A Promethean Mission: 
An Update on the Prometheus Leadership Framework

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In August 2020, three researchers published our article on a leadership framework 1.0² for the purpose of opening more collaboration toward the objective of a framework to help navigate the complexity of leaders and leading.

Over the 16 months since Jonathan Reams, Richard Claydon and I published our opening paper, we have continued the very efforts that were intended as follow up.³

It is hard to overstate my appreciation for those that gave us their time and shared our curiosity. The opportunities we create to listen with an open mind and accept disconfirming and reforming experience are too rare. They take time. They take mindsets, hearts and purpose greater than building our academic credentials or our brand and followers.

What we have learned has evolved some of the framework content but has mostly provided refinements and clarifications. This article is an update on all of that.

Just an Organizing Principle

The 2020 paper noted the choice to organize around what we saw that as the highest purpose of the Prometheus Leadership Commons framework (the “framework”) and The Prometheus Project.

There were two complementary criteria. The first was supporting this generally approachable narrative: “a leader brings who they are and what they know to the action-choice of leading so that they can have what they want” (see figure 2). The second criteria was organizing the framework as learning objectives – or a system of capacities and capabilities that we have in mind for leaders.

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³ Since then, many hundreds of hours of conversations, forums, panels, and focus groups have been done around the topics in the framework. CEOs and Chief Learning Officers, mid-level executives, front-line leaders, community leaders, coaches, consultants and esteemed academics representing global mega-brands, distinguished university faculty, small and start-ups, and NGOs have contributed from four continent, each with a part of the puzzle that tests the clarity and energy of who leaders are, what they know, and what leaders do.
The framework’s primary structures remain sets of affective, cognitive and behavioral objectives that make up who leaders are, what they know and what they do. However, in these months of engagement, we found the idea of learning objectives is not as familiar a concept as we assumed it would be. The short description of learning objectives is that they are the observable or measurable outcomes that are the goal of any of the learning methods (materials and activities) that are employed.

An example is an element in the framework’s objectives of self-awareness and empathetic awareness of emotions. The framework is not saying (with this element) that the method to build leadership is through doing self-reflection or empathy. The framework is listing those elements as outcomes that are part of the system or capacities of a leader. The method to build that emotional consciousness may include any creative mix of methods including knowledge of theory, experience, socialization, experiment, action and, yes, inner reflection.  

**Learning and Development Structures**

Since we noticed this tension about objectives (outcomes) vs methods (actions), we also noticed the tension was nearly unavoidable. In retrospect, this is reasonable that raising one begs the question of the other. So, we chose a pivot. Better to show both dimensions (objectives and methods), so that both were available in context, than to present one and still have to clarify both.

Therefore, in the framework each of the meta-domains of Being, Knowing, and Doing now includes a “How To” meta-structure that supports good conversation around learning and developing for that set of learning objectives. Thus, in details of The Prometheus Leadership Commons 2.1 framework you will find a set of attributes organized for learning objectives AND sets of practices for how to develop those attributes.

For example, the cognitive meta-domain of Knowing has an advanced cognitive unconscious competence as a high objective. However, mastery is gained by learning opportunities that include experience, socialization, affect and psychological integration. The primary objective is cognitive, but the supporting objectives (or supporting key results) are a mix of cognitive, affective and behavioral.

Similarly, the affective meta-domain of Being has psychological and emotional integration as its advanced objective – but it is still gained by learning opportunities including cognitive models, concepts, experience, consciousness, action-learning, social sharing, and personal introspection.

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5 We could have abstracted one set of learning method attributes. After all, is learning and development materially different from one domain to the other? However, we found communication value in showing specific language and sequencing toward the primary objective for each meta-domain. One for Being, one for Knowing and one for Doing.

6 We humans have a habit of thinking objectives can be single dimensional but then we remember that the more systemic they are, the more often they are complicated or complex system of objectives. This is the idea behind “OKRs’ – primary objectives are met through a series of supporting objectives.
The Challenges of Language

One of the biggest areas of our learning has been around language.

We strived to have simple language that avoids simplistic interpretations. We tested terms that were as free from bias and jargon as we can make them. We dream of language that suits the specificity of researchers, the ease of everyday front-line leaders, and manages to avoid the tropes of populist influencers. We want to be inspiring and coldly realistic. Empirical and theoretical. But we have a constraint of one or two words per meta-domain, domain or sub-area.

We naively assumed that the experience of applying the framework would, eventually, lead to ‘the right one word.’ Instead, we have found that the underlying meanings are rich enough that one word (or a few) are more the choice for a better fit – or a useful choice among imperfect options. Any words we use that are good enough to open a topic must still be further clarified.

