

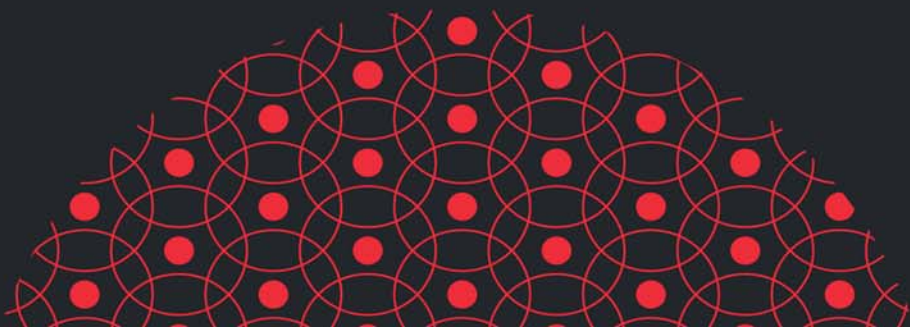


EMERALD POINTS

LEADING FOR EQUITY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

A Regenerative Process

DORIS CANDELARIE



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A Regenerative Process

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2024

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83797-383-5 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-382-8 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-384-2 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to all the educational leaders who are striving to lead for equity in uncertain times. It is heartfully dedicated to the leaders who shared their hearts and minds with me for the research of this book and whose souls I hope get renewed in the coming years by their teachers, students, and communities they love so much. Lastly and most importantly, my greatest gratitude is to my husband, Jim, for always supporting my work, listening, and responding to multiple iterations, and helping me to create the time and space to read, to think, and to write.

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PREFACE

This book is a process book, but it is also a book of the stories of the real experiences of educational leaders who put their personal lives aside to lead, care, and serve others during three of the most tumultuous years in recent history. The Regenerative Process was born from my work as an Associate Clinical Professor in educational leadership and policy studies. I teach people how to lead in educational organizations. I also consult with leaders, school communities, school districts, and related school entities on how to respond to their educational challenges.

In the fall of 2021, I was asked to present a professional development seminar to an educational community of leaders on how to reconnect their community. Their community had become divided and polarized due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and differing political ideologies. In my preparation and research on healthy communities, what do thriving communities do, and how to heal communities after crisis, I came across regenerative practices. Particularly, regenerative agriculture which honors nature's systems of renewal practiced by indigenous cultures around the world. In regenerative agriculture, one of the main principles is soil regeneration where soil essentially is brought back to life, to its highest self (Tindall et al., 2017).

I thought, if soil can regenerate, why shouldn't we be able to regenerate our human relationships? Why can't we regenerate our ways of being with one another? Why can't we regenerate education? Simultaneously while researching and preparing for this presentation, I was teaching my graduate students who were preparing to become school leaders how to lead through disruption and crises. I was hearing about their experiences in schools as teachers, deans, and assistant principals and the unrelenting demands being placed upon them. My students were sharing experiences of confusion and miscommunication from upper level organizational (district) leadership. I heard about how their students were presenting extreme mental health needs and behaviors they had not seen before.

Schools, leaders, teachers, students, and parents were all struggling to make sense of the turbulence happening around them. I began to frame a process to help this small community and my students make sense of their experiences.

What began as a protocol has evolved into a theoretical process. The Regenerative Process you will learn about in this book is grounded in social theories but grown from the lived experiences of educators and community members. The social theories of recognition, social connection (reconnection), reconciliation, reciprocity, reconstruction, and revolution are the basis for this process.

This book is designed to demonstrate how to use the Regenerative Process while at the same time sharing the experiences of high performing educational leaders during this difficult time. My experiences of using the Regenerative Process with educators have shown its promise for helping people process crisis, disruption, or significant change. I have seen disconnected groups of people reconnect over their common experiences, a desire for social cohesion, and a more hopeful future. I have seen departments, teams, and schools use the learning from the process as a catalyst for future planning fueled by what they learned and want to do better.

