"Shared Leadership and the Creation and Maintenance
of a Holding Environment"
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I. Introduction

Grace Wesleyan Church was a thriving congregation in the 1970s. Their building was adjacent to their denominational university and several denominational leaders and enthusiastic college students eagerly volunteered for ministries. In 1979, the unthinkable happened. The university moved to a different city, and the vitality that once filled the pews went with it. Grace Wesleyan never recovered and, three decades later, the church closed its doors. What happened at Grace Wesleyan that led to its inability to recover? Why were they unable to adapt to the shift in their neighborhood? While the specifics of this scenario may be unique, the situation of changing neighborhood demographics and a dying congregation are common.

This situation bring up many questions that leaders and members of these congregations ask: Why do some congregations successfully adapt while we slowly dwindled until we could no longer sustain ourselves? Is it possible that our context changed too swiftly for us to keep up? Could our pastors and staff have lacked a strong enough vision to lead us through this time? Or perhaps we, the parishioners, were too stubborn and did not listen to the Holy Spirit concerning the future? While there may be some truth in each of these - the context did change fairly quickly, the pastors did fail to lead successfully, and the parishioners showed a certain amount of stubbornness, - their failure is not unique. The processes and routines they employed had worked to successfully propel Grace Wesleyan to several hundred in its heyday. It is only natural to continue doing the same things that led to such success in the past.[1]

The issue of adaptation in the face of changing circumstances is not unique to religious organizations.[2] Businesses, too, have struggled to adapt to changing markets and technologies. In response to this, an increasing amount of literature has appeared to address how to cultivate innovation. David Kelley and Tom Kelley of IDEO talk about the human-centered process that they use to assist both experienced and amateur businesspersons in creating a new product and implementing a distribution strategy. They urge readers to start experimenting early and get as many repetitions as possible through their cycle.[3] CEO of Pixar, Ed Catmull, relays his experience cultivating innovation and creativity and advises readers to create a "braintrust" where a wide variety of people can contribute ideas.[4] Hill et al contend that the collective genius of an organization is greater than the single slices of genius the same individuals can produce on their own.[5] Each of these authors emphasize the importance of an environment where team participants can successfully innovate.

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[1] See Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How To Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2009).

[2] Chait, Ryan, and Taylor write about how to lead non-profits through environmental changes. Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor. *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005.

[3] Tom Kelley and David Kelley, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential within Us All* (New York: Crown Business, 2013).

[4] Ed Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (New York: Random House, 2014).

[5] Linda A. Hill et al, *Collective Genius: The Art and Practices of Leading Innovation* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2014).

In organizations, leadership plays an important role in cultivating an environment where team members can experiment and come up with new, viable products.[6] This paper will focus on shared leadership as a tool for cultivating such an environment where adaptation[7] is likely to occur. First, I will look at how institutions change, focusing particularly on Ronald Heifetz's description of adaptive change. Then, I will examine the practice of shared leadership by looking at theoretical precedents, required conditions, and conducive contexts. Next, I will examine the ways that shared leadership can successfully construct a holding environment that is necessary for adaptive change to occur. Finally, I will offer some suggestions for future research for shared leadership. Throughout, I will argue that shared leadership is able to create and maintain a holding environment through the cohesion created by internal commitment to a shared vision and trust, and the tension experienced from environmental changes, generative dialogue, and the shared leadership team's influence upon others. Consequently, shared leadership can be an important tool for congregations doing adaptive work in the face of changing circumstances.

II. Technical Versus Adaptive Challenges

In the field of business leadership, there are generally considered two interrelated but distinct types of challenges.[8] The first are technical challenges. Technical challenges are often encountered by organizations invested in research and development. Businesses as diverse as General Electric, Proctor and Gamble, and Pixar all rely heavily upon technical to stay on top of the market. Kelley and Kelley focus heavily on innovative technical work in *Creative Confidence*. They urge readers to identify a deficiency in their world that needs to be fixed. After a basic understanding of the issue, readers should come up with a basic idea and develop a quick prototype. They should invite target consumers to test the product, receive detailed feedback, and build a new prototype as soon as possible. The more repetitions through this cycle the better.[9] Technical challenges are not easy to solve, but the answers are available or able to be discovered. Although new methods or processes might need to be utilized, the innovator or organization itself does not need to change.

The other type of challenges is adaptive. When an organization is not the organization they need to be to face the challenges of their environment, they must either engage in adaptive change or face the consequences of failing to adapt. In *An Everyone Culture*, Kegan and Lahey discuss what it takes to became what they call a Deliberately Developmental Organization (DDO). They argue that in order for businesses to excel in the twenty-first century, they must help their employees meet their potential. DDOs release employees from covering over their weaknesses and help them turn those

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[6] Without the right leadership, innovation within a company can be exceedingly difficult. Ronald Heifetz insists that even those without formal authority can practice leadership and help organizations engage in adaptive change, although it will be exceedingly more difficult. Many authors on innovation would likely agree, while also agreeing that innovation will not be organization-wide if leadership is not on board. See Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1994), and Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2002). Peter Block presents a more participatory model. He focuses on what Heifetz would call giving the work back to the people, and balances out the role of a leader and the necessity of "citizens" who take ownership of their role in current praxis. Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

[7] Throughout this essay the interrelated terms of adaptation and innovation are used. Innovation is a more specific term and involves "the creation of new and useful, or functional ideas, and their application in organizational settings." Julia Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation: The Role of Vertical Leadership and Employee Integrity, " *Journal of Business and Psychology* 28, no. 2 (June 2013): 161. Adaptation means changing in the face of new circumstances. It includes innovation, but does not have to be something entirely new.

[8] See Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*.

