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Leading from the Inside-Out: Tools and New Success Metrics for Managing Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

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Conceptual

**Leading from the Inside-Out:
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69670/mje.2.1.1><https://www.williamwoods.edu/academics/mje>**Jaime E. Welbourn, Ph.D.
Will Darter, Ed.D.****Abstract**

Leadership is a prized attribute that is the highly sought-after cornerstone of success. High-achieving leaders often struggle with imposter syndrome and perfectionism, which present conflict and challenges for leaders. This conflict can hinder one's ability to lead others and reach their full potential as a leader by impacting mental health, relationships, organizational outcomes, growth, happiness, and career satisfaction. By redefining success metrics, leaders can move from stress, fear, unworthiness, and isolation to a new path encompassing self-awareness, personal growth, authenticity, sincerity, grace, peace, and humility. These metrics can be redefined by shifting leaders' paradigms using reflection, dialogue, and action to examine, challenge, and change outcomes caused by the internal conflict of integrated imposter syndrome and perfectionism. Ultimately, the concept of high achievers developing new habits using a culturally proficient, inside-out approach to overcome imposter syndrome and achievement-driven perfectionism offers a blueprint for becoming one's best leadership self. The ability to foster lasting impact through meaningful relationships, cultural awareness, and a commitment to lifelong learning positions leaders to bust the myth of perfect leadership and flourish personally and professionally while multiplying their influence on others.

Keywords

Imposter Syndrome, Cultural Proficient, Perfectionism

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Introduction

High-achieving leaders often exude characteristics of confidence, hard work, and perseverance. In their pursuit of achievement and success, they inspire others to greatness, setting a clear path for what to do and how to do it to be exemplary (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Covey et al., 2022; Duckworth, 2016; Moss & Ritossa, 2007; Searle & Hanrahan, 2011). Followers often pay close attention to high-achieving leaders' behaviors. Using a transformational leadership style, leaders inspire and motivate followers to exceed their self-interest for the organization's good (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2022). These leaders are visionaries in that they see the big picture, set goals, and through discipline and consistency, take actions that lead to their success. Petersen and Seligman (2004) argued that transformational leadership influences others through inspiration, motivation, and empowerment.

While many positive traits and behaviors lead to an individual's success, many might not notice that on the inside, because of the myriads of motivation, the work ethic of high-achieving leaders is laden with self-doubt and pressure to succeed (Harris, 2011; Kets de Vries, 2005). Although many operate under the theory of self-determination, an ideal that human motivation is driven by the fulfillment of the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 1985), high-achieving leaders often struggle with imposter syndrome and perfectionism, which present conflict and challenges for a leader's success (Pannhausen et al., 2022). This conflict can hinder one's ability to lead others and reach their full potential as a leader. At its core, imposter syndrome and perfectionism can become so invasive in one's thoughts that they derail success and affect the overall achievement and well-being of the leader.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter Syndrome is a psychological condition affecting leaders by causing the individual to ignore successes and achievements and persevere with doubt and fear that others will 'find out.' Clance (1985) characterized an *impostor* as having a superwoman/superman complex, self-imposed high-performance demands, and someone who overworks to make up for the so-called deficiencies. High-achieving leaders who experience imposter syndrome often have self-doubt, forcing them into thoughts and behaviors that question their abilities and achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978). In their initial research with women leaders, Clance and Imes (1978) discovered this phenomenon of imposter syndrome as the participants claimed their success was due to excessive hard work and/or fortunate situations, not their abilities. Ménard and Chittle (2022), in their review of literature, highlighted additional features such as the inability to relish successful outcomes due to a focus on their lack of intelligence, claims that success has been achieved in error, and the inability to accept compliments or congratulatory offerings. Further, characteristics such as feeling overwhelmed and focusing on failure or unattained goals have been linked by research to perfectionism with characteristics of critical self-assessment and high-performance standards (Clance & Imes, 1985; Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost et al. 1990; Pannhausen et al., 2022). Recent research has identified that these feelings of inadequacy exist across cultural groups identified by gender, race, ethnicity, age, and social class groups (Bravata et al., 2019; Harvey & Katz, 1985).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a personality construct that can create unrealistic expectations for high-achieving leaders. Hewitt and Flett (1991) defined *perfectionism* as a multidimensional personality trait characterized by excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations. Driven by a fear of failure, perfectionism manifests in leaders' personalities in three ways: *self-oriented perfectionism*, where leaders excessively strive and demand absolute perfection from self; *other-oriented perfectionism*, where leaders demand perfection from other people; and *socially prescribed perfectionism*, based on the perception that other people demand perfection from oneself (Flett & Hewitt, 2005). In recent decades, research has highlighted perfectionism's positive and negative aspects as a function of high-achieving leaders. Some of the negative aspects of perfectionism that have led scholars to believe it to be a maladaptive issue include self-defeating outcomes, unhealthy patterns in behavior, anxiety or worry about the reactions of the audience, difficulty concentrating, and low self-esteem (Flett & Hewitt, 2005; Frost & Henderson, 1991; Koivula, Hassme'n, & Fallby, 2002). Further, Gotwals, Dunn, and Wayment (2003) provided evidence of the negative aspects of excessive concern over mistakes, connecting perfectionism to imposter syndrome regarding rating their competence as low, being overly concerned about their mistakes, and doubting their actions. Recent research has highlighted the effects of perfectionism across gender, age, and socioeconomic statuses (Thakur et al., 2024).

