

Using Care of Creation Principles in Workplace Interaction: A Case Study of Developing a Plan for International Experiences

PATRICIA O'CONNELL, PH.D. & DARIEL JACOBSEN, PH.D.

Abstract

21st century applications of Franciscan concepts related to the care of creation are most often associated with environmental sustainability which includes matters of the earth and its creatures; creatures in the post-modern workplace are often exempted from these principles. This article chronicles a use of care of creation principles applied to respect for God's creatures in the workplace. Francis's tenets were used to guide the decisions for an important project in a higher education organizational setting.

The School of Professional Studies at Lourdes College was tasked to develop a plan to provide international experiences across diverse academic disciplines and populations. What could have been a stressful edict to quickly implement change and begin several initiatives was gracefully and carefully facilitated by applying Franciscan approaches to the decision process. Care of creation principles were extended to include these very busy and motivated creatures already involved in many projects and initiatives connected to the strategic plans of the college, the school, and their individual departments and programs.

When care of creation principles were applied to decision process planning, meeting proceedings, team interaction, and the leadership of the decision making and the people, results of the year-long committee work were very different from expected. The initiatives determined and requirements of the task force members reflected a leadership style and process in keeping with what Francis prescribed in *The Canticle of the Creatures*.

Introduction

"Happy those who endure in peace. . .sustain. . each other. . grant pardon for love of you. . .serve Him with great humility" (FA:ED, 1:113-114). These excerpts from the *Canticle of the Creatures* are wedged within the many recommendations to praise and honor Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Sister Water, Brother Fire, and Mother Earth. Our 21st century emphasis on the care of creation is to sustain our earth, environment and the creatures therein. Franciscan values and tenets also emphasize world peace, forgiveness, and service to the world.

Do we practice peace and humility, or do we rationalize that organizational and career success can override these tenets? Do we honor Brother and Sister colleagues as we aim to honor earth and sky and animal creatures?

At the same time, 21st century workplaces are often marked by a race to get ahead, to get much done, to grow our organizations, to stay in budget, and to remain locally, regionally, and globally competitive. As this workplace mindset prevails, do we sustain each other and care for those we lead and those with whom we interact - employees, associates, leaders, followers, colleagues and peers? Do we practice peace and humility, or do we rationalize that organizational and career success can override these tenets? Do we honor Brother and Sister colleagues as we aim to honor earth and sky and animal creatures? It would many times appear we have forgotten about the fellow human creatures with whom we can and should accomplish so much. Our workplaces are fraught with long lists of tasks to be done, opposing opinions and approaches, non-productive meetings, mistrust of leaders and peers, rivalries with external and internal competitors. Workers at all levels encounter personal and interpersonal struggles in trying to do the right thing and give their best effort despite the roadblocks encountered in this demanding workplace.

In our organizations, leaders and followers of all styles from authoritarian, directive, and controlling to transformational, charis-

matic, and even servant leaders, can treat the humans in their work teams like creatures with no limits. As humans we have elevated our unique capabilities over those of God's other creatures (Delio, Warner, & Wood, 2008). As humans in the workplace, do we overestimate and elevate our capacities, capabilities, and our expectations of each other?

Even visionary leaders and administrators can forget to apply care of creation principles in the workplace. Consider the challenges of administrative leaders in higher education. They are challenged to respond to the requirements of governmental and accreditation bodies; they must accommodate donors' beliefs and input and they are accountable to board members. Even the most dedicated servant leaders can become slaves to the daunting requirements of 21st century leadership when responding to these pressures and needs. Whether a result of their passion, commitment, sense of duty, or their impatience to achieve their goals, leaders many times become task masters, insensitive to the sustenance of the fellow human creatures in their care. Followers, in turn, may interpret leaders' recommendations, needs, and goals as requirements and edicts. As they work to achieve what is expected and accomplish goals, care of creation principles with fellow humans can be forgotten.

As an institution of higher education grows and prospers, both yin and yang are experienced by the creatures affected. Faculty, students, and community benefit from more offerings, higher quality education, and greater levels of commitment by board members and community leaders. At the same time, administration, faculty, committees, and task groups are required to follow through on a myriad of diverse initiatives based on a noble vision and ambitious strategic plan. These activities and initiatives can dramatically change the work, careers, and lives of these creatures.

