Metamorphosis: **A collaborative leadership model to promote educational change**

Stefanos Gialamas *
American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

Peggy Pelonis**
American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

Steven Medeiros***
American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

Abstract
A school that holds as a central belief that knowledge is individually and socially constructed by learners who are active observers of the world, active questioners, agile problem posers and critical and creative problem solvers must evolve leadership models and organizational patterns that mirror this model of genuine and meaningful learning as they promote and enhance it. Institutional change can **and must** take place at various levels. It can take place at the level of curriculum, adoption of new programs, and implementation of new strategies and methodologies. However, sustainable change must also take place at a deeper level, in which the very core of the institution's being is affected, and in which members adopt new ways of thinking, behaving, creating knowledge, **and interacting with each other,** not only as means to an end, but as the best possible ways of achieving the goals and objectives of the institution in harmony with professional goals meaningful to each member. The authors refer to this kind of change as institutional *metamorphosis,* a radical transformation of an institution's structure and function, preserving the institution's DNA of fundamental beliefs, values and principles. They propose that leading this kind of change demands a radically new leadership structure, which embodies (and reflects) the deepest values about the nature of teaching and learning and meaningful relationships that the institution holds. They name this model the ***Morfosis Paradigm***, explain its structure and conclude that when the model works, all levels of the organization reflect the same core principles about what meaningful relationships are that promote real learning and growth

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* Stefanos Gialamas is President of the American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

** Peggy Pelonis is Dean of Student Affairs at the American Community Schools of Athens, Greece

*** Steven Medeiros is Dean of the Institute for Innovation and Creativity at the American Community Schools of Athens, Greece.

Introduction

A fractal is a rough or fragmented geometric space that can be split into parts, -or neighborhoods -- each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole. The property is called self-similarity.[1] Visualize the structure of a bunch of broccoli or a head of cauliflower and you'll get the idea.

The image of the fractal provides a helpful metaphor for envisioning the culture of a healthy school, in which each "neighborhood" of the institution (leadership, institutional dynamics, the teaching and learning experience, operational patterns) is "self-similar" and reflective of the other and of the whole, in that they embody and express the fundamental values and beliefs of the learning community. We are proponents of a leadership approach that sees the school as a professional learning community and that models and promotes in every "neighborhood" of the institution a harmonious, meaningful and holistic approach to teaching and learning that puts the student at the center of his/her own learning and at the center of all institutional decision-making.

A school that holds as a central belief that knowledge is individually and socially constructed by learners who are active observers of the world, active questioners, agile problem posers and critical and creative problem solvers must evolve leadership models and organizational patterns that mirror this model of genuine and meaningful learning as they promote and enhance it.

Metamorphosis: The educational experience

Every academic leader brings to an institution a philosophy of education, shaped by his/her fundamental principles and values, the foundation upon which he/she imagines, builds, articulates and implements an authentic and galvanizing vision of the future in line with the school's communally defined mission. Given the complexity and flux of the contemporary world, education is inevitably in a continuous state of change: the only unknown parameters are its pace, magnitude, and depth. As a consequence, as Elmore[2] (p. 6) accurately notes, successful school reform must grow "from the inside out," and the process of bringing change must be **holistic.**

Institutional change can **and must** take place at various levels. It can take place at the level of curriculum, adoption of new programs, and implementation of new strategies and methodologies. However, sustainable change must also take place at a deeper level, in which the very core of the institution's being is affected, and in which members adopt new ways of thinking, behaving, creating knowledge, **and interacting with each other,** not only as means to an end, but as the best possible ways of achieving the goals and objectives of the institution in harmony with professional goals meaningful to each member.

