DEVELOPMENT OF DEPARTMENTAL LEADERS IN HONG KONG HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are the powerhouse of a knowledge-based society. The core of their activities takes place at the academic departments. Considerable studies show that departmental leaders play an instrumental role in enhancing students’ learning performance through effective resource management and construction of an organizational environment conducive to the betterment of teaching and research (Chin, 2007; Kok & McDonald, 2015, p. 2; Pounder, 2011; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). While the significance of departmental leadership has become prominent (Bush, 2008), leadership of HEIs in Hong Kong was rated below satisfactory level by academic staff (Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure, & Meek, 2010).

Development of departmental leaders is thus a pertinent issue. Unfortunately, departmental leaders in many countries and regions, including Hong Kong, generally received little training to cope with a myriad of challenges (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Burgoyne, Mackness, & Williams, 2009; Sirkis, 2011; Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2012). Thus, leader development is put at the top of agenda for policy making in countries like the UK for example (Burgoyne et al., 2009). To develop a deeper and richer understanding of the leader development experiences of departmental leaders, a qualitative study of eight departmental leaders from eight Hong Kong HEIs was conducted through one-to-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Deploying Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental theory as the theoretical lens, five major themes
were identified through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach: (1) top-down approach in leader selection and promotion, (2) advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice, (3) rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth, (4) personal drive as impetus for growth, and (5) leader maturation through cumulative learning. The findings supported that leader development is a multi-level, longitudinal, adaptive learning process grounded in the social environment, in which individual leaders construct and advance their leadership expertise and develop broadened leader identities over time through accumulative lived experiences. The findings call for both personal commitment and organizational commitment to a systemic approach to leader development. Their profound implications on leader development research and practice are discussed.

*Key words:* Leader development, leader succession, leadership, leader identity, image management, experiential learning, reflective practice, motivation, self regulation, hardness, career transition, organizational culture, organizational climate, constructive-developmental theory, higher education institution, tertiary institution, Hong Kong
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Improving the leadership skills at the departmental level is a pertinent issue in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Hong Kong. Being the largest group in higher education institutions’ (HEIs) management team, departmental leaders (i.e., department chairs, program directors, program leaders, and unit leaders) have a direct impact on program quality, operational effectiveness, and student achievement through improving teachers’ commitment, teaching practices, and organizational culture/climate (Chin, 2007; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Pounder, 2011; Siddique, Aslam, Khan, & Fatima, 2011; Waters & Marzano, 2007; Waters et al., 2003). While leadership has become a critical component of administrative positions in higher education during the past 20 years (Bush, 2008), survey found a disappointing fact that academics from Hong Kong reported a lower level of satisfaction with the leadership at their institutions (Coates et al., 2010). This highlights the pressing need for improving departmental leadership.

It should be noted that developing departmental leaders is especially critical because being an effective departmental leader is demanding. Departmental leaders in HEIs have to perform multiple roles and duties, such as leaders and managers of curriculum, resources, people, and frontline operation (Kok & McDonald, 2015; Sirkis, 2011; Spiller, 2010). In addition to
their widening scopes of job roles, exacerbating their burden has been the increasing expectations on departmental leadership roles. Like their counterparts in Western countries, departmental leaders in Hong Kong in the past decade of education reform have been pushed to the forefront of providing higher education programs that are expected to be “value for money”, “market oriented” and “fit for purpose” so as to satisfy the reform imperatives of market competition, public accountability, funding pressure, as well as external and internal quality assurance scrutiny (Bryman, 2007; Cheng, 2009; Mok, 2008b; Mok & Cheung, 2011). In short, departmental leaders are asked not only to do more, but also do it better and more with less resource. It is not surprising that academics in Hong Kong are hesitant to take up academic leadership roles due to the overwhelming demands imposed on them, which is consistent with the worldwide phenomenon (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). Obviously, developing both adequate quantity and quality of departmental leaders is indispensable for improving the quality and sustainability of higher education and avoid a leadership crisis in the future.

Indeed, HEIs around the world, including those in Hong Kong, call for stronger leadership in their managerial staff to cope with drastically changing educational landscape and increasing challenges (Kok & McDonald, 2015). In a recent comprehensive study of all UK’s HEIs, Burgoyne et al. (2009) reported that “leadership development is high on the agendas of policy-makers and senior managers in higher education institutions” (p.2). As such,
understanding the leadership development needs of departmental leaders of HEIs is critical to address this pertinent issue in order to improve contemporary HEI’s effectiveness.

Unfortunately, at the institute level, HEIs in Hong Kong have paid little attention to the development of departmental leaders and their leadership skills. Taking the University of Hong Kong as an example, although it is widely recognized as one of world-class universities, it rarely provides training and resources in supervisory skills and leadership to its academic and administrative leaders (Poon, 2008).

What is happening in Hong Kong resembles the situation in the international scene. Literature shows that HEIs have been lagging behind other sectors and have failed to invest sufficiently in leader and leadership development (Braun et al., 2009; Hoppe, 2003; Middlehurst, 2007). In countries like the U.S. and the UK, there has been insufficient investment and opportunity in developing the leadership, governance, and management in higher education, especially at the departmental level (Academy for Leadership Training and Development, n.d-b; Burgoyne et al., 2009; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Middlehurst, 2007; Sirkis, 2011). Literature shows that departmental leaders often receive little leadership training and development support to get ready, thus causing difficulties in coping with diverse demands from multiple constituencies (Avolio et al., 2009; Braun et al., 2009; Lucas, 2000; Raines & Alberg, 2003). Their difficulties in coping often results in widespread frustration, low self-efficacy, and a
tendency toward fire-fighting at the expense of long-term development in program provision (Briggs, 2001; Vilkins & Ladyshewsky, 2012).

Given the negligence in leader and leadership development at the institutional level, there is a need to understand how leader development happens at the personal level. Although it is expected that departmental leaders have to find their own ways to develop their leadership, it is unknown whether this really happens, and if so, to what extent personal leadership is effectively developed and how. To answer these questions, there is a need to understand how those departmental leaders make sense of their experiences with formal and informal learning as they relate to their personal leader development. This is the problem of practice to be addressed in this study.

Significance

Through understanding the lived experiences and voices of individual departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs, this study will provide a deeper and richer understanding of the process of how individual leaders develop and evolve from novice to expert stages. It is important to conduct this study because it is significant for improving the leadership practices at HEI departments in Hong Kong and thereby their operating effectiveness and program quality on a sustainable basis. As discussed earlier, there is a pressing need to enhance the quality and quantity of departmental leaders due to a lack of willingness and readiness of academics in
assuming leadership roles (Avolio et al., 2009; Braun et al., 2009). This study will bring new insights into the current situation and necessary support for leader development at personal and departmental levels. Such insights will not only help to raise the awareness of managers and policy makers in HEIs about the critical values of leader development, but also enlighten them on formulating strategies for accelerating leader development. This is especially critical under the current situation when leader and leadership development is on the top of policy agenda to address two pressing needs: First, there are inadequate numbers of upcoming academic leaders to cope with a wave of retirement. Second, stronger leadership academic departments are needed to cope with heightening expectations from diverse stakeholders and dynamic changes in the educational landscapes. Taking together, improved leadership ability at HEI departments gives the essential impetus for Hong Kong to realize its vision of becoming a world-class education hub in Asia.

At a personal level, this study is significant to facilitate individual departmental leaders to reflect on their own development. Amey (2006) urged that leaders in HEIs should “see their own development as paramount” and “seek opportunities to learn and reflect on their own experiences” (p.58). This study will provide leaders in HEIs with a rich account of others’ experiences, which is relevant for them to compare and reflect on their personal leadership development experience.
The study is also of scholarly significance to leadership research by enriching and widening our understanding of the leader development phenomenon with new insights into its underlying process from the perspectives of departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs. Leadership development in general is “the least explored topic within the field of leadership research and theory” (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010, p. 634). Middlehurst (2008) called for a stronger emphasis on "leadership learning" in leadership research, and more research efforts directed to examine the stages of development in the leadership life cycle, and the impact of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and expertise on the forms and levels of leadership. His views are echoed by Avolio et al. (2009), who pointed out that what leadership development strategies are effective in developing leadership competences is a critical question yet to be understood.

Further, the body of research on academic leadership in higher education has been underdeveloped (Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2012). As Tourish (2012) concluded in a recent review, “Every HEI has its own unique characteristics and leadership requirements. However, relatively little research has been conducted on leadership development within the Sector” (p.2). In particular, inadequate research effort has been directed to the professional training and development of departmental leaders (Braun et al., 2009; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Middlehurst, 2007; Sirkis, 2011). Moreover, to the best of the author’s knowledge, the majority of current
leader and leadership development literature has been focusing on Western countries. There is little empirical research on the Hong Kong higher education sector. In this regard, this study will enrich and extend the leadership development literature by providing better understanding of leader development at departmental level in the non-Western (Hong Kong) higher education context.

**Research Questions**

In view of the deficiency in leadership development research, this qualitative study aims to respond to the call for more research effort in this critical area. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how eight departmental leaders in Hong Kong’s higher education institutions make sense of their experiences of development as leaders over time through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Specifically, the study will seek to illuminate how personal and contextual factors affect their personal development to become effective leaders over time. The central research question of this study is as follows: *How do departmental leaders in Hong Kong higher education institutions think about their experiences of development as leaders?*

This study is intended to achieve three goals. The first goal of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of leader development at departmental level in the Hong Kong higher education context from the departmental leaders’ perspectives. Based on the common themes
identified through this study, the second goal is to improve professional practice in leader
development at personal, organizational, and potentially sector levels. As a leader myself, I am
enthusiastic about utilizing the research finding to improve not only my own development, but
also my ways of supporting next tiers of departmental leaders in my institute. Further, the good
practices and insights developed can potentially be shared to leaders and colleagues in the higher
education sector to raise their awareness of the importance of leader and leadership development
and commitment to developing departmental leaders. The third goal of this study is to
contribute to leader and leadership development literature by offering new insights about leader
development at departmental level and extending it to the non-Western (Hong Kong) context. I
hope that this study will raise more research interest in this area.

It should be noted that the focus of this study is on the development of individual leaders,
i.e., leader development. The terms “leadership development” and “leader development” are
often treated as synonymous in early literature, but have become conceptually differentiated and
closely interrelated (Day, 2000; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). As will be
discussed further in the next Chapter, the divergence of the two concepts was resulted from
broadening conceptualization on the notion of leadership from an intrapersonal to an
interpersonal focus (Day, 2000). Day (2000, 2011) contended that leader development is
intrapersonal and focuses on developing the human capital (knowledge, skills, and abilities) of
individual leaders, whereas leadership development is interpersonal and focuses on enhancing the social capital (leadership capacity of multiple individuals) of an organization. According to Day, leadership development is broadly defined to include leader development. Given that the terms “leadership development” and “leader development” have been often used interchangeably in literature, these two terms are referred to as “leader development” in this paper unless otherwise specified.

**Positionality Statement**

In conducting research, the researchers’ positionality may affect their way of understanding and interpreting research data, thereby easily leading to bias in the research process (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). According to Parsons (2008), “Individuals construct an understanding of the world and perceive themselves to occupy a particular location within the reality they construe are key premises of positionality” (p.1129). As such, truth is relativistic, perceived in the eyes of the beholders, and constructed in their mind as representation of the other, and understanding of the worldly phenomena (Briscoe, 2005). Hence, it is vital for researchers to be cognizant of the positionality of the researchers, the researched, and the relations between the two (Parsons, 2008), so as to control potential biases and keep open-minded about the research data on their representation of the other (the researched)
To this end, researchers need to identify and bring their personal bias to the foreground at the outset of the study (Briscoe, 2005; Salzman, 2002).

I chose leader development as my dissertation research topic because of my personal belief in the importance of personal effort in changing the trajectory of one’s life. Raised in an underprivileged Chinese family emigrated from mainland China to Hong Kong, I was the youngest one among the five offspring of my not-well-educated parents. I obtained little financial and social capital from my humble family background (Lin, 2001). Instead, my identity of being a Chinese emigrant and a graduate of a school with Chinese-as-medium of-instruction (CMI School) invited more discrimination than respect during the British colonial era. For me, self-reliance and personal effort are the keys to improve my intellectual, financial, and social well-being. Acting on such belief has enabled me to advance my career from entry-level positions to the managerial levels gradually. Such personal experience reinforced not only my belief in the primacy of personal effort but also my enthusiasm in understanding the notion of human development.

Comparing to my middle-class friends, I could also see that my social and economic background did hinder my personal development to a certain extent as I was victimized by my lack of social capital and supporting relationships that helped me identify and capitalize developmental opportunities. In this regard, although I reject the idea of determinism, I am
cognizant of the powerful influence of social environment on human development as an enabling or disabling condition. Nonetheless, I believe that individuals with a will can find their ways to cope with their environmental constraints. It is through such endeavor, human makes progress. Such belief is in line with the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

The focus in this study is on the departmental leaders. Personally, I have served at various managerial and leadership positions in a university department and a community college. I considered myself to be in the same category of my research participants. These work experiences allow me to better understand departmental leaders’ insider perspectives on their personal leadership development.

Gender, ethnic and cultural background may affect researchers’ positionality. Believing in the primacy of personal effort, I do not subscribe to the determinist ideas of gender, ethnicity, and cultural superiority. During my time of working in a multinational educational company, I have worked for supervisors with different genders, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, including French, British, South African Caucasian, Malaysian Chinese, and Hong Kong Chinese. Such experience reaffirmed my belief that gender and ethnicity have nothing to do with one’s leadership effectiveness. Nevertheless, effective leaders do demonstrate adequate sensitivity and respect to the cultural differences in their team. My work experience in a multicultural working environment helps me keep an open mind of different cultural perspectives that the
research participants may have. In short, as a researcher, I should keep an open mind in accepting diverse views and appreciate individual participants’ own perspectives in their personal leadership development experience.

**Theoretical Framework**

Currently, there has been a lack of well-established theory in leader development (Day et al., 2014). Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) conceptualized that leader development occurs throughout the lifespan development process at multiple levels in an ongoing, dynamic fashion. Hence, Day and his colleagues contended that leader development could be best understood from a human development and especially adult development perspective. In particular, Kegan’s (1980, 1982) constructive-developmental theory has been reviewed and started to be adopted by a number of leader development scholars (Day et al., 2014; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006). Given that this study takes a human development approach to leader development, Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory is chosen as the theoretical framework in this study. An overview of the theory will be presented below, which is followed by a discussion regarding its applicability to leader development.

**Constructive-developmental Theory (Kegan, 1980, 1982)**

Built on the seminal work of Jean Piaget (1954) on human’s lifespan development, the constructive-developmental theory is concerned with how individuals construct and interpret
their experience, and how such an ongoing process of sensemaking evolves in the course of lives when experiences are included, differentiated, and integrated. According to Kegan (1982), constructive-development theory is “about human being as an activity” (p.8) and concerned with the evolution of meaning that individuals made in their life span development. For Kegan, the world consists of processes as much as entities. The word “constructive” refers to human being’s ability to compose meaning from lived experience. In addition, individuals’ reality construction has their own logic, consistency and integrity. Human develops psycho-logic about the relations of the self and others (in Kegan’s term “subject-object relations”), which is “simultaneously cognitive and affective” (p.84) and serves as the lens for interpreting life experience. Its regularity becomes the deep structure of personality that produces thoughts, feelings, and actions (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987).

However, such deep structure is not static. As the word “developmental” suggests, such deep structure is the product of an individual’s dynamic evolution. As Kegan and Lahey (1984) elaborated, development is “a process of outgrowing one system of meaning by integrating it (as a subsystem) into a new system of meaning. What was ‘the whole’ becomes ‘part’ of a new whole” (p. 203). Hence, human cognitive development is a process of evolution as a meaning-construction activity. As Kegan (1982) explained, “Human development involves a succession of renegotiated balances…which come to organize the experience of the individual in
qualitatively different ways” (p.81). Moreover, “Every new balance is a triumph over the constraints of the past evolutionary truce” (p.90). The loss of balance is often triggered by novel experience, which causes emotional tensions and ambivalence due to inadequate understanding of the world. New organization of the world has to be created to restore psychological balance. While failure in such endeavor causes emotional vulnerability and conflicts, successful attempt allows an individual to reach a new developmental stage.

Through such a dynamic evolution, individuals construct their understanding of self and progress along six evolutionary balances: incorporative, impulsive, imperial, interpersonal, institutional, and interindividual, which are called order or consciousness in his later book *In Over Our Heads* (Kegan, 1994). Stage 0 incorporate balance is the starting state of an infant. At stage 1 impulsive balance, infants lack the capacity for impulse control and ambivalence. At stage 2 imperial balance, children’s development of social-cognitive capacity enables role differentiation and role taking. At stage 3 interpersonal balance, the self of adolescents is embedded in the feeling of interpersonal concordance. At stage 4 institutional balance, the self of adults evolves as a “psychic institution”, which “maintains a coherence across a shared psychological space and so achieves an identity [with a] sense of self, self-dependence, self-ownership” (Kegan, 1982, p. 100). At the final stage 5 interindividual balance, individuals develop the capacity for intimacy by resolving the emotions between the self-system and another.
Consequently, they are able to satisfy their need for *differentiation* (being different) and *inclusion* (being accepted). At its core, the key concern of the constructive-developmental theory is how individuals’ meanings evolve in the course of their lives when experiences are included, differentiated, and integrated. The major propositions of Kegan’s theory are summarized as follows:

1. People actively construct meaning and making sense of themselves and the world.
2. There are identifiable patterns of meaning making that people share in common with one another, e.g., orders of consciousness, ways of knowing, levels of development, organizing principles, orders of development.
3. Orders of development unfold in a specific invariant sequence, with each successive order transcending, including the previous order, and becoming more complex.
4. Developmental movement is driven by limitations in the current way of knowing; this can happen when a person faces increased complexity in the environment that requires a more sophisticated way of understanding themselves and the world.
5. Essentially, human’s order of development influences what they can become aware of, and therefore, describe and reflect on change.
6. Evolution of schemas is resulted from confirmation, differentiation, and reintegration of the schemas with the social environment (culture of embeddedness).
According to Kegan (1982), the evolution of individuals’ development involves the key questions whether their embedded culture in social relations is performing its functions of *confirmation* (confirmation and holding on one’s schema), *contradiction* (differentiation and letting go one’s schema with new experience), and *continuity* (continuity and reintegration of new schema). In other words, individuals’ development is shaped by exterior social contexts.

On the other hand, effects of external contexts are moderated by individuals’ interior motivation and cognitive frames. Constructive-developmental theory posits that a person’s developmental movement is triggered by his/her desire to develop more sophisticated ways of overcoming the limitations in his/her current way of knowing, when he/she faces increased complexity in the environment.

Kegan’s theory centers on the evolution of the lens through which individuals see the world, i.e., the *psycho-logic, or the deep structure of the self* that guide his/her thoughts, feeling and behaviors (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Kegan’s theory helps to bring insights into the inner cognitive and affective process of leader development and its interplay with the social environment. It can be seen that the “developmental” orientation of constructive-developmental theory fits well with the process view of leader development. As Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) contended, applying Kegan’s theory to leader development research helps understand “the processes through which people construct meaning out of their experiences”
may advance our knowledge of how leaders develop and advance their understanding about leadership (i.e., way of knowing) from their experience of coping with increased leadership challenges. Indeed, major propositions based on Kegan's theory can be found in leadership literature:

1. Leaders’ order of development represents their level of leadership competences acquired and thereby their level of leadership effectiveness (McCauley et al., 2006);

2. Leaders’ developmental movement does not happen automatically. If leaders cannot develop necessary skills and behaviors to move to higher levels, they will be locked into one stage (Zenger & Folkman, 2009);

3. Formal leader development interventions should create holding environments conducive to developmental movement (McCauley et al., 2006).

4. Leadership and leader development is an interactive social construction process in which the leaders’ thoughts and behaviors are shaping and are shaped by the social systems through norms, values, myths, and beliefs (i.e., sensemaking) (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Middlehurst, 2008; Uhl-Bien, 2006). This can be explained by Kegan’s (1982) concepts of confirmation, contradiction, and continuity that leaders learn and grow when their interaction with the embedded culture triggers differentiation and reintegration of new mental models with new experience.
From the above discussion, it can be seen that the constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1980, 1982) provides a longitudinal, lifespan human development perspective to explore how individual departmental leaders develop and transcend from novice to expert leaders. It is congruent with a social-construction perspective of leadership and leader development. Therefore, it provides a useful theoretical lens for this study.

Conclusion

This Chapter identified inadequate attention to leader and leadership development of departmental leaders in HEIs to be the problem of practice that will be addressed through this dissertation research. Departmental leaders at HEIs play an instrumental role in enhancing the teaching and learning of higher education in meeting the demands of diverse stakeholders. However, they are often unprepared for confronting the increasingly complex and multifarious challenges. Development of departmental leaders represents not only a priority for policymaking, but also in neglected area in leadership research, which warrants more research efforts. Hence, this study seeks to explore how eight departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs make sense of their personal leadership development experience.

Literature suggests that individual leaders play a pivotal role in their personal development from novice to expert leaders. This study seeks to develop insight into how eight departmental leaders at higher education institutions in Hong Kong make sense of their
experiences of development as leaders over time. Kegan’s (1980, 1982) constructive-developmental theory was chosen as the theoretical framework as it is suitable to understand individual leaders’ meaning construction from their life experience.