This case study analyzed the proceedings of one committee's response to a strategic planning implementation initiative at a small and fast growing Franciscan college. The committee was tasked to identify a set of focused international experiences for The School of Professional Studies at Lourdes College, in the third year of a five-year strategic planning process. From inception through final recommendations, the task force leadership increasingly applied Franciscan principles to the proceedings, meeting experiences, and decision-making. Specific leadership and team interaction behaviors were noted, described, and analyzed for further understanding of how using care of creation principles effected the team's process and outcomes.

Background

Over a ten year period, Lourdes College expanded its academic programs, engaged in marketing to increase awareness in the community, and doubled its student enrollment. During this time, the college benefitted from visionary leadership and implemented shared governance amongst administration, faculty, and staff. Many positive outcomes were achieved for the college. At the same time, administration, faculty and staff were laden with many major projects and strategic initiatives which included program reviews, accreditations, new program development, and process improvements of all shapes and sizes.

Some of the major strategic goals taken on and completed included the following:

- development and institution of six graduate programs;
- two rounds of campus-wide program reviews;
- a three-year college level Higher Learning Commission accreditation process;
- program-level accreditations for education, business, and nursing;
- implementation of a campus-wide assessment system;
- development and introduction of faculty evaluation;
- increased requirements for scholarship and terminal degree completion by faculty;
- continuous upgrades of facilities, a major capital campaign, and large building project; and
- the establishment of athletic programs, student life programs, and residential housing.

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Through the ambitious campaign to increase enrollment, build new facilities, and diversify the student population to include more traditional and residential students, the college maintained and even increased its high level of commitment to its Franciscan core values of learning, reverence, and service. The standards for quality and service both internally and externally were raised for all employees, both professionally and personally. Leadership continuously challenged everyone involved to stay true to the institution's core strengths of teaching, commitment to students, and servicing underserved populations while increasing faculty scholarship, community service, alumni involvement, and the traditional student population.

As part of the second five year strategic plan, with the ultimate goal to attain university status, the college leadership anticipated offering international experiences and/or study abroad for students in all academic programs. A college-level task force was assigned to review options and needs across campus. At the same time, a committee of 10 faculty and staff was assigned to develop a plan for international experiences within the School of Professional Studies. This School had been structured two years earlier to incorporate the departments of Education, Business, Leadership, and Social Studies under one moniker.

International Experiences Task Force Decision Proceedings

The task force held four meetings over two semesters. At each meeting, the use of care of creation principles with each other and with the meeting proceedings was evident. Leaders and members alike practiced humility by listening to all input while considering the needs of a set of varied individuals, departments, and programs. Task force participants showed reverence for their fellow human creatures when they allowed the decision-making process to flow naturally as new input and information was shared. Leaders encouraged and praised the group by honoring the process and its unexpected final outcomes instead of requiring conformity to the assumed and expected direction from campus-level leadership. The group used the College's own mission and values as a guide, applying the Franciscan principles of learning, reverence, and service through every stage of the team process. Forming, norming, storming, and performing were accomplished effortlessly. Although the conclusions and recommendations of the team were unexpected, they were accepted with respect and consensus by all involved.

Meeting One: Team Orientation, Forming, and Norming

The committee's first meeting followed the norming (i.e. agreeing on procedures and methods of interaction) and forming (i.e. identifying roles and developing plans) stages of team development described by Robbins and Judge (2009). To begin the session and the planning process, leadership used the simple practice of asking each person to share their own experiences and hopes for international experiences in this academic setting. As each person contributed, fellow committee members listened without interrupting, and appeared truly interested in the information each person shared. The meeting proceeded as simply a sharing of ideas and concepts. No decisions were forced or expected at this first session. Even though the group included some very "talkative" individuals, each committee member seemed to agree that it was important to understand the proceedings and decisions of the college-level International Experiences Committee, and to coordinate the efforts of this group accordingly. The committee's leader and members committed to be very careful to neither duplicate nor counteract the activities and efforts of the college level committee. Members commissioned their leaders, who were also participating in the college-wide planning effort, to keep the group abreast of the philosophies and activities being discussed and decided at the broader level. Equally important was the need to understand the diverse experiences and expectations of the faculty and staff of the School of Professional Studies.

