What Do We Mean When We Talk about Middle Leadership?

Insights from an Evaluation of the
2016 Leading from the Middle Academy

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Introduction

A growing number of community college educators are in positions with formal or informal leadership responsibilities. Colleges have always had titled middle leader positions such as "dean" and "department chair." Recently, however, with a proliferation of state initiatives and local innovations, an increasing number of faculty, counselors, and staff are moving into leadership roles with titles such as "Basic Skills Initiative Coordinator," "Student Equity Coordinator," or "First-Year Experience Coordinator." In those roles, educators may find themselves with new leadership responsibilities and the opportunity to make significant improvements in student success and institutional effectiveness, and yet with little formal training specifically designed to ready them for this undertaking.

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) launched Leading from the Middle (LFM) Academy in 2013 to support the professional development of middle leaders. Since then, more than 350 California Community College educators have participated in LFM activities, including the yearlong academy and customized programs designed for City College of San Francisco and the San Mateo County Adult Education Consortium.

What can we learn from the experiences of LFM participants? How can those experiences contribute to an emerging description of middle leadership and an understanding of the process of developing middle leaders?

Based on a commitment to learning from experience, the LFM leadership team has conducted annual internal evaluations of the academy experience since its inception. This document summarizes findings from the evaluation of the LFM Academy 2016 and builds on the formative evaluation of the first three years. We offer this report to share evaluation findings, promote understanding about the development of middle leaders, and highlight the roles these middle leaders can take in advancing institutional change.

We developed this report for campus executive leaders and other administrators who are in positions to support and encourage leadership development at their colleges. In addition, current and potential middle leaders can read about the experiences of colleagues who may have common aspirations and challenges as they work to develop their leadership identity. And finally, this work can also inform campus leadership development programs.

The report begins with an overview of the program's purpose, design (including its evolution over time), and anticipated outcomes. Following, we describe the LFM Academy 2016 participants and evaluation activities. We then present the evaluation findings associated with each of the LFM outcomes, organized in three clusters: (1) leadership development, (2) team collaboration and leadership, and (3) leading change in the context of a college initiative (which includes a summary of college projects conducted as part of the LFM Academy experience). The conclusion sums up insights gained about middle leadership over the four years of LFM and highlights potential next steps for the Academy.

LFM Purpose, Design, and Outcomes

Purpose

LFM's purpose is to support the development of middle leaders across California Community Colleges. This charge entails providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for deans and department chairs as well as for practitioners who serve as coordinators or directors for campus programs and who may not yet consider themselves as leaders. Because middle leadership is inherently collaborative, the LFM Academy invites colleges to send teams that draw from various functions of the institution and include current and emerging leaders. LFM supports development of both individual and collaborative team leadership.

As more colleges engage in transformational change—rethinking structures such as the sequence of basic skills courses, the process for how students choose a major field of study, and the design of pathways to completion—the role of middle leaders becomes even more important. It is likely that these initiatives to strengthen student equity and success and institutional effectiveness will take place in the functions, programs, and departments these individuals lead. If colleges are to launch these change efforts and sustain them over time, middle leaders need to be actively engaged in the process. In turn, LFM specifically addresses leading, facilitating, and engaging with the change process.

Additionally, LFM aims to make the importance of middle leadership visible. LFM began with a recognized, but often overlooked, need for ongoing professional development opportunities for middle leaders. By creating the Academy and documenting the work of participants, LFM is able to better define the role, function, and critical contributions of middle leaders and provide reasons to extend support to these agents of change.

Design

Two co-directors lead the RP Group's LFM initiative: Laura Hope, Chaffey College's Dean of Instructional Support, and Bob Gabriner, City College of San Francisco's former Vice Chancellor of Institutional Advancement and retired Director of the Education Leadership Doctoral Program at San Francisco State University. As LFM grows, the leadership team expands as well. The program has recruited former LFM Academy participants—themselves middle leaders—to join the leadership group and serve as facilitators and coaches for participating college teams. The leadership group now includes middle leaders from across the system (see Appendix I).