Change at this level affects the roots of the organization, its very culture. By culture we refer to the system of adhered-to and shared values, beliefs, practices and traditions within an institution that guide or influence the behavior of its members. Simply put, culture is *"the way we do things in the institution and why we do them this way."* A school's culture informs all aspects of school life, from the execution of strategy, to the way community members accept and implement new practices in making the institutional vision a reality, to the way all individuals within the school speak to and interact with each other. Institutional culture is

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[1] Mandelbrot, B.B. (1982). *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. W.H. Freeman and Company
[2] Drago-Severson, E. Leading adult learning: Supporting adult development in our schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/Sage Press, 2009.

tacit and experienced in varied ways. Some expressions of the institution's culture are quite visible; others lie below the surface and are somewhat difficult to unearth. A solid understanding of the culture into which change is to be introduced will provide a sound foundation for planning how to implement change. It is a fundamental first responsibility of a leader to observe and understand his/her school's culture at this deep level, to identify its weaknesses, but equally important, to understand its strengths and, to use Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's phrase, "its sources of goodness."[3]

Change that takes place at this level is sustainable across situations and not vulnerable to the passage of time, but paradoxically it embodies the promise and possibility of continuous change within it. Change of this type is **diachronic** (from the Greek, "transcending time") and transformative. The authors refer to this kind of change as institutional *metamorphosis,* a radical transformation of an institution's structure and function, preserving the institution's DNA of fundamental beliefs, values and principles. Here the metaphor of the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis may prove a helpful image for understanding the nature of this process.

While every leader may expect to encounter resistance to change from the many constituencies of an institution, he/she can anticipate an even stronger resistance during an institutional metamorphosis. As Shulman, et. al. point out, "while there have been changes in the economy, changes in relation to technological advances, and changes in market competition, all of which affect education, what remains the same is the resistance to change often encountered in institutions."[4] When one moves beyond economic imperatives and defines the role of a school as preparing global citizens who are prepared to serve humanity, the stakes are higher, the implications more profound and the possibilities for encountering resistance are multiplied; even when change is perceived as moving an institution towards growth and improvement. [5].

In *Embracing Change* (2006), Tony Buzan explains this pattern of resistance:

> [W]hen our familiar world becomes no longer familiar, as a result of unexpected or enforced change, it is natural to retreat initially into a negative response as a way of attempting to regain control. Sometimes we stay there – for too long. 'Familiarity and Risk Avoidance' may appear to equal 'Comfort and Security' initially, but in time may also come to equal 'No Growth and Stagnation"[6] p. 65

For some, change can be a seductive, exhilarating, rewarding process, despite any uncertainty and anxiety it may provoke. In this way, meaningful change mirrors the process of genuine learning, which involves confronting the unknown and creating new knowledge and embracing new paradigms. For others – as it can be for learners on the cusp of a new discovery -- it can be a tremendous source of anxiety, distress and overwhelming fear of the unknown.[7]

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[3] Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara**, *The Good High School,* Basic Books, 1983.

[4] Shulman, B.H., & H. Mosak. ***Manual for Lifestyle Assessment**,* New York: Brunner-Routledge, 1998, p.

[5] Gialamas, S. and Pelonis, P (2009), "Connecting with College Education: A Holistic Approach", ***International School Journal**,* Spring/Autumn, Vol. 11(2), pp. 22-23.

[6] Buzan, Tony. ***Embracing Change,** BBC ACTIVE, England*

Caine, R.N. and Caine, G. (1997), 'Understanding Why Education Must Change', New Horizons for Learning.

[7] Pelonis, Peggy. *Υπάρχω Αλλάζω (Living Changing),* Isoropon Publications, Athens, Greece, 2006.

Metamorphosis is total transformation and a movement toward the unfamiliar and unpredictable. Resulting new ways of being may involve immersion in new rules, new conditions, and unknown territory: a process that requires diachronic and continuous learning. During genuine metamorphosis, it is not unusual for members of an institution to challenge the validity of all previous accomplishments, practices and thinking processes. Departing from the safe and the familiar often occasions feelings of loss, as "all people and all systems seek a balance, a homeostatic pattern of parts of transactions that allow people and systems to function in familiar ways."[8] It means letting go of notions such as, *"I can do it, because I have been doing it for so long and the old way of doing things has always worked well."* It means moving to an unknown and unfamiliar realm and being able to say, *"I must now learn anew and begin from the beginning," i*n order to become a productive member of the new environment. We are not unmindful that such a shift in perspective can be the source of tremendous stress and are aware that "the process of moving from one model of schooling to another that is as yet unknown is causing chaos and confusion as well as immense opportunity and new possibilities."[9]