[9] Kelley and Kelley, *Creative Confidence*.

weaknesses into strengths.[10] Moving from a more traditional business model to a DDO model is an example of adaptive work. Kegan and Lahey believe the answer to a competitive marketplace combined with an employee pool searching for personal fulfillment is to change who an organization is. For them, the alternative is inefficiency and, possibly, bankruptcy.

Both types of work are necessary for organizations and individuals at different points in time. Both can lead to innovation or be innovative in and of themselves. However, congregations facing drastic environmental change are most often facing adaptive challenges. They must change before they can successfully meet the problems they face. Technical solutions will likely be needed, but new programs or strategies alone rarely help a struggling congregation be successful.[11] While similar types of leadership might effectively nurture both technical and adaptive work, this paper will focus on a leadership structure that naturally cultivates adaptive work.

The most important component for bringing about the change required for adaptive solutions is constructing and maintaining a holding environment. According to Harvard Business Professor Ronald Heifetz, a holding environment "is a place where there is enough cohesion to offset the centrifugal forces that arise when people do adaptive work."[12] Without a holding environment to balance disequilibrium and stability, people and organizations tend to maintain the status quo. They engage in work avoidance tactics that skirt the real issue or deny that there is a problem. Leaders can use multiple tactics to regulate the holding environment as they rely on both formal and informal power. It is often easier to maintain a holding environment through formal authority because formal leaders have structural power to maintain organizational cohesion. Managers can often force employees to engage in certain tasks (attend meetings, learn new processes, work with different departments, etc.) or be subject to discipline (e.g. demotion, lose their job). Informal authority can also be used to create and maintain a holding environment. Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi both used their informal authority as symbolic leaders to bring about adaptive change in their communities. Nonetheless, it is easier when leaders can use formal authority to force the issue and regulate the temperature.

The problem with adaptive change within Christian congregations is that there are limitations placed upon congregations and congregational leadership. First, many congregations in North America cannot rely on formal authority to construct and maintain a holding environment. Pastors and congregational leaders often have only limited authority over parishioners and pastoral staff. Second, congregations are limited by tools that are in line with their theology. Some forms of leadership are more congruent with Christian theology than others. Coercive power might be appropriate in the business world, but many Christian communities consider it off limits. Consequently, congregations must construct a holding environment without pushing formal authority too strongly or resorting to means such as coercion that are not congruent with Christian theology.

Fortunately, congregations are not the only place to experience such limitations to formal authority; business scholars, too, have been researching forms of leadership that require neither

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[10] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2016).

[11] Alan Roxburgh argues that new structures will solve nothing if we do not address the changed "core narratives" that underlie structures. In other words, if the congregations facing the drastic social changes that have occurred in many neighborhoods do not adaptively change, they will die. See Alan Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015).

[12] Heifetz*, Leadership on the Line*, 102-103. Earlier, Heifetz defines it as, "a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart," (102). See also Kegan and Lahey's concept of "Optimal Conflict." Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 54-56.

hierarchical authority nor coercion to construct and maintain a holding environment.[13] Out of this, a new form of leadership is emerging that focuses on sharing the leadership processes and tasks. It involves a leadership team where everyone has a voice and contributes to the outcome. It relies upon a shared vision, internal commitment, and trust to collectively develop and accomplish team goals. It creates a holding environment not through coercion but through a combination of the cohesion and safety of a trusting community and the pressures of generative dialogue and the pinch of reality. It has been linked with greater effectiveness in achieving goals as well as increased creativity and innovation.[14] It is called shared leadership and is challenging many of the assumptions of the traditional understanding of leadership as well as offering a compelling alternative to organizations where strong hierarchical structures might be counterproductive.

III. Shared Leadership
        While the concept of shared leadership has its roots as far back as the 1920s, it is still a relatively new concept in the field of leadership.[15] O'Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler, III, present several cases of shared leadership dating back to the 1950s with Bill Hewlitt and David Packard, although most scholars would classify these as examples of co-leadership not shared leadership.[16] Only in the last twenty five years has it emerged as a distinct concept that has received much attention from practitioners or scholars. No clear consensus has emerged on what shared leadership is and looks like, leaving shared leadership adaptable to many different contexts and organizations.
        Two pioneers in the shared leadership field, Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, define shared leadership as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both."[17] This definition is well-accepted as the starting point for shared leadership and focuses on spreading leadership tasks and processes around the team depending on situational needs and team members' skills. Instead of the usual method of reporting to a manager who then decides what to do, shared leadership gives the decision-making power to the one who has the most relevant skills and knowledge within the confines of agreed upon goals and processes.[18] Instead of assuming only one

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[13] Max DePree urges his readers to treat every employee as a volunteer. He argues that if they do not like working at your organization, then they will simply find another job. Consequently, leaders must rely on means other than coercion to motivate employees. Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989). Some economies are more conducive to finding different employment than others. Much of the literature on innovation and on learning organizations focuses on the tech industry. There, companies must emphasize what Kegan and Lahey call "new incomes" for their employees because, even in a recession such as the one in 2008, tech employees can often easily find employment if their current job does not suit them. Kegan and Lahey, *An Everyone Culture*, 8.

[14] See Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation;" Craig L. Pearce and Henry P. Sims Jr., "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership as Predictors of the Effectiveness of Change Management Teams: An Examination of Aversive, Directive, Transactional, Transformational, and Empowering Leader Behaviors," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 6, no. 2 (2002): 172-191.

[15] See Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, "All Those Years Ago: The Historical Underpinnings of Shared Leadership," in *Shared Leadership*, 6.

