

Leadership Skills in Conflict and Changing Times

MASA Fall Conference

Monday, September 27, 2021

2:45-3:45



Sources for Today's presentations

- ▶ Conversations with Superintendents about their capacities and skills
- ▶ Presentation by Mr. Tom Horner, Leading in a Culture of Extremes, April 25, 2018
- ▶ Presentation by Dr. Karen Orcutt, Disinformation, May, 2021
- ▶ Research by Dr. Karen Orcutt, Resiliency
- ▶ Information from *High Conflict*, by Amanda Ripley, 2021.



Four Internal Capacities for Public Leadership

- ▶ Centeredness
- ▶ Openness
- ▶ Resilience
- ▶ Courage

Four External Skills for Public Leadership

- ▶ Visioning
- ▶ Partnership
- ▶ Invention
- ▶ Forgiveness



Partisanship/
Ideology

Politics is not just about elections and what is developing in government. Politics divides us along deep partisan lines. It influences our choice of friends, values, where we get information, and how we spend money. Ideas are not accepted unless it is aligned with a politics.



Disinformation

- Disinformation leads to myths and misconceptions among school communities.



Solutions and
Building
Resilience

Proposed Solutions for
navigating decisions and
building professional
resilience

Partisanship and Ideology

- ▶ 47% of consistent conservatives and 28% of mostly conservatives say the Facebook posts they see mostly are in line with their own views. (Pew Research: <https://tinyurl.com/yb6bgvln>)
- ▶ 44% of consistent liberals and 25% of mostly liberals say they block or defriend people on Facebook who don't share their views. (Pew Research: <https://tinyurl.com/yb6bgvln>)
- ▶ Highly educated liberals become more liberal, while highly educated conservatives grow more conservative. (Avi Tuschman, Our Political Nature: The Evolutionary Origins of What Divides Us)
- ▶ Increasingly, we live in one-party states. In 2016, every single state that elected a Republican senator voted for Donald Trump — and every single state that elected a Democratic senator voted for Hillary Clinton. That's a first in American history! (Vox, <https://tinyurl.com/ycpmmsvn>)

Partisanship and Ideology

We get our news from sources that reflect our politics.

- ▶ 47% of consistent conservatives turn to Fox News as their primary source.
- ▶ 50% of consistent liberals rely on CNN, MSNBC, NPR or the New York Times. (Pew Research, <https://tinyurl.com/ydddc4yv>)

“Our political system has become the major barrier to solving nearly every important challenge our nation needs to address. . . Parties don’t need to deliver solutions, but only convince average voters to choose them as the ‘lesser of two evils.’”

Katherine M. Gehl, Michael E. Porter; “Why Competition in the Politics Industry is Failing America”

Partisanship and Ideology

Trust in Traditional Experts is Eroding...

Science and scientists are mistrusted by the left AND right....

- ▶ A minority of US adults – 37% – say eating genetically modified foods is generally safe; 57% believe it is unsafe. Among scientists: 88% say it is safe, 11% say it is unsafe.
- ▶ Half of US adults believe the earth is warming mostly because of human activity; 48% say it is a result of natural patterns or there is no evidence. Among scientists: 87% cite human activity, only 12% point to other causes.

And News...

- ▶ 27% of adults do not have confidence in newspapers and 28% do not have confidence in television.

Partisanship and Ideology

“When politics is used as a cure for spiritual and social loneliness, it’s hard to win people over with policy or philosophical arguments. Everything is shaped on a deeper level, through the parables, fables and myths that our most fundamental groups use to define themselves.”
(David Brooks, New York Times, Oct. 30, 2017)

Differences of opinion on policy issues, societal values and other topics increasingly are defined more by partisan affiliation than traditional determinants like age, gender or education. (Pew Research, October 2017 <https://tinyurl.com/y9uul94w>)

Disinformation Campaigns

Disinformation Campaigns/ Influence Campaigns

- ▶ Murky blends of truth, lies and sincere beliefs
- ▶ Serves an agenda, camouflaged in information distractions and often advanced by innocent and well-meaning people

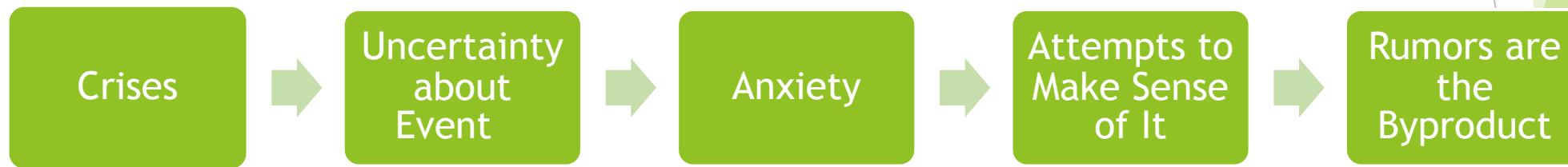
Infodemic

- ▶ A vast and complicated mix of information, misinformation and disinformation

Communication Research during Crisis

- ▶ Mix of information types
- ▶ Difficult to distinguish - an organic rumor from an organized disinformation campaign