**Organization of the Study**

This doctoral thesis contains five chapters. This chapter began with the statement of problem in relation to practice, theory, and research, which was followed by the purpose and questions of this study. A theoretical framework adopted for this study was presented, and the positionality of the researcher was reflected. Chapter Two provides the literature review of leadership, leader development, the leadership challenges confronting educational leaders in the Hong Kong higher education contexts, and leader development from a cross-cultural perspective. Chapter Three explains the research method, including research design, paradigm, methods of data collection and analysis. Issues such as ethical consideration, protection of human subjects, data management, as well as measures to tackling the threats to internal validity and ensuring the trustworthiness of this qualitative study will be discussed. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study. Themes emerged from the data collected through interviews of research participants will be identified through inductive analysis. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the research findings and their implications for practice. Limitations of this study will also be discussed.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Leader and leadership development is effective only when it is underpinned by insights of what constitutes effective leadership. This Chapter first discusses the evolutions of the leadership concept. Part 2 then discusses major perspectives in leader development in light of evolving conception of leadership. Part 3 looks into the specific challenges and competence demands of higher education leadership, and their impacts on academics’ transition into the leadership roles. Part 4 examines the major approaches of leader development adopted in higher education and the importance of a holistic approach to leader development. Further, Part 5 discusses leadership approaches and development in Hong Kong from the cross-cultural perspective and within the social, economic, and political contexts, which is followed by a conclusion.

Part 1: The Leadership Concept

Leadership has been a contested concept. Its conceptualization has been evolving toward an increasingly rational, broadening, and sophisticated approach in the past 100 years (Grint, 2011). As Grint described, modern leadership started with a leader-centric focus from the heroic “great man” leadership in the 1900s, to scientific management in 1910-1920s, and trait and charismatic leadership in 1930-1940s. Contingency theory (Fiedler, 1964) in the 1950-60s
made the attention shift to the fit of leadership behaviors with the *contextual* factors and follower characteristics (e.g., McGregor’s (1960) Theory X and Theory Y; Hersey and Blanchard’s (1969) Situational Leadership Theory). Prevalence of corporate culture and total quality management concepts in 1970-80s pointed to the importance of *leader-follower relations*. Then the business process engineering redirected the attention to the *complex systems* and strategic aspects of leadership. Diverse perspectives (e.g., distributed leadership, followership, and identity) haven been emerging since 2000 to offer new theories from *follower-centric*, cultural, moral, or identity-based perspectives (see Dinh et al., 2014; Grint, 2011). Over time, attention of leadership has been broadened from individual, to dyad, group, and organizational levels as well as its temporal effects in dynamic leadership processes or an event (Dinh et al., 2014).

Relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006) conceives that leadership is a process of social construction. From this theoretical lens, leadership has been understood as “a social and mutual influence process where multiple actors engage in leading-following interactions in service of accomplishing a collective goal” (DeRue & Myers, 2014, p. 834).

Advancement has been made to understand how the dynamics of intrapersonal (micro) processes (e.g., perceptions, emotion, and cognitions) and interpersonal (macro) processes (e.g., social-relational context) affect leader and follower outcomes, as well as leaders’ roles in leading organizational change and managing dynamic social networks (Dinh et al., 2014). For example,
behavioral complexity theory (Hooijberg, Hunt, & Dodge, 1997), one of the emerging theories based on the complexity and systems perspectives, argues that contemporary leaders deal with not just one contingency, but multiple contingencies arising from the dynamic environment and conflicting job demands.

Among the established theories, trait theory attributes effective leaders to innate qualities such as charisma, intelligence, or motivation (Yukl, 2010). As the conception of “heroic leader” fails to account for behavioral and contextual factors, neo-charismatic theories (e.g., transformational leadership, transactional leadership, charismatic leadership) and behavioral theories (e.g., participative leadership, delegation and empowerment, behavioral approaches) grew by demonstrating what leaders actually do is more important than who they are in achieving leadership effectiveness (Dinh et al., 2014). However, almost 100 years of leadership research reaches no conclusion on a single, normative leadership model (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002), and lends support to the contingency theory (Fiedler, 1964), which sees leadership effectiveness as the fit between leadership style and the specific situation.

Given that leaders achieve results through influencing others in an organization (Parry, 2011), follower-centric perspectives offer leadership theories from the other side story of the leader-follower dyad. For example, social exchange/relational leadership theories (e.g.,
leader-member exchange, relational leadership) emphasize how the leader-follower dynamics affect leadership outcomes. Follower-centric leadership theories (e.g., followership theories, romance of leadership, aesthetic leadership) reject the misattribution of individual heroic leadership and stress the roles of follower characteristics, perceptions, and motivation and their impacts on leadership (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011).

Since leaders operate in the social environment, social construction of leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as a multilevel social construction at the leader-follower dyad, team, organization, and the societal levels (Bligh et al., 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leaders’ effectiveness not only depends on their own behavioral and cognitive abilities, but also the interactive responses from their followers and the social world. As DeRue and Ashford (2010) put it, leadership enactment involves the processes of “claiming” and “granting” of leadership identities. Moreover, leaders’ values and behaviors are shaped and constraints by the prevailing organizational and social cultural norms and ideologies. Lastly, their leadership image and identity management also depends on perceptions formed by their peers, followers, supervisors and is even shaped by portrayal of the media (Bligh et al., 2011). Hence, leadership is an ongoing multilevel process that occurs within a social context created by individuals, groups, and larger organizational levels, which takes time and requires ongoing adaptation (Dinh et al., 2014).
From the social constructional lens, leadership is conceived as a social construct that differs across cultural contexts, instead of an objective phenomenon. In a complex social system, leaders play a critical role in creating shared meaning through values, norms, identities and beliefs through sensemaking (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Middlehurst, 2008).

In light of above, effective leaders have to possess a repertoire of dispositional, cognitive, affective, and social capabilities in order to adapt to the changing social contexts in the leadership process. Effective learning is the foundation for effective leadership. Leadership is conceived as an ongoing process that “that involves active and cumulative learning through experience, problem solving and the exercise of judgment” (Middlehurst, 2008, p. 333 emphasis added). In this process, leaders need to constantly reflect their identity, values, and developmental needs to fit changing situational demand. Hence, effective leadership begins with leader development (Day et al., 2009).

Part 2: Leader Development

Traditional entity-based perspective took a leader-centric stand and conceived leadership as an enactment of personal qualities, behaviors and cognitive information processing of individual leaders (Dinh et al., 2014). Thus, leadership development was centered on developing the skills and competence of individual leaders, i.e., leader development. For
example, in the first two editions of the Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004), leadership development was defined as “the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p.2).

Advances in leadership literature extended the conception of leadership to a social relational perspective that leadership is a social construction process enacted in a specific social context (Bligh et al., 2011). The notion of leadership has been extended to be dynamic processes of leadership at interpersonal, organizational, systems, and societal levels (Dinh et al., 2014). At this point, leader development became differentiated from leadership development: Leader development is conceptualized as being focus on within-individual attributes (human capital) to make for effective leadership, whereas leadership development on between-person process of developing the social capital (leadership capacity) of multiple individuals in an organization (Day, 2000; Day et al., 2014).

Specifically, Day et al. (2009) defined leader development as “the acquisition or development of within-individual attributes (i.e., human capital) such as knowledge, knowledge structures, skills, abilities, and competencies” (p.159), whereas leadership development as “enhancing the capacity of teams and organizations to engage successfully in leadership tasks, focusing on building the networked connections among members that develop leadership
capacity” (p.299). DeRue and Myers (2014) argued that leader and leadership development are interdependent processes embedded in the leader-follower relationships and collective leadership structures. As such, they defined leadership development as “the process of preparing individuals and collectives to effectively engage in leading-following interactions” (DeRue & Myers, 2014, p. 835).

Different conceptions of leadership have led to different emphasis and implications on leader development. The cognitive (information processing) approach to leadership conceives leadership as a knowledge structure (Lord & Hall, 2005). Built on Kegan’s idea, the cognitive perspective posits that leadership is possessed by a person (personal dominance), occurs in interpersonal interaction (interpersonal influence), and when people engage in collaborative learning from a shared work despite different views, values, beliefs, cultures, and worldview (relational dialogue) (Day et al., 2009). The development of leadership capacity from novice to intermediate to expert levels are underpinned by the growth of one’s leadership identity from individual to relational to collective levels (Day, 2011; Lord & Hall, 2005; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Using a grounded theory approach, Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) showed that leadership identity gradually shifted from a leader-centric, heroic view to more relational and collective views during the leader development process.
Moreover, leadership experiences in more complex tasks and relational environments are likely to help develop more complex and sophisticated ways of thinking about leadership, which enhance leaders’ adaptability (Day et al., 2009). From the cognitive perspective, leader and leadership development, i.e., growth in individuals’ and collectives’ capacity for effective leadership, is resulted from expanding the leaders’ conceptual models and mental structures about leadership, such as self-concept and identity as a leader, and implicit theories of leadership (cognitive schemas) of prototyped leader attributes and how leadership is structured in groups (DeRue & Myers, 2014).

The *skills-based model* sees leadership as a set of skills that can be learned and mastered over time. Leader development under this perspective emphasizes the skill acquisition process of how novices can become expert leaders (Day et al., 2009). Zenger and Folkman (2009) developed a stage-based leadership model, which conceptualizes leadership as five tents of competencies, namely *Character* (adherence to core values and beliefs, being trusted, exhibiting integrity and honesty), *Personal Capabilities* (technical knowledge, product knowledge, problem-solving skills, and professional skills), *Focuses on Results* (achieving results through others, setting high goals or standards of performance, and stressing continuous improvement), *Interpersonal Skills* (emphasizing relationship building, open communication, teamwork collaboration, motivating and inspiring others), and *Leading Organizational Change* (developing...
strategic thinking, leading organizational change, and aligning organizational units with organizational goals).

In Zenger and Folkman’s (2009) leadership model, professionals at stage I *contribute dependently* like apprentices. Professionals reaching Stage II become leaders with *personal leadership*, who are able to *contribute independently* like colleagues. Stage III professionals attain *local leadership*, who are able to *contribute through others* like mentors. Professionals advanced to stage IV achieve *organizational leadership*, who act as sponsors of organizational initiatives, and *lead others through vision*. Professionals have to develop necessary skills and behaviors to move forward, otherwise they become “locked into one stage” (Zenger & Folkman, 2009, p. 59). In other words, leader development is the key for individual leaders to transcend themselves to higher leadership levels.

Research shows that expert performance is resulted from a long period (approximately 10 years) of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007). In light of this, leader development is a long-term process, which involves engaging leaders in deliberate practices in areas that they do not do well (Day et al., 2009). Meanwhile, individual leaders’ development process from novice to expert stages is affected by their self-awareness and self-regulation competences (Day et al., 2009). Thus, leader development is best supported by individualized
assessment, feedback and authentic learning experiences that tailor for their individual needs (McCall, 2004; Tourish, 2012).

Besides training and development interventions, developmental experiences are deemed essential for leader development. As Day et al. (2009) argued, leader development is an experientially based process. Hence, a major challenge involves “helping leaders better learnt from their experiences, whether as part of formal classroom education, job and operational assignments, or self-development initiatives” (Day et al., 2009, p. 158). In practice, the experiential learning cycle (experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting) can be applied to foster leaders’ continuous learning and development from both successful and unsuccessful experiences (Day et al., 2009). Nonetheless, research shows that the degree of challenges in the developmental experience should be within one’s zone of proximal development; overwhelming challenges that putting leaders “in over their heads” (Kegan, 1994) may jeopardize their self-efficacy, motivation, and learning effectiveness (Day, 2011).

The Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) suggested six developmental experiences, including both formal (360-degree feedback, feedback-intensive programs and skills-based training) and informal experience (job assignments, hardships, and developmental support) (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010). According to McCauley and her colleagues, a systematic approach requires three closely linked key elements: assessment, challenge and
support. While assessment helps leaders identify their strengths and weaknesses, challenge is a key development element as it pushes leaders out of their comfort zones to cope with new experiences, thereby helping them reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, and develop new capacities. Challenges are often brought about by purposeful job assignments and unplanned hardships (business mistakes or failures, career setbacks, personal trauma, problem employees and downsizing), which bring wide variety of experiences that serve as developmental triggers to accelerate leader development (Avolio et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Additionally, when job assignments are purposefully arranged, they put learning within the organizational context and facilitate leaders to see learning opportunities, develop a shared understanding, and maximize learning. Lastly, supporting relationships are central to the leader development process as they enhance leaders’ motivation and self-efficacy for learning, growth and change (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010).

Further, the process view of leadership dictates that leader development is a multilevel, longitudinal process (Day et al., 2014). As Day et al. (2009) put it, while training involves relatively short-term procedures and processes to teach “proven solutions to known problems” (p.126), development is a long-term endeavor in which “the purpose is to enhance individuals’ capacity for being able to quickly make sense of the environment and adaptive effectively by learning their way out of problem” (p.129). Both training and development
approaches are required to develop expert leaders. Moreover, individual leaders’ trajectories of development over time are influenced by the interaction between personal factors (differences in motivation, cognitive capacity, degrees of sophistication in leadership schemas) with the cumulative experience and social contexts (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Further research is called for understanding the underlying factors affecting the trajectory of development over time (Day et al., 2014; DeRue & Myers, 2014).

In sum, leader development is understood as a progressive spiral arising from the leader’s conscious effort in coping with increasing complex challenges imposing on the leadership role. As such, leader development is an ongoing process, in which leaders shall act and learn from both formal and informal developing experiences. With proper provision of challenges, supports, and feedback, leaders’ development can be accelerated.

**Part 3: Higher Education Leadership: Evolution towards Multifarious Roles**

The purpose of leader development is to equip leaders with necessary leadership competences to fulfill their leadership role. To this end, it is useful to discuss the conception of departmental leadership in HEIs, which is evolving in tandem with changing societal expectations on the mandates and governance models of higher education due to higher education reforms. A growing numbers of researches have attempted to investigate the demands, roles, and critical nature of higher educational leaders. Evidence consistently
suggests that changing societal contexts have triggered leadership at all levels of higher education to become increasingly complex and multidimensional (Academy for Leadership Training and Development, n.d-a; Burnett & Huisman, 2010; Christensen, 2011).

To illustrate, educational leadership was narrowly conceived as moral leadership until 1940s. From 1940s to the 1970s, the social democracy movement made educational professionalism the dominant discourse. Educational leaders were expected to be professional experts, who espoused values of innovation, harmonious staff relations and teacher-student relations, and student-centered pedagogy. Against this backdrop, academic staff training prior to 1980s had mainly focusing on teacher training and teaching development (Middlehurst, 2007).

Starting from 1980s, neo-liberal higher education reforms proliferated from the U.S., Western countries to Asia, including Hong Kong (Cheng, 2009; Harris, 2008; Mok & Cheung, 2011). These reform initiatives called for strengthening HEIs’ leadership, management, and governance through policies that increased HEI’s autonomy in exchange for increased public accountability and reduced public funding (Christensen, 2011).

Since then, HEIs in many countries and in Hong Kong have undergone reforms to deliver greater value for money, expand higher education access, and enhance competitive positions in the intensifying global competition (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010; D. Chan & Lo, 2008; Cheng, 2009; Mok & Cheung, 2011). In response to these growing yet often conflicting
demands and priorities (Tourish, 2012), HEIs had to restructure their fundamental management approach from a collegial model of “organized anarchy” (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) with a strong emphasis on academic freedom, shared governance, and respect of collegiality (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Sporn, 1996), to one with new logics of “corporatization, competitiveness, commercialization” (Robertson, 2010). These new imperatives of running HEIs pressurized academic leaders to turn from a traditional collegial, consensus-building leadership model to a business-like managerial one so as to become more entrepreneurial and efficient in responding to environmental challenges (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Tomlinson, 2004). Under the managerialist imperative, leadership is deemed as the key to achieve organizational reform objectives and institutional effectiveness (Altbach, 2008; Head, 2011; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Middlehurst, 1999). Hence, leaders in HEIs had to act as effective change agents in reforming HEI’s governance.

**Leadership challenges due to changing governance model and culture.** Changes in governance model and university culture impose greater challenges to departmental leaders in HEIs than in other settings. Literature suggests that leaders in the higher education sector face a unique set of challenges that are imposed by its shared governance structure and a strong culture of academic freedom and professional autonomy (Christensen, 2011; Ek, Ideland, Jönsson, & Malmberg, 2011; Mok & Cheung, 2011; Postiglione & Shiru, 2011; Sporn, 1996;
Stayer, 1990; Tierney, 1988). In many cases, the department heads and department chairs are not the only leaders in university departments, and their terms of appointment are often temporary (Cooper & Burgoyne, 2006). In such a context, academic leaders must balance competing views and interests of faculties against other diverse stakeholders’ demands. As a result, leadership that undermines collegiality, autonomy, participative decision-making, and fairness, is likely to be ineffective, and damaging the commitment of academics (Cooper & Burgoyne, 2006; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Wang & Berger, 2010). In sum, the job requirements for departmental leaders such as the deans, has become more demanding, strategic, complex and managerial in nature although under overall contexts of academe (de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Kok & McDonald, 2015).

Besides traditional universities, teaching-oriented institutions like community colleges and further education colleges (FECs) face similar challenges. On the one hand, they are expanding their mandates from offering transfer education, vocational training, and community service to providing remedial education, corporate training, and adult learning programs (Eddy, 2010); on the other, they “are closely monitored and operate within a complex and turbulent funding and policy environment” (Collinson & Collinson, 2009, p. 366). Facing myriad new challenges, stronger emphasis on consensus building with diverse constituent groups and
increased adoption of technology, community college leaders need new skills to manage the new reality successfully (Eddy, 2010; Sirkis, 2011; Yukl, 2010).

The above challenges also impose on the higher education sector in Hong Kong. With a strong tradition of mirroring global trends, Hong Kong’s society and HEIs function according to international models and standards (Altbach & Postiglione, 2006; Kwan, 2011). Jumping in the bandwagon of “global revolution” in higher education reform imperatives, Hong Kong HEIs are under strong pressure to adopt entrepreneurial and business-like practices to cope with intensifying competition, and offer more self-financing programs in line with the principles of financial accountability and responsiveness to stakeholders (Mok, 2008a; Mok & Cheung, 2011; Spiller, 2010). These new economic imperatives require institutional commitment to bringing about swift conflict management and proactive strategic management (Kok & McDonald, 2015; Robertson, 2010; Sirkis, 2011; Taylor, 2004).

Such calls for increasing accountability, performance-based management, and change management, contribute to the expanding and multidimensional nature of leadership at HEIs from the top cascading down to departmental level. Under the large, complex universities’ environments, faculty and administrators have to “fill increasingly different roles and encounter different aspects of the environment” (Raines & Alberg, 2003, p. 34). According to Ramsden (1998), academic leaders faced the following major challenges: maintaining education quality
with reduced resources; leading at a time of hyper change; increasing student population with increasing emphasis on employability, and coping with changing external environmental demands. In conclusion, he stressed the crucial role of academic leadership in maintaining morale, enhancing productivity, and helping staff to welcome momentous change. As Burke, Marx, and Lowenstein (2012) comment,

It is widely understood that leading in today’s school environment is not for the weak in heart or mind. The demand for such leadership requires a complex integration of skills and knowledge, enacted through the contextual adaptation of distinctive styles. (p.113)

The above discussion suggests that effective leaders need to take both “academic” and “business” perspectives in running a contemporary HEI (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). They need not only to preserve and manage the collegial traditional values of academic freedom and autonomy embedded in the complex university culture, but also to embrace a broader conception of leadership that is entrepreneurial, forward looking in renewing HEI’s governance, and responsive to external demands (Christensen, 2011; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Postiglione & Shiru, 2011; Sporn, 1996; Tourish, 2012)

**Tensions of different expectations on educational leadership.** Unfortunately, university leaders often cannot live up to these expectations. Studies raise concern that a growing numbers of academics are unwilling to take up administrative roles due to lack of incentives, role conflicts in balancing autonomy with bureaucracy (Hoppe, 2003; Sirkis, 2011;
Moreover, their reluctance is attributed largely to their negative view of the culture of corporate managerialism and confusion about leadership and management. Marshall, Adams, Cameron, and Sullivan (2000) found that mainstream academic leaders see their roles confined to teaching, research and community service, without considering to broader managerial issues (i.e., managing change, quality, information, finance, and physical and human resources). For them, administration is a lower-level job (Burgoyne et al., 2009; Hill & Stephens, 2005). On the contrary, effective higher education leadership that contributes to excellence in academic departments include as wide as eight broad areas, namely change management, research and teaching, communication, strategy and shared values, leadership, departmental culture, rewards, and staffing (Kok & McDonald, 2015). Clearly, academic leaders’ leadership identity and competence often fail to match with heightening job requirements.

Problems in transition from academic to leadership roles. On the other hand, those willing academic leaders present different problems. Study found that departmental leaders find it difficult to cope with diverse demands from multiple constituencies (Filan & Seagren, 2003; Sirkis, 2011). The cause is that they rarely develop a sophisticated philosophy about their roles and goals that can aid their transition from academia to administration (Bryman, 2007; Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, & Tripps, 2009; Sirkis, 2011). For example, empirical studies
found that program leaders of HEIs in Australia and the UK: (a) had widespread feeling of frustration and low self-efficacy in delivering the full range of responsibilities; and (b) focused too narrowly on immediate issues like “getting the job done” and “working with others”, and paid insufficient attention to longer-term developmental issues that may affect the innovation, quality, and long-term viability of their courses (Briggs, 2001; Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2012). Such finding is a wake-up call to address the pertinent leadership crisis in HEIs through effective leader development initiatives at personal and organizational level. This will have profound impact on effective functioning of university departments, leader succession, and thereby HEIs’ sustainable success.

