

My Leadership Story- Manifested Competencies Reflection

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I began my MA in Organizational Leadership as a new professional who was particularly interested in organizational culture. At the time, I was working for an organization who fostered an organizational culture where staff felt genuinely trusted, connected, and capable of both personal and organizational growth. I initially based my understanding of organizational culture through the basis of communication and relationships. I quietly examined how leaders treated people, whether employees felt heard, and whether the team operated from a shared vision and purpose. These questions still matter deeply in my leadership approach, although what has transformed throughout the program was my understanding of where culture actually lives. I began to recognize through both coursework and a growing career in management, that culture isn't created solely through conversations or values statements. It is also shaped through decision making, workflow design, diverse perspectives and experience, and the unwritten expectations people learn to carry.

I started the ORGL program understanding the practical responsibility of my position, but lacked a clear leadership identity. That being said, my career progressed quickly because I noticed what was missing and did something about it. I quickly learned unfamiliar processes, translated between different people and roles, created resources and processes that did not exist, and stepped into gaps before they became larger challenges. I became the person anyone could rely on when work became unclear or urgent. For a long time, this approach caused me to understand and measure leadership through usefulness. If I could keep everything moving and make everyone else's job easier by quietly absorbing the impact myself, I believed that meant I was leading well.

While this was a strong instinct that served well in the progression of my career, it also had a hidden cost. I would become so focused on supporting other people that I had slowly absorbed all of the responsibilities the organization had never formally assigned. I noticed myself quietly correcting problems myself rather than addressing it directly, because doing so felt easier, safer, faster, and kinder than naming the pattern directly. I would present myself as a steady leader while privately trying to hold together too many moving parts. The more capable I became at compensating for poor systems, the easier it was for those systems to remain unclear. The ORGL program did not teach me that dependency was necessarily wrong, but it did teach me to question what happens when dependability becomes a substitute for shared knowledge, honest communication, and collective responsibility. This lesson became much harder to ignore as my own work responsibilities expanded exponentially.

While enrolled in the master's program, I moved from managing one program to suddenly managing three different programs without any shared processes. My previous approach to leadership became painfully unsustainable, working in an environment where priorities shifted faster than I could grasp, resources were limited, and important information lived in one person's memory rather than the clearly defined processes I had once worked so hard to maintain. Studying leadership while working in these conditions, I often desperately applied tools and concepts from the ORGL program to active situations at work. What I had to quickly learn was that good intentions do not compensate for missing infrastructure, and frequent communication did not always guarantee a shared understanding. The most clear and critical lesson is that decisions that make sense to leadership often feel completely lost on the employees that are actually responsible for carrying out those decisions.

The concentration in change leadership provided me with a different set of questions. Rather than only asking why someone wasn't following a standard process, I remained curious about how the process had been introduced, whether there are competing priorities around it, what information the person has available to them, and whether success was actually made possible. Instead of viewing resistance as something to overcome, I became more interested in what the resistance was communicating. Resistance might reflect fear or discomfort, but it can also shed light on a poorly designed system or workflow, a lack of trust, conflicting priorities, or practical knowledge and insights never reaching the people making the decisions. Listening to resistance does not mean agreeing with every objection, but it does require viewing employees as useful stewards of information rather than obstacles standing in the way of change. This development of perspective caused me to realize that I was becoming less interested in managing people themselves, and more interested in understanding the systems that serve them.

For that reason, systems thinking and change theory was where several of these ideas came together. For a long time I had dreamed of becoming an engineer, as my mind naturally enjoys breaking complexity into parts. I like noticing the inconsistencies, missing information, connections that aren't always immediately visible, and untangling how they impact one another and the organization as a whole. This can be a wonderful gift when analyzing an organizational problem, but turns into a curse when it becomes difficult to stop. Every answer prompts a new question, allowing for even the most straightforward challenges to become much larger investigations because I want to have the entire picture before making even small decisions. Systems thinking felt like finally learning the language my brain has already been trying to speak.

That being said, one of the most meaningful developments in my leadership journey has been getting comfortable with saying “We don’t know that yet”, without feeling like uncertainty is a failure. My thought process is always to take in all the information available, but some information can be ambiguous or needs development. That is the piece I had to get comfortable with- when I had already absorbed everything in front of me, and yet couldn’t come to a clear answer. This shift also changed how I approached my capstone project. I originally imagined an extensive diagnostic framework that would map systems, examine root causes, design interventions, and evaluate results. I realized I was trying to fit everything I learned from this program into one workbook, and it would have promised more certainty than one leadership tool could realistically provide.

In order to narrow the scope, I had to give up the idea that intellectual value depended on including everything I know, rather than focusing on what the user actually needed first. The final Organizational Systems Diagnostic Toolkit turned into a simple yet structured pause between noticing a concern or pattern, and responding based on the first assumption. The capstone project reinforces what I have come to learn in the ORGL program, being that responsible leadership sometimes means slowing down enough to avoid claiming certainty too early.

This project represents one of the ways I find most rewarding to lead. I enjoy studying complexities, researching new or stronger practices, and creating the materials to help others move forward. With that being said, I don’t want that contribution to make me the source of every answer. The people closest to the work hold knowledge that no leadership model or external consultant could ever replace. My role is to bring the research and tools into the conversation, organize what it is we are learning, and help others realize their expertise is critical

in improving what comes next. My proudest moments as a leader have involved watching someone move from uncertainty to ownership, watching as their confidence catches up to their abilities. Earlier in my career, I supported people by quietly taking difficult work off their plates. Now, I recognize the difference between rescuing someone from discomfort and instead giving them what they need in order to grow through it.

Throughout the program, I have become increasingly interested in how technology and artificial intelligence are rapidly changing the ways people and organizations work. Drawing from what I have learned throughout the ORGL program and first-hand experience, organizations don't remain current by simply introducing new tools. They must be able to learn from implementation, keep up with new developments, and most importantly- not lose sight of the people doing the work. As I move toward work in implementation, organizational effectiveness, and technology adoption, I carry with me a broader definition of leadership. I no longer view leadership through positional authority or absorbing all the chaos. Instead, leadership means helping view challenges differently, connecting knowledge that has remained fragmented, and ultimately creating the conditions and environments for people to do their work well.

I began this program wanting to understand how leaders build healthy organizational cultures. I leave this program with the understanding that culture and systems can't be separated. Every process communicates something about what the organization values, whose knowledge it trusts, and what it expects people to carry on their own. I don't have clear answers about the next chapter of my career, but I do have better questions, a clearer understanding of my leadership identity, and more confidence in the ways I choose to show up as a leader. I want to help

organizations understand how their people, knowledge, systems, and processes affect one another, while helping teams feel confident in the knowledge and capabilities they already hold.