To frame the options, the group developed a list of possible models for international experiences for consideration (See Table 1). The team leader then commissioned a survey of faculty, staff, and two senior level student groups to gather further input. Even though the options and the process for completing their task were still not apparent, collaboration and coordination at all levels was the team's clear goal.

To begin this complex decision process with a very diverse set of committee participants who represented unique and specialized programs and departments, the team leaders encouraged all to contribute openly. They then modeled listening and sincere acknowledgement of all input and ideas. Recommended change leadership principles of empowerment and engagement of participants were applied. Leadership encouraged risk taking in the form of open dialogue without fear of judgment or reprisal, and was willing to flex existing practices that might hinder the decision process (Kotter, 2007).

Table 1	
Nine Models for International Experiences Identified by Task Force	
1. Semester Abroad Options:	Lourdes program staffed, Foreign partner institution, Domestic partner institution
2. Student Exchange, using partner institutions	
3. Faculty Exchange, using partner institutions	
4. Foreign Study Tours Options:	Travel partners, ECO tourism, Special winter or summer terms
5. Half-semester Sessions to fulfill Cultural Awareness Curriculum Requirements	
6. Franciscan Heritage Experiences	
7. International Internships or Student Teaching Experiences	
8. International or Domestic Service Learning Programs or Courses	
9. International Virtual Experiences, such as International Workshops for Teachers	
Taken from proceedings of SPS International Experiences Committee, 10/16/2009	

Meeting Two: Team Storming

At this meeting, the group had expected to identify the possibilities for international experiences for the School of Professional Studies (SPS). During this meeting, the team reviewed their survey results (See Table 2). While reviewing these interesting but non-conclusive results and sharing input for specific follow up initiatives, the team became aware of the plethora of options and the challenges of selecting one model or one approach to fit the needs as well as the current capabilities of the varied departments, faculty, staff, and students. They realized there could be no clear consensus or one simple approach. One of the team leaders had participated in a community-based international exchange. She quickly noted the importance of developing a mission and a focus for this group’s recommendations and activities. As such, she presented a draft mission statement for the SPS task force to consider. The group reviewed this, but openly noted that the college-level task force had not yet determined a focus for direction, activities, or resources. There was consensus that coordination of missions and visions was not yet possible.

At this point, another group member suggested a brainstorming and decision process to identify and analyze the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the School’s international experience initiatives. The team’s leader humbly and respectfully recognized this as a useful “time-out” from a now energetic yet “stuck” decision process. All agreed this would be a useful next step in the decision process.

Table 2	
Summary of Faculty Survey Results on International Experiences	
Category	Percent
Participation in international exchange	20%
Considerable international travel or business experience	45%
Useful contacts for arranging international experiences	30%
Interested in an international faculty exchange	55%
Interested in supervising student international experiences	70%
Fluent in a foreign language	15%
SPS International Experiences Faculty Survey, Q. 1,2,3,4,5,9.: October, 2009	

This second meeting was characteristic of the team life stage of storming. Again, individual participants felt free to speak their voices. As a result, they identified conclusions and insights not expected or popular, per Kotter's (1995) recommendation for risk taking in change leadership. At this session, the team and its leaders applied the leadership challenge principles of finding their voices and challenging the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Team members were now showing use of care of creation principles by honoring each other and acknowledging that there were no clear answers or direction. By taking a peaceful approach which allowed the flow of creation to prevail, the storming process became a gentle and refreshing shower, not a thunder-and-lightning event.

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Meeting Three: Constructive Storming Using The KaleadeScapesm Process

At this meeting, the task group applied a process for strategic thinking which is often used only in high level decision making and organizational-level strategic planning. The meeting facilitation technique, termed the KaleadeScapesm process, supported input and participation from all group members. It used both brainstorming and nominal group thinking techniques.

First, a detailed, time-sensitive agenda was created specifically for this decision process. The agenda set a series of questions for the task force to answer openly. Task force members were encouraged to project their own voice in their input without fear of judgment or reprisal. Participants were each given a stack of 3 x 5 cards on which to record any and all ideas. The decision process facilitator re-iterated that all ideas were acceptable, and nothing would be judged including the spelling and grammar used in the written thoughts. The cards/ideas were collected, sorted, and displayed by the meeting facilitator. This provided opportunity for the committee members to see the patterns of thought and categories of answers emerging from their group thinking process.