**Part 4: Leader Development Approaches in Higher Education**

To address the above problems, some leadership training initiatives have emerged in different countries and made promising progress. The U.S. pioneered such initiative in 1965 and launched the American Council on Education Fellows Program (AFP) to identify and prepare leaders for colleges and universities in an outcomes approach (Chibucos & Green, 1989; McDaniel, 2002). The American Council on Education (ACE) claims on its website that the AFP is “the most effective, comprehensive leadership development program in American higher education today” with over “more than 1,800 vice presidents, deans, department chairs, faculty, and other emerging leaders have participated” (American Council on Education, n.d). Survey
of 18 years of graduates shows that the AFP were helpful for improving participants’ leadership effectiveness (Chibucos & Green, 1989). See that few leadership training opportunities have been available to departmental leaders at HEIs, the department chairs of the Maricopa Community Colleges initiated the establishment of the Academy for Leadership Training and Development in 1992 (Academy for Leadership Training and Development, n.d-b). The Academy adopts a holistic approach to transformational leadership training for departmental leaders in HEIs focusing on six critical issues: (a) understanding self, (b) understanding transformational leadership, (c) establishing and maintaining relationships, (d) leading teams, (e) leading strategic planning and change, and (f) connecting through community (Filan & Seagren, 2003). The emphasis is to “help participants apply leadership concepts, practices, and processes as they relate to the needs of actual work situations” (Academy for Leadership Training and Development, n.d-a). Academy’s success provided clear evidence of the benefits of leadership preparation to departmental leaders in HEIs (Filan & Seagren, 2003).

The UK was lagged behind U.S. as leadership development only started in 1984 by leadership scholar John Adair, who advanced leadership research from the trait model to the action-centered leadership model (Adair, 1968). He advocated a systemic approach to leader development and initiated a 2-day leadership course for department heads and senior staff at the University of Surrey, which was well received in participant evaluation. However, department
heads showed contrasting attitudes toward the applicability of management and leadership concepts from business settings to universities (Middlehurst, 2007). Adair’s initiative and the ACE’s experience in the U.S. ultimately inspired the establishment of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) in 2004, which provides “a dedicated service of support and advice on leadership, governance and management for all the UK’s universities and Higher Education colleges” (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, n.d., p. 'About us').

Recognizing the diversity and autonomy of the higher education sector, individuals, professions, and communities, LFHE provided a range of diverse leader and leadership development initiatives in four work streams, including supporting and developing individuals, building institutional capacity, creating learning networks, and generating ideas and innovation (Middlehurst, 2007). Overall, the UK experience highlights the values of a systemic approach to support diverse leader and leadership development needs.

Literature also records positive outcomes of leadership capacity building programs organized internally by HEIs. For example, Hill and Stephens (2005) reported that the School of Medicine of the University of Southampton in the UK organized a leadership training program to its 50 course coordinators to support curriculum change initiative amid increased student enrolment. Participants were motivated and gained a sense of direction and empowerment in their teaching and program development. Hence, they argued that leadership training for course
coordinators is vital to the program success and recommend a conception of leadership as a complex adaptive systems (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Similarly, Daytona Beach Community College in the U.S. embraced the learning organization concept and created its leadership development program for aspiring leaders to combat the challenges: employee shortage, rising turnover, and the need of cultivating the leaders of tomorrow (Quinton, 2006).

Quinton (2006) reported six positive outcomes of leadership development: (1) discovery of talents in all levels through the leadership training program as a showcasing forum, (2) increased staff participation in community service, (3) deepened understanding of individual leadership roles and their connection to the college’s mission, (4) enlarged pool of talents who are ready for taking leadership roles through both and leadership training, (5) a culture shift toward service excellence, and (6) strengthened networking among staff. Moreover, Aasen and Stensaker’s (2007) study of five European countries showed that leader development programs can actually help resolving cultural conflicts arising from education reform by equipping academic leaders with tools to modernize higher education to cope with external demands while maintaining commitment to traditional collegiality values and academic culture of shared decision-making. Steinert, Naismith, and Mann (2012) reviewed the literature of leader development in medical departments during the period of 1980-2009 and concluded that
participants value leadership development activities and report changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior.

Orr (2006) argued that leadership education has become the strategy of education reform. The above studies lend support to this view that leadership development does serve as a catalyst for change and empowerment of departmental leaders in HEIs. With stronger leadership competence, departmental leaders, who are at the forefront of effecting change in HEI governance model, are able to respond to intensifying challenges more effectively.

**Calls for holistic approaches in leader development.** Leader development takes a variety of forms. Scholars have identified seven most common forms: structured programs of study, 360-degree performance feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignment, and action learning (McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Tourish, 2012). Whatever the approaches taken, effective leader development intervention needs to tailor for individual needs and contexts. As the Academy for Leadership Training and Development (n.d-a) stresses on its website, “[Leadership] training cannot be conducted in a format that is isolated or disconnected from the participant's experiential world or the context of their reality.” Given the disparity in the emerging leaders’ prior knowledge, experience, personal traits, and organizational contexts, effective leaders exhibit a strong commitment to personal growth and self-development through
learning and reflection from self-experience (Goleman, 1998a). The question is “How well are current leader development initiatives preparing leaders in HEIs?”

Some studies shed lights on the above questions. Using the competencies framework developed by AACC, McNair et al. (2011) conducted a survey of over 400 community college presidents in 2007 on their leadership preparation experience. Respondents reflected that attending leader development programs, peer networks, and mentoring are important to their leadership preparation. In addition, respondents reported lower ratings on actual preparation in critical leadership competency areas, suggesting a gap in their perceived readiness in leadership skills. Moreover, McNair et al.’s survey found six critical leadership competency domains: resource management, collaboration, community college advocacy, professionalism, organizational strategy, communication, timing and organizational fit, and leadership preparation (McNair et al., 2011). Only 37 (13.1%) presidents out of 282 respondents considered themselves to become well prepared via a blend of professional experiences, studies and mentoring (McNair et al., 2011, pp. 10-16).

From McNair et al.’s (2011) study, we can conclude that: (1) Most of the community college presidents find their own way of developing leadership skills during their career advancement. (2) Without a holistic approach in leader development, the overwhelming majority of leaders perceive themselves under prepared for meeting the leadership challenges. These
highlight the importance of organizational support in effective leader development. This is echoed in Steinert, Naismith, and Mann’s (2012) review of leader development in medical education, which showed that effective leader development interventions included the use of multiple approaches: multiple instructional methods; experiential learning and reflective practice; individual and group projects; peer support and the development of communities of practice; mentorship; and institutional support. In sum, a holistic approach is the key to effective leader development (Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hoffman, 2012).

**Part 5: Leader Development in the Hong Kong Contexts**

This study aims to explore leader development in the Hong Kong (Chinese) context, which can be characterized as tier-two contextualization. *Contextualization* is essential for developing an accurate understanding of a phenomenon by “incorporating the context in describing, understanding, and theorizing about phenomena within it” (Tsui, 2006, p. 2).

According to Tsui, there are three tiers of contextualization: (1) thick descriptions of the context; (2) direct analysis of the effect of context on the phenomenon; and (3) comparative studies by identifying common and unique features across contexts. *Context* includes the culture, political and legal system, stage of economic development, and historical factors that created a context.

It will be necessary to appreciate major contextual factors that are shaping the higher education leadership in Hong Kong.
Leader development from a cross-cultural perspective. Although there is a comprehensive body of knowledge in leader and leadership development, scholars widely alert that most of the leadership theories are American products, which are bounded by American ideologies, cultural values, worldviews and conception on organizational power relations (Hofstede, 1980, 1994; Westwood & Chan, 1995). Scholars reached consensus that caution should be given to the validity and applicability of American leadership theories to non-Western contexts, and thus leadership education derived from them (Dickson, Castaño, Magomaeva, & Den Hartog, 2012; Dorfman & Howell, 1988; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Offermann & Hellmann, 1997; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Amy Yi Ou, 2007; Westwood & Chan, 1995). Thus, it is essential to be mindful about how culture shapes leadership practice.

Dimensions of cultures. Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) seminal works made a major advance in examining the impacts of national cultures on organizations through identifying and measuring the dimensions of cultures in more than 40 countries. He identified five culture dimensions: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity-femininity, and future orientation. The future orientation dimension was added in 2001 to address the deficiency in his early work that that instrument developed in Western countries had neglected the salient value dimensions in other cultures. In fact, the future
orientation dimension was built on the dimension Confucian dynamism (ordering relationship, thrift, persistence, sense of shame) identified in the Chinese Value Survey (CVS) of 22 countries (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

This line of cross-cultural studies showed that diverse leadership styles and managerial approaches were deemed effective in different cultures. For instance, Hong Kong culture was very similar to Mainland China and exhibited high power distance (score 68), collectivism (25), very long-term orientation (96), but a little bit higher masculinity (57) than Mainland Chinese (50), and much lower uncertainty avoidance (29) against Mainland Chinese (60). Collectively Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong were very different from the US, which had low power distance (40), uncertainty avoidance (46), high masculinity (62), very high individualism (91), and strong short-term orientation (29) (Hofstede, 1993, p. 91). From the American perspective, the business models of overseas Chinese in Hong Kong and Asian countries can be considered as lack of systems: They tended to be small, single-product family businesses operating through kinfolk networks. Nepotism, rather than professional managers were employed to run the business. Decision-making was centralized by family owners, opportunistic but extremely flexible. Nonetheless, overseas Chinese in Hong Kong and Asian countries commanded businesses worth hundreds of billions of US dollars, proving the success of its model (Hofstede, 1993).
Hofstede’s works inspired an explosion in cross-cultural management and leadership research, making it a distinct domain of study (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). The most extensive and significant study on cross-cultural leadership to date has been the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project led by Robert House as the principal investigator, which involves more than 200 researchers from multiple academic disciplines located in 64 national cultures across all parts of the globe (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012; House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). Since its inception in the early 1990s, Project GLOBE has been a long-term, multiphase, and multimethod project set out to explore the complex effects of culture on leadership, organizational effectiveness, and ultimately the economic competitiveness of societies and many aspects of human condition (Dorfman et al., 2012; House et al., 2004). Project GLOBE decomposed Hofstede’s “collectivism” dimension into “in-group collectivism” and “institutional collectivism”, and “masculinity” into “gender egalitarianism”, “assertiveness”, “humane orientation”, “performance orientation” and resulted in nine dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, humane orientation, performance orientation, future orientation (House et al., 2002). Among the ten culture clusters identified in the GLOBE project, Hong Kong belongs to Confucian Asia together with Mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea.
Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan are dominantly Chinese who share a common cultural heritage (Fu, Peng, Kennedy, & Yukl, 2004).

**Universality and contingency of leadership behaviors.** Cross-cultural leadership and management study can be divided into two major directions: (1) to explore specificity in a culture, and (2) to identify commonality across cultures. The culture specific perspective, takes an “emic” or insider approach to delineate rich descriptions about how certain leadership constructs uniquely enact in a culture. The culture universal position, aims to take an “etic” or outside lens and empirically test generalizable leadership relationships across cultures (Dickson et al., 2003; Dorfman et al., 1997). Literature in these two lines of inquiries is discussed below.

**Transformational vs. Transactional Leadership.** Bass (1997) examined the universal and contingent aspects of leadership styles in cross-cultural context and found cumulative evidence in both aspects. Bass found universality across cultures that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership, which is more effective than managing by exception, which in term is more effective than laissez-faire leadership. However, cultural differences moderate leader-follower relations and degree of leadership effectiveness. While the principles of “inspiration” and “contingent reward” are universal, they manifest into different behaviors in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (the Britain, the United States, Japan, and Hong Kong). Contingent reward to individuals may be treated as a matter of equity in
individualistic culture, but may cause disharmony and loss of face among team members in collectivistic culture, such as Chinese. Rather, reward systems in collective culture are often group oriented (Hofstede, 1980). Also, leaders in collectivistic cultures have a moral responsibility to take care of their subordinates’ professional and personal issues to be inspirational (Bass, 1997).

Meanwhile, Walumbwa and colleagues found transformational leadership applicable across cultures; and collectivism and self-efficacy moderate the positive effects of transformational leadership on job satisfaction, employee commitment and intention to quit in China, India, Kenya, the United States (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Walumbwa, Lawler, Avolio, Wang, & Shi, 2005). Li and Hung (2009) extended this line of research and found that in the sample of 1,040 Taiwanese teachers in a collective high-power distance culture, all four dimensions of transformational leadership (in order of significance: individualized consideration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation) have positive effects on leader-follower relationships and thereby task performance; whereas individualized consideration and inspirational motivation promote coworker relationships and thereby organizational citizenship behavior.

**Paternalistic vs. Participative Leadership.** Westwood and Chan (1995) argued that in East Asian cultures, a ‘paternalistic leadership’ model in line with the Confucian values is
prevailing. The paternalistic model stresses: (a) achievement of legitimized order and compliance in leader-follower relationships; and (b) value of social harmony. It incorporates the following five aspects: (a) personalism (versus Western conception of impersonal bureaucracy), (b) moral leadership, (c) harmony building, (d) conflict diffusion, and (e) didactic leadership (leader as teacher, moral role model and simultaneously their strategic control of information and knowledge diffusion fosters their power). Paternalistic leadership stresses legitimized order and compliance rooted in the Weberian notion of patrimonialism in which patriarchs serve as the protector of the family/clan in exchange for the respect and obedience from family members, as well as Hofstede’s (1980) high power distance in social relations. Chinese paternalistic leadership is often described as benevolent autocratic; leaders are expected to maintain social harmony through exhibiting moral leadership, e.g., human-heartedness, reciprocity, individual consideration, interpersonal sensitivity and respect for ‘face’ to maintain harmonious superior-subordinate relationships (Westwood & Chan, 1995).

Paternalistic leadership was found effective in developing countries including East Asian societies, which are characterized as being high power distance, having strong family bonds and a sense of fatalism, and expecting organizations to take care of employees as and their families (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). Dorfman et al. (1997) empirically tested leadership universality in five cultures (Chinese Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, and the United States) and found
three leader behaviors (supportive, contingent reward, and charismatic) were culturally universal, while three others (directive, participative, and contingent punishment) were culturally specific. Directive leadership had impact in Chinese and Mexican culture but no impact in America, Korea, and Japan. Participative leadership was effective in America and South Korea but not so in China and Mexico. Contingent punishment had positive effect in the US, but negative in other four cultures.

The differences of effective leadership practices in the Chinese context are underpinned by strong cultural values of high power distance, hierarchical social structure. Chinese leadership model and the Eastern models derived from it, favors centralized decision-making, nepotism, favoritism, and high social distance in leader-follower relations. Such expectations on leaders’ roles make empowerment and participatory leadership less effective and popular in Eastern cultures than in the Western world, which is underpinned by the values of individual autonomy and voluntary consent as the basis for leader legitimacy (Dickson et al., 2003; Fu et al., 2004; Westwood & Chan, 1995). Such cultural norms provide the scaffolding for paternalistic leadership.

**Universal and Contingent Leadership Characteristics.** After 20 years of cumulated evidence, Project GLOBE identified these leadership characteristics positively influence employees’ job satisfaction and commitment: Charisma, communication of vision, desire to
bring about change, being trustworthy, just, honest, inspirational, visionary, encouraging, motivational, positive, confidence builder, dynamic, having foresight, team-builder, communicator, coordinator, excellence orientated, decisive, intelligent and win–win problem solver. In contrast, being loner, ruthless, irritable and dictatorial are universally ineffective.

Lastly, cultural contingent characteristics include risk taking, ambitious, self-sacrificial, sincere, sensitive, compassionate, willful, and enthusiastic (Dickson et al., 2012).

Contingencies occur when country specific beliefs, cognitive schemas, or behaviors influence specific leader characteristics that are deemed as necessary and important to success (Bass, 1997). Cumulated empirical evidences lead to a consensus view that a leader’s behavior is effective when it is congruent with the cultural expectations embedded in the leader’s social environment (Dickson et al., 2003; Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006). In other words, a leadership style is effective only if it is endorsed by the values pertained in a particular culture, which reflect the historical and political connotation that the term ‘leader’ carries (Dorfman et al., 2012). Hence, robust research attempts have been conducted to investigate leadership behaviors in relation to specific cultural values, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance (Offermann & Hellmann, 1997), collectivism-individualism, and masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 1980). For example, comparing to US employees who were more influenced by peer consensus, Chinese employees in collectivist culture had the strongest
tendency to accept supervisors’ direction and less questioned the merit of their supervisor’s directions (Bu, Craig, & Peng, 2001). The GLOBE study found that Confucian Asian, Southern Asian, and Latin American clusters find team-oriented leadership to be essential for effective leadership (House et al., 2004). According to Hofstede (1980, 2001), in a masculine society, its dominant values stress assertiveness, toughness, pursuing monetary and material rewards without much concern about social relationships, quality of life, and well-being of others. In feminine cultures, values such as warm social relationships, quality of life, and care of the weak are stressed. Leaders thus need to adopt different communication and conflict management approaches in these cultures.

In considering cultural diversity, Tsui et al. (2007) recommended researchers to (a) consider the group properties of the culture concept; (b) adopt a configuration approach to consolidate cultural values, (c) adopt a polycontextual approach that includes physical, historical, political, social, economic factors beyond culture; and (d) go “native” and conduct country-specific study. Thus, an emic approach can develop local understanding and practical insights to inform cross-cultural management (Dickson et al., 2012).

**Uniqueness of Hong Kong culture.** Living under a colonial regime during 1842 to 1997, Hong Kong has been following a common law system, and a British model guided by the ethos of *positive non-interventionism* in public governance (Wilding, 1997). Prior to 1997
under the British rule, Hong Kong was once the safe haven for those wartime refugees fled from Mainland China’s communist rule. Average citizens experienced low social and political participation; only Chinese elites who could work with the Westerners were absorbed into the political and economic institution. Naturally, those who received Western education formed a class of social elites. Yet, many Chinese traditions, rituals, and social values were not interfered by the colonial government. Hence, Hong Kong Chinese share some of the deep-rooted traditional Chinese values.

On the other hand, robust economic growth as a leading economy in the Asian Four Dragons made the majority of Hong Kong Chinese people proud of their Hong Kong identity. However, uncertainty of the political future after 1997 also made Hong Kong Chinese people feel they were living “on borrowed time in borrowed land”, which made an orientation toward short-term decision-making, self-reliance, and opportunistic risk-taking the key to survival and success in Hong Kong (Fu et al., 2004). Since Hong Kong’s return to Mainland China, Hong Kong largely preserves its ways of living under the “one country -two systems” policy, with little direct interference from the central government in Beijing. As a result, Hong Kong unique configuration of cultural values persists after the return of sovereignty to China.

Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan shared the same cultural heritage. Under prolonged British influence and active engagement with the West, Hong Kong Chinese exhibit
more “westernized” cultural traits and identity than their counterparts in Mainland China and Taiwan (Law & Ng, 2009; Nisbett, 2003). As Nisbett (2003) showed, Hong Kong managers embrace Chinese social values but Western work values. Such differences can be attributed to the fact that Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan have undergone different paths in their process of societal modernization leading to disparate political, economic, and societal systems in the last century. As Yang (1996) put it, “In the past 100-plus years China has undergone the biggest political, economic, social, and cultural changes of the five millennia of Chinese history” (p.480), which has led to profound psychological and behavioral changes to Chinese people. Yang contended that societal modernization elevated the salience of Western cultural values without replacing traditional Chinese cultural values and thereby exerting coexisting influence on the behavioral and psychological functioning of Chinese people. In the traditionality-modernity spectrum among Chinese societies, Hong Kong represents the highest degree of modernity.

According to Javidan et al. (2006), Hong Kong Chinese align with Mainland China and Taiwan in collectivist values, but are closer to the individualistic Anglo culture in terms of assertiveness, power distance, gender egalitarianism and uncertainty avoidance in GLOBE study. Interestingly, Hong Kong managers even exhibited stronger Western values of assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, and performance orientation than the USA. In particular, Hong Kong
managers’ degree of assertiveness, referred as being tough, assertive, competitive, and confrontational in solving work-related issues, was highly “Westernized” – Hong Kong ranked fifth out of all countries whereas Taiwanese and Chinese managers ranked 42nd and 51st, respectively (Fu et al., 2004; Javidan et al., 2006). For example, under strong uncertainty avoidance, and high collectivism, Mainland Chinese prefer combining personal relationships and informal tactics to influence others to achieve their desirable outcomes. In comparison, with a cultural configuration of strong assertion and low collectivism, Hong Kong managers are inclined to assert their rights, use of pressure to influence others, and making relationship-building tactics less effective (Fu et al., 2004).

Such differences between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese may also be due to different stages of institutional development. In a well-developed institutional environment, formal rules and contracts often supersede informal personal relationships in business activities. Li and Yang (2006) contended that China is in a middle stage of institutional development, traditional guanxi-oriented management is giving way to a rules-based model emphasizing economic imperatives and institutionalized rules. Comparatively speaking, Hong Kong’s institutional environment is well developed, making interpersonal relationships less pivotal.

In terms of leadership behaviors, Hong Kong managers considered the use of merit as fairer in deciding distributive justice while Indonesia managers followed the use of need.
principle (Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002). Hong Kong managers were also more concerned with authority and collective interests in conflict resolution than US managers (Tinsley & Brett, 2001). However, both Hong Kong and US managers preferred the equity rule under low task interdependence and productivity goal; whereas parity was preferred under circumstances of high interdependence and the solidarity goal (Chen, Meindl, & Hui, 1998). These empirical studies demonstrate that Hong Kong managers adopt a mix of Chinese and Western values and leadership styles.

As Hong Kong is moving into a more egalitarian, low power-distance civic society, younger generations of Hong Kong people have received a university education that embraces less traditional Confucian values but much more Western cultural orientation. Hence, younger generations in Hong Kong increasingly attached themselves to a “Hongkonger” identity and valued more on modernity than Confucian values (Lam, Lau, Chiu, Hong, & Peng, 1999). Hence, generations by generations, Hong Kong people show a growing emphasis on personal freedom of choice and autonomy in making career decision than meeting parental expectations (Leung, Hou, Gati, & Li, 2011). Given that a leadership style will be effective only when it is culturally endorsed, the extent to which paternalistic leadership still works under an evolving culture of increasing modernity is unknown. It can be expected that the effective leadership
concept and the leader and leadership development programs derived from it, shall be able to account for such cultural changes.