So, a primary role of the educational leader (and also of the teacher in the classroom) is to inspire individuals in the learning community to embrace change and to mitigate their fears by creating a professional community in which risk taking is permitted and encouraged, and which allows for failure --which is seen as integral to the learning process -- building an organizational structure and ethos that supports this kind of work at every level of the school organization. We propose that nothing less than creating a model of leadership in a school that truly mirrors the beliefs about the teaching and learning process that we hold can foster the change we seek. Such an endeavour, of course, raises a whole set of questions about new models of accountability, as leadership gives over authority to match the level of responsibility it wants individuals (in the organization and in the classroom) to assume. This model of leadership also acknowledges that there may not be a place in the organization for those unwilling to assume such levels of responsibility and authority. The goal then is to exercise the kind of leadership that helps the members of the school community to experiment with these ideas and to test them in practice, to create a school that is a professional learning laboratory.

Morfosis *(Μορφωση)* Paradigm

Educating the whole person is a central tenet of the American philosophy of education. Teaching and learning take place, not only in the classroom, but during activities, assemblies, community service work, group projects, sports activities, and through the hundreds of formal and informal encounters that take place between members of a learning community each day.

The study of literature, mathematics, science, languages, the arts, history, social sciences, technology and physical education is the foundation of a well-rounded education, but a *holistic, meaningful and harmonious* approach to learning – what the Classical Greeks called *morfosis* -- takes into account *all* of the opportunities for learning that present themselves. Such an approach is also *student-centered and inquiry-based*. Teachers take into account the needs, interests, aptitudes, dreams and aspirations of students; and design

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[8] Satir, V., & Bitter, J.R. (2000). The Therapist and Family Therapy: Satir's Human Validation Process Model. In A.M. Horne (Ed), **Family Counseling and Therapy** (3rd ed.) Itasca, IL:F.E. Peacock, pp. 62-101.

[9] Caine, R.N. and Caine, G. (1997), 'Understanding Why Education Must Change', New Horizons for Learning. Available at: http://www.newhorizons.org/trans/caine_change.htm (last accessed July 05, 2010).

invitations to learning that promote *active learning* and *independent, critical and creative thinking*, so that students will be prepared to apply their knowledge and problem-solving skills across disciplines and in new situations. Learning, viewed in this way, is a life-long process of *making sense* of one's experience of the world by making connections to what one already knows and challenging oneself and asking questions to build *new* knowledge and understanding.

This vision of holistic learning builds on the classical definition of liberal education. In a sense what we are proposing is creating a leadership design that embodies classical notions of liberal education: that puts these notions into practice as a way of organizing the leadership strands of a school. Let us suggest yet another useful metaphor: a model of leadership as a parallel series of extended Socratic dialogues among the various layers of the school community. The leader then (of the institution/of the individual school/of the department or division/of the faculty group/of the classroom/of the learning group in the classroom: here again we draw on the notion of self-similarity) takes on the Socratic role of *daring* inquiry by posing questions that demand reflection and re-evaluation and reconstruction of understandings. In this sense, leaders (like teachers in their classrooms) are truly researchers/learners, probing to understand others' understandings and creating scaffolds on which others can expand and create new knowledge and understandings.

The Morfosis Paradigm: Educational processes

"The holistic education movement does not have a single source, a predominant proponent, or a definite form of expression. Consequently, it is difficult to define holistic education explicitly. However, there are a number of values and perceptions that most schools claiming to be holistic would embrace."[10]. It has antecedents in the Classical Greek notion of the well-rounded individual, the Renaissance idea of the "universal (wo)man", Dewey's theories of experiential learning and the expansive nature of the International Baccalaureate profile of the student learner.

