

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Leadership Development as a Lever for Social Change

*An Evaluation Framework and
Impact Storytelling Approach*

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Societal Impact Framework | 5 |
| Assumptions: CCL's Approach to Leadership Development for Societal Impact | 5 |
| Approach: Leadership Solution Factors in CCL Experiences | 6 |
| Self-Development | 6 |
| Relationship Development..... | 6 |
| Group Development..... | 7 |
| Organization Development..... | 7 |
| Partnership Engagement..... | 7 |
| Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion are Omnipresent Measuring Levels of Impact | 8 |
| Leader Self-Development..... | 10 |
| Groups..... | 11 |
| Networks | 12 |
| Movements | 13 |
| Why We Measure: Inform and Improve..... | 14 |
| Communicating Societal Impact: The Stories We Can Tell | 15 |
| Scope & Scale | 15 |
| Ripples | 15 |
| Highways..... | 16 |
| Cascades..... | 16 |
| Constellations..... | 16 |
| Conclusion..... | 17 |
| About the Author | 17 |
| References..... | 18 |



Summary

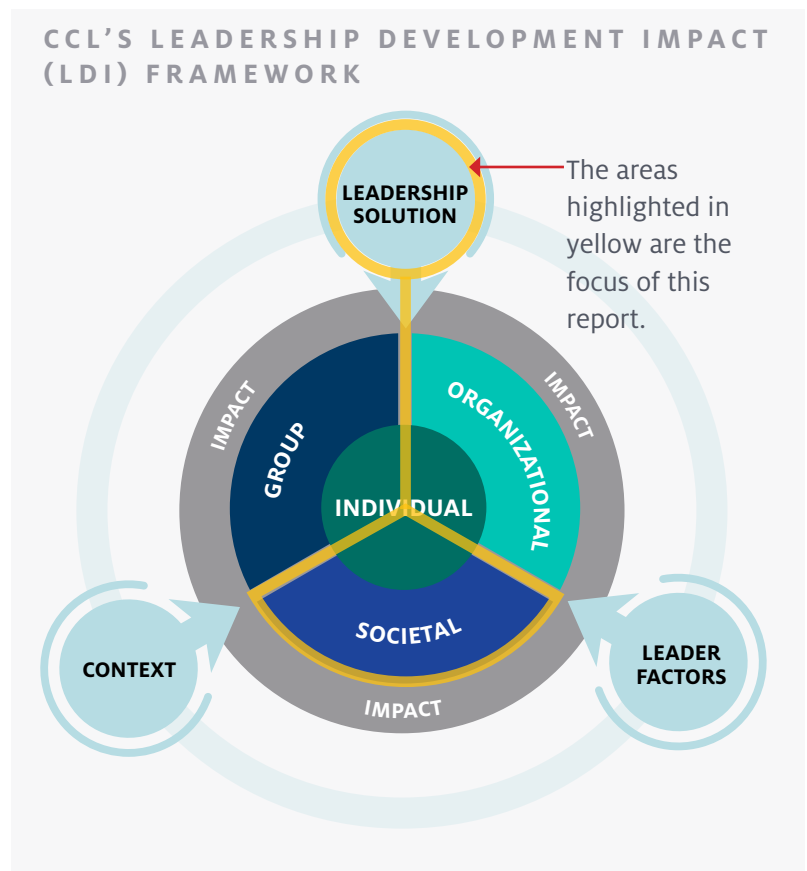
Founded with the mission to “advance the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide,” the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) has served both the social and commercial sectors for over 50 years. Many of our programs across corporate, government, philanthropic, and social (e.g., NGOs, nonprofits, K-12 institutions, higher education institutions, and population health organizations) sectors have the goal of improving outcomes for individual leaders and groups, and extending those outcomes to create impact at the organizational, community, or societal level. Our clients often aspire for large and transformational impact. They are interested in telling stories of impact – both immediate and sustained – that trace the power of their investment and its ability to result in

improved outcomes for individuals, organizations, and communities. However, it’s often difficult or impossible to represent such impact without intentional planning and measurement. Using the idea of levers as a metaphor, we present a pathway for how leadership development across contexts can lead to larger scale impact, with examples from some of our current efforts to demonstrate this impact. We also provide a typology of stories that can be useful for communicating complex impact pathways. The typology provides metaphors for understanding the variety of layers of impact that contribute to societal change. Our work in support of this framework is continuously evolving as we are learning, improving our measures, and identifying opportunities for increased evaluation efforts.

Introduction

Evaluators, funders, researchers, and employers are all wrestling with the challenge of systems-level evaluation.ⁱ Demonstrating impact beyond self-reported individual-level change presents a number of challenges. A recently published CCL Research Insights Paper explores the Leadership Development Impact (LDI) Framework as a means for understanding how to measure impact of leadership development programs. That paper focuses primarily on individual, team, and organizational impact. This current paper builds on the LDI by exploring more in depth how we are using measurement and evaluation to understand impact at the community and societal level. Impact measurement at those levels becomes even more challenging, due to the length of time it can take to realize impact as well as the presence of many additional variables to consider.

FIGURE 1



The LDI focuses on three factors – leadership development solution factors, context/organizational factors, and leader factors – and how they create impact across individual, group, organizational, community, and societal levels. In the LDI, leadership solution factors relate to issues of program design and delivery (e.g., cohort-based, single or multi-session, virtual or hybrid delivery). Contextual/organizational factors relate to issues in the environment where the leader works or functions (e.g., work culture, organizational structure). Leader factors relate to individual attributes

such as motivation, personality, life experiences, and career stage, that may influence receptivity to leadership development. Within that model, these factors combine to produce impacts that can be measured and demonstrated across the four levels, and the LDI paper focuses primarily on individual, group, and organizational. This paper’s deeper exploration of the societal impact level of the LDI primarily explores leadership solution factors as “levers to pull” to achieve larger impact, with linkages to individual, group, and organizational impact.

Levers as a Metaphor for Leadership Development

Levers are one of the simple machines humans developed which revolutionized our abilities to build and construct. Drawing from the latin term “levare,” which means “to raise” and “levis,” which means “to make light,” levers are a useful metaphor for understanding leadership development for societal impact. Levers make use of a fulcrum, which allow a person to create mechanical advantage and lift a very heavy object. The exertion required is varied based on the location of the fulcrum and the counterweight. In leadership development work, we can think of societal change as the heavy rock we are attempting to lift, leadership development as the fulcrum, and investment of resources as the downward weight. Levers “amplify an input source to provide a greater output force,” like how we assume leadership development can amplify any organization’s investment toward outcomes. Creating leverage implies agility, understanding smaller units and segments, and being nimble. In this framework we break down elements of design and corresponding aspects of measurement to understand how to maximize output from resource input.

