

## Introduction

As a Co-president of Staff Representation within the Maricopa Community Colleges, I have the privilege and responsibility of working closely with executive leadership and the presidents of all ten colleges. This unique vantage point allows me to both influence and witness the direct impact of leadership practices on staff, students, and institutional culture. My leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in four interrelated theories: **Transformational Leadership, Collective Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Democratic Leadership**. Each theory speaks to a dimension of leadership I find essential in higher education: inspiring change, shared responsibility, empathy, and inclusivity.

Transformational leadership aligns with my belief in the power of vision and motivation. Collective leadership reflects the interdependent reality of modern institutions, especially in education, where collaboration across departments and campuses is essential. Servant leadership resonates with my conviction that leaders should prioritize the growth and well-being of their followers. Democratic leadership reflects my dedication to inclusion, equity, and shared governance.

In this essay, I will outline my core assumptions and beliefs about leadership, compare and contrast these four theories with others presented in this course, and share how I intend to operationalize my leadership philosophy through practical actions, ethical commitments, and an ongoing journey of professional growth. The narrative is also enriched by insights from my professional work as well as the reflective leadership of Dr. Kate Smith, President of Rio Salado College. Dr. Smith's leadership journey offers a real-time embodiment of many of the theories I

discuss and serves as a case study in strategic vision, authentic leadership, and adaptive institutional transformation.

### **Leadership Philosophy—Expanded Theoretical Framework**

My leadership philosophy integrates four critical frameworks: transformational, collective, servant, and democratic leadership. Together, they provide a comprehensive and flexible approach for navigating the complexities of higher education leadership. Each theory supports a different facet of my practice, and when applied in tandem, they enable effective leadership that is ethical, inclusive, and adaptive to organizational change.

#### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is foundational to my philosophy. Northouse (2019) defines transformational leadership as the process by which a leader engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (p. 164). This form of leadership emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

In my experience working with executive teams and classified staff, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in motivating teams toward shared goals. I have often witnessed how transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, as Bass and Bass (2008) argue, to fundamentally shift how institutions function, especially in times of uncertainty (p. 625). During the pandemic, for example, I supported staff through rapidly changing work environments by fostering trust, providing clarity of purpose, and celebrating small wins behaviors aligned with transformational practice.

A strong exemplar of transformational leadership is Dr. Kate Smith, President of Rio Salado College. Under her leadership, the institution achieved recognition by the American Council on Education with the Fidelity Investments Award for Institutional Transformation. As she noted, "to me, that's the sign of a healthy culture, which is something we worked really hard at" (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Dr. Smith embodies transformational leadership not only by managing large-scale technological shifts but also by inspiring trust and collaboration across all levels of the college.

### **Collective Leadership**

In contrast to models that place a singular leader at the center, collective leadership emphasizes shared agency and relational collaboration. Ospina (2017) asserts that collective leadership is "intentional work to create spaces where participants can enact their leadership for the common good" (p. 275). This approach recognizes the dynamic interdependence of actors in public organizations and views leadership as a process that emerges across networks.

This framework resonates deeply in my leadership practice, especially in committee work and cross-college collaborations within the Maricopa Community College District. By promoting shared ownership of ideas and decisions, I have seen firsthand how collective leadership builds stronger coalitions and more sustainable initiatives.

Dr. Smith's reflections reinforce this model. She described her efforts in building a DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) council at Rio Salado, originally launched as the Trust and Value Committee. "The heart of that work is about building trust, building a college culture where everyone feels valued," she said (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Her

strategy exemplifies how collective leadership can reframe institutional culture by distributing leadership across a diverse group of stakeholders.

### **Servant Leadership**

Robert Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership, later developed by scholars like Spears and Northouse, argues that the primary role of a leader is to serve others helping them grow and become healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous (Northouse, 2019, p. 227). Servant leaders focus on empathy, listening, stewardship, and commitment to community.

I often find myself using this approach when mentoring newer staff or facilitating challenging conversations. Rather than directing, I listen and validate experiences. My goal is not merely to solve problems but to build capacity. This is especially crucial in representing classified staff, who may feel marginalized or underrepresented in district-wide decisions.

Dr. Smith also emphasizes this orientation. She noted that many leadership skills she relies on today were learned as a teacher. "Learning how to build effective communities where people learn how to trust each other" was something she practiced in the classroom and later applied in leadership (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). This student-centered mindset reflects the heart of servant leadership.

