



***Developing leadership for global
impact in postgraduate education***

Summary Report from the
Imperial College London
Graduate School
Roundtable Debate on
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Introduction

This report is the outcome of our 2019 Annual Roundtable Debate on ‘Developing leadership for global impact in postgraduate education’. It took place on 25 October 2019 at Imperial College London. The roundtable debate brought together representatives from different sectors including the Wellcome Trust, UK Council for Graduate Education, Advance HE, VITAE, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry, Engineering Council, University of Cambridge, University College London, Brunel University and Imperial College London. The full list of contributors is presented at the end. To set the scene, Dr Louise Drake (figure 1) presented an approach to leadership development advocated at the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL).



Figure 1: Dr Louise Drake

Global context

The current global context drives the need for a change in our approach to leadership development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide us with a clear vision for the future and they



Figure 2: Framing leadership in the global context giving need for a new approach

should be considered within the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution driven by Digital Data and Artificial Intelligence. With the accelerated use of resources, climate instability, concerns about a sixth mass extinction, and growing inequality, the Global SDGs will not be achieved if we do not adopt transformative approaches. We need to rethink the economy and business mindset, as well as the concept of impactful leadership. There is a need for ‘system-level’ change – fundamentally at the level of values and mental models regarding the relationship between humans and nature – which is an ambitious task but the reason why leadership is so important. As a society, we need to embrace a purpose that is relevant and scaled to the challenge we are facing. We need to maintain a ‘safe and just’ space for humanity where we can satisfy basic needs and consider long-term wellbeing. This presents us with the questions such as: “what is the purpose of the economy?” and “How can we rewire it to promote long-term planetary well-being?” Answering these questions is challenging because of the complexity of the systems of which we are part, the challenge of working with an uncertain future, and multiple value systems across different systems and societies.

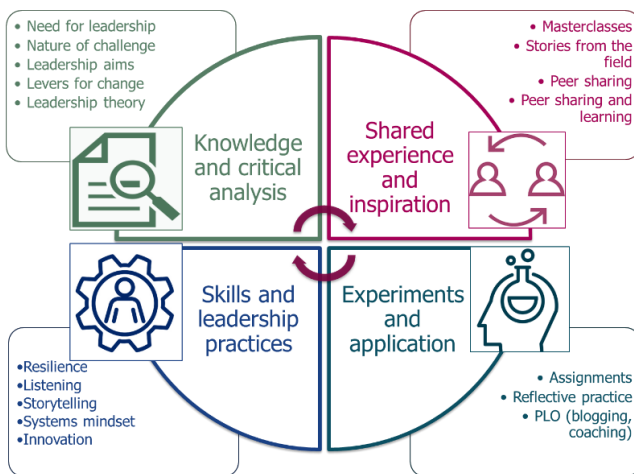
Leadership as collective action versus a role

As educators, it is critical to move away from the ‘heroic individual’ model of leadership as success in this global context depends on communities of people, not on one person. Followers also have agency and effective leadership is constructed from interactions amongst those leading and following. A collective, ‘constructionist’ understanding of leadership is likely to be better suited to addressing the

complex, ‘wicked’ problems that we face. Developing a shared purpose that in effect becomes ‘the invisible leader’ is important in enabling collective impact.

Transformational Learning for postgraduates

We need to encourage a change in perspective for postgraduates to develop the appropriate leadership skills. They need to explore and expand how knowledge and practice may have global impact. We need to provide an environment for transformative learning to shift the ‘group-thinking’. Rather than thinking about *teaching* leadership, our role could be to create spaces where postgraduates can *learn* about leadership, which includes reflecting on their daily practice outside of



the ‘classroom’ as reflective practitioners. There is a need to provide ‘scaffolding’ for an on-going conversation. Furthermore, we should embrace how the arts, humanities and social sciences can be part of the leadership process. Reflecting on cultures and historical changes help us and our postgraduates to understand what is happening now and what might happen in the future.

The framework presented in figure 3 is one approach adopted by CISL for developing leadership amongst postgraduates.

Figure 3: 4 Domains of Leadership Development Model (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), 2018)

The four domains of learning comprise:

- Knowledge and critical analysis
 - o Understanding leadership theory and levers for change and developing the skills to navigate a complex knowledge base.
- Skills and leadership practices e.g. listening, story-telling, psychological safety and personal resilience
 - o Practising and developing such skills in a safe environment where is ok to try things and maybe fail.
- Experiments and application:
 - o Innovating, implementing changes, reflecting and analysing as part of an ‘action inquiry’ learning approach.
- Shared experience and inspiration e.g. peer-learning, peer-sharing, peer-discussions
 - o Reinforcing shared purpose, the collective nature of leadership, and creating a community of practice which is sustained.

To conclude the debate, a range of reflections were offered on the implications for individuals seeking to develop their leadership capacity.

Authenticity

...authenticity is crucial when operating in an interconnected world in which organisations function like communities. Therefore, helping individual leaders to grow “who they are” needs to become the primary goal of leadership development...”
(Guglielmo and Palsule, 2014 The Social Leader)

It is essential to discuss and promote authenticity in the context of global leadership. We are in a social era, with global and connected communities. In this context, transparency and authenticity are core to effective leadership. Authenticity is important because a social leader deals with fast propagation of information, e.g. through social media. In this situation, a leader cannot play the ‘game face’ anymore (Guglielmo and Palsule, 2014). Equally, in the context of collective leadership,

individuals do not have to embody every desirable leadership capability, but rather can seek to leverage the influence and effectiveness of others, whilst seeking to be the best version of themselves.

Adaptive Capacity

Adaptative capacity (Sterling, 2010) is about nurturing the ability for continuous learning, sound judgement and personal resilience in a complex and uncertain future (Vare and Scott, 2007; 2008). This social process, associated with the concept of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), encourages learners to continuously develop skills, abilities, and expertise and to take actions to improve the quality of life and environmental conditions in the uncertain future.

‘Adaptive capacity’ (Sterling, 2010: 515)

“...the development of learners’ abilities to make sound choices in the face of uncertainty and complexity of the future”
(Vare and Scott, 2008: 3)

Agency

“Head, hands and heart...resulting in profound changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes related to enhancing ecological, social and economic justice”
(Sipos et al, 2008: 74)

Higher education has tended to privilege cognitive learning (head knowledge) but when cognitive, psychomotor (skills, practices) and affective (values and emotions) learning domains are engaged, transformative learning happens and learners develop group responsibilities and goals (Mezirow, 1997). Nurturing a sense of agency and responsibility amongst individuals is important. This sense of agency supports and promotes changes required by the group, while working together with

the group (CISL, 2018). In this social era, agency is collaborative: all participants are actively involved in deciding actions; identification of resources and potential partners; encouraging contribution and reflection. In this context, leaders facilitate the sharing of knowledge (Raelin, 2016) and are part of an on-going learning community.

Impact

The roundtable debate identified key aspects leading to a reframing of leadership:

- From heroic leader to **collective and constructivism** view of leadership.
- From vision to **shared purpose**. With a shared purpose the collective leadership will drive change together.
- From resilience to **adaptive capacity**. Building adaptive capacity in students and staff as leaders will enable everyone in handling complexity and uncertainty.
- From established model of leadership development to a **transformative model** of leadership development to change perspectives and mindsets.

The debate provided ways forward for engagement with postgraduates on the leadership debate. Notably, the discussion provided new insights for Imperial College's Global Fellows Programme and the Professional Bodies' descriptors for chartership.

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