

The Legacy Map

Mapping a Life of Leadership

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

Before you begin

Looking back on your work can stir up two feelings at once — **gratitude** for what has mattered, and **grief** for what is changing. Both are welcome here. You do not need to resolve them — let them sit side by side as you write.

THE GUIDING QUESTION

"What is the thread that runs through everything you have done as a leader?"

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YOUR LEGACY MAP

Work from the roots up. Draw a tree, make lists, or use your own shorthand. Write only what feels true.



Who shaped you?

Who shaped your professional life? Name the mentors, influences, and formative experiences you grew from.



Your red thread

What ideas or values have remained consistent throughout your career? What is the through line that makes your work cohere?



Your contributions

What have you built, taught, written, or led? Name the work itself.



Where your work is alive

Who carries your work forward? Where do you see your influence alive in others?



What you hope endures

What do you most hope endures — the thing you most want to outlast you?

◆ Your Through Line Statement ◆

Complete this sentence:

"The thread that runs through my leadership life is:

because no matter what role or context I have been in, I have always:

One sentence to carry forward:

I intend to make:

better because of my efforts as a leader.

THE GRIEF & GRATITUDE POLARITY

Looking back holds two feelings at once. These are not opposites to resolve — they are companions to hold together.

Legacy Dissonance & Vocational Grief	Legacy Resonance & Vocational Gratitude
The gap between contribution and recognition. Feelings that may arise: • Invisibility — feeling unseen • Wistfulness — bittersweet longing • Indignation — moral anger at unacknowledged work • Anticipatory grief — mourning what is fading • Righteous fatigue — exhaustion from caring alone These are not character flaws. They are signals pointing to what matters most.	Your contributions alive in the practice of others. Feelings that may arise: • Intellectual continuity — ideas moving forward • Relational warmth — enduring connections • Generative satisfaction — contribution multiplying • Peaceful completion — arc has coherence • Vocational fit — well-matched to the calling These can be cultivated through reflection, narrative, and gratitude practice.
∞ The goal is not to choose one pole but to breathe between them — grief and gratitude held together. ∞	

Reflections on what surfaced for me today:

Who handed the baton to me?	Who am I handing the baton to?

"Wisdom-building is a relay race, not a series of solo sprints."

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS TO CARRY FORWARD

Use these in your own time — in a journal, with a trusted colleague, or on a long walk.

The Roots — Who Shaped You

1. Who in your life first saw your leadership potential before you did? What did they see?
2. What formative experience most shaped how you understand leadership?
3. What have you received from your mentors and teachers that you are still drawing on today?

The Trunk — Your Red Thread

1. What values have you never been willing to compromise, even when it would have been easier?
2. What kind of problems do people consistently bring to you? What does that reveal about your gifts?
3. What has remained true about you across all the roles you have held?

The Branches — Your Contributions

1. What is the contribution you are most proud of — not for the recognition it received, but for the truth it contains?
2. What would your most honest former colleagues say was your signature contribution?
3. What do you know now — from lived experience — that cannot be taught from a textbook?

The Canopy & Seeds — Where Your Work Lives

1. Where do you see your influence alive in the practice or identity of those you have worked with?
2. Who carries threads of your intellectual or professional legacy? Have you told them what they carry?
3. How are you already passing your through line forward — and how might you do so more intentionally?

The Horizon — What You Hope Endures

1. What would you most want the next generation of leaders in your field to know?
2. If your leadership had a theme song, what would it be — and why?
3. What is the next chapter of your leadership calling you toward?

Integration — Grief and Gratitude Together

1. Where do you notice both grief and gratitude active at the same time? What does their coexistence teach you?
2. What would it mean to inhabit both poles of your legacy with integrity — honest about the difficulty, genuine in the gratitude?
3. What does it mean to choose wholeness in this season of your leadership life?

KEY CONCEPTS

A brief reference for the concepts introduced during the session. For deeper reading, see the References section.

A The Through Line

The animating thread that connects the significant moments, values, choices, and relationships across a leadership life. Often only visible in retrospect — looking back, the design appears. Also called the "red thread," it is the coherent strand that gives meaning to the whole career, independent of any single role or title.