The LFM Academy design reflects current literature on effective professional development and is experiential, related to practice, and undertaken collaboratively with colleagues.[1] LFM's hands-on approach to learning is evident in its design, curriculum, and instruction.

The LFM Academy has three components:

- Face-to-face convenings across a calendar year (February, June, and October)

- Online activities between convenings

- Coaching by a member of the LFM leadership group to maintain an ongoing connection with and support to college teams, and at times, to add an external perspective or suggest new directions.

Rooted in a project-based pedagogy, participating college teams of four to six middle leaders come with a designated campus change project to conduct throughout the LFM Academy experience. Collaboratively planning and leading the project gives participants the opportunity to apply their LFM learning and to experience leadership in practice. The hands-on learning experience also connects participants to peers from other colleges across the state.

The three LFM convenings trace the process and challenges of implementing a campus change project and the roles that middle leaders play in that process. The first convening introduces design tools to plan, initiate, and lead a project, including concept maps, logic models, and elevator pitches. The second convening gives participants the time to reflect on their campus experiences to date and extends the content on use of data and coalition building, including the popular topic of engaging resistance. The third convening focuses on sustaining momentum for an ongoing project; participants reflect cumulatively on the year's experience and how risk taking and failure are essential components of leadership.

Evolution of Design over Time

Participant feedback and reflection by the LFM leadership group have informed the evolution of the LFM Academy model since its inception. The first two LFM Academies (2013 and 2014) were formative, conducted as a design prototype with the intent to try strategies, approaches, and activities, and learn from the effort. During these first two iterations, LFM's leadership team explored a range of curricular topics. By the end of the second year (2014), LFM settled on a set of core topics that focused on aspects of the change process and the role of individual and collaborative leadership in that process (Appendix II). By the third year (2015),[2] program leaders built the schedule to support implementation of this core curriculum.

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[1] For examples of the principles for effective professional development, visit National Council of Teachers of English, Project Learning, and the National Staff Development Council.

[2] For more information, see LFM Year 3 (2015) Evaluation Report and LFM 2015 Year 3 (2015) Executive Summary.

In addition, the leadership team has made changes in the Academy schedule over the four years of implementation, specifically responding to the realization that LFM participants value time away from campus to think and plan with colleagues. On campus, given over-filled schedules and competing demands on participant time and attention, time is rarely (if ever) available for the kind of extended reflection and conversation that happens at the LFM Academy.

In response to participant feedback, with each consecutive iteration, LFM leaders have altered the schedule of the Academy to include more time for teams to work together and more activities where two teams mutually provide feedback on a plan or product. The LFM leadership team, also responding to the logistical obstacles of coordinating so many people's schedules, replaced webinars with asynchronous online activities between convenings.

Acknowledging that Academy days are long and information-filled, program leaders have shifted at least one team discussion at each convening from the meeting room to a walk around the scenic Cal Poly Pomona campus where the in-person convenings are held, both to balance the time sitting and to draw on the creative possibilities that happen when bodies are in motion (Jabr, 2014).

Outcomes

Middle leadership has particular characteristics and challenges. Rather than relying on authority and position, middle leaders work through collaboration, coalition building, and communication. Their work is rooted in an understanding of the local cultural context and enacted through a network of professional relationships. LFM aims for participants to grow in areas that will support their long-term development and efforts as middle leaders.