**Evolving leadership challenges arising from educational reforms.** In retrospect, Hong Kong has gone through three waves of educational reform, which raised expectations for increasingly sophisticated educational leadership (Cheng, 2005). According to Cheng, the first wave since the 1970s stressed internal process improvement to enhance internal effectiveness. Educational leadership in this stage focuses on the roles of (a) the goal leader and performance monitor; (b) internal process manager; and (c) problem-solver of process dysfunction. Educational leaders were relatively weak in managing political and cultural issues.

The second wave since the mid-1990s shifted its focus on the macro-social reform and centered on *interface effectiveness* between the school and community in terms of school-based management, quality assurance, accountability, and stakeholders’ satisfaction (Cheng, 2005). Institutional theory suggests that when the school-community relations become prominent, organizational environment imposes stronger influences on institutions at different aspects, including regulatory structures, government agencies, legal systems, professional bodies, interest groups, and public opinion (Scott, 1987). In addition, securing legitimacy is vital for justifying an organization's role and thereby survival in the social system (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Selznick, 1949). Hence, educational leaders have to assume an active role in making strategic
legitimation decisions to gain stakeholders’ conferment of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). As such, leaders had to acquire proficient leadership skills in four critical domains (strategic leadership, instructional leadership, organizational leadership, community leadership) in six core areas (strategic direction and policy environment; learning, teaching and curriculum; teacher professional growth and development; staff and resources management; quality assurance and accountability; external communication; and connection to the outside world) (Cheng, 2003).

The third wave undergoing since 2000 strives for future effectiveness concerned with preparing future generations for a globalized knowledge society (Cheng, 2005). Given the ambiguity and complexity of unfolding demands from social-cultural, economic, and political dimensions, leaders have to further expand their leadership skills to a new stage of effectiveness in five key dimensions, including structural leadership, social leadership, cultural leadership, political leadership and educational leadership (Cheng, 2005; Mok & Cheung, 2011). At this stage of educational reform, leader and leadership development and policy formulation should be centered on preparing leaders with multiple skills to cope with novel, ambiguous and conflicting demands presented to them by the dynamic environment.
**Conclusion**

From the literature review, we can see that HEIs today are facing ever-growing external demands from diverse constituent groups in the community. HEIs undergo fundamental changes in their governance models that call for stronger leadership, management, and governance in order to become more responsive to increased autonomy, accountability, and external challenges. Under such contexts, departmental leaders in HEIs play a central role in the effective delivery of teaching and student learning by balancing conflicting demands. The availability of well-prepared leaders at departmental level is indispensable for the effective functioning and continued success of HEIs. As such, leader and leadership development has becoming the top policy agenda in leading countries.

Effective leadership requires the alignment between the leadership approaches and the organizational contexts. Social construction of leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as a multilevel *social construction* at the leader-follower dyad, team, organization, and the societal levels. Given the disparity in institutional contexts and individual leaders’ own contexts, effective leadership practices should be authentic and adaptive to unique and changing leadership contexts. There is no quick fix to problems or cookie-cutter leadership practice that is suitable for any contexts and any leaders. Leaders have to continuously learn and adapt to dynamic social environment. Hence, effective leadership begins with effective leader development.
Literature points out the critical needs for providing holistic leaders development support to emerging departmental leaders in their transition from novice to expert leaders in HEIs.

Since effective leadership is dependent on individual contexts and personal characteristics, leader development should also be individualized and context specific. Therefore, it is logical to argue that leader development efforts should focus on building leadership competence and adaptability to cope with novice challenges. Moreover, leader development is considered as a multilevel, longitudinal process of lifespan development. It is vital to provide ongoing leader development opportunities. Hence, at the organizational level, HEIs and program providers are advisable to adopt a holistic approach in constructing a robust support environment that provides authentic learning opportunities in the workplace.

However, few studies have been directed to investigate departmental leaders’ development needs. Few studies are related to the HEIs in Hong Kong. Given the lack of literature on this issue in the Hong Kong context, it will be worthy to investigate the development needs of departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs from their own perspectives through this study. This study will seek to illuminate how departmental leaders make sense of their personal development journey from notice to expert leaders. It will not only enrich leadership development literature, but also inform HEI senior management, policy makers, and course developers with direction for systemic and holistic leader and leadership development
strategies and interventions for leadership capacity building at departmental level – the foci of
teaching and student learning.

This Chapter has also discussed the historical, social, economic, political and cultural
contexts shaping the leadership practices in Hong Kong higher education. Leadership research
and cross cultural study show that leaders’ success depends on the fit of their leadership
approach with their organizational contexts and embedded national culture. Given the
considerable differences between the Chinese and Western cultures, the prevalence of American
managerial practices and leadership approaches in management education available in Hong
Kong may not be culturally endorsed as contributing to effective leadership.

On the other hand, the educational reforms in Hong Kong have imposed increasing
challenges to leaders in HEIs to manage increasingly dynamic, ambiguous, and complex
leadership roles. Similar to what happened in the Western countries, Hong Kong’s education
reform has introduced more business-like managerialist approach to higher education governance.
Departmental leaders in Hong Kong, like their counterparts in the Western world, have to adopt
a blended leadership approach to accommodate the tensions between a managerial and collegial
academic culture (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). Furthermore, introduction of Western
managerialism initiatives emphasizing individual accountability, performance management, and
economic imperatives also impose new tensions in Hong Kong’s education sector, which
traditionally possessed a group-oriented and high power-distance culture (Kwan, 2011). Thus, the blended leadership approach shall also accommodate the expectations of both traditional Chinese cultural values and Western business norms and practices.

Overall, it is clear that there is no stereotype leadership style for leaders in HEIs to follow. They have to adopt an effective approach to develop their leadership capacities to cope with growing job challenges through personal development. It will be promising to explore their leader development experience in order to understand how they can be better supported.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how eight departmental leaders at higher education institutions in Hong Kong make sense of their experiences of development as leaders over time through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. To this end, the following research question was explored from the participants’ perspective.

Research Question

The central research question in this study is “How do departmental leaders in Hong Kong higher education institutions think about their experiences of development as leaders?”

Research Design

The research design in this IPA study is qualitative and inductive, which falls within the social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013). The research question is in line with the social constructivist paradigm because leadership and thereby leader development is conceived as an ongoing social construction process embedded in the leader’s relationships with followers, peers, and supervisors as well as the overarching organizational climate and culture (Day et al., 2009). This is congruent with the social constructivist assumption that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences from their historical and social context. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of departmental leaders’ reflections on their developmental experiences in leadership, which aligns with social constructivist’s concern of seeking to
interpret the meanings that individuals constructed about their world (Creswell, 2013). The social constructivist paradigm also fits well with the theoretical framework since constructive-developmental theory is concerned with individuals’ evolution and development of meaning construction from their life experience in the social world. Moreover, choosing IPA approach for this study is justified by: (a) alignment of the research design with research purpose, and (b) alignment of research tradition with the research question and theoretical framework.

**Justifications of qualitative research design.** First, this study focuses on what meanings departmental leaders attached to their leadership experience in their reflections, rather than testing generalizable casual relationships. This is in line with the social constructivist view that individuals’ subjective meanings are formed through interactions with others within the historical, social and cultural norms (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the goal of research is to uncover research participants’ complex views of the situation through induction (Creswell, 2013).

Indeed, qualitative study is fundamentally suitable for locating meanings placed on an aspect of their lives connected to their social world (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Second, contrary to a post-positivist view of an objective truth in quantitative study, this study is more in line with a relativist’s view that assumes reality is multiple and constructed by the social actors from their lived experience negotiated in social, cultural, and historical contexts (Creswell, 2013). Third, as leader development is a highly individualized, dynamic process, the antecedents, contextual
factors, and casual relationships among them are unknown. An *inductive* qualitative study can provide rich, holistic and ideographic account of research participants’ perspectives on leader development and give useful insights for further research and theory building (Creswell, 2013).

In sum, a qualitative research design is justifiable for the current study. Among all, IPA was chosen for this study as it is deemed to have the strongest alignment with the research question and the theoretical framework, as discussed below.

**Research Tradition**

This study adopted IPA, a form of phenomenological research approach. This section first discusses the suitability of phenomenology for this study and then discusses why IPA is chosen. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon” (p.76). It has three main features. The first distinctive feature is *focus on essence*. Phenomenological study centers on the essential features or structure of a common experience. The second feature is *hermeneutics*, which means that the researchers actively engage in interpretation of participants’ first-person experience. The third feature is *ideography*. The analysis aims to produce rich description of what and how of *individuals’* experience situated in their social-cultural context.
**Theoretical foundation of IPA.** Following an interpretive and social constructivist paradigm, IPA is a phenomenological approach developed by Jonathan Smith (1995).

According to Smith and Obsborn (2008), IPA as a phenomenological research approach follows the German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s motto of phenomenology “Zu den Sachen”, which means “back to the things themselves” (Van Manen, 1990). Additionally, IPA shares a central analytical concern with mainstream psychology in human cognition (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

As such, Phenomenological research approach and IPA are theoretically rooted in German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology as well as hermeneutic and existential phenomenology paradigms advanced by Heidegger, Merleu-Ponty, Sartre and Gadamer (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Edmund Husserl: Phenomenology as philosophy and method.** Although the term phenomenology was used by Kant (1724–1804) and Hegel (1770-1831), Edmund Husserl was inspired by Franz Brentano (1838–1917) in developing his phenomenology as a philosophy and a method (D. Moran, 2002). Husserl argued that study of human mind and cognition, which are subjective in nature, requires a new paradigm other than naturalism (Husserl, 1907/1964).

Husserl adopted Brentano’s concept of intentionality as a fundamental concept for understanding human consciousness. Intentionality means that the act of consciousness is intentionally related to an object (Dowling, 2007). As such, to understand an object that appears to us, we must turn
to our self consciousness to investigate our internal experience of the object (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl (2012) argued that the act of consciousness involves three spheres: worldly unity, psychological unity, and intuition. According to Moustakas (1994), *intentionality, noema* and *noesis* are concepts central to phenomenology. Noema is what is experienced. Noesis is how it is experienced. As experience is understood through consciousness, meaning is inevitably embedded in experience. Husserl (1964) argued that since experience is the source of knowledge, knowledge is meaning laden.

To “go back to the things themselves” and understand the core essence of a phenomenon, Husserl (1964) contended that the “‘lifeworld’” (Lebenswelt) should be understood by examining one’s pre-reflective, original, naïve understanding about the experience. Developing such understanding requires the *transcendental* method of *phenomenological reduction* to ensure the observer’s analysis is conducted in a detached and descriptive manner (Husserl, 2012).

Spiegelberg (1965) opined that *phenomenological intuiting* is the heart of phenomenological reduction. Intuiting means “an eidetic understanding of what is meant in the description of the phenomenon under investigation” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132). Specifically, Husserl’s intuiting method is *epoche* (bracketing), i.e., an act to suspend judgment and to systematically remove inessential aspects, symbolic meanings, context, so as to get into the core of the phenomenon.
(Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). To bracket out one’s preconceptions, one must firstly make them overt and as clear as possible (Dowling, 2007; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

**Donald Polkinghorne: Steps of phenomenological reduction.** Polkinghorne (1989) developed a two-step process for phenomenological reduction, which has then been widely adopted in phenomenological research: *imaginative variation* and *intentional analysis*.

Imaginative variation is a step to vary the frames of reference and the perspectives imaginatively “to the edges until it no longer describes the experience underlying the subject’s naive description” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 55). The purpose is to identify and describe the essential structure (i.e., essence) of an experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). In intentional analysis, the researcher describes how the experience is constructed through synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). From the above discussion, it can be seen that Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy and the phenomenological reduction method laid down the theoretical foundation and methods for conducting qualitative research in human science following the constructive interpretive paradigm in general, and phenomenological research in particular.

**Martin Heidegger: Hermeneutic phenomenology.** One of the main features of phenomenology is hermeneutics, which was developed by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Influenced by existential philosophy of Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Heidegger
placed a central concern of phenomenology with Being-in-the-World, i.e., the way of human existence (Dowling, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). He argued that understanding is developed via a “hermeneutic circle” between pre-understanding and understanding (Dowling, 2007). In other words, comparing to Husserl’s emphasis on descriptive, detached, and transcendental analysis, Heidegger’s interpretive paradigm emphasized that interpretation of meaning is essential to understand human experience.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Primacy of perception in phenomenology.** Built on Husserl and Heidegger’s work, Merleau-Ponty argued for the primacy of perception in human’s understanding and engaging with the world. He stressed the major role of body in knowing the world and argued that lived experience is dependent on body, making the detachment of subject from object impossible. He inspired phenomenological researchers (e.g., Van Manen) by proposing four existentials as the essential structure of the life world: lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation (Dowling, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

**Sartre: Extending existentialism to phenomenology.** Sartre extended Kierkegaard’s existential phenomenology in his seminal work *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1943/1964). His famous premise “existence comes before essence” signifies that we are always becoming more than being ourselves. Further, his concept of nothingness suggests that human’s lived experience is contingent on the presence – and absence – of personal and social relationships.
Thus, human existence is action-oriented, meaning-seeking, developmental, and processual
(Smith et al., 2009). As such, understanding of life experience is situated in personal, social, and
processual contexts. Overall, the works of Heidegger, Merleu-Ponty and Sartre provide the
theoretical scaffolding for phenomenological research, especially for IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

_Hans-Georg Gadamer: Founder of philosophical hermeneutics._ In his book _Truth and
Method_, Gadamer (1975) advanced the constructivist paradigm with two major concepts to
explain how human understanding is possible: (a) _prejudgment_ is part of our linguistic
experience that make understanding possible; and (b) _universality_ or common human
consciousness makes human’s mutual understanding possible. As such, he transformed the
conception of hermeneutic cycle – hermeneutic is not an researcher’s individual interpretive act
but should be a dialogue between the researcher and the researched (Dowling, 2007).

Following Gadamer’s approach, member checking is a necessary step to collect feedback via
discussion with the participants.

_Methodologists: Giorgi, Colazzi, van Kaam, van Manen, and Moustakas._ Psychologists
Amadeo Giorgi (1985), Paul Colazzi (1978) and Adrian van Kaam (1966) were instrumental in
increasing phenomenology’s popularity in psychological and education research in the 1970s and
1980s (Kakkori, 2010). They are credited for developing reliable methods for
existential-phenomenological research, which include similar steps as follows: (a) dividing
original descriptions into units; (b) transforming units into meanings expressed in psychological and phenomenological concepts; and (c) combining transformations to create a general description of the experience (Dowling, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989). These procedures were included in Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. Here, “transcendental” means “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34), which inherits Husserl’s focus on pre-reflective experience. Although a transcendental state cannot be totally reached in practice, it is necessary for researchers to bracket out their own positionality from the outset.

Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach includes the following steps: (1) determining if research problem has rich social meanings and significance that can be best examined through a phenomenological approach; (2) identifying a phenomenon of interest to study; (3) bracketing out researcher’s own positionality; (4) collecting data from multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon via person-to-person exploratory interview and follow-up interview; (5) analyzing data by what Moustakas’s (1994) called horizonalization, i.e., going through the data and highlight significant statements; (6) developing clusters of meaning from these significant statements into themes; (7) writing a textural and structural descriptions of an experience for each individual; (8) discussing the researchers’ own
experience and contextual factors that shaped their experience; and (9) synthesizing these descriptions into *composite description* that presents the “essence” of the phenomenon.

As another major school of phenomenology, *hermeneutic phenomenology* (Van Manen, 1990) adopted a different approach and focused on understanding lived experience via interpreting the “texts” of life. He contended that “Phenomenology is the application of logos (language and thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (an aspect of lived experience), to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 33). Further, he defined his approach as follows: “The phenomenological method consist of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive – sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, in the way language speaks when it allows the thing themselves to speak.” (Van Manen 1990, p. 111).

Methodologically, Van Manen did not define a set of procedures. Instead, he treated it as a process involving a dynamic interplay among six research activities: (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31). To categorize themes into structures of meaning, Van Manen borrowed Merleau-Ponty’s four
existential life-world themes to guide the reflective research process: “lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality)” (p. 101).

**Major features of IPA.** Comparing to phenomenology, IPA study places a particular emphasis on interpreting individuals’ *sensemaking* of their lived experiences. According to Jonathan Smith, the aim of IPA is to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Furthermore, IPA emphasizes research as a dynamic process in which the researcher plays an active role in interpreting the participants’ personal world from an “insider’s perspective”. Moreover, semi-structured interview is considered as the “exemplary method” for data collection in IPA study (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57). In essence, it has three distinctive features: First, it is *double hermeneutics*. In other words, the researcher focuses on interpreting research participants’ interpretation of their life experience. Second, IPA study focuses on the *meaning* that research participants make from their lived experience. Lastly, IPA study seeks to develop an *ideographic* understanding of the research participants’ sensemaking (Larkin, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

**Justifications of adopting IPA approach.** Comparing to phenomenology, IPA is considered more suitable for this study as it has stronger alignment with the research question
and theoretical framework. To illustrate, constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1980, 1982) is adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. Constructive-developmental theory conceives leader development as an evolving sensemaking process, in which people construct their understanding of self and the world from their lived experience in coping with increasing complexity in job demands. Leadership competence is enhanced when leaders reflect their lived experience. Interpreting their reflection is thus a double-hermeneutic exercise of IPA. Also, leaders’ progress to the next development stages follows identifiable common patterns (McCauley et al., 2006). As the details of these common patterns are largely unknown, the research question in this study is centered on some critical questions concerning how participants’ perceive and make meaning from their reflection on their growth process from notice to expert leaders, and how such development is shaped by the participants’ personal and social contextual factors. As Smith and Osborn (2008) recommended, IPA is suitable for investigating “how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 55). A qualitative study using IPA can help to understand the participants’ growth experience from their own perspectives.

**Role of the Researcher**

As Ponterotto (2005) pointed out, “a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism is the centrality of the interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation” (p. 129).
The role of the constructivist-interpretive researcher, according to Ponterotto (2005), is to bring to the surface the hidden meaning (i.e., *essence*) of research participants’ lived experience through “deep reflection” and intense “interactive researcher-participant dialogue” (p.129). The researcher as the “would-be knower” plays an active role as the primary research instrument who jointly develops with the research participants (the “knower”) a rich and holistic description and interpretation of the participants’ multiple perspectives (Ponterotto, 2005).

Additionally, the researcher in IPA engages in a two-stage interpretation process (i.e., double hermeneutic), where “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Hence, the researcher should be committed to understanding from the participants’ points of view. The researcher shall also get closer to the participants to understand what they say and do in their life setting, interact with them in a flexible, dynamic fashion, ask open-end questions, and suspend rationalization and evaluation (Larkin, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2008). As the researcher might bring his own values, presumptions, and personal, cultural, and historical background into the interpretive process, the researcher should acknowledge and describe relevant experience, values, and bias in the research, and give voice to research participants in the study (Briscoe, 2005; Creswell, 2003; Ponterotto, 2005).

Overall, qualitative study is an inductive and emergent process. The researcher did not
assume a strong prior understanding of the phenomenon, or make any propositions or hypothesis based on existing literature. Instead, he strived to identity common themes from the insights drawn from research participants in a hermeneutic approach.

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

Purposive homogenous sampling method is recommended in IPA approach so that the researcher can “examine in detail psychological variability within the group, by analyzing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 50). The key is to find informants who are able and willing to give a detailed account of their experiences under study. As such, this study mainly adopted widely used sampling strategies of referral, opportunistic, and snowball sampling (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Regarding sample size, Smith and Osborn (2008) stressed the flexibility in sampling and the importance of quality not quantity of samples, and recommended a range of four to ten interviews (not participants) is appropriate for a professional doctoral study (p.52). As Smith and Osborn (2008) explained, “given the complexity of most human phenomena, IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases” (p.51). The purpose is to allow a detailed examination of the similarity and difference, convergence and divergence in each case, and to avoid becoming “overwhelmed by the vast amount of data generated by a
qualitative study and are not able to produce a sufficiently penetrating analysis” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57).

The research site for this study was Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, there are 20 degree-granting institutions (9 publicly funded and 11 self-financing), and 20 self-financing sub-degree institutions, among which 16 are actually the schools of continuing education and subsidiary community colleges established by degree-granting institutions. The remaining four are independently established sub-degree institutions. These 40 HEIs can be classified into four types: (a) traditional publicly funded degree-granting universities/institutes, (b) self-financing schools/colleges of type (a) institutions, (c) publicly funded institutes of vocational and specialized training, and (d) independent self-financing institutions. Except Type (a) institutions, which place more emphasis on research and teaching, the rest types of institutions emphasize provision of professional and vocational education in response to market needs.

In line with their respective mandates, there is also a shift of emphasis from traditional academic culture towards business-like, market-oriented culture from Type (a) to Type (d) institutions. As far as accreditation is concerned, Type (a) and Type (b) institutions are self-accredited and subject to periodical institutional review; whereas Type (c) and (d) are externally accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) at both institutional and program levels. It can be seen that the
four types of institutions are subject to different degrees of market pressure and external monitoring, thus representing different operating contexts for departmental leaders in these institutions.

