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Leaders and Culture: "Remarkable, Perilous, or Toxic"

Session II

There's that word: "Culture"!

- Famously amorphous concept – everywhere, but intangible; soft, but obdurate; preoccupation and frustration; easy to blame or credit, hard to change.

- Guidance from the LASSCA planners on your behalf brought these questions to the table:

  - How to intentionally develop culture of collaboration?
  - Show to shape, promote, sustain healthy culture in Lasallian schools?
  - How to work with different generations of educators?

Approaching the Questions

- The path for this session involves input and dialogue in this sequence:
  - Understanding culture as a social and religious reality and identifying its features in Lasallian Schools
  - Focusing on the influence of leader behavior on culture
  - Force Field Analysis
  - Advice for the Road

Culture is multiply-determined

☐ In the organization behavior and sociological literature, culture is a complex resultant reality created by the interactions of many factors.

☐ The multiple determinants means that it is not possible to link one intervention to a specific change in a culture.

Culture is legitimating

☐ In tacit ways, often out of awareness, culture defines what is normal, what is acceptable behavior, what is valued, how things are done around here.

☐ The taken-for-granted nature of a culture makes it especially difficult for organization members to perceive alternative possibilities for behavior.

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Culture reflects lived values

- The culture of an organization reflects its **values and assumptions in-action** (not necessarily just espoused).

- Cultures do change over time; some factors are known to be more significant than others in changing culture, especially leader behavior.

Culture is generational and ethnic

- People bring to their workplace cultures the assumptions and preferences that mark their generation, race, religious and ethnic identities.

- The obvious differences are easier to negotiate because they can at least be named and validated.

- The challenging ones come in disguise, arising as a judgment of an "inappropriate" action or attitude.

Culture is resilient

☐ Unless crystallized in "a moment you can't ignore"[5] cultural resilience can defeat any number of attempts at change.

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Cultures Are Not Easy To Change

- Because cultures are resilient, they can develop "resistance" or "immunity" to change at various levels. (Resistance = protection of something valued)

- If you want to change the culture in some way, four types of resistance can surface:
  - Realistic resistance – Here's what could go wrong.
  - Emotion and anxiety – What happens to me or friends?
  - Political concerns – Who will have influence? What will the power players do?
  - New skills and behavior – Do we know how to carry out the desired change?

Cultural Context of Schools

- A technologically-sophisticated world puts pressure on the school culture to keep pace, provide value, be nimble and responsive.

- "Thinner" and more polarized religious-ethical cultures in family and neighborhood leave schools as sources of moral, ethical, spiritual, democratic values.

Catholic Culture in Flux

- Religiously-sponsored Catholic ministries in the US walk the balance beam of Church teaching and secular society rights and mores.

- Catholic culture, the magisterium, individual conscience, and communal discernment are no longer as aligned as once was true.

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Lasallian Schools and Brothers

- The changes in religious vocation patterns generate critical questions:

  - **As there are fewer vowed Brothers and more lay leaders in the schools, will the culture of the Lasallian school retain its distinctive character?**

  - **Can this Lasallian culture be transmitted *past* one, two, three+ generations of lay Lasallians?**

  - **What _IS_ the distinctive character of a Lasallian school culture?**

Identifying Culture…an exercise

☐ At your tables – reflect, then share:

*"If you arrived from a foreign land and observed my Lasallian school, you would notice these behaviors that we think are **distinctive** of our school culture:*

_____ *"*

*"How do the behaviors of this distinctive culture shape **inter-generational relationships? Collaboration? Faith?"** Are these influences good, or do you think they should be changed?*

Query Your Experience

□ What learnings are emerging?

□ How easy or hard is it to assess your own school culture? To "see" the culture of someone else's school?

What is your intention?

☐ What is it about the culture that you want to **retain** and transmit in the face of a changing external environment?

☐ What is it about the culture that you would like to **change**?

Keep this intention in front of you for the next round of table work in a few minutes…

How to Impact Culture

☐ Although many initiatives can impact culture, and although a combination of initiatives might have the most staying power, there are several kinds of interventions that have considerable heft in the workplace:

1. **Leader behavior**: What the leaders notice, value, dislike, speak about, live by; how they react in crisis.

2. **Reward systems**: What is (reliably) positively rewarded; what brings negative consequences.

3. **Member participation** : Initiatives or decisions flowing from the voluntary engagement of system members.

Focusing on Leader Behavior

- <u>Leader behavior salience</u> is an ancient, unconscious, primate orientation. It cannot be evaded -- even in officially "leaderless" groups, which produce their own dynamics of deference.

- Given the psycho-social challenges of a high-velocity, hyper-connected world (remember them?) – leaders of organizations carry extra burdens to provide confidence, security, containment, and reliable direction.

- Emotional intelligence <u>and</u> professional competence are <u>both</u> necessary.

A word about "EQ"

- Emotional Intelligence, or EQ = self-awareness, self-regulation (aka negative capability) , motivation, empathy, and social skill.

- Often recognized in women leaders, and valued in both men and women leaders of nonprofit and faith-based enterprises.