The six LFM outcomes are clustered in three major categories and include the following:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

1. Develop leadership identity

2. Develop strategies to sustain and support leadership development

TEAM COLLABORATION AND LEADERSHIP:

3. Create and sustain professional relationships in which peers share ideas and strategize together

LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF A COLLEGE INITIATIVE:

4. Engage with existing literature

5. Apply research and evidence to make informed decisions that advance institutional change efforts

6. Strengthen capacity to prioritize and lead departmental, institutional and other changes through the process of evidence-based inquiry

LFM Academy 2016

2016 Participants

The LFM 2016 Academy cohort had 70 participants, the largest group to date (see Appendix III for a list of LFM 2106 colleges).This cohort included 11 college teams and a team from the San Bernardino Community College District office along with two affiliated colleges. As part of the cohort, two college teams from LFM 2015 wanted to continue their participation. Although LFM organized a "2.0" Academy experience for returning teams in the third year (2015), this activity was judged too expensive to maintain as a separate program. However, LFM 2015 teams had learned about the option to continue; Cabrillo College and Diablo Valley College (DVC) decided to return in 2016. The returning teams split their time between participation in large group activities and engagement in their own planning sessions.

The cohort of LFM participants reflected a wide swath of college personnel.[3] Altogether, the LFM cohort touched many corners of the colleges. The group included roughly 13 vice presidents, deans, directors, and division chairs representing academic, student services, and administrative functions, along with nearly 20 faculty from a wide range of basic skills, general education (GE) and career technical education (CTE) disciplines. Several of these faculty members also reported serving in leadership roles (e.g., SLOs Coordinator, Student Success Coordinator, Faculty Equity Coordinator, and Academic Senate positions).

Program leaders and administrators included EOPS Directors; the Director of Business, Industry and Community Services; Student Equity and Success Center Director; Director of Professional Development; Director of Title III STEM grant; Director of Admissions and Records; and Director of Student Life. Classified staff members included personnel from offices of instruction/ academic affairs and student services, and the library. Moreover, six deans of research, planning and institutional effectiveness participated along with four senior researchers; most college teams included a participating researcher.

Additionally, two visitors from the Ed Insights Center at California State University (CSU), Sacramento attended as observers to learn about LFM, but rolled up their sleeves and participated—considering how a similar program could be developed for the CSU system.

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[3] The numbers provided to quantify participants are approximate, as some teams varied in numbers and participants over the three convenings.

2016 Evaluation Activities

LFM conducts internal evaluation activities designed to assess these program outcomes (see Outcomes, p.6) . The LFM academy was designed to support growth and development of leadership skills. However, these outcomes are not explicitly measurable in the context and scope of this evaluation effort; this internal evaluation focuses on gathering and using qualitative data to improve program delivery, inform the field about middle leadership, and consider other opportunities for development of this important group of leaders.

The findings in this report come from a range of evidence including observation of the large group discussions during these convenings, reflection cards that were collected at regular intervals during each of the 2016 face-to-face sessions, products developed by participants, and occasional surveys conducted during the convenings. We summarize the results from these evaluation activities below.

Leadership Development

The evaluation collected input on the development of participants' leadership identity throughout the Academy experience, as well as their understanding of the need to nurture themselves as middle leaders in order to sustain their work and impact.

Developing Leadership Identity

Participants come with widely varied backgrounds and experience as leaders. Leadership development supports educators new to leadership as well as those who have been in leadership positions. Participant feedback indicates that through their LFM experience, participants' **identity as a leader deepens and develops as it is enacted in practice**.

One participant illustrated this point, stating:

> I would describe [LFM] as a journey of self-discovery and development. Calling it "training" is almost misleading, insofar as there was little direct instruction and more reflection and guided activities. The bottom line is that one develops their leadership skills by DOING rather than by listening to others lecture or read about it.

Responses to a question included in a June 2016 participant survey further demonstrated this finding. When asked, "Have you had any experiences that made you think about leadership in a different way, either leadership in general, or about yourself as a leader," two participants noted the comprehensive nature of the leadership experience:

> I have found myself drawing on the literature and lessons that I took away from LFM. For example, acting more intentionally about relationship building and networking, and channeling potential resistance into an opportunity to learn and grow. I do think about

leadership a little differently, and I do feel better equipped and more confident acting in a leadership role.

