

# Shared-Purpose Process: Implications and Possibilities for Student Learning, Development, and Self-Transformation

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## Abstract

This article presents a student-established, shared-purpose process used to increase student engagement with, commitment to, and responsibility for their learning. In addition to establishing a shared purpose for their course, the students establish and commit to ways of being, doing, and interacting with one another necessary to intentionally and mutually achieve the shared purpose and other meaningful learning outcomes. They also commit to an individual practice that they believe will increase the likelihood of achieving the shared purpose, as well as identify personal inhibitors to achieving it. This process represents a form of experiential/case-in-point, student-centered, transformative, and partnership learning that is relevant to leadership, team, and organizational development courses. Based on the established shared purpose, we share how to effectively facilitate additional partnership and in-class experiential learning opportunities over the course of the semester.

## Keywords

student-centered learning, partnership learning, transformative learning, experiential learning, case-in-point, shared purpose, commitment

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When you are surrounded by people who share a passionate commitment to a common purpose, anything is possible.

—Howard Shultz

Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

—Vince Lombardi

College education has come to be seen by many merely as a requirement to find a “good” job, and academic courses simply as something to be endured to reach this goal. The U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard now employs college alumni’s salaries 6 years after graduation as their primary evaluative measure of colleges and universities (Lash, 2016). Higher education is described as a hoop that “excellent sheep” jump through to get to the next thing (Deresiewicz, 2014).

In this environment, many students see education as a means to an end, rather than something of intrinsic value. Because numerous students have learned through their experience to focus on grades rather than learning, many students want classes to be easy rather than challenging and meaningful, and they want to be told exactly what to do (Weimer, 2008). Consistent with our society’s achievement orientation (Leonard, 1992), high grades, multiple majors, and graduating become the driving forces of many students’ college education, rather than an interest in the actual content of courses, self-discovery, or self-development.

Consistent with this, over the course of Matthew’s teaching career, he continuously found himself disappointed with his students’ initial level of commitment to, engagement in, and responsibility for their learning and development as they enter his courses. Just as Lencioni (2002) identifies a lack of commitment as one of the five dysfunctions of a team, a low level of student commitment to a course has a significant negative impact on students’ learning and educational experience, as well as on instructors’ professional gratification (Jenster & Duncan, 1987). For many, it is as if education has become something that is happening *to* students rather than something that they actively and intentionally *engage in* to achieve some purpose beyond getting a good grade and course credit, preferably with a minimal amount of effort.

In this article, we present a response to student disengagement in the form of a shared-purpose process. Although initially conceived to increase students’ commitment to and engagement in their learning and development, as the shared-purpose process was employed it became apparent that

it was also a form of experiential/case-in-point learning (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) that is relevant to leadership, team and organizational development courses, as establishment of and commitment to a shared purpose and organizing context is important to becoming an effective member of a team or organization. In addition, once a shared purpose is established and committed to by students and teacher, it can provide a guiding framework through which to facilitate additional partnership and in-class experiential learning opportunities. For example, in an MBA Team and Organizational Effectiveness course, using their shared purpose, students partnered with Matthew to set the content and criteria on which they would be evaluated to determine their course grade.

Insights from Ron Heifetz's case-in-point pedagogy (Daloz Parks, 2005, Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), being in the classroom (Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005), student-centered learning (Weimer, 2008), and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) were applied to facilitate student learning and development. The case-in-point methodology, developed by Ron Heifetz (1994) and Martin Linsky (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), provides an opportunity for students and instructors to use the dynamics occurring within the classroom as a means to practice and learn about leadership and the process of organizing. The class uses its unfolding experience as "an occasion for learning and practicing leadership within a social group" (Daloz Parks, 2005, p. 7). Numerous unplanned opportunities for students to learn emerge from their shared experience (Pianesi, 2013). In a case-in-point pedagogy, the teacher becomes a facilitator of students' knowing based on their shared experiences within the classroom over the course of the semester, rather than the disseminator of information (Daloz Parks, 2005; Pianesi, 2013).

In contrast to other student-directed learning methodologies, the shared-purpose process takes into account the social, as well the cognitive, aspects of learning. In addition, it helps students proactively identify and develop strategies to address hindrances to their learning and development. Over the course of the semester, students' self-transformation is facilitated through their weekly engagement in self-reflection (D. A. Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983), self-reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004), peer coaching, and a cogenerative dialogue (Martin, 2006; Stith & Roth, 2006). Cogenerative dialogue allows students to learn from their classmates' experiences, as well as their own direct experience.

The shared-purpose process presented in this article is used in a number of undergraduate, MBA, and School of Continuing Education courses in leadership and management at a private liberal arts college in the northeast United States. Based on student feedback and instructor learning, the process developed over a span of six semesters.

## *Learning Objectives*

The overall learning objectives for the shared-purpose process are

1. Understand and experience the importance and impact to a team and organization of the development and commitment to a shared purpose and supporting context within which to achieve the shared purpose.
2. Understand and experience the importance and impact of identifying personal hindrances to achieving a shared purpose, as well as ways to eliminate or limit their impact.
3. Understand and experience the importance and impact of engaging in self-reflexivity and cogenerative dialogue, receiving feedback, and coaching in achieving a shared purpose.
4. Understand and experience how the establishment of a shared purpose provides a framework for collaboration among team and organizational members.

If the development of course evaluation content and criteria are used, the additional learning objectives include

5. Understand and experience the development and employment of effective and meaningful performance evaluation content and criteria.
6. Understand and experience providing and receiving effective performance feedback.

