
How to accompany people in making decisions?

The transition from a centralized and top-down style of governance to one of to one of shared leadership and responsibility requires, undoubtedly, a paradigm shift, especially regarding decision making.
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At the present time, I have the mission of jump-starting the life of four educational centers geographically located in the metropolitan area of the capital of El Salvador. I understand my mission as an intentional effort to accompany the leadership of the directors and their respective teams and to empower them in a holistic and coherent vision of the Marist mission in our schools.

Our provincial experience has been marked, during a good part of the one hundred years of Marist presence in the region, by an exercise of individual and personalized leadership, without the development of a culture of participatory processes in decision-making. This, together with an organizational and provincial prodding approach that tended to separate vertically the areas of intervention in the educational centers (direction, administration, pastoral and evangelization), favored a disintegrating force and in some circumstances even an unspoken power struggle.

Currently, our educational institutions live in highly competitive contexts that demand standards of performance that are not always in accordance with Marist values. Our schools are immersed in processes of constant cultural change. The disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated these processes that seem to lead to the socio-cultural regeneration of organizational patterns that seemed permanent.

This is generating a constant evolution of roles, both in families and educators, in work teams and in management, which demands a permanent updating of those engaged in leadership.

As a Congregation and as a Province we face the decline and aging of the brothers, which has led to the renewal of our organizational paradigms and the search for new forms of leadership



and new management models. What we call “shared mission” among the Marists of Champagnat, cannot remain only in the incorporation of lay people repeating the same courses of action. The identity of our centers cannot reside only in the figure of a leader as the absolute promoter of the whole reality of the educational center.

What model of leadership should we assume in our Global Network of Marist Schools and in each one of them so that our evangelizing educational project continues to be present in a significant way in our societies?

How, starting from this position of institutional weakness and from a part of the laity marked at times by a critical unfamiliarity with our educational tradition, should we consider the best possible model of Marist leadership?

Answering these questions requires certain essential choices. I will point out two of them:

- To opt for a model centered on the development of people, of current leaders and of those who will take over soon.

- Change the focus: from the individual to the relational, understanding and influencing group behavior patterns as a key to improve the performance of leadership teams.

Marist leadership must contain a global, hierarchical, and interactive vision of educational processes. The first responsibility of a good directive function consists of personal initiatives and teamwork aimed at defining and internalizing the educational project as a means of integration and as a source of identity and creativity.

From my experience of working in the training and support of administrators, I consider essential the intentional development of what we could call institutional competencies that are incorporated in a harmonious and articulated way, enriching professional skills and the ability to carry out a good handling of relationships and teams.

A solid training focused on strengthening individual competencies and oriented to a distributed leadership practice capable of generating trust, bonding, co-responsibility, satisfaction in the mission and favoring fundamental organizational conditions for sustainable innovation and change.

I consider it important to accompany those who are already exercising leadership, providing feedback on their ability to guide, who motivate and commit their teams to the institutional mission, thus generating a strong sense of collaboration and co-responsibility.

It is also essential to foster collaborative organizational models: matrix designs, self-directed teams, participatory processes and networking as a necessary condition to foster change and innovation, thus positioning ourselves with a greater competitive advantage in the environment in which we find ourselves.

A paradigm shift requires breaking with inertia and traditions. It is about empowering competent charismatic leaders to direct our works from the cornerstone of our institutional mission and to be able to imbue their teams with motivation, commitment, and adaptation to change.

Accompanying people in decision making means empowering them to feel that change is possible and that change depends on them. Carrying out a collaborative process, to dream together about the desired future, to impact on the change of the internal culture of the center, could be a good start.

It is a matter of encouraging and leaving space, creating the conditions so that everything we dream is possible, guiding with meaning, towards the future we desire.



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If you would like to share your ideas, reflections, or experiences about servant and prophetic leadership with the Commission as a result of these reflections, write to fms.cimm@fms.it