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Throughout the facilitated KaleadeScapesm meeting, participants were encouraged to comment, clarify, and suggest changes to the ideas forming and categories/patterns being named and labeled. The facilitator took care to remain objective through the process, serving only as the "sieve" for the many ideas brought forth. Three major KaleadeScapesm exercises were completed: identifying strengths of the school of professional studies in the realm of international experiences; identifying weaknesses; and identifying opportunities. For each exercise, participants discussed and clarified input, agreed on the major decision patterns that emerged, and prioritized the categories to reflect the degree of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities (See Table 3). To conclude the meeting session, the facilitator drafted a shortened version of the vision and mission items that emerged from the group input. All agreed in essence to the concepts of the vision and mission, and accepted that any improvements to the language or wording would be encouraged and reviewed at the next team meeting (See Table 4).

The process and leadership applied in meeting three drew the principles of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration from Bass and Avilio's (1994) model of transformational leadership. It also applied Kouzes and Posner's (1989) leadership challenge theory practices of challenging the process which enabled others to act, and inspired a shared vision.

More importantly, the facilitation and leadership process followed principles that Francis taught us. Just as Francis did when he challenged the Sultan and confronted the grey wolf, the leaders and the team members confronted their issues and conflict with peace-filled confidence. They proceeded with a mindset that expected collaboration, dialogue, and a meaningful solution. Further, like Francis, the participants trusted in the natural harmony of *human* nature. They kept their common and seminal Franciscan values at the fore when engaging in discussions and decisions.

Meeting Four: Team Performing and an Unexpected Outcome

At the fourth meeting of the group, the proceedings and information generated to date were reviewed and discussed by the group. The team members were again encouraged to openly offer their own thoughts and conclusions, without judgment or reprisal. After a lively exchange, another review of the many options and much diversity of needs, backgrounds, and resources by each program in the School of Professional Studies, the task force leaders allowed an unexpected conclusion. The consensus reached was contrary to the assumed progress toward a School-wide or school level program or initiative. The task force concluded that the School should continue to encourage individual initiatives and activities by faculty and each academic department. However, no master plan of action or forward progress could be developed at this time.

Table 3

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities Identified for SPS International Experiences Using the KaleadeScapesm Process

Strengths

1. Synergy with Lourdes College Strategic Plan and SPS Personnel Interest
2. International Connections, Contacts, and Experiences
3. Knowledge, Skills, and Specific Programs Favorable to International Experiences
4. Dispositions of Energy, Creativity, and Desire to Support the Effort

Weaknesses

1. Lack of Formal Experience and a Formal Process to Initiate International Experiences
2. Competition for Support, Resources, and Opportunities within SPS
3. Lack of Focus for SPS-level Programs, Geography, or Purpose
4. Resource Constraints: Financial, People, and Time

Opportunities and Needs

1. Focus on Lourdes College students
2. Involve students from other countries at Lourdes
3. Focus on faculty exchange and development of international expertise
4. Determine College-level plans, focus, and resources
5. Seek funding for international experiences
6. Collaborate with other institutions

Taken from proceedings of SPS International Experiences Committee, 12/4/2009

The team concluded college-level and department level, not School level, decision making needed to progress; college-level resources and focus would be needed before the School could form its own top-down strategies or sponsor overall approaches. At the same time, the “bubbling up” of ideas and initiatives should continue. Each department should wrestle with its needs and pursue opportunities for international involvement or experiences as they became identified at the faculties or staffs of the individual professionals.

All departments were encouraged to keep the identification of and involvement in international experiences for both faculty and students top of the mind as a strategic opportunity and initiative. Specific funding and resourcing via grants or sponsorships would be accepted and encouraged, but no resources would be committed. Faculty and staff were also encouraged to actively pursue contacts and cooperative efforts and to identify opportunities for collaboration with community groups, other colleges in the area, and other Franciscan colleges. Anyone interested in these activities or already involved should continue to understand and participate in opportunities.

In effect, the team concluded it was too soon to identify master activities and a strategic direction from the top down. The care of creation values and principles led the leaders and the team to disperse without fully completing the task assigned to them. However, the team agreed that forcing decisions or initiatives from the top down would be uncaring and inappropriate for the human creatures involved. The year-long process concluded with a list of opportunities for individuals and individual departments, and a commitment to be satisfied with a non-decision. The process highlighted needs and listed opportunities via this furthered awareness (See Table 4).