## **Development and Rationale of the Shared-Purpose Process**

Shared commitment is the basis for genuine partnership because here we are willing to move through ambiguity, misunderstanding, and friction in the interactions in order to fulfill the commitment we share. (James Flaherty, 2010, p. 100)

The original purpose of the shared-purpose process (initially called shared-commitment process) was to increase students' commitment to their learning and development (Gaddy, Marzano, Foseid, Foseid, & Marzano, 2005; Jenster & Duncan, 1987). "Purpose can be seen, in its most general sense, as an aim or objective which guides action—achieving a goal in a particular context" (Kempster, Jackson, & Conroy, 2011, p. 320). In the classroom, a shared purpose provides the context for committed students to determine how to relate and interact with one another (Weimer, 2008).

In the past, when he encountered student apathy, Matthew used techniques such as calling students forth to take responsibility for their learning and development, developing graded assignments that would “force” them to read what was assigned, and calling them out in class if they did not do their reading or assignment. All these techniques were directed *at* students and had minimal impact on increasing their level of engagement in, commitment to, and responsibility for their learning and development. Often, it resulted in student resentment, even when they put more effort into the course.

Immediately prior to the development of the shared-purpose process, in an attempt to increase students’ sense of responsibility for and engagement in their learning, Matthew would tell students during the first day of class that if they came back to the second class meeting, he would assume that they were committing to what was outlined in the syllabus, and if they could not commit, this was not the course for them—end of story. While this technique raises students’ awareness that taking the course is a choice they made and induces a sense of responsibility for their decision, it did not seem to result in a significant improvement in the students’ mind-set, attitude, engagement, or behaviors over the course of the semester and may lead to a feeling of resentment because it was presented to them as an ultimatum.

The first step (see Table 1 for a timeline of the development of the shared-purpose process) in what eventually led to the student-established, shared-purpose process presented in this article was taken based on the assumption that learning is inherently a social process in which the interactions among students and faculty affects students’ learning and development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1934/1962). In the fall of 2012, Matthew asked students in the first class meeting of each of his three different leadership courses to collectively determine a list that included “who we need to be, what we need to do, and how we need to relate with one another within our Community of Becoming to have a successful semester of learning and authentic becoming together.” Matthew explained he chose the words “Community of Becoming” to emphasize the continuously emergent and relational nature of students as humans—that human beings are not fixed entities separate from one another but continuously emerging from their relationships with others (Allport, 1955; Mesle, 2008). In addition, he articulated that the notion of a “Community of Becoming” highlighted the fact that the class does not just consist of learning concepts and ideas but also focuses on developing and transforming as human beings. The process of transformative learning encourages students to reflect on their current perspectives to assess whether these ways of being serve them (i.e., lead to positive outcomes in their lives). Then, if these approaches do not serve the learner, transformative learning provokes the learner to change or recreate them (Mezirow, 1991).

**Table 1.** Development of Shared-Purpose Process.

Date	Shared-purpose activity developed	Courses
Fall 2012	Establishment of course purpose by the instructor and an enabling course context by the students. Students were "challenged" to remain enrolled only if they were committed to the course purpose and enabling context	- Leadership Theory - Self-Leadership - Leadership Development
Spring 2013	Asked students to publicly commit to the shared-purpose and enabling course context	- Leadership and Diversity - Leaders on Leadership - Leadership Development
Fall 2014	Students developed the course shared-purpose, as well as the enabling course context. Instructor publicly committed to the shared-purpose and enabling course context	- Leadership Change - Self-Leadership - Team and Organizational Effectiveness
Fall 2014	Facilitated partnership learning based on course shared purpose	- Team and Organizational Effectiveness
Summer 2015	Students identified one thing they would do to enhance their learning development and becoming and the possible hindrances to them achieving the course shared purpose	- Leadership Coaching

In pairs, students were asked to brainstorm ideas based on prior courses and other life experiences that resulted in their greatest learning and development. Then, as a class, with a student facilitating the process, they created an initial list on the board. Toward the end of the process, based on his experience, Matthew offered some suggestions for discussion and their consideration. At the end of the process, he told the students he would type up what was on the board and forward it to them in an e-mail the next day for their review. Also, Matthew told them that they would have an opportunity to edit the list during the next class meeting.

On leaving the first class meeting, students were told,

If you are not willing to make these commitments, this is probably not the course for you. Since this course is an elective, why would you take a course to which you are not committed? To do so would be unfair to yourself and your classmates, since learning, especially in this course, is a social process that we all impact.

The students most likely experienced this statement as a *de facto* ultimatum. Prior to the beginning of the second class, the following week, a couple of students dropped the course.

At the beginning of the second class, the class discussed the process of intentionally establishing and committing to a shared purpose of “learning and becoming together” and developing a course context that would enable us to achieve our shared purpose. The class also discussed whether or not this is a process in which effective leaders and teams should engage. During the discussion, students were asked to reflect on their lived experience for insight. In general, most students had experienced their greatest development on teams and in classes that had clearly articulated purposes that they had “bought into.”

Next, a discussion took place about a couple of students withdrawing from the class. The conversation focused on students’ experiences on teams on which there was an uncommitted member(s) and how it influenced their experience and the team’s performance. It was discussed that research supports that members’ normative commitment to their organization or team is shown to positively influence organizational performance (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003) and is negatively related to cognitive withdrawal and employee turnover (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Although a few students expressed initially possessing mixed feelings about students dropping the course, by the end of the class discussion, the articulated class sentiment was that this was a positive outcome for their learning and development, as those students not committed to the shared purpose probably would have negatively affected the classroom learning environment.