- Spiritual maturity is linked to psychological maturity.

A Continuum of Leader Behavior

- Research on leader ability to access <u>both</u> emotional intelligence (EQ) and professional abilities yields a continuum with three descriptors[6]
  - **Remarkable**
  - **Perilous**
  - **Toxic**

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Remarkable

- **When a leader operates from the Remarkable stance, he or she is:**
  - Displaying well developed emotional intelligence (EQ)
  - Psychologically well-adjusted
  - Managing people and the enterprise well
  - Productively narcissistic
  - Good at mentoring.

  Remarkable leaders exert a positive influence on culture.
  Professional skills and competencies are a given.

Perilous

- **When a leader operates from the Perilous stance, her or she is**
  - Displaying average EQ
  - Shows variable psychological adjustment
  - Manages people less well than the enterprise
  - Impaired by unfulfilled desires or insecurity
  - Disinclined to nurture others.

The cultural influence of Perilous leadership is variable.

Potential trap: professional skills and competencies are stronger than ability to lead the people.

Toxic

- **When a leader operates from the Toxic stance, he or she is:**
  - Demonstrating poor EQ,
  - Achieving highly erratic results and poor people management,
  - Unproductively narcissistic
  - Potentially facing serious work and personal issues.

Toxic leadership has a very negative impact on culture.

Sooner or later this undermines professional skills and competencies also.

Destination: Remarkables!

- *Toxic* leader behavior is very difficult to modify in the short term – better understood as a selection filter or a de-selection criterion.

- *Remarkable* leader behavior deserves every kind of affirmation and reinforcement.

- Most of us can be found in the task of **moving** Perilous leader behavior **towards** the Remarkable side of the continuum.

Developing the Remarkable

☐ **Inner work = increasing one's capacity for emotional intelligence by addressing personal issues that give rise to insecurity, resentment, or fear, releasing the blocks to valuing others.**

☐ Accomplished through:

- ☐ Wise supervision and mentoring

- ☐ Spiritual direction, coaching, prayer

- ☐ Professional development programs that incorporate personal growth.

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Leaders Who Impact Culture…

□ A wide literature on leadership points to the kinds of actions and methods that emotionally intelligent leaders use to address issues and shape the culture. Some of these are:

  ▪ Collaborative Authority

  ▪ Practicing Adaptive vs Technical Leadership

  ▪ Finding the Future in the Present

  ▪ Empowering Narratives

Leading Collaborative Cultures

- Since organizational cultures are less and less oriented to hierarchical authority:
  - **Give authority in order to get authority back**; use more distributed and collaborative decision making.
  - Move from "Command and Control" to "Command and Collaborate"; wise use of authority.[5]
  - Move from **Push to Pull** – mobilize energy around attractive, compelling purposes or initiatives – connect to passion and shared sense of mission.
  - Bring the horizon of the organization into view (mission).

Adaptive vs Technical Leadership

- <u>Technical</u> leadership offers knowledge and solutions to problems that are understood, no matter how complex they might be. *(I observe that educators are prone to value this highly, esp. in higher educ.)*

- <u>Adaptive</u> leadership helps people address problems for which solutions are not known or are intrinsically complex and changing[7].

- Adjust the "heat" and keep as much of the work as is fair in the hands of those who should/do own it.

Finding the Future in the Present

- Most organizations have a few people or places or projects that contain the innovative seeds of the future in some partial form.

- Notice creative difference and recognize potential. Don't co-opt innovations too soon – go to the margins to learn! ("Found pilots"[5])

- Identify the essence of Lasallian cultural attributes, and be open to their expression in new or unexpected forms.

- Intentionally highlight generationally-different gifts.

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Empowering Narratives

- "Good enough" emotional containment of anxiety by leaders permits organizations to move out of victim and dependency modes into positive action.

- The language of complaint and blame can be replaced with the narrative of commitment and responsibility[8] for the greater good.

- The deepest and largest container of anxiety for a ministry is trust in the Providence of God.

Application Laboratory

□ Reflect, then agree with table mates:

- ❑ What is an example of an aspect of culture that needs support in many/most Lasallian schools?

- ❑ Create a force field diagram that identifies the factors that constrain and the factors that support the desired culture.

- ❑ What actions would you recommend to the leaders of the school?