The primary question we receive from the clients, foundations, partners, and intermediary organizations is, *how do we understand what kinds of leadership development experiences will make the most difference toward their focal systemic outcomes (i.e., community health outcomes, student achievement metrics).* Sponsoring organizations want a clear way to understand the impact of their investment, and while context and leader factors likely influence the impact, the leadership solution itself presents the most tangible point of influence for ourselves and our partners. We assume that leader and context factors are still influential, likely in terms of how the solution can impact individuals and realize sustained impact across time.

However, a focus on solution factors also puts power in the hands of our partners and designers to take action on design considerations which could have a more immediate and measurable result. Though we limit our focus in this paper to solution factors as a pathway for measuring impact, we recognize that solution designers and facilitators must consider the intersectional and interdependent influence of leader and context factors to achieve maximum impact. While in the future we plan to explore how leader factors (such as years of experience, leader level, readiness for development) and context factors (such as organizational culture, community metrics) influence leadership solutions, for now, we depict them as influencing impact.

Societal Impact Framework

FIGURE 2

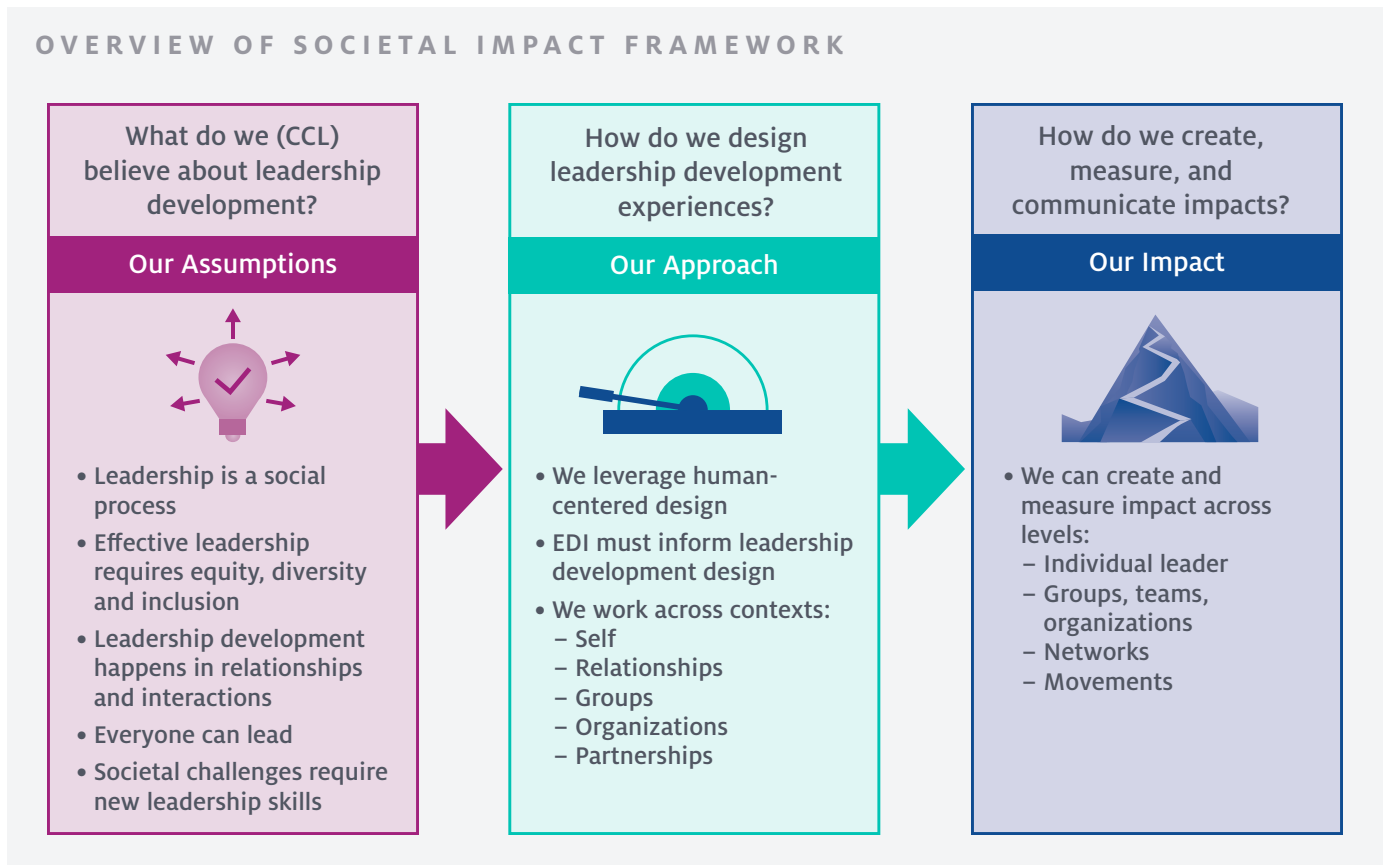


Figure 2 provides an overview of the path outlined in this paper. Before we arrive at impact, we first explain the core assumptions we, as an organization, make about leadership development and the primary ways that translates into the design of our experiences. Those assumptions and design elements translate into inputs and outputs that we can measure to understand impact. In the model above, we suggest that societal impact *begins* most often with individual leader development, where seeds of future impact, ways of being in relationships, and ways of doing work with and through others are planted. We assume that these seeds can yield compounding impact where small changes by individuals and groups can accumulate to produce bigger effects at the collective level, greater than the sum of their parts. This assumption is aligned with ecological human development,ⁱⁱ developmental evaluation,ⁱⁱⁱ and social

innovation through institutional change theory.^{iv} We can demonstrate impact beyond the self as we move into groups, networks, and movements, which are all increasingly complex levels of societal impact. Where the LDI framework primarily considers impact at the individual, team, and organizational level, we suggest that community, networks, and movements are the continued extensions required for that impact to move to the societal level.

In order to understand how we arrive at societal level impact, it is important to understand the assumptions that inform CCL’s overall approach to leadership development, the design and facilitation methods, and practices that guide the experiences we provide. The assumptions reflect our theoretical grounding and the approach to designing leadership solutions provides ways of operationalizing the experience into variables that can be adjusted over time.

