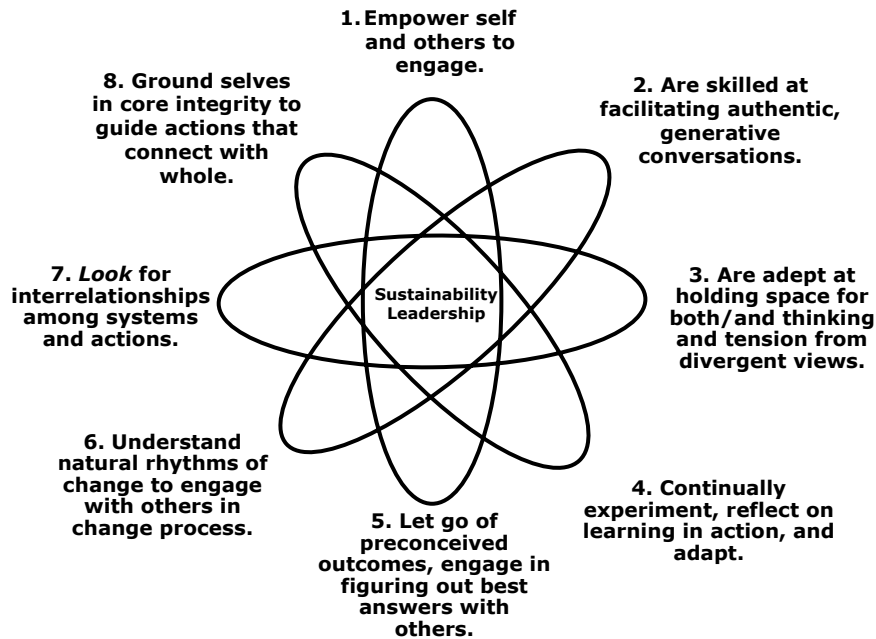
chaos) that results in the potential for a shift to a new mental model in social systems, analogous to a shift in the structure of a chemical system revealed in Prigogine's scientific experiments (1996). The ebb and flow of responses to unpredictable patterns of change are natural characteristics of healthy, self-organizing systems.

In our groups' examination of mechanistic versus a self-organizing views of human systems, it was clear that we all had experienced our world as complex, turbulent and self-organizing in spite of our efforts to predict and control. From there, we examined more closely the leadership principles and practices that could be derived from these established theories of self-organizing systems. A reprint, below, from the working groups' handouts summarizes the eight Sustainability Leadership principles and the corresponding leadership practices that put the principles in play at an application level.

Sustainability Leadership Principles



Corresponding Sustainability Leadership Practices



Our working group dialogue was full of examples and stories where these dynamics were played out time and time again in the work of co-creating sustainable solutions for organizations and communities. Key questions centered around how to apply this approach in hierarchical organizations as well as those with dominant power (i.e., NGO's and multinational corporations) that are not necessarily interested a highly skilled collaborative and self-organizing approach to leadership. Our group agreed that these and other substantial questions deserved further exploration in our dialogue, but we were unable to pursue them at length due to time constraints. If we had more time, the dialogue might have covered the following topics:

- Sustainability frameworks that incorporate whole systems thinking and determine their appropriate application and value such as the Natural Step and Natural Capitalism
- The connections between leaders' beliefs of how people change and their actions.
- Risk-taking strategies, strategic partnerships and power dynamics involved in leading sustainability efforts
- Strategies to interrupt existing patterns that serve to galvanize the status quo
- The group's ideas of how to invite, engage, construct and participate in constructive conversations
- Working with paradox and ambiguity
- Discuss strategies that make sustainability relevant to all stakeholders

Results

During the dialog it was clear that there were many questions, insights and new directions that warranted further exploration, yet there were many useful findings that came out of this time together.

Validation of Leadership Approach

Through discussions of the sustainability leadership principles and practices, the working group validated the sustainability leadership approach, finding it relevant to their individual experiences as leaders. The group also found that the complex nature of sustainability challenges did, indeed, call for an expanded view of leadership grounded in complexity and self-organizing principles. As the group examined the approach in depth, they found they not only resonated with many of the concepts but found it useful to have them assembled in a holistic model.

Translation to Tangible Applications

Once the group validated the approach, individual participants immediately began to explore how the principles and practices applied to their current work situations. This aspect of the dialogue set the context for the entire group to think about application examples, thus increasing everyone's knowledge and understanding of how best to apply the principles in similar settings.

