Reframing Leadership Development in Healthcare

An OD Approach

By Vic Cocowitch, Stephen Orton, Jacque Daniels, and Debbie Kiser

Introduction and Background

This case study describes a leadership development program implemented within Novant Health (Novant), a nonprofit healthcare system. In 1997, Novant was formed through the merger of two large regional hospitals: Presbyterian Healthcare in Charlotte, NC and Carolina Medicorp in Winston-Salem, NC. Novant now has a four state footprint with 14 medical centers, 360 physician clinics, 158 outpatient centers, and 25,000 employees.

The leadership development program, entitled Leadership Novant, set out to impact leaders individually, to improve the way they work in teams, to integrate the organization's cultures, and to link learning to Novant's strategy of becoming a unified system. The Leadership Novant experience suggests lessons learned for OD and HRD professionals desiring to enhance the impact and integration of their leadership development investments.

Origins of Leadership Novant

Eight years after the 1997 merger, with the addition of many other hospitals and healthcare facilities, Novant still had multiple cultures, with a wide variety of policies, strategic plans, and information systems. Leadership networking, development, and succession planning suffered as a result.

The distinct cultures and networks prevented senior leaders from seeing the talent in the organization. In 2005, many senior leaders were concerned that the organization lacked the talent to fill new leader roles. However, two key leaders, Novant’s Chief Administrative Officer and the Vice President of Learning and Development, believed the leader pipeline could be filled largely by internal talent. At the same time, they wanted to unify the culture by building a network across the merger divide.

In addition, Novant decided in 2005 to double in size within five years. That growth strategy created two imperatives for Leadership Novant: 1) develop a pool of talent to fill the many new leader roles across the enterprise, and 2) intervene to address culture issues that had the potential to undermine the growth strategy.

Principles and Beliefs about Developing Organizational Leadership

The design and development of Leadership Novant was informed by key principles and beliefs about learning and organizational development.

- Leadership is learning. We endorse Vaill's (1998) notion that leadership is not learned, it is continuous learning (p.132). Vaill’s metaphor, “permanent white water,” also perfectly describes the healthcare industry, where managers “are not just attempting to survive the shock and surprises that are buffeting them but trying to be proactive at the same time, pursuing intended changes in products, services, cost structures, technologies, and organizational structures and cultures and, beyond these, seeking a transformative
change of their basic mission and purpose” (p. 120).

Leadership Novant encouraged leaders to face that turbulent health care environment through seeing their leadership as a continual learning process. The program was not seen as a capstone program that assumed learning was over after completion; instead, leaders were just getting started in applying their learning to the organization’s challenges.

» **The system is a great laboratory for learning.** More and more attention is being paid in management and leadership education to using the work environment as a learning laboratory, versus the external classroom or a case study constructed from another organization’s experience. Scherer (2009) refers to this as “the workplace school of life” where you pay no tuition; faculty are always there; no one grades you besides your inner critic; school is always in session; and instead of exams you get constant real-time “tests” (pp. 3-4).

Leadership Novant accentuated the system as the context for learning. The system’s evolving change and growth challenges became action learning projects. The program developed internal leaders as team sponsors and as program faculty over time.

» **Managers and leaders learn through experiences.** Mintzberg states that management is a blend of craft (experience) with art (insight) and some science (analysis) and believes that management education should be “engaging,” where managers learn from their own experiences (2004, p. 1). A recent white paper from the Center for Creative Leadership finds that many organizations instead rely on “content-heavy” training models that are “dated and redundant” and “increasingly mismatched against the challenges leaders currently face” (Petrie, 2011, p. 10).

Leadership Novant focused heavily on experiential design, real-time case studies, and community learning, balancing content with experiences, and time for reflection and dialogue. We attempted to create what Mintzberg, Kleiner, and Schein refer to as a “mutual help society” (2011, p. 44).