Assumptions: CCL’s Approach to Leadership Development for Societal Impact

Leadership Is a Social Process. Our framework views “leadership as a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results that they could never achieve working as individuals.”^v We avoid the exclusive (and inequitable) “hero model” of leadership that privileges individual action, leader-follower dichotomies, access to institutional power, and savior narratives.^{vi} Rather, CCL defines leadership as a social process grounded in working collaboratively to establish direction, alignment, and commitment to a larger goal or purpose.

By defining it as a social process, we understand that “leadership happens in the interactions and exchanges among people with shared work.” This also recognizes that leadership does not happen in a vacuum; rather, a focus on social processes reflects how leadership is enacted in the real world. This grounding in social relationships underpins our societal impact framework, as the scaling of social relationships (understanding relationships between individuals and across organizations and communities) informs measurement across levels of impact. It also allows for recognition that transformation is greater than the sum of its parts – while we can reduce and quantify interactions and connections, relationships have the power

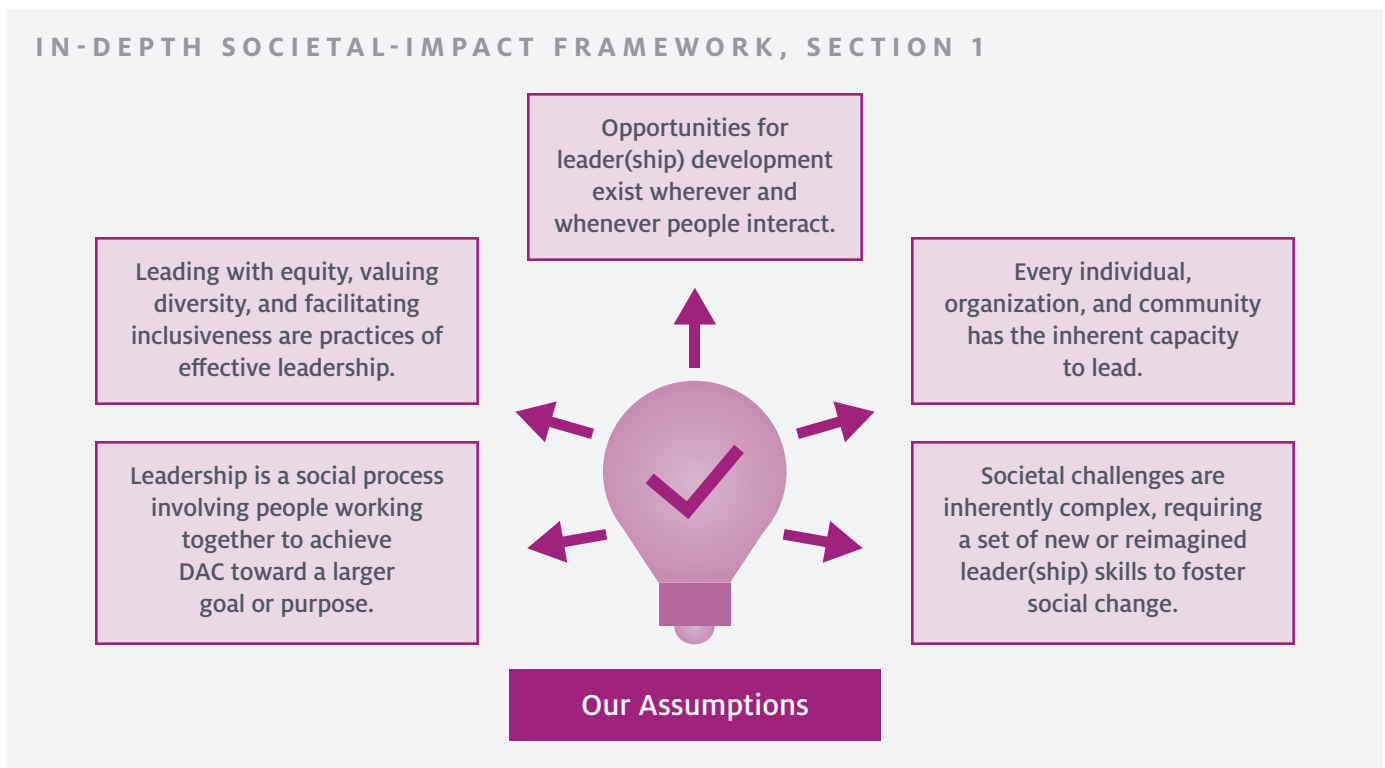
to create exponential impact by continuously evolving and influencing people and systems.

Leadership *development* is therefore the process of creating and delivering learning experiences (aka leadership solutions) that contribute to the continuous learning and improved efficacy of leadership. Each leadership development solution, from a one-day session to a multi-session or multi-year engagement, can be evaluated for its ability to contribute to overall impact.

To understand societal impact within the LDI, we focus on the interactions between and among individuals, groups, and communities and the types of human learning and development experiences that can influence the effectiveness of those interactions toward a shared goal. To that end, the following assumptions also undergird our framework.

Leading with equity, activating diversity, and facilitating inclusiveness are practices of effective leadership. Focusing on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is central to our mission at CCL. We lead with equity because it pushes for action to create environments where everyone can learn, grow, lead, and thrive. Our

FIGURE 3



assumption^{vii} is that for us to advance our mission of fostering leadership development for the benefit of society worldwide, we must help leaders move from awareness to action. For this reason, we foreground verbs in front of each component of EDI – asking leaders to lead, activate, and facilitate.^{viii} These assumptions directly inform our leadership solution factors and are discussed in the next section.

Opportunities for leader(ship) development exist wherever and whenever people interact. We do not adhere to a hierarchical model of leadership premised on official positions of power or individual actors within traditional power structures. Conceptualizing leadership in such a way will only contribute to inequities within social systems. Rather, we assume that anyone and everyone can and does exhibit leadership behaviors and that anyone and everyone can grow in their ability to be effective leaders. Wherever people interact together in their work toward a goal presents an opportunity for improved leadership practices. This approach recognizes the power of leaders' learning and growth mindset toward continuous improvement and serves as a reminder that leadership is more about behaviors and actions than titles. Importantly, inequities related to access, mentorship, and sponsorship often result in disparate outcomes and opportunities to grow and develop as a leader. But, even when not in a position of power, individuals rely on leadership skills to interact with others and influence their surroundings.

Every individual, organization, and community has the inherent capacity to lead. Our framework does not assume that leadership is something to be granted or bestowed upon anyone. Rather, the inherent capacity to lead is within all people and communities, the challenge is in creating the conditions for that capacity to be catalyzed. Additionally, this belief also recognizes that individuals, organizations, and communities may bring different leadership skills and talents to their work and, just because those skills may not be recognized by more mainstream leadership philosophies, it is important to understand and honor the leadership values they promote.