To ensure the sample size is adequately robust, this study included eight participants. To maintain reasonable homogeneity within the samples, research participants were only included if they met the following criteria: (a) They were holding an academic leadership position as departmental leader or program director in a HEI; and (b) They had at least five years of leadership experience. In addition, participants of both genders were included as suggested by Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005). Given that the data was analyzed using constructive-developmental theory as a theoretical lens, different levels of leadership positions can be conceptualized as the proxy of different leadership expertise levels to cope with increased role complexities. Thus, effort was made to recruit participants who were not only in different disciplines and institutional types, but also at various leadership levels. This technique of recruiting participants at various leadership stages to understand the experiences of the population as a whole is known as maximum variation (Creswell, 2013). Their collective experiences help a wide range of readers of this report relate the finding with their own professional and experiential knowledge (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al, 2009).
Specifically, the eight participants were all Hong Kong Chinese. Four female and four male were purposefully recruited. Their average leadership experience was 13 years. The shortest was 5.5 years and the longest was 22 years. Their leadership positions ranged from program director, associate department head, department dead, associate dean, and college head, representing leadership stages at program, department, and college/faculty levels. They also came from different departments/faculties, including Arts and Humanities, Business, Communications, Community and Vocational Training, Education, Engineering, Hospitality Management, Languages, and Science and Technology, which offered programs ranging from certificate/diplomas, degrees, master’s to doctoral levels. Moreover, most of the participants had work experience with several HEIs. Their work experiences collectively covered 20 institutions, representing 50% of the institution population and all four types of instructions, i.e., publicly funded degree granting institutions, self-financing schools/colleges of degree granting institutions, publicly-funded training institutes, and independent self-financing institutions. Hence, the generalizability of the research participants’ common experience was deemed robust.

**Recruitment and access.** Suitable research participants were identified through the researcher’s personal network and respective institutions’ websites. Invitation were sent to their email address and followed up in a week’s time by phone or email (See Appendix A).
Interested parties who met the research criteria were then invited to fill in the Informed Consent Form. As there was no case of participant mortality, no additional participants were recruited.

**Ethical considerations.** This qualitative study involved intensive interaction between the researcher and the research participants to collect personal experience, views, and personal data on leader development from departmental leaders at HEIs. The critical relationship between the investigator and human subjects was governed by the general principles of honesty, trust, and respect, as stipulated by National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research (2008). In addition, the research process followed the three principles stated in the "The Belmont Report" (1979): (1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence, and (3) justice. To ensure compliance with ethical principles and requirements, the researcher has completed the required education (Protection of Human Research Participants) and obtained a Certificate of Completion from the NIH Office of Extramural Research. In addition, prior approval from the Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were obtained before data collection (Appendix B).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

In this study, research participants were departmental leaders in HEIs, who are considered as autonomous persons and not vulnerable population as defined by the NIH Office of Extramural Research (2008). The research process involved in-depth semi-structured
interviews. There was no physical, emotional, mental harm or discomfort imposed on research participants. The following measures were taken to protect the human subjects:

1. Research participants were invited for voluntary participation with written explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks, rights to withdraw from the research at any time, and protection of confidentiality. Participants were invited to sign an Informed Consent Form before participating in the study.

2. Confidentiality of participants’ data was strictly protected. Participants’ responses were collected in personal interview in private, secured space that the participants chose. Pseudonym were used to protect the identity of participants. Their responses, when quoted, were reported in anonymity or with pseudonym. Hard copy data were stored in a locked cabinet accessed by the researcher only. All data and documents will be destroyed after the research is completed.

**Informed consent.** The study recognized the importance of completing the informed consent process and obtaining each research participant’s signed written consent form for record. The researcher provided clear information in the Informed Consent Form and explanation to the participants so that they fully understood the study’s risks and benefits, and their rights to ask questions before signing the informed consent form. The Informed Consent used the Northeastern University’s Template 1 Format for Signed Informed Consent Document available
The Form were sent together with the invitation letter to prospective research participants to allow sufficient time for them to consider. Before conducting an interview, the researcher also went through the Form with the participant and ask if he/she has any questions that need clarifications. If the participant decided not to proceed, the interview would be cancelled. After the participant had signed the Informed Consent Form, the interview then start. During the interview, the participants did not experience any physical and emotional discomfort arising from a question. A few of them requested to take a short break to answer urgent phone calls and the interview resumed afterwards. The researcher established good rapport and encouraging atmosphere during the interview. None of the participants withdrew from the study.

**IRB approval.** Application for IRB approval was made after the thesis supervisor approved the Doctoral Thesis Proposal (DTP) for this study and agreed to be the Principal Investigator. The researcher completed an application form for Approval for Use of Human Participants in Research obtained from the NEU website:

http://www.northeastern.edu/research/hsrp/files/Application_Form.doc. Also, as the study is a student research, the thesis supervisor reviewed the DTP and signed the Assurance of the Principal Investigator Form. The application form, Assurance Form and a copy of NIH
Certificate of Completion of required training were submitted to IRB for approval. The approval letter from the Northeastern University IRB is provided in Appendix B.

Data Collection

As this study followed a qualitative IPA approach, the researcher (as “would-be knower”) was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis of the voices of participants (the “knower”) (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study adopted semi-structured, face-to-face interview – the “exemplary method” in IPA study (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57), which offers the following benefits:

This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise. (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57)

In this study, participants were interviewed once in a one-to-one, semi-structured format. Consistent with an interpretive, naturalistic inquiry, the purpose of in-depth interview was to allow the participant to provide a holistic and rich account (“thick description”) of their perspectives on their lived experience at their own natural social-cultural context, and allow the researcher to probe interesting areas emerged in the dialogue (Dowling, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Hence, among the eight participants, five semi-structured interviews took place at research participants’ office or a private and secured place that was chosen by the participant and three were conducted through telephone. Each interview was
scheduled for 90 minutes, but it took longer or less time, depending on the participant (Seidman, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Following the standard qualitative interview procedure, the interview instrumentation adopted a pre-designed interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) with a set of neutral, non-leading, open-end questions (see Appendix D) (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Although all participants’ native language was Cantonese, the interviews were conducted in English. The interview started with general ice-breaking questions to make interviewees feel comfortable talking to the investigator, and then the substantive questions were asked, which were followed by closing questions. Though there is no set order in the questions, the interview largely followed the sequence of questions designed in the interview protocol. Meanwhile, when a response was insufficient, probing questions were raised to elicit more explicit responses. When the interviewees had difficulty in answering a question, the researcher also provided some explanation or switched to other topics and revisited the question later.

According to Smith and Osborn (2008), tape recording is highly necessary for an IPA study to enable the investigator to focus on dialogue with the interviewees. In the study, upon the participant’s consent, face-to-face interviews were audio recorded by the voice recording app in the researcher’s Android smartphone, whereas telephone interviews were recorded using the smartphone app ACR-Call Recorder (http://nllapps.com/apps/acr/). Before the interview, the
researcher personally tested the voice quality of these apps with a non-participant and found the audio quality good enough for the transcription purpose.

The researcher personally conducted the verbatim transcription in Microsoft Word immediately after each interview. *Express Scribe* (http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/), a professional audio player software designed for PC to assist the transcription of audio recordings, was used to facilitate the work. *Express Scribe* allowed adjusting playback speed and using ‘hotkeys’ to control playback and rewinding on a computer. After testing, the playback speed was set at 76% to allow the researcher to hear the participants’ voice word by word very clearly via a headphone. This approach allowed the researcher to identify some words and expressions of which was unaware during the interview. Additionally, the researcher also referred to the research notes taken during the interview where necessary. Finally, each draft transcript was sent to the respective participant for member checking.

Smith et al.’s (2009) encouraged researchers to listen to the audio recording before conducting the coding exercise. Conducting the transcription personally served the same purpose. Although the above transcription process was time consuming, it proved to be worthwhile because it allowed the researcher to immerse considerably into the participants’ voices and form a deeper understanding of the participant’s meanings. Overall, the transcription process generated 45,805 words of textual data in eight transcripts.
Data storage. Qualitative study normally produces large amount of audio and text data from interviews and data analysis. Complete record of these data is necessary for verification and external audit. This study took note of the following advice from Creswell (2013): (1) Always backed up computer files; (2) used high-quality tapes for audio-recording; (3) developed a master list of types of information gathered; (4) protected the anonymity of participants by masking their names in data; and (5) developed a data collection matrix as a visual means of locating information (p.175). Specifically, data were password protected and stored in the researcher’s personal computer. Hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s private space. Important documents were also scanned and saved in the researcher’s personal computer.

Data management. Main issues in data management include ensuring (a) high-quality data, (b) documentation of analysis, and (c) retention of data and associated analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, data analysis involved repeated reiteration of coding, categorization, and analysis of the original data. The following data management measures were adopted:

1. Fieldwork notes were be taken after each interview using a standard template that states the site, persons involved, date, and with sequential pagination.
2. Documents were put in file folders and sorted into a structure of file types including:

   “Interview raw Data”, “Coding Data”, and “Analytic Statements”.

3. Interview data of each participant was kept in separate sub folders named in a consistent
   format for easy referencing: pseudonym + interview date.

4. To have effective version control and trail, every time when there was an update, the version
   and date of analysis were printed on the document cover page and saved as a new file with
   the updated date indicated in the file name.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis in a qualitative study, including IPA, is a personal interpretive process.

Indeed, the focus of IPA data analysis is the content and complexity of meaning. According to
Smith et al. (2009), participant’s accounts of their lived experiences and world meaning are
*descriptive*; their use of specific language is *linguistic*; and the interpretative comments on the
participant’s experience from the researcher’s vantage point are *conceptual*. Through the
hermeneutic interpretative process, the researcher identified and extract conceptual themes from
the participants’ first-hand accounts of their developmental experiences as leaders (Shinebourne,
2011; Smith et al., 2009). Smith and his colleagues (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008)
explicitly stressed that it is inappropriate to designate a prescriptive data analysis approach so as
to make room for more experimentations. In analyzing each set of interview data, the
researcher used MAXQDA software to organize and code the data. Each completed verbatim transcription of interview was imported into MAXQDA. Then the researcher followed the six analytical steps designed by Smith et al. (2009) as follows:

**Step 1: Reading and re-reading.** By doing so, the researcher immersed thoroughly in the original data, and then located rich sections, significant statements, and contradictions in the transcript. This also served as proofreading. In case of doubt, the researcher also referred to audio recording and field notes for verification.

**Step 2: Initial noting.** In this free textual analysis process, the researcher wrote notes, initial interpretive comments, and reflections on the transcript through close analysis of the content, use of language, and context. Focus was placed on richer sections of the transcript. When reading a transcript passage, the researcher kept in mind the following questions: “What is the underlying meaning of this passage for the participant?” and “What does this passage mean to me in relation to the theoretical framework?” (Smith et al., 2009). During this, the researcher dropped down explanatory notes for anything significant. For example, 79 explanatory notes were produced from the first transcript.

**Step 3: Developing emergent themes.** This step involved distilling the initial notes into emerging themes. It is referred as first-cycle coding by Saldaña (2013). The researcher focused on developing analytical phrases that offer a higher-level conceptual understanding and
simultaneously retaining enough particularity of the participants. These analytical phrases were grounded in participants’ own words and captured the essence of the statement. As phenomenon under study was the leader development process, a mix of coding methods (initial coding, descriptive coding, and process coding) were adopted (Saldaña, 2013). Twenty-eight emergent themes were produced from this step.

**Step 4: Clustering and connecting themes according to conceptual similarities.**

This is also referred as second-cycle coding, in which axial coding and theoretical coding methods were used (Saldaña, 2013). The main task was to identify patterns in the emerging themes and develop descriptive labels that highlight the convergent themes contained in each of the clusters. According to Saldaña (2013), codes are categories linking the textual data, whereas themes should be phrases or sentences capturing subtle processes underlying the phenomenon. In conducting IPA, researchers are encouraged to link structure with process by focusing on themes that represent underlying conditions, key phenomenon, key actions and interactions and their consequences (Smith et al., 2009). In actual implementation, the emergent themes were first listed chronologically. The researcher then looked for connections among the themes. Themes that could not be clustered are discarded. The researcher produced a table of clustered themes that showed the structure of superordinate themes and subthemes, and then gave a label to indicate the conceptual essence of a superordinate theme in each cluster. Key quotes or
extracts of the participants’ transcripts were presented under each subtheme with the paragraph number included for reference. This has been an iterative process requiring the researcher to go back and forth between the previous steps to reexamine the importance of themes and to ensure the original meanings of the participants were preserved. Themes that did not fit well in the structure were discarded. This step resulted in seven superordinate themes.

**Step 5: Moving to the next cases.** The above Step 1 to Sept 4 were repeated for each participant. The researcher was cautious about the ideographic commitment of IPA and considered each case in its own term. Also, the researcher was open to allow new themes to emerge from each new case. When a new theme emerged, the researcher also reviewed the transcripts of earlier cases and included quotes that support the new emergent theme. For example, three codes (“performance assessment and feedback”, “earned credibility and trust”, and “alignment with organizational culture”) were added. Altogether, 832 text segments were coded after all the eight transcripts were analyzed.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.** After all the transcripts were analyzed, the researcher completed the production of a final table of superordinate themes as a whole. Under each superordinate theme, the clusters of subthemes themes and supporting quotes from different transcripts were listed. This was an iteration process between the transcript and themes until they formed an ideal set (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). In this iterative process, the
researcher reexamined the convergences and divergences in the themes and looked for patterns across all cases. In identifying common themes across cases, the researcher was guided by the following questions, “What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are the most potent?” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101).

As a result, some themes were merged or re-ordered in view of the richness of the original data in highlighting the themes. For example, “managerial focus for program leadership” and “transformational focus for departmental leadership” were combined as “transformational vs. managerial leadership”; “contingency perspective of leadership” was merged into “reflective judgment on contextual applicability”. Moreover, three superordinate themes “Increasing leadership challenges”, “Supportive organizational climate” and “Women leadership” were discarded, and a new superordinate theme “Impacts on leader development” was added. Finally, five superordinate themes and 16 sub-themes were identified.

Based on the final table of themes, the researcher then produced a narrative account of the common experience of the participants, which was the outcome of interplay between the interpretations of the participants and the researcher. Each superordinate theme was presented one by one and supported by quotes in the participants’ own words as well as the researcher’s interpretive comments. Finally, the researcher invited participants to review their interview
transcripts and the narrative account for member checking purpose. Adjustments were made according to the feedback received.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the quality of research, researchers adopted appropriate strategies to ensure the quality of data collection and analysis. For qualitative study, Rubin and Rubin (2012) contended that “quality means that the results of the research are fresh and real. The conclusions are balanced, thorough, credible, and accurate, and the final reports are rich with ideas” (p.60, emphasis in original). Creswell (2013) reviewed many perspectives of validation in qualitative research and argued that validation in qualitative research essentially can be conceived to be “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) developed a set of widely adopted criteria for constructivist studies following a naturalistic paradigm, namely “trustworthiness criteria of credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), and confirmability (paralleling objectivity)” (p.114). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that in naturalistic paradigm, (a) credibility of findings in an inquiry is demonstrated by their adequate representation of multiple realities that are credible to their constructors (i.e., research participants); (b) transferability is a judgment call of the reader
discerning the contextual similarity between the research site and the reader’s own circumstance;

(c) *dependability* in emergent study is affected by variability in research-participant interaction, contexts, and research design; and (d) *confirmability* is achieved when the research findings reflect the participants’ perspectives on the social phenomenon through an unobtrusive process and controlling of the researcher’s bias.

Merriam and Simpson (2000) recommended using multiple techniques to provide internal validity, including triangulation, member checking, submersion in the research setting (similar to prolonged engagement and persistent observation), and statements of researcher bias. Creswell (2013) also recommended using “at least two” strategies (p.253) – In particular, triangulation of data sources, thick description, and member checking are most popular and cost-effective procedures to conduct while peer audits and external audits are more costly and time-consuming.

In view of the above, for the purpose of this dissertation study, the following strategies were adopted: clarifying research bias from the outset of the study, member checking, thick description, and audit trail.

**Clarifying researcher’s bias and assumptions.** In conducting research, the researcher was mindful of maintaining reflexivity about the positionality of the researchers, the researched, and the relations between the two (Parsons, 2008), so as to control potential biases and become open-minded about research data on their representation of the *other* (the researched) (Briscoe,
To enhance the credibility of IPA study, the researcher followed Yardley’s (2008) principle of sensitivity to context by paying attention to the social-cultural contexts of the study site, the power imbalance during the interviewer-interviewee interaction, and paying extra care in giving participants voice in data analysis and interpretation. The researcher also disclosed his positionality in the dissertation to keep himself vigilant on this issue and also to help reader evaluate the extent of bias exists in data interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

**Member checking.** Member checking is deemed “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314; see also Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Member checking also provides strong analytical triangulation. Patton (2002) argues that “having those who were studied review the findings offers another approach to analytical triangulation” (p. 560). Through member checking, researchers and evaluators can “learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 560). As such, participants were invited to verify the transcripts, draft interpretation, and draft finding report to ensure accuracy.

**Thick description.** In reporting the study finding, as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008), sufficient amount of verbatim extracts from the participants’ material was provided to support the argument made. The purpose was to provide a holistic, nuanced, and
rich account of each participant’s perspectives in their voice about their lived experience in personal leadership growth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To these aims, the research examined the variety of examples and themes, and explored alternative interpretations and perspectives as advised by Rubin and Rubin (2012).

**Audit trail.** To allow self and external audit, Yin (2009) suggested to file the documents and data to provide the chain of evidence from initial documentation to the final report. Such approach is recommended in IPA study and was adopted in this study (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Specifically, the audit trail consisted of the following: initial notes on the research question, the research proposal, an interview schedule, audio tapes, annotated transcripts, tables of themes and other device draft reports, and the final report (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 183).

**Threats to internal validity.** According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), there are ten major threats to internal validity: participant characteristics, mortality, participant attitude, location, instrumentation (instrument decay, researcher characteristics, researcher bias), implementation, testing, history, maturation, and regression. The last three (testing, history, maturation, and regression) are relevant to quantitative study only. This IPA study, like other qualitative studies, involved prolonged interaction between the researcher and the research participants, making the first seven threats listed above relevant. Threat of researcher
characteristics was irrelevant to this study because there was only one researcher conducting interviews. In addition, research bias has been discussed earlier. Controlling of remaining five threats will be discussed below.

**Participant characteristics and mortality, and attitude.** As mentioned earlier, differences in participant characteristics are reflected in purposive sampling to recruit small samples of participants who have firsthand experience, complementary perspectives, and are knowledgeable with different personal and social cultural background. Meanwhile, since no participant discontinued the study, no mortality problem occurred.

To control threat of participant attitude, the researcher was cognizant that to obtain good data, it is vital to make participants comfortable to share their true perspectives during interview. In line with the principle of sensitivity (Yardley, 2008), the researcher were mindful of “showing empathy, putting the participant at ease, recognizing interactional difficulties, and negotiating the intricate power play where research expert may meet experiential expert” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 180).

**Location.** As naturalistic research seeks to understand research participants’ lived experience, in-depth interview were conducted at participants’ own natural social environment, e.g., their venue or a private, secured venue chosen by the participant to make them feel comfortable to share their views (Dowling, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Implementation. In qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Good data is obtained in skillful handling of the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). To encourage participants to provide a rich and holistic account of their experience, the researcher made use of the following techniques suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008): (a) developed an interview protocol to guide the interview process in light of research questions; (b) established rapport with the participant at the beginning of the interview; (c) asked sensitive questions only after the interviewee became comfortable to speak; (d) engaged with an interviewee in flexible, interactive dialogue; (e) listened attentively and probed spontaneously to find out more important and interesting things; (f) avoided asking leading questions; and (g) resisted the urge to interpret what were heard during the interview.

Moreover, as advised by Rubin and Rubin (2012), attention were paid to seek detailed examples for each theme and to check for candor, memory, and consistency in the interviews so as to enhance credibility. The following methods were adopted to ensure accuracy: transcription of interviews, member checking, analyzing negative theme, and exploring alternative interpretations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to explore how eight departmental leaders at higher education institutions in Hong Kong make sense of their experiences of development as leaders
over time. A qualitative research design following the social constructivist paradigm is in line with the chosen theoretical framework. Thus, it is suitable for exploring departmental leaders’ meaning construction from their lived experience and developing insights into their common experience through inductive analysis. The study adopted the IPA approach, which allowed the researcher to interpret in detail how the research participants make sense of their personal leadership development experience from their “insider’s perspectives”.

This study adopted a purposeful, opportunistic, and snowball sampling strategy. Efforts were made to recruit participants who were at program, department, and college/faculty levels of leadership positions from eight different disciplines in eight different HEIs in Hong Kong. They were Hong Kong Chinese, four males and four females, with at least five years of leadership experience (mean = 13 years). Their collective work experiences covered 20 HEIs in Hong Kong, representing 50% of the population, and all four types of HEIs (i.e., publicly funded degree-granting institutions, self-financing schools/colleges of publicly funded degree granting institutions, publicly funded training institutes, and independent self-financing institutions). A sample size of eight participants was deemed robust enough for a doctoral study. Adequate measures were in place to protect the well-being of human subjects. In particular, participants’ informed consent was obtained and their confidentiality was protected.
In conducting a qualitative study, the researcher as the primary research instrument engaged in extensive interactions with the research participants in semi-structured interviews. The researcher was committed to developing an ideographic understanding of the phenomenon under study (leader development) from the research participants’ perspectives. In conducting the data analysis, the researcher followed the six-step IPA analytical approach recommended by Smith et al. (2009). Through various commonly adopted strategies in qualitative studies (e.g., clarifying the researcher’s bias, member checking, thick description, and audit trail), the trustworthiness of the study is safeguarded.
Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

As stated in Chapter I, this qualitative study was set out to explore how eight departmental leaders in Hong Kong’s HEIs make sense of their experiences of development as leaders over time through an IPA approach. This study was guided by the central research question: How do departmental leaders in Hong Kong higher education institutions think about their experiences of development as leaders? To answer the above question, this chapter presents a rich descriptive and analytic account of the eight participants based on their lived experience of development as leaders within their personal, historical and social contexts. This chapter is organized in three sections. The first section introduces the profiles of the participants. Then the second section presents the five superordinate themes through interpretations of the data: (1) top-down approach in leader selection and promotion, (2) advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice, (3) rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth, (4) personal drive as impetus for growth, and (5) leader maturation through cumulative learning. The third section summarizes the results.