My hope is educational leaders at all levels can learn from this process and the leaders' experiences to anticipate the needs of the people in their organizations after crisis, disruption, and significant change. It is clear to me we need a new way forward in education. What we are doing at scale in education is not working for most of our leaders, teachers, and students. We need a new education model that is regenerative, open to the future as it is emerging, inclusive of the people it is designed for, and a leadership model that centers equity, equity mindedness, and is responsive to the times we are in today.

INTRODUCTION

This is the Age of Threat, when everything we encounter intensifies fear and anger. In survival mode, we flee from one another, abandon values that held us together. Withdraw from ideas and practices that encouraged inclusion and created trust in leaders. And, most harmfully, we stop believing in one another.

– Margaret J. Wheatley (2023)

We are living in uncertain times. Most adults can agree, the recent years beginning with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 led to isolation and resulted in human divisiveness and now polarization. These ways of being are not natural to humans ordinarily and by nature, humans crave connections and unity around our commonalities (Lieberman, 2013). The additional significant events in the United States including the traumatic and public display of human violence in the George Floyd murder on May 25, 2020, and the political ramifications of divisiveness leading to the January 6, 2021, insurrection have contributed to this current state of being. These three significant events, I have named the Trifecta+ social phenomenon. The plus sign represents the increasing violence in the United States including violent rhetoric, violent behavior, and gun violence (Kleinfeld, 2021; Rosenfeld et al., 2023; Rosenfeld & Lopez, 2022). Many researchers have identified that we are experiencing a mental health crisis at a level never seen before (Reinert et al., 2022). Additionally, research has identified the COVID-19 pandemic as the cause of individual and collective trauma, post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and racial trauma (Ashby et al., 2022; Blume, 2021; Gay et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2021). This is most prevalent in education at all levels and significantly in public schools where the research for this book was conducted. Educational practitioners and leaders put mental health support at the top of the list of what is most needed in our schools right now.

How did we get here? How did we get to this state of trauma, stress, and disruptiveness in our country? Hutchins and Storm (2019) outline a

compelling explanation titled, “The Journey of Separation.” *The Journey of Separation* is a recounting of the historical events leading humanity from equality and connectedness to self-development and separateness. The shift in the journey began 10,000 years ago when hunter gatherers began to create permanent communities with housing structures and growing and managing their own food sources. The authors posit significant climate related disruptions caused a reduction in personal resources which ultimately drove people apart and toward individualism, power, and control. What followed was a conscious focus on the separateness of religion and nature along with developments in science (the Scientific Revolution) which led to furthering the ideals of power and control. This brief overview may be simplistic, yet there are clear parallels to the present-day divisiveness, the lauding of individualism over collectivism, extreme nationalism over internationalism, and the denial of the impact of all of this on humans. The Trifecta+ social phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial justice tensions, and the politization of daily life in the United States of America have stressed the already fragile US American identity.

It all begins and ends with leadership. Leadership matters and during crises and disruption, it matters the most. Over the history of time, notable leaders are recognized not only for how they responded in the best of times but more so for how they responded in the worst of times. Kearns Goodwin (2018), a US president historical scholar highlights former US presidents, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt (FDR), and Lyndon B. Johnson as leaders who led in turbulent times. What unites these leaders is their sense of self, driven by moral purpose, and a guiding belief their leadership would make a difference for the masses. Each of these leaders experienced personal strife, yet they were able to lead beyond it, for the greater good. Another important commonality for these leaders related to the content of this book is how they entered leadership at significant moments of uncertainty in the US context. Both Lincoln and FDR took office at a time of unprecedented divisiveness in the United States. Lincoln with the battle over slavery, ultimately leading to the Civil War, and FDR with the US instability from the economic impacts of the Great Depression and democracy challenges. While T. Roosevelt and Johnson were not initially responding to these types of strife, they took office after assassinations, which shook the core of US democratic order. T. Roosevelt led the country through *The Great Coal Strike* of 1902, and Johnson through the civil rights era and voting equality.