B Legacy Dissonance

The psychological gap between one's actual contribution to a field and the recognition, attribution, or continuity that contribution receives. It manifests as tension when ideas are absorbed without citation, pioneering work is invisible to inheritors, or derivative work gains visibility without acknowledging lineage. Different from the desire for recognition — it concerns the intellectual integrity of attribution.

C Vocational Grief

The complex emotional response to real or anticipated losses associated with one's professional identity, contribution, and meaning making through work. It can occur while still working, upon retirement, or in the transition to emeritus status — mourning not a role, but relevance and ongoing contribution. The emotions involved are legitimate signals pointing to values that matter deeply.

D Legacy Resonance

The lived experience of deep alignment between one's professional contributions and their active continuation in the knowledge, practice, and identity of those who follow. It is not the gratification of being praised — it is the deeper satisfaction of being understood. Legacy resonance may occur with or without explicit attribution and can be cultivated through intentional reflection and relational practice.

E Vocational Gratitude

A profound and embodied appreciation for the privilege of having lived a professional life in purposeful service through a healing vocation. It is not the relief of the exhausted survivor, nor the resignation of someone glad a hard career has ended. It is the grateful recognition that one's gifts were called out by the work, deepened by the relationships, and returned to the world through service.

F The Polarity (Johnson)

The tension between Honoring My Legacy and Releasing Attachment to Recognition is not a problem to solve — it is a polarity to navigate. Both poles carry genuine upsides; overemphasizing either creates problems. The infinity symbol (∞) represents the continuous oscillating movement between them — grief and gratitude as companions rather than opposites, held together in an integrated professional life.

G Generativity and Ego Integrity (Erikson)

Erikson's Stage 7 (Generativity vs. Stagnation) centers on contributing to future generations through mentoring, creative work, and community. Stage 8 (Ego Integrity vs. Despair) involves looking back with acceptance and meaning — or with regret. Legacy work is this developmental task made practical: asking "Did what I did matter?" and "Am I passing something forward?" The through line helps achieve ego integrity by finding meaning in the whole arc.

TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

Eight things to carry with you from today's session.

1 Your leadership story has a through line — a coherent thread connecting your values, your choices, your relationships, and your impact. It is already there. The work is to find it and name it.

2 Leadership legacy is not about monuments or titles. It is about what continues to live in others because of your influence — in their thinking, their practice, their identity.

3 The full range of emotions that arise in legacy reflection — including grief, wistfulness, and invisibility — are legitimate signals pointing to how much this work has mattered. Name them without shame.

4 Vocational gratitude is a practice, not a mood. It is the honest recognition that your gifts were called out by the work, by the relationships, and by the people who believed in you before you believed in yourself.

5 The tension between honoring your contribution and releasing attachment to recognition is not a problem to solve — it is a polarity to navigate, again and again, with growing wisdom.

6 Wisdom-building is a relay race. Name your mentors. Name your successors. Make the transmission conscious. This is one of the most generous acts of leadership available to you.

7 The through line is not finished. You are still writing it. Whatever stage you are in, there is still a next chapter — and it matters.

8 Choose wholeness. Not the denial of difficulty, not the suppression of grief, but the integration of everything you have experienced into a life of meaning, generativity, and grateful service.

"Every professional life is a story about what we gave and what we received.
To cultivate legacy resonance and vocational gratitude is not to deny difficulty.
It is to choose wholeness."

— Daniel J. Pesut, 2026

PRACTICES FOR CONTINUED CULTIVATION

Legacy resonance and vocational gratitude are not passive experiences — they can be actively nurtured. Try one of these in the weeks ahead.

01 Resonance Mapping

Systematically identify traces of your professional influence in the current knowledge landscape — dissertations that cite your work, practitioners who use your frameworks, colleagues shaped by your mentorship. This is evidence-based gratitude: empirically grounding appreciation in documented fact. Ask: Where is my work alive right now?

02 Vocational Narrative Construction

Write the coherent, integrated account of your professional life as a meaningful whole — not a resume, but a story. Identify the red threads: animating questions, recurring themes, values that proved durable across decades. Hudson called this essential life-story work. Begin with: "The story of my leadership begins with..."