I've had various opportunities to reflect on leadership and my own leadership as a way to build meaningful relationships with colleagues and using evidence-based inquiries to move projects along. I've found that I've been more cognizant about developing logic models and identifying possible outcomes to establish a framework.

In October 2016, participants further reflected on what they had learned about themselves as leaders; they **report being more confident and more strategic in their decisions and actions**. In the words of two participants:

I feel more empowered and knowledgeable as an adjunct faculty member. Within my department, I feel that my input is valuable, however I have felt overlooked within the broader campus fabric. My experience at LFM, especially regarding connecting with other classified staff and more experienced faculty, has helped me to feel like a more integrated member of our campus community and like I can lead my students in terms of having a voice...a voice that can be heard!!

I have gained confidence and learned to speak up for equity in venues where that might not be the popular thing to do. I have learned a lot about resistance and am willing to accept criticism without taking it personally.

One educator could see broader opportunities to apply these leadership skills, stating:

It benefits me a lot, and I am able to apply the learning from LFM to my work—leading the Educational Master Plan planning team, leading the Assessment Coaches team, leading the possible upcoming Institutional Effectiveness model.

Sustaining as a Leader

In shaping the program outcomes, LFM leaders recognized that developing as a leader is an ongoing process that can at times be stressful and exhausting. Leaders need strategies to avoid burnout. Participant feedback illustrates recognition of this need, as well as participants' identification of sources of support that could help maintain their engagement and growth. For example, one participant's reflection shows awareness that mutual support with colleagues is a way to sustain energy and effort over time.

Leadership is a new skill/trait that I'm nurturing, and just as in a challenging class, it's great to work with people struggling with similar issues, just as reassurance that I'm on the right path in my own development and that none of this is supposed to be easy. It's not always easy and often frustrating. But as we support and encourage each other through our various times of frustration, we can keep going.

Many community college educators have chosen their work because of their passion and belief in their students. In this sense, choosing to work in a community college and commit to

providing not only access to higher education, but to quality education for a diverse student population, is an expression of moral purpose. One participant described the way that moral purpose is a part of leadership and a deep driver for continued involvement:

> Leadership is the work in service of moral purpose in a transparent, authentic, reflective way that invites others to engage in their work in a transparent, authentic, reflective way.

These LFM participants, who engage in professional development on their weekends and on top of their busy schedules, demonstrate that they **want to translate their passion into action**. LFM offers a venue to reflect on this dedication to their students' success and provides an opportunity to pursue college projects driven by their deep desire to improve outcomes for their students, As one participant stated:

> I think that our team has learned that we are stronger when we pull together on behalf of our students AND that we need student input to help inform our leadership directives.

Team Collaboration and Leadership

Another critical component of the LFM experience focuses on developing participants' sense of middle leadership as a collective and team-oriented effort. For middle leaders, relationships are particularly salient; middle leadership is intensively collaborative. Much of the language and literature of leadership comes from business and tends to describe executive leadership, most often in individual terms. However, for middle leaders, the danger of seeing leadership as an individual act is that it becomes isolating. One caution in trying to effect change alone is that the change will be associated with an individual and will not be maintained by others. Another pitfall of a view of leadership as individual heroic actions is the likelihood of exhaustion and burnout.

The issues that middle leaders address are bigger than their own division, department, office, or classroom. The more intentionally they engage others, the more likely they are to effectively address those issues. These **networks and coalitions that middle leaders build** are not only necessary for implementing a project; they **provide ongoing sources of support, knowledge, and action**.

At the end of the Academy, participants reflected on the collaborative leadership of their team. Overall, their comments indicate that through LFM participation, they could see the value, strength, and growth of the team. Participants concluded that these **collaborative efforts are worthwhile given the outcomes**. As one participant summed up the experience, "Shared leadership produces stronger results." Others concur, stating:

> We're stronger together; we all bring different spheres of influence and diverse knowledge bases.

> I've learned that the more I talk about the particular strand of our project that I'm leading, the more comfortable I get, and the more conscious I become of the needs of those whose cooperation will be vital. My knowledge and anticipation of their concerns has helped

defuse potential resistance and allow conversation to flow.