Force Field Chart

Resisting Forces

DESIRED CULTURE

Supporting Forces
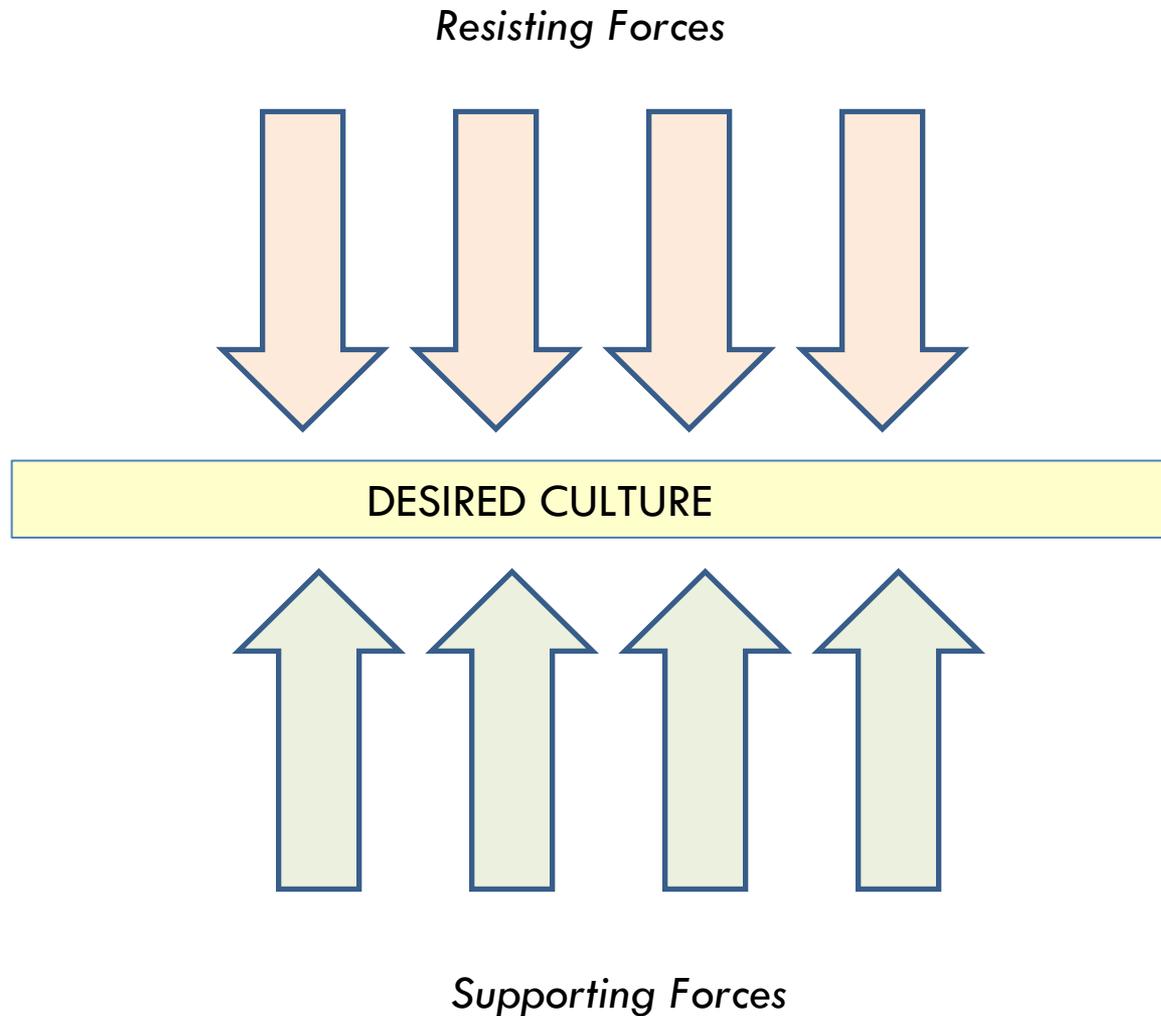
Advisories Along the Road

☐ Cultural impact takes time and <u>patience</u> and great deal of observation and <u>listening</u>. From the "natives" viewpoint, the behavior you want to change may seem reasonable and necessary.

Advisories Along the Road

- <u>Build on the positive</u> whenever possible. It is much easier to bring cultural strengths to a problem than to attempt wholesale change first.

Advisories Along the Road

- ☐ If you…
  - ☐ respect culture,
  - ☐ stand up responsibly to the critical tasks of the organization's mission,
  - ☐ distribute leadership to other players
- ☐ …a healthy, collaborative culture <u>will take care of itself</u>.

Validation …

- The importance of emotional intelligence, negative capability, spiritual maturity for leadership in ministry is not new to you.

- The take-away point is that these attributes are essential to leadership during times of turbulence, instability, or evolution – not "nice-to-have" peculiarities of the nonprofit world".

… and Courage

- Courage means marshalling the self-confidence to lead:
  - with full energy but without dominance over others,
  - with strong and reliable "holding" of the mission and the challenges,
  - with respectful invitation to the contributions of others.

Faith and trust in God undergird the ministry leader.

Notes for Session 2

1. **"In Over Our Heads,"** Robert Kegan, 1994

2. **"What You Don't Know You Know,"** Kenneth Eisold, 2010

3. <u>Negative Capability, Dispersal, and the Containment of Emotion</u>" Robert French, 2000, **Int'l Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations,** London Symposium

4. **"The Workplace Within,"** Larry Hirschhorn, 1990

5. **"The Moment You Can't Ignore: When Big Trouble Leads to a Great Future,"** M. O'Connor and B. Dornfeld, 2014

6. "<u>Patterns of leadership behaviour: Implications for successful executive coaching outcomes</u>", Karol M. Wasylyshyn, Hal S. Shorey & Jason S. Chaffin, 2012, **Coaching Psychologist**

7. **"Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading"** Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, 2002

8. **"How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work "** Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, 2001