Capturing the Promise of Collaborative Leadership and Becoming a Pluralistic Leader: Using Case Stories to Transform Beliefs

Adrianna Kezar

Abstract

Metropolitan leaders need to respond to and embrace the diversity within the community, students, staff, faculty, and administration. Developing skills as a pluralistic leader is critical for urban leaders of the twenty-first century. Three principles can facilitate the development of pluralistic leaders: (1) an awareness of how identity and power impact leadership beliefs; (2) an acknowledgment of multiple interpretations of institutional leadership and personal philosophies of leadership; and, (3) an opportunity for negotiation among multiple interpretations of institutional leadership and personal philosophies of leadership. This article illustrates the way case stories can be used as a professional development tool for promoting collaborative leadership and creating pluralistic leaders.

Throughout this volume, authors note the need for leaders who engage multiple constituents, who understand different stakeholders needs, and who develop collaborative or shared governance, planning, and decision-making processes. A key element that is missing from these articles is how individual leaders can develop the skills necessary to conduct this important leadership work. This article illustrates the way case stories can be used as a professional development tool for promoting collaborative leadership and creating pluralistic leaders in higher education. Pluralistic leaders produce an environment that values diversity, draws on the collective voices and resources of the campus, fully integrates all cultures into the organizational structure, minimizes institutional cultural bias, and reduces inter-group conflict (Cox 1993). There is a great need to train faculty, staff, administrators, and students in this form of leadership since it has been illustrated to have so many benefits over traditional leadership on campus.

Traditional leadership practices tend to represent one of two styles: (1) presidential and administrative leadership tend to be authoritarian, hierarchical, control oriented, and position based with one-way notions of power; or (2) faculty leadership characterized by collectivism, management by majority or consensus (Bensimon and Neumann 1993; Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum 1989). Neither of these models is truly collabora-

tive, nor do they help to incorporate the growing diversity of voices on college campuses due to the increase of women, people of color, and those from varying socio-economic classes. In the last two decades, collaborative forms of leadership have been advocated and appear to have the potential to foster an inclusive environment (Astin and Leland 1991). Studies of this form of leadership, however, have shown that all identity groups and roles are often not given the opportunity to contribute to the leadership process (Kezar 1996; 1998b). The challenge is to capture the promise of collaborative leadership. This article suggests that collaborative models do not provide enough guidance about incorporating diverse voices and suggests a new set of principles entitled "pluralistic leadership."

Metropolitan universities, in particular, need to respond to and embrace the diversity of the students, staff, faculty, and administrators. An important area to illustrate commitment to diversity is in the training of leaders. The benefits of training people within our campuses to practice pluralistic leadership are many. First, a more diverse group of people tends to be identified, hired, and advanced into leadership positions (Ayman 1993). This greatly enhances institutional productivity, increases quality decision-making, and leads to greater satisfaction among employees (*ibid.*). Opening up the leadership environment to more diverse voices and approaches will also curb assimilation (the process whereby people model characteristics that are incompatible with their identities in order to be leaders). Assimilation has been associated with an assortment of organizational problems such as low morale, absenteeism, and high turnover. These problems associated with assimilation were illustrated in research on women leaders in higher education in the 1970s and 1980s (See Aisenberg and Harrington 1988; Astin and Leland 1991; Bensimon and Neumann 1993). Another benefit is that decision makers become aware of a wealth of untapped or underutilized leadership, which can be used to address complex problems that the institution faces (Lee 1993). Finally, being aware of the multiple ways that leadership is defined can facilitate sounder organizational communication; staff, faculty, and administrators will realize the necessity of explaining their assumptions about leadership (Bensimon and Neumann 1993).

Unfortunately, such a form of leadership does not characterize most campuses. One reason for the lack of progress in creating this environment is that there are few strategies or tools to capture the promise of collaborative leadership or fashion pluralistic leaders. The principles and values undergirding pluralistic leadership require, in large part, personal transformation (changes in leadership beliefs and behaviors) among individuals within institutions. Case stories can be used to facilitate personal transformation, impacting individuals' beliefs about leadership. They can be used in training sessions or read by individuals as part of self-improvement efforts.