We also tried more poetic words that connoted the whole underlying meaning of a given subdomain. We tried words like beauty, clarity, love, wisdom, energy because they held deep value, but they were also so abstracted that few would find them accessible. We found a lot of blank stares. Instead, we have settled on the opposite approach – to pick the simplest prosaic words and let the rest come out in follow-up. We want words that invite inquiry. We do not want words that merely satisfy with inspiration.

Eventually, we took comfort in the reality of this and included some space for aliases in parts of the framework.

There is No Language Without Sufficient Experience

We also recognized language as a structural challenge.

Leaders and leading is not familiar to enough to our first-person consciousness and experiences to support adequate language. The right terms do not exist because our experience is rooted in one flawed reality but not an ideal reality – where leading is clear and leaders are common. Our language supports the current state because language is a system of the current state. Our language does not support the better state. We have to choose the words and hope for a day when leading is clear and leading is common and then find there is language for that experience.

We have to make do. We have to build the new.

Making do and building new is not so easy.
The Tragedy of Lists

The framework is a set of lists and a hierarchy of topics. That brings limitations. Any hierarchy is one-dimensional, which is an imperfect match for our multi-dimensional reality. We’ve settled on living with that, too.\(^7\)

A case in point is the domain of leader Exchange Skills. What the framework lists are the contexts that skills are used in. We open a question like this: What skills are most useful for us or best learned in this context?

The framework does not (yet) give those skills (mindsets and practices).

Given the choice of a contexts list or a list of topics, we prefer the contexts – in order that we can choose topics that will be learned and used in that context, which is the best scenario for learning through action and integration.

We also find that topics are not so clear when they are out of context. Out of context, we accept more vagueness and theory and less practice and action. So, we choose the contexts as the primary organization because they also lead to more clarity on the skills.

Should we create a list of topics, as well? We think so. We have done some of that work. There is more to do.

Lists vs Sequences

This sets up one of the other limitations of lists – the assumption of sequencing. If there are a list of six things that are numbered or lettered, it’s hard not to think of them as sequenced.

The framework identifies seven domains of leadership learning and tags them ABC and WXYZ. ABC are about who the leader is. WXYZ are about what the leader knows and does. These are just tags for quick reference in conversation even as they convey the ‘two sides’ of leadership as the leader vs the work and action of leading. However, there is no intention to convey a sequence or priority. You can start to learn with X or start with C or any other.\(^8\)

At the third level in the framework, within seven domains, there are 38 sub-areas. Here, we sometimes intend to show sequence or hierarchy and sometimes we do not. Where we think there is a sequence, we find a way to make that point – but the list of single words (or word pairs) that make up the framework’s lists of domains and sub-domains do not always imply sequence or hierarchy.

\(^7\) A future version may provide some solutions. We would like to someday build the relational models that satisfied these complexities as well as the next level of atomized detail.

\(^8\) We actually think that starting with Z is a good idea, because it leads to more specific and individualized insights around ABC WXY, some parts of the Z domain are adoptable by everyone in every context, so it builds over time and creates cohesiveness in the culture.
The domain of Action of Leading is another example. Its list of six sub-areas are not the linear experience that the list sequence may imply. There is a sequential logic to some parts, but in real practice these are addressed more organically to the situation. The first items, to ‘frame’, may very well start the action as implied by its position at the start of the list. But you could also frame and re-frame often and at any point in the action. Likewise, the ‘attend’ action can be done continuously across the whole action, not at the end of the action because it is positioned last in the list (figure 4).

As far as our bias for attributing sequence and hierarchy to lists, as Cher’s character says in the 1988 comedy Moonstruck, “Snap out of it!”

**Metaphor and Symbol**

Because the words used in the framework are simple and inadequate, but the concepts are rich with depth and inter-relationships, we find that more meaning is conveyed and more conversation opens with images and symbols. Even though they are not as specific, they evoke a richer story.

We spent time these months creating and testing images and symbols for the seven domains, and the four to six sub-areas that are associated with each of them. We will continue to build symbolic content and welcome contributions in this area.

These are sets of symbols for the six sub-areas of the Action of Leading domain, the three icons for the domains within the Being meta-domain and the three icons for the domains within the Knowing meta-domain. These are examples. Come back to these and see if they help form a story of Leading, Leaders and Knowing for you.

**Toxicity**

We recognize our bias is to describe the whole-being of leaders with generative skills and who chose creative action. Our bias is that we think that leaders are good.
We had quite a period of debate about this. Is everything that we cover in the framework true of good leaders and bad leaders, as well? Does Hitler fit these attributes as well as Mandela? Should a leadership framework be neutral about ethics or morality? This was a tough question for us and we may not have fully satisfied ourselves with the answer.

