

MBA LAB RESEARCH

Transformative Leadership at VCU

A research-based analysis of the Executive MBA and Institute for Transformative
Leadership

Independent research report prepared for MBA Lab. Research cutoff: July
28, 2026.

Primary audience: executives, MBA students, leadership-development
professionals, and organizational leaders.

Prepared as independent analysis. MBA Lab is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or
an official representative of Virginia Commonwealth University. The 2026-27
VCU Bulletin was still labeled preliminary as of the research cutoff; this report
identifies that status wherever the bulletin is used.

2. Executive summary

VCU uses transformative leadership as an applied, human-centered approach to executive development rather than as a simple synonym for transformational leadership. Official Institute materials begin with caring and compassionate relationships, then align feedback, planning, difficult conversations, and change execution through what VCU calls compassionate accountability. The current Executive MBA makes the approach concrete through a three-course sequence: FMBA 620 develops self-awareness, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, authenticity, communication, values, and relationships; FMBA 621 applies those capabilities to performance, teams, coaching, conflict, ethics, psychological safety, and culture; FMBA 622 extends them to strategy, change, crisis, resilience, innovation, belonging, systems thinking, and lasting organizational impact (VCU, 2024a, 2026a, 2026b).

The verified starting hypothesis is therefore substantially supported. The best description is a three-level development pathway with a cross-cutting stakeholder and societal horizon: (1) transforming the leader, (2) transforming relationships and teams, and (3) transforming organizations and systems. VCU does not publicly label this as a proprietary three-level model, so the report treats it as a strong curricular interpretation. Relationships, culture, ethics, and stakeholder responsibility recur across all three levels rather than belonging to only one stage.

Mindfulness is operationally the capacity to notice internal reactions, external cues, and relational dynamics without immediately acting on habit. Care is disciplined regard for dignity, voice, growth, and real constraints. Accountability is shared clarity about commitments, evidence, support, review points, decision rights, and fair consequences. High care without accountability can become avoidance or paternalism; high accountability without care can produce fear and concealment. The target is high care and high accountability together.

The Barry-Wehmiller relationship is best classified as institutional, inspirational, and intellectually aligned, with curricular influence that is visible in the language of care, dignity, people-first leadership, and the leader's "span of care." Public sources do not disclose enough course-level detail to determine exactly which Barry-Wehmiller materials are required in the EMBA. VCU adds a broader academic and organizational architecture: mindfulness and mindsets, ethical judgment, psychological safety, belonging, systems thinking, change, crisis, innovation, analytics, and integrated business strategy.

For executives, the Monday-morning difference is behavioral: pause before reacting; ask what is fact, interpretation, emotion, and system condition; name the standard and impact clearly; invite the other person's perspective; diagnose capability, motivation, and structural constraints; agree support and commitments; specify follow-up and consequences; and learn from the pattern. The approach is not "being nice." It is a disciplined operating practice for making consequential decisions without treating people as instruments.

For MBA Lab, the strongest near-term opportunities are an independent definitive guide, a transformative-versus-transformational explainer, a compassionate-accountability conversation planner, a difficult-feedback preparation tool, an educational high-care/high-accountability self-assessment, and a

30-day practice. These should be original, behavior-based resources, not copies of VCU course material or proprietary psychological instruments. Every VCU-specific page should carry clear attribution and a non-affiliation notice.

REPORT MAP

3. Research methodology and source-quality standards

This report used a source hierarchy designed to separate what VCU explicitly says from what can reasonably be inferred and from what empirical research supports. The primary record consists of the current VCU Executive MBA program page, the preliminary 2026-27 Graduate Bulletin entry, the FMBA course catalog, the Institute for Transformative Leadership site, the current Executive MBA brochure, the VCU faculty profile for Christopher S. Reina, VCU News coverage, and archived bulletins. Peer-reviewed scholarship was then used to evaluate the component mechanisms and compare VCU’s language with established leadership traditions.

Source hierarchy

Table 1. Source-quality standards used in the report

Claim classification

Explicit VCU claim: directly stated in an official program, Institute, bulletin, or course source.

Evidence-supported conclusion: supported by peer-reviewed research, whether or not VCU itself makes the exact claim.

Analytical interpretation: a transparent synthesis of official curriculum structure and relevant research.

Insufficient evidence: a plausible claim for which public evidence is not adequate, especially causal claims about VCU-specific outcomes.

The report searched for current information through July 28, 2026. The 2026-27 VCU Bulletin identified itself as preliminary and stated that a final version would be available in August. No final edition was publicly available by the research cutoff, so the report cites the preliminary status. The dedicated FMBA 620-622 sequence appears in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 catalogs but not in the 2023-24 or 2024-25 course catalogs reviewed. That finding supports describing the sequence as a recently formalized curricular architecture, not claiming that VCU’s interest in human-centered leadership began only then.

A public, peer-reviewed outcome evaluation of the VCU Executive MBA’s transformative leadership sequence was not located. The report therefore does not use program testimonials, rankings, organizational case narratives, or the Institute’s own language as proof that the curriculum causes better business results. The analysis is strongest when describing the curriculum, locating it within scholarship, and identifying testable mechanisms. It is necessarily more cautious when discussing long-term organizational transformation.

4. The problem transformative leadership is attempting to solve

VCU's approach responds to a familiar executive problem: organizations need strategy, innovation, accountability, speed, and performance, yet the conventional language of management often treats people as resources, costs, functions, or units of execution. Leaders then face a false choice between “hard” business performance and “soft” human concern. The Institute explicitly rejects that separation. It presents leadership development as the integration of personal awareness, caring relationships, technical leadership skills, stakeholder responsibility, and organizational execution (VCU, 2024a).

The practical failure mode is not merely incivility. It is degraded information. When employees expect blame, dismissal, or indifference, they are less likely to raise errors, admit uncertainty, challenge assumptions, disclose overload, or offer unconventional ideas. Trust and psychological safety matter because complex work depends on the timely movement of uncomfortable information. This does not mean relationships should precede every task chronologically or that a leader must earn unanimous affection. It means relationship quality is part of the coordination system through which tasks are understood, debated, and corrected (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017).

A second problem is leader reactivity. Executives work under time pressure, status threat, ambiguity, incomplete information, and emotional contagion. Habitual reactions can turn anxiety into micromanagement, urgency into disrespect, empathy into avoidance, or confidence into premature closure. VCU's attention to self-reflection, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, courage, values, and cognitive bias implies that better leadership begins with better noticing and response choice, not with a script alone (VCU, 2026b; Gottfredson & Reina, 2021; Reina & Kudesia, 2020).

A third problem is fragmentation. Leadership programs can isolate interpersonal skills from finance, operations, analytics, strategy, or change execution. VCU's EMBA describes an integrated, modular, interdisciplinary, team-oriented curriculum that repeatedly applies knowledge to unfamiliar business situations. The transformative leadership sequence is therefore not positioned as a substitute for management competence. It is intended to shape how executives use business competence, power, and judgment (VCU, 2026a, 2026c).

The core design challenge

5. Definitions and history of the term

Transformational leadership: the Burns and Bass tradition

Transformational leadership is a comparatively established research tradition. Burns (1978) distinguished transforming leadership from transactional exchange, emphasizing a process in which leaders and followers elevate one another's motivation and moral purpose. Bass (1985, 1999) developed the construct for organizational research and associated it with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration. Later meta-analyses generally found positive relationships with effectiveness, satisfaction, motivation, and performance across levels, while also documenting overlap with other positive leadership constructs (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011).

This tradition centers how leaders mobilize followers beyond narrow self-interest and existing expectations. It can include individualized attention and ethical aspiration, but empirical measures often emphasize charisma, vision, inspiration, and stimulation. The construct has also been criticized for leader-centric assumptions, heroic imagery, measurement redundancy, and insufficient attention to power, context, and moral direction. A leader can transform effort toward a harmful goal; “transformational” is not automatically ethical (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018).

Transformative leadership: a family of usages

“Transformative leadership” is less standardized. In education and social-change scholarship, it often emphasizes critique of inequity, moral purpose, redistribution of power, and transformation of institutions and society (Shields, 2010). In management and business ethics, it may combine ethical stewardship, trust, collaboration, human dignity, and sustainable excellence (Caldwell et al., 2012). In humanistic and systems-oriented work, the term can refer to changing the assumptions and communicative practices through which organizations reproduce instrumental or dehumanizing patterns. These usages overlap but do not constitute one universally accepted construct with one validated scale.

VCU’s public materials do not state that the EMBA adopts Shields’s educational model, Caldwell’s formulation, or any other single published theory. Nor do they claim that VCU invented transformative leadership. The safest conclusion is that VCU uses the phrase as an umbrella for a distinctive applied synthesis built from multiple traditions: mindful leadership, humanistic management, ethical and authentic leadership, compassion and care, psychological safety, coaching, stakeholder responsibility, adaptive and systems thinking, transformational change, and standard executive disciplines.

Table 2. Transformative leadership versus transformational leadership

6. VCU’s working definition

VCU does not publish a single sentence labeled “the definition of transformative leadership.” Instead, its working definition must be reconstructed from converging official sources. The Institute says transformative leaders seek to ensure that others feel valued and belong, treat leadership as a lifelong journey, act intentionally, promote connection and compassion, build deep relationships, and show up fully. It describes the curriculum as beginning with caring and compassionate relationships and then aligning feedback, strategic planning, difficult conversations, and change execution through understanding, courage, and connection (VCU, 2024a).

The EMBA program adds organizational direction. It describes leaders who lead with intention, foster belonging, create meaningful impact, navigate uncertainty, influence strategy, and transform organizations from within. The brochure emphasizes high levels of both care and accountability,

supported by emotional intelligence, communication, coaching, feedback, mindfulness, empathetic listening, strategic thinking, systems thinking, international business, and negotiation (VCU, 2025a, 2026c). The course catalog supplies the most concrete developmental progression (VCU, 2026b).

What “transforming from within” most plausibly means

VCU’s phrase “transform organizations from within” should not be read as a claim that internal mindset work alone changes institutions. A defensible interpretation is that organizational patterns are reproduced through recurring attention, language, relationships, decisions, routines, policies, incentives, and resource allocations. Leaders transform from within when they change those everyday mechanisms while aligning them with strategy and stakeholder obligations. Humanistic organizing provides a conceptual bridge: communication can textualize guiding wisdom, invoke it attentively in concrete situations, and enact it ethically through practice (Town et al., 2024).

Explicit claims, supported conclusions, interpretations, and unknowns

Table 3. How claims are separated in this report

7. The VCU Institute for Transformative Leadership

The Institute provides the clearest articulation of VCU’s human-centered emphasis. It frames the challenge as helping leaders think reflectively, widen the lens of analysis, connect deeply with others, and serve a broad array of stakeholders under conditions of anxiety, distraction, and uncertainty. Its public goals include value and belonging, continual improvement, intentional thought and action, connection, compassion, deep relationships, and transformative experiences (VCU, 2024a).

The Institute’s teaching sequence is especially important. It says leadership instruction begins with the creation of caring and compassionate relationships. Technical practices such as feedback, strategic planning, difficult conversations, and change are then aligned through understanding, courage, and connection to produce compassionate accountability. This is more precise than a general people-first slogan. It proposes an order of operations: relational and self-regulatory capacity shapes the quality with which leaders exercise technical authority.

The Institute also describes a “humans first” approach and argues that strong, trusting relationships are conditions for individual and team performance. That claim should be read carefully. Trust is supported by evidence as a meaningful contributor to attitudes and performance, and psychological safety is associated with learning and effectiveness. Yet neither trust nor care is sufficient. Competence, role clarity, resources, strategy, incentives, and operational discipline remain necessary (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Frazier et al., 2017).