Societal challenges are inherently complex, requiring a set of new or reimagined leader(ship) skills to foster social change. Societal level challenges are complex – spanning multiple sectors, systems, institutions, histories, and human experiences. The leader behaviors and leadership skills necessary to help navigate these

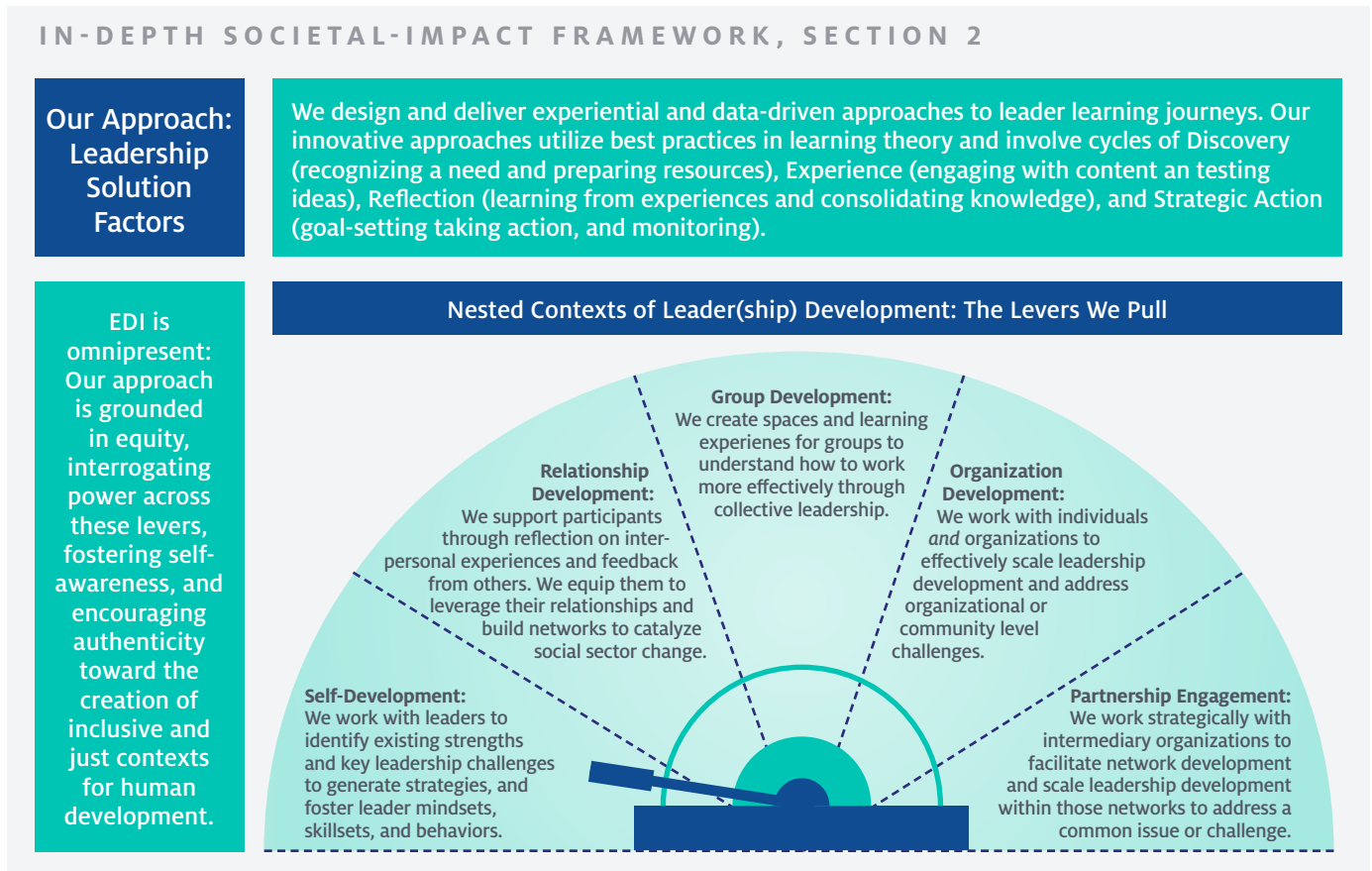
challenges and create transformational change will require more networked, strategic, and interpersonal and collaborative relationship-building skills.^{ix} Such reimagined leadership skills also pose measurement challenges that traditional research and evaluation methods are ill-equipped to capture. Reductionist approaches do not mirror real life (leadership does not happen in a lab) and, as we explore further below, continuous and emergent learning strategies are required to truly learn from evaluation and measurement from such initiatives.

Approach: Leadership Solution Factors in CCL Experiences

This framework primarily focuses on leadership solution (aka Solutions) factors and how we evaluate the effectiveness of them at contributing to broader impact – beyond individuals and groups and ideally toward community and society. Contextual factors and leader-level factors certainly contribute to overall effectiveness as well, and we are working to understand the ways these factors may influence the success and impact of our solutions. For example, CCL has found that contextual factors such as boss support for development can be critical for a leader's ability to implement new leadership practices.^x Given our focus in this paper on how leadership solution factors connect to impact, we have depicted probable influence of context and leader factors in our model (see Figure 5), assuming that leader factors may influence individual receptiveness to and growth through a solution, while contextual factors may influence the ability of an organization or community to change or a network to grow, and vice versa.

Each set of factors discussed below represents *possible* levers of change that can be pulled within a leadership solution, depending on the desired outcome(s). In theory, evaluators could isolate or manipulate some of these factors to understand how they influence impact and leader experiences. Solution designers often choose between factors to emphasize or prioritize depending on time, funding, resources, scope, and leadership needs (which directly relate to context and leader factors). Not all the factors below will be present in every solution, but the following discussion characterizes how we operationalize the factors for measurement toward outcomes when they are present.

FIGURE 4



Self-Development



We work with leaders to identify existing strengths and challenges, generate strategies, and foster leader mindsets, skillsets, and behaviors.^{xi} These factors include,

but are not limited to, understanding leadership styles and preferences, personality preferences, and developmental needs and challenges. Participants in programs are often introduced to concepts or frameworks that provide a different way of understanding how to lead. These include helping participants to:

- realize they are all leaders no matter their role;^{xii}
- gain a new understanding of leadership as a social process;
- shift their mindsets about fundamental leadership behaviors such as mentoring, advocacy, feedback, or inclusion (to name just a few examples).