Participants’ Profiles

Given that the higher education sector in Hong Kong is a relatively small circle, this section provides holistic and aggregate descriptions of the eight participants’ backgrounds in
order to protect their confidentiality. Purposive criteria sampling strategy was adopted to recruit eight departmental leaders in eight different Hong Kong HEIs who met the research criteria: (a) They had held an academic leadership position as departmental leader or program director in a HEI; and (b) They had at least five years of leadership experience. Among the eight participants, four were males and four were females. All of them were Hong Kong Chinese. Their average leadership experience was 13 years. The shortest was 5.5 years and the longest was 22 years.

As described in Chapter III, maximum variation sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants at various leadership stages and contexts to understand the experiences of the population as a whole (Creswell, 2013). This allows various readers of this study to assess the findings in relation to their professional and experiential knowledge (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, et al., 2009). Because most of the participants had work experience with several HEIs, their work experiences collectively covered 20 institutions, representing 50% of the institution population and all four types of HEIs in Hong Kong: (a) publicly-funded degree-granting institutions, (b) self-financing schools/colleges of publicly funded degree-granting institutions, (c) publicly-funded training institutes, and (d) independent self-financing institutions. These institutions offered programs ranging from certificate/diplomas, degrees, master’s to doctoral levels (see Table 1 below). The participants also came from diverse departments/faculties,
including Arts and Humanities, Business, Communications, Community and Vocational Training, Education, Engineering, Hospitality Management, Languages, and Science and Technology.

Their diverse experiences provide a robust representation of departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs.

Table 1

*Summary of Participants’ Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Leadership Level</th>
<th>Leadership Experience (Years)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Institution Types #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>16.50</td>
<td>Ed.D</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benny</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>B,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>A,B,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>College/Faculty</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>College/Faculty</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>Ed.D (candidate)</td>
<td>B,C,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>Ph.D. (candidate)</td>
<td>B,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>Ph.D. (candidate)</td>
<td>C,D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#  Type A: Publicly funded degree-granting institutions, Type B: self-financing schools/colleges of publicly funded degree-granting institutions, Type C: publicly funded training institutes, Type D: independent self-financing institutions.
As shown in Table 1 above, the participants’ leadership positions ranged from program level (i.e., program leader), department level (associate head or head of department dead), to college level (associate dean of faculty or head of college). Higher leadership positions is associated with increasing role complexities, and more advanced leadership expertise levels. Regarding their education levels, four participants had doctoral degrees, three were doctoral candidates, and one had two master’s degrees. As presented below, their professional backgrounds, career path and objectives were diverse. Since different institutions may adopt unique positional titles, the participants’ titles are intentionally standardized to mask their institutional affiliation while reflecting their levels of positions. Pseudonyms are used to protect their confidentiality.

**Anna.** Anna is a deputy head of a Type A institution at Associate Professor rank. Her roles include departmental leadership, research, teaching, and committee work. She had prior leadership experience at committee, course, and program levels, as well as senior management experience in a school and a social service organization. She had worked in two Type A institutions in Hong Kong. She studied leadership in her Ed.D study.

**Benny.** Benny has worked as the department head in a Type B and Type D institution at Principal Lecturer rank. His major roles include departmental leadership and program development. Teaching and research are not required. Before promoted to the Department
Head position, he had leadership experience at course and program levels. He also had nearly four years of experience in co-founding private businesses before joining the education sector. He did not receive training in management or leadership.

**Chloe.** Chloe is a program leader of degree programs at a Type B institution at Senior Lecturer rank. Her roles include program leadership, teaching, committee chairpersons and research. She had worked in Type A, B, D institutions. Prior to her current positions, she had leadership experience at course and program levels in Hong Kong and the USA. She received no formal leadership education but learned about business management and accounting in her undergraduate study.

**David.** David is an associate dean of faculty in a Type D institution at Associate Professor rank. His roles include faculty leadership, teaching, program leadership, and committee works. He started his career as a research scientist before moving into the higher education sector. He developed leadership skills at his secondary school, church and a research company in Australia. Prior to his current position, he had leadership experience at course and program levels. He received no formal leadership or management education.

**Ella.** Ella is a department head in a Type A institution at full Professor rank. Her roles include departmental leadership, research, teaching, and committee work. She had worked in three different Type A institutions. As an established scholar with impressive scholarly
accomplishment, she had been focusing on research and teaching until five years ago, when she started to took up academic leadership positions at committee, program and department levels. She had the highest academic rank and yet the shortest leadership experience (5.5 years). She received management education in her MBA study.

**Francis.** Francis has the longest leadership experiences (22 years) in Type B, C, and D institutions respectively and highest position among the participants. He started as a frontline teaching staff and gradually climb up the career ladder and became the head of college in a large Type D institution. His role had gradually shifted to administration instead of teaching. Prior to that, he had leadership experience at course, program, department, and center levels in Hong Kong and mainland China. He learned about leadership concepts in his Ed.D study.

**Gavin.** Gavin is an associate head of a department in a Type D institution at associate directorial rank. He has leadership roles at program departmental and inter-departmental levels. Teaching and research are not required. Started as a frontline support staff, he climbed up the career ladder from an administrative track. He had prior leadership experience at program and team levels at a Type B and Type D institution. He received management education in his MBA study.

**Hannah.** Hannah is a department head of a Type C institution at associate directorial rank. Her main duties include departmental leadership, program development, and committee
works. Teaching and research are not required. She developed her interest in education when teaching part-time courses in the UK, and started her teaching career at a Type D institution after returning to Hong Kong. She had leadership experience in two Type D institutions at program and departmental levels. She learned about management in her master’s study.

**Emergent Themes**

As described in Chapter III, 32 emergent themes were identified from 832 coded text segments (32 codes are related to participants’ career and education background, 800 are related to the research question) through analyzing 45,805 words of textual data contained in the verbatim transcripts of interviews with the eight departmental leaders. Then, these emergent themes were conceptually clustered into five superordinate themes and 16-subthemes as follows: (1) top-down approach in leader selection and promotion, (2) advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice, (3) rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth, (4) personal drive as impetus for growth, and (5) leader maturation through cumulative learning.

Table 2 shows the numbers of quotes of these sub-themes and superordinate themes from each participant. Smith et al. (2009) stated that there is no fixed minimum threshold to qualify a superordinate as prevalent, but they used “over half of samples” as the criteria in their illustration (p.107). As shown in Table 2, all superordinate themes and sub-themes have relevant quotes from all of the participants, except that three sub-themes (1.1, 1.3, 3.2) have
quotes from six to seven participants, which exceeded the 50% threshold for qualifying for prevalent themes. In the remaining part of this section, a narrative account of the five superordinate theme will be presented one by one. Following the IPA approach to analysis, each theme or subtheme will start with a brief overview of the topic or construct, then extracts of participants’ own words about their subjective experience will be quoted before presenting the researcher’s interpretative comments (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, et al., 2009). The key findings in each theme or subtheme will be synthesized in the summary.

Table 2

Identification of Recurring Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes and Nested Themes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Top-down Approach in Leader Selection and Promotion</td>
<td>1.1. Top-down leadership appointment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2. Academic credential and subject expertise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3. Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4. Earned credibility and trust</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Advancing Leadership Expertise through Reflective Practice</td>
<td>2.1. Transformational vs. managerial leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2. Expertise development via on-the-job learning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3. Formal education for leader development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rich Developmental Experience as Catalyst for Growth</td>
<td>3.1. Challenges as catalyst for growth</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2. Performance assessment and feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3. Support availability</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal Drive as Impetus for Growth</td>
<td>4.1. Career aspiration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Self-awareness of development needs

5 2 5 5 12 7 11

4.3. Motivation to develop

6 7 13 5 1 12 4 6

5. Leader Maturation Through Cumulative Learning

5.1. Cumulative learning

2 4 7 6 2 8 5 1

5.2. Self-efficacy

2 1 3 1 3 1 2 6

5.3. Leader identity development

6 1 13 10 10 5 6 11

Total

91 84 146 81 102 121 96 111

Note: The Letters A to H are the initial of the participants. The figures represent the number of quoted text segments of each participant linked to a particular theme.

Theme 1: Top-down approach in leader selection and promotion

To start with, this theme delineates the mechanism of how leaders are selected and promoted in HEIs in Hong Kong. In describing how they became academic leaders, most of the participants grammatically used passive voice and verbs like “chosen” or “assigned” to signify that they did not actively seek for the leadership position. Rather, they were appointed by the senior management. As Anna explained, “So I would say I did not actively seek the leader position but was asked to.” Ella metaphorically reflected her feeling of her appointment, “I'm kind of dumped into the position.” This suggests that the whole leadership appointment process is engineered by the senior management in a top-down approach. That raises the question of how these departmental leaders were identified, selected, and by what criteria. Ella’s remark also highlighted that she felt unexpected for her sudden promotion. As she explained, “But something fell through; they had to change the plan. And all of a sudden, I became the Department Head.”
When leaders may not be promoted according to a well-publicized succession plan, a further question is that how these leaders may gain acceptance by the peers and subordinates to sustain their leadership positions. These questions are concerned with the underlying process and conditions of how departmental leaders obtained, sustained and advance to higher level leadership positions, which will be discussed in four sub-themes, namely top-down leadership appointment; academic credential and subject expertise; interpersonal skills; and earned credibility and trust. A summary will conclude the theme after presenting an interpretive analysis of the participants’ subjective accounts.

**Top-down leadership appointment.** Most participants cited manpower needs arisen from the departmental operation as the primary reason for their appointment to leadership positions. Chloe recalled, “I think they simply assign me as the Program Leader because they need someone to do it.” Francis and Garvin echoed:

Francis: They nominated me to be the Coordinator, *not* because they wanted to groom me; it was because they wanted to pass the job to me as I could do it well, and they didn't need to worry about it anymore.

Garvin: Because the senior management was uncomfortable with the performance of the Chair, they asked me to replace him actually.

The primacy of operational needs over staff development concern is indicative of a shift to managerialist governance approach away from the shared governance model, when the HEIs, regardless of their institutional types, need a dedicated management team to implement top-down
decision-making in a business-like fashion to foster greater operational efficiency and effectiveness in responding to dynamic environmental changes. While market-oriented Type B, C, and D institutions have established corporate-style structured organizational hierarchies, academic departments in Type A institutions also abandoned the traditional shared governance model of appointed heads or deans through a bottom-up voting system, to an appointment system, as Ella observed:

I do have the impression that there is a tendency to move away from a voting system to an appointment system. I think that goes to the Dean as well, when the President appoints a Dean…It could be the universities in Hong Kong are going through a more difficult environment. Maybe you need something like that.

In a top-down appointment model, the senior management needs to identify suitable person to assume the leadership position. Easy-going personality is often cited by the participants as the reason why they were chosen by the senior management:

Chloe: I think the only personality they looked at is to find someone who is easy to work with. And I am not too rebellious! (Laugh.)

Hannah: He found me quite positive in a sense because I seldom say no. (Laugh).

Ella: But it’s like when the need arises, I am the convenient person there.

Francis: I was always negotiable and flexible, whereas XXX always adhered to principles. That was not something the Department Head preferred.

Their accounts highlight the senior management’s preference to those who are “convenient,” “flexible,” and not “rebellious” to “say no” in order to get the job done. In other
words, being cooperative to accept job assignment is deemed necessary. This also involves subjective assessment of their personal qualities over a period. Some participants suggested that they were unclear about how this process happened. Garvin speculated, “Maybe they have already observed some of my qualities so they asked me do the job.” David said, “I can only guess. You know there are a lot of factors.” Only Chloe was well informed in advance for her promotion from a Deputy Program Leader to Program Leader. In Ella’s case, her department had a success plan to put her on the leadership position without prior discussion with her. Essentially, she was kept out of the discussion, “This was kind of behind my back. I didn't know about the plan. But the former Department Head had named me as her successor,” she recalled.

To make sense of the situation, she observed:

So, I guess it was not so clear a structure that you have someone in mind and you move the person from one position and to another to train the person as such. It’s more *haphazard*, something between a top-down and a bottom-up structure.

Their guessing and speculation indicate that leader selection often been engineered in a “*haphazard*” fashion and lacked transparency. Nevertheless, the appointed leaders ultimately were able to satisfy the expectations of their supervisors, peers and subordinates. This is elaborated by other three sub-themes below.

**Academic credential and subject expertise.** According to the participants, “you have to be qualified” for the position (Benny), since “academic qualification is a must” (Francis). To
elaborate, a doctoral degree is the pre-requisite for Chloe’s position in a Type B institution, whereas in Type A institutions, associate head is required to be an academic staff at the Associate Professor rank and the department head position is required to be at full Professor rank in Anna and Ella’s their institutions respectively. Little attention had been paid to the appointee’s leadership competence, as Chloe demonstrated:

Actually, in the job interview and selection process, I believe it was more like they looked at my academic profile, experience, academic credentials like research publications, and level of academic qualifications, rather than assessing my leadership qualities.

Meanwhile, Benny cited “know-how in the discipline,” “market sense,” and “academic network” as the requirements for a leadership position, while Garvin named “academic competences,” and “technical know-how” as the qualifiers. Lastly, Hannah stressed the importance of “international teaching experience” and “quality assurance experience.”

Comparing to Type A institutions’ emphasis on research skills and academic leadership, broad-based management expertise is valued in teaching-oriented Type B, C and D institutions.

This can be shown by comparing Ella and Hannah’s statements:

Ella: I think ultimately without that [research expertise], then you lack something. There's always a hole if you don't have the academic leadership to lead an academic department. I think that's very important. And I think it's important to how I look at the department and how I may take it forward.

Hannah: I can say that because of that [quality assurance] experience, I can in a way be more - not prestigious - but authoritative to have the expertise that in a sense I can share with them something that they really want to learn.
From the participants’ accounts, it can be seen that academic qualifications and ranks serve as an objective selection criteria, while their subject expertise, broad-based program management competences are considered in the leader selection process. Although different types of institutions have varied emphasis, their appointment decisions have been focusing on their academic credentials and willingness to accept administrative duties.

**Interpersonal skills.** In addition to academic credentials and competences, there was a striking consensus among the participants to stress interpersonal and communication skills as the foremost essential aspect of leadership skills. According to them, interpersonal skills is the most valued leadership quality in leader selection. For instance, Anna pointed out, “The former Dean thought that I am the one who worked easily with colleagues in the department. That was why he nominated me.” Other participants further stressed the importance of interpersonal skills in sustaining their effective leadership after assuming the leadership positions. Garvin used the phrase “To me, it is quite obvious” to stress excellent interpersonal skills as a pillar of effective leadership. Ella illustrated this point by telling a dramatic story about how people issue made her the department head: The former head could not align the faculty members together toward the direction she set. Conflicts tore the department apart. She recalled, “The department was going through some difficult time - it was highly divided. I was in department meetings to see how people were fighting, screaming on one another, and so on.” Consequently,
the new dean had to appoint her as the new department head to “soothe the department.” When
the interviewer asked, “How do you see yourself different from the former head to run the
department more effectively?” Ella replied firmly, “People skills!” She further explained:

So when I inherited the department, the most important thing was to build rapport with the faculty members. So really, people management is the one and the top priority, being getting the department to function as a unit again.

Ella and her former head’s story demonstrated the impact of interpersonal skills on the leader and on the department. A leader who failed to manage his/her leader-follower relationship may eventually face subordinates’ discontent or uprising. From other participants’ accounts, interpersonal skills are even more vital at higher leadership levels:

Chloe: I believe to lead; I need to be on personal good term with them. My personal relationships with them count a lot.

Anna: I think interpersonal skills are very important because as a leader you have enormous opportunities to work with your colleagues at different levels.

Benny: If you performed well, and did it right, there was something what I put leadership because you can motivate staff in program development.

Hannah: People skill is important all the time, because it is just different ways of communicating with different people.

Francis: There is a Chinese saying “Knowing who is better than knowing what.” Ha-ha (laugh). That means especially when you move higher up, actually you don't really need to do the actual operation. Basically, a lot of staff would help you and be responsible for the daily operation. As an effective leader moving higher up, you need to make connections with different people. That's why interpersonal skill or EQ will determine whether you can become a well-connected person.
The above accounts illustrate different functions of interpersonal skills in sustaining the leaders at different levels. At a program or entry-level leader, Chloe has less positional power and influence. Maintaining good interpersonal relationship is essential for her to solicit support from her subordinates, “To me, successful leadership means you can get your subordinates support you,” she said. Additionally, managing up is another dimension of her people skills. She shared how she skillfully managed her relationship with her supervisors to solicit support, “It was more like earning his compassion or mercy by saying…to let them gain better understanding.”

At a departmental level, Anna pointed out that mid-level leaders have to manage internal staff, interact with colleagues at different levels in their organization, and handle external stakeholders, whereas Benny and Hannah’s accounts highlighted the salient role of departmental leaders in motivating staff members with diverse interests through tailored communication approaches and giving individualized consideration. This point resonates with Garvin’s self-reflection on how he established positive leader-follower relationships:

I think I am an open-minded person. I welcome opinions from my colleagues. Also, I am a good listener and approachable. So that’s why my colleagues like to express their concerns to me.

Francis reached the highest leadership position than other participants. His account described a gradual shift in the leadership role from a specialist to a generalist, accompanied by a
shift of attention from internal to external networking to manage external relationships and
obtain community resources in tandem with his advancement to higher leadership levels. It can
be seen that interpersonal skills is essential from the outset and becoming more pertinent at
higher leadership levels.

**Earned credibility and trust.** Under a top-down appointment system, an important
question is how the senior management can and staff members get to know and accept a staff for
a leadership position. It is found that the participants had implicitly “communicated” their
personal leadership quality to the senior management and their subordinates in the form of
established reputation or popularity even before they assumed the leader’s role. This emerged
prominently from the participants’ accounts:

Benny: They just thought that my number of programs and incomes had grown
significantly, and the number of staff reported to me. The most significant factor in
their decision was performance.

David: Maybe one thing at least I could go to different committees and I can still do well.
Maybe that’s the reason.

Garvin: I think because I participated in that kind of central functions, the senior
management thought I could take up more challenges and duties. That’s why they
chose me for this position.

Chloe: I don’t think any faculty members possess the same expertise with the same
familiarity. So actually I had little question about my suitability… I did very best in
developing new initiatives and new things from scratch.
Francis: I mean when you can move from one position to the other, you must have something you’re very proud of that can show to people that you are very capable of taking a more important post. This is what I refer to track record - what did you do before to convince me that you are better.

Their accounts showed that a convincing track record of their performance and achievements established an credible leader image and reputation especially in the eyes of senior management. Typically, they earned their scores in special projects (Garvin), committee works (David), cumulated program experience (Chloe), or operating performance (Benny). From an operational need’s perspective, senior management is inclined to consider a candidate’s performance track record. Subordinates’ acceptance of the newly appointed leaders is another matter. This was vividly illustrated by two dramatic episodes, in which Ella and Hannah received contrasting staff reactions to their appointment:

Ella: When I became the Department Head, the department *calmed down right away*. And I think that’s the relationships I had with my colleagues, and is something that takes place when you are in an organization.  

Hannah: To some extent, they found me too young to assume this position and *tried to do things that challenged me a lot*… So I think it is a long-term journey to convince them I'm young but I can do something.

Such different reactions can be attributed to their lengths of engagement with staff members. Hannah was relatively new to the organization with little track record and established reputation or social relationships. There were people with longer seniority than her. It can be imagined that interpersonal dynamics often becomes sensitive when former peer relationship become leader-subordinate relationship after a staff is promoted. In Hannah’s case,
Hannah’s identity as a newcomer exacerbated existing staff’s difficulty in psychological adjustment when a senior-newcomer relationship became a subordinate-leader relationship. Hannah had to take a longer time to defend their challenges and convince them through establishing her track record and image management tactics. On the other hand, Ella had cumulated adequate popularity before she was named as the department head. Consequently, people “calmed down right away.” Such trust and credibility are earned through ongoing accumulation of prolonged relationship built through daily interactions over time, as they reflected:

Chloe: I think handling such conflict situation is not ad hoc. I think it is an accumulation of interactions in the past. My staff know me well that I am not trying to take advantage of them. So I think it is a prolonged relationship built in the past with frequent interactions,

Ella: I think a lot of that has started when you are in the department, people have already known what type of person you are: Are you easy to work with? Are you difficult? Are you a fighter? Do you have good ideas? Do you know what's going on in the world and the industry? So I think a lot of them is ongoing.

Gavin: To me, personality is more important because when you try to twist your personality, you may be effective in a medium term, but to me it is more important that I can build trust with my teammates. It is better to be consistent in all times.

Gavin’s sharing of his belief links Ella’s emphasis on personality and Chloe’s temporal concern on interpersonal trust established in prolonged relationship. Indeed, behavioral
consistency rooted in one’s positive personality is a key for authentic leaders to build trustful leader-follower relationships over the long run.

**Belittled women leaders.** Gender bias is a lower-level subtheme identified under the sub-theme “earned credibility and trust”. Although it is common that women occupying leadership positions in Hong Kong, including in higher education sector, three out of four women participants expressed that their gender put them in a disadvantaged position in gaining credibility. As such, they had to work harder to gain acceptance as shown below.