### **Democratic Leadership**

Democratic leadership is closely linked to servant and collective models. It emphasizes participation, shared decision-making, and inclusive dialogue. According to Northouse (2019), democratic leaders offer guidance while also actively engaging group members in the decision-

making process (p. 59). This style is particularly effective in educational settings where diverse perspectives enrich understanding and innovation.

In my role, I routinely organize and participate in forums where staff voices are elevated. I view this as not only a method of governance but an ethical imperative. The inclusion of diverse voices leads to better, more equitable decisions. During the review of district policies on professional development access, I led an initiative to ensure equal representation from all job categories, reflecting the democratic principle of fairness.

Dr. Smith echoes this philosophy in her leadership. She participates in open forums, supports shared governance, and advocates for systems change through dialogue. As she explained, she was drawn to leadership because of her “endless belief in what we can do,” a belief that leadership is not about control but about enabling potential (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

In summary, these four leadership theories transformational, collective, servant, and democratic form a strong, ethically grounded, and pragmatic foundation for educational leadership. They enable me to meet the challenges of today’s higher education environment with authenticity, collaboration, and strategic vision. The lived experiences of practitioners like Dr. Kate Smith further affirm that these theories are not abstract ideals, but practical, impactful frameworks when embedded into daily leadership practice.

This section will provide deeper elaboration on each leadership theory, integrating new literature, lived experience, and reflective application.

### **Case Study – Leadership in Practice at Rio Salado College**

Dr. Kate Smith's presidency at Rio Salado College offers a compelling case study in how transformational, collective, servant, and democratic leadership theories converge in the real-world practice of educational leadership. As the president of the largest-serving college in the Maricopa Community College District, Dr. Smith operates in a unique and complex environment. Rio Salado functions on a fundamentally different academic and operational structure compared to its peer institutions. With rolling enrollment, proprietary systems, and a largely online student population, the demands of leadership at Rio require innovation, adaptability, and a deeply rooted commitment to culture and equity.

### **Strategic Vision and Digital Transformation**

One of the most visible areas where Dr. Smith exemplifies transformational leadership is in Rio's pioneering approach to online learning. The college was an early adopter of digital platforms, evolving with technology long before it became mainstream. "We have to have systems that support [weekly start dates]," Dr. Smith explained, emphasizing that these systems were built in-house due to the inadequacy of traditional tools (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

Her vision for the future of digital learning is expansive and forward-thinking. She speaks of building systems to carry Rio into the next 20 years, with integrated technology that supports students, faculty, advising, and administrative operations. This strategic foresight is a hallmark of transformational leadership, which Bass and Bass (2008) describe as the ability to "envision the future and inspire others to pursue that vision" (p. 630).

### **Building Trust and Inclusive Culture**

Perhaps the most foundational element of Dr. Smith's leadership is her commitment to building and sustaining a healthy institutional culture. She speaks with passion about the importance of trust, repeatedly returning to the theme of culture as the heartbeat of the college. "If you don't get your culture right, you've got an uphill battle every single day," she asserted, encouraging new leaders to start with culture before all else (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

This reflects the essence of servant leadership. Northouse (2019) notes that servant leaders are "committed to the growth of people" and to "building community" (p. 232). By investing in college-wide initiatives like the Trust and Value Committee which later evolved into the DEIB Council Dr. Smith prioritized psychological safety, equity, and belonging.

### **Navigating Organizational Complexity through Collective Leadership**

Rio Salado's organizational context requires adaptive leadership beyond the traditional top-down model. As the only college in the district with systems distinct from the standard structure, Rio operates under unique constraints. For example, data reporting, staffing, and advising tools are all built internally, which creates both innovation opportunities and bureaucratic challenges.

To navigate this complexity, Dr. Smith exemplifies collective leadership. Ospina (2017) explains that collective leadership is about co-constructing solutions through shared knowledge and mutual accountability (p. 282). Dr. Smith facilitates leadership through her direct reports while encouraging widespread input across the institution. Her decision to involve diverse

stakeholders in policy revisions, trust-building efforts, and strategic initiatives underscores the practice of leadership as a networked and participatory process.