Institutional position and evolution

The July 27, 2026 VCU News article described the Institute as entering its fourth year and expanding the footprint of a practical, human-centered approach. Archived course catalogs show the dedicated FMBA 620-622 sequence by 2025-26, while the sequence does not appear in the 2023-24 or 2024-25 FMBA catalogs reviewed. Taken together, these sources suggest an institutional initiative that developed before the dedicated sequence was formally visible in the course catalog. The precise internal chronology cannot be established from public materials alone (VCU News, 2026a; VCU, 2023, 2024b, 2025b).

Research, teaching, and service

The Institute presents three linked functions. Research addresses leadership, mindfulness, compassion, care, and interpersonal relationships. Teaching translates those topics into executive-level practices. Service seeks to diffuse a culture of care within VCU and into external organizations. This three-part structure matters because it treats transformative leadership not only as an EMBA topic, but as a research-to-practice and institution-building project. Whether that diffusion produces measurable system-level transformation remains an empirical question.

8. Christopher Reina's research foundation

Christopher S. Reina is the Institute's founding executive director and a VCU management professor whose research focuses on leadership, mindfulness, emotions, employee well-being, relationships, and performance. His scholarship supplies much of the conceptual vocabulary needed to understand why VCU emphasizes leader presence and relational quality. Public evidence does not establish that every publication is assigned in the EMBA. The appropriate distinction is whether a study directly describes the program, is conceptually aligned with it, or provides adjacent evidence.

Table 4. Reina scholarship and its relevance to the VCU approach

Humanistic organizing as an organizational bridge

Humanistic organizing is the most direct bridge between individual mindfulness and organizational transformation. Town et al. (2024) argue that organizations can be reoriented through mindful organizational communication grounded in wisdom, concentrated attention, and ethical conduct. The framework moves beyond asking leaders to be calmer. It asks how language, stories, policies, meetings, and decisions repeatedly call humanistic principles into action. This is conceptually compatible with VCU's movement from self-awareness to relationships to systems and with its emphasis on belonging and stakeholder well-being.

The framework is nevertheless a theory article. Its mechanisms are propositions for research, not established causal laws. The presence of Barry-Wehmiller as an illustrative case does not independently demonstrate that the case produced its reported outcomes through those mechanisms. A rigorous VCU account should therefore treat humanistic organizing as a promising explanatory foundation and research agenda.

Mindful relating and interaction quality

The mindful relating framework explains how a leader's attention affects a relationship trajectory. Attention helps the leader perceive cues; decentering reduces fusion with immediate interpretations; response flexibility makes it more possible to act consistently with values and the needs of the interaction. Over time, congruent interactions can strengthen relationship quality, while power differences, negative shocks, and habitual reactions can send it downward (Reina, Mills, & Sumpter, 2023). This logic helps explain VCU's treatment of trust as something built through repeated moments rather than declared as a value.

The qualitative mindfulness-infusion study adds an applied insight: mindfulness can enter work through formal practices, informal cues, self-focused regulation, and other-focused presence. A leader can therefore practice mindfulness by preparing before a difficult conversation, listening without rehearsing a rebuttal, naming uncertainty, pausing a rushed meeting, or designing reflective routines. Meditation may support the capability, but the leadership behavior is what happens in interaction (Reina et al., 2023).

Mindsets, well-being, and performance boundaries

Gottfredson and Reina (2021) argue that leadership development often teaches knowledge and skills without addressing the mindsets through which leaders interpret situations. Their framework highlights fixed versus growth, performance versus learning, implemental versus deliberative, and prevention versus promotion orientations. The value for VCU is not that one pole is always superior. Executives need to know when to deliberate and when to implement, when to prevent harm and when to pursue opportunity. Development means expanding the range of intentional choice.

Reina's broader work also supplies important limits. Mindfulness can buffer some effects of daily hassles, but it should not be used to individualize structural overload. Mindful communication can strengthen creativity, but proactive teams still need focus and leader support. Well-being can be measured, but a favorable self-report does not demonstrate system transformation. These boundaries are consistent with a mature interpretation of the VCU model: inner capacity matters, and so do workload, incentives, power, design, and strategy.

9. The mindfulness, care, and accountability model

"Mindfulness, care, and accountability" is a useful shorthand for the logic visible across the Institute, brochure, and courses, but no public source was found that names it as a formally validated VCU model. The report uses the phrase analytically. Each element corrects a predictable weakness in the others.

Table 5. Operational definitions and failure modes

Why relationships and trust sit before, or alongside, task execution

VCU's Institute says caring relationships come first, then technical leadership skills are aligned through connection. The defensible interpretation is not that task work waits until intimacy is achieved. It is that the quality of relationship affects the quality of information, coordination, disagreement, and recovery available during the task. Trust reduces the interpersonal tax on asking for help, admitting mistakes, and challenging authority. Psychological safety makes interpersonal risk more tolerable. Neither removes performance standards; both make it more likely that reality reaches the decision-maker in time (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017).

The high-care/high-accountability matrix

Table 6. High care and high accountability matrix

The matrix should not be treated as a psychometric instrument or as a claim that every situation can be solved through conversation. In emergencies, safety events, misconduct, or fiduciary threats, decisive direction and immediate containment may be required. High care can still be expressed through proportionality, explanation, due process, support for affected people, and review after the immediate danger is controlled.

10. Compassionate accountability

VCU explicitly uses “compassionate accountability” to describe the alignment of technical leadership practices with understanding, courage, and deep connection. Public materials do not supply a validated scale or a complete protocol. The following definition is therefore a report-derived operationalization: compassionate accountability is holding people and systems to clear, consequential standards through candid, respectful, curious, and support-oriented processes that protect dignity and agency while applying fair consequences.

An eight-step conversation protocol

1. Regulate before entering: Notice anger, anxiety, defensiveness, urgency, or the desire to rescue. Decide what a values-consistent response requires.
2. Separate facts from interpretations: Identify observable behavior, agreed standards, business impact, and what remains uncertain.
3. State the standard and impact: Be direct about what was expected, what occurred, who or what was affected, and why the gap matters.
4. Invite the other perspective: Ask what the person saw, intended, knew, and experienced. Listen for information that could change the diagnosis.
5. Diagnose the system: Distinguish capability, clarity, capacity, motivation, role design, incentives, coordination, and resource constraints.

6. Agree support and commitment: Define what the leader, employee, and system will do, by when, with what evidence.
7. Specify review and consequences: Set checkpoints and explain proportional consequences if commitments are not met or harm recurs.
8. Follow through and learn: Review outcomes, reinforce progress, apply consequences when necessary, repair harm, and change the system if it contributed.

This protocol balances psychological safety and standards by distinguishing interpersonal risk from performance immunity. A person should be able to speak, disagree, disclose a mistake, or ask for help without humiliation. That does not eliminate responsibility for decisions, conduct, or results. In fact, clearer voice makes accountability more informed because the leader is less likely to punish a symptom while ignoring a system cause.

What compassionate accountability is not

Not delayed honesty. Withholding difficult feedback to preserve comfort usually increases later harm.

Not forced vulnerability. Leaders should not demand personal disclosure as proof of trust or belonging.

Not equal treatment without context. Fairness may require different support while maintaining transparent standards.

Not endless accommodation. Repeated nonperformance, harmful conduct, or inability to meet a role's essential requirements may require reassignment or separation.

Not emotional performance. Empathy language without changed decisions, resources, or follow-through is likely to be experienced as manipulation.

11. The three-level development pathway

The user's three-level hypothesis is strongly supported by the official course sequence. FMBA 620 focuses primarily on the leader's inner capacity and interpersonal presence. FMBA 621 focuses on performance, teams, ethics, trust, and culture. FMBA 622 focuses on strategic change, crisis, innovation, belonging, systems thinking, and organizational impact. VCU does not publicly name this a three-level model, so the pathway below is an interpretation of the curriculum rather than a proprietary framework.

Table 7. VCU transformative leadership competency map

Level 1: Transforming the leader

Level 1 concerns the leader as an instrument of attention, interpretation, emotion, communication, and influence. Self-awareness is not treated as introspection for its own sake. The implied purpose is to help executives recognize how their mindsets and emotional states shape the climate around them.

Authenticity means consistency between values, words, and behavior, not unfiltered self-expression. Courage means acting on values and naming difficult realities despite discomfort. Reflection converts experience into learning rather than repetition.

Mindfulness supports this level by creating a small but consequential gap between stimulus and response. Emotional intelligence adds perception and regulation of emotion. A learning mindset reduces the need to defend an identity of already knowing. Together, these capacities can improve the quality of attention brought to people, data, and decisions. They do not guarantee ethical behavior; values, incentives, and accountability still matter.

Level 2: Transforming relationships and teams

Level 2 moves from personal capacity to the recurring work of management: expectations, feedback, coaching, delegation, conflict, collaboration, performance, and culture. The core tension is how to preserve dignity and voice while making standards and consequences real. VCU's distinctive answer is the pairing of care and accountability. Psychological safety is included because teams need candor and learning; ethical and stakeholder reasoning is included because performance decisions distribute benefits, burdens, and risk.

Team transformation is therefore not a motivational event. It is the accumulation of observable practices: who speaks, how decisions are made, what happens after errors, whether high performers are allowed to violate norms, whether leaders keep commitments, how work is allocated, and whether feedback is timely. Trust grows when those patterns are predictably competent, honest, benevolent, and fair.

Level 3: Transforming organizations and systems

Level 3 recognizes that interpersonal care cannot overcome a system designed to produce overload, silence, inequity, or short-termism. Executives must connect vision and mission to strategy, structures, incentives, technologies, information flows, and resource decisions. Change leadership requires attention to resistance and sensemaking. Crisis leadership requires decisiveness, humility, communication, and resilience. Innovation requires both promotion focus and disciplined selection. Belonging requires voice and valued uniqueness, not assimilation into a dominant style.

Systems thinking is the culminating capability because actions have delayed, distributed, and unintended consequences. A leader may improve a local metric while shifting cost, risk, or burnout elsewhere. A VCU-aligned approach asks not only whether a decision works, but for whom, over what time horizon, under which assumptions, and with what effects on human dignity and stakeholder trust.

12. Detailed analysis of FMBA 620, FMBA 621, and FMBA 622

The 2026-27 Bulletin lists three one-credit Executive MBA courses dedicated to transformative leadership. Their formal descriptions are unusually specific, allowing the curriculum to be mapped to observable behavior. The tables below paraphrase the official topics and add applications and intended

outcomes. “Intended outcome” does not mean the outcome has been empirically demonstrated for VCU participants.

FMBA 620: Foundational Concepts of Transformative Leadership

Table 8. FMBA 620 topic-to-behavior map

FMBA 620 establishes the premise that leadership behavior is downstream from attention, identity, values, emotion, and mindset. Its strongest design feature is the integration of inward and outward work. Reflection without communication would remain private; communication without reflection could simply make habitual influence more polished. The course description links both to relationship quality and culture.

FMBA 621: Applying Concepts of Transformative Leadership

Table 9. FMBA 621 topic-to-behavior map

FMBA 621 is the pivotal course because it converts values and awareness into managerial practice. It also introduces the model’s central safeguards. Care is constrained by accountability. Psychological safety is constrained by performance standards and ethical responsibility. Decision confidence is constrained by uncertainty, risk assessment, cognitive bias, and time horizons. Culture is treated as something leaders shape through decisions and routines, not merely messaging.