### Elements for Leadership Novant

The Leadership Novant model included three major interactive and integrated components: the Cohort Program, System Engagement and Commitment, and Ongoing Leadership Development. *Table 1* (see next page) presents a summary of the OD elements of the model.

**Team Leadership is vital for Novant’s success, as the organization relies heavily on interdisciplinary teams working collaboratively to continuously improve patient safety, increase quality, and problem-solve. Because of this, teamwork was a key theme throughout the curriculum in readings, assessments, simulations, and social activities. During the nine-month cohort program, fellows completed two different action learning team projects.**

**Design Team**

The design team consisted of Novant’s Chief Administration Officer and Vice President of Learning and Development, the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Gillings School of Global Public Health, and an independent organizational and leadership development consultant who had worked extensively with healthcare systems and leadership development. These partners co-designed the model and played complementary roles throughout its implementation:

» Novant’s **Chief Administrative Officer** aligned the program with the current issues facing Novant and ensured the Executive Team’s involvement. She also led the internal committee that defined action learning team projects and selected program participants, called fellows.

» Novant’s **Vice President of Learning and Development** ensured that content aligned with the organization’s current educational strategies, tools, and leader competencies.

» **UNC** contributed action learning and adult education experience; an annual organizational assessment that informed improvement and redesign; and a network of external faculty. They also provided planning and logistics management for off-site retreats.

» **The Organizational Development consultant** played a design and facilitation role, helping weave the model’s components and faculty together. Because he also consults with the Novant system, he was able to connect the model’s

**Participant Selection Process**

For the first several cohorts, the Executive Team selected the participants. This eventually transitioned to the System Administrative Committee, whose role it was to oversee the “health” of Novant and to ensure capacity and capability to deliver sustained performance. All directors and above, including physician leaders, were potential candidates. Criteria used in the selection process included length of time in role (one-year minimum), performance (including 360 degree feedback related to the Novant Leader Competencies), potential for advancement, commitment to full attendance, and diversity (both cultural and organizational).

**Cohort Program—Themes**

The model’s centerpiece was a nine-month cohort program: five sessions of three days each. Each session employed a mix of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Component</th>
<th>OD Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design Team</strong></td>
<td>Co-designed with multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Program is co-designed by internal senior executives with external expertise and perspectives from UNC Institute for Public Health and external OD and leadership consultant.</td>
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<td><strong>Participant Selection Process</strong></td>
<td>Selection of program fellows</td>
<td>Fellows are selected by an internal system committee based on established criteria and assessment of candidates’ capabilities. The composition of cohorts can vary with system needs. Fellows are invited to participate by the organization's President.</td>
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<td><strong>Nine-Month Cohort Program</strong></td>
<td>Design team and emerging design</td>
<td>The design team is always learning and improving the cohort program with emerging designs to fit evolving organizational challenges and learning opportunities.</td>
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<td>External faculty development and relevance</td>
<td>External faculty are selected to deliver content relevant to organizational learning needs; briefed on organization context; and supported to build case studies and experiential sessions using current system data and situations.</td>
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<td>Experiential design</td>
<td>Experiential learning is the underpinning of the cohort program. There is a balance of process work with content allowing ample space for learning through dialogue and discussion of the unexpected.</td>
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<td>Three level learning: self, teams, and system</td>
<td>Retreats focus on all three levels of leadership learning, as well as provide time to reflect on and plan for back home applications.</td>
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<td><strong>System Engagement and Commitment</strong></td>
<td>Ongoing diagnosis of critical system issues</td>
<td>Ongoing diagnosis of key issues is conducted via leader interviews. This input drives relevancy of curriculum content, action learning projects, and faculty.</td>
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<td>Action learning team projects and system learning</td>
<td>Action learning projects are selected by the system committee to address current leadership challenges, balancing tactical and strategic issues. Teams engage with system as learning lab. Participants present learnings to colleagues to enhance dialogue/systems thinking.</td>
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<td>Selection and training executive sponsors</td>
<td>The system committee matches projects with executive sponsors. Sponsors guide the teams and encourage them to challenge system beliefs and current approaches to their work.</td>
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<td>Linkage to leadership tools, language, and approaches</td>
<td>The design team aligns faculty and program content with leadership tools and approaches current to the organization to build a uniform culture and language around leadership.</td>
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<td><strong>Ongoing Leadership Development</strong></td>
<td>Life-long learning</td>
<td>Fellows often report breakthroughs during the cohort program. Sometimes clarity comes later, as leaders “try on” a new role, skill, or behavior. Internal OD and education staff are available after the cohort program for follow-up coaching.</td>
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<td>Mentorships</td>
<td>A formal 8-month mentorship follows the cohort program, reinforcing application of new leadership skills and behaviors. Many current mentors are program alumni.</td>
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<td>Reunions</td>
<td>Reunions are planned about two years after each cohort program, allowing fellows to reflect on their progress, sharpen their developmental plans, and reconnect with their colleagues.</td>
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educational methods including team-based action learning projects, social networking, and self-assessments. All sessions were conducted at an off-site conference facility. The cohort program had three main learning themes: Use of Self, Team Leadership, and Systems Thinking and Change Leadership.