The Case for Building a Mindset to Overcome Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

For high-achieving leaders to lead themselves and others in ways that fulfill their potential and support their well-being, they must use tools and new metrics to overcome the barriers caused by imposter syndrome and perfectionism. An inside-out approach includes the use of a theoretical based framework focused on mindset and action around culture. The term *culture*, as used in this conceptual paper, is most aligned with a definition provided by Lindsey et al. (2019), "everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you" (p. 29). The Conceptual Framework of Culturally Proficient Practice is a set of interrelated tools that allow effective cross-cultural communication among diverse groups (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022).

Using Cultural Proficiency, a mindset, allows relationships to flourish for the purpose they exist (Welborn, 2024). In this context, the reference to relationships and linkage to the barriers of imposter syndrome and perfectionism in a leader's mind is two-fold: the leader's relationship with self and the leader's relationship with others. To simplify, imposter syndrome and perfectionism can be metaphorically seen as "a person different from you," who causes internal conflict with self and external conflict with others. One form of conflict arises internally through relationships and their associated communication, as perfectionism and imposter syndrome create negative, adverse effects for leaders through demeaning thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about oneself. A second implication is that leaders work with others whose thoughts and behaviors may differ significantly, often stemming from the psychological conditions of imposter syndrome and perfectionism.

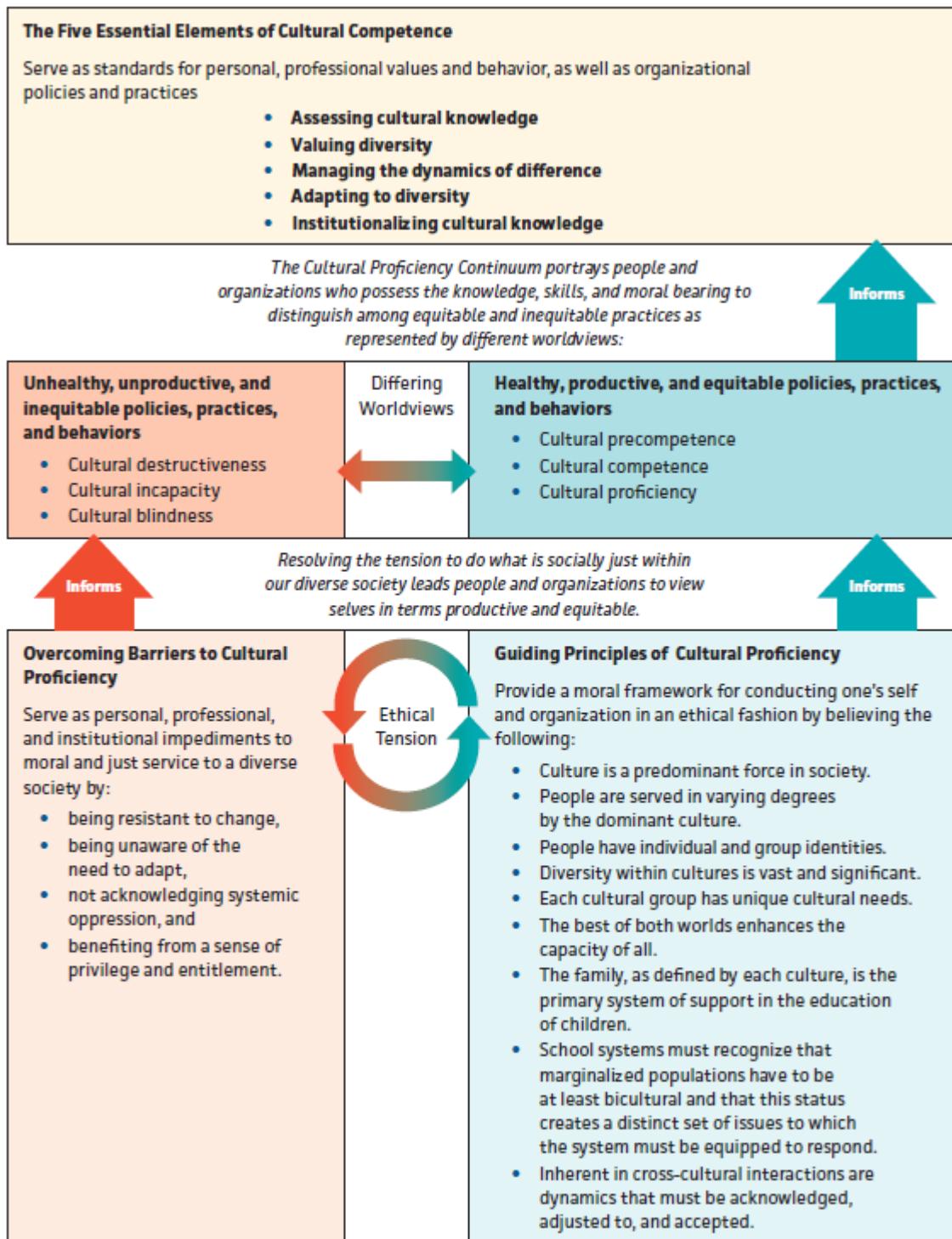
Differences in thought and behavior, informed by notions of imposter syndrome and perfectionism, can cause conflict, placing unrealistic expectations on self and others. Without the ability to manage imposter syndrome and perfectionism, it can be difficult to work with others from different cultural groups. This conceptual paper uses the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to integrate a guide for assessing one's mindset, thoughts, and behaviors, confronting the myth of perfect leadership, and overcoming the barriers caused by perfectionism and imposter syndrome by developing and committing to actions. Understanding the impact of imposter syndrome and perfectionism on effective leadership can shield leaders from the associated pitfalls, causing them to lead others with new metrics of hope, love, peace, joy, and inspiring growth and change in thought, behavior, and outcome.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Proficiency, at its core, is a mindset and inside-out approach to the personal values and behaviors of individuals and the organization's policies and practices that provide opportunities for interactions among students, educators, and community members (Lindsey et al., 2010). Further, because of its transformative nature, the tools allow individuals to change those values and behaviors, opening doors for increasingly positive, healthy, and successful outcomes (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). Literature suggests that beginning with the self is essential for change (Dewey, 1938; Dilts, 1990). Applying this inside-out approach to change for leaders challenged by imposter syndrome and perfectionism allows us to see that imposter syndrome and perfectionism are the "other person" or "other setting." These psychological conditions challenge success, happiness, and career satisfaction, leading to internal tension. A new path is needed to overcome this tension and bust the myth of perfect leadership.