However, they also acknowledge that **collaboration is not always easy or smooth**. Three participants articulate this learning as follows:

> Team dynamics account for [a] slower yet more thoughtful process; [they] also account for longer lasting rewards and higher impact; collaborative leadership moves us as a pack, and strengthens our common force.

> …Take the time to grow together in order to move faster in the end.

> I think the most difficult thing to learn was trust and placing that trust in many others on campus as well as in my group.

Part of the challenge of collaboration is to go beyond only finding colleagues who share the same opinions. Leaders **need to be able understand and engage opposition and resistance**.; Collaboration can be a way to structure different perspectives and conflicting views in ways that can strengthen the effort. LFM particularly focuses on building this awareness among participants, which is reflected in the following quotes:

> We are involving more voices around the table and making sure campus communication is at the forefront of decision-making.

> Good ideas come from supporters and resisters. And you need to be able to incorporate these ideas into your plan.

Another facet of collaborative leadership is **supporting colleagues and encouraging their leadership capacity**. Feedback from LFM participants demonstrates this recognition, including the following:

> I have been able to help others see themselves in leadership roles. I reach out more regularly to staff and faculty on the other campus of our college to coordinate events and work on projects.

Participants' connections extend beyond members of the own college team to include colleagues from other colleges. Having colleagues in similar roles at another college and **having perspectives of how things are done at other colleges can provide context for middle leaders to understand their own setting better**. As one participant noted:

> This was a wonderful opportunity to engage individuals from across our campus, and I REALLY enjoyed the opportunity to meet and collaborate with other colleges.

Leadership in the Context of a College Initiative

Two of the LFM outcomes of "engaging with the literature" and "applying research and evident to make informed decisions" contribute to third overall skill of "strengthening capacity to prioritize and lead departmental, institutional and other changes through the process of evidence-based inquiry." College projects conducted by LFM teams offer the setting to deploy and experiment with these skills. The following section provides feedback and reflections from participants on these three Academy outcomes.

Engaging Existing Literature

LFM participants confirm that they have few opportunities in their regular work schedules to read or discuss professional literature with colleagues; in turn, LFM provides a space for engagement with theory, research, and practice literature. Each year, Academy readings and activities have been adapted to be responsive to the college team projects. The LFM leadership team curated a set of readings from the literature for the 2016 Academy to provide frames and perspectives that aligned with the chosen work of participants. For example, Academy leaders included articles on equity (Dowd & Bensimon, 2014) and integration of academic and student services (Kuh & Hinkle, 2002).

As one participant summed up, "Readings were a good background. " In the final program survey, responses primarily indicate that the **selections were generally relevant to their work and leadership development**; of 31 respondents, 42% (13) said they were 'very relevant,' 55% (17) described them as 'somewhat relevant,' only 3% (1) found the readings not relevant.

Leadership Framework

In *Leading In a Culture of Change* (2001), Fullan describes, "a remarkable convergence of theories, knowledge bases, ideas, and strategies that help us confront complex problems that do not have easy answers" (p. 3). This framework both reflects and supports LFM's perspective on middle leadership.

Moral Purpose: Action with intent to make a positive difference is the starting point for Fullan's framework; it can be seen in the community college mission and the passion and dedication educators bring to their work.

Understanding Change: Middle leaders need to be prepared for a change process that is complex and messy; as middle leaders develop plans, they come to anticipate barriers, resistance, and unexpected external forces.

*Relationship*s: Connections with a range of diverse people are central to middle leadership; relationships are the connective tissue for collaborative teams and coalitions; continuing relationships also help sustain change.

Knowledge Building: As middle leaders gain experience with the change process, they draw on a range of resources to collectively build and share local knowledge; as their collective knowledge grows, they become more strategic and intentional in planning, communication, and implementation of change.