Use of Self is a key foundation of leadership learning. The Use of Self model (Figure 1) was customized for Novant from the work of Seashore et al. (2001) and woven throughout the cohort program. Effective leadership depends on a deep awareness of self and an ability to intentionally manage and deploy self for desired organizational impact (Bennis, 1988).

The Use of Self model identified strategies, traceable to a leader’s sense of self, that enhanced leader effectiveness. It also articulated blocks and barriers to leadership effectiveness. The goal was to help leaders perform Novant’s six core leader competencies shown on the right side of the diagram. This Use of Self Model was reinforced in each retreat through readings, self-assessment instruments, feedback, and content sessions.

Team Leadership is vital for Novant’s success, as the organization relies heavily on interdisciplinary teams working collaboratively to continuously improve patient safety, increase quality, and problem-solve. Because of this, teamwork was a key theme throughout the curriculum in readings, assessments, simulations, and social activities. During the nine-month cohort program, fellows completed two different action learning team projects.

Examples of projects included developing a health literacy program; analyzing post-acute care facilities and...
strategy; and developing a cultural due diligence process and tool for potential mergers and acquisitions. Most projects concluded in a single four-month cycle; a few continued from one team to another. If appropriate, sponsoring leaders worked to find an organizational champion to implement team recommendations at the conclusion of each team cycle.

» Systems Thinking and Change Leadership were reinforced throughout the cohort program. The organization's strategic plan drove content and action learning projects aligned with current change needs. Case studies showcased system-wide change initiatives as they were taking place: for instance, key leaders presented early plans for the roll-out of the new health information technology platform for inpatient facilities and physician practices.

Cohort Program—Learning Components
The design team outlined the basic content and process components of each session, leaving enough “white space” in agendas to let content and process emerge, sometimes with “just-in-time” agenda changes. Each three-day session included a social science self-assessment instrument, action learning teams, and networking. Table 2 (see next page) is a summary of the design features in each of the cohort program retreats.

» Social science self-assessment instruments created dialogue around personality types, leadership styles, or preferences. Experiential learning sessions enabled fellows to explore the deeper leadership issues embedded in each self-assessment’s findings with their colleagues. From the beginning of the program, careful attention was given to creating a safe environment that allowed for personal risk-taking and meaningful feedback from colleagues.

» Action learning teams planned, reported, and got feedback on their work at each retreat. In addition to building strong connections on each team, the action learning process connected fellows to leaders across the organization who served as team sponsors or subject matter experts. Action learning methodology in this case allowed current organizational challenges to fuel team and organizational learning, and it “develops the whole leader for the whole organization” (Marquart et al., 2009, p. 85), while promoting “individual, team, and organizational learning” (p. 7).