New Leadership Principles: Becoming a Pluralistic Leader

Three principles can facilitate the development of pluralistic leaders: (1) an awareness of how identity and power impact leadership beliefs; (2) an acknowledgment of mul-

tiple interpretations of institutional leadership and personal philosophies of leadership; and, (3) an opportunity for negotiation among multiple interpretations of institutional leadership and personal philosophies of leadership. These principles can also be thought of as a set of principles to be incorporated into collaborative leadership, rather than as a new or different approach to leadership. These are not lessons one learns by reading, being lectured to, or even attending a conference. These principles require an innovative type of professional development that entails personal reflection, as well as experiential learning. I will describe each of these principles in greater detail to illustrate how they contribute to the development of a pluralistic leader and truly collaborative environment. I will also suggest how they are distinct from traditional approaches of training leaders.

Leadership development has always acknowledged the importance of understanding oneself, yet the pluralistic leader includes aspects of self left out of earlier approaches such as the influence of gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, etc. For example, current leadership literature focuses on the development of particular personal characteristics or styles, for example developing trust or courage. There has been some recent interest in spirituality in relation to leadership (Bolman and Deal 1994). As the link between spirituality and leadership grows, there has been a greater awareness of the need for leaders to learn self-reflection and to focus on identity, but this usually does not translate into an examination of gender, social class, or sexual orientation. Awareness of identity means understanding, by looking at your complex, overlapping identity, how you developed your beliefs about leadership, what these beliefs are grounded in, who you are as a leader, and how you might differ from other leaders.

Awareness of personal power has a long tradition in leadership training. When speaking of awareness of power (in relation to being a pluralistic leader), I am not referring to personal power, but the way that power conditions operate within organizations. In particular, awareness about oppression and the ways that leaders, who are in positions of authority, may inadvertently create harm. Also, leaders need to be aware of power conditions among groups and individuals on campus; this is often referred to as having a political lens. Yet, what is required of the pluralistic leader is more than a political lens for observing interest groups, but a desire to understand these groups—putting yourself in their shoes and realizing that differences in power often lead to differences in perspective. Leaders analyze how power conditions have impacted their own identity and reflect on how that has impacted the way they see the world. Again, particular attention to the relationship of gender, race/ethnicity, age, or disability to power assists the leader in developing an awareness of the ways individuals on the campus might be excluded from the leadership process. Because of this awareness, they are more likely to develop efforts to include these groups.

By developing awareness about one's leadership beliefs and the factors that impact one's definition, the pluralistic leader is likely to acknowledge and be alert to people on one's campus with different beliefs about leadership. By acknowledging and legitimizing these beliefs, leaders help people on campus to compare, negotiate, and perhaps

even appreciate the different perspectives (Kezar 1998). For example, a male faculty member might think of leadership as a set of administrative skills while a female administrator might conceive of leadership as developing collaborative relationships with other people. Different personal definitions and descriptions of institutional leadership could be combined and applied to resolving issues on campus, rather than conceptualizing multiple perspectives as problematic. Although earlier leadership research has illustrated the importance of leaders examining the environment as complex and socially constructed, this research has not made the link between peoples' diverse background (race/ethnicity, gender, social class) and views of leadership. Researchers such as Bolman, Deal, and Morgan encouraged leaders to examine institutions through political, human resource, bureaucratic, and symbolic lenses (Bolman and Deal 1991; Morgan 1986). But, these theories do not suggest that a woman, lesbian, or West African might have a distinct view of leadership.

Finally, pluralistic leaders work to negotiate these many diverse approaches to, and perspectives of, leadership in order to improve how leadership is exercised on campus. Often the various perspectives on campus are partial viewpoints and by combining them, campus issues can be better addressed. One strong model for this approach exists; feminist pedagogy provides a helpful example for how to negotiate different knowledges (Maher and Tetrault 1994). Instead of valuing one type of knowledge more than another, the different forms are presented and then compared, leading to growth among all participants. Knowledge is constructed from these multiple perspectives. The pluralistic leader must also balance and negotiate his/her own definitions with other people's perspectives, philosophies, and approaches. This is the complex, but important role of the pluralistic leader. Although collaborative leadership advocates consensus building, it does not necessarily seek out different perspectives and ensure they are included as is advocated by pluralistic leadership.