In terms of impact (discussed below) these changes are often self-reported, but may also be reported through observation measures such as 360-surveys, which identify how others experience the participant.

Relationship Development



We support participants' learning about effective leadership behaviors through reflection on interpersonal experiences and feedback from others. We equip participants to catalyze social sector change

through relationships. Relationship factors show up in our leadership solutions through exercises and program experiences that bring interpersonal behaviors to the surface for reflection, understanding, and improvement. This may include experiences in group projects, role-playing experiences around giving feedback^{xiii}, and working with a coach over several sessions.

In addition to understanding interpersonal behaviors, relationship factors may also be addressed in the

context of network development. This is distinct from “networking” (i.e., connecting with people to ‘network’ for opportunities or visibility), which often connotes connecting for personal gain. In societal impact work, networking is the process of strategically building connections for collaborative work by identifying shared goals, building trust and reciprocity, and strategizing how to work together most effectively in a sustained manner. These changes are often understood through measurements across time (i.e., longitudinal impact surveys, longitudinal 360s), and through social network analysis.^{xiv} Such measurement tools allow us to understand not only the density of the networks and the connections that are built, but the quality, depth, and utility of the connections (i.e., understanding if they are reciprocal or what type of support they provide).

Group Development

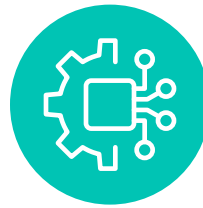


We create spaces and learning experiences for groups to understand how to work more effectively through collective leadership. Our understanding of human development and learning

is that it is highly experiential. Our programs may create settings where groups can identify challenges and work together on shared projects. This may include problem solving through experiential activities that have parallels to work in their communities, or it could include community-based work together (or both).

Group-based work provides a window for reflection on self in relationship to others, a chance to model relationship building that will serve collective purposes, and often a safe(r) environment for feedback. Groups may also be supported by coaches or mentors, who can provide additional context-based support and feedback. The way this lever is pulled may depend on whether whole groups and teams are going through an experience versus whether representatives are going through an experience and expected to take their learnings and tools back to apply to their group. The style of group engagement and the desired outcomes would then contribute to how the experience is designed and how group-level outcomes are measured. Group-level outcomes can be measured through social network analysis, cohort-based analysis, or team level functioning, for example.

Organization Development



We work with individuals and organizations to effectively scale leadership development and address organizational or community level challenges.

Working with organizations helps to address the broader ecosystem that participants return to once they have engaged in a leadership development experience.

When working with organizations, factors may include: dosage/reach across the organization and its members, targeted needs assessments and targeted solutions depending on challenges, data collection and exploration of organizational culture and challenges. In many social sector settings, organizations may consist of clusters and intra-organizational networks that can serve as conduits for leadership development solutions (such as leadership teams in schools that span a district or state). Ultimately, working at the organizational level involves fitting solutions to the context of the organization, versus taking a one-size-fits-all approach, because it considers what is most needed in the organization.

Impact at this level may be measured in terms of perception of the organization, social network analysis, organizational reach, and culture change.

Partnership Engagement



We work strategically with intermediary organizations to facilitate network development and scale leadership development within those networks to address a common issue or challenge. One

additional tool we have at our disposal for leadership solutions, particularly in the social sector, is the possibility of leveraging partnerships for greater impact. We can work with large foundations, corporate social responsibility groups, or established community and/or professional networks to scale leadership development solutions or focus on specific priorities of the partner organization. These partnerships often allow for multi-session, multi-year engagements, some of which may be cohort-based or place-based. The partnerships can also offer different opportunities for reaching participants – through lighter-touch efforts at greater scale (such as

workshops, webinars, kits) and more in-depth experiences at a smaller scale. The presence of a partnership often also allows the opportunity to offer a leadership journey to multiple cohorts over time, improving each iteration based on feedback and refining the focus through continuous improvement and data collection. Partnership is critical for societal impact because it fosters buy-in and sustainability of practices in a way that is rarely possible through only third-party collaboration.

Impact at this level can be measured in a variety of ways, such as reach across the partnership organization's constituents, measurable progress toward partner goals and outcomes, ripple-effect mapping of leadership learning within the participants' organization or community, and even quasi-experimental comparison of similar settings that did not have a leadership development intervention.^{xv}

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Are Omnipresent

As discussed in our assumptions, equity, diversity, and inclusion are a core part of CCL's approach and central to the mission of leadership development for the benefit of societies worldwide.^{xvi} EDI factors and considerations are present throughout leadership solutions and provide a critical lens for understanding how decisions related to solution factors can be informed by EDI and influence EDI outcomes.

Our approach to leadership development is grounded in equity, interrogating power across these levers, fostering self-awareness, and encouraging authenticity toward the creation of inclusive and just contexts for human development.

In an effort to show how this assumption informs design, and to make EDI considerations tangible and actionable, we highlight ways EDI can manifest in the aforementioned leadership solution factors.

- **Self:** increasing knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to EDI including self-awareness, courageous leadership, humility and vulnerability, understanding of social identities, knowledge around key concepts such as equity and power, and inclusive leadership practices. EDI can also show up in terms of *how* we approach understanding and measuring these concepts (i.e., our use of 360s or alternate

assessments, which competencies or capabilities are prioritized in content).