The new path includes specific use of the four Tools of Cultural Proficiency. This mindset, developed by using the RDA (Reflection, Dialogue, Action) Process, allows leaders to confront the barriers and challenges of imposter syndrome and perfectionism to self-identify areas of growth using one tool - *The Cultural Proficiency Continuum* and plan for change using another tool – *The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency*. Figure 1 illustrates the Cultural Proficiency Framework (Welborn et al., 2022, p. 9).

To explain in terms of examining one's values and behaviors for the purpose of abandoning success metrics as a leader associated with perfectionism and imposter syndrome, the left side of the Framework includes the *Barriers to Cultural Proficiency*, which inform the left side of the *Continuum*. In this tool, leaders can determine if current values and behaviors are culturally destructive, culturally incapacitating, or culturally blind. Once these impediments are identified, educators can rely on the culturally competent beliefs about themselves, also known as the *Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*, highlighted in the green box to transform the negative and unhealthy values and behaviors.

Figure 1*Cultural Proficiency Framework*

Source: Adapted from R. B. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell (2009, p. 60).

Leadership: Myths, Metrics, and Methods

High-Achieving Leadership: The Myth of Perfect Leadership

High-achieving educational leaders often function with the idea of perfection. Too often, many educators and building and district leaders hold onto the vision of being a “perfect leader.” This idea of perfectionism is frequently shaped by hiding from embarrassment and coupling insecurity with unrealistic expectations to pursue flawlessness in systems, structures, and districts (Harburg, 2020). While pursuing excellence is honorable and noble, being driven into perfectionism ultimately stifles leadership capacity and effectiveness (Jackson, 2018). The real work of a leader is not only to learn for the sake of gaining competency but to address imposter syndrome and perfectionism (He & Wei, 2022) deeply rooted in how the business of school is run from the central administrative office to the classroom, the bus routes to the field of competition.

