

# LEADERSHIP NETWORKS: A STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR'S DEVELOPMENT

## Presenter:

Dr. Leda Stawnychko, PhD  
Assistant Professor, Strategy and Organizational Theory  
Bissett School of Business  
Mount Royal University  
[LStawnychko@mtroyal.ca](mailto:LStawnychko@mtroyal.ca)

**Presentation Theme:** Leadership and Management

**Presentation Type:** Best Practice Presentation

## Abstract

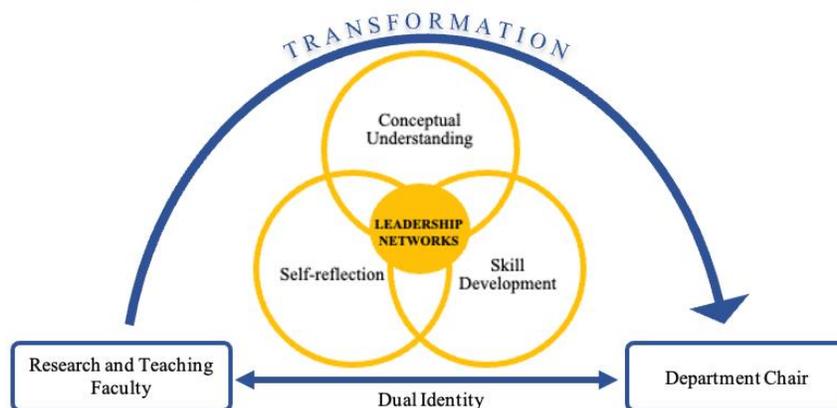
The interactive workshop will begin with a 20 min introductory presentation drawing on the results of an empirical study conducted at a comprehensive research university in Canada. The participants will be invited to analyze the importance of networks in the context of their own leadership development and to explore strategies to develop and nurture them.

**Keywords:** leadership networks, leadership development, department chairs, sustainable leadership, qualitative methods

## Description of the Session

Higher education scholars interested in leadership roles need to develop skills and specialized knowledge to navigate a dynamic context and solve complex problems. A new empirical study (Stawnychko, 2021) found that networks play a central role in the development of new university leaders. The study highlighted that these networks served as mechanisms that facilitated accessing mentorship and support which, in turn, helped faculty to enter and understand leadership positions, develop new skills, and practise self-reflection. Furthermore, the mentorship accessed through these leadership networks facilitated a transformation among the study participants from researchers and teachers to academic leaders. The session will draw on the study and the presenter's experience to help participants articulate the critical value of networks and to develop personalized plans to nurture and strengthen them.

Fig. 1 Stawnychko (2021) Conceptual Framework



This workshop is important and impacts leadership in higher education because it:

1. Builds on innovative approaches to support academic leadership development
2. Supports adaptation in the face of changing societal expectations
3. Promotes building positive academic environments

The workshop will include opportunities for participants to use their local institutional context to explore strategies aimed at developing and nurturing their leadership networks.

### **Activities**

Participants will be invited to join small groups to explore developing their networks from four different perspectives i) entering a leadership role; ii) understanding the leadership role; iii) developing/strengthening leadership skills; and iv) practicing self-reflection. Participants will develop a list of best practices and recommendations. The small group sessions will be followed by a large group discussion to review lessons learned and finalize the list of best practices and recommendations for individual and organizational use.

### **The following literature references support this conference proposal:**

Boyko, L. (2009). *An examination of academic department chairs in Canadian universities* (Doctoral thesis).

Brinkley-Etzkorn, K. E., & Lane, I. (2019). From the ground up: building a system-wide professional development and support program for academic department chairs. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(3), 571-583.

Gmelch, W. H., & Buller, J. L. (2015). *Building academic leadership capacity: A guide to best practices*. John Wiley & Sons.

Heffernan, T., (2020). Academic networks and career trajectory: ‘There’s no career in academia without networks.’ *Higher Education Research and Development*, 1 – 14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1799948>

Ibarra, H., & Hunter, M. (2007). How leaders create and use networks. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(1), 40–124.

Normore, A. H., & Brooks, J. S. (2014). The department chair: A conundrum of educational leadership versus educational management. In *Pathways to excellence: Developing and cultivating leaders for the classroom and beyond*. Emerald Group.

Stawnychko, L. (2021). Leadership development experiences of department chairs at a Canadian university. (Doctoral thesis). University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.