[16] James O'Toole, Jay Galbraith, and Edward E. Lawler, III, "The Promise and Pitfalls of Shared Leadership: When Two (or More) Heads Are Better Than One," in *Shared Leadership*, 250-67. Their article looks at cases of shared leadership in the highest office of leadership, whereas much of *Shared Leadership* is focuses on groups within an organization.

[17] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Years Ago," 1.

[18] Cf. DePree's concept of roving leadership: "Roving leaders are those indispensable people in our lives who are there when we need them. Roving leaders take charge, in varying degrees, in a lot of companies, every day." DePree believes that it is "difficult for a hierarchy to allow 'subordinates' to break custom and be leaders." Depree, *Leadership Is an Art*, 41-42. I agree. Shared leadership takes roving leadership and legitimates it within the leadership structure. It is expected and normal, rather than divergent as within hierarchical leadership. See also Fletcher and Käufer's term, "fluid expertise," which is like roving leadership, but with an emphasis on growth: "The notion of fluid expertise highlights the

person is capable of making important decisions, shared leadership assumes that the tasks and roles of a team and organization are interdependent and the sum will be greater than its parts.[19]

Shared leadership is a growing practice in part because it has been linked to increased innovative behavior, greater effectiveness, and higher employee satisfaction. Julia Hoch researched two companies and found that those teams that rated higher in shared leadership displayed much more innovative behavior.[20] Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi connected shared leadership with flow theory and found that shared leadership was conducive to experiencing flow by providing a means to greater intrinsic motivation, interest, and social meaning."[21] Several studies have also found that shared leadership was more useful in predicting team effectiveness than vertical leadership.[22] Furthermore, shared leadership is correlated with higher job satisfaction as team members find personal fulfillment through reaching their collective and individual goals.[23] There is still a great amount of empirical research to be done, but studies to date build a strong case for shared leadership's benefits.

Important theoretical precedents upon which shared leadership is built include Stone Center Relational Theory, self-leadership theory, and substitutes for leadership literature.[24] Stone Center Relational Theory argues that humans are selves-in relation, not independent, autonomous selves.[25]

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ability to move easily between expert and non-expert, teacher and learner with no loss to self-esteem but, rather, with some gain in self-in-relation esteem." Joyce K. Fletcher and Katrin Käufer, "Shared leadership: Paradox and Possibility," in *Shared Leadership*, 41.

[19] While empowering leadership, transformational leadership, and other forms of leadership focus on spreading power around a team or organization, they still follow the individualistic leadership model. One leader has the power to give others power and, correspondingly, to take away that power. It is distinctly different than shared leadership in its individualistic assumption.

[20] Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation."

[21] Charles Hooker and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow, Creativity, and Shared Leadership Rethinking the Motivation and Structuring of Knowledge Work," in *Shared Leadership*, 227. Flow is "a state of consciousness in which people feel completely involved in an activity to the point that they lose track of time and lose awareness of self, place, and all other details irrelevant to the immediate task at hand" (220).

[22] Jonathan F. Cox, Craig L. Pearce, and Monica L. Perry, "Toward a Model of Shared Leadership and Distributed Influence in the Innovation Process: How Shared Leadership Can Enhance New Product Development Team Dynamics and Effectiveness," in *Shared Leadership*, 54; Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership."

[23] See Anson Seers, Tiffany Keller, and James M. Wilkerson, "Can Team Members Share Leadership? Foundations in Research and Theory," in *Shared Leadership*, 77-102; Jeffery D. Houghton, Christopher P. Neck, and Charles C. Manz, "Self-Leadership and SuperLeadership: The Heart and Art of Creating Shared Leadership in Teams," in *Shared Leadership*, 123-40; Jay A. Conger and Craig L. Pearce. "A Landscape of Opportunities: Future Research on Shared Leadership," in *Shared Leadership*, 285-303; Monica L. Perry, Craig L. Pearce, and Henry P. Sims, Jr., "Empowered Selling Teams: How Shared Leadership Can Contribute to Selling Team Outcomes," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 19, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 35-51.

[24] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Years Ago," provide a brief overview of several leadership theories upon which shared leadership draws. Among the most important are social exchange theory, participative decision-making, expectation states theory, co-leadership, and role differentiation. They do not list Stone Center Relational Theory, but this is an important philosophical theory that displays the importance of rethinking the traditional individualistic leadership paradigm. The following chapter (Fletcher and Käufer) discusses this theory.

[25] Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility," 37-39. Fletcher and Käufer bring Stone Center Relational Theory into their essay on shared leadership and reorient the individualistic role of the leader around the understanding that we are "selves-in relation" and all growth naturally happens through connections with others. They posit that while legends sprout up around heroic leaders, no leader ever accomplished anything singlehandedly. The issue is that support staff and surrounding leaders often "get disappeared" in the telling. While they approach this argument from a psychological perspective (developed in the 1970s and 1980s from the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College), many theologians have made a similar argument from a theological perspective. See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry; The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991); Jurgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, Translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

It posits that human growth occurs primarily in connection with others, rather than separation from others. "Four phases of learning conversations" describe the process through which groups typically pass as they move from talking nice (concern for how the self is perceived by others), through talking tough (focus on expressing one's self) and reflective dialogue (understanding others' views), to generative dialogue (co-creating something new). Shared leadership and intentional growth-in-connection require the final two phases as each team member contributes and ideas are developed together.[26] Stone Center Relational Theory shifts the focus from the individual human leader and bases it upon a self-in-relation that cannot lead or grow without connection.[27]

A second theoretical precedent is the substitutes for leadership literature. This suggests, "that certain conditions, such as highly routinized work or professional standards, may serve as substitutes for social sources of leadership."[28] A formal, appointed leader is unnecessary if the right conditions are met.[29] This literature provides shared leadership with the theoretical basis for substituting vertical leadership with shared leadership as members of a shared leadership team (SLT) perform the tasks and processes of leadership. For example, if the team collectively develops its shared vision, then a visionary leader is unnecessary.[30] As with Stone Center Relational Theory, this requires a shift in the typical understanding of leadership as individualistic that is vital for understanding shared leadership and its contributions to organizations.

