The Council of Independent Colleges

Creating **Tomorrow's Institutions**, Together

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From Silos to Shared Leadership: Co-Designing the Future of Our Institutions



Presenters

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- Cultivating courageous, sustainable leadership
- Strengthening organizations
- Advancing equitable workplaces

FROM SILOS TO SHARED LEADERSHIP

Co-Designing the Future of Our Institutions

Chinyere Oparah + Laura Furge
CIC Institute for Chief Academic Officers 2026



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Why Shared Leadership?

Our most consequential institutional challenges cross boundaries.

Academic decisions affect enrollment.

Enrollment management decisions impact finances

Financial decisions shape the student experience.

Faculty and students protest the consequences.

Advancement is asked to fill the gap.





The problems are interconnected.
Our leadership structures often aren't.

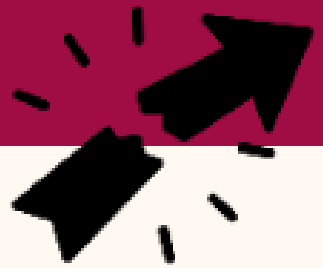
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Today's Objectives: Why are YOU here?



DIAGNOSE

Uncover what is really getting in the way of cross-functional collaboration.



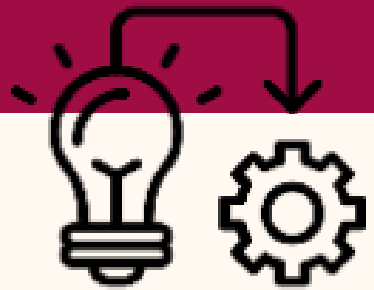
DISRUPT

Recognize how urgency, expertise, and individualized accountability can reinforce silos.



CO-DESIGN

Practice shared visioning, decision-making, and action across institutional boundaries.



APPLY

Bring multiple leadership lenses to a real challenge and identify moves toward shared action.

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When Collaboration Gets Hard

Why do smart leaders who care about the same institution get stuck?

As you listen, consider:

What is getting in the way?

Where are different professional lenses at work?

What does each leader believe they are responsible for protecting?

What similar cross-functional challenge are you navigating at your institution?

Where are shared goals colliding with different responsibilities, priorities, or ways of seeing the problem?

Case Lab: The Curriculum of the Future

CASE

A small university has made **curricular transformation** a strategic priority. Enrollment has declined in several longstanding programs, while prospective-student data suggests growing interest in interdisciplinary and career-connected offerings. The president has asked the cabinet to **develop a strategy** that can strengthen enrollment while remaining **financially prudent** and advancing the institution's **academic mission**.

Six months later, progress has stalled. Several proposals have circulated, but none has moved forward.

Cabinet members agree that change is necessary, yet meetings repeatedly end without clear decisions.

Faculty leaders are increasingly concerned about the direction of the process, and there is growing pressure to demonstrate progress before the next board meeting.

Discussion

What is happening here?

Why is this stuck?

What do the Cabinet members see from their different perspectives?

A Systems + Complexity Lens

PEOPLE • POWER • PURPOSE • RESOURCES

PEOPLE

What fears, identities, relationships, status concerns, losses, or trust issues are present?

PURPOSE

What different understandings of mission, history, future, or competing priorities are present? What institutional stories are being evoked?



POWER

Who owns this issue? Who has formal authority? Informal influence? Expertise? Who can slow, stop, or accelerate change?

RESOURCES

What financial, enrollment, staffing, time, or capacity realities are shaping the options?

S.C.A.R.F.

When change feels threatening, pay attention to:

Status
Certainty
Autonomy
Relatedness
Fairness

The Liberated Leadership Framework

IMAGINE

Look beyond what exists to reconnect with possibility, creativity, wisdom, and our freedom dreams.

DISRUPT

Challenge institutional practices and assumptions that undermine our goals, including siloed, top-down, and harmful ways of leading.

EMPOWER

Expand voice, agency, choice, and people's capacity to shape what comes next.

CO-DESIGN

Create with those most affected, drawing on shared wisdom rather than designing for others.



PAUSE

Resist urgency long enough to discern what is happening and choose our response strategically.

DARE

Practice strategic courage while navigating complexity, power, relationships, and risk.

REPLENISH

Build the boundaries, connection, reflection, and restoration that make leadership sustainable.

CELEBRATE

Recognize progress, courage, learning, connection, and shared wins that sustain collective change.

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From Diagnosis to Shared Action

EMPOWER

Expand who helps us learn.

Before designing a solution, ask:

Who experiences this problem?
Whose knowledge or perspective are we missing?
Who understands different parts of the system?
Who can help us solve this problem?

→

CO-DESIGN

Change who gets to participate in shaping what comes next.

Invite those perspectives into:

imagining possibilities
developing and testing approaches
shaping decisions and trade-offs
learning and adapting together

When does co-design feel like a burden rather than a possibility?

Design With, Not For

Instead of:

“We need faculty buy-in.”

Ask:

What knowledge do faculty hold that we may be overlooking?

Instead of:

“How do we get students on board?”

Ask:

What do students know about their experience that institutional leaders cannot know for them?



Participation goes beyond consultation.
It should improve the design.

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Slow Down to See the System

BEFORE WE SOLVE...

NOTICE	What is actually happening?
INQUIRE	Whose experience and knowledge are we missing?
UNDERSTAND	What system dynamics are producing what we're seeing
IMAGINE	What else might be possible?
TRY + LEARN	What can we test rather than prematurely perfect?

Informed by Liberatory Design, National Equity Project.

Cross-Functional Consulting Lab

1 BRING A REAL CHALLENGE

Think of an initiative that:

- requires multiple parts of your institution
- has become stuck, strained, or slower than it needs to be
- doesn't have an obvious technical solution

2 minutes: jot down your challenge.

Briefly share.
Your table chooses ONE.

2 MAP THE SYSTEM

PEOPLE

What's happening?
→ One strategic move

POWER

What's happening?
→ One strategic move

PURPOSE

What's happening?
→ One strategic move

RESOURCES

What's happening?
→ One strategic move

What can colleagues outside your functional area see that you couldn't see alone?

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What Changed When We Changed the Lens?

What became visible that you hadn’t initially seen?

What did someone from another functional area see differently?

What assumption did you notice in your own professional lens?

What might you do differently now?

Take time to understand different priorities.
Listen to and leverage different perspectives.

What Happens to Your Leadership Under Pressure?

Take the C4LL Shared Leadership Quiz

Discover the leadership tendencies you rely on when complexity and pressure rise.

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What Is Your Leadership Pattern?

TAKE CHARGE
You create momentum by stepping forward, clarifying direction, and driving action.

DELIVER EXCELLENCE
You bring deep expertise, high standards, and strong accountability for the work in your area.

BUILD ALIGNMENT
You invest in relationships and shared understanding so people can move forward together.

OPEN THE SYSTEM
You broaden participation and bring more perspectives into understanding and shaping the work.

HOLD THE WHOLE
You connect people, power, purpose, and resources to see the larger institutional system.

THINK ABOUT YOUR CABINET

Which tendencies are especially strong?

Which are less represented?

Who do you tend to agree with?

Who should you listen more closely to?

Every tendency brings strengths.
Under pressure, any tendency can narrow our leadership when it becomes our only move.

One Move Toward Shared Leadership

When you return to your institution...

What is one conversation, relationship, or decision process you will approach differently?

What is one move you will make toward greater shared ownership?

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Thank you for attending this session!