There are parallels from the past to the present-day Trifecta+, the COVID-19 pandemic, the call for racial justice and resulting ideology conflict,

and where the United States saw its first disruption to the peaceful exchange of presidential power on January 6, 2021, with the insurrection.

The fight for equity has always been at the center of the major events of history in the United States and once again has given rise to a new level of polarization for US Americans. The Trifecta+ has had a significant impact on equity and education. The United States had the highest number of cases and highest number of deaths from COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, n.d.). The racialized and minoritized populations and those living in poverty were more significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, and in the United States from a variety of factors including food and housing insecurity, job loss, health services access, domestic violence, and mental health (Chen et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2020).

Racial inequities and conflict are woven into the fabric of US American history and culture and continue to be exacerbated by intractable systemic social issues and US politics. The public display of human violence at the hands of police in the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota was shocking and led to protests calling for racial justice around the world. It awakened many people to racial violence happening in their countries, states, cities, and communities, yet it reaffirmed for people of color, specifically Black people, racism was core to the US identity at large.

The two-party system in American politics is naturally conducive to divisiveness, and in recent years politicians have found success in utilizing fear to manipulate human decency and commonality into separateness and otherness to drive votes and control power. Social dominance has taken on new forms of extremism and individualism and working for the greater good and collective humanity is viewed as weakness. The advancement of these beliefs and shifts in the US American culture increased during the Trump presidency (Pew Research Center, 2021) with the presidency ending in the January 6, 2021, insurrection. Leadership matters, without it, countries fall to the lowest levels of human behavior. This book describes how regenerative educational leaders can lead their organizations and school communities out of chaos and into the opportunity to redesign the future of education for everyone in their care.

The impact of the Trifecta+ on education is reflected in the impact on young people, students at all levels, but more significantly those from upper elementary to college age due to their access to social media. From March 2020 through May of 2021, students experienced turmoil, seismic shifts, and dramatic gaps in their educational experiences. The tumultuous US national response of the COVID-19 pandemic shut down of society including schools, led to isolation for many students. Later the lack of clear guidance and agreement on safety measures led to disruptive schooling environments and

inequitable learning experiences. While student experiences varied greatly, most students had access to social media which served as a source of escape and entertainment but also as a source of how they were making sense of what was happening around them and to them. Educators across the country have identified students' mental health and well-being as one of their greatest concerns moving forward (Hamilton & Gross, 2021).

We need a new way forward. Educators are seeking something different the old ways of operating our educational systems are no longer working. The evidence of this includes the Great Resignation, quiet quitting, and the resulting teacher shortage which are impacting the educational systems' ability to provide a quality education for students (Lee et al., 2023). Current research reveals, educators do not want to work in schools they feel are sucking their lives and spirits away they want to be in schools that are supportive, challenging in good ways, creative, empowering, heart connecting, and filled with purpose and positive outcomes for students (Walker, 2022). Teachers, students, and parents want to be seen and heard they want leaders who listen and who act on what they hear in a responsive manner. Educators want to feel a meaningful connection to their work, to one another, to their students, and to a higher purpose.

The findings in the study for this book revealed there are many wounded school leaders left in the wake of the Trifecta+. Many of these leaders expressed how they felt unsupported by upper level organizational leaders, and they need to not only heal from their experiences but also find ways to renew their passion for and joy in leadership.

To regenerate means to create again, to restore to a better, higher, or more worthy state (Merriam Webster, n.d.h). This is what educators are asking for right now, the regeneration of education. If regeneration is what is needed, then regenerative leadership may be the guidance needed at this time.

REGENERATIVE LEADERSHIP

Find your greatest power by balancing the wild with the tame, the calm with the passionate, the new big idea with time-tested wisdom.

– Peter S. Temes (2006)

The word regenerate is becoming a popular word to express everything in new ways from a regenerative climate to a regenerative economy. It could easily become the “new big idea” in leadership, yet it is an indigenous way of being as old as the beginning of time, “the indigenous worldview is based on wholeness. . .all life is interconnected, and interrelated” (Mitchell, 2018, pp. 182–183). Wholeness, interconnectedness, and interrelationships are the time tested wisdom for leadership. Every leadership decision or action affects the system and the people within the system. To be a regenerative leader is to consider both the individual and the collective together. Regenerative leaders practice consciousness of this wisdom and work toward leading people back to themselves in their humanity.