The allure of perfectionism to a leader is that they will be bulletproof against criticism and negativity and make flawless decisions by looking into every possible outcome, all while delivering picture-perfect results and protecting themselves in a confident demeanor. Finklestein and Chakrabarti (2022) described this concept as how “High Potential Leaders” (HIPO Leaders) often stop themselves from success. While being confident and perfect is usually perceived as admirable, this type of leadership does not work in the reality of uncontrollable variables, outside factors, and human nature at work. Leaders who are hindered by perfectionism often fall short of their true abilities and the abilities of their team (Stoll et al., 2022). The metric of perfectionism often leads to the belief that the leader is all-knowing and all-capable. This standard leads to burnout, self-destruction, and a lack of effectiveness (Fernandez et al., 2022) beyond the transactional level of positional leadership (De La Torre, 2022). At the core of perfectionism is fear, not courage or strength; it is the need for the approval of others rather than the leader’s focus on the impact of their decisions and the care of those around them (De La Torre, 2022).

The result of perfectionism is often coupled with a leader’s need to be *enough*, to not be behind others, and a comparison of competency (Jackson, 2018). In short, imposter syndrome is a strong sense of inadequacy, the doubt of a leader’s abilities, and a fear of being exposed as a fraud. In educational leadership, leaders are often expected to be perfect and are measured by metrics such as their continuous ability to deliver outcomes at ever-increasing performance standards, beyond their leadership capacity (Jackson, 2018).

A leader’s decisions and actions can create a culture of imposter syndrome that infiltrates the system and culture (Ménard & Chittle, 2023). The contrast between a leader and their perceived polished image of success at all times can hinder the actual effectiveness of the metrics that matter. Educational leaders who do not address perfectionism and imposter syndrome fail to recognize their impact on others in their building and district, even affecting students. When leaders live by personal or perceived expectations of performance and perfectionism, trust, creativity, and morale erode within their leadership capacity, school culture, and community (Ménard & Chittle, 2023).

Impactful Leadership: Choosing Better Leadership Metrics

Instead of facilitating an organizational culture that leads to mistrust, fear, loneliness, and busyness, leaders can create a culture of hope, peace, and joy by doing the work required of a leader to address these old metrics and establish new ones (Jackson, 2018). Leaders enter the field believing they can make a difference, instill hope, and inspire joy in the lives of those they lead (Rao, 2013). However, along the way, leaders are often tempted by the allure of positional leadership and accomplishment, sacrificing the things they value (Sanders, 2014).

New success metrics for education leadership today are not about status, how much money one makes, or position, which has been too often the measure of success and is the fuel to perfectionism. In the end, new metrics are deeply rooted in the self of each leader and the values they possess and live by to influence others (Otto et al., 2021). The work of the self is the work of the organization. Utilizing tools is critical to this work and the process of discovery, adventure, and joy in a leader's learning to overcome perfectionism.

Many leadership models are based on a leader's charisma, accomplishments, and skills. While these competencies are necessary, they will inspire success for a short period when seen as the primary qualifier for leadership duplication (Otto et al., 2021). Under traditional leadership metrics, a perfectionist leader's impact, while initially positive, can result in short-lasting tenures, a negative perspective on that leader by others in the organization, and does not last past the leader's time within a system (Zhao & Huang, 2025). Further, the metrics of perfectionism and imposter syndrome fail to call forth new leaders from diverse backgrounds to move school districts forward to help the learning of students into the necessities of the demands of a community (Otto et al., 2021).

As a leader, the duplication of leadership or the multiplying of oneself is just as critical as doing the work of a leader in any organization (Azad et al., 2017), especially in education. This requires a leader to process their thoughts, feelings, and emotions through the lens of Cultural Proficiency. Self-reflection and multiplication of leadership require inside-out self-leadership to identify key metrics to pass on to new leaders (Knotts et al., 2022). This model requires a person-centered focus over quick development practices. This is even more important in a culture where educational leaders leave the field at alarming rates (2022).