Coherence Making: At a college, numerous small, separate innovations do not add up to coherent, or transformational, change; this concept prompts LFM to support participants looking for ways to connect their projects with other work on campus.

Participants identified the following readings as particularly relevant:

> Readings on engaging resistance and collaborations between faculty and staff were helpful. We often operate in silos, and I've been working to identify strategies to engaging with more faculty and staff.

> The Fullan framework from the beginning continues to make sense.... "Engaging resistance" was a great topic.... And (for tomorrow) "On Risk" carries a good message worth remembering.

> *Innovation at Scale*...this reading illustrated system wide changes and required collaborative conversations and compromise.

Applying Data and Evidence

The application of relevant data and evidence, presented in meaningful ways, can serve as a vital component supporting student success and organizational change. In constructing their initial elevator speeches, for example, LFM participants include both quantitative and qualitative evidence to make the case for change. Participants shared that they particularly found **utility in learning to tell a story with data**; as one participant noted, "[I] can create a compelling message based on use of data."

Another participant described their growth in this skill area:

> I have been able to think more critically about institutional change and the role of data in creating this change and the impact on different departments, faculty, staff, students, and admin[istrators] in the process. For example, when trying to implement a project, one of the first steps I take is looking for the evidence and data to frame the project. I never did this in the past.

A large part of the LFM curriculum attempts to orient participants to the complexity and messiness of change. To ground that complexity in a tangible framework that allows for ongoing measurement of impact and assessment of progress and success, the LFM curriculum also introduces participants to logic models. Although the logic model tool is introduced in the first convening to give teams a chance to map out their projects in terms of inputs, actions, and outcomes, they find that change rarely follows a definite plan. By the second and third convenings, teams have had experiences on their campuses that clearly illustrate that the change process is not simple, straightforward, nor linear. That said, the logic model provides participants a useful graphic tool that illustrates intent and the initial projected path to outcomes. The tool can be revisited and revised as the project develops. Feedback indicates participants **develop facility with logic models**, as one participant stated: "[I can] use the logic model to develop a plan, implementation approaches, and evaluation metrics."

Leading a College Initiative

Developing College Projects

In the initial application to LFM, college teams identify a project they will work on. When LFM was originally planned, a campus project was first envisioned as a laboratory experience, a setting for participants to practice new leadership skills. However, teams now frequently come with projects closely connected to college priorities; participation in LFM is a chance to develop these initiatives.

Given the influence and requirements of current statewide initiatives such the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI), Student Support and Success Program (SSSP), and Student Equity Plans (SEP) there were similarities across projects pursued by college teams as part of their LFM experience. Equity and student support were central to several team efforts.

Riverside and Butte focused on implementing their student equity plans; Butte College in particular looked at how professional development could shape campus culture to support equity. Riverside and El Camino also looked for ways to integrate campus initiatives such as SEP and SSSP. Diablo Valley, worked on defining inclusive excellence as a core concept for strategic planning, along with continuing their work from 2015 to increase the number of under-represented students in STEM. Other college teams sought ways to build student support on campus. The Mt San Antonio College team worked to establish an LGBTQ center on their campus. Merced focused on creating a visual representation of the student journey through the college and the resources available along the way.

San Joaquin Delta redesigned the placement process in order to increase the number of students placed in college level English and math. Yuba College worked on dual enrollment. Both Norco and the returning Cabrillo team worked on developing guided pathways. Norco looked at creating meta-majors, and the Cabrillo team worked to lay the foundation for creating guided pathways.

The Cañada team developed a campus-wide professional development plan. The San Bernardino district team, including district and technical personnel as well as participants from Crafton Hills and San Bernardino Valley Colleges, launched work on the system-wide Education Planning Initiative; however, their project was slowed by delays in the statewide effort.

Implementing a College Initiative

In planning and implementing a college project, teams get to experience the process and then reflect on their experience. Hearing similar stories from other college teams lets participants know they are not alone in their successes or struggles. Typically when participants return for the second and third convenings, they have a mix of stories of progress as well as of unexpected obstacles, bureaucratic pitfalls, and unexpected forces that disrupted their initial plans.