### **Authenticity and Self-Awareness in Leadership**

Another defining characteristic of Dr. Smith's leadership is her deep self-awareness and authenticity. She openly discusses the evolution of her leadership style, grounded in her early experiences as a mathematics teacher. Teaching, she says, taught her how to build community and help people feel safe making mistakes skills that remain central to her leadership today.

"If you are not authentic to who you are... forget it," she emphasized, arguing that successful leadership is impossible without authenticity (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). This echoes the core components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency (Northouse, 2019, p. 201).

Her ability to reflect on personal growth areas such as fundraising and messaging in group settings—further exemplifies authentic leadership. Rather than seeing challenges as failures, she frames them as learning opportunities and seeks feedback for growth. This vulnerability not only humanizes her as a leader but also models reflective practice for others.

### **Commitment to Equity and Recognition of Institutional Success**

Finally, Dr. Smith's leadership has brought national recognition to Rio Salado. The college recently received the American Council on Education Fidelity Investments Award for Institutional Transformation, an honor typically reserved for four-year institutions. "To me,

that's the sign of a really strong college culture," she said, celebrating the achievement not as her own, but as a reflection of collective effort (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

The award recognizes Rio's resilience and innovation in navigating the challenges of higher education. It also affirms the effectiveness of a leadership style that centers inclusion, equity, and shared accountability. Dr. Smith's emphasis on inclusive practices such as equity in hiring, culturally responsive programming, and the creation of DEIB infrastructure reflects a comprehensive application of ethical and democratic leadership principles.

In summary, President Kate Smith's leadership at Rio Salado College provides a vivid, real-world case study of transformational, servant, collective, and democratic leadership in action. Her ability to build trust, articulate a compelling vision, embrace complexity, and lead authentically offers a model of leadership that is both aspirational and practical. By embedding ethical commitments into every aspect of institutional life, she sets a powerful precedent for what educational leadership can achieve when it is both visionary and grounded in shared humanity.

### **Comparative Analysis of Leadership Models**

While my leadership philosophy is built upon transformational, collective, servant, and democratic leadership, it is enriched by a critical comparison with other prominent theories presented in this course. These include Path-Goal Theory, Situational Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, and Authentic Leadership. Each provides valuable perspectives and contrasts that illuminate the strengths and limitations of my own framework.

### **Path-Goal Theory**

Path-Goal Theory, developed by House, emphasizes the leader's role in clarifying paths to goals and removing obstacles for followers (Northouse, 2019, p. 115). Leaders are expected to adapt their behavior based on follower needs and the task environment. This approach shares an instrumental dimension with servant leadership especially in its attention to clearing barriers but differs in orientation. Whereas servant leadership is grounded in ethical service and the intrinsic development of followers, Path-Goal Theory is more outcome-driven.

In my experience, a purely task-focused, performance-centric approach may neglect the deeper motivations and identities of team members. At Maricopa, I've seen how transformational and democratic practices those that seek to include, inspire, and empower often lead to better long-term outcomes than directive or reward-based strategies.

### **Situational Leadership**

Situational Leadership, developed by Hersey and Blanchard, calls for leaders to assess followers' readiness and competence and then apply the appropriate style: directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating (U2 230917, p. 2). This model is practical and adaptable, which I value, especially when onboarding new team members or navigating times of rapid change.

However, Situational Leadership places the leader at the center of the decision-making process. It is the leader who diagnoses the situation and determines the appropriate approach, often without co-construction with followers. In contrast, collective and democratic leadership frameworks shift this dynamic by inviting shared interpretation and collaborative decision-making.

For example, at Rio Salado, President Kate Smith models an inclusive form of leadership that empowers her teams to adapt and lead change together. Her reflections on navigating the complexity of Rio's nontraditional systems especially its weekly enrollment model and year-round peak operations highlight the value of distributed leadership over command-and-control models (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

### **Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory**

LMX Theory examines leadership as a series of dyadic relationships between leaders and individual followers (Northouse, 2019, p. 137). High-quality exchanges are characterized by trust, respect, and mutual obligation, while low-quality exchanges are more transactional. LMX is helpful in understanding organizational dynamics, especially the risks of exclusion and favoritism.

In my own leadership practice, I am mindful of how inequitable access to the leader can create disparities in morale and opportunity. While LMX helps diagnose these dynamics, it does not offer sufficient tools for systemic change. Collective and servant leadership offer broader frameworks to create cultures of belonging, where leadership is not constrained by proximity to power but shared across networks.