The students were then first asked to discuss in pairs and then a group discussion took place to determine additions or deletions that should be made to the list developed at the end of the first class. If a student did not participate, Matthew asked each student “based on your experience, is there anything missing from the list or something on the list that would be inhibiting to achieving our shared purpose?” The students decided to add a few more elements to the course context.

After they made these edits, they were asked to, as a team, commit to what was collectively identified as “who we need to be, what we need to do, and how we need to relate with one another within our Community of Becoming.” This exercise established the course context that students believed would enable us to achieve the shared purpose. Establishing a context allows us to “bring our own life into alignment” with our purpose (Flaherty, 2010, p. 75).

Building on the above process, in the spring of 2013, in the introductory e-mail sent out to students 2 weeks prior to the first day of class, students were informed of the shared-purpose process that they will be asked to

engage in. Rather than committing as a team, these new groups of students in each course were asked to individually commit to the established shared purpose and course context. Prior to committing, to raise student awareness of the significance of commitment, the students were asked if they agree that

If someone commits verbally to something but does not commit to it in one's heart, one is being fraudulent. Also, if one commits in one's heart but fails to follow through in one's actions, one displays a lack of integrity.

Students were asked to think about this in the context of their relevant past experiences. This was done to spur a discussion about the importance of commitment to a shared purpose in leading and for teams and organizations, as well as its personal and relational implications. In addition, there was also a discussion about when an individual publicly commits to something one is more likely to deliver on that commitment, based on humans' need to be seen as consistent (Cialdini, 1984). This led to a great class discussion and student learning about commitment and its relevance to leading, teaming, and organizing.

In the fall of 2014, the students' development of their shared purpose was used when Matthew was teaching for the first time a course titled *Team and Organizational Effectiveness*, as well as in the two leadership courses that he was teaching that semester. Along with identifying their shared purpose (e.g., "To transform ourselves as leaders, teammates, and human becomings"), students in the leadership and *Team and Organizational Effectiveness* courses identified who they should be, what they should do, and how they should interact with one another so they could achieve their shared purpose. The key to this process is that each student has the opportunity to share, clarify, and/or contradict each other's thoughts, knowing that their beliefs and ideas are of value and at least considered, if not ultimately employed: "[t]he point here is that most reasonable people do not have to get their way in a discussion. They just need to be heard, and to know that their input was considered and responded to" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 965). In addition to their collective commitment, students were asked to identify a specific individual commitment that they had not engaged in the past that would significantly enhance their learning and becoming and the likelihood that he or she would achieve our shared purpose this semester.

Rather than being asked to publicly commit as they were in prior classes, students were "invited" to publicly commit to the shared purpose, the agreed-upon ways of doing, being and interacting, and their individual commitment. Based on Matthew's experience and personal development as a teacher, he now realized the importance of students' agency to the efficacy of



commitment process. It was explained to the students that it was up to each one of them whether he or she chose to commit or not and that there would be self-learning and development either way. It was further explained that the intention of the shared-purpose process was to learn about commitment, consciously constructing a team and organizational context, and themselves through the experience of trying to live out their commitment over the course of the semester, rather than about their success or failure. They were encouraged to think about it as an experiment and, thus, that it was not about being successful *per se* but about their learning and development through engaging in the experience. For most students, this framing of the shared-purpose process seems to alleviate the majority of the anxiety that they may experience about committing to the shared purpose. All students chose to commit.

After the students committed, Matthew publicly committed to the above, declaring that he is a member of the team of individuals that has his own unique experiences and perspectives that students can choose to accept, reject, question, or about which they can provide an opinion. Realizing that students are not used to relating to an instructor in such a manner, Matthew tried to facilitate this over the course of the semester by acknowledging students' courage and thanking them for speaking up when they disagreed with him, expressed frustration or anxiety, or shared differing opinions and ideas. Matthew committed to the shared purpose because he believes himself to inherently be part of the class (i.e., community of becoming), not separate from it.

Finally, in an MBA Leadership Coaching course taught in the summer of 2015, as well as all future courses taught by Matthew, based on their past learning and developmental experiences, students were asked to identify one thing they were willing to commit to that would increase the probability of them realizing the course shared purpose. They were also asked to identify individual hindrances (Flaherty, 2010) to them fulfilling the shared purpose (see Appendix A, for an example of a Shared-Purpose document). To help students identify their hindrances, they were given the following prompt:

Thinking of your relevant past learning and developmental experiences, as well as your present life situation, identify below any hindrances (e.g., habits, relationships, practices and inhibiting life situations) that exist to your achieving our shared purpose through enacting our course context. Also, please identify what you can do to eliminate or limit these hindrances.

To stimulate students' thinking about and challenge each other to go deeper inside himself or herself to identify meaningful personal hindrances and develop effective strategies to limit the impact of these hindrances, each

student worked with a peer coach/learning partner to flush this out. Matthew also identified and shared with students his individual commitment (i.e., to be empathetic to but hold high-expectations for students) and inhibitors to achieving the shared purpose.

Peer coaching is introduced during the second class meeting and used in the course throughout the semester. Public commitment on its own is not enough to drive behavior. Feedback is also required (De Leon & Fuqua, 1995). The role of the peer coach is to deeply listen to (i.e., listen to understand the other person and to meaningfully respond), ask self-generative questions (i.e., questions that help the other person increase his or her self-understanding), share relevant personal experiences, and brainstorm with one's peer to deepen his or her self-understanding and improve his or her performance.

The peer coaching is developmental, rather than evaluative. The coach does not provide evaluative feedback but rather helps the coachee more deeply understand himself or herself and his or her experience and develop strategies to improve his or her performance to achieve desirable outcomes. As human beings, we can always improve our performance and impact on others. Furthermore, it is put forth that to improve as leaders we need to be self-aware and that others provide us with a mirror to see our self and their honest feedback is a gift to our self-development. Time is spent discussing coaching and answering any student questions or concerns.