A third theoretical precedent is self-leadership theory. This theory describes strategies which individuals can utilize to lead themselves to increasing levels of capability and success.[31] Self-leadership strategies work when team members are knowledgeable about the organization, skilled, and motivated.[32] As team members learn to lead themselves, they can more effectively take responsibility for the team and influence others. Moreover, self-leadership can be a substitute for formal leadership as team members self-regulate and self-manage, rather than rely on managers to do either. Combined with Stone Center Relational Theory, self-leadership offers practitioners of shared leadership a way to talk about how the team collectively self-regulates and self-manages, as well as the way each team member helps each other to regulate and manage themselves. Vertical

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[26] This model illustrates how, as with all relationships, shared leadership will take time to develop and refine.

[27] Fletcher and Käufer argue that shared leadership practices "get disappeared" because they do not fit the mold of the heroic leader. Threaded throughout their argument is a focus on gender and power. They argue that the efforts of women and others who have been marginalized in business leadership often demonstrate leadership that goes unnoticed. Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility."

[28] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Year Ago," 11; Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership." 176.

[29] Ed Catmull demonstrates the "tens of thousands of decisions, often made by dozens of people," that are made every day that contribute to the success or failure of a Pixar film. While there is vertical leadership at Pixar, every team member must bring their creativity and skill set to make the company a success. In the same section, he argues that a great director (i.e. vertical leadership) is necessary. Nonetheless, it is the professional standards set by the reputation of the company and the internal commitment to the creative project that dictates the creative and inherently subjective decisions that are made by the film's many team members. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*, 75

[30] Some might argue that there are certain tasks of a leader that shared leadership simply cannot execute such as forming the team and cultivating the necessary conditions for everyone to positively contribute. See Cox, Pearce, and Perry, "Toward a Model of Shared Leadership;" Edwin A. Locke, "Leadership: Starting at the Top," in *Shared Leadership*, 271-84. In her study on the antecedents of shared leadership, Hoch sees vertical leadership as vital to cultivating shared leadership. Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation." There might be an occasional place for vertical leadership, especially at the beginning of team development if the team expects vertical leadership. However, under the right conditions, vertical leadership is unnecessary.

[31] See Houghton, Neck, and Manz, "Self-Leadership and SuperLeadership." While they advocate for a "SuperLeader… who leads followers to lead themselves through empowerment and the development of self-leadership skills" (124), self-leadership does not inherently require this. Houghton, Neck, and Manz, assume vertical leadership is an indispensable component of leadership. I am attracted to their description of a SuperLeader, but question this assumption concerning vertical leadership's indispensability and desire to envision a form of leadership that has no need of hierarchy.

[32] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Year Ago," 11.

leadership is not necessary because the team and individuals are leading themselves toward greater capability and success.

Based upon these theoretical foundations, shared leadership becomes a viable alternative to formal, vertical leadership as it shifts away from the traditional leader-follower paradigm. Instead of a top-down relationship where those in authority develop a vision to which those closest to the ground are supposed to be committed, likely only externally so,[33] shared leadership is built on a shared vision, internal commitment, and mutual trust. It is a substantive option for organizations such as Christian congregations that already rely upon these three conditions and have little formal authority or power at their disposal. These three must be further expounded in order to understand shared leadership.

First, a shared vision unites the team.[34] There must be an agreed upon reason for the team to exist in which all members have a stake. This will vary depending upon the longevity, breadth, and context of the team. A pastoral search committee has a clear purpose which will unite the team until a pastor has been called. Then the team will disband. A congregation's youth ministry team might exist to oversee the spiritual growth of the teenagers in their care. This will unite the team for a long period of time as team members come and go.[35] In shared leadership, team members buy into the vision and feel a sense of responsibility for moving forward to that vision.

An important corollary to having a shared vision is having shared values and processes. Teams must have similar mental models and attitudes in order to effectively implement shared leadership. Team members should work together to agree upon processes that will be used to come to a consensus, handle conflict, pursue goals, and transfer leadership as the situation changes, all in line with the shared vision.[36] This is not to say that diversity is unimportant nor that team members should all think the same.[37] Rather, just as with vertical leadership, there should be a structural framework that makes explicit how the team has decided to work together to accomplish team goals.

Second, and corresponding to shared vision, in order to practice shared leadership, team members must have high internal commitment to the team.[38] This is rooted in a commitment to the shared vision but can also be supplemented by a commitment to other values such as professional

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[33] See Chris Argyris, "Empowerment: The Emperor's New Clothes," *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1998): 98-105.

[34] This may or may not involve an official vision statement. For businesses, work teams will likely not have an official vision, but they will have an agreed upon purpose.

[35] Shared visions need not be noble or altruistic. A work team might have the vision to become the leading seller of a product or see double digit growth in a sector. Hill et al use the idea of "purpose." Hill et al, *Collective Genuis*. Jim Collins' idea of BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) function in a similar manner for businesses. A BHAG should be a "huge and daunting goal" that "serves as a unifying focal point of effort, galvanizing people and creating team spirit," Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap… and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 202.

[36] C. Shawn Burke, Stephen M. Fiore, and Eduardo Salas, "The Role of Shared Cognition in Enabling Shared Leadership and Team Adaptability," *Shared Leadership*, 103-22.