FMBA 622: Transformative Leadership for Organizational Excellence

Table 10. FMBA 622 topic-to-behavior map

FMBA 622 prevents the model from collapsing into interpersonal kindness. The course requires leaders to deal with resistance, crisis, strategy, innovation, diversity, and system integration. The phrase “organizational excellence” signals an aspiration to connect human-centered leadership with performance and impact. The public evidence supports the educational intent. It does not establish that the course produces lasting transformation without reinforcement, authority, resources, and organizational alignment.

13. How the broader EMBA experience reinforces leadership development

The transformative leadership sequence accounts for three of the program’s 42 credits, but the broader delivery system may be more important than the credit count suggests. The Bulletin describes an integrated, modular, team-oriented, interdisciplinary curriculum that repeatedly requires application to unfamiliar problems. The program page and brochure describe cohort learning, consulting projects each semester, executive coaching, simulations and assessments, a capstone strategic dilemma, and global immersion (VCU, 2025a, 2026a, 2026c).

Table 11. Curriculum and experiential-learning reinforcement map

Why the cohort matters

A cohort can function as a leadership laboratory because members cannot simply choose collaborators who think or work like them. Over time, teams confront differences in pace, expertise, communication, ambition, status, risk tolerance, and standards. That creates opportunities to practice conflict, delegation, voice, feedback, and repair. It also introduces risks: social pressure can suppress dissent, uneven contribution can breed resentment, and a cohesive cohort can mistake harmony for learning. Faculty and coaches must therefore design for candor, rotation, explicit norms, and reflection.

Why coaching and assessments matter

Leadership training is more likely to transfer when learners receive feedback, practice over time, set goals, and work with realistic problems. Meta-analytic evidence supports leadership training and workplace coaching on average, while also showing that design quality matters (Jones et al., 2016; Lacerenza et al., 2017). Assessments can create useful language and baselines, but they should not be treated as identities. A 360-degree result is a sample of perceptions, not an objective essence of the leader.

Why projects and immersion matter

Real consulting projects create constraints that classroom discussion cannot fully simulate: a client has interests, data are incomplete, recommendations have costs, team members depend on one another, and the work must be communicated. Global immersion can challenge ethnocentric assumptions, but exposure alone does not produce intercultural competence. Learning requires preparation, curiosity, local context, structured reflection, and examination of how power and institutional differences shape what “good leadership” looks like.

14. Comparison with other leadership theories

VCU’s approach overlaps with many established theories. That overlap is not a weakness by itself; leadership practice often requires integration. The critical question is whether the combination adds conceptual clarity and useful sequencing or simply relabels familiar ideas. VCU’s strongest differentiator is not a unique behavior that appears nowhere else. It is the architecture that starts with attention and self-awareness, moves through caring and accountable relationships, and extends into strategy, change, belonging, innovation, and systems.

Table 12A. Broader leadership-theory comparison: focus and views of people

Table 12B. Broader leadership-theory comparison: mechanisms, behaviors, and outcomes

Table 12C. Broader leadership-theory comparison: similarities, differences, and criticisms

Synthesis: a distinctive applied framework, not an unprecedented theory

The comparison supports a balanced conclusion. VCU's approach is not unprecedented in its individual components. Servant and compassionate leadership emphasize care; authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness and values; ethical leadership emphasizes moral modeling and reinforcement; psychological safety emphasizes voice; adaptive and systems leadership address complexity; humanistic management and stakeholder theory center dignity and broad value creation. VCU's distinctiveness lies in combining these strands with business disciplines and sequencing them through a developmental pathway reinforced by an EMBA delivery system.

15. How transformative leadership works in practice

The following scenarios test whether the approach changes executive behavior under pressure. Each scenario distinguishes a conventional management response, a poorly executed people-first response, and a VCU-aligned response. The examples are analytical applications of the public curriculum, not official VCU case solutions.

Scenario 1: Difficult performance feedback to a valued employee

Scenario 2: Conflict between two high-performing team members

Scenario 3: Leading a restructuring or layoff

Scenario 4: Responding to employee burnout

Scenario 5: Resistance to a major AI implementation

Scenario 6: Leading through a crisis with incomplete information

What a transformative leader does differently on Monday morning

Begins one important conversation by naming the outcome and the relationship both worth protecting.

Pauses before a consequential response and writes down facts, assumptions, emotions, stakeholders, and system conditions.

Makes one implicit expectation explicit, including evidence of success and a review point.

Asks the team what bad news is currently difficult to raise and changes the leader response that suppresses it.

Removes or redesigns one process that asks people to absorb a structural problem through personal resilience.

Closes the loop on a prior commitment, recognizing progress or applying a consequence rather than allowing drift.

16. Organizational outcomes and supporting evidence

VCU's public materials connect transformative leadership to well-being, belonging, trust, team performance, innovation, change, stakeholder impact, and business results. Those outcomes should be separated into three evidence categories. Component research can support plausible mechanisms. Conceptual work can propose how mechanisms connect. Program claims can state educational aspirations. None of these, by itself, demonstrates that the VCU sequence caused a specific organization-level result.

Table 13. Outcome claims and evidence status

Leadership training and coaching

Meta-analytic evidence indicates that leadership training can improve reactions, learning, transfer, and results, especially when programs use needs analysis, multiple delivery methods, practice, feedback, spaced sessions, and supportive implementation. Workplace coaching also shows positive average effects on learning and performance. VCU's cohort, coaching, projects, and immediate work application are consistent with these design principles (Jones et al., 2016; Lacerenza et al., 2017). The evidence supports the delivery logic, not a claim that this particular program's effect size is known.

Trust, psychological safety, and accountability

Trust and psychological safety are among the most defensible links in the model. Trust in leadership is associated with satisfaction, commitment, performance, and citizenship. Psychological safety is associated with learning, information sharing, and performance-related outcomes. Yet both can be weakened by inconsistent consequences. When a leader ignores harmful behavior from a high performer, the team may feel superficially safe to speak but learn that standards are not fair. High-care/high-accountability practice is therefore a hypothesis about how to sustain voice without losing reliability.

Mindfulness, well-being, and behavior

Workplace mindfulness research supports attention, regulation, well-being, and some behavioral outcomes, but the literature is heterogeneous. Intervention quality, dosage, voluntary participation, context, and comparison conditions vary. Mindfulness can help a leader see workload and suffering more clearly; it should not be used to ask people to accept preventable overload. The ethical test is whether awareness changes decisions and systems, not whether employees become calmer inside an unchanged harmful environment (Eby et al., 2019; Good et al., 2016; Gupta & Reina, 2024).

17. Criticisms, limitations, and unresolved questions

Table 14. Critical limitations and implementation risks

Unresolved research questions

Can the VCU sequence be operationalized with a stable set of behaviors that are distinct from existing leadership measures?

Which components change first: self-awareness, interaction quality, team climate, culture, or business outcomes?

Does compassionate accountability improve performance and trust more than care-only, control-heavy, or standard feedback approaches?

How do effects vary by culture, hierarchy, remote work, industry risk, union context, and leader authority?

What organizational structures reinforce or neutralize the behavior changes developed in the EMBA?

Do changes persist after graduation and transfer to colleagues who did not participate?

A mature VCU research agenda would publish a logic model, behavior taxonomy, validated or carefully assembled measures, pre/post and multi-source data, repeated follow-ups, implementation fidelity, and organization-level outcomes. It would also report null results and adverse effects. Such evaluation would strengthen the Institute's contribution without requiring it to claim a wholly novel theory.

18. Practical executive playbook

A decision and conversation checklist

1. Center: What am I feeling, defending, avoiding, or assuming? What response would reflect my values and role?
2. Clarify reality: What are the observable facts, standards, unknowns, data quality, and time constraints?
3. Map people and power: Who is affected, who has voice, who bears risk, and whose perspective is missing?
4. Name the outcome: What business, ethical, relational, and stakeholder outcomes are required?
5. Invite information: What do others see that I may not? What is difficult to say?
6. Diagnose the system: Is the issue clarity, capability, capacity, motivation, process, incentives, authority, or coordination?
7. Choose proportionately: What action balances urgency, dignity, fairness, evidence, and reversibility?

8. Commit and follow through: Who will do what, by when, with what support, measure, review point, and consequence?
9. Learn and repair: What changed, what harm occurred, what should be reinforced, and what system must be redesigned?

Practice cadence

Table 15. Daily, weekly, monthly, and organizational practices

Five rules for maintaining high care and high accountability

Do not let care make the standard less visible. Explain what good performance and acceptable conduct require.

Do not let accountability make the person invisible. Ask what conditions, information, or power shaped the outcome.

Support should be explicit, finite, and connected to a commitment. Rescue without ownership weakens agency.

Consequences should be timely, proportional, consistent, and reviewable. Surprise punishment destroys trust.

Leaders are accountable for systems too. Repeated individual failures often indicate unclear roles, conflicting priorities, poor tools, or incentives.

When to be directive

Directive leadership is appropriate when delay creates material safety, legal, ethical, or operational risk; when authority must be clear; or when the team lacks the information or capability to decide. A VCU-aligned leader can still explain the basis, communicate uncertainty, protect dignity, invite new evidence, and review the decision. Care influences how authority is used; it does not require authority to disappear.

19. Measurement and assessment

Transformative leadership development should be measured as a chain rather than as a single score. Leader attention and behavior are proximal; team trust, safety, accountability, and belonging are intermediate; change, innovation, retention, well-being, stakeholder, and business outcomes are more distal. Strong evaluation uses multiple sources, repeated measures, behavioral evidence, comparison points, and implementation data. It does not infer organization-wide transformation from a post-course satisfaction survey.

Table 16. Measurement options and cautions

A defensible evaluation design

1. Define the logic model: specify which learning activities should change which leader behaviors, team mechanisms, and outcomes, and over what time.
2. Establish a baseline: collect self, peer, direct-report, and objective data before the intervention where feasible.
3. Measure behavior, not only attitude: use structured observation, commitment completion, meeting practices, feedback quality, and decision records.
4. Repeat and triangulate: assess immediately, at three to six months, and later; compare sources and investigate disagreement.
5. Track implementation fidelity: record coaching exposure, practice frequency, manager support, role change, and organizational barriers.
6. Use comparison where possible: matched cohorts, staggered rollout, or within-person time series can improve inference without overstating causality.
7. Protect privacy and avoid surveillance: aggregate team data, restrict access, communicate purpose, and do not use developmental data as undisclosed discipline evidence.
8. Report uncertainty and adverse effects: disclose attrition, missing data, null results, subgroup differences, and any evidence of burnout, coercion, or reduced voice.

20. Implications and opportunities for MBA Lab

MBA Lab can occupy a valuable position between academic source material and practical executive use. The opportunity is not to present an “official VCU model,” reproduce course materials, or create personality labels. It is to build independent, source-transparent learning resources that translate public VCU concepts and wider research into concrete preparation, reflection, and team practices.

Editorial and attribution principles

State clearly that MBA Lab is independent and is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or speaking for VCU or the Institute.

Use phrases such as “based on MBA Lab’s analysis of public VCU materials” and distinguish direct VCU language from MBA Lab frameworks.

Link to official VCU pages and original research. Quote sparingly. Do not reproduce assignments, slides, assessment items, or proprietary course materials.

Do not copy validated scale items unless permission and licensing are confirmed. Original assessments should be labeled educational and unvalidated unless properly tested.

Avoid promising that compassion, mindfulness, or psychological safety automatically increases profit. Present mechanisms, limits, and tradeoffs.