Dr. Smith's establishment of Rio's DEIB Council reflects this shift. By embedding equity work into the strategic plan and engaging employees across departments, she operationalizes leadership as a shared, inclusive process rather than an individual transaction (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

### **Authentic Leadership**

Authentic Leadership is perhaps the most aligned with my personal values. This model emphasizes self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing (U3 240215, p. 3). As Northouse (2019) notes, authentic leaders are grounded in their values and consistently act in accordance with them, even in the face of pressure (p. 198).

Authenticity is a cornerstone of my leadership. Like Dr. Smith, I believe that “if you are not authentic to who you are... you will have zero success” (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). This principle was deeply ingrained in my early teaching experiences and has remained central in my work with staff and administration. It underpins my use of democratic practices, informs my commitment to transparency, and shapes my willingness to reflect and adapt.

One area where authentic leadership complements but also extends other theories is in addressing personal and systemic alignment. It challenges leaders to continuously examine whether their actions reflect their espoused values. This is especially important in public institutions like community colleges, where leaders are stewards of public trust.

In conclusion, while Path-Goal, Situational, and LMX theories provide useful insights into the mechanisms of leadership, they often fall short in addressing the ethical, inclusive, and transformational dimensions that are vital in contemporary educational settings. Authentic Leadership, in contrast, harmonizes well with the core theories of my philosophy, especially transformational and servant leadership. Together, these comparisons deepen my understanding and reinforce my commitment to a relational, ethical, and inclusive approach to leadership.

This section will offer an extended comparison of selected theories with:

- Path-Goal Theory
- Situational Leadership
- LMX Theory
- Authentic Leadership

### **Application of Leadership in Organizational Settings**

My current leadership role as Co-president of Staff Representation at Maricopa Community Colleges provides a direct platform for applying my leadership philosophy in real organizational contexts. Across multiple layers—staff advocacy, policy interpretation, committee work, and organizational mediation I consistently employ transformational, collective, servant, and democratic leadership practices. These real-world applications provide tangible proof of how these theories function not in isolation, but in dynamic and often overlapping ways.

### **Staff Policy Negotiation and Representation**

As a representative of classified staff across ten colleges, I frequently facilitate conversations around policy interpretation, workplace equity, and professional development opportunities. This requires both a servant and democratic leadership stance. Servant leadership allows me to empathize with the needs and challenges of staff who may feel voiceless in district-wide decisions, while democratic leadership enables me to create forums for listening, discussing, and co-creating solutions.

For instance, during negotiations about remote work policies post-pandemic, I initiated a collaborative working group that included classified staff, HR representatives, and college leadership. We used structured dialogue techniques, aligning with Northouse's (2019) emphasis on inclusivity in democratic leadership (p. 59), to gather data on needs and concerns. Rather than proposing a top-down solution, we collectively drafted a proposal that acknowledged departmental differences while preserving equity. This mirrored the collective leadership principle of shared agency in problem-solving (Ospina, 2017, p. 275).

### **Committee Work and Strategic Planning**

I serve on multiple district-level committees where leadership takes on a more strategic and visionary character. Drawing from transformational leadership, I often help set agendas that align with long-term goals and inspire others to think expansively. For example, I contributed to the revision of the district's professional development framework. Many stakeholders initially viewed the changes through a lens of budget limitation. By reframing the conversation around strategic investment in human capital, I helped shift the narrative toward opportunity and growth—a hallmark of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2019, p. 167).

This type of leadership closely mirrors the work of President Kate Smith at Rio Salado, particularly in her approach to transforming digital learning. "We are going to get it done," she asserted about her goal to remake Rio's learning systems for the future (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Her commitment to vision and execution highlights the same integration of transformational leadership that I aim to model in planning conversations.

### **Mediation Between Classified Staff and Executive Teams**

My leadership role often places me at the intersection of differing perspectives. Mediating these tensions requires emotional intelligence, patience, and ethical integrity. Here, authentic and servant leadership principles guide my approach. I strive to understand not just the positions, but the values behind stakeholder concerns.

In one instance, a conflict arose over policy implementation timelines that disproportionately impacted evening and weekend staff. Rather than taking a rigid stance, I facilitated small group meetings with those affected, then met with administration to present data-informed, human-centered adjustments. This approach honored both transparency and compassion qualities emphasized in servant leadership (Northouse, 2019, p. 231).