Case Story Technique

Understanding how an individual comes to terms with his/her sense of identity and power related to leadership, moves toward acknowledging multiple forms of leadership, and negotiates his/her understanding with others is difficult to address through the typical strategies applied to educational problems (e.g., policy development, allocation of resources, decision making). These complex, human problems require a unique approach such as training sessions with narrative case stories. There are three aspects of case stories that are particularly well suited to help create pluralistic leaders. First, stories are particularly powerful for understanding how identities are fashioned since they examine formative influences and experiences (Rosenwald and Ochenberg 1992). Second, using case stories allows for the complexity, ambiguities, and contradictions of human existence to be revealed that are necessary for personal transformation. Thirdly, since most individuals do not live in isolation but are part of a social world, stories tend to speak to a variety of people (*ibid.*).

Case stories are highly personal written accounts of real events that include intriguing analysis and reflection (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 1996). Although similar to case studies, their highly personal nature distinguishes them from this tradition. Because they are provocative accounts, they encourage and facilitate discussion, exploring, and learning. They are most often discussed as a pedagogical tool; individuals in educational settings create case stories to learn a concept, principle, or skill. The purpose is to ground abstract learning in experience; personal experience is often the most powerful way to achieve this goal. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski discuss case stories as "collective and reflective learning processes" that "allows individuals to reflect and theorize from their own experience." Case stories provide a tool for accomplishing one of the major goals necessary for transforming leadership beliefs, the development of self-awareness.

Case Story for Developing Pluralistic Leaders

In this section, I present a case story dialogue; it was developed from a study about creating more inclusive leadership environments on campus. The dialogue is about the woman's leadership philosophy and her leadership experiences. This conversation illustrates the type of dialogue and self-reflection necessary to transform notions about leadership. The case story is followed by questions for reflections. I present only one case in the article, but in a training session several different case stories would be used.

The goal of the case story is to make abstract concepts concrete and to facilitate an ideological voyage. When used in a training setting, the cases might be 10–15 pages in length so that individuals reviewing them fully understand the story and background. Rather than being read, the dialogues could be presented as a play or dramatic reading. One performer might ask the same question to three dramatists who enact the cases, more vividly presenting the different notions about leadership. The exercise should be accompanied by instructions that describe the purpose and goals of the case story, e.g., how it allows participants to reflect on their own beliefs about leadership, leadership on their campus, and past experiences of leadership. A set of questions helps readers ponder and analyze their own experiences. These questions act as a catalyst moving people from passively reading to grounding the cases in their own experience and eventually to writing one's own case story. Again, only a sample of possible questions is presented.

The final outcome of reviewing, analyzing, and reflecting on the cases would be for the individual to develop a case story about their leadership beliefs and experiences, what influenced those beliefs, and what changed their beliefs. The emphasis is on describing specific examples from their life that explicate their beliefs.

This case story has been developed from Ginger's experience, a new administrator at Equivocal Community College (ECC) (note: pseudonyms have been used for the institution and for the individuals mentioned throughout the case). Equivocal Community College has undergone a change from a hierarchical organization to a participatory

organization; this happened with the transition of presidents about eight years ago. Ginger came to the campus within the last two years; she was compelled to work on the campus because she finds the vision and philosophy of the president were aligned with her own. She has a wealth of experience in higher education and has thought about leadership fairly extensively. I chose Ginger's story as an example because she was self-reflective and could clearly articulate her beliefs about leadership. The italicized comments represent both the interview questions asked as well as post interview interpretation (Ginger reviewed the interpretations for accuracy). Case stories can also be written strictly as narrative rather than dialogue.

Ginger's Case Story

Tell me about your views on leadership. I am coming from a counseling background and from a campus where it was the president's natural leadership style to work with teams. For five years, I worked at (Sterling Community College with President Diana Duncan); I got to watch somebody do it right. This is the style I am used to, not only from my professional values and from my last job, but I have had this style for as long as I can remember.