Over the course of the semester, students reflect on their experience of coaching their peer and being coached by their peer, talk about it as a class, and offer feedback to their coaches to improve their performance as a coach, all continuously framed as a developmental process focused on "what are you learning?" and "how might you improve?"

## **Example of the Shared-Purpose Process for Partnership Learning**

The Team and Organizational Effectiveness course that was referred to above will be used as the example to elucidate the possibilities of the shared-purpose process for facilitating partnership learning. This course was centered on providing students with a semester-long experiential learning opportunity. This is accomplished by placing the students in teams of three to four to develop a fundraising event for a local charity that they were jointly passionate about helping achieve its mission. An outline of the shared-purpose process used is presented in Figure 1.

First, with the agreed-upon shared-purpose serving as the decision-making framework (Flaherty, 2010), students and teacher partnered to determine

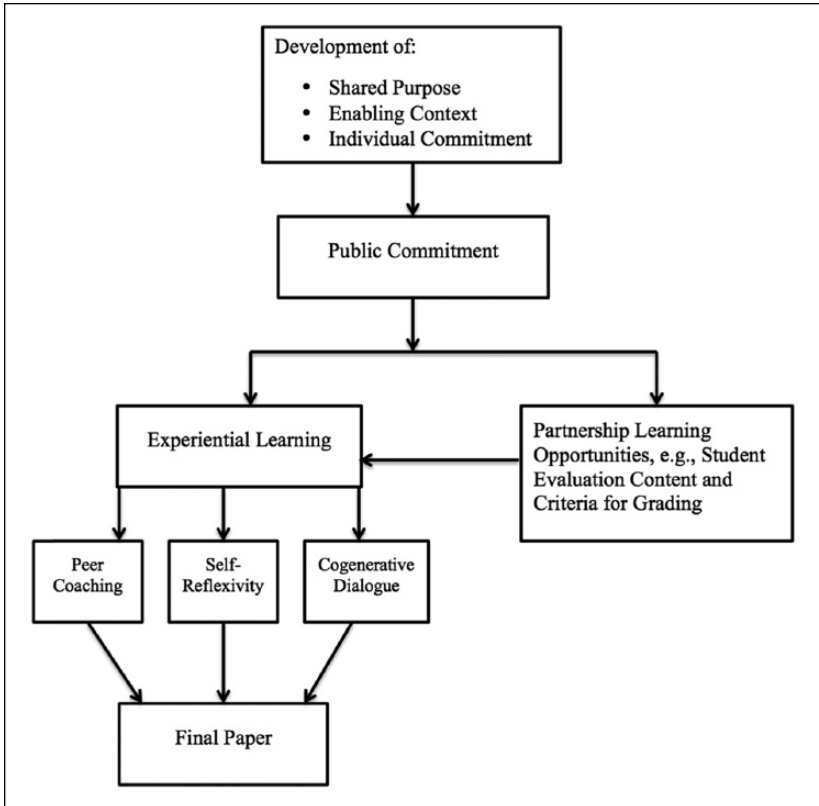


Figure 1. Shared-purpose process.

the content and the percentage of their final grade that each content item would count for. They also determined who would evaluate their performance for each content item. During this process, Matthew limited his role to helping students hold their shared purpose center when choosing the content of their performance evaluation and who would be responsible for its evaluation. Usually, that took the form of “How will evaluating this (fill in content item) lead us to transform ourselves as leaders, teammates, and human beings?” and “Why is (fill in person) the best person(s) to evaluate this content item?”

Second, the students developed the evaluation criteria for each content item for which they decided to be the evaluators (D. F. Baker, 2008), similar to contract learning used by Hardigan (1994) and Hiller and Hietapelto

(2001). They chose to evaluate their self-managed team's overall fundraising initiative performance and each of their teammates' individual performance (an average evaluation of all their teammates would result in the student's grade). Using peer assessment three times over the course of a semester allowed the peer-assessment process to serve a developmental as well as an evaluative purpose (Druskat & Wolff, 1999; Fellenz, 2006). In Appendices B and C, we present a sample individual team member evaluation (Appendix B) and team evaluation form (Appendix C) that were developed by one of the student teams. As with the determination of the student-performance evaluation content, Matthew limited his role to trying to ensure that the grading criteria they chose was in alignment and supportive of the achievement of the course shared purpose.

It was agreed that the teacher would determine the grades for the weekly assignments, class participation and attendance, and the course after-action review and personal reflection final paper. Finally, it was decided that a representative of the organization for which each team held its fundraiser would determine the remaining 5% of their grade, although the students developed the evaluation criteria (e.g., see Appendix D).

To facilitate their development as a team member and evaluator, in addition to being encouraged to provide each other frequent informal feedback (Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001), students provided their teammates with formal feedback two times during the semester and once at the end of the semester. The final assessment at the end of the semester was the basis of their individual grade for their individual performance on their team. With repetition in evaluating one another, students increased their comfort and effectiveness as evaluators (Brutus, Donia, & Ronen, 2013). With repetition in being evaluated, students had the opportunity to change their behavior to improve their performance over the course of the semester based on the feedback received from their team members (D. F. Baker, 2008).

At the beginning of each weekly class meeting, students were asked to reflect on how well each of them met the shared and individual course commitments, to engage in self-reflexivity (i.e., examine how they think, feel, want and act, and how this influences their experience relative to honoring their course commitments), and to work with their peer coach to receive support and identify strategies to improve their performance.