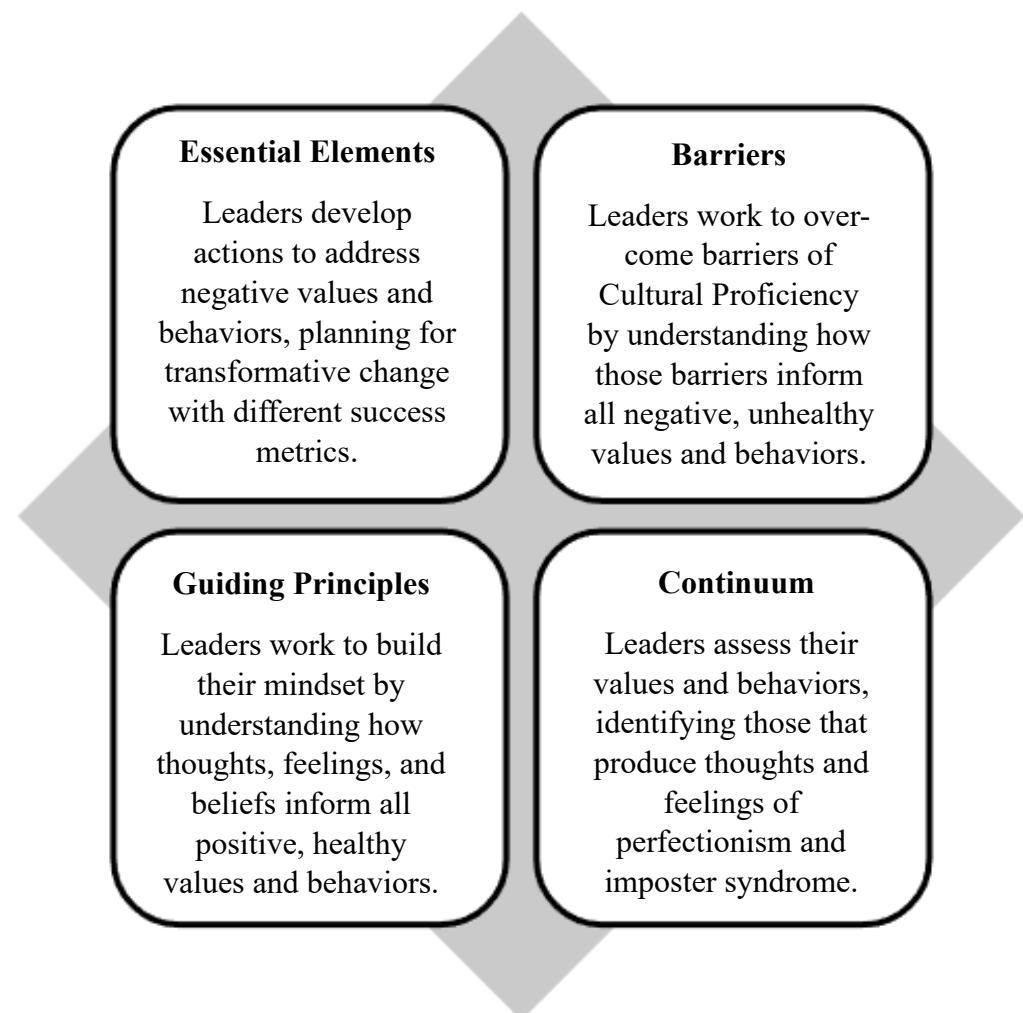
The metrics of hope, peace, love, acceptance, and joy are counter-cultural to the demands of perfectionist leadership (Otto et al., 2021). Some of these values can be identified and lived out immediately; however, the leader must often wrestle with their own perfectionism and imposter syndrome to discover these values and experience them in meaningful ways before they can be adopted to one's leadership practice (2021). These metrics are then used to develop the protégé, not just expanding one's achievement. The sequence required to pass on leadership metrics using the Cultural Proficiency Framework is about the protégé, their growth into experiencing more hope, peace, love, and joy in their lives in all roles and leadership (Welborn et al., 2022).

Culturally Proficient Leadership: An Inside-Out Approach to Leadership

Culturally proficient leadership is grounded in the belief that effective leaders in cross-cultural settings understand their assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding people and cultures different from their own (Terrell et al., 2018). These leaders rely on the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency, a set of four interrelated tools designed to acknowledge and assess behaviors and values of individuals that have impact, either positive or negative, on those who engage with the leaders (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). As mentioned, this is done by designing a plan with five specific actions using the *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency*. Figure 2 summarizes how leaders can use each of the tools to transform their mindset and break through the barriers and challenges impeding their success, impact, happiness, and overall career satisfaction. Cultural Proficiency is a core competency of personal growth and leading others.

Figure 2

Tools of Cultural Proficiency to Overcome Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism



New Habits for High Achievers

One thing to be said about the habits of high achievers: they typically make to-do lists to reach ultimate goals and check those actions off for self-actualization, characterized by personal growth and achieving one's full potential. Self-actualization, rooted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, posits a theory of motivation (1943). The five goals of motivation and basic needs include physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. When any of the five unmet needs, along with perfectionism and imposter syndrome, invade highly successful leaders' mindsets, they contribute to self-doubt, high levels of self-criticism, and, ultimately, the fear of failure.

Developing new habits centered on core values is propelled by a mindset of cultural competence in working with others. A new list can be created; goals can still be achieved, but the actions become more in line with opening the door from other perspectives around self and leading others. In other words, new thoughts become new habits. Habits produce the most effective leadership. The *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency* serve as five actions high-achieving leaders can take to amplify leadership from good to great. Before taking action, leaders must learn how to assess their thoughts and behaviors associated with imposter syndrome and perfectionism. Table 1 includes a continuum for assessing one's cultural competency toward imposter syndrome. Table 2 includes a continuum for assessing one's cultural competency regarding perfectionism. Both tables can allow leaders to reflect on the impact of their internal dialogue. The tables are arranged from cultural destructiveness (most harmful) to culturally proficient (most healthy/beneficial to self and others).

