



## FEATURE

### **Bringing to life Nomad Wisdom around leadership, strategy, and building strong communities**

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**DOI Number:** <https://doi.org/10.26203/sjxd-ra57>

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**To cite this feature:** Jackman, V. (2021). Bringing to life Nomad Wisdom around leadership, strategy, and building strong communities. *Education in the North*, 28(1) pp. 181-185.



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## **Bringing to life Nomad Wisdom around leadership, strategy, and building strong communities.**

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As Leadership Lead at College Development Scotland (CDN), creating development opportunities for leaders across the College sector is one of my most rewarding responsibilities. The current global events give us the option to turn this responsibility into an opportunity to redefine Leadership and its impact on the whole educational ecosystem. We need educational leaders who not only have a deep understanding of themselves, but also a deep understanding of the environment in which they operate and what is required build strong communities.

Colleges are rapidly changing in scale and scope and the current technological revolutions are contributing to the urgent need for a Learning Revolution. The COVID pandemic has pushed changes that have been beyond our reach for decades. However, to bring about the changes we *really* want to see, we need altruistic leadership and leadership that is agile, collaborative, and inclusive, as highlighted in the [Cumberford-Little Report](#) (2020).

In June 2019, CDN introduced the Preparing for Executive Leadership (PEL) programme. It is not a qualification, rather an experiential programme that seeks to support leaders to draw on their own knowledge, experience, curiosity, and passion. Collaboration and a systems leadership approach sit at the heart, and the different components, which include less-traditional approaches such as Lego Serious Play, Equine-assisted Leadership, Solutions Focus and Service Design are facilitated by a diverse spectrum of specialists. The second cohort of PEL was due to start in June 2020 but COVID restrictions meant face to face gatherings were not possible. While this could have been seen as an impediment, we saw it as an opportunity to explore how we could enhance the programme and bring additional opportunities to support the unprecedented leadership challenges our 21st century educational leaders are facing.

When we look around, we are bombarded with courses and articles offering simple solutions to becoming amazing leaders. They proclaim to have the answers and summarise those answers in soundbites such as “The 10 things you must do” or “The 7 steps to leading effectively”. The majority of these offerings seek to tell us what we need to do with little regard for our experience or our context, and they are offered on a one size fits all basis. What we at CDN were looking for was something different, something that would give our leaders another lens through which they could explore their own leadership journey and context. We wanted to bring out something that everyone intuitively already has inside them: our collective ancient wisdom.



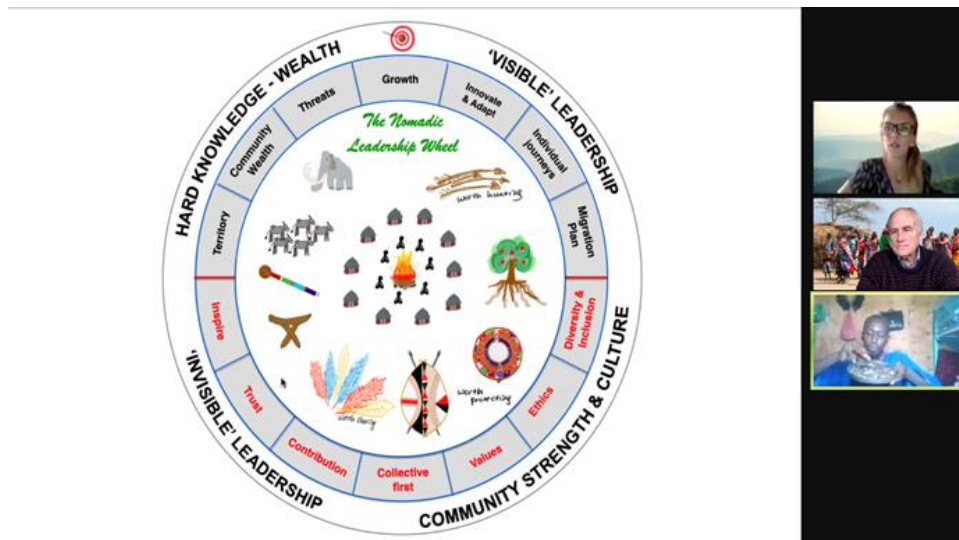


Figure 2: Doutzen Groothof, Anthony Willoughby, and Emmanuel Mankura explain the Leadership Wheel

Anthony and his colleagues Emmanuel Mankura, a Maasai Elder from Kenya, and Doutzen Groothof who is based in Rwanda, developed, and delivered a series of three on-line workshops that supported this objective by giving people a fresh and different perspective on their journey to elder hood, sharing tools that would enhance their self-awareness and insight in the context of their leadership, and offering a new way to look at what success means in the context of their educational ecosystem. It also provided an opportunity to use a combination of their knowledge, personality, and creativity to build understanding and confidence about their journey ahead. Ultimately, we were seeking to help unlock people's trust in themselves and to give them the insight, energy, and courage to move forward in their leadership roles with hope and self-belief.