Additionally, students engaged in cogenerative dialogues about what they were learning about themselves and about honoring their commitments. Cogenerative dialogue supports the aims of transformative learning by providing opportunities for students to engage in authentic learning experiences through which they learn how to work effectively with one

another, learn about themselves, and take responsibility for their learning (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2015). The cogenerative dialogue begins with questions about what is working, what could be improved, and how can we support one another to improve our individual and collective performance in achieving our shared purpose (Stith & Roth, 2006).

As with peer coaching, the cogenerative dialogues are framed as developmental, rather than evaluative. These cogenerative dialogues not only facilitate students learning and development but also increase students' sense of responsibility for their learning and development (Wharton, 2010). Some students were initially hesitant to share their experience with the class, so it was important to explain the value in sharing their experience to their fellow students' learning and development and to be empathetic to their classmates' experience, as we are all human and inherently worthy simply because we are human. We discussed the importance of compassion and self-compassion to our mutual learning and self-development (Neff, 2015).

Inevitably, some students are willing to share. When they do so it is important to express appreciation for their courage and acknowledge the learning it provided for their classmates. This, as well as our human tendency to reciprocate (Cialdini, 1984), creates an environment of spiraling amounts of sharing of their experiences, learning from each other's experience, and a feeling of being in this together.

Based on their self-reflection, self-reflexivity, and cogenerative dialogue, a conversation ensues about whether any additions or adjustments should be made to the enabling course context that would allow us to more effectively achieve our shared purpose. For example, students might realize that being present in class is critical to achieving our shared purpose and thus, add this as an element of the course context. A student might also want to update his or her hindrances. For example, as the semester unfolds, a student might realize his or her friends' pressuring him or her to go out on weeknights is hindering his or her ability to achieve our shared purpose.

As part of the final class discussion, students and Matthew discussed how well they met their shared purpose and lived out the enabling course context, articulated what they learned about establishing a shared purpose and course context with respect to leading, teaming, and organizing, and explored the future possibilities to use these practices as team members, managers, and leaders. In their final paper for the course, students were asked to assess their performance in fulfilling the course shared purpose and its supporting commitments and to articulate what they learned about the process and how they might use what they learned in the future.

### *Preparation by the Instructor*

To prepare to use the shared-purpose process instructors would benefit from developing an understanding of the student-centered, partnership, experiential, and transformative learning literature. It is meaningful to understand the reasoning behind and composition of an effective shared purpose, the development and creation of a supporting context, and the importance of student participation to fulfilling their commitment. In addition, instructors are encouraged to develop their ability to facilitate the shared-purpose process.

Developing a familiarity with the case-in-point methodology would also be meaningful, as what takes place within the classroom provides an experiential learning opportunity for students. In her 2005 book *Can Leadership Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World*, Sharon Daloz Parks explains and articulates the experience of Ron Heifetz's case-in-point methodology. In their 2016 book *Teachable Moment of Leadership: Case-in-Point Resources for Daring Educators*, Adriano Pianesi and Jill Hufnagel share resources to practice and master teaching leadership experientially using the Case-In-Point methodology. Finally, Jill Hufnagel's 2015 article "The point of Case-In-Point: Six Anchors for Turning Classrooms in Living Leadership Labs" offers a nice introduction to the case-in-point methodology. Prior to facilitating the process for the first time, instructors are encouraged to walk through the shared-purpose process themselves.

The instructor's role shifts from being an expert who imparts knowledge to a co-creator of learning (Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005) and fellow traveler in learning who must let go of certain ideas of how he or she wants the course to unfold (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). The relationship with students becomes a form of alliance conducive to more egalitarian exchange (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). It becomes important for the instructor to facilitate a safe classroom environment in which experiential, transformative learning that is inherently emotional and "aims to validate students' individual, idiosyncratic tacit knowing and learning" (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015, p. 717) can take place. In their article titled "Creating and Maintaining a Safe Space in Experiential Learning," Kisfalvi and Oliver (2015) provide approaches to create and maintain a safe space in the classroom. As it turns out, the enabling context that students establish as part of the shared-purpose process invariably contains numerous elements identified as important to the creation of a safe space (e.g., being respectful, caring, share experiences, being honest, trusting, being open-minded, possessing a "beginner's mind," being non-judgmental, etc.). To maintain such a space the instructor must continuously be mindful of his or her reactions to ensure he or she does not react defensively toward students in a way that impedes students' learning and development.

Rather than a performance mind-set, it is effective for instructors to hold a developmental mind-set throughout the process. Rather than focusing on students' success in realizing the shared purpose, enabling course context, and their individual commitment, to effectively facilitate students' development the focus should always be on what did they learn about themselves and about engaging in the shared purpose process and, based on what they have learned, what can they do differently in the future to improve their performance? This focus reduces students' anxiety and fear of failure and allows them to focus on their learning and development.

Even when holding this developmental frame, some students will still be anxious and not initially "buy-in." As one student stated at the end of the class,

The most personally challenging part of this course was buying into the system. I did not want to change and I think I made that pretty clear in my attitude. I had no idea what transforming meant and I did not want to be a part of it. It was not until I saw the development with everyone else in the class that I decided to make an effort to buy in.

With students like this, the instructor should accept, acknowledge, and discuss any resistance or defensive reactions in the moments they occur (A. C. Baker, 2004). Resistance is a normal part of any transformative learning process and, thus, should not be denied or suppressed but rather encouraged, expressed, and welcomed. This contributes to the creation of a space that facilitates students' learning and development (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). It is important for the instructor to maintain a nonjudgmental and accepting attitude (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

Within a developmental framework, "failure" becomes a reason for celebration as it is an opportunity for great learning and personal development. As another student expressed,

I think our failure of not fully embracing our classes' shared purpose helped us learn a lot. Our group did not want to do what we were asked at first. I learned that we are a bunch of "know it alls." And on top of that, we don't actually know everything. When someone tries to teach you something new, you should embrace it and try to learn from it.