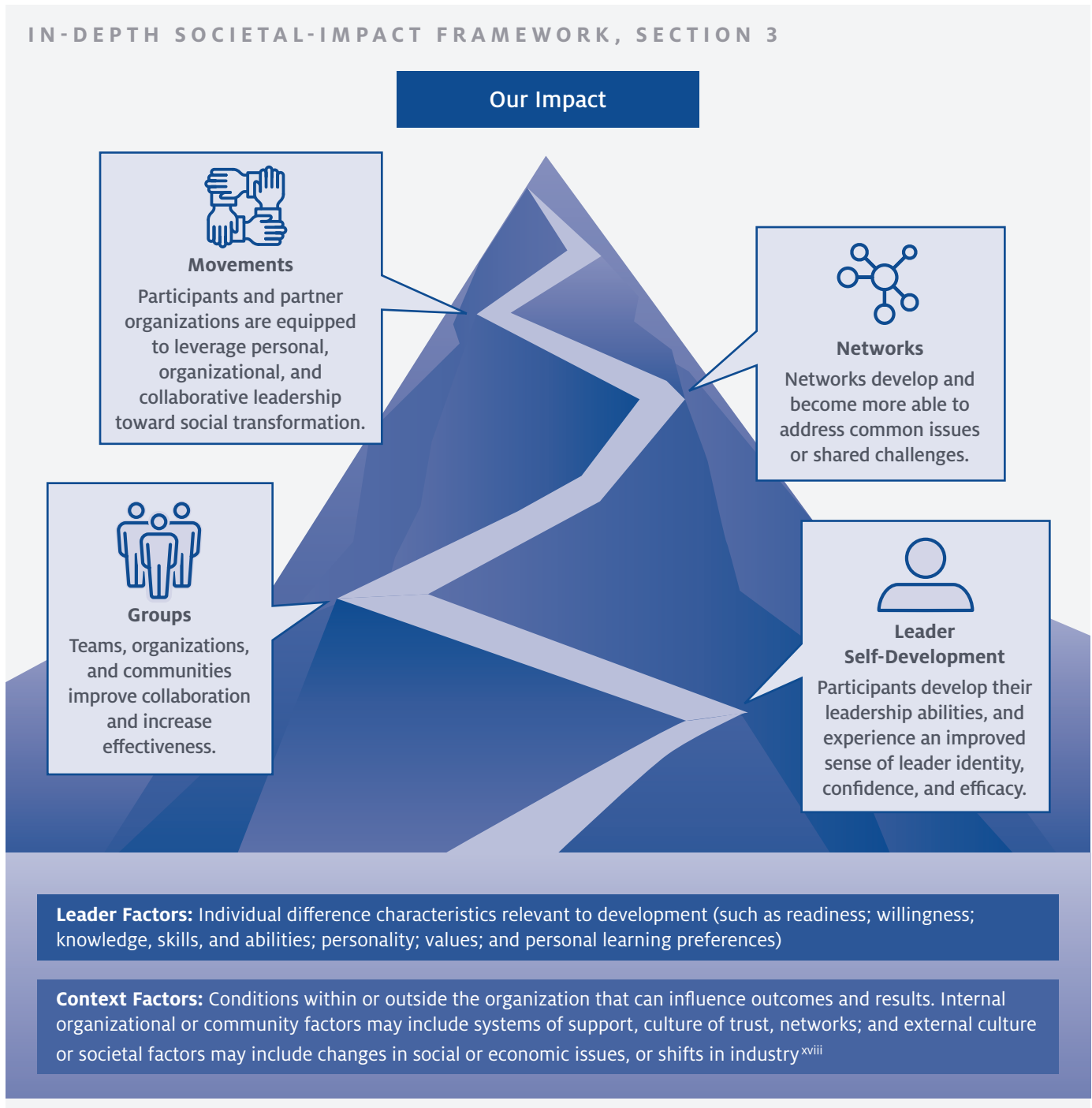
- **Relationships:** providing feedback and reflection on critical behaviors such as active listening, inclusive leadership, advocacy, and influence. Coaching focused on EDI related leadership behaviors and widening an understanding of relationships and networks to consider diversity and power are additional examples.
- **Groups:** considering which groups need to come together and for what purpose provides an opportunity for amplifying overlooked groups, defining groups differently than hierarchy or status quo, and critically examining representation in terms of group composition.
- **Organizations:** within organizations, EDI factors may include a deeper understanding of culture, organizational belonging, equity-based policies and practices, and implementing programs designed to build an inclusive environment.
- **Partnerships:** partnerships present several EDI opportunities, in large part due to the amount of influence, power, funding, and resources that large partners can provide. Therefore, partner factors related to EDI may be more complex and yet even more critical. Partners can think creatively about recruitment strategies for large initiatives, grassroots-based participation, innovative funding or small-grant practices as components of their leadership solutions.

Impact: Measuring Levels of Impact

The LDI framework offers the following levels of impact that we build upon in this paper: ^{xvii} individual, group, organizational, and societal. Our exploration of societal impact includes looking more closely at impact at the network and movement level. These levels of impact are

assumed to occur because of participation in a leadership development solution. The type and degree of impact will be influenced by the design choices and the effectiveness of the solution. Each section below includes examples of possible pathways to achieving impact at the level and possible outcomes and indicators that can serve as evidence of impact.

FIGURE 5





Leader Self-Development

Participants develop their leadership abilities, and experience an improved sense of leader identity, confidence, and efficacy. These changes represent attitude, mindset, and behaviors shifts within individual leaders.^{xix} While these changes can be self-reported at the individual level, we can also utilize observational measures and 360-degree assessments to understand how others experience these behavior shifts.

Client Impact Example

Challenge: Increase leadership and employment opportunities for rural North Carolina college students^{xx}

Approach: Multi-year, multi-session cohort-based leadership program with coaching and internship experience

Impact Observed: Participants increased in their sense of leader identity and efficacy, felt an increased connection to rural North Carolina, and experienced increased job opportunities (both actual and perceived sense of opportunity) after completing their internship

TABLE 1

| EXAMPLE PATHWAYS TO IMPACT | EXAMPLE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT |
|---|--|
| Increase knowledge and skill-building for leadership behaviors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reported increases in psychological capital, 360 ratings. • Increased understanding of networks, network positioning, and network gaps. |
| Develop key leadership commitments to drive behavior change. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rater-reported progress on leadership commitments. • Change in organizational culture from participants not experiencing the leadership development directly. • Presentations from the participant about how their key leadership commitments led to change with challenges they were facing. • Well-being, satisfaction, retention, of direct reports or those impacted by the participants' role/actions. |

Groups

Groups, teams, and organizations improve collaboration and increase effectiveness. Impact at this level can vary based on the scale of the solution. When groups or teams participate in a leadership journey and they are part of an existing organization (such as leadership teams within a school), we expect to see outcomes such as increases in group effectiveness or shifts related to shared language and practices. Seeing measurable change across an entire organization is also possible and may depend on the “saturation” of the solution in terms of how many individuals from across the organization experience some of the leadership development. Groups do not have to be limited to members from the same organization and may come together based on other commonalities (such as multiple organizations working together in a community). Understanding impact of more diffuse groups can be more challenging, but measuring trust and relationship building within the group, sustainability of intergroup collaborative relationships, or group identity can provide evidence of impact.