In the first workshop Anthony, who is the most wonderful storyteller, shared some of his personal life story and his experiences of living with indigenous tribes across the globe. He talked about the importance of knowing oneself and knowing one's territory. Knowing who you are as a leader and what you stand for. Knowing where you are heading and the future you are working towards. He also spoke about the importance of building trust and inspiring others so that together you can navigate the terrain of your territory and adapt to new circumstances.

Participants were then invited to draw their own Territory Maps and to share their experience of doing so. While the process was relished by some, there were others for whom it sat outside their comfort zone. None the less, everybody found the process interesting and insightful. One participant commented that it had "turned his world upside down" and that based on that simple activity he had gained new and significant insights to his leadership journey. Another talked about how it gave him a completely different way of seeing and understanding not only his own leadership journey, but also the context in which he was working. "It helped break my pattern of thinking and enabled me to be more confident in developing an adventurous plan for the future."

During the second workshop, Emmanuel told of how the Maasai keep seven values: responsibility, courage, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and hope. Responsibility is something that is learned at a young age. When a child is three, they are given responsibility for a goat with the message that if they

look after the goat well, they look after and contribute to the whole community. Recognised contribution gives people a sense of belonging. At the age of 15, a young man becomes a warrior; a role that bears new responsibility. He learns to exercise courage and how to fight for and protect his community. The next stage is that of an elder. Rather than exercising power, elders work together to solve problems that affect the community.

Emmanuel also explained that in the Maasai culture, each level of leadership makes its own decisions. To some extent they have complete autonomy. Interestingly, the elders operate with distinctive restraint, declining to constantly dictate “this is what you need to do – this where you need to go”. But when a level of leadership is unable to make a decision, they look to the elders for advice. Each new generation of the tribe enacts the same stages – carrying responsibility and the need for leadership within each stage.

The final workshop was again hosted by Emmanuel and he invited the participants to share their learning from the previous sessions and what insights and inspiration they had gleaned. One participant shared that “I felt, before I engaged in the workshops, that I knew the direction I was going and how I was going to get there. I was of the mindset that I could not progress as far as I would like in my area of expertise. Now though, I know that the only barrier to that was me, and that I have the ability to change that, and my area of expertise has major importance to the sector moving forward”. Another shared that the workshops had helped her recognise the importance of “handing out her feathers of wisdom to others and how she had come to realise how valued that is by her colleagues”. In the second workshop Emmanuel spoke about the importance of mentoring future generations and this resonated with many of the participants. Another thing that resonated strongly was the importance of a leader not believing she had to know everything and, instead, being confident in drawing on the knowledge of others.

When I asked Emmanuel what he and the Maasai get from doing this type of work, he spoke of how the Maasai had resisted change when the British occupied Kenya, not physically but by not accepting the new ways of life; education and religion. The Maasai now recognise how important education is, and by doing this work Emmanuel and his clan folk can not only share their culture and wisdom across the world, but they can also earn money to support their community and send their young people to school. “In the past the spear and the shield have been vital for our survival, however, if we want to create a sustainable community, we must recognise the power of the pen and the book. We must empower our youth and send them to school so that they can bring back knowledge. Together with our ancient wisdom this new knowledge will be key to our survival.”

The Maasai have gone through many challenges over the past 50 years since Kenya became independent and as a result they have had to change. Working with the Nomadic School of Business also helps Emmanuel and his tribe understand the larger eco system. The Maasai have had to separate important values from taboos. Values are things unique to the Maasai, which unite them as a community. Taboos are small beliefs that do not make any sense in the new world. While keeping values they have been breaking taboos. One of the taboos was growing crops. Because the Maasai

had been pure livestock keepers, growing crops was not a traditional way of life. However, land subdivision, climate change and other changes forced them to review this. In order to survive they adopted a new way of survival. In this TED talk Emmanuel gives his perspective on taboos, those of his community, and those facing leaders in other parts of the world.

From my own perspective, we can talk about bringing indigenous wisdom to Education, but I think it is particularly important to bring it to Educational Leadership. The foundations of a strong community are universal, and we need leaders who can draw on their own innate wisdom to build these strong communities. We need leaders who trust themselves and respect what every member of their community brings. Leaders who can distinguish between values and taboos and have the courage to bring about the changes we really want to see. We need leaders who instil pride in their communities and invest in nurturing and mentoring future generations by handing out their feathers to future generations. People don't "do" adaptable and resilient, it's something they become, and we need leaders who can support that becoming.

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