Sharing this Approach with Others

The group also determined this leadership approach would be valuable to a wide audience, including members of their communities and organizations. They explored how leadership capacity-building training programs, as well as other learning events and experiences, could be offered to a wide variety of individuals and organizations.

Refining the Model

The working group identified the need to flesh out the 18 capabilities developed to support the eight Sustainability Leadership Principles and Practices in ways that would make them more accessible to practicing leaders. Examples included: expanding the list of capabilities to accommodate nuanced variations that come up in the discussions, developing fuller descriptions and application examples for each of the 18 capabilities, re-combining or structuring them differently in relation to the Sustainability Leadership Principles and Practices.

Recommendations

Through the dialogue and final reflection time the following recommendations were collected.

1. Increase our understanding of the many creative ways in which people can translate the proposed sustainability leadership approach to actions in their organizations and communities.
2. Continue to uncover and understand the complex challenges and inter-relationships inherent in sustainability work.
3. Collect case studies that illustrate how sustainability leaders are learning to apply this approach in traditionally hierarchal organizations.
4. Develop tools that enable people to apply the sustainability leadership principles and practices in their specific situation.
5. Take responsibility for building one's own leadership capability by experimenting with the principles and personalized actions that make sense in each unique situation, adjusting as needed when new information comes to light, sharing the learnings with others, and modeling the process in ways others can learn to emulate.
6. Develop capacity-building opportunities so more people can learn how to be sustainability leaders.
7. Recognize that a sustainability leader is never "developed;" the complex nature of local and global sustainability challenges requires continuous experimentation, learning and adaptation.

While our group did not have time to fully develop a set of recommendations for implementing the Sustainability Leadership model, it is fair to say there was overall consensus that further work must be done by all of us to expand understanding and knowledge of the sustainability leadership model needed to build more sustainable communities.

Participatory Governance Focus Area: Results and Recommendations

Each participant was asked to share their most pressing question about sustainable participation. Four thematic questions emerged from this brainstorm: (1) How do we design collaborative processes where there are disparate values? (2) How do we engage governments to value and embrace participatory governance? (3) How do we encourage and/or incorporate the involvement and participation of historically under-represented groups, including people of color, new residents to the US, and low to moderate income earning individuals? (4) How do we provide a framework for Sustainability Leadership?

The tenets of the suggested strategies were identified by the participants, who have successfully incorporated these strategies in their wide-world work. They self-identified as experienced development professionals able to answer these questions and migrated to different brainstorming groups.

How do we design Collaborative Processes where there are disparate values?

- Work hard to find common values. People have a lot more in common than they think.
- Work together with respect; create a safe space where people feel comfortable expressing their views.
- Find areas of long-term common vision—where people see themselves in the future

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- Help motivate people to come together; e.g. how their participation in the process can help them—self development
- Invite other opinions to your circle
- Expand common views; place areas of disagreement in the larger context of what you agree upon
- Express your views
- Individuals have a willingness to give their consent even if they are not in 100% agreement—but want the process to move forward
- Be tolerant of other opinions
- Establish on –going community structure for multi-stakeholder/diverse perspectives dialogue; e.g. working groups.
- Help build strong leadership for collaborative processes
- Agree at outset of collaborative process on set of procedures for working together; e.g. decision-making, conflict resolution, etc. **Before you start doing anything!!!**

How do we engage governments to value and embrace participatory governance?

- Identify who/where has power & target them
- Through the election process
- Funding attached to a process that requires broad representation, this becomes an education process for government officials
- Teach leadership skills through grassroots involvement
- Use the land use laws, e.g. zoning & other legal authority, to exercise the power you have
- Hold leaders accountable & make them responsible for working with us

- Celebrate & broadcast successes
- Cultivate leaders from the grassroots and promote them

How do we get people involved? Specifically, incorporating and encouraging participation of under-represented groups?

- Going to where people are and begin conversations
- Finding where people are coming from (perspective)
- Empower individuals to believe in themselves and that their involvement evokes change
- Create questions that encourage open-ended and reflective thinking
- Go to the children within the groups, teach and support them
- Serve food

Sustainability Leadership: How do we do it?