The Morfosis Educational paradigm, then, refers to learning that is holistic, meaningful and harmonious. Based on the tenet that the student is the at the center of the institution and aiming to educate future citizens able to cope with the multiple demands of a society in constant flux, the paradigm firstly recognizes that "the development of trusting relationships between school personnel and students will go some way toward ensuring that young people will seek the support and information that is necessary for making decisions about their school and other choices."[11] The goal of leadership in such a model is to foster agreeable partnerships for decision making, recognizing that the nature of the partnerships will change as the journey of institutional transformation matures. In such a case, organizational flexibility is a necessity, recognizing that both leaders and followers will grow and change as a consequence of the process as the leader moves from being an instigator of change to a facilitator of continuous change.

The authors recommend that a similar process of relationship building take place not only within the institution, but that the establishment of working relationships and networks between schools and other agencies within the local community should be a high priority.[12] These institutions may include colleges and universities and local community organizations.

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[10] From **The Third Annual Conference on Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child** at the Roehampton Institute, London; exploring the question, "Whose values are shaping education?" http://www.pdfio.com/k-811252.html

[11] Australian Centre for Equity through Education Australian Youth Research Centre, **A Report on the Perspectives of Young People,** 2001, p. 48 http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/publications/2001/

[12] Australian Centre for Equity through Education Australian Youth Research Centre, **A Report on the Perspectives of Young People,** 2001.

Such local partnerships offer the institution the opportunity to model the values of civic responsibility it seeks to embed in its daily operations, by establishing, mentoring or motivating educational and service programs in the local community and by opening its doors to community agencies to expand opportunities for educating its students.

A *holistic* approach to education, then, successfully combines academic, emotional, physical, intellectual and ethical components of learning to provide students with the tools to become healthy and balanced individuals who can successfully cope with the changes that the university experience and life beyond will bring. Furthermore, a *meaningful* education unfolds within a framework of principles and values, and leads learners to define and achieve their personal, academic and professional goals. Learning is meaningful when it is connected to that which is most important in our lives; when it speaks to our dreams, strengths, desires and talents; when it leads us to fall *in love with life and learning;* when it helps us to discover the gifts we can offer in service to the communities to which we belong. Finally, a h*armonious* approach to education ensures that all dimensions of the learning experience *cohere.* Principles, values and practices must be consistent and mutually reinforcing in order for the learning experience to truly promote the classical ideal of living a full life with *ethos.*

The Morfosis Paradigm: Beliefs

Adherence to a foundation of core beliefs shapes all actions and institutional decision-making. Such fundamental beliefs include:

- Holistic, meaningful and harmonious student learning necessitates a genuine partnership between the student, the school, and the family
- Institutional decisions must be made in the best interest of students first and foremost and then in the interest of all stakeholders.
- All students can succeed and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become life-long learners with ethos.
- Achieving excellence must be built upon each student's unique talents and abilities. (*ACS Athens School Plan*, adopted 2008)

The Morfosis Paradigm: Outcomes

The Morfosis paradigm shapes young people who will be:

creative and critical thinkers;

life-long learners;

capable of utilizing sound scientific and mathematical aptitudes;

skilful in expressing selves clearly: orally and in writing in more than one language, and through the arts;

knowledgeable of other cultures;

appreciative of the value of the study of the past;

masters of the tools of technology;

inspired to maintain physical and emotional well being;

responsible and productive citizens;

effective leaders.

(*ACS Athens Curriculum Framework Document*, developed by ACS Athens faculty, 1994)

The Morfosis Paradigm: Leadership

The ability to lead a dynamic 21st century institution, in which learning is diachronic, requires a leader well versed in Morfosis. While leadership is traditionally defined as the continuous act of influencing self and others to accomplish personal and professional as well as common goals, Morfosis leadership is a particular type of leadership comprised of two essential components: the establishment of an *Authentic Leadership Identity* (PLI) and the creation of a *Collective Leadership-Partnership Approach* (CPA).