The instructors should see themselves as part of the class—not as a separate observer of the class but as an embedded participator (Mesle, 2008). Thus, it is recommended that the instructor engage in the shared-purpose process with the students, as well as identifying his or her individual commitment and inhibitors to achieving the shared purpose. Throughout the

semester, it is recommended that the instructor engage in self-reflexivity and the cogenerative dialogue with students to understand how he or she is enabling or inhibiting the class in achieving its shared purpose, and based on this understanding, identifying and practicing what he or she might do differently to support the realization of the enabling course context and shared purpose.

If the instructor chooses to have students use their shared purpose as a decision-making framework to create effective and meaningful performance evaluations, they would benefit from understanding how to effectively create performance evaluation content (Halogen Software, 2016) and provide and receive developmental performance feedback (Harvard Business Review, 2016; Heen & Stone, 2014; Phoel, 2014). Prior to having the students develop the performance evaluation content and criteria, instructors are encouraged to think about how they will “challenge” students to stay true to their shared purpose in this.

Even as students choose to evaluate one another’s performance on their team, for most of the students, giving and receiving feedback is an uncomfortable and anxiety-producing process. As one student stated,

I learned that it is hard for me to provide feedback when it could potentially hurt some one’s feelings. I did not want my teammates to be mad at me so I was not always honest at first in my feedback.

Another student expressed,

At first I did not enjoy receiving feedback as I often took it as criticism that I did not agree with. I would be stubborn and feel that what my teammates were telling me was not true because I did not want to believe that I wasn’t living up to their standards. After several feedback sessions, however, I saw the importance of receiving feedback and learned to learn from it. . . . I learned that with practice you could become better at this.

But in the end, most students found it a valuable learning and developmental experience:

I learned that I care a lot about what my teammates think of me. I do not ever want to be considered the weakest link of a team or one that is bringing the team down. That is one of the reasons why I think it is more difficult for me to receive feedback. I’ve been working on taking criticism constructively so that I can make positive changes from the feedback I receive; this is one of the areas where I believe I have grown since the beginning of class. I have also learned



to give feedback more honestly. I've realized how critical feedback can be for a team's performance, so giving the best, most honest feedback is something that I've been trying to deliver.

### *Preparation for the Students*

Some students will be anxious about engaging in the shared-purpose process, as they are used to teacher-centered learning in which they do not actively participate in choices about their learning or develop a felt-responsibility for their learning. Because of this, it is recommended that the instructor take the time to explain the goal, the personal developmental benefit, and the learning outcomes of the shared-purpose process. The ultimate reason for engaging in the process is best to be framed and centered on providing the students with an experiential learning opportunity to learn about the efficacy of organizing based on developing and committing to a shared purpose and an enabling context. Thus, what is more important than their performance per se is what they are learning about themselves from engaging in the process and identifying what they might do differently in the future to improve their performance. Throughout the process, it is recommended that the instructor allow students the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, and articulate any concerns they are having. Once the process is used by a teacher, in future semesters, providing examples of the end product and students' comments on the benefits they received from engaging in the process are effective in increasing students' comfort level.

The shared-purpose process is most effective when framed as an experiment in which the goal is students' learning through the experience over the course of the semester, which will include learning from failure, rather than students' "doing it correctly." This is supported by the fact that students are not graded on their performance. As such, it is recommended that the instructor clearly communicate that the emphasis will be on his or her students' learning and development over the course of the semester rather than simply their objective performance in fulfilling the shared purpose and enabling course context.

### *Learning Objectives With Student Experience*

Student experiences and feedback from the class were collected in an end-of-semester after-action review and personal reflection final paper. A few students have struggled with the shared-purpose process at the beginning of the semester. As one student expressed,

I have openly said in the past I was not too excited about this class in the beginning. But I always like these list of commitments. Most of the things on this list, for me, are things necessary to be a good person. Putting these aspects in a list for me made it more overwhelming but it made me actively think about it more. This is better for my development as a person.

But by the end of the semester, probably because the shared-purpose process is developmental, almost all of the student feedback is positive, as in the end they all seemed to learn and develop through the experience.

Below are the shared-purpose process learning objectives supported with student experiences articulated in their after-action review and personal reflection final paper:

1. Understand and experience the importance and impact to a team and organization of the development and commitment to a shared purpose and supporting context within which to achieve the shared purpose:

Because of the shared purpose and course context, we were all on the same page and there were no barriers that separated us from each other. Together we were all working towards achieving the same goal and I think that it created the necessary transparency that allowed us all to be successful and committed to it. Having a shared purpose creates a sense of unity and integrity among us as individuals. It removes any disconnect between the group and makes you view each other as equals.

2. Understand and experience the importance and impact of identifying personal hindrances to achieving a shared purpose, as well as ways to eliminate or limit their impact:

The most profound part of the course for me was working discovering my hindrances and working addressing them moving forward. I knew there were things that were holding me back in life, but this class really forced me to talk about them with other students. I lived up to my personal commitment. I eliminated hindrances by using the 5 minutes of meditation to get myself in a proper mindset. I learned that when everyone establishes a purpose it makes me more committed because I do not want to let the other members of the team down.