President Smith offers a compelling parallel when she reflects on her role: “At the end of the day, the President is held responsible and is held accountable... you have a big responsibility to build a strong culture” (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Like her, I see culture-building not as a passive outcome, but an active, daily practice that leaders model through communication, presence, and integrity.

### **Cross-functional Collaboration and Organizational Culture**

One of the most rewarding areas of application has been fostering cross-functional collaboration. In working groups focused on advising and onboarding, I intentionally bring together voices from disparate departments. Using democratic principles, I facilitate equitable participation and shared authorship of recommendations.

Dr. Smith’s emphasis on “building a college culture where everyone feels valued” resonates deeply with these efforts (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Her leadership in

establishing the DEIB Council, which evolved from the Trust and Value Committee, illustrates how consistent application of democratic and collective leadership transforms organizational climate over time.

In summary, the practical application of leadership theories in my organizational setting underscores the necessity of integration. Transformational leadership provides vision; servant leadership ensures compassion; collective leadership shares power; and democratic leadership builds legitimacy. Together, these frameworks enable me to lead with clarity, adaptability, and a deep commitment to ethical and inclusive practice.

Real examples from my leadership role will be expanded to cover:

- Staff policy negotiation
- Committee work and strategic planning
- Mediation between classified staff and executive teams

### **Ethics, Equity, and Inclusion**

Ethical leadership and the promotion of equity and inclusion are not merely peripheral considerations in my leadership philosophy they are central to how I understand and enact leadership within educational institutions. Grounded in servant and democratic leadership, I believe that the ethical obligation of a leader is to create environments in which all individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered.

### **Ethics in Shared Governance**

Ethics in leadership demands more than simply adhering to rules or policies; it involves integrity, transparency, and accountability in all decisions and interactions. Northouse (2019) emphasizes that ethical leaders act in ways that are consistent with their values and build trust by being open and honest (p. 334).

One area where I consistently apply ethical leadership is in shared governance. As Co-president of Staff Representation, I advocate for inclusive policy development, particularly when procedures affect classified staff who may be less visible in leadership structures. For example, during a revision of the grievance process, I ensured that staff representatives were included in every step, offering feedback that reflected their lived experiences. This not only improved the policy itself but reinforced ethical principles of fairness and participation.

President Kate Smith's leadership at Rio Salado similarly reflects this commitment to ethical, inclusive governance. Her transparency in decision-making, her emphasis on open forums, and her advocacy for staff and student voices all serve as ethical benchmarks. As she noted, "Get your internal culture good. You better always spend time on it, because you'll lose it if you don't" (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Her approach underscores how culture and ethics are intertwined in leadership.

### **Culturally Responsive Leadership**

Culturally responsive leadership is essential in today's diverse educational environments. This means acknowledging the multiplicity of experiences and identities within a college community and responding to those differences with empathy and informed action.

I strive to lead in culturally responsive ways by listening deeply to the voices of staff from underrepresented communities and ensuring that diversity is reflected in both policy and practice. One initiative I supported involved creating employee resource groups for culturally diverse staff. These groups provided safe spaces for connection and professional growth while also serving as advisory bodies for district-wide decisions.

President Smith exemplifies this leadership practice through her support for the DEIB Council. Initially created as a trust-building initiative, it has since evolved into a key driver of inclusion at Rio Salado. “We talk about it. We’ve dedicated resources to it,” she explained. “Building that type of culture that really celebrates the diversity... makes us better at our jobs” (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx).

### **Building DEIB Frameworks**

Embedding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging into the fabric of an institution requires intentional, strategic action. Drawing from collective leadership theory, I believe DEIB work should be shared across all levels of an organization, not assigned to a single department or individual.

In Maricopa, I have helped lead district conversations about embedding equity into budget decisions, hiring practices, and professional development. One example was my advocacy for an equity-centered evaluation rubric for department funding proposals. By grounding these conversations in values-based leadership, we not only improved fairness but increased awareness of systemic bias.

President Smith's strategy similarly connects DEIB to organizational effectiveness. Her reflections about Rio's recent national recognition illustrate this connection: "It's a sign of a really strong college culture... when you get noticed by the think tank in Washington, DC" (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). This recognition wasn't incidental it was earned through years of inclusive, equity-focused leadership.