Table 1

Cultural Competency Towards Imposter Syndrome Continuum

Continuum Level	A Leader's Internal Dialogue
Cultural Destructiveness <i>Eliminate</i>	<i>I do not have what it takes to be in this leadership position. I should just quit before someone finds out I am a fraud.</i>
Cultural Incapacity <i>Wrong</i>	<i>I have never been cut out for this leadership role. There are many other people who are better leaders than I am because of their knowledge and skills.</i>
Cultural Blindness <i>Pretend</i>	<i>Everyone doubts themselves at one point or another; I just need to be stronger, and this feeling of being a leadership imposter will go away.</i>
Cultural Precompetence <i>Begin to know</i>	<i>I know imposter syndrome is a real thing, but maybe it is all in my head. I should find a leader who can mentor me.</i>
Cultural Competence <i>Change</i>	<i>Through deep reflection, I recognize that my imposter syndrome is shaped by past experiences, not just my competency and ability to lead others.</i>
Cultural Proficiency <i>Advocate</i>	<i>I belong here as a leader to help others with imposter syndrome by naming my own self-doubt, becoming aware of practices and behaviors that create it, and supporting others so they do not feel the same feeling of acting as a fraud.</i>

Table 2*Cultural Competency Towards Perfectionism Continuum*

Continuum Level	<i>Leader's Internal Dialogue</i>
Cultural Destructiveness <i>Eliminate</i>	<i>If my leadership decisions are imperfect, I should be removed from this position. I am embarrassed to the organization's stakeholders.</i>
Cultural Incapacity <i>Wrong</i>	<i>I will never be as polished or confident as others in leadership positions. I am one mistake away from people realizing I should not be in this position.</i>
Cultural Blindness <i>Pretend</i>	<i>Everyone wants to be perfect and excel. If I work harder and push through these feelings, everything will turn out fine.</i>
Cultural Precompetence <i>Begin to know</i>	<i>I know my desire to be perfect is hindering my progress as a leader, but I do not think I can relinquish the high standards I have for myself. I must keep focusing on the big picture and balance thoughts and behaviors towards my work as a leader.</i>
Cultural Competence <i>Change</i>	<i>I recognize that my perfectionism is driven by internalized expectations and external pressures. When I recognize I am being overly critical in self-evaluation, I remind myself to strive for excellence without hard criticism.</i>
Cultural Proficiency <i>Advocate</i>	<i>As a leader, I will challenge the systems that create unrealistic expectations in the organization, model self-compassion for myself, and help others see that imperfection can be really beneficial to our personal and professional growth.</i>

Essential Elements of Culturally Proficient Leadership

The *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency* were developed as an action-based approach to managing the dynamics of difference and adapting to diversity. In 1989, Cross and his colleagues investigated the degree to which minority children with severe intellectual disabilities were provided with adequate mental health care and social work services. Cross et al. (1989) developed five actions that could be used to open people's minds and change behaviors around deficit-based practice. Just as these actions were developed in social work and have been used across various career-related fields, including education, leaders can use these actions to develop new habits, change their mindsets to overcome the barriers presented by imposter syndrome and perfectionism, and to navigate spaces with clarity in leading others towards success by becoming the best leader they can be. Each new habit is defined with self-reflection, as imposter syndrome and perfectionism serve as the "other culture," and influence followers in the environment who

are guided by the leader.

Assess the Culture of Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

Assessing cultural knowledge, one of the Essential Elements vital for culturally competent leadership, requires leaders to examine their thoughts and behaviors while identifying and learning about the differences among the people in their environment. This habit intends to bring an awareness of differences in organizational and individual culture and behavior compared to their own (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). For high-achieving leaders who struggle with perfectionism and imposter syndrome, this habit can aid in recognizing how internal pressure to succeed, or be perfect, shapes how leaders view and communicate with others. Leaders must deliberately engage in reflection and dialogic processes to understand how their work habits, expectations, and self-perceptions impact their success, well-being, and the individuals they lead.

Developing this habit begins with the inside-out approach of assessing leaders' own cultural knowledge, recognizing how perfectionism and imposter syndrome shape behaviors and impact the diverse individuals within their environment. It is essential for leaders to reflect on how their beliefs about success and failure shape their expectations of self and others and their perceptions of their behaviors and those of others. Engaging in this inside-out approach to leadership can help leaders better understand how their behaviors impact others in the organization. By assessing cultural knowledge of their values, thoughts, and behaviors and those of their teams, leaders can mitigate the negative effects or unhealthy impacts of perfectionism and imposter syndrome, enhancing personal and organizational success and well-being. Table 3 includes new habits for high-achieving leaders to shed perfectionism and silence imposter syndrome.