For now, our check against ill-intended influence, power and charisma is in two parts. First, the system of the whole person’s character, specifically, the leader’s Outward Stance, or the leaders’ capacities for what is outside their selves which we talk about in terms of care, love and good. Second is the assumption of leading as a collective experience, where there is attention to the persons, purpose, and process that are part of the Action of Leading.

We’d like to think the capacity for good, the presumptions of collective awareness, and the voices of stakeholders and contributors would be ‘guardrails’ for toxic leadership. But we acknowledge that has not worked in many cases. Someone can have the capacity to be outwardly focused but not use that capacity—they instead act selfishly or narcissistically. They can attend to a purpose that is ill gotten and attend manipulatively to the emotions and psychology of collaborators or followers.

Right now, we are uneasy with the moral and ethical neutrality of the framework and trust it is sufficient that those in the context will step up to what is right and good and not ceding power to the single leader.

One of the future efforts around the framework may be to articulate the ‘don’ts’ of leading, in contrast to our current emphasis of ‘do’s.’ We hope that crystalizing the ‘don’ts’ will empower followers and contributors to be more aware and make influential adjustments.

**Down Selecting for Cohorts or Classes of Learners**

Finally, the framework is useful if it includes all of the possible objectives to consider for a leader and leading, but it also has to allow us to down-select objectives and prioritize them.

We have done some work on the idea of baselines for cohorts or classes in an organization. For example, we held a series of focus groups with very highly experienced functional and HR executives and asked: “What would the leadership attributes be for someone be over the first decade of a career?” We have some good insights from this. However, the idea of a step-down guide is still on our list for the future.

**What are the Attributes in Framework Version 2.1? What has Changed?**

We have already covered the addition of structures for “how to” build each of the three metadomains (first level).
For the main attributes of the framework, we have more than one version of lists and graphics that represent the content. Figure 1 shows a mindmap version. The figure is too detailed to read, but it conveys the idea of three major meta-domain branches, an associated ‘how to’ branch and seven (lettered) domains that are grouped and broken into 38 sub-areas that have various other groupings and clusters. All of the branches are color-coded and some show associated icons.

![Figure 1. Mindmap of Prometheus Leadership Commons 2.1](image)

What follows is a summary of framework changes and evolution.

**Loosely Fixed Top-level Structure**

We use variations at the top-level structure. I suppose that is counter to those who want a neater framework, but we think they all work together.

- The simplest is that we arrange the framework by the distinctions between the leader and the leading. (We used this singular approach for framework version 1.0 where we had one group of “inner capacities of the leader” and another as “adaptive capabilities”).

- We also use the (increasingly) familiar structures of being, knowing and doing (“Be, Know, Do”), and variations. These are very digestible and effectively open curiosity and conversation around who leaders are and what leading is.
- We make the distinction about the “Know” meta-domain as being both “knowledge and experience” and “practices and skills.” When we say “Knowing” we mean all of this.

- Finally, including practices and skills in “Knowing” opens the view of the Action of Leading (or Doing) that we think is an important contribution.

So our top-level division is really a set of variations. We think this is just fine for approachability and usefulness.

The alternative, if we were very literal, would be three levels of abstractions before we drill down to the seven domains. This would be much too complicated! We are already too complicated. Simpler is better.

Figure 2 shows one high-level narrative across the three meta-domains. Figure 3 has the very simple domains along with the purpose of leadership (you create what you want), with the color-coding that we use in all the detail graphics.
Domain Knowledge Addition to the (Second) Mid-level

The 2.1 version of the framework expanded from six to seven domains. The primary content of the framework is these seven domains and the three ‘how to’ domains are there as ancillary references.

The new seventh domain, Domain Knowledge, is part of the Knowing meta-domain. Domain Knowledge has six sub-areas that further define the categories of knowledge and experience.

Graphic views of the Knowing meta-domain and all seven domains are in figures later in this article.

The Challenge of Anti-intellectualism

There are some in the leadership industry who will disagree with Domain Knowledge as an attribute of leadership. They have two arguments.

One argument is that those areas of knowledge do not describe something unique to leadership – so they are not leadership. This is a really interesting point. However, we are not trying to identify the thing that uniquely distinguishes leaders from people in general, or that distinguishes leadership behavior from other behavior. We are identifying all of the things that are valuable to lead (because they then are also valid objectives for learning and development).

We think that there is a lot of other content that does not self-identify as leadership, but is. So choosing attributes that are also used to describe other practices or disciplines is not a bad thing, it is the kind of integration that The Prometheus Project is working to. We sometimes say ‘it’s the whole elephant,’ referring to the fable of the blind men unable to perceive the whole of the elephant.