3. Understand and experience the importance and impact of engaging self-reflexivity and cogenerative dialogue, receiving feedback, and coaching in achieving a shared purpose:

I lived up to our class shared purpose by being open and willing to share my inner thoughts, fears and desires with each of my classmates, as if I knew them

all for years. This came easy to me, given the fact that others were being open and were sharing deep feelings as well. I definitely opened up in this class more than any other class I've ever taken. I also lived up to our shared purpose by being present, engaged and enthusiastic during the class discussions. I found myself commenting and contributing more in this class because of the energy that I found in the circle.

4. Understand and experience how the establishment of a shared purpose provides a framework for collaboration among team and organizational members:

I learned that I cared more for those around me and that by caring for those around me and that by caring for them and holding them accountable they did the same for me and increased my engagement and ability to share without fear or anxiety.

If students decide on the course evaluation content and develop some of the course evaluation criteria as a partnership learning opportunity, the additional learning objectives would include

5. Understand and experience the development and employment of effective and meaningful performance evaluation content and criteria:

This was the first course that I ever developed meaningful performance measurements for. The majority of the group projects I have worked on in the past required teammates to fill out a generic feedback form with no room for specific examples. Students would often give each other perfect reviews to maximize the group's overall grade and minimize social backlash. This class obviously reached a much deeper level. I probably spent more time preparing the feedback sheets for this course than I did on entire projects in other courses. Thinking of specific examples of our teammates behaving in a certain matter made reflecting on this assignment very meaningful comparatively.

6. Understand and experience providing and receiving effective performance feedback:

I learned that providing effective feedback is essential to a team's success. A key piece to doing this effectively is having a psychologically safe environment. It is important to make sure the feedback does not sound like a personal attack. It is important to support feedback with evidence and examples. This helps mitigate the idea that it is a personal attack. I also learned that body language and attitude of a person giving feedback can greatly impact the person receiving the feedback. If I am giving feedback, but I am nervous and uncomfortable, it will make the

other person feel the same way. This class helped me realize that I [need] to be more receptive to feedback. As explained above, I realize that I need to not look at it like a personal attack. The readings in the class have also taught me that I need to understand the motives of the person giving me feedback. It is important to understand that if someone is giving feedback, they are more than likely just trying to help the team and myself. It is also important to bring up any concerns with the feedback. If I have a negative reaction to the feedback, I should calmly address with the individual in a civilized two-way conversation.

As articulated in the “Preparation by the Instructor” section, although a number of students struggled with giving and receiving feedback at the beginning of the semester, students expressed that they learned about developing effective performance appraisals and giving and receiving feedback and personally developed from the experience.

### ***Adaptations***

The shared-purpose process can be applied to any course as methodology to increase students’ commitment to, responsibility for, and engagement in their learning and development, as well as to provide a framework through which to facilitate partnership learning and case-in-point learning. In addition to the eight courses cited in this article, there are numerous professional development courses in which this could be used as a form of experiential learning and case-in-point methodology.

As well as being applied in undergraduate and MBA courses, the practice of developing a shared purpose and enabling context to achieve the purpose can be implemented in professional settings and team-oriented environments, if there exists a desire to increase member engagement, accountability, development, and collaboration. This process has been used with teams in business organizations and college athletic departments.

In an educational setting, once a shared purpose is created, it can be used as a framework to guide all types of partnership learning opportunities. A shared purpose is inspiring, increases student engagement and commitment, and provides a framework for students to make meaningful decisions about their learning. In a team or an organizational setting, a shared purpose provides a framework through which to facilitate effective collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

The shared-purpose process was developed as a methodology to increase student engagement and facilitate students taking responsibility for their learning. Over the course of a number of semesters of being employed,

the process was continually developed based on student feedback and instructor learning. After engaging in self-reflexivity alongside his students (Cunliffe, 2004; Eriksen, 2012), reflecting on their reflection in action (Schön, 1983), taking part in cogenerative dialogue with them, (Martin, 2006; Tobin & Roth, 2006) and being a part of partnership learning, Matthew realized that the process could be used as a form of case-in-point learning relevant to the leadership and team development courses in which it was used. More recently, the shared purpose developed by students has been used as a framework for additional partnership and case-in-point learning opportunities (e.g., developing course-grading criteria and assigning grades).

In summary, the shared-purpose process provides a form of partnership learning that increases student engagement in, commitment to, and responsibility for their learning and provides an opportunity for case-in-point learning (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) in leadership and team development courses. Once a shared purpose is established, it provides a framework to facilitate additional partnership and case-in-point learning opportunities. This shared-purpose process can also be used in teams and organizations to improve members' engagement, commitment, and performance, and once the shared purpose has been established, it can be used as a structure to facilitate collaboration and productively work through conflict.

## Appendix A

### *Shared Purpose*

*Leadership Coaching, Summer 2015.* As a member of this course, I commit to our Shared Purpose:

- To pursue happiness

Our Course Context:

- Confidentiality
- Possessing a beginner's/open mind
- Being encouraged but having the right to share and not share our lived experience
- Being open to ideas, opinions, and lived-experiences that differ from ours
- Pushing outside our comfort zones

- Being curious and explorative
- Being honest
- Being present—being in the here/now
- Being engaged and participating
- Being enthusiastic
- Encouraging and supportive of one another
- Trusting one another
- Being courageous
- Being honest with others and ourselves
- Being nonjudgmental
- Challenging and question one another in a respectful way
- Being prepared for class discussion by completing the assigned readings and assignments prior to the class meeting when they are due
- Sharing how we are experimenting with ideas learned in class in the outside within our day-to-day lives
- Outside class, taking time to reflect on previous classes' discussions and activities and relevant lived-experience

My individual commitment to enhancing the probability of realizing our shared purpose:

- Having a beginner's mind

Thinking of your relevant past learning and developmental experiences, as well as your present life situation, identify below any hindrances (e.g., habits, relationships, practices and inhibiting life situations) that exist to you achieving our shared purpose through enacting our course context. Also, please identify what you can do to eliminate or limit these hindrances.