It is your professional identity as a counselor and the past president you worked with that influenced your beliefs about leadership. Why do you think you have always been inclined toward team, collaborative, shared leadership, even prior to those experiences? This is who I am naturally, I am a very participatory leader. First, I grew up in a small, poor town, I would say by 10–11 years, I already had leadership roles in the church and community organizations; I was lucky to have excellent role models. These role models always talked about a collective, community-based, vision oriented leadership. So, I was most influenced by these experiences with my church. Second, I mean I have always been empowered and not everywhere I have been has had a team approach, but my parents raised me to have such a good self-concept that I can always speak up, that influences who I am as a leader.

You can identify several different influences on the way you think about leadership; role models within the community you grew up in and the church you attended emphasized a collective and collaborative leadership style, and your family empowered you to believe that you could be a part of leadership. Yes, knowing you were coming to talk to me about this I have been doing some thinking about why I hold the beliefs that I do.

Have you ever had to work at places where this wasn't the style? Yes, and I have left jobs. I have been places where there was a hierarchical, male style. I was trying to work within this other philosophy; at some point I said this isn't worth it, because I am so true to who I am, I don't like to walk around being incongruent. So I have always been lucky, when it wasn't working—I was in an incongruent environment—I could leave.

Fit concerns are especially important among women administrators in a field that tends to be defined in "male" terms. Your experiences reflect the agency to leave environ-

ments where you have not felt congruent. Yes, I haven't thought about how important fit was to me, not consciously. That issue of privilege, that is different from how I thought about it, but yes.

Tell me your perceptions about leadership on this campus. Well, we are utilizing a team approach, open communication, open environment where decisions are made at the lowest level. That is it in a nutshell. I can tell you about it in my division. I provide a lot of opportunities for open communication. I have open office hours every week. I spend a lot of time in every staff meeting, in all areas, (providing opportunities for people to talk about issues). Every semester I either do a walk through or ask them to tell me, show me how this feels to students (to come through their service area). So I spend a lot of time sharing with people what I see. I have started a newsletter; they seem to really like it. So I think you need to have all kinds of writing, talking, and opportunities for people to question. One of the things you might want to see is my belief statements, I write this down for people. I passed this out to when I got here and said this is who I am, hold me accountable to this. I am human and I will make mistakes, but when you see me screwing up, hold me accountable.

That is the leadership you fostered, but what did you encounter when you came here? When I first came here they told me they were fearful to tell me what they really thought because in the other administration you didn't tell a dean things. So we spent a lot of time getting them to feel comfortable to speak up. So the lack of empowerment has to do with who they are, inferiority complexes they have, and the things that they carry from the old system. In addition, I am trying to let them know I don't like "yes" men. I try not to stifle ideas as they are coming up. I try to create and maintain an open environment while at the same time being able to hold my own opinions. One person came in to my office hours and felt comfortable to say, I am offended when you say, all the time, in (Kansas) this is the way we did X, Y, Z. This ain't (Kansas), we ain't there and you need to know that offends me. I said, I didn't realize I was offending you, I was just speaking from my experience. I wrote her a thank you note, saying thank you for feeling good enough about our communication that you could say that to me and hold me accountable. I am going to try not to do that anymore.

Can you tell me more about yourself as a leader? Sure...there is this book, *The Art of Leadership*, that mirrors my philosophy. I think leadership is different from management; it is a person who can motivate the masses to move toward accomplishment of a common goal—a vision. It is a person that has the ability to see the vision, to motivate, to influence, and to convince. Leadership in its best form is about motivating people and helping them move toward a common goal. I also think I am really a situational leader, I think because I have a counseling background it makes it easier for me to adjust to different people and situations. I think that I can modify myself while still staying true to my style. One thing I did when I came here was have brown bags, just meet with people, introduce myself, tell them who I am and I asked them what they wanted me to do for them. I haven't done a section with faculty yet because I need to think about what we are going to talk about, and this gets at situational leadership.

Faculty don't want to go somewhere with me and ask them what they need, they want me to come up with a topic that is intellectually stimulating and say let's talk about achievement in the classroom. My counseling background is very helpful for me as a leader, being able to read different backgrounds. *I can see how your counseling background is related to the way you think about leadership.*

I have a related question: who do you think are the important leaders on this campus and why do you consider them to be important leaders? That is a tough question. Idealistically, I would say everybody. But that is not true yet. I think the provost and president, just by position if nothing else. I think (Deborah) is very effective at what she does, she is very powerful. Also (some of the other administrators), their styles are very compatible with mine. I would say the woman over at the library, strong, inspirational; (Jan,) who has a key role; (Carolyn, Diane), powerful support staff persons; another support staff, (Gina).