Table 17A. MBA Lab opportunity map: audience, problem, framework connection, value, and priority

Table 17B. MBA Lab opportunity map: product logic, oversimplification risk, and attribution

Table 17C. MBA Lab opportunity map: SEO value and recommended format

Recommended product sequence

The first release should establish editorial authority and a reusable conceptual backbone: the definitive guide and the transformative-versus-transformational explainer. The next release should convert the core tension into action with the compassionate-accountability planner, difficult-feedback tool, and educational high-care/high-accountability assessment. A 30-day practice then creates repeat engagement and supplies qualitative learning about which prompts users find useful.

The second wave should extend into team operating systems: working agreements, one-on-ones, conflict, change and AI readiness, reflection, and scenario practice. More sensitive diagnostics, especially psychological safety and belonging, should come later because privacy, anonymity, instrument licensing, subgroup interpretation, and organizational misuse require stronger product safeguards.

Original MBA Lab framework opportunity

For search strategy, MBA Lab should build a topic cluster around definitional intent, comparison intent, and problem-solving intent. Definitional pages can answer “what is transformative leadership?” Comparison pages can distinguish transformational, servant, authentic, mindful, and compassionate leadership. Problem-solving pages can target “how to hold employees accountable with empathy,” “how to give difficult feedback,” “psychological safety and accountability,” “people-first layoffs,” “AI change resistance,” and “leadership reflection questions.” Interactive tools should link back to the research guide and surface source notes at the moment of use.

21. Conclusion

VCU’s transformative leadership approach is best understood as a distinctive applied synthesis, not a wholly new or yet-validated proprietary theory. Its public architecture is unusually coherent: leaders first develop awareness, mindset, emotional regulation, authenticity, values, communication, and relationships; they then apply those capacities to expectations, feedback, coaching, conflict, trust, psychological safety, ethics, stakeholder judgment, and culture; finally, they integrate them with strategy, change, crisis, resilience, innovation, belonging, and systems thinking.

The approach’s central practical contribution is the refusal to separate care from accountability. Care without standards can become avoidance or paternalism. Accountability without care can become fear and concealment. The VCU-aligned target is candid, consequential leadership that protects dignity, invites information, diagnoses systems, supports growth, and follows through. Mindfulness makes that balance more possible by improving what the leader notices before acting.

The evidence is promising but bounded. Research supports many component mechanisms and the general value of well-designed leadership training and coaching. Conceptual scholarship provides a plausible bridge from mindful interaction to humanistic organizing. What remains unproven is the causal effectiveness of the VCU sequence as a unified model. That gap is not a reason to dismiss the approach; it is a reason to describe it precisely, evaluate it honestly, and resist promotional overreach.

For executives, the standard is behavioral and structural: show up with attention, tell the truth with care, make standards and consequences real, redesign systems that repeatedly create harm, and connect human dignity to strategy rather than treating it as a competing objective. For MBA Lab, the opportunity is to translate that standard into independent, well-sourced guides and tools that help leaders prepare, practice, and measure without claiming official affiliation or certainty the evidence does not support.

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23. Appendix

Appendix A: Source map

Table A1. Primary source map

Appendix B: Curriculum-to-competency matrix

Legend: P = primary course emphasis; R = reinforced; A = applied in context; blank = not a prominent public emphasis. The matrix is an interpretation of public program materials, not an official VCU curriculum map.

Table B1. Curriculum-to-competency matrix

Appendix C: Historical development visible in public materials

Table C1. Cautious public chronology

Appendix D: Evidence-to-practice summary

Table D1. Evidence-to-practice guardrails

Tables

Tables are grouped here in document order rather than inline, matching this report's source extraction. Each is referenced by number from its corresponding section above.

Table 1

Central finding VCU has not publicly established a single validated proprietary theory of transformative leadership. It has created a distinctive applied architecture that develops the leader, then relationships and teams, then organizations and systems, while integrating mindfulness, care, accountability, business judgment, and experiential learning.

Table 2

Best concise definition VCU's transformative leadership is a human-centered, evidence-informed practice of developing the leader's awareness and intentionality, using mindfulness, care, and accountability to build trusting and high-performing relationships, and aligning strategy, culture, systems, and change around human dignity, stakeholder well-being, and durable organizational results. This is the report's synthesis, not a verbatim VCU definition.

Table 3

What appears genuinely distinctive The combination and sequencing: inner work before interpersonal technique; care paired with explicit accountability; relationships treated as performance infrastructure; and leadership development embedded across coaching, cohort work, consulting projects, simulations, global immersion, and integrated business courses.	What the evidence does not establish No public, peer-reviewed evaluation was found showing that FMBA 620-622 cause superior profits, retention, well-being, belonging, or executive performance. Evidence is strongest for component mechanisms such as training, coaching, trust, psychological safety, mindful attention, and well-designed feedback.
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Table 4

Sections	Purpose
3-6	Method, problem, terminology, and VCU working definition
7-13	Institute, research foundation, operating model, curriculum, and EMBA delivery
14-17	Theory comparisons, workplace practice, evidence, and limitations
18-20	Executive playbook, measurement, and MBA Lab opportunities
21-23	Conclusion, references, source map, and curriculum matrices

Table 5

Grade	Source class	Examples	Interpretive rule
A	Official VCU academic record	Bulletin, course descriptions, program requirements	Best evidence of what is formally taught or required; still distinguish preliminary from final editions.
A-	Official VCU program or Institute material	Program pages, brochure, Institute page	Best evidence of public positioning and educational design; promotional outcome language is not causal evidence.
B+	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis or systematic review	Leadership training, coaching, psychological safety	Strongest general evidence for component relationships; may not transfer perfectly to VCU's specific population or delivery.
B	Peer-reviewed empirical primary study	Mindful communication, well-being, trust	Useful for mechanisms and boundary conditions; designs vary, and many are correlational or self-report.
B-	Peer-reviewed conceptual theory	Humanistic organizing, mindful relating	Provides coherent mechanisms and propositions but may still await direct tests.
C	Organizational self-description or case material	Barry-Wehmiller philosophy and examples	Valid for describing the organization's own approach, not for proving effectiveness.
C-	News, interviews, and testimonials	VCU News, alumni comments	Useful for chronology and context only; not treated as outcome evaluation.

Table 6

Research limitation Public materials describe learning objectives and delivery mechanisms, but they do not disclose detailed syllabi, required readings, assessment rubrics, participant-level longitudinal data, control groups, or organization-level outcome evaluations. Absence of public evidence is not evidence that evaluation does not occur internally; it means external readers cannot verify it.

Table 7

False choice to avoid Either drive results through pressure and control, or protect relationships by softening standards and delaying hard decisions.	VCU-aligned alternative Create conditions in which dignity, candor, support, standards, evidence, and consequences coexist. Care shapes how accountability is exercised; accountability keeps care from becoming avoidance.
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Table 8

Dimension	VCU-aligned transformative leadership	Transformational leadership
Terminology status	A broad family of humanistic, social-change, educational, and systems-oriented usages; VCU uses it as an applied umbrella.	A mature research tradition associated with Burns, Bass, and the four-I model.
Central question	How should leaders and organizations change themselves, relationships, systems, and stakeholder impact?	How does a leader elevate motivation, meaning, effort, and performance beyond ordinary exchange?
Leader emphasis	Self-awareness, intentionality, care, accountability, ethics, relationships, systems, and durable change.	Vision, inspiration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration.
Follower/member view	Whole persons and stakeholders with dignity, voice, agency, needs, and responsibilities.	Followers whose values, motivation, and effort can be elevated.
Mechanisms	Mindfulness, reflection, dialogue, trust, coaching, clear standards, belonging, culture, systems alignment, change practices.	Identification, inspiration, reframing, stimulation, role modeling, individualized support.
Moral content	Explicitly people-centered and stakeholder-oriented in VCU's usage, though implementation still requires ethical safeguards.	Often treated as positive, but transformational influence is not inherently moral.
Level of analysis	Explicit progression from self to relationships/teams to organizations/systems, with community impact.	Individual, dyadic, team, and organizational outcomes; often measured through leader behavior ratings.
Distinctive VCU feature	Care and accountability are deliberately paired and embedded in an integrated EMBA experience.	Not VCU-specific; one influential theory among several incorporated into the broader synthesis.
Evidence status	No public validated VCU-specific model or outcome evaluation found; component evidence varies.	Substantial meta-analytic evidence, accompanied by construct-overlap and causality concerns.

Table 9

Report synthesis Transformative leadership at VCU is best understood as a personal philosophy, a set of observable behaviors, and an organizational operating logic at the same time. The philosophy concerns dignity, intentionality, care, growth, and stakeholder responsibility. The behaviors concern reflection, listening, candor, coaching, feedback, conflict, decision-making, and change. The operating logic concerns culture, incentives, systems, strategy, resilience, innovation, and belonging.

Table 10

Classification	Statement	Basis
Explicit VCU claim	The Institute begins with caring relationships and aligns technical leadership skills through compassionate accountability.	Official Institute teaching description.
Explicit VCU claim	FMBA 620-622 move from personal development to teams/performance and then organizational change/systems.	Official course descriptions; the “three-level pathway” label itself is not official.
Evidence-supported conclusion	Trust and psychological safety can improve learning, voice, coordination, and team functioning.	Meta-analytic and primary research; effects depend on context and measurement.
Evidence-supported conclusion	Leadership training and coaching can improve learning and performance outcomes when well designed.	Meta-analyses; not specific to VCU.
Analytical interpretation	Relationships function as performance infrastructure rather than as a preliminary nicety.	Consistent with VCU language and research, but not a formal VCU proposition.
Analytical interpretation	VCU’s distinctive contribution is synthesis, sequencing, and delivery rather than invention of each component.	Comparison of curriculum with established theories.
Insufficient evidence	The VCU sequence causes superior organizational financial performance, retention, or well-being.	No public controlled or longitudinal program evaluation located.
Insufficient evidence	Barry-Wehmiller practices are required in each EMBA course or explain program outcomes.	Public partnership evidence exists; exact course use and effects are not disclosed.

Table 11

Research stream	Representative work	What it contributes	Status for interpreting VCU
Humanistic organizing	Town et al. (2024)	Conceptual theory of mindful organizational communication using textualization, attentive invocation, and ethical enactment.	Strong conceptual alignment with “transform from within,” dignity, belonging, and people-centered systems; not a program evaluation.
Mindful relating	Reina, Mills, & Sumpter (2023)	Multilevel framework linking attention and decentering to interaction congruence and relationship trajectories.	Explains why moment-to-moment attention, emotion regulation, power, and relational shocks matter; conceptual.
Mindfulness infusion	Reina et al. (2023)	Qualitative grounded theory of formal/informal and self-/other-focused mindfulness practices in workplace interactions.	Supports the view that mindfulness is enacted in conversations and routines, not only meditation; qualitative evidence.
Leadership mindsets	Gottfredson & Reina (2021)	Argues that growth, learning, deliberative, and promotion-oriented mindsets are foundational development targets.	Directly aligns with FMBA 620’s lifelong learning and reflective development; not proof of VCU outcomes.
Everyday mindfulness	Reina & Kudesia (2020)	Three experience-sampling studies showing that mindfulness varies with situations, not just stable traits.	Supports designing environments and routines that cue mindful attention; empirical but not curricular.
Trust and mindfulness	Kudesia & Reina (2019)	Experience-sampling evidence that generalized trustworthy relationships are associated with mindfulness.	Suggests a reciprocal relationship between relational context and mindful attention; observational.
Hassles and counterproductive behavior	Gupta & Reina (2024)	Mindfulness buffers the pathway from daily hassles through exhaustion to counterproductive behavior.	Supports self-regulation while cautioning that mindfulness is not a substitute for reducing harmful workload.
Mindful communication and creativity	Wei, Liu, & Reina (2025)	Leader mindful communication strengthens the pathway from proactive team personality to promotion focus and creativity.	Aligned with FMBA 622 innovation; multisource, multiwave field evidence, but context-specific and not experimental.
Eudaimonic well-being	Bartels, Peterson, & Reina (2019)	Develops and validates a measure of workplace well-being focused on interpersonal and intrapersonal growth.	Provides a measurement option and a richer outcome than satisfaction alone; scale validation, not program proof.
Influence and turnover	Reina et al. (2018)	Examines manager influence tactics, employee emotional engagement, and voluntary turnover.	Supports attention to how influence is experienced; adjacent evidence.