Table 4

Mission and Vision Statements Considered for International Experiences in the Lourdes College School of Professional Studies 2009-2010

First Draft (suggested at start of decision process):

Mission: The School of Professional Studies International Experiences Program will promote the value of cross-cultural learning experiences that promote multiple perspectives, state of the planet awareness including global issues, comprehension and appreciation of other cultures, the world as an interrelated system, and the significance of human choices. The program will foster student-to-student, people-to-people contacts to create citizens of the world with a positive and generative global perspective on human rights, access to education, shared governance, and shared markets.

Vision: The School of Professional Studies International Experiences Programs will provide Global Learning services for undergraduate and graduate students both full and part time enrolled in the School via teaching, leadership, and research opportunities through interaction with visiting international students and faculty on our campus plus digital exchange, travel abroad, study abroad, student exchange, faculty exchange, and international education.

Second Draft (adopted May, 2010):

Mission: Understanding and experience of global context is an essential part of being a professional in today’s world. Utilizing Franciscan values, the Lourdes College School of Professional Studies seeks to engage faculty and students in learning and exchange experiences designed to promote cultural literacy and global professional perspective. This will be accomplished by providing diverse opportunities for global awareness and practices in the areas of student learning, faculty development, and service or volunteerism.

Vision: The needs and priorities for international experience will vary among the departments within the School of Professional Studies. Each department will establish priorities for specific initiatives utilizing a set of categories for Student Learning, Faculty Development and Scholarship, and Service Learning/Volunteer Opportunities. Departments will implement initiatives in coordination with the Lourdes College Office of Global Learning , when it becomes established.

Taken from proceedings of SPS International Experiences Committee, 2009-2010

Table 4 illustrates the dramatic change in scope and direction that took place over the course of this committee's tenure. The major differences in initial expectations versus the final recommendations for the School of Professional Studies demonstrate how care of creation principles and Franciscan values influenced the outcome. A less energetic approach ensued. A realization by all participants of the importance of carefully and less ambitiously using both human and material resources for this effort emerged. The creatures involved ended the process believing that they had been cared for because they were able to speak their voices, have their needs considered, and be gently nudged to consider major changes in their activities and initiatives. Some responded with relief; others responded by continuing to pursue their own opportunities for international experiences. The process ended with assurances that these efforts would emerge from within the creatures in the workplace, at the highest and lowest levels, in a dignified manner, but in places and times yet to be understood.

Conclusion

Time alone will determine whether care of creation principles applied to the leadership and decision process will in fact improve the quantity and quality of international experiences for faculty, staff, and students in the Lourdes College School of Professional Studies. Regardless, the SPS International Experiences task force and its leaders engaged in a process that acknowledged the needs and limitations of fellow creatures in the workplace. Leaders and members demonstrated humility in listening to and reverence for the diverse input and options. All participants openly expressed the voices that spoke to them of a task not yet ready to be forced to completion or action. Those involved courageously finalized a decision not expected by the organization and its leaders. While the process ended for the year with a pause in directives and initiatives, there was a strong belief that "various fruits with colored flowers and herbs" (FA:ED 1:114) would take seed at the destined times and places. In doing this, the team acknowledged their "essential creature hood" and their role as "co-participants in creation" (Delio et al., 2008, p. 78). In their decision the team applied Franciscan tenets and values in relation to what they interpreted through their learning and reverence as the natural order and harmony of creation.

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About the Authors



Dr. Patricia O'Connell Ph.D.

is Associate Professor of Business & Leadership Studies at Lourdes College in Sylvania, Ohio. Her career experiences include being vice president of an international market research firm and president of a consulting firm which facilitated strategic planning processes and executive team development.

Dr. Dariel Jacobsen Ph.D.

is Associate Professor of Education at Lourdes College. She teaches in the Masters of Education program. Her main area of research is investigating ways for gaining, maintaining and sustaining hope.



Patricia K. O'Connell
Associate Professor of Leadership Studies
Poconnell@lourdes.edu
419-824-3698

Dariel Jacobs
Associate Professor of Education
djacobs@lourdes.edu

Lourdes College
School of Professional Studies
6832 Convent Blvd.
Sylvania, OH 43560