It doesn't have to be a person with position because you mentioned some support staff. I am not sure I understand yet. What do you mean by powerful and position? Well the president and provost as symbolic figures, I think they act as symbols of leadership. By powerful, I mean these people all tend to work well in this team environment and are respected—they tend to be part of the new movement. Also, they have the skills to work in this new team environment; the top thing in this team environment is the communication skills. I think they all tend to have the same vision. They are also people people.

Hum, this is shaping up a little different from how I thought. In this team environment people who emerge as leaders are those who adopt the new leadership philosophy and fit in with a new set of associated people and communication skills. Hum, I need to think about that; I see what we do as empowering.

Some people have described the new campus environment as oppressive, which is quite different from your description; what do you think is going on? Others don't see a collaborative process operating on campus? I realize that this is a difficult change, to a new leadership culture. The college operated completely opposite of that prior to the reorganization because there was a president here for many years and his style was opposite that. So you have a number of people who have been here twenty plus years and that is the only leadership style they have ever seen. Many of them, have never worked anywhere else. So that means we are in transition. People are learning new techniques of communication, we have provided training for people in all sorts of areas. Teams are set up with opportunities for people to practice those skills. We have, at the dean's level, people who understand the new approach and so we are modeling the behavior in order to get others to model that behavior. Also regional values influence what is happening on campus. People like to work on their own. This state is very inward looking. They don't know what is happening on other campuses around the country. In (Kansas) we were always looking at models around the country. They don't do that here.

The resistance to the new leadership is due to people who tend to conceptualize the campus within the old culture. This again illustrates the influence of the history of leadership. People are in transition learning the new skills. That might explain why many people don't really feel empowerment since the model is not happening in practice yet among many parts of the campus. It does not explain the narrow nature of leadership that some people on campus described. You also mention that the regional values are related to people's acceptance (or in this case resistance) of the new leadership model since this is, in many ways, in conflict with the regional values of autonomy and individuality. I have been having trouble, struggling to understand what is happening here. But you know with any movement, there is always going to be resistance and what you do is that you move with the people who are motivated to go and eventually the largest percentage of the people will come with you. The president has said we are in transition to give people time to understand and adjust to who they are, to align. The next step is that some promotion will be based on having gone through the training and modeling the behavior—and those who move the masses, help them move forward, will be rewarded.

You conceptualize this change as a social movement. But shouldn't people want to move in the direction they are going? Do you see a problem with imposing the leadership model? Why do you have to coerce people? Well, I see your point, but I think our approach has been balanced. At some point after people have had time to adjust—and this is coming soon, since people have completed training and they have seen the behavior modeled—they will have to be held accountable. People have to take responsibility to act within the new way of operating. I see it as taking responsibility.

Questions for Reflection

These questions are a tool for facilitating reflection on individuals' own experience and are the first step in developing their own case story. If used in a group training or educational setting, people would be asked to share their responses to these questions. Through dialogue, discussion, and hearing the multiple viewpoints, further understanding is developed.

1. Think about your own views of leadership. How do you define leadership? Ginger defined it as a process of setting and implementing a vision and motivating people to follow the vision, as a social movement. How does this relate to the ways you think about leadership?

2. What impacts the way you define leadership? How might this be a reflection of different aspects of your identity? Ginger described the church, her community, her professional background as a counselor, past work experiences, and her gender as influences on the way she thinks about leadership.

3. How might your role within the institution, background, and power conditions in your life or work context impact your understanding of leadership—both your

personal understanding as well as the type of leadership you see occurring on your campus? For example, Ginger appears to be influenced by her position of authority as an administrator in the ways she describes leaders on campus. How do you see power operating on the campus where Ginger is? How is it operating on your campus?

4. Have you ever been concerned that your idea of leadership did not match or fit with others you worked with, as Ginger described? How did it make you feel? What did you do?