» Network development was an important component of Leadership Novant. At each retreat a social networking activity helped fellows to deepen personal relationships and networks, and to “nudge” them out of their comfort zones. Activities included an evening cooking school, a judged team dance competition, improvisational acting, and karaoke. Each activity had a connection to leadership. For example, improvisational acting demonstrated leadership principles related to presence, authenticity, teamwork, risk-taking, and transformational mindset.

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Retreat #2—Transformational Change Leadership. Each team delivered a midterm presentation on their action learning project and received mid-course feedback from peers and senior leaders. The presentations were video-taped and teams critiqued their own work with a consultant specializing in public presentation skills. Change leadership was a major content area for this retreat. The Change Style Indicator self-assessment instrument helped fellows understand their leadership styles.

Retreat #3—First Action Learning Project Completion. After 4 months of work, teams presented learnings and recommendations from their action learning projects. A wide variety of senior leader guests reacted to the recommendations, and engaged in dialogue about the leadership implications for the system as a whole. The fellows then switched teams and began a new action learning project.

Because Novant’s culture relies heavily on leveraging the collective wisdom of the team, the retreats provided a platform for fellows to share their insights, challenges, and successes. The retreats also served as a catalyst for change, allowing fellows to reflect on their experiences and apply new knowledge and skills to their work. The retreats were a vital component of the cohort program, helping fellows to develop the skills and mindset necessary to drive system-wide change.
Table 2. Cohort Program Design Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THREADS</th>
<th>JANUARY</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JULY</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Features</td>
<td>• Welcome by CEO&lt;br&gt; • Review Program Models/Expectations</td>
<td>• Transformational Change and Leader Mindset&lt;br&gt; • Mid-Term for Action Learning Projects</td>
<td>• Complete Round 1 Action Learning Teams&lt;br&gt; • Round 2 Team Start-up</td>
<td>• Mid-Term for Round 2 Team Projects</td>
<td>• Integrating Program Learning&lt;br&gt; • Preparing for Mentor&lt;br&gt; • Closure Activities</td>
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<td>Use of Self</td>
<td>MBTI&lt;br&gt; • Extrovert/Introvert&lt;br&gt; • Sensing/Intuition&lt;br&gt; • Thinker/Feeler&lt;br&gt; • Judge/Perceiver&lt;br&gt; Johari Window Model</td>
<td>Change Style Indicator&lt;br&gt; • Conserver&lt;br&gt; • Pragmatist&lt;br&gt; • Originator&lt;br&gt; Use of Self Model</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence&lt;br&gt; • Self-Regard&lt;br&gt; • Self-Awareness&lt;br&gt; • Assertiveness&lt;br&gt; • Independence&lt;br&gt; • Self-actualization</td>
<td>TKI-Conflict Style&lt;br&gt; • Avoider&lt;br&gt; • Accommodator&lt;br&gt; • Compromiser&lt;br&gt; • Collaborator&lt;br&gt; • Competer</td>
<td>• Integrating Feedback into Development Plans&lt;br&gt; • Mentor Assignments</td>
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<td>Team Leadership Action Learning Projects</td>
<td>• Action Learning Project Assignments&lt;br&gt; • Team Meetings with Sponsors&lt;br&gt; • Team Start-up Exercise&lt;br&gt; • Group Dynamics Exercise</td>
<td>• Mid-term Team Presentations/Feedback&lt;br&gt; • Public Speaking Coaches&lt;br&gt; • Team Planning Time</td>
<td>• Team Final Presentations&lt;br&gt; • 1st Round Team Closure&lt;br&gt; • 2nd Round Team Meet with Sponsors&lt;br&gt; • 2nd Round Team Start-up</td>
<td>• Mid-term Presentations/Feedback&lt;br&gt; • Public Speaking Coaches&lt;br&gt; • Team Planning Time</td>
<td>• Action Learning Team Final Presentations&lt;br&gt; • “Present Your Leadership Novant Journey”</td>
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<td>Systems Thinking And Change Leadership</td>
<td>• Novant 2015 Strategy&lt;br&gt; • Current Organizational Analysis&lt;br&gt; • Paper Planes Simulation</td>
<td>• Case Study—Transformational Challenges at Novant&lt;br&gt; • System Dialogue with Leaders</td>
<td>• Novant Financial State and Challenges&lt;br&gt; • System Dialogue with Leaders</td>
<td>• Appreciative Inquiry&lt;br&gt; • Innovation: Building a Culture of Innovation</td>
<td>• System Thinking: Being a Change Agent&lt;br&gt; • System Dialogue with Leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Faculty/Guests</td>
<td>• Management &amp; Leadership: Theory &amp; Practice&lt;br&gt; • Transformational Change: Models and Mindset</td>
<td>• Leadership Discussion: Novant CEO</td>
<td>• Human Value Chain as Competitive Advantage&lt;br&gt; • Leadership Lessons from Improvisation</td>
<td>• Spouses/Bosses Invited for Graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>• Cooking School&lt;br&gt; • Karaoke</td>
<td>• Judged Dance Competition</td>
<td>• Amazing Race</td>
<td>• Graduation Dinner and Dance!</td>
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Reframing Leadership Development in Healthcare: An OD Approach
on ad hoc, interdisciplinary teams, the process of team closure and new team start-up was closely managed to accentuate its importance as a leadership skill. Team closure included an in-depth feedback session where individuals heard feedback from each team member. Content sessions focused on current leadership challenges in the system. A special evening with the Novant CEO was featured where fellows asked questions about the organization and the CEO’s own leadership journey. Fellows completed an assessment on emotional intelligence and studied its connection to leadership effectiveness.