Ethical leadership measurement	Riggio et al. (2010)	Develops the Leadership Virtues Questionnaire.	Relevant to values and ethical leadership; instrument use requires methodological care.
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Table 12

Element	Operational meaning	Observable behaviors	Failure mode
Mindfulness	Present-moment attention, awareness of internal and external cues, decentering from automatic interpretations, and deliberate response choice.	Pause before reacting; distinguish fact from story; notice emotion and power; listen for meaning; revisit assumptions.	Without care it can become detached self-optimization. Without accountability it can remain private awareness with no behavioral consequence.
Care	Disciplined regard for dignity, voice, agency, growth, belonging, and the real constraints affecting another person.	Ask and listen; explain impact; offer appropriate support; protect dignity; include stakeholders; repair harm.	Without accountability it can become rescue, favoritism, paternalism, or avoidance. Care is not agreement or insulation from consequences.
Accountability	Shared clarity about standards, commitments, evidence, roles, decision rights, support, review points, and fair consequences.	Set expectations; document decisions; give timely feedback; follow through; correct systems; make difficult calls when commitments are not met.	Without care it can become fear, humiliation, coercion, or blame. Accountability is not punishment for its own sake.

Table 13

Position	Pattern	What it looks like	Likely effects
Low care, low accountability	Neglect and avoidance	Standards are unclear, feedback is delayed, support is absent, and underperformance is tolerated until a crisis.	Drift, cynicism, inequity, surprise consequences, low learning.
High care, low accountability	Protective indulgence	The leader empathizes but repeatedly softens expectations, rescues, or avoids consequences.	Dependency, resentment among reliable performers, hidden standards, paternalism.
Low care, high accountability	Coercive pressure	The leader monitors, threatens, blames, or imposes consequences without listening, support, or dignity.	Compliance, concealment, burnout, turnover, risk silence.
High care, high accountability	Compassionate accountability	Standards and impact are explicit; the person is heard; constraints are diagnosed; support and commitments are agreed; follow-up and fair consequences are real.	Candor, learning, agency, performance, trustworthiness, and more defensible decisions.

Table 14

Development level	Core competencies	Observable behaviors	Intended outcomes	Evidence status
Level 1: Self and presence	Awareness, reflection, mindset, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, authenticity, values, courage, communication, influence, learning orientation	Names reactions and assumptions; regulates before acting; invites feedback; aligns behavior with values; communicates with clarity and presence	Better response choice, credibility, learning, and relational consistency	Explicit in FMBA 620; mechanisms supported to varying degrees
Level 2: Relationships and teams	Care, accountability, coaching, feedback, expectations, delegation, conflict, collaboration, trust, psychological safety, ethics, stakeholder judgment, culture	Sets standards; gives timely feedback; listens; diagnoses performance; delegates decision rights; resolves conflict; follows through; protects voice	Candor, coordination, learning, fairness, and sustained team performance	Explicit in FMBA 621; substantial component evidence
Level 3: Organization and systems	Vision, strategy, change, resistance, crisis, resilience, adaptive leadership, innovation, diversity, belonging, systems thinking, lasting impact	Connects mission to choices; maps stakeholders and system effects; communicates tradeoffs; redesigns incentives and routines; leads through uncertainty	Change readiness, resilience, innovation, belonging, alignment, and stakeholder outcomes	Explicit in FMBA 622; organizational causal claims require more evidence
Cross-cutting horizon	Community, human dignity, social responsibility, broad stakeholder impact, global perspective	Considers who benefits, who bears risk, whose voice is missing, and how decisions affect communities over time	Legitimacy, ethical quality, and more durable value creation	Explicit across Institute, Bulletin, and EMBA; not a separate formal course level

Table 15

Topic	Level	Observable behavior	Workplace application	Intended outcome	Supporting source
Self-awareness and reflection	Self	Names triggers, values, assumptions, and patterns; seeks disconfirming feedback	Pre-meeting reflection, decision journal, leadership debrief	More deliberate choices and learning	VCU, 2026b
Lifelong learning mindset	Self	Frames setbacks as information; asks what must be learned	After-action reviews, stretch goals, feedback plan	Adaptability and development	VCU, 2026b; Gottfredson & Reina, 2021
Mindfulness	Self / relationship	Sustains attention, notices reactivity, listens before answering	Difficult conversations, crisis updates, meetings	Less automatic reaction; better interaction quality	VCU, 2026b; Reina et al., 2023
Emotional intelligence	Self / relationship	Recognizes emotion, regulates expression, reads social cues	Conflict, influence, coaching, change communication	More effective communication and regulation	VCU, 2026b
Authenticity, courage, and values	Self	Explains principles; acts consistently; names uncomfortable truths	Ethical dilemmas, upward influence, strategic tradeoffs	Credibility and values-aligned action	VCU, 2026b
Communication and influence	Relationship	Adapts message, listens, uses evidence and narrative responsibly	Executive presentations, negotiations, stakeholder alignment	Understanding, commitment, and informed choice	VCU, 2026b
Meaningful relationships	Relationship	Invests attention, follows through, repairs breaches	One-on-ones, cross-functional partnership, customer dialogue	Trust and coordination	VCU, 2026b; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002
Recognition, growth, and feedback culture	Relationship / team	Recognizes contribution; gives specific developmental feedback	Performance routines, peer feedback, learning reviews	Motivation, clarity, and learning	VCU, 2026b; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996

Table 16

Topic	Level	Observable behavior	Workplace application	Intended outcome	Supporting source
Performance expectations	Team	Defines outcomes, quality, decision rights, and evidence of completion	Goal setting, role clarity, project launch	Clarity and fair evaluation	VCU, 2026b
Impactful feedback	Relationship / team	Uses specific observations, impact, dialogue, and next commitments	Performance correction and development	Learning and course correction	VCU, 2026b; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996
Coaching	Relationship	Uses questions, practice, reflection, and follow-up rather than solving everything	One-on-ones, succession, capability building	Agency and skill growth	VCU, 2026b; Jones et al., 2016
Team dynamics and delegation	Team	Matches authority to responsibility; clarifies interfaces and escalation	Cross-functional work and leadership pipelines	Capacity, ownership, and coordination	VCU, 2026b
Conflict and collaboration	Team	Surfaces interests, protects dissent, resolves or escalates constructively	Priority disputes, role conflict, resource allocation	Better decisions and durable working relationships	VCU, 2026b
Care and accountability	Relationship / team	Pairs dignity and support with clear standards, follow-up, and consequences	Underperformance, conduct, commitments	Trustworthy performance management	VCU, 2024a, 2026b
Trust and psychological safety	Team	Invites concerns, admits uncertainty, responds fairly to bad news	Risk review, incident response, innovation	Voice, learning, and error detection	VCU, 2026b; Edmondson, 1999
Ethics and stakeholder impact	Team / organization	Identifies affected parties, rights, harms, duties, and tradeoffs	Pricing, layoffs, data use, customer safety	More defensible decisions and legitimacy	VCU, 2026a, 2026b
Uncertainty, risk, bias, and time horizons	Team / organization	Uses pre-mortems, base rates, scenarios, dissent, and staged commitments	Investment, hiring, AI, crisis decisions	Reduced blind spots and better risk judgment	VCU, 2026b
Culture alignment	Team / organization	Connects values to routines, rewards, hiring, promotion, and consequences	Culture change and operating cadence	More consistent norms and behavior	VCU, 2026b

Table 17

Topic	Level	Observable behavior	Workplace application	Intended outcome	Supporting source
Change management and resistance	Organization	Maps stakeholders, diagnoses loss and uncertainty, sequences adoption, adjusts based on evidence	Restructuring, transformation, technology adoption	Readiness, adoption, and reduced avoidable harm	VCU, 2026b; Oreg et al., 2011
Change communication	Organization	Explains why, what, tradeoffs, unknowns, decisions, and channels for voice	Enterprise change and crisis communication	Sensemaking and trustworthiness	VCU, 2026b
Vision, mission, and strategy	Organization	Translates purpose into choices, priorities, resource allocation, and metrics	Strategic planning and portfolio decisions	Alignment and coherent execution	VCU, 2026b
Crisis, resilience, and adaptive leadership	Organization / system	Stabilizes immediate risk, communicates uncertainty, mobilizes learning, adapts roles	Operational disruption, reputation crisis, public health event	Continuity, learning, and recovery	VCU, 2026b; Heifetz, 1994
Creativity and innovation	Team / organization	Creates idea flow, separates generation from selection, funds experiments, stops weak bets	Product, process, and business-model innovation	Learning and viable innovation	VCU, 2026b; Wei et al., 2025
Diversity, belonging, and trust	Organization	Expands voice and access, values uniqueness, examines patterns in opportunity and consequence	Talent systems, meetings, promotion, product design	Belonging, information quality, and legitimacy	VCU, 2026b; Randel et al., 2018
Systems thinking and holistic integration	System	Maps feedback loops, delays, externalities, constraints, and cross-functional effects	Policy, incentives, operating model, stakeholder strategy	Fewer local optimizations and more durable impact	VCU, 2026b; Senge, 1990
Lasting organizational impact	System	Builds routines, governance, measures, and successor capability	Institutionalization and leadership succession	Sustained practices beyond one leader	VCU, 2026b; analytical interpretation

		rather than relying on charisma			
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Table 18

Element	Leadership-development function	Reinforcement mechanism
FMBA 620-622	Provides the developmental spine from self to teams to organizations and systems.	Concepts and practice prompts recur across semesters.
Integrated business curriculum	Connects leadership choices to finance, analytics, operations, strategy, law, technology, and markets.	Prevents people-centered leadership from becoming detached from business competence.
Cohort and cross-functional teams	Creates repeated interdependence, conflict, feedback, influence, trust, and repair.	Peers become a practice field and source of multi-rater observation.
Consulting projects each semester	Requires application with real clients, incomplete information, deadlines, and stakeholder tradeoffs.	Turns abstract leadership concepts into consequential team and client behavior.
Executive coaching	Supports individualized reflection, goals, feedback interpretation, and transfer to work.	Can accelerate behavior change when goals, practice, and follow-up are strong.
Assessments and simulations	Make patterns visible and allow practice under structured pressure.	Useful for feedback and rehearsal; validity depends on instrument quality and debrief.
Global immersion	Exposes assumptions about culture, institutions, markets, and leadership expectations.	Can widen perspective if paired with preparation, reflection, and avoidance of superficial cultural generalization.
Capstone strategic dilemma	Integrates business disciplines with ambiguity, executive judgment, and stakeholder impact.	Tests whether the leader can combine care, accountability, evidence, and strategy.
Professional role while enrolled	Allows immediate transfer to current teams and organizations.	Creates a rapid learn-apply-reflect loop, though workplace conditions may constrain experimentation.