1. Authentic Leadership Identity

To define the special characteristics of *Morphosis Leadership,* we turn again to Socrates, by way of Adler, and apply a central tenet of Socratic philosophy – that living a life of meaning begins with the quest to "know oneself." In our conception, the process of adopting this leadership model can be expressed in the following formula:

Authentic Leadership Identity = Life Experiences + Individual Characteristics+ Personal Leadership Identity

(ALI = LE + IC + PLI)

Life Experiences and Individual Characteristics

The process of understanding where we come from and how life has affected and shaped our personalities, life choices and approaches to living is important in developing and defining a leadership identity. We are not separate from our experiences, and our experiences and perceived view of the world will, to a great degree, define our leadership approach. As Adler has noted (in Mosak and Maniacci, 1999), there is a

> subjective, unarticulated set of guidelines individuals develop and use to move them through life and toward their goals. They develop through the interactions children have with their significant others, peers, and social world; through their experience of culture and community; through their biological growth and dysfunction; and, perhaps most significantly, through their perceptions and choices. It is both conscious and non-conscious, in that it exists on what current theorists call a tacit-implicit level as well as explicit, verbal level. [13] p.47

Adler refers to these developments as one's style of life, which involves myriad concepts, including:

> individuality and individual forms of creativity, ways in which we solve life's problems, our own attitudes towards life, ways in which we compensate for inferiorities, what life means to us, our entire unitary personality, our goals and means of achieving them, opinions we have of ourselves and others, ways in which we fulfil

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[13] Mozak, H.H., & Maniacci, M.P., *A Primer of Adlerian Psychology*. New York : Brunner-Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 1999.

our strivings for superiority and social interest, and expressions of our entire personality. [14] p.57

We are suggesting then that knowing oneself, at this level, is a necessary first step in creating the vision of the institution and defining its philosophy of education, but it is also the fuel that will guide decision making, establish relationships and ensure that the institution is a healthy, thriving entity within the community, capable of moulding healthy individuals who will become tomorrow's leaders, global citizens with a commitment to serving humanity.

Personal Leadership Identity

Within this personality framework, we must identify clearly our principles and values, knowing very well which are absolutely non-negotiable. Once defined, these are the fixed guides that point us in the direction of achieving our vision. By principles, we refer to specific ways of behaving; a general way of conducting ourselves. Values are best described by Eyre and Eyre (1993) as "the standards of our actions and the attitudes of our hearts and minds that shape who we are, how we live, and how we treat other people." [15] (p.15)

Next, we must also clearly define our professional goals through a similar process of self-reflection and revision: where do we want life to take us, and how can we participate in this co-creative process? These are the questions a leader must continuously ask in order to revise, fine-tune and refine his/her leadership approach. Finally, as the last step in establishing a leadership identity, the leader must clearly identify his/her personal goals, adopting a holistic approach to life and leadership by ensuring that personal and professional goals align and do not conflict with or undermine one another.

Thus, rather than promote the adoption of a particular "leadership style," we suggest that in order to identify one's leadership approach the leader delves deeply into uncovering the style that has evolved from his/her personal characteristics and experiences, as well as from the meaning he/she has attributed to them. Only then can he/she understand the personal blueprint he/she has designed for approaching life and become comfortable within a leadership style that has evolved from the sum of who he/she is.

In the process of defining his/her authentic leadership identity, the leader models the process of growth and development through which he/she guides the institution he/she leads. The process becomes both and individual and an institutional imperative, and the process of becoming a school leader defined by the Morfosis paradigm gains validity because it is reflective of the process of teaching and learning that we seek to foster. Once again, the metaphor of the fractal and its central principle of self-similarity, with which this discussion began, provide us with a helpful image for understanding this approach.

2. Creating a Collective Leadership- Partnership Approach

Previously, we have discussed the centrality of developing agreeable partnerships across the institution as an important responsibility of the leader. We believe that the leader must begin this process by implementing a leadership - partnership approach with his or her leadership team, whom the leader has identified as belonging to the group of "early

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[14] Lundin, Robert W. *Alfred Adler's. Basic Concepts and Implications*, 1989. Accelerated Development inc. Levittown, PA

[15] Eyre, Linda and Rich, *Teaching your Children Values,* 1993. Simon and Shuster, New York, New York, p. 15.

adapters,"[16], open to the possibilities of radical change. Establishing such a leadership partnership is itself a journey of self- and group exploration, growth and development that includes the following stages:

- Establishing a partnership based on common principles and values, and complimentary personal and professional goals in life;
- Distributing authority and decision making;
- Outlining clearly the type, magnitude and areas of authority;
- Supporting and encouraging team members in using their decision making authority;
- Reflecting continuously on the partnership in order to adjust the distribution of ownership of decision making;
- Motivating members of the leadership team to reproduce this model in their work with members of their own teams;
- Fostering the same model of collaborative leadership in the classroom to empower students to pursue the kind of learning necessary to develop the intellectual, social and moral autonomy we have defined as essential 21st century human skills.