The concept of regenerative leadership was developed by Hardman (2012, 2017) as a framework for leadership in business, educational, political, and community settings. Hardman’s regenerative leadership framework goes beyond sustainability in how it “synthesizes the mindsets and behaviors of individuals and organizations engaged in building a culture of regenerative practice” (2012, p. 21). Hardman describes a shift from sustainability leadership as a desired model to regenerative leadership due to the necessary healing and restoration it implies. This shift is apt for these uncertain times and as a response to the Trifecta+. Hardman (2017) outlines the ways in which regenerative leadership encompasses aspects of Burns’ (1978) transforming or

transformational leadership including the need for a moral compass and trust and expands the Burns’ definition to include, “purpose driven leadership through the suspension of the ego and personal agendas in pursuit of a greater goal” (2012, p. 42). Hardman (2017) defines regenerative leadership,

as the capacity to restore the damage caused by human activity on natural, social, and economic systems, while at the same time securing lasting, desirable futures for all living beings through the design of integrated approaches that lead to resilient, thriving and life-affirming organizations, communities, regions, and the world. (p. 12)

The Regenerative Leadership Framework (RLF) (Fig. 1) is described by Hardman (2017) as a matrix of intersecting and overlapping components, while discussed below in a linear way, it is nonlinear in practice.

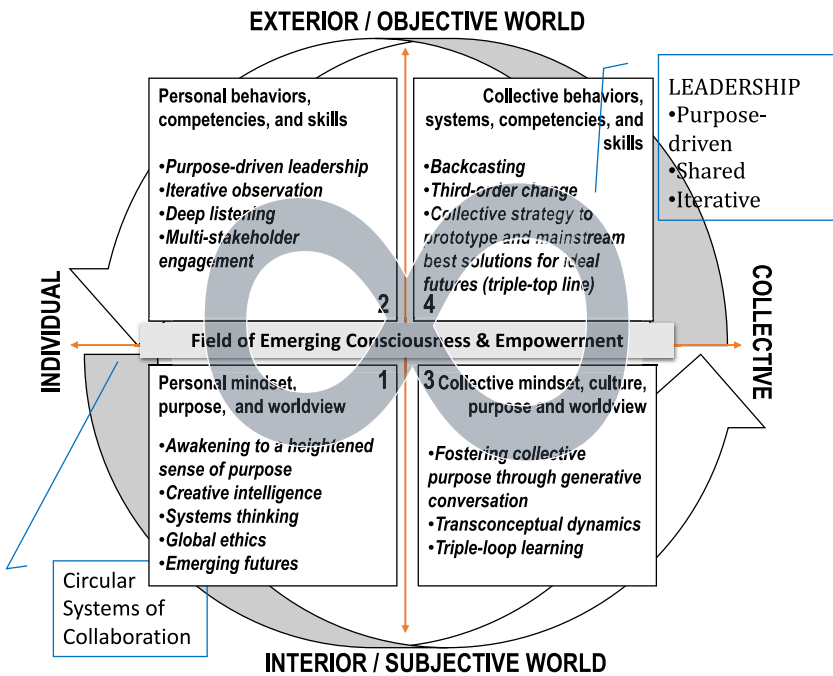


Fig. 1. The Regenerative Leadership Framework.

- *Quadrant 1* (bottom left) displays the interior subjective world of the individual (regenerative leader) reflected in their *personal mindset, purpose, and worldview*.