Retreat #4—Systems Thinking and Conflict. This session included a final chance to deliver strategically relevant content, and new teams gave action learning mid-term presentations. A template for individual development was introduced after the conclusion of the cohort program. Fellows explored conflict styles through the lens of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Between the fourth and fifth retreat, fellows sorted through all of the experiences, self-assessments, feedback, team events, and self-insights to create individual leadership development plans for their futures.

Retreat #5—Graduation. During the graduation retreat, the teams presented their final project recommendations and repeated the team feedback exercise with a different set of team members. The graduation retreat prepared fellows for an eight-month structured mentorship program. To do this, fellows fine-tuned their individual leadership development plans and received feedback on them from their one-up boss before being assigned a mentor.

The process of closure for the cohort program occurred on many levels, allowing time for individuals to reflect on learnings and insights, for teams to say goodbye, and for the entire cohort to review its learning journey. The CEO spoke at the formal graduation ceremony and celebration. Fellows were encouraged to invite a spouse or guest.

System Engagement and Commitment
To ensure that Leadership Novant met the organization’s evolving needs, a wide variety of system leaders and committees were engaged in every aspect of the program. Many senior leaders participated in an organizational diagnosis and interview process conducted prior to a new cohort launch. This process refreshed program content to address relevant leadership challenges.

The System Administrative Committee not only selected the participants but also developed the action learning project topics. Using system leaders to develop topics and to serve as executive sponsors not only enhanced system relevancy and commitment, but also promoted action learning teams’ access to data and resources for their project.

Fellows had repeated contact with members of the Novant Executive Team (including the CEO) and other senior leaders, who taught, spoke, sponsored teams, and attended multiple retreats for project presentations. It was standard for 10 to 15 senior leaders to attend sessions where teams presented mid-term project learnings. Other leaders, including the one-up boss of each fellow, attended sessions where teams make final presentations. This level of engagement by leadership reinforced the message that team output is valued, and created a feedback loop for learning about the organization’s history, strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Ongoing Leadership Development
After graduation from the cohort program, fellows became the protégés of assigned mentors based on a variety of factors, including needed organizational exposure and leadership skills. The protégé and the mentor met 2 months after the completion of the cohort program to review the development plan and begin the mentorship process. The mentorship process reinforced the language from the cohort program. Over time, more and more mentors came from the alumni ranks of the cohort program, which has had the effect of evolving the leadership culture toward the fellows’ shared experiences.