Collective Sense Making



Disinformation has its Roots in Dezinformatsiya

- ▶ Soviet Union intelligence agencies
- ▶ Attempts to change how people understand and interpret events
- ▶ Deception for political purpose

Effective Campaigns are Built Around a Plausible Core

- ▶ Exploit existing biases and divisions
- ▶ Employ unwitting agents to applaud the content

Disinformation campaigns target an issue,
however - pervasive disinformation works
at a more profound level

Social media is a preferred vehicle

Evolving Professionalism to the Activity

- ▶ Cyber troops used to share opinions
- ▶ Trolls to harass
- ▶ Fake accounts to misrepresent how many people engage with an issue

Vulnerability to Biased Narratives

- ▶ Amplifies the fear, anger and shock that people feel in uncertain times and ambiguity
- ▶ Fear Basis - fear mongering as core tactic

NATO's Approach to Countering Disinformation

- ▶ Forgeries
- ▶ Fake Personas
- ▶ Falsehoods
- ▶ Amplifications - laundering of hostile narratives through news sites
- ▶ Language Leap
- ▶ Outreach

Top Tips to Counter Disinformation

- ▶ Proactive Communications
- ▶ Pre-Bunking
- ▶ Flag Common Sources of Disinformation
- ▶ Report & Counter Disinformation on the Platform where it Spreads
- ▶ Pick your Battles

High Conflict

►Amanda Ripley (2021)

Recognition through Language

- ▶ Sweeping, grandiose language
- ▶ Sprinkled with rumors, myths or conspiracy

Recognizing through Activities

- ▶ Many withdraw, giving appearance of binary extremes
- ▶ Does it have its own momentum?

When we are baffled by the insanity of the other side - in our politics, at work or at home - it is because we aren't seeing how the conflict itself has taken over.

Prevention

1. Investigate the understory
2. Reduce the binary
3. Marginalize the fire-starters
4. Buy time and make space
5. Complicating the narrative

Focus on Goals

- ▶ Hold onto the mission
- ▶ Simplify goals
- ▶ Keep emotion low

Some Closing Thoughts

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”

-Preamble to the constitution of UNESCO

Four Internal Capacities for Public Leadership

- ▶ **Centeredness:** *Deeply aware of one's core values, strengths and weaknesses, understanding of the “Office of Superintendent“ versus self, and grounded in service, integrity and performance*
- ▶ **Openness:** *Listening without judging, an empathy for the condition and hopes of others, communicating in ways that empowers self and others*
- ▶ **Resilience:** *Adapting and learning from all situations, acting from a core set of beliefs, accessing personal and professional support, responding to doubt and disappointment with confidence and humility*
- ▶ **Courage:** *Living gracefully in ambiguity and uncertainty, staying engaged in the midst of doubt and fear, operating from district-interests over self-interests and interacting with clarity, humor and recognition of one's and other's gifts*