LFM participants expressed their **growing understanding of the change process, including advancing their strategic thinking, gaining more ability to read their environments, and acting more intentionally**. The final program survey asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: "As a result of participating in LFM Academy, I have gained skills to lead change based on data and research." Of the 30 participants who responded to this question, nearly all responded positively: 37% (n=11) agreed strongly with the statement, 60% (n=18) agreed, only 3% (n=1) disagreed. Participant comments further illustrate this understanding:

> I need to take time to be more intentional to think through this framework.

> I lead more effectively if I keep an eye on the big idea. The more I communicate and network, the more successful the project seems to go.

As teams described the progress they made on their projects over the year, they **described the value it will bring to their colleges**. Although few of the projects were of a scale that could be completed in one year, they could **see the ongoing progress, recognize opportunities for improvement, and articulate their next steps**. Two participants describe this advancement as follows:

> We have developed our professional development "prototype" and are currently working with the first set of participants (we have one session left this semester). We are in the planning stages for next semester's program, and we are working through what changes we will need to make to make it more successful.

> Discussions surrounding the case study have allowed us to develop some more concrete plans for outreach to high schools, allowing our work in math to potentially dovetail with recruitment for our learning communities, as we seek to move the equity needle with that. It has allowed us to see the interrelation between these and may strengthen both projects, as they may recruit manpower from one another.

Sometimes, participants acknowledged that progress meant retracing steps already taken and repeating them to create more engagement, and ultimately, impact. In the words of one participant:

> We were making good progress, but we now need to start the planning process again with wide faculty involvement. Although this has extended our timeline by a year, I am sure it will only improve our ending project of Dual Enrollment.

Another team noted that the value of their work was recognized on campus, stating:

> Our project is seen as a model and touted by senior management as a project that is helping our college think about pathways, faculty development, student support and program outreach to K-12.

Receiving Coaching and Team Support

Each college team had a member of the LFM leadership group who served as a coach. Coaching has been part of the LFM design since the Academy's inception. Over the years, the coaching roles and relationships have been refined. During the Academy's first iterations, the coaching experience was uneven, depending to a great extent, on the ability to schedule time to connect. When coaching worked effectively, the teams appreciated the external support and accountability.

This year, **several former participants joined the LFM leadership group and served as team coaches**. Having been through the LFM experience themselves, they were **more willing** (as one coach put it) **to be "embedded" with the team**, spending more time at each convening as preparation for the ongoing conversations conducted between face-to-face meetings. From the **participants' perspective, they appreciated the coaches' outside observations on development of the college projects.** Participants noted the value of this support as follows:

> The meeting with our coach was useful in the sense that it forced us to move forward. We had reached a plateau with our work and kept going around in circles about what we were doing. We had so many ideas defining our framework, mission, vision, and values. When our coach visited, they gave us no more than two minutes to focus on each aspect and move on. It gave us permission to move on.

> It is easy for us to get tangled up in our own spiral of thoughts. The coach is a good mediator to help keep us on track at times, and make us feel that we were accountable to something, or someone, other than just ourselves…

> Our coach was always questioning things that we hadn't considered, or challenged us to think of things in a different context.

Conclusion

Given four years of Academy implementation and evaluation, the LFM initiative has ample experience on which to address key questions that serve as the foundation for this effort: What can we learn from the experiences of LFM participants? How can those experiences contribute to an emerging description of middle leadership and an understanding of the process of developing middle leaders? Below we summarize the implications from the LFM Academy 2016 and reflect on learning over the past several iterations of program implementation. We conclude with how considerations will factor into the future of the LFM Academy.

Evaluation Implications

California Community Colleges face major challenges and opportunities. In pursuit of stronger student outcomes, colleges are implementing numerous programs and initiatives. More than half of the colleges in the system, for example, have created accelerated basic skills sequences.