Anna: I don’t say this is gender bias, but sometimes in Chinese culture, people will see men who are in very high rank as very powerful, and women at lower rank not so powerful *(laugh)* – even we are doing the same thing.

Chloe: It is not like they *[men]* don’t like working for a woman. I think we have to work harder to earn the credibility to show that we can be competent in terms of knowledge, expertise and experience.

Hannah: Well, as a woman leader, I have to work harder to convince other people, especially at the very beginning.

**Summary of Theme 1.** From the participants’ narratives and stories, it is evident that HEIs in Hong Kong widely adopt a top-down approach in leader selection away from a bottom-up voting system. This trend is motivated by the senior management’s primary concern on operational efficiency and manpower needs. It is found that top-down leader selection process could be haphazard, and not necessarily transparent. In any case, academic credentials
such as qualifications, academic ranks and subject expertise are deemed as the prerequisite
criteria.

However, the more determinant factors that sustain the leaders’ smooth enactment
afterwards are leaders’ interpersonal skills and earned credibility and trusts. Above all, leaders
have to use image management tactics to establish a credible and trustworthy leader image.
Gaining subordinates’ support is the prerequisite for effective team performance. Trust and
credibility are earned from individual leaders’ prolonged relationships built from frequent
interactions with others in daily routines, special projects, or committee works, in which leaders
establish a record of accomplishment and display their trust-worthy personality to others. This
requires primarily excellent interpersonal and communication skills to engage with increasingly
diverse work relationships vertically across organizational levels and horizontally across
departmental and organizational boundaries. Further, behavioral consistency is a key factor to
gain trust and support from their subordinates and supervisors in prolonged work relationships.

Additionally, leader’s reputation and popularity are not necessarily confined within their
organization. As Hannah suggested, “staff turnover” and “the Internet” can actually help spread
her reputation to her current institution well before she joined in. This may be particular
significant to those leaders who parachute to a new work environment.

Theme 2: Advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice
Given that the leaders were selected primarily by their academic credentials and personality, then a subsequent question is how they develop and advance their leadership expertise on the job. Its underlying process is addressed in this theme, which consists of three sub-themes: “transformational vs. managerial leadership;” “expertise development via on-the-job learning;” and “formal education for leader development.” The first sub-theme delineates the participants’ convergent perspectives about leadership approaches across leadership levels. The second and third sub-themes look into their convergent and divergent views about the effectiveness of formal and informal leader development methods.

**Transformational vs. managerial leadership.** How the research participants defined their leadership roles as mid-level leaders was shaped by expectations from their supervisors, their own, and their subordinates. When advancing from program to departmental levels, Most participants perceived a significant shift in their leadership roles, as they maintained:

**Anna:** For manager, management is something about ensuring the organization running smoothly. I would say it is sort of keeping the *status quo*, not related to fundamental changes. But for leadership, it is about transformation, about changing, leading the organization to be more effective, and something you want to achieve. I will refer this as leadership.

**Chloe:** In a way, academic leaders are more like effective managers, getting things done by other people… For academic staff, these are not the right type of people motivated by creativity… They like things as usual, and keep the *status quo*… To me, a good leader should be *inspirational* to his/her colleagues. I think this is really a good leader should discharge.
Benny: When I was young – maybe 20 years ago, my understanding about effective leadership was to tackle things effectively. That was the basic idea… [As a department head] the other concept about academic leader is that we need to have very clear and concise goals for our academic administrators and teachers to pursue and work on it to get it done.

Ella: Program Director, is just managing few people, ha-ha-ha (laugh), ensuring things go smoothly, probably involves a lot of student works as you work at the program level… [As department head], I am now moving more so - it's really going beyond the people management part, in terms of moving the department forward.

David: I mean the course leader to program leader is more or less on the academic program administration level. It is academic and also sort of administrative – You ensure smooth running of the program, following the QA, like that. On the other hand, the migration or moving on to Associate Dean is more on the administrative level than anything else. I think it is a different type of game… The most important thing is allow them to have the same vision.

The above comparison suggests that the differences of role expectation between program and departmental level leaders are significant. Program leaders, at the starting leadership level, are expected to follow established guidelines and QA procedures, and find the right people to “get things done” in their subject areas, whereas departmental to college level leaders have gone beyond people management into “a different type of game” in which challenging “the status quo,” “moving the department forward,” making “fundamental change” with a “shared vision” and “clear goal” become prominent. At this point, their idealized leadership model is inspirational and transformational leader. The above shift can be associated with increased autonomy granted by the leaders’ senior management. Thus, the leaders can redirect their focus onto
strategic issues and take a holistic and process view of issues confronting the department. For instance, Ella shared that she was concerned with pertinent issues, such as getting resources for setting up labs and repositioning the program majors. Such shift is also illustrated in Hannah’s narrative about her role, “But now I am more like overseeing, checking the alignment, and planning ahead. It is more like on a strategic level.”

On the other hand, departmental leaders need to meet subordinates’ diverse expectations. Satisfying diverse, and sometimes conflicting, expectations of the significant others (supervisors and subordinates) and the self requires departmental leaders to strike a delicate balance in the supervisor-self-subordinate relationships, as illustrated by Chloe and Francis’s discussions about “boss-pleasing leaders”:

Chloe: To me, successful leadership means you can get your subordinates support you. Definitely those boss-pleasing leaders cannot do this. But I think they are successful because they make their bosses happy, so they can secure their power and positions. For leadership, I think they still possess one of the fundamental requirements that they hold the power of decision-making. So to me, they’re not really like leading, but more like managers for the bosses to get things done by their subordinates.

Francis: I believe leadership means whether you can do the job well in the eyes of your boss (laugh). Yeah, this is this is how I see leadership, because sometimes even though you gain the respect from your colleague, if you had a bad relationship with your supervisor, he still won’t see you as a good leader. This is how I felt. So, on the one hand, you need to earn the respect from your colleagues; on the other hand, you also need to gain your trust from your supervisor. And that is how you become an effective leader.

Ella, as a program leader, believed that effective leaders should be those inspiring leaders who gain subordinates’ support. In her own words, she felt “confused” and questioned about
the “definition of effective leadership” when observing some leaders secured their position by pleasing their bosses at the expense of subordinates’ needs. For her, those “boss-pleasing leaders” act as the bosses’ agents and thereby gaining their trusts but losing subordinates’ respect. Francis, based on many years of leadership experience, clarified her confusion and exhorted departmental leaders to gain acceptance from both supervisors and subordinates. According to him, ignoring either side will make a leader ineffective. In sum, managing positive supervisor-self-subordinate relationship is essential for effective leaders. To achieve this, the participants adopted a similar leadership style as described in their narratives below. First is an emphasis on communication in managing leader-follower relationship, which resonates the “interpersonal skills” subtheme in Theme 1:

David: The most important thing is allow them to have the same vision.

Benny: My focus was on the importance of communication. Communication for what? For establishing a common belief of team members.

Ella: I guess in order to move them forward, you need to get people's buy-in for your ideas. Without all that you can't lead them forward.

Hannah: Buy-in is very important… When people are actually quite cooperative, communication is still important because you don't want to lose confidence in them. You do want to keep a close relationship, a closer bond, so that you all work towards the same goal.

The above four leaders advocated the value of communications in establishing a common belief among subordinates, getting their buy-in for the leader’s new ideas and directions, and
maintaining mutual trust and close bonding toward the common goal. Furthermore, most participants adopted similar leader-follower communication strategies:

Chloe: I want to delegate more. So I try to involve junior faculties in different functions in my program. I want to share more responsibilities with them but this will give them some incentives. They feel can also participate in decision making so I can gain their support.

Garvin: That’s why I want to understand their needs first. And then I would decide how their needs can be accommodated without hampering the overall objective of their functions and tasks. Then I would ask for assistance from other departments and resources from others, even my senior in order to make sure that everything can go smooth. From my experience, this is a kind of effective way to lead my team.

Francis: Well, I always believe in collegial decision. That means I wouldn’t adopt a top-down approach or bottom-up. That means you can’t just take your subordinates’ opinions and views and do things, because you should have bigger and wider perspectives and have more information than your staff have. So that's why I always believe in the mix of the bottom-up and top-down approach and see how we can get the best out of it. This is how I see leadership.

From their common experiences, participative leadership approach is deemed an effective way to engage subordinates to “own” the tasks. By doing so, subordinates feel respected and motivated to take up their responsibilities. Open and transparent communications enable subordinates to understand the rationales of decisions and their roles with respect to the whole picture. As Chloe and Garvin stressed, theory-Y, not theory-X approach should be adopted in managing academic staff. Further, Francis’s remark shows that the leaders should not be passive listeners. Rather, they should be able to offer bigger and wider perspectives than their
subordinates in decision-making. Thus, “a mix of bottom-up and top-down approach” helps to solicit inputs from both the leader and subordinates and thereby improving decision quality.

Garvin and Ella contended that leaders also served as the link between their subordinates and their supervisors by understanding subordinates’ needs and concerns and resolving them at higher organizational levels, as Ella elaborated, “You need to align it [your vision] with the faculty and the university’s objective in order to function.” Also, David and Garvin illustrated leader’s essential role in managing their supervisors’ and subordinates’ expectations through helping them understand situational constraints (e.g., staff concerns, procedures and systems, and shortage of resources), to achieve better alignment:

David: I told them that I really respect you as a person, but there are certain procedures that I have to follow. It is not whether I respect you or not. I hope you understand this is how this university works. You know, it is not a matter of respect, but a matter of procedure.

Garvin: Sometimes you need to explain to your colleagues why their expectation cannot be met, because from college perspective, resource deployment perspective, they have to understand, without the expense of your credibility.

In sum, the participants’ common experiences demonstrated that when advancing to higher leadership levels, the leaders’ roles are expanding from personal leadership (as an effective academic staff) to local leadership (as an effective program leader or team leader), to organizational leadership (as an effective head of department, faculty or college). In light of advancement in leadership roles, there is a stronger need to shift from managerial leadership to
transformational leadership. While program leaders have more established procedures and systems to follow, leaders at higher levels enjoy relatively greater autonomy, which enable them to take a proactive role in defining organizational vision, goals, and directions.

To achieve their goals, the leaders commonly emphasized open communication and adopted participative leadership approach in practice. The purposes can be threefold: (a) to engage subordinates to take ownership of problems; (b) to gain subordinates’ buy-in for a shared vision and goal to motivate subordinates, ensure better alignment, and establish close bonding in leader-follower relationships; and (c) to improve decision quality by incorporating inputs from both the leader and subordinates. Moreover, departmental leaders also serve as the communication node between senior management and staff members. By understanding and communicating the organizational constraints (e.g., staff concerns and needs, policy requirements, and resource shortage, etc.) upward and downward, they managed to align the expectations of both sides and resolve problems at the appropriate levels.

**Expertise development via on-the-job learning.** The above discussions show that the higher the leadership levels, the more diverse in leaders’ roles in managing the greater task complexities and the web of social relationships in the organizational environment. Leaders thus have to learn how to cope with novel tasks and their role transition. The underlying learning and adaptive process is explored in this sub-theme.
In describing her learning process, Ella used a metaphor, “You go in to swim or you sink.

Ha-ha-ha (laugh).” Her analogy, from a research scholar’s eyes, on the one hand highlighted her pressure of being a leader by equating it with the blunt “publish or polish” rule in academia; on the other hand, spelt out the action-learning nature of acquiring leader development.

Essentially, you cannot learn swimming without jumping into the pool. Other participants, regardless of their leadership levels, consistently stated that they mainly advanced their leadership expertise through day-to-day learning in the workplace:

David: I think leadership is more a personal thing, more day-to-day training to me.

Anna: Whether I can perform as an effective leader depends on myself; whether I can put those theories into practice; how I can handle the complexity of change. No one can tell…I learn it [leadership] through observation, day-to-day operation.

Garvin: I think organizations have different cultures. It is hard to just use theories. You need to try and practice in different organizations.

Benny: Developing leadership skills is a daily activity because we perform our leadership role on daily basis in every single task, or yearly project tasks, etc. I think everything is accumulative.

Chloe: Because I learn leadership first through apprenticeship or mentorship, I really prefer such on-the-job learning, rather than attending a structured course.

The above accounts not only lend support to the premise that effective leader development is a context-specific adaptive learning process, but also highlight the contextual and temporal dimensions of leader development. According to David, Garvin and Anna, leaders
have to assume ownership of their development because they have to personally “try” and “put those theories into practice” and “figure out the solution” in daily works. As Garvin pointed out, different organizational cultures present unique situations to leaders. Thus, learning about leadership takes place naturally in their authentic operational contexts, as Anna and Chloe asserted. Indeed, it is the daily work challenges that stimulate conscious development efforts.

Additionally, Benny’s belief “everything is accumulative” highlighted the temporal dimension of leader development as a continuous maturation process (This will be discussed further in Theme 5). Then, one question that follows is: How does learning actually happen? The participants’ common experiences suggest that their development is an action-learning process consisting of trial-and-error and reflective learning:

Francis: I can tell you that I made a lot of mistakes. Every time when I made a mistake, I knew that I made a mistake. I will make sure that I won't make the same mistake next time. This is very important. And this is how I learned from the past and that's why I got promoted higher and higher. So as effective leaders, we always need to have introspection and also self-reflection on what we did and how we could do better in the future.

Garvin: I would say I learn more from unsuccessful experience because from my past experience, when we have a success, normally we won’t not look back why we were successful. You think you are capable of accomplishing things. But for the failure, you will reflect on why you can’t accomplish that.

David: When I got frustration – I got frustrated with my supervisors, or other people – then I would have to think why certain thing doesn’t work out – then this would give me a chance to think whether I am acting the correct way or whether there is a better way to
resolve the differences, things like that.

Hannah: So if they told me something that they had feedback on what I proposed, I thought it was good time for me to reflect on. So I take criticism as well.

Anna: I just try to let it go (laugh), or reflect on my leadership practice so that I can do better next time. I try.

As we can see from the above accounts, while success enhanced one’s self-efficacy, negative experiences such as mistakes, failures, and criticism, albeit emotionally frustrating, were significant sources of learning for most participants. When coping with a negative experience, they tried to relieve their emotional stress by trying to “let it go” (Anna), or seeing it from a positive light as a learning opportunity. Either way, negative experience motivated them to engage constantly in introspection and self-reflection during their spontaneous interactions with the work environment. In sum, these leaders’ expertise development is characterized as a continuous action-learning process, which consists of challenges, negative experiences, and leaders’ self reflection, naturally embedded in the leaders’ authentic work contexts.

Here, leader’s motivation affects how they perceive a failure or challenge from a positive or negative light, which will be further explored in Theme 4 later on in this Chapter. Another critical question is what made their learning more effective. The participants’ common experiences and subtle differences were captured in their reflections below:

Ella: But I guess when you work, you see different people - both effective and less effective leaders, people I work with. And you develop your own style that way.
Francis: The informal channel is to observe, talk to different people, expose yourself to different systems, then these are the ways that you can learn and observe what is good for you to become a good leader.

Benny: I would say four factors: First, my experience of working with different people. Second, accumulation of experience of different job assignments. Third, getting older. Four, exposure to different work environments.

Hannah: I think to be involved in different kinds of exercises is important because you’ll have the chance to learn broadly so that you're not just confined to teaching. So you’ll have the opportunity to touch on different areas, say program planning, writing up syllabuses, and maybe sitting in different committees. So you gain various experiences during your daily work.

According to the above narratives, three factors, namely (a) observing and learning from others, (b) exposures to different job assignments, and (c) exposure to different systems or work environment, are vital for the participants’ development as leaders. As discussed earlier, leader development is resulted from intentional learning when the leaders are coping with the environment. In this regard, effective leader development depends not only on the leader’s conscious learning efforts, but also the richness of developmental experiences available to them (This will be detailed in Theme 3). Other than learning from own experience, learning from others is also an important means of leader development, which is a lower level sub-theme to be discussed below.

Learning from others. When sharing about how they learned from others, first and foremost, most participant considered modeling experienced leaders an effective way of
developing their leadership, especially at early stages. As Francis asserted, the experience of “being led” is necessary for learning “the proper way to lead”:

Francis: Let me put it this way, you must have a solid experience in being led by other people, then you can prepare yourself to become a leader. If you are never led, then you can hardly be a good leader because you don't know what the proper way to lead is.

Anna: I receive different styles of leaderships. Different leadership styles have impact on me and I also learned from them.

Anna and Francis’s assertions highlight the significant influence of the participants’ supervisors on the participants’ leadership styles. Indeed, most participants talked extensively about the influence of their present and former supervisors on their development. For instance, Chloe reiterated several times how she learned about leadership from an “apprenticeship” relationship with her supervisor, “I think that apprenticeship counted a lot because [my supervisor] was really a role model to me.” From an apprenticeship relationship, Chloe had ample opportunities to “watch” and imitate her supervisor’s approach in the form of “supervised” practices in the learning process. This approach of learning by observation and modeling was also emphasized by other participants:

Anna: I like directly working with him [Supervisor]. I would say I brush up my leadership skills by working with him.

Ella: My old boss is very much a mentor to me, not only academically, but also in terms of leadership. I learn from him through observation, talking to him, etc., etc.
Although Anna had more prior leadership experience than Chloe, she still felt her leadership skills were “brushed” up through frequent *interactions* with her supervisor.

Similarly, Ella having the least leadership experience among participants, learned from a close “*mentoring*” relationship with her former boss. The implications from Anna, Ella and Chloe’s experiences are twofold: First, the frequency of interaction is positively associated with accelerated learning. Second, learning is more effective when the participants concur with their supervisors’ values and implicit leadership philosophy. As Anna stressed, “For the other three bosses I worked with, we do share common values. I think that is important.” In contrast, when they did not agree with their supervisors’ values and leadership philosophy, they could not establish an intimate apprenticeship or mentorship relationship with their supervisors. Instead, they drew lessons from these supervisors to stay away from their leadership styles and behaviors:

Ella: Of course, I also learn from my former Head - I mean things you won’t do.

Chloe: I see all these bad things from [big boss] so I really want to *avoid* that myself.

Francis: Well, to be honest, since I left the Tertiary Institution A, I haven't encountered a very good leader or good supervisor whom I could learn from… Of course, I can learn - I can learn from their [supervisors'] mistakes so that I know I *shouldn't be like him or her* - another way of learning.

Garvin: I tried to understand more the why and how these top leaders do these things in these ways. Frankly, it was quite a challenge from that experience, but I think frankly I learned a lot from that job position. For example, I can see some merits of using this approach, even though I won’t use it.
Garvin’s account illustrated the emotional discomfort in working under a leader with incongruent leadership style. Nonetheless, Gavin admitted that he learned a lot from such experience by observing and evaluating which leadership approach is “suitable and comfortable” for him. His experience reiterated a point made by Francis regarding the value of “being led.”

To elaborate, when receiving different leadership styles, one can observe and evaluate them from a first-hand “receiver experience,” which brings a different learning experience from those experiences gain in the learning by doing mode.

On the other hand, some leaders might not have the privilege of close interaction with their supervisors, especially when advancing to higher leadership positions. As such, they relied on learning from their social network. For instance, both David and Hannah expressed gratitude that there were “many good people around” for them to model or seek advice from.

“Everybody is my mentor actually. I do like talking to people because I can update myself with different things,” claimed Hannah. Similarly, David vividly described how he gained inspiration from daily conversations:

Yeah, sometimes I just talk to my colleagues, or to my wife or my friends, just in normal day-to-day conversations. Sometimes I just share with them my frustration. And then they may give me a response, which opens up my mind, or tell me something I don’t know. I don’t really close my door and meditate. I never do that (laugh). I think the better reflection is to reflect all with other people.
Similarly, Benny, who felt not finding a role model, also found it essential to seek experience sharing from “peers and colleagues”, and also “elder family members” to find solution for difficult tasks. For the participants, their social network can be conceived as a collective problem-solving system containing a web of intelligence and repertoire of solutions that they draw inspiration from. Insights and inspirations from their social network, as Benny put it, “shaped my concepts of a leader.” In particular, most participants consider it very useful to learn from their peers or seek their feedback:

Anna: Sometimes they [the peers] will handle things quite good and I will observe how they do it and learn from them.

Garvin: If you talk about support, I would seek more feedback from my peer, say talking about my leadership.

David: But for colleagues, you can get more chance to interact with them on a personal level. I think this is also important. For example, I know certain people would think in certain way, how they make their decisions. So when I become in a position of a leader, I know how such persons would think, that would make me easier to communicate with them and understand their concerns. So those people on the same level are also quite good models to learn from.

From the above accounts, three aspects of learning from peers can be identified, namely observing peers as role models, soliciting feedback from peers, and developing personal knowledge of subordinates. While the first two aspects are straightforward, the third aspect raised in David’s argument warrants further discussion.
A moral we drawn from our earlier discussion is that gaining subordinates’ acceptance is deemed as paramount for leaders in managing leader-follower relationships. Built on this moral, David’s argument points out that deeper personal knowledge about individual subordinates helps leaders manage relationships with subordinates more effectively. His account implies that the best timing to gain a deeper understanding of subordinates’ thinking patterns, personal aspirations, and fears is when one is in the peer group of those “being led”, when peers and workmates have much more opportunities for informal interactions and frank expression of feelings and views that might not be disclosed to the bosses. As such, personal knowledge about subordinates helps a leader better anticipate staff’s concerns and responses after assuming the leadership role. Developing personal knowledge about staff gives the leaders essential preparation for their jobs. Without that, individual leaders have to spend much more time and efforts to build trust and gain valuable personal knowledge. This is illustrated in Benny’s account of doing the “ground work” when leading a new team:

I set up meetings with them twice a month, and also talked to each one in the first two months to understand them more, read their personnel-file to understand their strengths, and let them share their experience with me their career prospects and expectations in this organizations, their happy and sad moments at work. I will call this the process of building up understanding relationships, the ground work. I observed that after half a year, they knew me better. And after my conversations with them privately or in meetings, I also knew how they react to my leadership, what they expected the team could support them.
In the participants’ accounts on learning from social network, they also mentioned about family members, friends and even classmates in professional courses. An issue that follows is how useful are those acquaintance (friends and classmates), who have remote understanding in the leaders’ work context. On this, Garvin and Francis offered divergent views about the usefulness of their classmates in their professional study outside the education sector:

Garvin: The most valuable thing is the network and friendship developed with your classmates. But normally you won’t ask your classmates what kinds of leadership styles. You can ask about their experience but still it is just a third-party opinion.