A second argument is something like “Our survey respondents do not mention anything like Domain Knowledge as a statistically differentiating factor.” This may be literally true, but logically and pragmatically false. Those same survey results point to attributes like trust and behaviors like mentoring. They may further say that trust includes confidence in judgement, or discernment, or competence. We have never seen someone appreciate a mentor when they have nothing to mentor about. We have never known someone to have good judgement or discern a situation or to show trustworthiness in competence when they do not have sufficient knowledge and experience in the situation or subject.

Our own research over the last months confirms this for us. When we are speaking to the head of Artificial Intelligence, a technical product team or a physicist, you can bet your paychecks that they expect and admire domain knowledge in their leaders. When we discuss executive development programs with CHROs, you can bet that includes cross-functional and cross-cultural experience.

If our expectations on the future of work and the human race includes advanced technologies, or if the social experiences of anti-facts and anti-science are a cultural trend, that should convince
us that Domain Knowledge is part of the mix of who leaders are, what they know and how they lead.

We are also curious if the research population of corporate cultures of the 90’s (for example) might have outlived its relevance for more complex organizations and operations today. It would be hard to imagine that those who selected participants did not skew away from contributors who favored technology and science but were marginalized in the minds of the organizations’ research sponsors.

*Lastly, there may be a structural selection bias in those attracted to the leadership industry.* Those who hold uncertainty or disempowerment, or shame around their intellectual abilities or achievements, or who hold a stronger need for belonging and connection than achievement and change are influential and prominent in this space. The industry attracts people people.

We can find models, programs or proclamations that work, ideas, and people domains. We hear some assert that too much emphasis is put on work and results, so the leader is someone who focuses on the person. Others say, that leading is about results and requires the capacity to forget our own stake and gratification and to prioritize the mission. Others will point out that the creative pursuit of some situations is creating knowledge – the intellectual capacity *is the point* so it cannot be put aside in leadership.

We think all are true. All have to be present. There is no holistic leadership if the whole of the human experience is not included in our definitions of it. Just as with our individual clients – it is about the range and the balance.

Over-intellectualizing is not better or worse than over-introspection or action without reflection. If we are tempted one way or the other – we are stuck in our bias.

**The Max-of-Five-Constraint**

In early design of version 1.0 we arbitrarily chose to have a constraint: The domains could not be sub-divided into more than five sub-area attributes. Like most constraints, this forced our creativity. We had to let go of our long lists, re-conceptualize and consolidate the sea of terms and ideas and keep the list of sub-areas more digestible. It served us well. Five seemed like a small number.

Still, as we applied the framework in real situations and with real people, we adjusted. In a few cases, we found the effort needed to clarify the max-of-five-constraint was counter-productive. The complexity added to the communicating was more than the simplicity gained from the limits.

A clear example is in the domain for the Action of Leading. The changes from version 1.0 to 2.1 include new terms but also a sixth sub-area.

The Action of Leading domain shows the wider pattern of actions for what is going on in any act of leading. Specifically, the patterns include four core actions (reality, vision, intention, and resolution) which are sustained by two supporting actions (frame and attend).
For a long time, we tested with five terms, pivoting between the idea of vision and intention. What we really meant was that leading includes establishing and sustaining a creative tension between the current reality and the vision, designing a strategy of actions and criteria for resolving that tension, commitment to act and learn from the team/organization/individual, and to sustain action to results.

We struggled to keep the max-of-five-constraint. We tried many clever and suitable approaches in dozens of events, but in the end, what worked was just to say: vision, reality and intention as parts of the action of leading.

In Version 2.1 there are now 38 sub-areas and up to six per domain within the learning objectives portions of the framework, and the three ancillary “How To Domains” each add more. It is a lot to absorb.

One of the ways that we express suitability for this design is that the framework seems too simple for the underlying reality of leadership, but too complex to easily absorb at the detail levels. That seems like the “Goldilocks” balanced approach, and the reason the details, as sparse as they are, have two summary levels above them.

These categories are parsed in the lists, but integrated and inter-related in the reality. The ‘whole elephant,’ again.

**The Action of Leading Domain**

This Action of Leading domain is one of the central points of value in the framework. It is designed from a synthesis of models including those from business change, product development, creative arts, psychotherapy and anthropological studies of indigenous tribes. We see a common pattern of creating, changing and learning across all of these models/theories.

To us, this part of the framework is the forest among the proverbial trees. This is the view of what is going on that can guide all participants’ actions as well as leadership development. We think this is where learners meet the reality of each other, who they are and what they know and can do.