TABLE 2

| EXAMPLE PATHWAYS TO IMPACT | EXAMPLE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT |
|---|--|
| Understand personal preferences for working in relationship with others. Reflect using feedback from group members. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longitudinal change in 360 results for a leader level, department, or cohort. |
| Assess/reveal team dynamics and team functioning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated growth in team functioning (e.g., continual monitoring of DAC and assessment of related experiences). • Improvement on team-based metrics related to performance or other goals. |
| Build group cohesion, trust, and collaboration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in trust and collaboration within smaller networks and cohorts. |

Client Impact Example

Challenge: Increase collaboration to foster innovation and accelerate progress for cancer-fighting drugs at a global pharmaceutical company^{xxi}

Approach: Within organization network-analysis discovery phase, Boundary Spanning Leadership programming phase

Impact Observed: Increased collaboration within and across organizational pods, increased distributed leadership behaviors across hierarchical levels, increased job effectiveness



Networks

Networks develop and become more able to address common issues or shared challenges. Expanding beyond single organizations and focusing on how multiple organizations, or representatives from multiple organizations can increase the effectiveness of their collaboration toward societal challenges is the first step toward societal impact. Even though there are network antecedents, measures, and outcomes at the prior levels of impact that we can understand, it is important to intentionally call out networks as a level of impact given the unique advantage they have for helping individuals address complex societal challenges. When we think about networks on their own, outcomes at this level can include measures of network connectedness, collaboration within and across networks, degree to which individuals feel part of and supported by a network, and the extent to which network level participation yields outcomes beyond the network. For example, we may work for several years with a partner network to disseminate leadership solutions tailored to their network participants and then measure the impact of the solution on the larger ecosystem.^{xxii}

Equally important from a continuous learning perspective, understanding network impact may also help to uncover network vulnerabilities (such as bottlenecks or resource gaps)

or identify issues with inclusion or access. When we think about impact at the network level it helps us ask questions that matter directly for communities such as who has access to power and resources, where is impact actually happening, and what barriers exist to continued improvement on key metrics.^{xxiii}

TABLE 3

| EXAMPLE PATHWAYS TO IMPACT | EXAMPLE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT |
|--|--|
| Identify network gaps. Understand strategic networking behaviors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reported change in networking behaviors. • Increased network density or connections over time. |
| Create boundary spanning facilitated sessions to allow groups to collaborate toward a common goal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network strength and alignment. Success of network achieving stated goals. |

Client Impact Example

Challenge: Increase representation of women at senior leadership levels in healthcare while building a cross-organizational professional network^{xxiv}

Approach: Multi-session, cohort-based leadership development program

Impact Observed: Fellowship program rated as one of the most effective ways to build impactful networks; networks endure for years beyond programmatic engagement; network mobilized to fund scholarship program for future participants; networks leveraged in multiple ways, such as emotional support and career advancement





Movements

Participants and partner organizations are equipped to leverage personal, organizational, and collaborative leadership toward social transformation. Impact at the movement level is the most challenging outcome to measure. For CCL, we are focused on the belief that leadership development can benefit society worldwide. We can look across our sectors (nonprofit, K-12, higher education, and population health) and within our partnerships to understand our overall contribution to the effectiveness of the social sector. Impact at this level involves sustained data collection, across sectors and networks, to determine in what ways leadership learnings cascade from individual to interpersonal, group, and network-level impact.

Client Impact Example

Challenge: Increase representation of women leaders in global health^{xxv}

Approach: Multi-session, cohort-based leadership development program including experiential learning, group mentoring, coaching, and leadership project

Impact Observed: Women leaders acted intentionally to bring about ripple effects at the societal level in three core areas: contributing to policy and practice changes, contributing to research, and building their networks to increase their visibility and influence

TABLE 4

| EXAMPLE PATHWAYS TO IMPACT | EXAMPLE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT |
|---|--|
| Understand long-term vision. Recognize positions of power and privilege. Connect personal mission and values to larger goals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-reported or documented increase in advocacy efforts, community presence, or influence within networks. |
| Sustain long-term relationships with funders to build community-based networks around critical social issues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress on sector or community-based metrics of interest where networks exist (such as legislation, health outcomes, reduction of achievement gaps) |
| Individuals interacting more with larger systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggregating participant reports of engaging with field-level work such as policy groups, elected positions. |

Why We Measure: Inform and Improve

While measurement and evaluation are often employed at the conclusion of a program to demonstrate the return on investment, we argue that if societal impact is a goal then the purpose of measurement must expand. Demonstrating societal impact at the end of an intervention requires significant resources (funding, time) and often is still difficult to carry out, given the challenge of limiting the influence of variables in social contexts. Those working on social impact interventions have to balance the need to demonstrate impact with the cost that it requires. However, measurement that happens in a formative manner, intentionally embedded throughout leadership development solutions, can help inform and improve solution implementation while still gathering data to support a summative impact story. The goal of impact measurement at this point is not necessarily to “prove” the effectiveness of a single intervention (at best, a scientific approach to data can help gather information to support claims, rather than prove impact); rather, impact measurement at the movement level should focus on “how” learnings are applied, how impact is sustained, and how our understanding of impact can inform continuous improvement to best meet the needs of our networks, partners, and ever-changing societal challenges.

For our organization, implementing leadership development solutions essentially always occurs in a living system, where the demands of society, culture, markets, and environment are constantly shifting. **Our approach to measurement has to be agile and collaborative – which means recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to measurement and, most importantly, conducting measurement and evaluation in close collaboration with stakeholders.** We aim to connect our measurement to our mission (and the missions of our funders and clients) by understanding the big and small ways that leadership development builds toward societal impact. This is because central to our mission is the underlying assumption that poor leadership is at the root of our societal problems. Any solutions to these big problems will have good, effective leadership at their core, and the role of measurement, evaluation, and impact storytelling is to identify how we move from individual leadership behaviors to collective action to societal outcomes at higher levels (e.g., reduced conflict between countries, progress on climate change, etc.). In our experience, impact at this level can be understood and communicated in a variety of ways.



Communicating Societal Impact: The Stories We Can Tell

Perhaps the greatest challenge of demonstrating societal impact is in weaving together the pieces of evidence that support the pathways into a larger cohesive story. We propose a series of storytelling metaphors – scope and scale, ripples, highways, cascades and constellations – for communicating the varieties of societal impact that can be achieved through leadership development.