In summary, ethics, equity, and inclusion are not separate from effective leadership—they are its foundation. Whether through ethical decision-making, culturally responsive action, or DEIB strategy development, my leadership is defined by an unwavering commitment to justice, transparency, and human dignity. These commitments, reinforced by the work of colleagues like President Smith, guide my daily practice and long-term vision for what leadership in education must become.

Using examples from both my work and President Smith's leadership at Rio Salado, this section will address:

- Ethics in shared governance
- Culturally responsive leadership
- Building DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging) frameworks

### **Leadership Development Plan**

Effective leadership is not static; it is a continuous journey of learning, reflection, and adaptation. As such, I view leadership development not as a finite goal but as an evolving process grounded in the core values of self-awareness, service, inclusion, and transformation. My leadership development plan focuses on expanding my capabilities through intentional strategies

that align with my philosophy particularly transformational, collective, servant, and democratic leadership. The following action areas reflect my plan for lifelong leadership growth.

### **Participation in Conferences and Professional Networks**

One of my primary strategies for leadership development is engaging in conferences and leadership networks. I find the interactive, real-time exchange of ideas especially valuable. As an auditory learner, I thrive in environments where dialogue and storytelling dominate. I plan to attend leadership institutes such as the League for Innovation in the Community College, the AACC Future Leaders Institute, and regional conferences hosted by NASPA and ACE.

President Kate Smith noted a similar preference, stating, "I probably prefer conferences a little bit more than anything else... just getting a chance to sit and talk with people" (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Like her, I find that unstructured yet intentional conversations often lead to the most meaningful growth.

In addition to general leadership forums, I will seek out identity-specific and mission-specific conferences—such as the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) or the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) to deepen my understanding of inclusive leadership practices and broaden my cultural competency.

### **Mentorship and Coaching**

Mentorship has already played a pivotal role in my growth. As I progress in my leadership journey, I intend to formalize a reciprocal mentorship structure: serving as a mentor for emerging leaders while maintaining regular check-ins with more experienced mentors. This

dual model aligns with servant and collective leadership, as it reinforces mutual learning and shared responsibility.

Dr. Smith referenced her informal mentors—leaders who inspired her through their authenticity and purpose-driven action. “She just saw something in me,” she said about her dean, “and I just admired her so much about how she worked and the integrity with which she worked” (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). I aim to both seek out and be that kind of mentor.

### **Continuous Feedback and Reflective Practice**

To remain grounded and effective, I commit to developing feedback loops that include both formal evaluation and informal, real-time feedback. I will continue to facilitate anonymous surveys after major initiatives, engage in 360-degree reviews where appropriate, and meet regularly with peer thought partners for reflection.

Reflective journaling is another key tool. Modeled on the authentic leadership principle of balanced processing (Northouse, 2019, p. 202), journaling will allow me to explore dilemmas, celebrate growth, and ensure alignment between values and actions. I will also explore using structured reflection models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to ensure consistency.

### **Leadership in Innovation and Digital Transformation**

A key area of development for me is digital transformation in education. President Smith's work at Rio Salado provides a roadmap for leading in a highly digital, data-driven learning environment. Her efforts to envision a future-ready college inspire me to explore how I, too, can lead innovation within the Maricopa system.

To build this skill set, I plan to take courses in digital strategy and educational technology, read extensively on AI in higher education, and join innovation-focused communities of practice. I am particularly interested in human-centered design as a method of applying both democratic and collective leadership to system redesign.

### **Fundraising and Financial Stewardship**

One area where I seek deliberate growth is in fundraising and financial management. As President Smith candidly shared, “That was something there's nowhere in my background that I ever learned anything about” (President Kate Smith Rio Salado.docx). Inspired by her ongoing efforts to develop this skill, I will pursue development opportunities through CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) and engage with the CFO community within our district.

Understanding budget structures, donor cultivation, and grant development are not only practical skills but ethical imperatives in stewarding public resources responsibly. I plan to take online modules in budget management and participate in cross-functional budget planning groups to develop fluency in this area.

In summary, my leadership development plan is a living document one that evolves with experience and reflection. It is deeply aligned with my values and theories of leadership, emphasizing service, growth, authenticity, collaboration, and transformation. Inspired by the work of leaders like President Kate Smith and shaped by my professional context, I see this plan as a pathway not only for personal excellence but for the collective advancement of the communities I serve.

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