[37] One of the struggles with shared leadership in Christian congregations is reconciling the universal vision of the Church, where people from all nations and people groups will worship together, with the reality that sharing leadership is very difficult when team members have vastly different cultural understandings. In *Cultures and Organizations*, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov present extensive research that suggests both that cultural values change very little relative to other cultures and that those on opposite ends of the spectrum on cultural values will have difficulty working closely together. Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind; Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, 3rd edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010). Shared leadership may be a struggle when different cultures come together, but with time, intentionality, high commitment, and trust, shared leadership can be practiced even with differences in cultural values. At the very least, team members can strive to be aware of differing cultural values and make space for the other's differences in the team.

[38] Argyris rightly points out that internal commitment is not necessary in every situation. Neither is shared leadership. However, when facing challenges, particularly adaptive challenges, shared leadership can play a vital role in doing adaptive work. Argyris, "Empowerment."

excellence or organizational loyalty.[39] While vertical leadership often allows team members to hide under the umbrella of a manager, shared leadership requires every team member to bear responsibility for team tasks and goals. Even more difficult, shared leadership requires team members to bear responsibility for other team members, especially their learning and personal development. SLTs that practice generative dialogue, engage in a "spiral of growth" where "mutuality, learning, and the creative activity of co-creating solutions and shared understandings are shared by the collective."[40] If team members do not have high internal commitment, then they are unlikely to bear such responsibility.

Internal commitment is strengthened by the invitation shared leadership gives to align personal goals with team and organizational goals.[41] As the team develops its collective goals and interdependent tasks, team members bring their personalities, ambitions, and goals to the table, helping to develop team goals that facilitate meeting individual goals. Furthermore, team members know that as they contribute to the team and put team goals ahead of personal gain, it is likely that all members will come out ahead as the team succeeds. Borrowing from transactional leadership and social exchange theories, shared leadership asserts that team members contribute as long as other members reciprocate.[42] Reciprocation could take various forms and could include both external and internal rewards (friendship, status, money, self-worth, influence, etc.). Following generalized social exchange theory, SLT members do not expect direct reciprocation. Rather, team members expect that as they contribute to the team, other members will reciprocate either to team goals or to another member of the team.[43] As team members contribute and mutually reciprocate, both team goals and individual goals are met.

Third, shared leadership relies upon trust between team members. While trust is important to any good practice of leadership, it is especially vital within a team practicing shared leadership. Team members must be predictable in their values and skills as they navigate shared leadership.[44] They must believe that other members are reliable and will perform tasks consistently and work through agreed upon processes. Furthermore, they must trust that other members have internal

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[39] Denominational loyalty is decreasing in the U.S., but would fit in this category. More locally, congregational loyalty, where somebody is committed to a ministry team because they see it as vital to the congregation's survival or success, could supplement shared vision.

[40] Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility," 40. Much of the literature on learning organizations likewise emphasizes this responsibility team members have for their team member's personal development.

[41] While this alignment is important to shared leadership, Conger and Pearce recognize that it is not always the case that individual and personal goals align. They include this lack of alignment, as well as a lack of alignment between team and organizational goals, as one of the limitations of shared leadership. Conger and Pearce, "A Landscape of Opportunities," 299. Similarly, in an essay on the methodological issues of assessing shared leadership, Seibert, Sparrowe, and Liden recognize three difficulties: "(a) that the group might not be unified in its attitude toward a specific goal or objective, (b) that individual members might employ different influence tactics, and (c) that group members distinguish among individuals in choosing the type of influence tactic employed or their reaction to a specific influence attempt." Scott E. Seibert, Raymond T. Sparrowe, and Robert C. Liden, "A Group Exchange Structure Approach to Leadership in Groups," in *Shared Leadership*, 178. Pearce and Sims cite ambiguous evidence on whether participative goal setting leads to higher performance. Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership," 175. Regardless, participative goal setting increases internal commitment and arises out of internal commitment.

[42] Transactional leadership and social exchange theory are separate theories that are conflated here because of their similar influence on shared leadership. The former emphasizes what a leader might offer to team members as an immediate reward. Cox, Pearce, and Perry, "Toward a Model of Shared Leadership," 56. The latter emphasizes social gains and costs, particularly among friendship groups. Pearce and Conger, "All Those Years Ago."

[43] Seers, Keller, and Wilkerson, "Can Team Members Share Leadership," 86-87.

[44] "Trust in authority relationships is a matter of *predictability* along two dimensions: values and skill…. Trust has two components: predictable values and predictable skills," (Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 107).

commitment toward the shared vision, will bear responsibility for the outcome, and will forego taking individual credit for success and blaming others for failure. Most importantly, team members trust that as they contribute ideas and offer who they are to the team, the others will not abuse their offering but will receive it with gratitude.[45]

There are certain contexts where shared leadership is most appropriate and effective. Contexts where knowledgeable employees must make quality, on-the-ground decisions are conducive to shared leadership if there is little likelihood that conflict will occur regarding decisions.[46] Moreover, teams with responsible and trustworthy members who have integrity are more likely to develop the necessary trust to practice shared leadership effectively.[47] Many scholars have linked specific types of vertical leadership as an important antecedent to shared leadership.[48] Since most organizations currently utilize vertical leadership, it is important that formal leaders create the conditions necessary for shared leadership to emerge. This might include, "forming the team, managing boundaries, providing as-needed leadership support, and maintaining the shared leadership system in the team."[49] In contexts that are less conducive to practicing shared leadership, teams and organizations may need to be more intentional about developing leadership skills before shared leadership can be effectively implemented.[50]