Many institutions are advancing strategies to close the achievement gap for groups that have been disproportionately impacted on their campuses. A growing number of colleges are planning to establish guided pathways. As community colleges look towards major structural and cultural changes, middle leaders have central roles in transforming their institutions.

A group of experienced middle leaders created the LFM Academy to show what middle leadership entails, to point out some of the predictable pitfalls, and to make clear the reasons for participants to take on the challenges involved in institutional transformation. Each year, the LFM Academy has engaged a group of community college educators in the hands-on experience of leading implementation of a college project. That experience provides the setting for educators to use a range of tools and apply strategies that fit their local campus culture. The LFM Academy also provides the opportunity to reflect on the experience and hear perspectives from colleagues in similar settings. While leadership development is an ongoing process, not bounded within the one-year timeframe of the LFM Academy, the year does offer a focused experience of preparation, rehearsal, and reflection on the process of leading, both as an individual and as a collaborative team.

The LFM Academy 2016 participants described the many and varied ways they are learning to be more strategic and more intentional about planning, communicating, and including different perspectives in implementation of their projects. They acknowledged that leadership includes rough and rocky parts as well as progress and satisfaction.

At the beginning of LFM, the designers had a sense of middle leadership rooted in their own experiences. From four years of observation, engagement, and evaluation, the LFM team has deepened its own understanding about the characteristics and challenges of middle leadership. Below are insights gained from the LFM experience.

Middle leaders:

- are rooted in the moral purpose of their work; the mission of the institutions and the passions of the individual educators are motivation for developing leaders.

- are key organizers, implementers, and sustainers of institutional change at their colleges.

- need to see and understand the bigger picture—bigger than their own classroom, program, division, or campus.

- engage in collaborations, teams, and coalitions; collaboration means working with a range of colleagues, not only those who agree.

- need to understand how complex and messy the change process can be and anticipate pitfalls and resistance.

- need to be prepared to stay in for the long haul; the time frame for transformational change is measured in years.

Future Directions for LFM

Given the observations and the practical experience of four years of the LFM Academy, the leadership group is looking forward to future possibilities and expansion. In 2016 LFM received support from the Institutional Effectiveness Division of the California Community College Chancellor's Office. These resources give LFM the opportunity to expand in multiple ways. The funds will subsidize participation in the 2017 LFM Academy, lowering the cost per individual participant. The resources also allow LFM to bring more former participants into the leadership group as coaches and facilitators and support the embedded coaching model.

In addition, LFM will seek opportunities to actively collaborate with the California Community College Success Network (3CSN). The two programs serve overlapping practitioner populations. Several college teams have participated in both leadership development programs and found the experiences to be mutually supportive. With expansion, the two programs plan to share knowledge and collaborate on regional workshops and presentations on practitioner leadership.

The theme of the 2017 Academy will be coherence. Cognizant of the many initiatives that community colleges are undertaking, and having observed the development of campus initiatives as part of LFM, Fullan's framework points to coherence as a missing perspective in institutional transformation. And middle leaders are central to the process of transforming their institutions in ways that support stronger, more equitable student success.

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Appendix I: LFM Leadership Team

Co-Directors

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West Valley College

Rose Asera
Program and Professional Learning Developer
The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

Appendix II: LFM Core Curricular Topics

Making the Case/Using Evidence

Understanding and Analyzing Institutional Cultures

Building Teams and Coalition

Engaging Resistance

Using Design Tools: concept mapping, prototyping, case studies and logic models

Communicating Successfully

Taking Risks

Failing Successfully

Appendix III: LFM Academy 2016 Colleges

Butte College

Cabrillo College

Cañada College

Diablo Valley College

El Camino College

Merced College

Mt. San Antonio College

Norco College

Riverside College

San Bernardino Community College District, with Crafton Hills and San Bernardino Valley College

San Joaquin Delta College

Yuba College

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California community colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

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