Four External Skills for Public Leadership

Visioning : *Anticipating, guiding and communicating key questions of what is*

Truth vs. myth

Important vs. noise

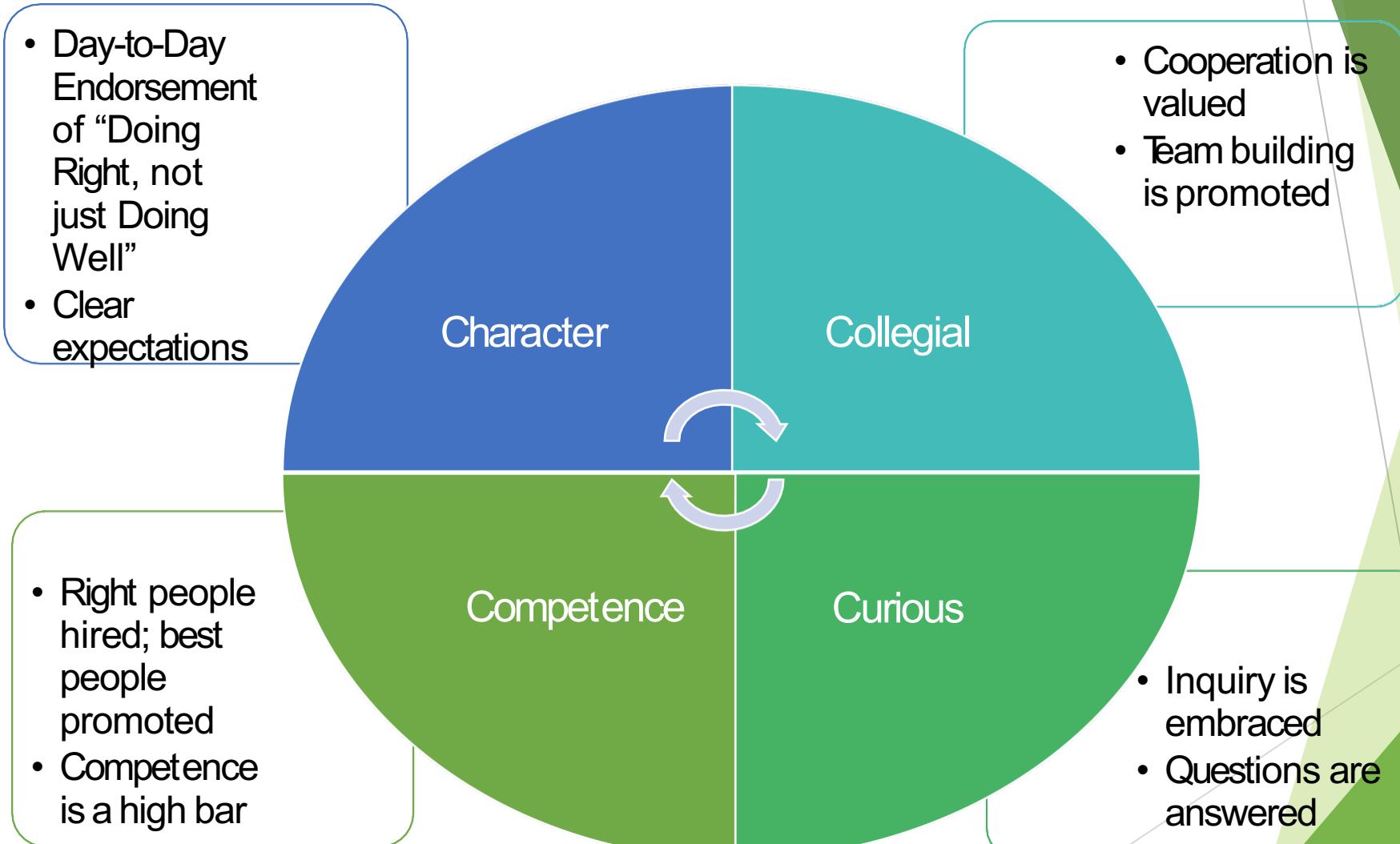
Increasing vs. diminishing

Fixed vs. flexible

for the best blending of resources, strategies, needs and outcomes

- ▶ **Partnership:** *Engaging in relationships and influence for others to succeed in their projects and work while allowing others help you with your work and projects. Cultivating one's cultural and political capital as needed to best serve the school district and community*
- ▶ **Invention:** *Remaining alert to continuous and disruptive change, adapting as needed to best support student achievement, as well as engaging, improving and rewarding the failure and learning process*
- ▶ **Forgiveness:** *Dealing directly with negative self-talk, compassion for and encouraging of others, as well as forgiving self*

Solutions: A culture of excellence and openness





Resilience

Superintendency Institute defines Resilience...

“Adapting and learning from all situations, acting from a core set of beliefs, accessing personal and professional support, responding to doubt and disappointment with confidence and humility”

Resilience

- ▶ Partnership is dynamic, not static; a relationship, not a set of positions. The potential for greatness lies in the many, not the one. Yet usually the leader does see, feel and worry more while sleeping less. Resilience is the understanding partnership requires aloneness and separation at times.
- ▶ Invention assumes failure and learning far more frequently than normal patience levels of individuals and groups. Brilliance is far more luck than intelligence. Resilience, emotional intelligence and delayed satisfaction are key factors for both the long run and the sometimes surprising short jog.

- ▶ Forgiveness is rarely obvious in gradual or small doses. It can be an “aha!” followed quickly by “oh no”. The patience and the humility required for self and others may cause many to pause, to doubt, to wonder “if I only”. And then it occurs again. Resilience provides for forgiveness without paralyzing

Keep Optimistic

- ▶ Have a positive attitude
- ▶ Stay above the fray
- ▶ Remain in hope

Utilize the Ability to Imagine a Desired Condition in a Way that Motivates and Guides

- ▶ Expect good outcomes

The Ability to Engage in Both Optimistic and Pessimistic Thinking at the Same Time

- ▶ Free your mind from labels for others

Biphasic Patterns of Adjustment

- ▶ Ability to rapidly change circumstances

Some Things to Avoid

- ▶ Avoid exploding - emotional tantrums or even non-verbals
- ▶ Avoid imploding - going numb and feeling helpless and overwhelmed
- ▶ Avoid victim mentality - blaming others for ruining their lives

Disruptive Change: Positive Response

- ▶ Orient quickly to a new reality
- ▶ Cope with immediate challenges
- ▶ Remain flexible, adapting to new circumstances quickly
- ▶ Thriving in constant change
- ▶ Creating a knack for making good luck out of circumstances that many see as bad luck

Solutions: Create stakeholders

Trust people with information

Identify influencers; provide information on what the District is doing and why it matters.

Listen and learn

Host forums for conversations. Build Understanding.

Be the knowledge broker

Engage the community in learning about new challenges and new opportunities and how the District is responding.

Be credible.

A good test: Are you as quick to share relevant bad news as you are good news?



When you finally learn that a person's
behavior has more to do with their
own internal struggle than it ever did
with you...

you learn **GRACE**.