If our theory (and others’) is true that we lead with the people and skills that we have (not who/what we want), then the components of the action of leading are the most important thing to learn to evoke a culture of leaders and leading.

If the theory that we learn character, capacity and capability in action is true, then the attributes of the Action of Leading are where we understand reality, sharpen our vision of what to learn next, hone our people and work knowledge and skills. The action of leading is the crucible for the creation of something new in ourselves, our common collective.

Figure 4 shows a graphic of the content of the Action of Leading in the context of the other six domain titles. There is also more overview narrative later in this document.
How Do You Down-select a Baseline for an Early Career Class?

We held a series of workshops and focus groups where we were able to make a preliminary general summary for what we heard experienced sponsors of leadership wanted to see in early career staff. Below is some of what we heard.

Ideally, at the point of entering an organization people should have a foundation in these qualities. They would be expected to further develop and learn over a first decade of experience, so that initial qualities are well established and the next wave of capacities have taken root.

What Capacities of the Person?

From our focus groups one statement that stands out was from the woman CEO and MIT graduate of a tech company. Her number one leadership attribute was ‘someone who wants to have responsibility – the desire to be accountable is in their DNA’.

I would not disagree with this. But it is a great example of an attribute of a person that is not easy to deconstruct and to build into a development program. It can be a criteria for selection. But the settings where the candidates are being prepared still have the challenge of deconstructing the contributing elements – so they can be developed.

Looking at just the meta-domains of Being you might target these areas for development:

- I want the intellectual capacity to see past my bias and see a situation realistically and to see the possibility for change.
- I want the self-possession to be open to risk-taking, seeing and accepting reality, and courageous to take action.

- I want the dedication to purpose and resilience to be integral to the persons motivation so that they sustain effort for creating value.

- I want the person to be comfortable with their emotional experience so that judgement is balanced and effort and motivation is sustainable.

Beyond this example, the focus groups highlighted other attributes of the leader (aka being) that said in many ways that the development of a person in this stage of career should include what adult development theorists would identify as having grown beyond an early stage identity.

These staff should have a sense of their own values, even as this continues to be formed in the new contexts and new experiences. They should have capacities that might be labeled empathy, service and kindness.

They should show the courage of their convictions and the openness to others’ convictions and influence. They should have the emotional capacity and healthy identity to collaborate. They should have the self-possession to be open to the of constraints, authority and other actors.

Figure 5 shows the domain and sub-domains around the framework’s Being meta-domain. Using the letters and numbers on the graphic, what we heard in the focus groups is that strengths should be present and built around A 1, 2 and, B, 1, 2 and 3, and C 2 and 4 as a priority for this first decade.

**Figure 5. Being – the Capacities to Be**
What Experience and Knowledge and Contextual Skills Do We Want?

The domain knowledge for leaders is not just the technical and market knowledge that is specific to organizations and roles. These are the things we traditionally expect universities to provide and will continue on the job. Other knowledge domains in the framework may be less conventional university content and even with a solid foundation of theory from schools, are ripe topics to continue to learn on the job. These include:

- An integrated understanding of the process and practices of continuous, collective, life-long experiential learning.

- “The Ropes” of how organizations make decisions and the cadence of their operations.

- In school we might learn the concepts of business models and value creation, but in the organization, we want to observe and understand what is specific in that organization, both in the present and in possibilities.

- Constituencies, groups of collaborators, stakeholders and customers as real persons in the organization’s political and social system.

- Culture is also a topic where foundational knowledge would support specific observation and strategies in the context of the norms, values and power of the organization.

Moving from domain knowledge to skills and practices, what stands out is one-to-one and group communications and collaboration. Part of this is the capacity to work across multiple detail frames, from concrete to conceptual to general, as the basic skills of ‘communicating up and out’ beyond the immediate work groups and peers. These communication skills are not ‘once and done’ and are built upon and added to as time goes by and as responsibilities increase. For example, a new set of communication skills is needed for new managers who not only communicate laterally and up, but down and diagonally.

The work contexts and the skills should be mixed for both utility and learning. Whatever the situation they are in is the very best to learn those skills – because learning in action and learning in context trumps learning in theory or in the lab simulation every time.

So, what skills across the framework do we target? Some would argue that less experienced staff are most likely matched to more stable operations. So, the skills for incremental innovations, working from the perspectives of a team, contributor, leader and follower are useful. However, some roles may be more creative and innovative so ideation and co-creating skills would be appropriate right at the start.