- *Quadrant 2* (top left) displays the external, objective world of the individual in the form of *personal behaviors, competencies, and skills*.
- *Quadrant 3* (bottom left) displays the interior, subjective world of the collective or (regenerative) organization in the form of its *collective mindset, culture, purpose, and worldview*.
- *Quadrant 4* (top right) displays the external, objective world of the collective or organization, in the form of its *collective behaviors, systems, competencies, and skills*.
- The *Field of Emerging Consciousness and Empowerment* represents the dynamic, evolving interaction between the interior, subjective worlds of the individual, and the organization, and how these are translated into skills, competencies, and behaviors in the eternal objective world.
- The *Infinity Symbol of Regenerative Leadership* illustrates both the focus of regenerative leaders on organizational culture, and also the iterative, evolving nature of (regenerative) leadership growth in terms of attributes and behaviors.
- *Horizontal systems of collaboration* represent the circular, nonhierarchical, inclusive approach to decision-making and solution design favored by regenerative leaders.

Hardman's RLF *Quadrant 1* expresses the mindset of regenerative leaders as an "awakened sense of purpose" (p. 24). It is this sense of purpose that informs their leadership mindsets of creative intelligence, systems thinking, a global ethics world view, and the ability to imagine and influence the future as it is developing. Creative intelligence is applied at scale and is inspired by a sense of purpose not only in the leader but is fostered in those they lead through shared leadership. As systems thinkers, regenerative leaders apply systems thinking with the understanding everyone and everything within their organization is interrelated in some way. They understand how they lead impacts those they lead and ultimately the world around them. Their global ethics philosophy is one of interconnectedness, serving a higher purpose, and a belief they can influence the greater good. Finally, as futurists, regenerative leaders understand how their leadership and work can live at the edge of the present and they purposefully use the space between their current reality and their aspirational future for growth toward their visions and sustainability.

Quadrant 2 is a representation of the key behaviors of regenerative leaders. Here behaviors are action oriented and include purpose driven leaders,

iterative observation, deep listening, and multiple stakeholder engagement. Regenerative leaders are driven by a purpose that encompasses an understanding of social and global issues, such as climate change, social inequities and intolerance of differences, and a deep desire to address the impact of those issues in their work. To lead in this way, regenerative leaders utilize cycles of observation with those they lead and critically analyze the systems within their organization while monitoring the impact of their decisions and actions. Deep listening is critical to both observation and full understanding of the effect of the current social issues and other challenges on their organizations. Regenerative leaders' behaviors are steeped in humility and a willingness to include many viewpoints, even if it is counter to their own.

In *Quadrant 3*, the Regenerative Leader shifts to focus on collective culture and mindsets. Hardman (2017) states “the most successful organizations emerge from the collective culture of individuals passionately engaged in meaningful work” (p. 37). Generative conversations are the medium for mindset development in this quadrant. Generative is defined as “originating, producing, or reproducing,” thus, to grow or create (Merriam Webster, n.d.b). Generative conversations are conversations that grow or create deeper or new thinking. Regenerative leaders host generative conversations with those they lead that are related to their meaningful work and connected to both individual and collective purpose. Through this kind of dialogue, regenerative leaders create spaces where trans-conceptual dynamics are stimulated and encouraged. Hardman defines trans-conceptual dynamics as “the ability to go beyond the rational to explore and activate other human faculties, such as imagination, intuition, and creativity” (p. 39). To lead generatively involves a leader's willingness to suspend ego and control, embrace vulnerability and allow for triple loop learning to operate fluidly. Hardman (2017) cites Starr and Torbert's (2005) description of triple-loop learning as “awareness in action” and a conscious letting go of previous mental models, past ways of thinking and doing things to be open to ideate in future possibilities.

Quadrant 4 highlights the collective behaviors, systems and competencies, and skills of those within an organization which include backcasting, third-order change, and collective strategy to prototype and mainstream best solutions for ideal futures. The commonality here is the term, collective behaviors. This is easier to conceptualize than to do. Regenerative leaders must have the other three quadrants in action to fulfill Quadrant 4. They begin with the end in mind using the visioning strategy called backcasting to first create a collective vision of the desired state. They use principles of the design process to work toward the vision while iteratively adapting their ways of working to live the vision while it is being created. To actualize the vision, third-order change processes and the prototyping