Each Leadership Novant cohort developed a strong professional network and interpersonal bonds. To enhance this sense of community, reunions were held for each class about two years after the graduation event. These gatherings were two days in length and provided an opportunity for alums to re-connect, reflect on their accomplishments, and align their individual development needs with the organization’s constantly evolving change agenda.

Impact

The impact from Leadership Novant was felt throughout the program’s seven-year history and continues to influence the organization today in a variety of ways.

» Culture. Perhaps the program’s most significant impact was in terms of integrating the many separate cultures existing in the system into one. Each program cohort, due to its timing, had a special impact on Novant’s culture. For example, the first cohort represented the coming together of the system from its two founding regional hospitals and addressed competitive and non-collaborative issues holding the organization back. By the fourth cohort, new system structures, relationships, and a shared leader language had emerged; the focus shifted to how to manage the pace and complexity of change at a broader system level. The organizational culture that exists today only vaguely resembles the one that began this leadership and growth journey in 2005.

» Succession Planning. One of the original goals for Leadership Novant in 2005 was to develop internal talent to fill leadership roles as the system doubled in size in 5 years. Leadership Novant successfully allowed high-potential leaders to be recognized and known within the system. Over half of the fellows in the first three cohorts had been promoted by 2011, including a full 70% of the initial class. All current senior leaders in the 13 hospital facilities have participated in Leadership Novant. One fellow is currently on the seven-person Executive Team; two more are regional
market presidents. These promotions, combined with Novant’s success at doubling in size, attest to the positive impact of the Leadership Novant model.

» **Network Development.** Leadership Novant accelerated the elimination of facility and program silos, as well as geographic barriers. What exists today is a tight-knit, system-wide network of leaders. Their shared experiences provide them with a common language and set of processes and tools that allow them to work effectively as one system. Given the challenges embedded in health care today, this network provides vital support to individual leaders who know they are not alone.

The program must be always evolving. For Leadership Novant to be effective it needed to change in relation to the needs of the system. For each cohort, we needed to be ready to significantly change the agenda, content experts, and case studies. We never used the same organizational case study twice, as there was always something emerging that was more relevant. We were prepared to make real time changes at retreats as critical events often happened that created unexpected learning opportunities.

» **Learning Organization.** Leadership Novant engaged almost everyone in the top three tiers of leadership over seven years. The program was modeled in such a way as to enable the organization to become a more effective learning organization through fellows and leaders working together on real organizational issues. Today this commitment to dialogue and systems thinking can be seen in a quarterly meeting of all senior leaders, where they engage in future planning and the discussion of operational issues needing attention.

» **Administrative/Physician Partnership.** Engaging physician leaders in every cohort of the program helped to create a strong administrative/physician partnership, with mutual respect for each other’s perspectives and roles. This partnership is vital for the next stage of Novant’s journey to truly transform health care delivery and be a national leader for patient experience, affordability, quality, and safety.

**Impact on Novant Executive Team.** Leadership Novant significantly impacted the Executive Team. The program provided a regular platform for the Executive Team to be heard in a new way, and over time they became more transparent and less guarded in their conversations. It enabled them to also listen differently to the voice of the organization. Leaders felt more empowered to speak up and “push back,” as the CEO often implored them to do. A more open and trusting organization is the result today. The Executive Team now meets on a regular basis with a broader set of operational leaders - many of them graduates from Leadership Novant - to discuss strategic and operational matters.