What shared leadership looks like varies greatly depending upon organizational goals, team size, context, culture, and longevity. Much of the research on shared leadership has focused on cross-functional teams where innovation and creativity are important goals. These were typically small teams that worked together for several months to a few years. Other SLTs might be set up to lead an entire organization. CEOs can invite co-leaders to share power or share leadership goals and tasks with their executive board. SLTs can be temporary or permanent, although because of the time it takes to establish generative dialogue, teams will likely see higher levels of shared leadership the longer that they work together. Shared leadership can be a temporary strategy which organizations use to complete specific tasks or an overall strategy of leadership built into organizational structure. This gives organizations flexibility as they implement shared leadership.[51]

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[45] Kegan and Lahey mention the trepidation that some employees had undergoing their personal and organizational change process. They were worried that current or future organizational leaders might negatively use the information in the future. Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*. While they are not researching shared leadership, the openness to the team and desire to help each other undergo personal and team development is a similar process to shared leadership. Consequently, practitioners of shared leadership might feel a similar trepidation in the beginning. Pearce and Sims studied shared leadership in Change Management Teams at an automotive manufacturing firm in the U.S. They found that while aversive leadership is negatively correlated with the practice of shared leadership, they can coexist. However, a lack of formal authority hinders the coercive potential any individual is able to practice. Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership."

[46] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Years Ago," 10. They are borrowing from participative goal setting theory, particularly, V. H. Vroom and P.W. Yetton, *Leadership and decision-making*. Rev. ed., (New York: Wiley, 1973).

[47] Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation," 160.

[48] See Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation;" Cox, Pearce, and Perry, "Toward a Model of Shared Leadership;" Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership."

[49] Cox, Pearce, and Perry, "Toward a Model of Shared Leadership," 58. Fletcher and Käufer include this as one of their paradoxes of shared leadership - hierarchical leaders are often tasked with creating a less hierarchical organization. Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility," 24.

[50] Argyris posits that there are contexts where empowerment is a bad idea. He is correct; however, in Christian congregations, where theological convictions about humanity and God are conducive to shared leadership, lack of these conditions is no reason to forego shared leadership. Argyris, "Empowerment." As Paolo Friere discovered, even a people who are illiterate and have been oppressed for years can develop a critical consciousness and become a Subject. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1974).

[51] Seibert, Sparrowe, and Liden list five separate configurations to illustrate the generalized exchange relationships present between dyads in an SLT. The ideal is a unified team where everybody is strongly and equally connected with every other team member. However, the reality in every team is that there will be stronger connections and weaker

Shared leadership in a congregational setting will likewise look differently depending on the context. However, in order to spark the imagination and make the concept more concrete, I will offer one example of what shared leadership might look like in a congregational setting. Imagine a leadership team, consisting of all who desire to be involved (lay leaders, pastors, staff, etc.), coming together on a regular basis to collectively lead the congregation. At the beginning of each commitment period (the amount of time an individual on the leadership team commits to be a part of the team), a facilitator is elected, somebody who has been on the team for a while and knows how to cultivate the conditions necessary for shared leadership. Each team member is committed to the shared vision of the congregation, bears responsibility for their own growth and the growth of other team members, and trusts that others are likewise committed. They decide things by consensus, trusting that the Spirit of God will guide them. Each member brings something different to the table. One is especially good with finances and has volunteered to oversee the finance team. Another is deeply committed to children's spiritual growth and will oversee the children's ministry team. When tough decisions have to be made, they help keep each other focused on the hard issues. Things are not perfect. They make some bad decisions. They occasionally hurt each other's feelings. They sometimes practice work avoidance mechanisms. Nonetheless, they keep coming back, constantly seeking after the Spirit, apologizing when necessary, and focusing on the areas where God is calling them to individually and collectively change. They practice shared leadership not because it is always practical, but because they see it as a way to invite the participation of many different people as they collectively bear witness to their unity that is in Christ Jesus.

IV. Shared Leadership and the Holding Environment

The question still remains concerning shared leadership and the creation of a holding environment. Using Heifetz's definition of a holding environment, this next section will demonstrate how shared leadership can work to create a holding environment that has "enough cohesion to offset the centrifugal forces that arise when people do adaptive work" using "structural, procedural, or virtual boundaries" to allow people to "feel safe enough to address the problems that are difficult, not only because they strain ingenuity, but also because they strain relationships."[52]

First is the issue of cohesion. Can shared leadership create enough cohesion to offset the tremendous centrifugal forces at play in adaptive work? Using vertical leadership, leaders can practice directive or aversive leadership to create cohesion.[53] Shared leadership relies upon other strategies, which is why a shared vision and internal commitment are vital. When high levels of shared leadership exist, team members have high internal commitment to the team's vision and trust that their teammates are likewise committed. Considering the market mentality among employees of many organizations and parishioners of many congregations, high internal commitment may be rare.[54] Even so, high participation in the life of an organization and high internal commitment go

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connections and individuals will have differing levels of influence. Seibert, Sparrowe, and Liden, "A Group Exchange Structure Approach to Leadership in Groups," 174.

[52] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 102-03.

[53] Of course, both of these can still be practiced within an SLT as well as by an SLT toward others. However, Pearce and Sims found that both are negatively correlated to the practice of shared leadership. Pearce and Sims, "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership."

[54] Kegan and Lahey mention "new incomes: personal satisfaction, meaningfulness, and happiness." As they argue for the necessity of becoming a "Deliberately Developmental Organization," they posit that conventional incomes ("paychecks, health benefits, and limits to the hours in a workweek") are no longer sufficient. Organizations must take the next step in offering new incomes. Kegan and Lahey, *An Everyone Culture*, 8.

together.[55] Shared leadership invites increasing participation and internal commitment from team members so that as the temperature of the holding environment is raised, the team continues to work together toward its shared vision.