Partnerships and collaborations ensure that there are checks and balances, that other individuals participate in the decision making process and that there is a comprehensive support system in place to ensure that the institution thrives and functions at the highest possible level of achievement. They also create a greater pool of knowledge, experience, expertise, questions, ways of knowing and approaches to problem solving that make the sum greater than the individual parts. It is crucial that all members of the leadership partnership share a belief in the institutional vision and are committed to striving towards reaching common goals.

To assure the most meaningful and far-reaching collaboration, the team members must also share, for the most part, similar principles and values. Each member must also engage in the process of identifying and clarifying his/her own personal and professional goals to ensure that these do not conflict with one another or with the institutional goals. This educational team consists of various leaders within the institution, each with clearly exhibited expertise in his/her area of operations and each with a clearly defined scope of authority, including the school's principals and directors of special programs (at ACS Athens these include Student Affairs, Learning Enhancement Programs, Athletics, Innovation and Creativity, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement, Finance, Human Resources and Admissions, Communications and Technology). Authority and decision-making are distributed among the team members, not necessarily equally or in a fixed way at all times. Authority and decision making, while for the most part well defined, will entail a degree of flexibility according to the changing needs of the institution, current circumstances and to individual capabilities of the team members.

The leader provides opportunities for members to exercise their authority and ensures their success by offering support and encouragement at all times. Finally, the leader and team members reflect on the partnership continuously in order to make adjustments as necessary to accommodate the range of institutional needs. As this process evolves, the role of the institutional leader also evolves. The leader who began as the chief director and instigator of change and decision-making becomes instead a mentor to the members of the team (individually and collectively) and a facilitator of their work as they engage in the process of institutional transformation.

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[16] Gialamas, S. and Pelonis, P., "Connecting with College Education: A Holistic Approach", *International School Journal*, Spring/Autumn 2009, Vol. 11(2), pp. 22-23.

Conclusion

Morfosis leadership assumes a holistic, meaningful and harmonious approach to leading (and learning). It places human beings at the core of the institution and takes care to help members identify personal and professional goals in order to align these, where possible, with the institutional vision.   Morfosis leadership requires team members to work collaboratively, among themselves, as well as with the institutional leader and with their own working teams in order to ensure that the institution remains on its trajectory as defined by its mission and the leadership vision. The interaction of team members as equals when undertaking projects ensures that there are checks and balances built into the process of achieving goals as well as safeguards against making grave mistakes. Mutual support among team members ensures that energy levels remain high and performance optimal. The replication of this approach in the work of team leaders with the members of their own teams assures that the transformation penetrates all "neighborhoods" in the institution.

In the end, when the model works, all levels of the organization reflect the same core principles about what meaningful relationships are that promote real learning and growth. We can't educate future leaders if the model of leadership we are promoting is not embedded in every level of institutional practice. Thus, a working meeting of school leaders, or a faculty meeting, or a department meeting shouldn't look much different from the kind of classroom learning environment that we want to promote.

We have come full circle to the metaphor of the fractal with which we began.

Thus, Morfosis leadership is a special kind of leadership *approach*, which transforms institutional thinking and its methods of teaching and learning in dynamic ways. Leading institutions toward this type of transformation goes beyond the changes often required with the implementation of new programs or with the coming of new administrators; it underscores change at the cellular level of the institution, where every cell (individual) adopts and integrates the change, transforming the very core of the institution. Outwardly, the outcome may have little in common with the beginning phase, yet the process is one of continuous development, evolution and modification. Much like a butterfly evolving from its chrysalis -- which shares the DNA of the caterpillar it was -- the institution, grounded in fundamental principles and values, is transformed and ready to fly toward desired directions.

 In this sense, metamorphosis has been accomplished.

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