It is safe to assume that most newer staff would not start out being responsible for leading in a crisis, or leading to scale changes across a larger organization, or leading globally or with unconventional relationships such as joint venture or tightly integrated channels. Even if someone were in those bigger situations, the skills they would need as pre-requisites likely include the one-to-one and group skills as a foundation.
Figure 6 shows the domain and sub-areas around the framework’s Knowing meta-domain, or the capabilities of knowledge & experience and practices & skills. Using the letters and numbers on the graphic, what we heard in the focus groups is that strengths should be present and built around W 1, 3, 5 and 6, X 1 and 2, and Y 1 and 2 as a priority for this first decade.

Prometheus Leadership Commons™
A SHARED FRAMEWORK TO NAVIGATE LEADING AND LEADER DEVELOPMENT

**W. DOMAIN KNOWLEDGE**
Constructs for your mission and operation
1. **Learning** - integrated practices of learning
2. **Technology** - elements creating product/service
3. **The Ropes** - rules of decisions and cadence of operations
4. **Models** - how organization create value as a system
5. **Constituencies** - collaborators, stakeholders, and customers
6. **Culture** - norms, values, and power in organizations

**Y. CHALLENGE SKILLS**
Skills fit to patterns of challenge
1. **Perform** - incremental continuous improvement
2. **Discover** - ideation, innovation & creativity
3. **Change** - scaling and transitioning
4. **Complex** - global, cross-boundaries, time, and scale
5. **Crisis** - high importance and urgency

**X. EXCHANGE SKILLS**
Skills to fit diverse people and organizations
1. **One : One** - between individuals
2. **Groups** - among individuals
3. **Cross-boundaries** - cross-boundaries, time, and scale
4. **Humans among us** - differences in people, power, and culture
5. **Collective** - co-leaders, co-learners, co-influencers

**Figure 6. Knowing Meta-domain**

**What Do We Want Them to Be Ready to Do?**

Most of the focus groups would say that they want staff who understand how to take action, and adapt with agility as contributors, followers and co-leaders to serve the intention of the situation.

Anyone working with others to a goal will be more confident, focused and aligned with an understanding of “what is going on” in a general way, so that action is not lost in the details. That is the value of the framework’s Action of Leading domain.

More senior members of the organization may typically want to take a front-and-center role in visioning, but the vision is not effective until it is internalized by the contributors. Ideally, a vision should be co-created and the idea of its place in the system (“this is what we will see when we are there”) should be understood by all. The same goes for the other actions of being clear with reality, designing a strategy that all are committed to, and doing the technical or relationship work that creates the valued results. Every team member will want to understand the obligations and practices to “Attend” to the people and the processes they are engaged in. Teams that are self-managing and self-sustaining will need these capabilities.

One exception may be the function of “Framing,” which is the perspective and larger context for the action. This is more likely the part for the more senior experienced members, rather than
those in their early career. Senior leaders may want to Frame the vision that is created, so that how that vision fits into the larger context of the organization and its business is clear. Without that many visioning efforts flail. That said, Framing is a capability for leaders at every level. Certainly during that first decade all of these leaders will have the opportunity to initiate and oversee some sort of creative action where they are the Framers. Some will do this on day one.

Looking back to figure 4, what we heard in the focus groups is that strengths should be present and built around this domain would be Z 3, 5, and 6 as a priority, but there would be value and contribution in all of the sub-areas.

Flipping a Narrative

This is the image that I would like you to consider: If I gathered all the references and materials on leadership from academics, practitioners and programs, I would have two big piles and one small pile. The table would have a big stack around personal development and the inner experience of the leader. There would be a big pile around techniques and tools to use as a manager, team member or team. The third pile about what leaders actually do, that pile would be smallest. We would like to flip that story for learning and development. We will make leading clear and leaders common faster if we do this.

The action of leading, to us, is the most approachable, the most pragmatic, the shortest time-to-results and the shortest time-to-self-experience-as-a-leader. I think that the possibility at hand, the timely action, is to help people figure out that they are already capable leaders in some ways and to create a cohesive sense of what they are doing as a team so that they can discover themselves as collective leaders – self-managing, self-organizing, self-empowering innovators, creators, learners and makers of change.

The techniques and knowledge of the Know meta-domain will be valuable in some specialized or tougher contexts. The personal growth of the Being meta-domain will also be valuable, there is no reason to wait for that longer lead-time and there is no better way to crystalize and motivate people to change than their experience in the Action of Leading, today. So, as we have said a few times, lets us shift from preparing on the long-slope and to noticing the leading in action.

Future Interests

From Topics to Practices

The framework is a structure across all of the topics of leadership. It is a helpful tool to traverse and integrate the whole of the leadership story. This will help you set goals. This will challenge your assumptions.