Cohesion in an SLT also relies upon the relationships within the team. In generative dialogue, relationships are characterized by "trust and openness."[56] When one has taken responsibility for the growth of one's self and others in the team, strong bonds are formed that hold the team together through difficult times. As social and group exchange theories describe it, when team members put in commitment, effort, and friendship, they receive something in return - friendship, community, external rewards, confidence, etc. This cycle is self-reinforcing and creates strong bonds between team members. Teams that practice higher levels of generative dialogue, and thus, shared leadership, will likely remain highly cohesive in the face of powerful centrifugal forces and strained relationships.

A second issue is the ability to raise and lower the temperature of the holding environment so that adaptive change can occur. In his study of small groups in the U.S., leading sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow found that small groups all too often function to comfort people and rarely challenge members to change.[57] In other words, small groups are great at lowering the temperature and nurturing safety but often struggle to raise the temperature. While SLTs are not the same as a small group or support group, which Wuthnow studied, similar dynamics are at play, and his study must be taken into consideration. Fletcher and Käufer's four phases of learning conversations are helpful here as they offer guidance to a team that is serious about moving beyond "talking nice" and arriving at "generative dialogue" where shared leadership and growth-in-connection can occur.[58] The temptation for SLTs will be to lower the temperature and talk nice. It will take effort and time together to advance toward reflective and generative dialogue.

Additionally, four of the five suggestions that Heifetz gives for lowering the temperature are tasks in which SLTs are likely to excel, including addressing the technical aspects of the problem, subdividing the problem into smaller parts, employing work avoidance mechanisms, and slowing down the process of challenging norms.[59] Addressing the technical aspects of the problem is far more likely when there are greater technical skills at the table. Dividing and subdividing tasks can be much easier when there are several team members to single out parts of the problem they can solve. With little conscious thought, teams can employ work avoidance mechanisms such as scapegoating,

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[55] Argyris, 100. Nancy Ammerman found that small, dying congregations tended to have higher amounts of internal commitment, as measured by regular attendance and higher giving percentage (327). She attributes this to the small size of the congregations and the fact that fewer people means each person must contribute more in order for the congregation to survive. She also found that commitment was vital in the early stages of a successful new change program and less important in later stages (328). This suggests that internal commitment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful congregational adaptation. Ammerman, Nancy, *Congregation and Community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2001.

[56] Fletcher and Käufer, *Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility*, 38.

[57] Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[58] Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Possibility: Paradox and Possibility," 37-39. This concern is similar to the resistance that Kegan and Lahey discovered in their research for *Immunity to Change* and *An Everyone Culture*. For different reasons than Wuthnow found, people were often hesitant to open up and to challenge others in the work place. It was not perceived as a place for personal growth. However, they have successfully worked with many individuals and organizations and helped to transform work environments into places where learning and personal growth take place. Small groups are at an advantage because they are often already perceived as a place where people can be honest and open. SLTs must also become a place where people can challenge each other in pursuit of a shared vision.

[59] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 111. "Temporarily reclaim responsibility for the tough issues" might be harder for teams. At the very least, it will be just as difficult as it would be for an individual leader.

focusing on a distracting issue, and externalizing the enemy.[60] Perhaps simplest of all, teams can slow down the process of challenging norms by endless discussions, committees, and subcommittees. SLTs will likely excel at lowering the temperature.

On the other hand, SLTs that are aware of these tendencies can overcome them and use them to their advantage. Because of the greater amount of technical skills present in the team, SLTs can sort the technical challenges from the adaptive and focus on the challenges that require adaptive solutions. They can call each other out on work avoidance mechanisms and help keep each other on point. And they can use discussions and committees to include more people and place the work where it belongs - with the people.[61] The same tendencies that might be considered weaknesses can be used as strengths to both raise and lower the temperature as the team regulates the holding environment.

There are four suggestions Heifetz recommends for leaders to raise the temperature, all of which can be done with either vertical or shared leadership.[62] The most important one, drawing attention to the tough issues, is the biggest challenge to shared leadership's ability to create a holding environment. In order to do adaptive work, a group must "feel the pinch of reality" so that the temperature is raised and they are compelled to address the tough issues.[63] Without a hierarchical or coercive leader to facilitate this pinch of reality, those engaged in adaptive work will naturally engage in work avoidance measures. How can an SLT experience this without lowering the temperature of the holding environment?

First, an SLT pays attention to its environment. In a typical business, competition, rising costs, a changing work force, or new technology often provide an opportunity for adaptive work. Many organizations end up closing their doors as they fail to do necessary adaptive work Other times organizations withdraw from the environment and refuse to acknowledge the change that is necessary to be competitive in the future. Christian congregations, especially, can be tempted toward withdrawal.[64] Nonetheless a well-functioning leadership team that pays attention to its environment will feel the pinch of reality as they realize the dire circumstances in their changing environment and identify the adaptive challenge.

Another mechanism to feel the pinch of reality in an SLT is the team itself. In the case of a team at the top of an organization or a team leading a congregation, they can raise the temperature of the holding environment for the rest of the organization. Similar to how a vertical leader raises the temperature, an SLT can engage in the same practices as it leads the organization. Heifetz highlights Martin Luther King, Jr., and President Lyndon B. Johnson in his examples of a holding environment. However, As Fletcher and Käufer insist, and as Heifetz illustrates, they did not act alone as they raised and lowered the temperature.[65] Even within their leadership structures, both had teams around them that helped them lead. They were the symbolic leaders, but they had a great

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[60] Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 37.

[61] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 127.