03 Gratitude Letters & Legacy Conversations

Write a letter to a mentor, colleague, or student who shaped your journey. Hold an intentional conversation where you name what you are most proud of and invite others to name what they carry from you. Making the transmission conscious is one of the most generous acts available to a leader.

04 Contemplative Practice & Somatic Gratitude

Gratitude is not merely cognitive — it is a somatic experience of openness and warmth (Watson, 2024). Practices such as meditation, centering prayer, or gratitude journaling cultivate embodied alignment between values and lived experience. Try writing three specific things you are grateful for in your professional life, each day for one week.

My commitment — one practice I will try:

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

Foundational: Legacy Mapping

Hinds, P. S., Britton, D. R., Coleman, L., Engh, E., Humbel, T. K., Keller, S., Kelly, K. P., Menard, J., Lee, M. A., Roberts-Turner, R., & Walczak, D. (2015). Creating a career legacy map to help assure meaningful work in nursing. *Nursing Outlook*, 63(2), 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2014.08.002>

The original legacy map article. Introduces the map as a self-guidance tool: declare a professional legacy (what you intend to make better), then map the influences, activities, and steps that lead toward it.

Foundational: Career Cartography

Feetham, S., & Doering, J. J. (2015). Career cartography: A conceptualization of career development to advance health and policy. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 47(1), 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.12103>

The original career-cartography framework: treating a career like a map with a clear destination and an iterative, visual trajectory of past, present, and planned work.

Doering, J. J., Feetham, S., & Schiffman, R. F. (2025). Career cartography to envision careers that advance health and health policy. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 57(5), 816–828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.70027>

A recent update revisiting and extending the 2015 framework after a decade of practical experience.

Feetham, S., & Doering, J. J. (2018). Career legacy cartography portfolio for advanced practice nursing. In *Optimizing the advanced practice registered nurse experience* (pp. 73–87). Springer.

Bridges career cartography and legacy portfolio work directly.

Legacy, Grief, Gratitude & Renewal (Pesut)

Pesut, D. (2026). Legacy dissonance and vocational grief: Navigating the polarities. University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/278232>

Introduces legacy dissonance and vocational grief; includes the full emotional landscape, polarity map, and reflective assessment tool.

Pesut, D. (2026). Legacy resonance and vocational gratitude: Cultivating wholeness in the passage from active practice to emeritus life. Pesut, Daniel. (2026). . Retrieved from the University Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/280703>.]

The companion article — the positive pole of the polarity; includes OPT model application and practices for cultivation.

Pesut, D. (2025). Finding your red thread: A metacognitive approach to professional identity and career coherence in nursing. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/277268>

Practical framework for identifying the animating themes across a nursing career.

Pesut, D. (2025). Documenting your career legacy: A toolkit for scholarly retrospection and synthesis. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/items/Odc64e71-39a3-47e0-a85f-c95298798cd3>

Practical toolkit for legacy documentation, oral history, and professional coherence.

Pesut, D. (2025). Conscious elderhood: An integrated framework for nurse leaders in the wisdom years. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/277276>

Comprehensive framework for the emeritus passage and transition to conscious eldership.

Pesut, D. (2024). Principles and practices of legacy leadership: Recalling, reclaiming, and recasting. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/261437>

Pesut, D. (2025). Create the future through renewal: Twenty years of inspiration and action. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/277247>

Additional Theoretical Foundations

Erikson, E. H. (1982). The life cycle completed. W. W. Norton.

Johnson, B. (2020). And: Making a difference by leveraging polarity, paradox, or dilemma (2nd ed.). HRD Press.

Hudson, F. M. (1999). The adult years: Mastering the art of self-renewal (rev. ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Watson, J. (2024). Metaphysics of Watson unitary caring science: A cosmology of love. Springer.

A distinction worth keeping:

A legacy map (Hinds et al.) is reflective and meaning-centered — who shaped me, what endures. **Career cartography (Feetham & Doering)** is forward-planning and trajectory-centered — where am I going and how do I get there. The tree exercise in today's session borrows the heart of the first; the references above let you follow either path.

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