Table 19

Theory/tradition	Primary focus	View of the leader	View of followers or members
Transformational	Elevating motivation, meaning, and performance	Visionary influencer and role model	Followers capable of exceeding exchange-based expectations
Servant	Serving follower growth and community	Steward whose legitimacy follows service	Persons whose development and welfare are primary
Authentic	Self-awareness and values-consistent leadership	Self-aware, relationally transparent, balanced processor	Partners who judge credibility and consistency
Ethical	Normatively appropriate conduct and moral management	Role model, communicator, and enforcer of ethical standards	Moral agents affected by rewards, discipline, and example
Compassionate	Noticing suffering, empathic concern, and wise action	Responsive human agent who alleviates avoidable suffering	Whole people with vulnerability and agency
Mindful	Attention, awareness, decentering, and nonreactivity	Present, observant, and response-flexible	Interaction partners whose cues and context deserve full attention
Inclusive	Belonging and valued uniqueness	Accessible, open, and supportive boundary-spanner	Contributors who need voice, belonging, and recognition of difference
Adaptive	Mobilizing people to address complex, nontechnical challenges	Orchestrator who regulates distress and returns work to the system	Stakeholders who must learn, experiment, and absorb loss
Systems	Interdependencies, feedback loops, delays, and leverage points	Designer and learner within a larger system	Actors embedded in structures and reciprocal effects
Humanistic management	Human dignity, flourishing, and ethical value creation	Steward of persons and institutions	Persons with inherent dignity, not merely production inputs
Conscious capitalism	Purpose, stakeholders, culture, and conscious leadership	Purpose-driven leader balancing stakeholder value	Interdependent stakeholders in a value-creation system
Stakeholder theory	Value creation and obligations across affected groups	Integrator and negotiator of stakeholder interests	Parties with legitimate interests, rights, and risks
Psychological safety	Interpersonal risk-taking and learning climate	Climate shaper who responds to voice and mistakes	Team members deciding whether speaking is safe
Coaching leadership	Developing capability, insight, and ownership	Facilitator who asks, challenges, supports, and follows up	Learners with agency and developmental goals

Leader-member exchange	Quality of dyadic leader-member relationships	Partner in differentiated exchange relationships	Dyadic partners whose relationship quality affects outcomes
Change leadership	Direction, alignment, commitment, and adoption	Sensegiver, coalition builder, decision-maker, and sponsor	Change recipients who interpret, support, resist, or adapt

Table 20

Theory/tradition	Main mechanisms	Typical behaviors	Intended outcomes
Transformational	Identification, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration	Articulate vision, challenge assumptions, model commitment, develop others	Motivation, extra effort, performance, change
Servant	Service, stewardship, empowerment, community	Listen, empathize, develop, share power	Growth, trust, service, community well-being
Authentic	Self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, transparency, balanced processing	Disclose appropriately, seek evidence, align values and action	Trust, engagement, ethical consistency
Ethical	Social learning, reinforcement, moral communication	Model ethics, discuss standards, reward and discipline fairly	Ethical conduct and climate
Compassionate	Attention to suffering, empathy, discernment, action	Notice, inquire, respond proportionately, remove avoidable harm	Well-being, connection, recovery, dignity
Mindful	Attention regulation and decentering	Pause, observe, listen, regulate, choose response	Reduced reactivity, better interaction, well-being
Inclusive	Openness, accessibility, availability, fair voice	Invite difference, share information, remove participation barriers	Belonging, voice, creativity, retention
Adaptive	Productive disequilibrium, experimentation, learning	Diagnose adaptive challenge, regulate heat, protect voices below	Learning and adaptation under complexity
Systems	Feedback, stocks/flows, mental models, leverage	Map system, test assumptions, coordinate across boundaries	Fewer unintended consequences, system learning
Humanistic management	Dignity, well-being, ethics, plural value	Design institutions that respect persons and shared flourishing	Human flourishing and legitimate performance
Conscious capitalism	Purpose, stakeholder integration, culture	Lead with purpose and stakeholder orientation	Sustainable stakeholder value and engagement
Stakeholder theory	Joint value creation, rights, tradeoffs, governance	Identify, engage, balance, and justify choices	Legitimacy and durable value creation
Psychological safety	Leader response and shared belief about interpersonal risk	Invite input, admit fallibility, respond appreciatively and fairly	Voice, learning, error reporting, innovation
Coaching leadership	Goal clarity, questioning, feedback, practice, accountability	Ask, challenge, support, observe, follow up	Learning, self-efficacy, performance
Leader-member exchange	Reciprocity and relationship quality	Build trust, respect, obligation, and role clarity	Commitment, performance, citizenship; also differentiation effects

Change leadership	Sensemaking, coalition, communication, capability, reinforcement	Create direction, mobilize, remove barriers, institutionalize	Adoption, alignment, and change outcomes
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Table 21

Theory/tradition	Similarity to VCU	Difference from VCU	Important criticism or limitation
Transformational	Vision, individualized support, change, inspiration	VCU adds mindfulness, care-accountability balance, explicit stakeholder and systems emphasis	Heroic leader bias, moral ambiguity, construct overlap, common-method measurement
Servant	Care, service, dignity, development, community	VCU is more explicit about executive accountability, business integration, change, and systems	Can romanticize service, understate authority, or become paternalistic
Authentic	Self-awareness, values, reflection, relational credibility	VCU extends from authenticity into teams, performance, belonging, strategy, and systems	“True self” ambiguity, cultural assumptions, overlap with transformational/ethical leadership
Ethical	Values, role modeling, fair standards, stakeholder effects	VCU combines moral management with mindfulness, compassion, coaching, and change	Ethical norms may be contested; compliance can replace moral reasoning
Compassionate	Care, human suffering, wise response	VCU pairs compassion with explicit accountability and business judgment	Empathy fatigue, favoritism, performative concern, avoidance of hard choices
Mindful	Attention, presence, decentering, response choice	VCU treats mindfulness as foundation for relationships, accountability, and systems action	Can individualize structural harm, be depoliticized, or become productivity theater
Inclusive	Belonging, voice, difference, trust	VCU situates belonging within the full self-team-system sequence	Inclusion rhetoric can mask unequal power or demand assimilation
Adaptive	Uncertainty, learning, loss, resilience	VCU adds care, belonging, accountability, and integrated business content	Can be vague; leaders may shift burdens to employees under the label of adaptation
Systems	Holistic integration and lasting impact	VCU grounds systems thinking in leader presence and relational practice	Complexity can paralyze action; maps may obscure power and moral choices
Humanistic management	Dignity, flourishing, people-centered enterprise	Very close philosophical fit; VCU offers an applied curriculum and mindfulness research bridge	Plural values are hard to operationalize; business tradeoffs remain
Conscious capitalism	Purpose, stakeholder value, culture, care	VCU is less tied to one branded movement and more explicit about mindfulness and academic development	Can rely on exemplary firms, underplay conflict, and make broad performance claims
Stakeholder theory	Broad stakeholder responsibility and	VCU adds leader development, interpersonal mechanisms, and	No simple rule for resolving stakeholder conflicts; measurement is

	tradeoffs	culture practices	difficult
Psychological safety	Trust, voice, learning, candor	VCU explicitly pairs safety with accountability and performance management	Often misunderstood as comfort or freedom from consequences; climate may vary within teams
Coaching leadership	Feedback, growth, agency, follow-through	VCU embeds coaching inside ethical, relational, strategic, and systems responsibilities	Not every problem is coachable; directive action may be necessary
Leader-member exchange	Relationship quality and trust	VCU expands beyond dyads to team fairness, belonging, stakeholders, and systems	Differentiated relationships can create in-groups, inequity, and justice concerns
Change leadership	Vision, communication, resistance, institutionalization	VCU adds mindfulness, care, belonging, and humanistic accountability to change execution	Linear models oversimplify change; communication cannot compensate for harmful design

Table 22

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Delay until the formal review, present a list of failures, emphasize urgency, and prescribe a corrective plan.
Poor people-first response	Soften the message, over-focus on the employee's good intentions, take work back, and leave the standard ambiguous.
VCU-aligned response	Prepare by regulating frustration and checking the evidence. State the agreed standard, the observed gap, and the impact. Ask for the employee's view. Diagnose clarity, capability, capacity, motivation, and system constraints. Agree on support, measurable commitments, review dates, and consequences. Continue to recognize the person's value without pretending the gap is optional.
Mindfulness	Prevents the leader from converting disappointment into identity judgment or rehearsing only a prosecution.
Care	Protects dignity, listens for context, and offers proportionate development or resources.
Accountability	Makes the standard, evidence, timeline, ownership, and consequences explicit.
Tradeoffs and risks	Too much process can delay action; unequal support can look like favoritism; the role may ultimately be a mismatch despite good intent.

Table 23

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Tell both people to “work it out,” split responsibilities, or side with the stronger performer to preserve delivery.
Poor people-first response	Facilitate emotional sharing but avoid naming missed commitments, disrespect, or the cost to the wider team.
VCU-aligned response	Meet separately to understand facts, interests, identity threats, and power. Convene a structured dialogue. Establish shared outcomes and behavioral standards. Surface specific incidents and impact, not personality labels. Clarify decision rights and interfaces, create commitments for communication and escalation, and address any high-performer exception that undermines culture.
Mindfulness	Helps the leader notice favoritism, status bias, and the urge to solve the tension prematurely.
Care	Ensures both people are heard and avoids reducing either to the conflict.
Accountability	Makes collaboration behavior part of performance and applies consequences if harmful conduct continues.
Tradeoffs and risks	Forced reconciliation may be unsafe or unproductive; structural role conflict may require redesign rather than better feelings.

Table 24

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Optimize the financial target, keep decisions confidential, script managers, announce quickly, and move forward.
Poor people-first response	Use empathetic language while hiding decision logic, offering little practical support, and asking remaining staff to “be resilient.”
VCU-aligned response	Challenge whether the action is necessary, proportional, and fairly distributed. Include stakeholder and system effects in the decision. Use clear criteria and governance. Prepare managers to communicate what is known, unknown, decided, and not negotiable. Provide meaningful severance and transition support where feasible. Protect privacy. Give remaining employees space for questions and grief, reset workload and priorities, monitor inequitable impact, and review what structural choices created the need.
Mindfulness	Helps leaders face discomfort without hiding behind euphemism, speed, or emotional distance.
Care	Shapes process, timing, support, dignity, and attention to both departing and remaining people.
Accountability	Requires honest financial logic, consistent criteria, responsible implementation, and ownership of consequences.
Tradeoffs and risks	Confidentiality limits transparency; delay can worsen risk; no compassionate process removes the real harm of job loss.

Table 25

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Offer wellness resources, encourage time off, and ask the employee to improve prioritization while delivery expectations remain unchanged.
Poor people-first response	Express concern and reduce one person's workload informally, shifting the burden to others without examining system capacity.
VCU-aligned response	Listen to the employee's experience and assess immediate health or safety needs. Examine workload, staffing, role clarity, process friction, meeting load, after-hours norms, and conflicting priorities. Make explicit tradeoffs: stop, defer, automate, staff, or reduce scope. Agree on recovery steps and follow-up. Use aggregate patterns, not private disclosures, to address team-level causes.
Mindfulness	Allows the leader to notice defensiveness and the impulse to treat burnout as a resilience deficit.
Care	Takes suffering seriously and avoids demanding unnecessary disclosure.
Accountability	Requires leaders to own capacity decisions and employees to communicate constraints and commitments early.
Tradeoffs and risks	Some deadlines are fixed; accommodations must be fair; mental-health issues may require professional support beyond a manager's role.