- If I feel like the teacher does not care about my learning and development
- Allowing my track/cross country career get in my way
- Procrastination
- Attention distracting environment
- Being judged by classmates

## Appendix B

### Individual Evaluation

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Comments
Reliability			Attends team meetings when convenient, completes assignments on time but with no extra effort. Individual is pleasant and can make time for others				Always at team meetings (when reasonably feasible), always follows through with completing assigned tasks and goes above and beyond initial request. Individual is always approachable and makes time for others when needed
Communication			Posts to blog weekly and responds to inquiries on blog or e-mail (status updates, surface level)				Posts to blog more than once a week and is proactive about posting new ideas and frequently interacting with other (providing acknowledgment, updates, reflection, brainstorming, etc.)
Insight			Understands concepts from the text—but does not make the extra effort to apply them. Shares experiences, but does not reflect on how they personally “experienced” them				Reflects on experiences frequently via team meetings or the blog by discussing what it means to them or how they better understood themselves as a result of the experience. Implements concepts learned in the text in class and in the team setting. Shares ideas/feelings/growth/struggles with the group and class weekly
Passion		Acts of out self- interest	Supports the cause via participation. Completes assigned tasks. Does not necessarily use the personal story to connect with the cause				Proactively searches for new ways to fundraise. Shares personal story about the cause to motivate and engage others. Acts out of the best interest of the cause
Timeliness			Arrives on time to class and meetings. Is respectful of others time and schedules. Completes work by deadline—no sooner				Always on time to meetings and class. Is aware of others schedules and is considerate when planning meetings/events. Quickly turns around assigned work and shares with the group before providing to end user (charity/donors)

(continued)

## Appendix B. (continued)

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Comments
Feedback			Hesitant to receive or give feedback, but will participate when solicited. Wants a safe environment, but does not actively promote it. Feedback is provided to the group and is constructive but provides little to no actionable items				Consistently solicits feedback from others. Offers feedback to others unsolicited. Reflects on personal performance often, i.e., self-evaluation. Creates a safe environment where feedback is possible. Feedback is given in an appropriate setting (group or private) and is constructive and respectful in nature.
Inclusivity			Shares ideas with others, but does not solicit their ideas or opinions. Individual makes you feel welcome				Invites other team members to provide input on all aspects of work. Considers others ideas and opinions in meetings. Shares success with team and does not take sole credit for any accomplishments. Individual makes you feel important to the success of the entire team
Attitude			Positive attitude/outlook toward group and charity. Excited to complete tasks, but not necessarily enthused about self-transformation or promoting others in their journey				Always enthusiastic and eager to take on challenges/tasks. Provides a positive and realistic outlook for the team. Encourages other team members and supports them in their transformation
Initiative			Completes tasks assigned by groups. Takes part in all group initiatives, has new ideas—may not follow through on all				Is creative in fundraising efforts and always trying new things to raise money. Starts tasks without being asked by team members. Follows through with ideas or side projects without reminders from the team. Is not afraid to fail for trying new things. Applies concepts learned in class to project effectively
<b>Score</b>							



## Appendix C

### Team Evaluation

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Comments
Rewards/ Recognition			Team members gave positive reinforcement & offered congratulations when tasks were accomplished.				Team members praised individual's efforts, recognized teammate's performance and contributions throughout the project. They expressed gratitude and connected team/individual efforts to the collective purpose.
Effort			Team members worked within their realm of comfort, completed all assigned tasks and gave input, but looked for consensus vs. conflict.				Controversial conversations took place to develop and enhance ideas. Team members challenged each other to grow and stepped outside their comfort zones.
Caring			Team members performed the work that was required on this project and were cordial with teammates and sponsor.				Team members worked to create rewarding relationships with teammates, clarity, corporate sponsor, and classmates.
Equality			Team members allowed others to express their opinions but they did not take them into consideration when decision making.				Team members remembered that reasonable people can and do differ with each other. Each team member really wanted to learn as much as he/she could from others on the team and allowed each team member to express commitment.

(continued)

## Appendix C. (continued)

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Comments
Accountability			Team members were reluctant to have conversations when needed out of fear/discomfort.				Crucial conversations took place when team members failed to meet goals. Team members felt comfortable holding each other accountable.
Considerate (Empathy)			Team members allowed teammates to express their opinions but they did not provide the teammate their full attention or show interest in their opinions.				Team members gave team members the benefit of the doubt. Recognized team members as people on a personal level.
Plan of Action			Team established rough outline for project and implemented targets to reach along the way. Tasks were disbursed as they arose.				Team established specific goals and deadlines for accomplishing tasks which would ultimately contribute to fulfilling our purpose. Goals and actions were shared so each member had a real and meaningful contribution.
Commitment			Team members were aware of the commitments and followed them when necessary to complete tasks.				Team members lived out the team and class commitments through their actions.
Trust			Team members offered input, but were a bit guarded with expression of opinions.				Team members were willing to express opinions and thoughts freely without fear. They continually offered honest and real input.
Fulfillment of Purpose		Team members performed tasks necessary to hold a successful fundraiser.					Team members understood and performed with the ultimate goal in mind of the organization, the team, and the class all the time.
							<b>Score</b>

## Appendix D

### Nonprofit Organization Evaluation

Please score each criterion on a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

1. Communication

2. Ability to act on plans

3. McBride's Fundraiser Event

4. Challenge Letters

Would you work with our team in the future? Do you feel we represented Amos House and its Mission?

Additional Comments

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