5. When comparing your understanding of leadership to Ginger's, what differences and what similarities can you identify? Compare your beliefs about leadership to your co-workers and to others on campus.

6. Have you ever been in a situation where the leadership changed as it did at ECC? How did this impact you and others you worked with? Were you comfortable with the previous leadership/the new leadership? Why do you think you were aligned (or unaligned) with this leadership?

7. Who do you consider to be important leaders on your campus and why? Try to be specific as possible, describing individuals or processes that embody your beliefs.

8. How has your current job influenced the way you think about leadership? Examine several different levels of influence including department or unit, school or college, and institution? Ginger was greatly influenced by her work experience at a previous campus. What about the region you live in? Does that influence your leadership beliefs?

9. As you review your leadership beliefs, can you see any contradictions in your beliefs? Or between your beliefs and behaviors? Ginger's description of leaders on campus contradicts her definition of leadership. Many times we hold contradictory beliefs or do not align values and beliefs. Can you see how this might be problematic?

10. How do you react when someone has a different view of campus leadership? How do you reconcile their beliefs with your own? For example, Ginger interprets peoples' perspectives as impacted by the previous president. How do you develop interpretations about other peoples' leadership beliefs? Ginger is not aware of some of the leadership beliefs on campus. How can you become aware of colleagues' views about leadership?

Conclusion

The values/cultural change necessary to develop pluralistic leaders requires personal transformation and, as noted earlier, is not readily addressed with conventional strategies, i.e., incentives. Many of the major challenges facing educational institutions require similar cultural or values change, for example, beliefs about multiculturalism and affirmative action; resistance to technology initiatives; reactions to curricular

changes focused on collaborative learning; or cultural conflicts in the move toward multi- or interdisciplinarity.

One of the reasons that these challenges remain prevalent and are so difficult to address is that we are not aware of or do not utilize adequate strategies for addressing these issues. Case stories can be used as a strategy for addressing these types of issues.

Second, this article offers a method for helping to capture the promise of collaborative leadership. As people on this campus began to reflect on their beliefs and transform their views, the collaborative leadership process that had failed to be truly inclusive was altered. Campus members cited feeling more engaged, involved, and committed. This method may help to strengthen the collaborative leadership effort of your campus.

Third, this approach reveals the transformative impact of having people reflect on their experience and others. This case was developed from sets of interviews where people described their beliefs about leadership being changed through such a dialogue and analysis. The transformation usually did not occur during the interview; instead people noted that it occurred later as they reflected on our conversation. Others noted that it began to happen during our dialogue, as they reflected on the questions. For example, Ginger shared with me how prior to the interview she had not really understood why she had left past campuses and why she was so comfortable at Sterling and at ECC. She also discussed how she had not been aware of the contradictions between the beliefs and practices of collaborative leadership at ECC until after our interview.

I utilized Ginger's story because she illustrated a high degree of self-analysis that will help others to begin the process of self-reflection, not because she was transformed more than other individuals I interviewed. Several faculty members, who had reflected less on their beliefs about leadership in the past, noted that their definition of leadership had become clearer or changed after they were interviewed. In addition, as they became aware of their own perspective, they realized how others on campus might differ. One faculty member described how he had conceptualized leadership as a set of administrative skills, but during our conversation he decided it was a set of values that impacted relationships and ultimately the culture on campus. One critique of this method is that only people who are already self-reflective can benefit or will take part in the process. However, many of the people I initially contacted about the interviews were hesitant to speak about leadership, to be involved with the process, and certainly did not imagine the type of change in their beliefs that occurred. Therefore, many people were not self-reflective and had no initial desire to change. The success of the training process will partly depend on the ability of the trainers to bring people into the process.

Becoming a reflective practitioner is an important goal for most professionals in higher education. I hope this method is helpful for campuses as they search for professional development techniques and meeting the mandate for change within higher education.

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Author Information

Adrianna Kezar, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the University of Maryland and is Editor for the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report Series. She is also a former director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. Her scholarship focuses on higher education leadership, diversity issues, organizational theory, systems change, and administration.

Adrianna Kezar
University of Maryland
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership
2202 Benjamin Building
College Park, MD 20742
Telephone: 301-405-0868
E-mail: kezar@wam.umd.edu