Table 26

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Frame resistance as a communication problem, mandate training, set adoption targets, and reward use.
Poor people-first response	Hold listening sessions, promise that no one should worry, and avoid confronting productivity, role, privacy, or workforce implications.
VCU-aligned response	Segment resistance: legitimate risk, job loss fear, skill gaps, workflow mismatch, ethical concern, status threat, or simple inertia. Share the business case and limits of current knowledge. Include affected employees in workflow design and risk review. Establish human oversight, data governance, quality measures, escalation, and a process for reporting harm. Pilot in stages, publish learning, invest in capability, and be honest when roles may change.
Mindfulness	Reduces technology enthusiasm bias and defensiveness toward critics.
Care	Recognizes identity, livelihood, privacy, fairness, and customer consequences.
Accountability	Requires adoption where justified, measurable outcomes, risk controls, and decisions when a tool fails to deliver.
Tradeoffs and risks	Participation can become symbolic; competitors may move faster; leaders cannot promise zero displacement or perfect safety.

Table 27

Lens	Application
Conventional response	Centralize decisions, project confidence, limit information, and focus on immediate control.
Poor people-first response	Over-consult, delay containment, communicate reassurance unsupported by facts, and avoid hard priorities.
VCU-aligned response	Separate immediate containment from adaptive learning. Name what is known, unknown, assumed, and next to be tested. Establish decision rights and a cadence for updates. Invite frontline and dissenting information. Protect people from preventable harm, prioritize critical operations, document decisions, and revisit them as evidence changes. After stabilization, conduct a blame-aware but not blame-free review that distinguishes reasonable decisions from negligence or concealment.
Mindfulness	Supports composure, attentional control, and willingness to revise a public position.
Care	Keeps human safety, communication, workload, and disproportionate impact visible.
Accountability	Requires clear authority, timely action, documentation, truthfulness, and review.
Tradeoffs and risks	Direction may need to be unilateral; transparency can create confusion or legal exposure; hindsight bias can distort evaluation.

Table 28

Outcome	Evidence category	What is reasonably supported	Important limitation
Leader awareness and response flexibility	Empirical component support	Mindfulness varies with situations and is associated with attention, regulation, and interaction quality; mindset research supports development targets.	Effects depend on practice, context, measurement, and ethical direction.
Trust and relationship quality	Empirical component support	Trust in leadership is associated with attitudes and performance; mindful relating offers a mechanism for relationship trajectories.	Much evidence is correlational; trust can be misplaced or unevenly distributed.
Psychological safety, voice, and learning	Strong component support	Primary and meta-analytic evidence links psychological safety with learning behavior, voice, and effectiveness.	Safety is climate-specific and does not equal comfort or absence of standards.
Feedback and performance improvement	Mixed component support	Feedback can improve performance, and coaching shows positive average effects.	More than one-third of feedback effects in a major meta-analysis were negative; design and focus matter.
Employee well-being	Moderate component support	Mindfulness interventions and eudaimonic well-being research support plausible benefits.	Self-selection, self-report, and short follow-up are common; mindfulness cannot repair harmful workload alone.
Creativity and innovation	Emerging component support	Mindful communication and psychological safety can support idea contribution and creativity.	Innovation also requires strategy, expertise, resources, selection, and market discipline.
Ethical climate and stakeholder quality	Theoretical plus adjacent empirical support	Ethical leadership, stakeholder theory, and humanistic management identify mechanisms and outcomes.	Values conflict, power, and tradeoffs remain; no single metric captures ethical quality.
Change readiness and resilience	General change evidence	Participation, communication, fairness, capability, and leadership affect reactions to change.	Change outcomes are highly contextual; caring communication cannot redeem a poorly designed change.
Business performance and durable transformation	Aspirational for VCU-specific model	Leadership, trust, training, and team climates can contribute to performance.	No public VCU-specific causal evaluation was found; financial outcomes have many competing causes and time lags.

Table 29

Issue	Why it matters
Term ambiguity	“Transformative” can mean personal growth, organizational change, social justice, humanistic management, or exceptional impact. Without a formal construct definition, different audiences may infer different models.
Theory overlap	The model shares substantial content with servant, authentic, ethical, mindful, inclusive, transformational, adaptive, systems, and humanistic leadership. This can enable integration but also risks construct proliferation.
Care as paternalism	A leader may presume to know what is best, use family metaphors to demand loyalty, or substitute benevolence for employee voice, rights, and bargaining power.
Performative empathy	Listening language can become a technique for gaining compliance while decisions, resources, or consequences remain unchanged.
Psychological safety confusion	Teams may confuse safety with protection from evaluation, challenge, or consequences. Leaders may also invoke “candor” to justify disrespect.
Well-being versus operational pressure	Human-centered intentions do not eliminate deadlines, scarcity, competition, fiduciary duties, or safety constraints. The quality of tradeoff reasoning becomes central.
Cultural variation	Direct feedback, emotional disclosure, hierarchy, individual voice, and relational expectations vary across cultures. A U.S.-centric model may not transfer without adaptation.
Power and structural inequality	Interpersonal kindness cannot by itself change pay inequity, discrimination, unsafe work, coercive contracts, concentrated decision rights, or legal constraints.
Adverse incentives	Leaders may be rewarded for short-term output while care, learning, or long-term stakeholder effects remain unmeasured. Individual development cannot compensate for contradictory governance.
Measurement difficulty	Transformation is multi-level, delayed, and influenced by many factors. Favorable survey scores do not prove durable culture or performance change.
Selection and survivorship bias	EMBA participants are experienced professionals who choose and can access an intensive program. Outcomes may reflect motivation, employer support, or prior trajectory.
No public VCU-specific evaluation	No peer-reviewed longitudinal or controlled evaluation of FMBA 620-622 was found. Program descriptions establish intent, not causal effectiveness.
Individualization of system problems	Mindfulness and resilience can be misused to locate failure in the leader or employee rather than workload, policy, technology, or market structure.
Need for directive leadership	Safety events, crises, misconduct, and time-critical decisions may require unilateral action. The model must accommodate authority without abandoning dignity and review.

Table 30

Cadence	Practices
Daily	One-minute pause before high-stakes responses; clarify one expectation; close one loop; recognize a contribution specifically; ask one genuine question before advising.
Weekly	Hold protected one-on-ones; review commitments and support; invite bad news; conduct a brief decision or meeting reflection; examine workload and bottlenecks.
Monthly	Review team trust, voice, accountability, conflict, and capacity; analyze one consequential decision for bias and stakeholder effects; coach a leader; remove one recurring system friction.
Quarterly	Review talent and performance with evidence and fairness checks; assess change readiness; examine belonging and opportunity patterns; revisit team agreements and decision rights.
Organizational	Align incentives, promotion, resource allocation, governance, data, and consequences with stated values; build channels for voice and appeal; measure human and business outcomes together.

Table 31

Construct/outcome	Possible measures	Key cautions
Self-awareness / reflection	Self-Reflection and Insight Scale; structured reflection quality; 360 themes	Self-report bias; reflection can become rumination; scale permissions should be checked.
Emotional intelligence	Ability-based MSCEIT or commercial EQ-i 2.0; observer behavior ratings	Major instruments are proprietary; scores can be overinterpreted; EI is not morality.
Feedback orientation	Feedback Orientation Scale; feedback-seeking behavior; follow-through records	Scale permissions and context; willingness does not ensure feedback quality.
Mindful attention	MAAS or FFMQ; experience-sampling; observed listening and interruption patterns	Self-report and demand effects; meditation frequency is not leadership behavior; permissions vary.
Mindful communication	Original behavior rubric: attention, nonreactivity, curiosity, summary, response flexibility	A custom rubric requires validation and rater training; avoid implying a VCU-validated scale.
Trust	McAllister cognition- and affect-based trust measures; qualitative breach and repair data	Trust may vary by relationship and can reflect similarity bias; permission should be checked.
Psychological safety	Edmondson team scale; voice, incident, and learning behavior	Team-level aggregation requires adequate agreement and sample size; safety is not absence of consequence.
Engagement	UWES or other validated measure; discretionary effort and participation indicators	Gallup Q12 is proprietary; engagement can coexist with overwork; common-method bias.
Well-being	Eudaimonic Workplace Well-Being Scale; validated burnout or strain measures; absence and workload data	Privacy and clinical boundaries; do not diagnose; survey improvement may reflect attrition.
Turnover intention / retention	Short validated turnover-intention items; regrettable turnover and internal mobility	Intent is not behavior; turnover has labor-market and personal causes; protect confidentiality.
Team effectiveness / accountability	Goal attainment, quality, reliability, peer commitments, decision latency, rework	Metrics can be gamed; outcome difficulty and interdependence must be considered.
Ethical climate	Ethical Climate Questionnaire or Leadership Virtues Questionnaire; misconduct reporting and resolution	Instrument permissions; low reports may mean low misconduct or low trust in reporting.
Belonging and inclusion	Workplace belongingness scales; voice, opportunity, promotion, network, and exit patterns	Average scores can hide subgroup gaps; belonging should not reward conformity.
Change readiness	Holt et al. readiness measure; adoption, proficiency, sentiment, and barrier logs	Readiness changes over time and by stakeholder; adoption alone does not prove value.

Innovation	Idea flow, experiment quality, learning velocity, implementation, customer and risk outcomes	Counts reward low-quality activity; innovation has long and uneven time horizons.
Stakeholder and business outcomes	Customer trust, safety, quality, supplier outcomes, community effects, financial and operational measures	Attribution is difficult; select balanced measures and predefine expected mechanisms and lags.

Table 32

Measurement principle A leader-behavior score can show that behavior changed. It cannot by itself prove that an organization transformed. Organizational transformation requires evidence of changed routines, systems, distributions of voice and opportunity, stakeholder outcomes, and durable performance across time.

Table 33

Idea	Intended user	Problem solved	Connection to VCU framework	User value	Priority
Definitive transformative leadership guide	Executives, MBA students, educators	Confusion about the term and VCU's approach	Full self-team-system synthesis	High-value reference and internal linking hub	P1
Transformative vs transformational explainer	Students, managers, search users	Common conflation of terms	Clarifies VCU's umbrella versus Burns/Bass tradition	Fast conceptual clarity	P1
Compassionate accountability planner	Managers preparing hard conversations	Care and standards feel incompatible	FMBA 621 and Institute language	Produces a structured conversation plan	P1
Difficult-feedback preparation tool	Managers and team leads	Feedback is delayed, vague, or punitive	Mindfulness, communication, coaching, accountability	Improves preparation and follow-through	P1
High-care/high-accountability self-assessment	Managers and leadership cohorts	Leaders overuse rescue, avoidance, pressure, or neglect	Central operating tension	Reflection and development targets	P1
30-day mindfulness, care, and accountability practice	New and experienced managers	Insight does not transfer to habit	FMBA 620-622 progression	Small daily experiments and reflection	P1
Team working-agreement builder	Project teams, MBA cohorts, managers	Unclear norms, decisions, conflict, and response expectations	Trust, safety, delegation, conflict, accountability	Creates explicit operating norms	P2
Manager one-on-one planner	People managers	One-on-ones become status updates	Care, coaching, expectations, well-being, follow-up	Balanced agenda with continuity	P2
Conflict-navigation worksheet	Managers, peers, teams	Conflict becomes avoidance or personality labeling	Mindfulness, care, accountability, collaboration	Separates facts, interests, power, standards, and system issues	P2
Change and AI readiness assessment	Executives, transformation leads	Leaders misclassify resistance and overfocus communication	FMBA 622 change, ethics, systems, belonging	Maps readiness, risk, voice, capability, and adoption barriers	P2
Leadership reflection journal	EMBA students and managers	Experience is not converted into learning	Self-awareness, mindset, mindfulness, values	Builds a decision and behavior record	P2