» **Team Process.** Leadership Novant’s team and action learning format has been adopted as the model for working on projects. It is routine for leaders throughout the system to come together in short-term, ad hoc teams to solve system problems and drive needed change initiatives. These teams include all levels of leadership and have enabled Novant to be more nimble and strategic.

» **Continuity with New Leaders.** Over time, Leadership Novant provided the opportunity to share with a critical mass of leaders a consistent body of content knowledge, a common leadership language, and the organization’s strategic growth agenda. To ensure continuity with new leaders, three Leadership Novant graduates serve as faculty for each monthly program in a newly created leadership immersion program. This encourages their continued leadership growth and ensures a consistent on-boarding process for new leaders.

**Lessons Learned**

Over the seven years of Leadership Novant the lessons learned were many.

» A high-potential leadership program must be owned and actively supported by the organization’s CEO and the entire Executive Team. In this way, the program becomes an intervention aligned to desired growth and change. Their active engagement—as teachers, as learners, and listeners—enables meaningful system dialogue and learning.

» One Executive Team member must play a sponsor role and be involved in every stage of design, development, and implementation. This ensures a healthy linkage with the Executive Team. The Executive Team sponsor attended every session over the seven-year period, which permitted many unexpected but important interventions and conversations to occur.

» Where possible, use the internal resources of the organization to build the curriculum and deliver the program. This promotes a consistent leadership language and set of tools. It also engenders constructive dialogue and the real systems context for leadership.

» The program must be always evolving. For Leadership Novant to be effective it needed to change in relation to the needs of the system. For each cohort, we needed to be ready to significantly change the agenda, content experts, and case studies. We never used the same organizational case study twice, as there was always something emerging that was more relevant. We were prepared to make real time changes at retreats as critical events often
happened that created unexpected learning opportunities.

» Evolving the program to align with system needs helps the design team maintain its energy and focus. We could see the changes taking place in each cohort and the organization. This fueled our learning and enthusiasm for the program. We stayed focused on the change: that is the appropriate legacy, not the program itself.

» A leadership program is not the place where leaders go when they need to get fixed. We were firm in the conviction that the program was for high-potential leaders.

» Learn when to take a break and when the program is over. After the first three cohorts we stopped for 18 months to allow the system to catch up with some critical changes and to allow the leader pipeline to fill up. When we started our last two cohorts, the system’s leaders and the faculty were ready to fully reengage.

We ended the cohort program in 2012, realizing that we had built the critical mass of leaders needed to tackle the challenges of transforming the system. Novant continues to grow and change but this is now based on a uniform leadership culture and a systems approach. If a new program develops for senior leaders, it will be different than the one we envisioned with Leadership Novant, and will reflect Novant’s new reality.

Conclusion

To create a leadership program that truly promotes transformational change, almost every aspect of traditional leadership development must be conceptualized and designed with an OD mindset that takes into account individual, team, and system level learning that is fully aligned with the strategic direction of the organization.

In 2005, the sponsors of Leadership Novant knew intuitively they had to prepare for substantial organizational change and growth, but were surprised by how rapidly change has happened. Driven by high costs, lack of operational efficiency, consumer expectations, and state and federal reforms, the entire healthcare industry is now in the midst of radical reinvention. Novant is well into its transformational journey, with many years of dedication and focus to come, and with confidence in its leaders’ abilities.

References


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OD PRACTITIONER is the quarterly journal of the Organization Development Network, an international association whose members are committed to practicing organization development as an applied behavioral science. The Handbook for Strategic HR is edited by: John Vogelsang, Maya Townsend, Matt Minahan, David Jamieson, Judy Vogel, Annie Viets, Cathy Royal, and Lynne Valek

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A compendium of the best thinking on the subject, Handbook for Strategic HR includes 78 articles from the renowned OD Practitioner. It introduces readers to core organization development strategies and skills, giving them creative approaches, practical tips, and proven methods to help them:

- See the big picture, think systemically, and strategically identify where best to foster change in their organization
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