[62] "1. Draw attention to the tough questions. 2. Give people more responsibility than they are comfortable with. 3. Bring conflicts to the surface. 4. Protect gadflies and oddballs," (Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 111). Arguably, the final three are easier with shared leadership. In generative dialogue, people have a tremendous amount of responsibility, conflicts are inevitably surfaced, and every voice, including the "gadflies and oddballs," is protected.

[63] Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 149.

[64] Ammerman notes several congregations that practiced a strategy of withdrawal. Often, this mean withdrawing from the neighborhood to focus on a niche community or moving to another neighborhood. These might be technical solutions, but do not require much, if any, adaptive work. Sooner or later their niche community or neighborhood will change again and the congregation will face another opportunity for adaptive work.

[65] Fletcher and Käufer, "Paradox and Possibility," 25. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*.

amount of help from others in leadership who focused attention on the tough issues. SLTs can draw attention to the issue so that the organization feels the pinch of reality just as a vertical leader can.[66]

Within an SLT, generative dialogue can raise the temperature.[67] As team members are authentic, open, and vulnerable with each other, they invite others to speak into their lives so that they can grow-in-connection. This constructive conflict invites participants to change who they are and how they see the world. It sparks a spiral of growth that makes the team more effective and team members more mature. As team members develop, the team will become more effective. As team members undergo adaptive change together, the team itself will also change. Generative dialogue raises the temperature as it makes constructive conflict and growth-in-connection an expectation across the team.

As an SLT manages the holding environment, the amount of people involved increases the chances of an innovative solution to which many people have contributed. Within the safe environment of shared leadership, team members can share information and offer their unique perspectives.[68] This allows SLTs to build upon each member's ideas and create solutions to adaptive challenges.[69] Because these are ideas developed by team members instead of from vertically-leading management, there is more likely to be collective ownership, which in turn leads to a greater chance of implementation.[70] As they dialogue, co-create solutions, and implement plans, the team learns both what they need to do and who they need to be to meet the adaptive challenge. Adaptive change occurs as they move forward together, unsure exactly where decisions will lead, but certain that they will arrive together.

V. Conclusion

Much research on shared leadership still needs to be done. While Pearce and Conger's influential collection of essays is an important first step, there are still foundational differences in how scholars and practitioners understand shared leadership. Scholars must continue to contribute to the field and work hard to develop a basic consensus regarding what shared leadership actually looks like. SLTs should be studied to develop best practices and offer strategies for increasing the level of shared leadership in organizations. Empirical research is needed to ascertain whether and in what contexts shared leadership leads to innovation, effectiveness, and employee satisfaction. It is also needed to see how people react in and under a shared leadership team while in a holding environment. Whether or not shared leadership can raise the temperature of a holding environment enough to cultivate adaptive change is purely theoretical until SLTs are studied in more detail in the future.

Shared leadership is not easy; no leadership is easy. Detractors from shared leadership models often have an implicit assumption that an individual leader can do things that a team

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[66] Heifetz notes that people often expect authority figures to "restore equilibrium" and reduce the anxiety experienced in a holding environment. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, 125. With an SLT at the helm, it might be more difficult to scapegoat one's leaders, especially in a congregational setting where one knows that one is expected and able to contribute to the leadership.

[67] Fletcher and Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility." Generative dialogue is very similar to Kegan and Lahey's Deliberately Developmental Organization. Kegan and Lahey, *An Everyone Culture*. Both rely upon openness and vulnerability among team members so that colleagues can challenge each other and mutually develop.

[68] See Hoch, "Shared Leadership and Innovation," 162.

[69] Shared leadership coincides with much of the literature on innovation concerning collaboration. Hill et al discuss individuals bringing their slice of genius to create collective genius; Catmull created a braintrust at Pixar; Kelley and Kelley encourage readers to innovate with others. They even created a school to help innovators to work with others. All emphasize the importance of collaboration. Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*; Kelley and Kelley, *Creative Confidence*.

[70] Again, see Argyris, "Empowerment".

practicing shared leadership cannot.[71] Holding on to the myth of the heroic leader, detractors say that shared leadership is unrealistic, will take too long to react, or will not work without coercive or aversive practices. Yet research suggests it can and does work. Moreover, as Fletcher and Käufer argue, when has an individual ever successfully led without others? There are always countless decisions made by many different people and unforeseen environmental events. These are aggregated together to produce successes and failures. Shared leadership makes explicit what popular heroic leadership myths leave unsaid: we are selves-in-relation, not monads; we grow in connection, not in solitude. Our leadership practices should reflectively practice this ontological foundation.

Furthermore, shared leadership can create a holding environment that has enough cohesion to offset the centrifugal forces at work during adaptive change. As an SLT is attuned to its environment, practices generative dialogue, and influences others, the heat is turned up and the holding environment is maintained. This is where shared leadership thrives: generating and refining ideas, developing innovative solutions, and implementing them across the organization or team. Shared leadership is not a silver bullet for all organizations and teams. It takes hard work and intentionality. Mistakes will be made. Relationships might be strained. Nonetheless, the evidence is stacking up: shared leadership can be an important structure for teams and organizations to increase effectiveness and innovation.

Grace Wesleyan faced an innovate-or-die situation and proved unable to innovate. Yet things could have been different. What if they had practiced shared leadership? What if they had developed an SLT to lead them through the drastic changes in their environment? A team, internally committed to a shared vision, built upon trust, and intent upon discerning where they can join what God is doing in their community, might have been just the structure Grace Wesleyan needed to generate and implement innovative ideas. Research suggests that shared leadership could have made a difference. Congregations would be wise to consider shared leadership as they seek to develop and implement adaptive solutions to adaptive challenges.

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[71] This assumption is made explicit in Locke, "Leadership: Starting at the Top."

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