Table 3

Key Habits for High-Achieving Leaders – Assess

1. Reflect and discuss imposter syndrome and perfectionism with others.
2. Set goals with an indication of perfect achievement and completion.
3. Seek diverse perspectives on work, competence, decisions, and products.
4. Focus on continuous learning regarding how norms, standards, and behaviors differ across cultural groups (i.e. gender, race/ethnicity, social class, age).

Value Diversity in Behavior and Thought Regarding Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

Valuing diversity is another new habit that leaders, who have tendencies toward perfectionism and are hindered by imposter syndrome, can develop to use new metrics of high achievement, success, and well-being, while effectively leading others. Valuing diversity, an Essential

Elements of Cultural Proficiency, centers embracing the differences as an integral contribution to the value of the environment (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). For high achievers laden with thoughts and behaviors associated with perfectionism and imposter syndrome, this habit can contribute to overcoming internal pressures to be flawless and evaluations with extensive self-criticism or criticism of others.

Developing this habit of valuing diversity can increase leaders' efficacy by noticing some of the negative thoughts and behaviors related to perfectionism and imposter syndrome in others and discovering ways to value those behaviors, not only in themselves, but with others. Valuing diversity, in its simplest form, is developing an appreciation for the differences between people on a team working to reach a certain goal. That same appreciation and grace must be given to oneself, especially when perfectionism or attention to detail can lead to success and achievement. Acknowledging it is not wrong to be less than perfect; there is value in less than perfect, allows us to give our own selves grace. By valuing diversity, leaders can balance perfectionism by appreciating differences, recognizing diverse strengths, and embracing varied perspectives for collective success. Table 4 includes new key habits for high-achieving leaders to shed perfectionism and silence imposter syndrome.

Table 4*Key Habits for High-Achieving Leaders – Value*

1. Name your strengths instead of focusing on imperfections.
2. Celebrate the quick wins with progress over perfection.
3. Practice self-appreciation and patience.
4. Give self-compassion and grace with metrics of hope, love, joy, and peace.

Manage the Dynamics of Differences Caused by Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

All leaders must be able to manage the dynamics of difference, which serves as one of the five Essential Elements or actions for change based upon the culture of perfectionism and imposter syndrome. Managing the dynamics of difference requires leaders to reframe diversity as an asset, navigate perfectionism and imposter syndrome, and foster growth through constructive feedback and relationship-building (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022).

When leaders lead others in an organization, it is essential to have the ability to reframe differences so that diversity is not perceived as a problem to be solved. An effective leader learns how to

respond appropriately and effectively to issues that can arise in a diverse environment caused by perfectionism or imposter syndrome. Part of managing the dynamics of difference for a leader is also learning to effectively use strategies for resolving conflict, particularly among people whose cultural backgrounds and values differ. Part of being a leader with ourselves is managing when our mindset tells us that we are not good enough or that we have to be perfect before we put any of our work out in front of others. Developing that new habit of managing the dynamics of difference can help leaders effectively engage with others and promote success and well-being from within. Table 5 includes new key habits for high-achieving leaders to shed perfectionism and silence imposter syndrome.

Table 5

Key Habits for High-Achieving Leaders – Manage

1. Normalize a finished product over a perfect product.
2. Challenge self-doubting thoughts and behaviors.
3. View every opportunity as a growth opportunity.
4. Disrupt self-talk rooted in imposter syndrome and respond with positive self-affirmations.

Adapt to Diverse Behaviors Caused by Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

A fourth new habit that leaders with perfectionism and imposter syndrome can develop to continue their high achievement and increase their efficacy in leading others is to adapt to diversity. The keyword for adapting to diversity is change (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). Change in this case refers to changing the narrative about self or changing the systems to ensure healthy and effective responses to diverse thoughts and behaviors associated with perfectionism and imposter syndrome.

Stakeholders in an organization will inevitably exhibit diversity in how they work, their behaviors, and their expectations. It is important to constantly grow and change practices and behaviors to adapt to the diversity within any setting. Adapting to diversity requires leaders to embrace change, refine policies and practices, develop intercultural communication skills, and institutionalize inclusive strategies supporting diverse work styles and perspectives. Table 6 includes new key habits for high-achieving leaders to shed perfectionism and silence imposter syndrome.

Table 6*Key Habits for High Achieving Leaders – Adapt*

1. Embrace flexibility in work completion, not being perfect.
2. Think about change as growth.
3. Move from harsh criticism of self and others to curiosity towards growth.
4. Try one new approach that provides a sense of hope, love, joy, and peace.

Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge About Effects of Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism

The last Essential Element of Cultural Proficiency is *institutionalizing cultural knowledge*. This action-based habit involves teaching and learning about differences and how to respond effectively (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). When perfectionism and thoughts of imposter syndrome are exhibited through our behaviors, leaders can be effective in building the capacity of others to overcome their sense of perfectionism and imposter syndrome that hinders their success as leaders. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge is about advocating for awareness around diversity, how we present ourselves as leaders, and showcasing that in our work.

Leaders who develop this habit of institutionalizing cultural knowledge successfully drive the changes into an organization's system. Knowing that culturally, we all approach work in different ways, we can also drive changes into our systems as individual leaders by being okay with being okay. Incorporating cultural knowledge about imposter syndrome and perfectionism into the organization's mainstream can also help build the capacity of others called to be leaders within the organization, which ultimately supports a leader's ability to lead others. Remembering to integrate the system's information and skills will enable all to interact effectively in various intercultural situations concerning perfectionism and imposter syndrome, which is also important.

Leaders who cultivate this habit successfully embed cultural knowledge into the fabric of an organization, driving systemic change. Recognizing that individuals approach work differently based on cultural influences, leaders can foster change by embracing imperfection and normalizing growth. Integrating discussions of imposter syndrome and perfectionism into organizational culture strengthens leadership capacity and supports emerging leaders. Table 7 includes new key habits for high-achieving leaders to shed perfectionism and silence imposter syndrome.

Table 7*Key Habits for High-Achieving Leaders – Institutionalize*

1. Journal about your growth around imposter syndrome and perfectionism.
2. Create lifelong learning opportunities for others to overcome imposter syndrome and perfectionism.
3. Set up mentoring groups regarding imposter syndrome and perfectionism.
4. Embed awareness regarding the culture of imposter syndrome and perfectionism, and how it is exhibited and viewed by various cultural groups.
5. Advocate for success metrics of peace, love, joy, and hope.

Developing new key habits is transformative for high-achieving leaders who focus on the Essential Elements of culturally competent leadership. Intentionality around assessing, valuing, managing, adapting, and institutionalizing differences in behavior related to imposter syndrome and perfectionism can open doors to success as a leader, both personally and professionally. Table 8 provides reflection and dialogic questions to support developing new habits and leading others with the self-actualization of hope, peace, love, and joy.

Table 8*Reflection and Dialogic Questions for Developing New Habits for High-Achieving Leaders*

Assessing Cultural Knowledge

- What is the “culture” of imposter syndrome and perfectionism, and how does it impact me? How does my mind impact my behavior?
- What behaviors do I display, and how do they impact my mind?
- How does my mind and behavior around imposter syndrome and perfectionism impact those I lead?

Valuing Diversity

- How do I show value for myself and others when imposter syndrome and perfectionism enter my mind and affect my behaviors?
- In what ways can I focus on my strengths?
- How do I show myself grace?

Managing the Dynamics of Difference

- How do my tendencies toward imposter syndrome or perfectionism impact my ability to acknowledge and value diverse perspectives within my team?
- What strategies can I implement to balance high standards with fostering an inclusive environment where my team and I feel empowered to take risks and grow?

Adapting to Diversity

- What do I tell myself when the thoughts creep in?
- How do I change my behaviors?

Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge

- How can I help others who are working through self-doubt?
- In what ways can I engage in lifelong learning to overcome the barriers due to imposter syndrome and perfectionism?

Conclusion

Effective leaders recognize the need for self-awareness and a strong commitment to addressing their own perfectionism and imposter syndrome. These leaders understand that without addressing their thoughts and behaviors, the confidence and ability to lead others, especially those with different cultural norms and standards, diminishes. Ultimately, the ability of a leader to address their own perfectionism and imposter syndrome is less about simply unleashing their potential but also the potential of the organization, school building, and district.

By utilizing the *Cultural Proficiency Continuum* for reflection and the *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency* as an action-based process, leaders can actively dismantle their limitations and foster inclusive school learning environments rooted in pursuing long-term meaningful change. These tools provide praxis for educational leaders to rely on new habits and metrics for success. However, it must be noted that the effectiveness of the *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency* may be limited by the need for leaders' deep reflection on individualized self-awareness. Future research should explore school leaders' lived experiences and/or perceptions of how these action-based Essential Elements have supported self-reflection and awareness for managing the impact of conflict caused by imposter syndrome and perfectionism.

A leader's job is to build stronger communities and cultures that inspire the fullness of life through body, mind, and spirit. The technical work of developing these environments is the leader's job. Through an inside-out approach, high-achieving leaders can manage the challenges of imposter syndrome and perfectionism by developing new habits and working with others to sustain meaningful, life-changing, and life-long transformation.

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