Leadership scenario simulator	MBA students, emerging leaders	Concepts feel abstract until tradeoffs appear	All three levels	Practice choices and see consequence pathways	P2
Team trust and psychological-safety pulse	Teams and facilitators	Leaders need signals about voice and response patterns	FMBA 621 trust and safety	Prompts discussion and action	P3
Culture and belonging audit	HR, executives, team leaders	Values and belonging are not connected to systems	FMBA 621-622 culture and belonging	Links experience to routines, opportunity, and consequence	P3
Instructor and classroom resource pack	Faculty, trainers, student clubs	Need credible cases and discussion materials	Three-level progression and scenarios	Ready-to-use teaching support	P3
Expert interview and contributor series	Leadership readers and practitioners	Need nuance beyond tools	Research-to-practice mission	Credibility, lived cases, disagreement, updates	P3

Table 34

Idea	Data or logic required	Risk of oversimplification	Source and attribution requirements
Definitive transformative leadership guide	Curated sources, diagrams, examples	May overstate coherence; label interpretations	Cite VCU and original scholarship; non-affiliation
Transformative vs transformational explainer	Comparison logic and citations	Binary framing can obscure variation	Credit Burns, Bass, VCU; link primary sources
Compassionate accountability planner	Inputs: facts, standard, impact, perspective, system causes, support, consequences	Can become scripted or legal-risky	Label as MBA Lab-derived; HR/legal caution
Difficult-feedback preparation tool	Fact/story split, goals, questions, commitments, review	Tool cannot diagnose complex performance or protected issues	Cite feedback evidence; privacy notice
High-care/high-accountability self-assessment	Original behavior items, scenario scoring, action plan	False precision and social desirability	Clearly unvalidated; do not mimic proprietary scales
30-day mindfulness, care, and accountability practice	Daily prompts, streak, weekly review, workplace safeguards	Mindfulness may be reduced to productivity ritual	Credit public concepts; explain limits
Team working-agreement builder	Decision rights, response times, conflict, feedback, workload, repair	Agreement can be ceremonial without review	Original template; cite psych safety/team research
Manager one-on-one planner	Goals, obstacles, growth, feedback, workload, commitments	May invite oversharing; privacy risk	Do not collect sensitive data by default
Conflict-navigation worksheet	Structured prompts and escalation criteria	Unsafe cases need HR or formal process	Include harassment/safety escalation guardrails
Change and AI readiness assessment	Stakeholder matrix, data governance, skill, workflow, trust, metrics	Can produce pseudo-scientific score	Original logic; disclose assumptions; cite change research
Leadership reflection journal	Prompts, patterns, commitments, review cadence	Rumination and sensitive-data storage	Privacy-first; local/export options
Leadership scenario simulator	Branching scenarios, evidence notes, reflection, no “perfect” answer	Oversimplifies context and rewards gaming	Original scenarios; label analytical, not VCU cases
Team trust and psychological-safety pulse	Original items or licensed scale, anonymity thresholds, action planning	Small-group anonymity and survey fatigue	Do not copy protected items; strong privacy controls

Culture and belonging audit	Policy/process inventory, subgroup data, qualitative evidence	Can become checklist compliance or collect sensitive data	Legal/privacy review; cite inclusion research
Instructor and classroom resource pack	Slides, facilitator notes, cases, rubrics, sources	Could drift into copying VCU content	Entirely original; no VCU branding or proprietary materials
Expert interview and contributor series	Interview framework, editorial standards, disclosures	Promotional interviews can become uncritical testimonials	Disclose relationships; verify claims; seek diverse views

Table 35

Idea	Potential SEO value	Recommended format	Priority
Definitive transformative leadership guide	High: “transformative leadership,” VCU intent queries	Pillar article	P1
Transformative vs transformational explainer	Very high question-based demand	Article + comparison graphic	P1
Compassionate accountability planner	High: compassionate accountability, accountability conversation	Interactive tool + template	P1
Difficult-feedback preparation tool	High evergreen manager demand	Interactive tool	P1
High-care/high-accountability self-assessment	High: leadership style and accountability searches	Educational assessment	P1
30-day mindfulness, care, and accountability practice	Medium-high long-tail and retention value	Email course / guided journal	P1
Team working-agreement builder	High practical demand	Interactive builder + export	P2
Manager one-on-one planner	High recurring search and product use	Tool + recurring template	P2
Conflict-navigation worksheet	High evergreen demand	Template + article	P2
Change and AI readiness assessment	High current AI/change demand	Interactive diagnostic	P2
Leadership reflection journal	Medium; strong retention and classroom use	Journal tool / PDF	P2
Leadership scenario simulator	Medium-high shareability and course value	Interactive simulation	P2
Team trust and psychological-safety pulse	Medium-high	Pulse tool	P3
Culture and belonging audit	Medium-high B2B demand	Diagnostic + guide	P3
Instructor and classroom resource pack	Medium, high authority/link value	Downloadable teaching pack	P3
Expert interview and contributor series	Medium; link earning and brand authority	Editorial series / podcast	P3

Table 36

The CARE loop MBA Lab could create an original, clearly non-VCU mnemonic for practical use: Center attention; Articulate reality and standards; Relate with dignity and curiosity; Execute commitments, consequences, and learning. The content should be presented as MBA Lab’s translation of public leadership research, not as VCU’s official framework.

Table 37

Source	Role in report	Source type	Confidence and limit
VCU 2026-27 Executive MBA Bulletin	Program goal, learning outcomes, 42-credit curriculum, FMBA 620-622 requirement	Official academic record; preliminary	High for formal curriculum; final edition pending in August
VCU 2026-27 FMBA course catalog	Detailed content of FMBA 620, 621, and 622	Official academic record; preliminary	Highest available evidence of course intent
Institute for Transformative Leadership site	Values, intentionality, belonging, relationships, humans-first orientation, compassionate accountability	Official Institute page	High for public model language; not outcome evidence
VCU Executive MBA program page	Program focus, cohort, consulting projects, coaching, global learning, integrated application	Official program page	High for delivery design; promotional claims treated cautiously
VCU Executive MBA brochure	Care and accountability, skill list, coaching, projects, cohort, immediate application	Official marketing PDF	High for positioning; not causal evidence
VCU News, July 27, 2026	Institutional status and expanding footprint	University news	Context and chronology only
VCU News, Jan. 18, 2024	Humanistic organizing context and research translation	University news	Context only; paper is primary source
Christopher Reina faculty profile	Role and research focus	Official faculty profile	High for position and stated research areas
VCU Bulletin archives	Appearance of dedicated course sequence over time	Official archive	Supports cautious chronology, not origin of ideas
Barry-Wehmiller partnership page	Partnership, Truly Human Leadership, Humanistic Leadership Academy connection	Organizational self-description	Valid for relationship description; not independent effectiveness evidence
Barry-Wehmiller span-of-care page	Meaning of “span of care” and stewardship language	Organizational self-description	Valid for philosophy; claims require independent evaluation
Town et al. 2024	Humanistic organizing and mindful organizational communication	Peer-reviewed conceptual theory	Strong conceptual bridge; empirical testing still needed
Reina, Mills, & Sumpter 2023	Mindful relating and relationship trajectories	Peer-reviewed conceptual framework	Strong mechanism logic; not program evaluation
Reina et al. 2023	Mindfulness infusion in workplace interaction	Peer-reviewed qualitative study	Strong practice insight; context and causality

			limits
Gottfredson & Reina 2021	Leadership mindsets as development foundation	Peer-reviewed conceptual/practitioner article	Directly aligned with FMBA 620
Reina & Kudesia 2020; Kudesia & Reina 2019	Situational mindfulness and trust context	Peer-reviewed experience-sampling studies	Empirical mechanism evidence, mainly correlational
Gupta & Reina 2024	Hassles, exhaustion, mindfulness, counterproductive behavior	Peer-reviewed empirical study	Supports boundary condition; not a structural cure
Wei et al. 2025	Leader mindful communication and team creativity	Peer-reviewed field study	Emerging, context-specific evidence
Leadership training/coaching meta-analyses	General effectiveness of training and coaching	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis	Supports delivery logic, not VCU effect size
Trust and psychological safety research	Voice, learning, attitudes, performance	Peer-reviewed primary and meta-analysis	Strong component support with context limits

Table 38

Competency	620	621	622	Integrated core	Coaching	Cohort	Projects / capstone	Global immersion
Self-awareness and reflection	P	R	R	R	P	R	A	A
Mindfulness and response choice	P	R	R	R	R	A	A	A
Emotional intelligence	P	R	R	R	P	A	A	A
Values, authenticity, and courage	P	R	R	R	P	A	A	A
Communication and influence	P	R	R	P	R	P	P	A
Meaningful relationships and trust	P	P	R	R	R	P	P	A
Performance expectations and accountability	R	P	R	P	R	P	P	
Feedback and coaching	R	P	R	R	P	P	A	
Delegation and decision rights	R	P	R	P	R	P	P	A
Conflict and collaboration	R	P	R	R	R	P	P	A
Psychological safety and voice	R	P	R	R	R	P	P	A
Ethics and stakeholder responsibility	R	P	R	P	R	A	P	P
Risk, uncertainty, and cognitive bias	R	P	R	P	R	A	P	P
Culture and belonging	R	P	P	R	R	P	P	P
Vision, mission, and strategy	R	R	P	P	R	A	P	A
Change and resistance	R	R	P	P	R	A	P	A
Crisis, resilience, and adaptation	R	R	P	R	R	A	A	A
Creativity and innovation	R	R	P	P	R	P	P	P
Systems thinking and integration	R	R	P	P	R	A	P	P

Table 39

Source period	What is visible	Interpretive caution
2023-24 bulletin	Dedicated FMBA 620-622 sequence not found in the course catalog reviewed.	Does not establish absence of leadership content elsewhere.
2024 Institute page	Publicly articulates values, belonging, mindful and compassionate leadership, and compassionate accountability.	Page updated September 25, 2024; initiative may predate page update.
2024-25 bulletin	Dedicated FMBA 620-622 sequence not found in the course catalog reviewed.	Archived catalog evidence only.
2025-26 bulletin	Dedicated FMBA 620-622 sequence appears.	Supports recent formalization of the three-course architecture.
October 2025 brochure	High care and high accountability become prominent EMBA positioning; coaching, projects, cohort, and global immersion are emphasized.	Marketing source, not evaluation.
2026 program page and preliminary 2026-27 bulletin	Transformative leadership is an explicit program differentiator and learning outcome; sequence remains required.	Bulletin final edition was pending at cutoff.
July 27, 2026 VCU News	Institute described as entering its fourth year and expanding its practical, human-centered footprint.	Institutional news context; full outcome evidence not provided.

Table 40

Element	Legitimate purpose	Observable practice	Guardrail
Mindfulness	Improves noticing and response choice	Pause, label, listen, revise	Do not use as a substitute for workload or system change
Care	Protects dignity, agency, voice, and belonging	Inquire, support, explain, repair	Avoid rescue, favoritism, forced disclosure, and family-based loyalty demands
Accountability	Creates clarity, reliability, and learning	Set standards, evidence, owners, reviews, consequences	Avoid humiliation, surprise punishment, and metric gaming
Trust and safety	Increase flow of risk, error, and dissent information	Invite bad news, respond fairly, admit uncertainty	Do not promise comfort or immunity from performance consequences
Coaching and feedback	Build capability and course correction	Ask, observe, practice, follow up	Poorly focused feedback can reduce performance
Systems and change	Address structural causes and cross-boundary effects	Map stakeholders, incentives, loops, delays, and adoption barriers	Communication cannot compensate for harmful design or power imbalance