- Other sustainability models & frameworks need to also include engagement of community
- Tangible examples (results & outcomes)
- Engage young people into participatory leadership opportunities
- Find the doorways into the business sector (use tangible examples)
- Find ways to make sustainability relevant to others using their language & criteria
- Start discussions about what we all mean by sustainability
- Think holistically & consciously
- Finding ways to maintain people's interest

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- Read case studies of how other leaders are “doing” it
- Staying in the present
- Learn ways to engage more people into leadership
- Create new spaces for leaders/expand existing spaces for new leaders
- Open the heart, sets the tone, makes the space (authentic is another word)
- Find funding to nurture growing entrepreneurs who are practicing this type of leadership
(e.g. ASHOKA)

These recommendations are based in strategies in which participants have found success in applied community development.

To share our nurtured and sated spirits, we worked toward consensus to identify a way to report to the broader Sustainable Communities Conference participants what we learned during our working group sessions. In order to most accurately represent our growth, connectedness and brilliance, Paul Kervick, of Awakening Sanctuaries, nobly recited a speech from a Hopi elder to his Nation (see Appendix F).

Participatory Governance participants then shared a word that represented the inspiration with which they will return to their homes. Among these words were “hope”, “trust”, “vision”, “leadership” and “honesty”. We learned that technique can be important while working with neighborhood and community groups, but how well we listen, and encourage others to listen, will be of greater impact and significance.

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For more information about the principles of Sociocracy, visit the Sociocracy website at <http://www.twinoaks.org/clubs/sociocracy>.

For more information on principles and practices see Sustainability Leadership Institute's website at www.sustainabilityleadershipinstitute.org

For more information about the Center for Community and Neighborhoods/Community and Economic Development Office, visit www.cedoburlington.org.

Biography of Contributors

Christie Binzen, M Ed., Prevention and Community Development Program, Woodbury College is an experienced director of community-based non-profit prevention programs with a long term background in early childhood and family support work.

Mary A. Ferdig, Ph.D., Ferdig, Inc., Omaha, Nebraska, is an organizational development and change consultant with 25 years of experience in business, primarily utilities, and nonprofit arenas. Mary's research emphasis is leadership and social change; she is currently a faculty associate at University of Nebraska (Omaha), Benedictine University (Chicago), and the Complexity Management Center, University of Hertfordshire (London). Mary is a founder and co-director of the Sustainability Leadership Institute and heads up the Midwestern Regional Office.

Christopher Juniper, COO/Sr. Consultant, Natural Capitalism, Inc., Boulder Colorado, is a sustainability economist with over 12 years experience serving communities and states as an economic development manager, he has also launched three successful business startups. Formerly with the Rocky Mountain Institute, Christopher he currently consults with businesses, government organizations and communities engaged in the sustainability challenge, and teaches sustainable economics at Colorado College. Christopher is a founder and co-director of the Sustainability Leadership Institute and heads up the Western Regional Office.

Monica McKenna, Learning Technologies, Cornwall, Vermont, is a management development consultant with over 20 years experience designing training and development programs for all levels of the workforce, from top level management to entry level employees in both large and small scale organizations. She has particular experience with the finance, software development, healthcare, energy utility and nonprofit sectors. Monica is a founder and co-director of the Sustainability Leadership Institute and heads up the Eastern Regional Office.

Organization Background Information

The Sustainability Leadership Institute is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to developing leadership capacity in local, national and international organizations and communities to support the work required to create a more sustainable economic, environmental and social future. The organization focuses its attention in three areas: 1) ongoing research to identify and develop understanding of the particular leadership capabilities needed to engage in a meaningful sustainability agenda; 2) development and presentation of learning resources and program curriculum uniquely designed for, and offered in partnership with, academic, community and business institutions; 3) consulting support to leaders and leadership groups who are developing and implementing sustainability strategies with others.

Woodbury College is an adult-focused, accredited college specializing in preparing people for careers in the legal, human services, community development, and conflict management fields. Woodbury offers Associate Degrees, Bachelor Degrees and Professional Certificates. In the Prevention and Community Development Program, students learn to build upon individual and

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community strengths to foster health and well-being and reduce the incidence of substance abuse, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, truancy and other destructive behaviors. The PCD program includes an emphasis on experiential, community-based learning. The Dispute Resolution Center offers trainings and services for schools and communities in mediation, meeting facilitation, and conflict resolution.