These metaphors are useful primarily for demonstrating *how* leadership development contributes to societal impact (not if it does). We can conduct quasi-experiments and test out different solution modalities or content within our programs and their iterations (as shown in the previous tables); but, the larger conceptualization of impact requires viewing a bigger picture through narrative. We propose that storytelling in this manner is also important because these stories are all open-ended – the story of the solution and impact can continue to grow, change, and evolve. The stories are not meant to document impact and live on a shelf (or hard drive). They are intended to inform and inspire others, provide history and learnings, and contribute to broader understanding and transformation. Importantly, they are intended to encourage an emergent learning process – whereby impact storytelling prioritizes data and meaning-making that can be actionable and more quickly lead to impactful leadership development solutions that have a well-informed design to meet evolving needs. These stories are also meant to inform the design of leadership development programs by identifying measurable outcomes that are connected to our assumed mechanisms of action within leadership development solutions. Impact stories should be both inspirational, actionable, and applicable.

The impact of leadership development can be shared in a variety of ways. The story metaphors are not mutually exclusive, nor is one type inherently more valuable than the other. Depending on audience, values, and priorities, some stories may resonate more than others, and each requires different data to support the story.



Scope and Scale

Scope and scale stories encompass demonstrating numbers of “lives touched,” number of individuals reached in an organization, or groups in a community, or other quantifiable ways of documenting the number of people or organizations who have been served by a leadership development solution. The underlying assumption is that an encounter with leadership development is meaningful in some way, but this story does not emphasize depth of impact. These stories are useful when it is important to demonstrate reach or saturation, or when it is presumed that reaching a critical mass within a system is needed for lasting impact. For example, during the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, CCL provided over 1,400 coaching hours pro-bono to over 300 nurses. Given the high risk for burnout and retention challenges in the field, and existing research showing that coaching helps individuals navigate challenging contexts and more effectively lead their teams, we knew that meeting the immediate need for nurse leaders could provide an opportunity for impact.



Ripples

Ripples evoke concentric circles and in the case of leadership development can look like an individual experiencing leadership learning, applying that learning in relationship to others, and others being changed in some way as a result. If an individual is the center, the secondary ring would include people they are one degree away from, and the tertiary ring would include people who they are two degrees from and so on. Ripple effect mapping^{xxvi} is a technique within evaluation that aims to understand some of this impact. In our work, we have documented ripple effect by learning what aspects individual raters, who did not go through one of our programs but who work with someone who did, have incorporated into their own leadership practice. Practices, behaviors, and mindsets can provide powerful ripples, because they are often things that are easily communicated and that others can put into their own practice (such as methods for giving feedback). A powerful example of ripple

effects in our work with healthcare providers shows that physician leaders improve on critical competencies (as reported by peers and supervisors) while also experiencing gains on patient satisfaction scores.^{xxvii}



Highways

Highways provide a means for moving faster in a forward direction while also having the ability to switch lanes. In some ways, leadership development can accelerate skills

and behaviors (at the individual level) or resources (at the organizational or community level) that were in a more nascent state and in need of a push. We have also seen impact that occurs in parallel lanes. For example, when an individual learns a new skillset or behavior and they put it into practice in an adjacent domain – such as learning about feedback at work and applying it to relationships at home, or learning about values at work and applying it in conversations about parenting. One of our regular metrics that we track on our end-of-program surveys is applicability of the content to work as well as applicability to daily life. We consistently find that well over 80% of our participants report that they will be able to use the skills learned outside of their work environment. In our systemic school initiatives we often see influence on parenting skills in addition to professional skills.^{xxviii} The ability to move lanes enables leadership learning and acceleration across domains. In our work we ask about both applicability of learnings to professional/organizational work and applicability to daily life in order to understand some of this transferability.



Cascades

Cascades are exponential – incorporating scale, movement, and acceleration at the same time. Cascades also evoke transformation and interdependence across a

broader ecosystem. Cascade stories will take longer to develop and may represent a lifetime of work. An example of a cascade from our own work can be seen through the VPA Waddington program, where an alumni participant was so moved by their experience that they

created an endowment that now funds work across the state of Vermont.^{xxix} The endowment has funded years of work with Vermont principals and through that work we have shown that teacher and principal relationships have been influenced and cost-savings have been experienced by the state due to decreased turnover. Train-the-trainer approaches around a specific societal challenge can also provide an example of a cascade, our work with the McKnight Foundation to develop leaders of the West Africa Community of Practice in their Collaborative Crop Research Program.^{xxx} Over 140 participants received training, with 47 receiving additional training to become program facilitators. They were then able to train over 9,300 community members and colleagues on personal and interpersonal leadership development skills. A cascade does not presume a specified impact at the outset – there is no way to know where the single drop of water will end up – but the journey of the droplet from waterfall to river to sea and back again is one possible story of impact out of many possible stories.

Constellations



Constellations represent an ecosystem of impact stories and indicators that combine for a bigger picture. Some examples may shine brighter than others, by virtue of more in depth data or stories of impact.

Constellations require the viewer to take a step back and see how interconnected pieces are related to one another and dependent on the viewer's perspective. Impact stories that draw upon the constellation metaphor require data and interpretation to help the viewer connect the dots between the interrelated aspects of each component of the constellation. A constellation approach could help tell the impact of varied projects in a portfolio of work or grant-making, or collective impact across programs that span multiple sectors. For example, within our K-12 education work, we recently looked across the portfolio of programs and impact data to understand how improving school leader behaviors, creating a culture of trust in schools, and increasing student engagement through leadership development can have a lasting impact on various metrics of school and student performance.^{xxxi}

Conclusion

This paper is an exploration of the pathway to societal impact for our leadership development solutions. The pathways outlined in this paper can happen across all sectors, not just the social sector, to drive toward social impact. Societal transformation is not (and cannot be) limited to the social sector. The complexity of the world necessitates that we understand how all of the work we do toward supporting leadership development contributes to the benefit of society worldwide. Our goal in outlining the impact pathways, connecting to leadership solution factors and design choices, and providing examples of how to tell the stories is to help clients, funders, and program designers understand how

they can think intentionally about learning and data at all steps in the process of leadership solution design and delivery, and use that data and learning to inform a larger theory of change. Future work can explore how factors like career stage, readiness, motivation, baseline network size, leadership identity, organizational psychological safety, among many other factors, may influence the pathway we investigate in this paper. We look forward to continuing to refine and expand our understanding of measuring and communicating societal impact in partnership with our participants and collaborators across the globe.

About the Author



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Valerie is a former director of the Societal Impact Insights and Impact Team at CCL. In this role, she thought broadly about CCL's impact at the societal level, focused on internal learning through data utilization, and oversaw the evaluation and research work across K-12 education, higher education, nonprofits, population health, and youth-serving organizations. In addition, Valerie has contributed to CCL's work in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion by supporting the EDI evaluation and research. Currently, Valerie is the founder and chief catalyst of Mission Bloom, a consultancy dedicated to empowering

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