The framework has always been a first step in the overall Prometheus Project’s mission of making leading clear and leaders common. What is needed in addition are insights into practices that are useful for leading. For example, one-to-one exchange skills include listening. What are good practices for a leader to adopt for learning? What are good practices for learning to listen?
This is not a shortcoming of the framework – it is unfinished business in the mission.

More Explicit Sequencing

There are indications in the newest framework about early vs advanced capabilities or capacities. Mostly, these are about contexts of greater scale or complexity. They are also about more collective consciousness, that are states of being consistent with adult development models.

However, additional details about dependencies and sequences would be helpful when actually applying the framework to an organization and its micro-learning and program design.

The “Promethepedia”

To support the specter of adding specific topics to the illustrate the categories in the framework, with growing content and relationships across content, we would imagine a Wikipedia-like resource that is collectively created and curated by a cross-disciplinary group through The Prometheus Project.

Down-select or Objectives Guide

We think that further experience with individuals and organizations to apply the framework to their specific contexts and vision will provide opportunities to form a rubric or guide for decision criteria about which objectives are suitable. We can see the potential for AI assisted software to support this process.

Clarity for Popular Concepts

There are many concepts and constructs in the popular engagement around leadership. Terms like ‘emotional intelligence’ are used with a presumption that that means something specific. We think it means a range of things across the framework. So, we would like to make popular concepts like this clearer by using the structure of the framework to parse and illustrate them.

Another is the concept of “empathy” or “trust.” To build these requires meeting learning and development in several areas of the framework. If we are to progress past talking about leading and leaders and from abstractions to capacities, then some work is needed to parse and illustrate these kinds of outcomes.

More Explicit Integrations

There are valuable tools and models that have been considered in our research and are part of the experience we draw from. We think it would be helpful to articulate the relationships and the structure of the framework. The framework will meet its purpose when it can serve as a commons across all of the proprietary resources or provide a context for all of the atomized content and research.
Cross-sectional to Longitudinal

We would like to use the framework on a longitudinal basis to re-plan and govern an organization’s leadership development policies and programs – across all functions and levels of an organization. We recognize that some organizations are increasingly virtual/fungible across legal entities such as co-producers and contractors. We’d like to extend the scope of leadership governance and development to the whole of those who are contributors and stakeholders.

Do’s and Don’ts – Toxicity Rubric

As noted earlier, the framework is looking at the good leader’s attributes, but one of those capacities of leaders is to assess the current reality they are in – including assessing when something is not right, wholesome or generative. Then, to find a creative, generative response, which may not be ‘cancel culture’. We think more explicit content about the ‘don’ts’ of leading and creating will be helpful. We have opened a space in the www.WeLead.Gobal community as a placeholder and have taken a few initial steps toward this content.

Additional Voices and Influence

The voices of The Prometheus Project are substantial, but we would love to expand this. We would particularly value aligning more psychiatric, neurological and psychotherapeutic perspectives, more chief learning offices, like-minded practitioners and consultancies, and more individual leaders at front-line and middle levels.

Community of Purpose

The Prometheus Project holds a digital space for members who share the mission of making leading clear and leaders common. This can be found at www.WeLead.Global. Consumers and observers are welcome. But creators and contributors are needed to realize the vision for this space for inquiry.

Open Cautions

Feeding Perfectionism

All of these leadership attributes tend to push our assumptions to the point that we expect ALL of these attributes in our leaders. That will never be true (or rarely will be).

First, we remember that we think every single person in an organization, team or community has moments of choice and potential to lead in small and large ways. We want them to self-recognize these possibilities and to be recognized for these contributions.

Second, we have always held that leadership is a collective practice among imperfect leaders – not a heroic practice of one superhero. We are concerned that the scale of what is in the framework will convey unsuitability to someone who compares themselves to this system of leaders and
leading. Almost no one will measure up. We do not want the message to be that they do not have the stuff because they will never be all of these things. Rather, this is the basket of possibilities for themselves and the mix of whole leadership that they can assemble as a team.

Third, this raises the complementary ideas of followership, kindness and flexibility among each other and with those in positions where leadership is expected. They may or may not have all of these qualities. They will not. Leading can happen imperfectly.

This is one of the reasons why focusing on the Action of Leading domain is a priority – to just know and expect what it means to lead in some shared purpose.

Feeding Exclusivity

Similar to perfection, we know that the demands of leadership are broader and more complex at higher levels of an organization. So, we might be reinforcing the idea that long-term leadership development should be focused on those at the top (or on their way).

We want those at the top to be great leaders.

We also want those everywhere to be great leaders in their contexts.

We think that focusing on the Action of Leading domain can help achieve this. Everyone can execute the components of this domain – even if they do them as imperfect people and with imperfect knowledge and skills.

