

PROGRAM ABSTRACT & DESCRIPTION

The Legacy Map

Mapping a Life of Leadership

A Reflective Session on Legacy, Gratitude, and Where Our Work Lives

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Format: Facilitated reflective workshop, 60–90 minutes, in person or virtual

Audience: Experienced leaders, faculty, and clinicians nearing retirement, transitioning to emeritus status, or reflecting on a career milestone

Keywords: Legacy mapping, leadership legacy, career legacy, through line / red thread, vocational grief, vocational gratitude, legacy dissonance, legacy resonance, career cartography, generativity, ego integrity, polarity thinking, reflective practice, mentorship and succession, emeritus transition, professional identity, wisdom transmission, nursing leadership

Abstract

The Legacy Map is a reflective workshop that invites experienced leaders to trace the through line of their professional lives — from the mentors who shaped them to the influence they hope will outlast them. Using a tree metaphor, participants map five dimensions of their leadership journey: the Roots (who shaped you), the Trunk (your red thread of consistent values), the Branches (your concrete contributions), the Canopy & Seeds (where your work lives on in others), and the Horizon (what you hope endures). The session pairs this guided self-mapping with a framework for holding two emotions that often arise together — vocational grief and vocational gratitude — as companions rather than opposites to resolve. Drawing on Erikson's stages of generativity and ego integrity, Johnson's polarity thinking, and the presenter's own scholarship on legacy dissonance and legacy resonance, the workshop closes with a personal through-line statement, a set of take-home reflective questions, and concrete practices for continuing the work of legacy-making beyond the session.

Program Description

PURPOSE

Looking back on a career can surface two feelings at once: gratitude for what has mattered and grief for what is changing. Rather than asking participants to resolve this tension, The Legacy Map creates a structured, low-pressure space to hold both. The guiding question for the session is simple but generative: "What is the thread that runs through everything you have done as a leader?" Participants are invited to write only what feels true, using a tree, a list, or their own shorthand.

SESSION FLOW

Participants work through five stages of their own legacy map, moving from the roots of their formation to the horizon of their hopes:

- Roots — Who shaped you? Name the mentors, influences, and formative experiences you grew from.
- Trunk — What is your red thread? Identify the values and ideas that have remained consistent and made your work cohere.
- Branches — What have you built, taught, written, or led? Name the work itself.
- Canopy & Seeds — Where is your work alive? Identify who carries it forward and where your influence shows up in others.
- Horizon — What do you most hope endures — the thing you most want to outlast you?

The session closes with a Through Line Statement — a short, personal sentence participants complete and carry forward — and a facilitated conversation on the Grief & Gratitude Polarity, including the prompt "Who handed the baton to me? Who am I handing the baton to?"

KEY CONCEPTS

- The Through Line — the animating thread connecting values, choices, and relationships across a leadership life, often visible only in retrospect.
- Legacy Dissonance & Vocational Grief — the gap between one's actual contribution and the recognition it receives, and the legitimate emotional response to real or anticipated loss of professional identity and relevance.
- Legacy Resonance & Vocational Gratitude — the deeper satisfaction of being understood, and a profound appreciation for a professional life of purposeful service.
- The Polarity (Johnson) — honoring one's legacy and releasing attachment to recognition is not a problem to solve but a polarity to navigate, again and again.
- Generativity & Ego Integrity (Erikson) — legacy work as the practical expression of Erikson's later life stages: contributing to future generations and finding meaning in the whole arc of a career.

TAKEAWAYS

Participants leave with a completed legacy map, a personal through-line statement, a set of reflective questions to use in ongoing journaling or mentoring conversations, and a menu of four continued-practice options: resonance mapping, vocational narrative construction, gratitude letters and legacy conversations, and contemplative/somatic gratitude practice. Each participant identifies one practice as a personal commitment to carry forward.

THEORETICAL & SCHOLARLY FOUNDATIONS

The Legacy Map builds on the career legacy mapping work of Hinds et al. (2015) and the career cartography framework of Feetham and Doering (2015, 2025) and is grounded in Daniel J. Pesut's ongoing scholarship on legacy dissonance, vocational grief, legacy resonance, and vocational gratitude (2024–2026), alongside foundational theory from Erikson (1982), Johnson (2020), Hudson (1999), and Watson (2024).

FACILITATOR

Daniel J. Pesut, PhD, RN, FAAN is Emeritus Professor at the University of Minnesota and Indiana University Schools of Nursing and holds the Lillehei Chair in Nursing Leadership (Emeritus). His scholarship focuses on legacy, reflective practice, and the emotional and developmental work of the emeritus passage.