The Prometheus Leadership Commons 2.1 Summary

For reference, figure 7, shows all of the seven domains, grouped and color coded.

The Capacity to Be

The blue tones in the figure are the domain of Being (aka Capacity to Be) (aka The Leader). While this domain is about who we are, not what we know, there is a knowing component to persons. The brighter blue domain and sub-areas are about “What is going on in me so that I know?” or “What are the elements that I integrate to bring clarity and wisdom and consciousness about myself and the world?” The more purple tones are about me as the subject that is self-aware and me as the subject that is focused on what is outside of me, whether that is other people, principles or purpose.

When we are fully accepting and conscious of ourselves, we are beautiful and others are beautiful. We are filled with quiet power and energy. We are clear and unfiltered about all kinds of truth and wisdom. We may never be this whole or fully human, we may only have glimpses and moments of these states. If we are lucky and wise, we will leverage each other to meet this standard and accept and love our clumsy humanity as we go.
Our Knowledge and Skills

The orange tones are the adaptive capabilities that make up our knowledge and skills. The darker red tones are domain knowledge, the intellectual stuff. The orange tones are the contexts in which selected skills can be prepared and learned. We expect these to be well mastered in applied experience and integrated across related knowledge domains, self-integrated emotionally and socially. However, they may not only be the theoretical and technical knowledge we assume.

These are all handy for assessing, working and interacting in the real world. We can sometimes do this well in with humility, good purpose, intellect and observation and with little knowledge and few honed practices. This is the truth behind the idea that building the leader, the inner work, is the most adaptable. Or “Who you are is how you lead.” But our situations are often not that simple. We may not be in a safe-to-fail context. We may not have perfect or even viable constituencies. The reality we face may be more chaotic and complex than we can assess on the surface. We have some natural talents but other capabilities for influence and transformation may take some work. To illustrate, while improvisation can be natural, even improvisation is improved with conscious rehearsal of the practice.9 We may be better at it in our own minds than is objectively true.

We humans (at least this one) tend to over-prepare. We do not (yet) trust our native ability and accept our flaws. So, we over-invest in collecting up knowledge. We do not dare the shame to be imperfect in public, so we are scripted and rehearsed. This is, obviously, not what we are suggesting by highlighting and valuing knowledge and skills.

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9 We consider practices to be technique and mindset honed in experience.
I will lastly point to the irony of some who claim knowledge and skills and practices are less important – but assert a set of knowledge and practices for developing leaders or shifting cultures. Those same may assert that their leadership in the industry is built from their research and technologies. What would Loretta Castorini, Cher’s character, say?

**Leading is Action**

The third meta-domain in green tones is the Action of Leading domain. Whatever the details of your situation, these six things are present (or should be) to lead and succeed.

The darker green sub-areas (three to six) are somewhat of an iterative sequence of plan-do-check-repeat. You could consider them standards of health for creative change, so if we understand them we have language to raise concerns. Can we have a suitable strategy if we do not have a sense of where we are and where we want to go? In some cases, we do not have either of those clear, yet we are working hard. The lighter green sub-areas (one and two) are context for the others. Framing gives a context to action. Attending is considering and sustaining people and process. 

Some of these areas in the Action of Leading will fall in place, quickly and effortlessly. Some of them will be a lot of work to influence and align, with many teachable moments that require patience and experimentation. Vision, for example, is sometimes clear and quickly finds a resonance with the stakeholders and effortlessly fits the larger context of the mission. In other times, this is a major effort that takes much knowledge, learning iterations, a toolbox of techniques, human connections and open minds and hearts.

Finally, the sub-area labeled Resolution is referring to resolving the creative tension that is energized by the contrast between accepting Reality as it is and a vibrant compelling Vision. This may be one of the most valuable points to remember – because many of us practitioners and researchers forget that leading is not about just being there, thinking or doing, or inspiring. Leading is ultimately about results – whatever those results may be. We lead because we want change. We lead because we want to learn. We lead because we want to create. We lead to create what we want and what we want the world to be.

**Conclusion**

That concludes a summary overview of leaders and leading in the view of the framework and as it stands at this point of publication. While we very much welcome and expect disruptive contributors and amplifiers, we prefer some ‘yes, and’ partners. We very much look forward to applying and learning to bring this framework to more usefulness and fulfill The Prometheus Project’s humble-audacious mission of making leading clear and leaders common.

Thank you for your attention, your shared passion and commitment to leaders and leading, your shared sense of urgency for the broader possibilities we can create in the world.

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10 If you are an experienced Agile practitioner, you will recognize that an intentional effort to open and sustain individuals and relationships, observe what works and take responsibility for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of a system of action is ‘attending.’