Francis: I am more interested in meeting people with different backgrounds… You then would know that they will get different kinds of thinking patterns, different kinds of parameters to help them to plan. So I’m more willing to learn from them rather than those from the education industry. There is not much excitement I can get from these people from the education industry, you know.

Garvin used the rhetoric “just a third-party opinion” to dismiss his doctoral classmates’ ideas as something merely out of the context of his problems, and thus had little practical use. By contrast, Francis expressed his “excitement” in learning about different “patterns” and “parameters” in decision-making from his classmates. While Garvin was concerned with the practical relevancy of a piece of advice on the solution outcome, Francis’s concern was on improving the decision-making process through incorporating others’ thinking patterns and factors of considerations. As such, Francis’s voice rejoiced together with those of Hannah and David, which claimed that “everybody is my mentor” and “the better reflection is to reflect all with other people.”
Summarizing their perspectives and the earlier discussions, we may conclude that in the leaders’ social network, their supervisors and peers, who are at the closest positions to their work context, may provide the leaders with insights to improve both the process and outcomes of decision-making; whereas their acquaintance, being remote from their work context, tend to offer fresh inspiration to improve their decision-making quality and to find creative solutions to problems. In any case, wider exposure to others’ ideas will accelerate the leaders’ expertise development.

**Learning from other's narratives.** Books often offer an alternative way of learning from others’ experience. However, most participants either did not have the habit of reading leadership books, or had divergent views about their usefulness. For example, they argued:

Garvin: Actually, I tried to read some books like “*How to be an effective leader*”, but it helps just little because it just tells you some theories, which you may not be able to apply to your workplace.

David: I am not reading leadership books. Actually I had read one – *Seven Habits of Effective People*, but I don’t really like that book much. Instead, I like reading books like history and novels. *They actually are good at describing how human beings behave.* How people react in different ways is the concern of the stories, you know. Reading books, novels or history is also an important part of my training.

Benny: I learned from biography about success stories of past figures in modern China like Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. Their sharing of their attitude in their success stories when they encountered difficulties has affected my way to deal with my difficult situation, things, and people around.
Chloe: I read a book written by a Catholic Father in Germany. He talked about something like life transforming type of leadership.

Contrary to Chloe, both Garvin and David perceived leadership books to be either “common sense” or just “theories”, which may not be applicable to the workplace. While Garvin dismissed the values of books in offering relevant solutions to workplace problems, Benny and David enjoyed reading history and biography books to understand human behaviors in different situations and get inspirations to improve leadership skills.

In sum, comparing to learning from others in the social network, the participants relied much less on books, especially leadership books, to learn from others’ experiences. The reason was that they generally felt that the books offer general theories only, rather than offering solutions to their workplace problems. However, a few participants did read about history and biography to enrich their understanding about human nature, and behaviors in different situations so as to gain inspirations for their own leadership practice.

**Reflective judgment on contextual applicability.** Other than learning from others’ experiences, one of the key elements of on-the-job learning is the leaders’ conscious reflection on their practice. The participants’ accounts show that their reflections had been centering on the fit of their behaviors with the work contexts, because they subscribed to the contingent perspective of effective leadership, as they maintained:

Anna: Of course, there is no definite good leadership style; it depends on the context.
Garvin: When you are dealing with different groups of people, it is impossible one leadership style fits for all.

Ella: I think a good leader has to look at the context and see what needs to be done and then go from there.

Chloe: I think academic leaders in academic contexts will be very different from the business contexts… So this type of idol-worshiping style would not be accepted.

Work context as a construct has multiple dimensions. A particular type of leadership style or behavior has to fit a type of situation. The participants’ elaborations offer further insights into the nuance of the phenomenon. First, the participants tried to develop a sense of their sphere of influence, as illustrated below:

Benny: I can say I understand the limitations of my capacity. So from this standpoint, I know I should take some approach that works with this team.

Francis: That means if there's something that you cannot change, then just be patient and watch. But in the meantime, you just try to do your best in your own boundary.

David: Maybe as you are becoming at a so-called higher level, you seem to have greater authority. I think the understanding of where your lines are drawn; for example which are within your jurisdiction of authority; which are not; and when you exercise your authority; maybe that could become more important.

Based on the above accounts, the leaders’ sphere of influences can be attributed to three aspects: the leaders’ sphere of competence versus their subordinates (Benny), the leaders’ sphere of influence versus external constraints (Francis), and the leader’s sphere of jurisdiction versus the organizational level suitable to deal with the problem (David). The “sweet spot” for the leaders will be the intersections of the three aspects. Anything outside the leaders’ sphere of
influence has to be handled with care. For example, David became well verse of his jurisdiction of authority to decide when and where to use his authority. Francis on the other hand, learned where to put his effort productively after unsuccessful testing the boundary of external constraints. Whereas Benny learned his strengths and weaknesses versus the subordinates to decide which parts of a task he could step in or offer advice, and which parts he had to entrust others with.

Given the primacy of leader-follower relationship in fostering effective leadership, interpersonal context inevitably is one of the most important factors that the participants considered in their leadership practice. As Hannah and Francis exhorted:

Hannah: I do think it depends on the nature of the team - if you find the team is rather inexperienced, then more coaching is needed. So you have to demonstrate, you have to lead more and teach them something they don't know. But for more experienced team, you can actually get more inputs and contributions from the team, and then your role will be shifted to build a stronger team, better use of them, instead of developing them and teaching them new things.

Francis: You also need to manage your staff’s expectations. Yeah, I would also say that you know your staff’s working style, you need to use different ways to motivate your staff.

Hannah and Francis’s accounts are complementary, yet show different emphases on the leader-follower dynamics. Hannah considered the experience of staff members and adjusted her delegation and guiding behaviors accordingly. She was cognizant of the shift in her leadership role from being a team coach to a team builder when team members were more
experienced and more capable of offering inputs and contributions. In contrast, Francis’s focus was individual differences in staff’s expectations. As discussed earlier, in the transformational leadership approach that the participants widely adopted, giving individualized consideration is one of the key components. Francis’s account shows that personal knowledge of subordinates informs the leaders to deploy suitable tactics to motivate individual staff members by addressing their diverse expectations and concerns. In addition, to get staff’s buy-in, effective leaders also pay attention to the deeper cultural and organizational design issues, which that influence how works are organized in a department or an organization, as Hannah and Francis warned:

Hannah: If you work with people of different colleges, you have to use different mindset so that they can actually get buy-in for your idea. If I want to do things very fast but they want to plan better before implementation, then we would have conflict and pressure. So we have to use different ways to do things with different groups of people.

Francis: you must have substantial experience working in well-developed tertiary institutions, then you develop substantial experiences and knowledge that you know how to take out the good things, good elements from these structured organizations to be introduced to this flexible organization, because not everything is good to be introduced here.

Although Hannah and Francis’s accounts are complementary, we can still find different emphases. As her example illustrated, Hannah stressed the “soft” elements in the work context – unique mindset, routines, and norms – that people collectively held in different organizations. Different mindsets were rooted in the formal and informal culture of the department that she worked in. In contrast, Francis’s notion of flexible vs. structured
organizations brought insights into the “hard elements” – human relationships defined by organizational hierarchies. Although Francis did not argue directly, his account implied that different organizational designs also manifest the underlying organizational cultures and the expected roles and behaviors of organizational members. Thus, the leaders cautiously considered cultural acceptance issues when changing certain parts of an organizational structure to fit their leadership styles. In sum, Francis and Hannah’s accounts urge leaders to be mindful of organizational culture to get staff’s buy-in. This point will be further discussed in the next subtheme “alignment with organizational culture.”

Overall speaking, effective leaders consciously align their leadership approaches and tactics with situational demands in terms of team characteristics, staff motivations, and expectations manifested in work practices, job routines, cultural norms and organizational designs. To do so, leaders have to make reflective judgment on the contextual applicability of their leadership approach and make swift adjustment accordingly.

Alignment with organizational culture. As mentioned above, organizational culture is a critical contextual factor with which leaders have to align their leadership practice. As David cried out, “I hope you understand this is how this university works!” Indeed, all participants shared that it is important for both leaders to understand the cultural norms, routines and practices to stay effective, as they observed:
Hannah: In different environments, people actually behave differently… So there are different ways of handling the same situation. *So the first thing I have to understand is how people used to do things here,* then I have to make judgment on whether I want to follow the old practice or I can introduce some new idea.

Francis: But *one man cannot change the whole corporate culture.* It will take time. Also because of the system...just like if you set up a good system, that kind of authoritarian culture can diminish its effect.

Benny: Each organization has its own history and cultural practices. They have different essential elements that affect their organizational culture. Some will place emphasis on obedience type, some oriental type, and some open-type, and some maybe mixed. *So that kind of cultural influences the habits of execution.* You cannot ignore them.

In Hannah’s account, she treated developing a cultural understanding as “the first thing” she had to do when joining an organization, because such knowledge is vital for her to anticipate others’ responses when initiating transformational change. Francis and Benny’s accounts highlighted the significant impact of temporal factors, i.e., organizational history and “habits” on enduring existing practices, norms, and sometimes inertia. According to them, changing the culture is difficult, time consuming, and thus requires careful handling to avoid backfire. Rather, they chose to adapt their leadership approaches and tactics to align with different organizational cultures, as they reflected:

Chloe: I just have the observation that leadership style cannot be in crash with the organizational culture. That will make you very ineffective.

Francis: But in different corporate cultures, I’ll adopt different tactics.
Garvin: To tell the truth, in my previous organization, personally I was not get used to the style of the organization. It seemed that I like to work in a collaborative organization. Well, just as what I mentioned, if you want to get things done, you have to do it differently in different organizations.

Ella: Primarily if you look at the academic structure, academic structure is like professionals. You have much flatter structure than in some other corporations. It's flatter but at the same time each person has lot more freedom, say, and autonomy. So you need to respect that and somehow move them forward as a group (laugh). So I think that is the major part if I compare myself with the former Head.

Although all participants saw themselves as transformational leaders, they expressed that they have to be sensitive and pay respect to the dominant organizational culture when leading the department forward. Operationally, they adopt different approaches in different organizations to avoid cultural crash. By doing so, Ella avoided the mistake of the former department head and gained faculty members’ and the dean’s acceptance as the new head. On the other hand, Garvin’s experience tells the other side of the story – the fit of the leader’s personality with the organizational culture. A crash of organizational culture with a leader’s personality will results in confusion or conflict between the behaviors expected by the cultural norms and by the self. (This resonates Chloe’s confusion about the “boss-pleasing leaders” on her leadership practice.) When such conflict reaches the limit, the leader will no longer comply with the cultural norms, but choose to quit from the post or the organization.

In sum, developing cultural knowledge is deemed as the top priority for leaders when arriving an organization because alignment of leadership approach with the cultural norms is
vital for effective leadership. Thus, leaders are sensitive to the impact of organizational culture and adapt their leadership practices in different cultural contexts. However, some participants’ experiences shows that such adaptive behaviors happen when there is a fit between the leader’s personality and the organizational culture. In case of severe crash of personality and culture, the leader may eventually choose to leave the organization.

**Formal education for leader development.** Other than on-the-job learning, formal education is another possible means of leader development. Among the eight participants, only Anna and Francis learned about leadership in their doctoral studies. Ella, Garvin, Chloe, and Hannah learned leadership related subject – business management – in their bachelor or master’s study. Benny and David did not study business subjects at all. However, similar to their views regarding the usefulness of leadership books, the participants had bipolar views about the value of formal leader education. The “negative” camp did not think leadership courses useful, as David, Garvin and Chloe argued:

David: I am sorry. I don’t think these courses work. Sorry let me be a bit frank.

Garvin: I mean [an MBA program] is just a kind of academic knowledge. I can see different people using different leadership styles, like power leadership. So it gave me the background knowledge of how to communicate with different leaders, but it didn’t tell me how to work effectively with them.

Chloe: I did develop familiarity with managerial operations and how things are done in a managerial context, but not in leadership.
While David bluntly dismissed the effectiveness of leadership courses, Gavin asserted that management education only offers “background knowledge” and fails to provide useful tools or insights into addressing individual concerns. For instance, change management theories advise leaders to educate staff members about the long-term common good of an organizational change imitative. In practice, the leaders still need to find their own ways to convince a staff who resists change due to personal motives. In other words, Garvin stressed the gap between theoretical knowledge and solution to specific problems. Furthermore, Chloe conceived leadership different from management, and thus considered business education only trained managers rather than leaders. Ella echoed her view:

For someone as green as I was when I took business courses, leadership cannot really come in place. I don't think I learned about leadership that way. Of course for someone who is lot more seasoned, when he or she takes an MBA program, the take might be different. But to me it was really learning about the functional areas, because I came from a non-business background.

According to Ella, business education, such as an MBA, may place emphasis on functional management, rather than leadership. Furthermore, prior experience also affected her take-away from the study. Her inexperience actually hindered her appreciation of conceptual knowledge because leadership was too remote to her own context. Her account implies that the benefits of learning can be maximized when the learners have accumulated adequate prior experience to connect with theoretical knowledge in the learning process. On the other hand,
Hannah in the “affirmative” camp shared her attitudinal change arising toward the value of formal leadership education:

From the very beginning stage, I didn't really think of applying what I've learned in class to my daily work. This is *just one of the qualifications* I gained that can help me enter into the industry. Afterwards, from time to time when I moved up, I *did find some of the theories very practical*, for example, coaching people and motivating staff… So I do find it useful. I don't deliberately apply the theories but when the time comes, I do use them *unintentionally*.

Same as Ella, Hannah did not reap the maximum benefits of learning at the time of formal study when she was inexperienced. However, the fact that she was able to apply theories to daily work *unintentionally*, suggested that some of theoretical knowledge learned had been internalized and integrated into her knowledge schemas for her intuitive application afterwards. However, given that their learning did not target any relevant practical problem, the relevancy of acquired knowledge to future problem solving is loosely coupled. On the other hand, when the leaders have adequate experience, formal leadership study is useful to the leaders, as Anna and Francis claimed:

Anna: I am influenced by what I learned from the Ed.D program; otherwise, I can’t use these terms to describe my situation.

Francis: Formal training gives you the structure and formal knowledge, which is very important. This is like an interface and the structure of knowledge so that you can internalize all this knowledge and observation into your own doing.

From Anna and Francis’s account, theoretical knowledge acquired in formal leadership study helps leaders in two ways: First, it provides a robust knowledge structure (i.e., schema),
and allows leaders to develop more sophisticated understanding of leadership through differentiating and integrating conceptual and experiential knowledge. As David claimed, “Any experience has scope.” Formal education may help leaders transcend their knowledge beyond the limitation of their lived experience. Second, it provides the conceptual framework for describing, analyzing and solving practical problems, although it does not offer direct answers to specific problems. In short, its usefulness is in the eye of beholder, depends on whether the leader looks for solutions to problems or refining the knowledge structure.

**Summary of Theme 2.** They key idea under this theme is that leaders advance their leadership expertise through reflective practice. From the participants’ accounts of their experiences, it is evident that leaders developed more sophisticated leadership skills to cope with wider responsibilities at higher leadership levels. At the entry leadership level, program leaders generally develop managerial leadership skills to ensure smooth program operation within established guidelines and procedures. When advancing to higher leadership levels, leaders’ roles are expanding from personal leadership to local leadership and ultimately to organizational leadership. At higher levels, departmental leaders tend to embrace the transformational leadership approach, which seeks to lead staff forward by gaining their buy-in for common vision, goals, and directions. As such, they tend to emphasize upward and downward communications, and integrate managerial leadership approach with participative leadership
approach to motivate subordinates and to align the expectations between the management and the subordinates.

Leaders develop more complex leadership expertise dominantly through on-the-job learning in the workplace, which places a strong emphasis on reflective practice through observation, deliberate practice, and self-reflection. In this regard, diverse developmental experiences provide rich source of learning for leaders. While successful experience boosts leaders’ self-efficacy, negative experience often stimulates leaders’ motivation for self-improvement through reflection. Meanwhile, learning from others is widely considered as an effective means of developing leadership expertise. In particular, apprenticeship or mentorship under a role model is highly effective for beginning leaders. At higher levels, observing and learning from others in the social network often help leaders evaluate and reflect on their leadership approaches for improvement purposes. To a certain extent, reading books (e.g., biography and history), which offer an alternative way of understanding how human beings cope with different situations, also inspires leaders to draw morals that enhance their leadership expertise.

Most importantly, leaders enhance their leadership effectiveness through constantly reflecting on the applicability of their leadership practice with the work contexts in terms of organizational structure, cultural norms, historical practices, and interpersonal dynamics. By
doing so, they are able to evaluate the appropriateness of strategies and tactics in different contexts, thereby maintaining the fit of leadership approach with the context, and enabling higher-order learning through differentiation and synthesis of lower-order skills. Note that the intention of learning depends on the congruence of leader’s personality with cultural values. Severe conflict between the two may cause confusion, ambivalence, and eventually leader’s resignation from the position or the organization.

Lastly, leaders who look for tools of solving specific problems may not find conceptual knowledge readily applicable to their context. However, a leader’s leadership expertise developed through learning by doing is confined by the scope of experiences. Formal leadership study may not only offer conceptual knowledge that transcend one’s limitation in experiential knowledge, but also provide a robust conceptual framework for leaders to analyze problems and facilitate the integration conceptual and experiential knowledge, rather than offering direct answers to specific problems.

**Theme 3: Rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth**

This theme seeks to delineate how developmental experiences accelerate leader’s growth. It includes three major subthemes: (a) challenges as catalyst for growth; (b) performance assessment and feedback; and (c) support availability. When leaders seek to learn from
experiences, there is a limitation in an experience that can potentially offer to learning, as David put it nicely,

*There is a certain scope to any experience.* This university certainly has scope… This university is not competing in a premier league. So I don’t get the experience of competing in the premier league. It’s a limitation I have to admit… Of course, if I had the experience working in another university, I might become a different person.

Asserting “I might become a *different person,*” David proclaimed that the *self,* being a leader or essentially a human being, as the product of cumulated experience. In other words, one’s life experience dictates what type of person he or she becomes. In this regard, leaders have to widen their developmental experiences to maximize their growth.

**Challenges as catalyst for growth.** As mentioned in Theme 2, self-reflection on leadership practice is an important means of developing leadership expertise. Diverse experiences, even those resulted in failure and frustration, enabled leaders to evaluate their leadership skill repertoire and the applicability of certain skills in specific contexts, thereby developing higher-order leadership expertise. Along this line, most participants saw challenges in a positive light, as manifested in their quotes attributing their growth in leadership to coping with challenges:

Anna: And I would say *challenging* environment will *help* me to grow as a leader because if everything is OK, everything is fine, it will not brush up my leadership skills. In my institute, the *complexity* of job nature affects my growth as a leader.

Benny: Some tasks I have encountered before also affected my concepts and ideas of development as a leader, especially for some *difficult tasks I haven’t encountered before.*
Chloe: I would say I was most motivated in my current position because in my first job as Graduate Assistant, I didn’t have much accountability. And then as a Subject Leader, there was not much to do. And in the US institution, things were very simple, not many challenges.

Francis: But still I would like to take the chance and move forward because I could see there was a big opportunity and bigger challenge that would enhance my personal profile as well as my work experience. So I decided to move from there.

Ann and Benny’s accounts bring insights into the effects of external environment on their growth, whereas Chloe and Francis’s accounts disclose their inner emotional responses. Anna and Benny’s account reiterates that difficult and novel tasks, complex jobs, and challenging environment, comparing to a familiar and smooth operational context, actually “help” their growth because they provide fresh and rich learning experiences. On the other hand, Chloe’s account illustrates her emotional response to challenges – more challenges and higher accountability stimulates higher motivation for growth. Similarly, in Francis’s successful career, overcoming challenge for him means greater personal growth and credibility. Like others, he proactively sought a spiral of growth: seeking greater job challenges → self learning and development → stronger leadership expertise and credibility → higher leadership positions → greater job challenges.

*Increasing expectations on accountability.* All participants reported that they had to cope with dynamic market competitions. In tandem with higher leadership levels, they were
held accountable for increased expectations from diverse stakeholders, including external quality assurance agencies, employers or professional bodies, senior management, and staff members.

Some examples of participants’ narratives below illustrated this point:

Ella: The industry has changed so much in the past few years, and it's absolutely important for the department to be aligned with the university’s academic standard, which has going up a lot, and with the industry that changes a lot. Otherwise, we will be training students and putting them into some space that they have no jobs whatsoever.

Anna: The competition among local universities become keener. I would say it is market drive. Also, the senior management exercises more constraint on the autonomy of academic staff, like we have a lot of QA mechanism.

Hannah: Decision making is more difficult because you have to consider more elements in the process; because you don't want to please one party and upset the other one. So you have to strike a balance.

In their accounts, Ella and Anna stressed the primacy of the internal quality standard, external industry needs, and wider market force in shaping the program provision of academic departments. Anna for instance, as an associate head, personally had to cope with high expectations on teaching and research from both professional bodies and the senior management. As she put it, “We need to be excellent.” Additionally, staff members are another group of important stakeholders whom departmental leaders need to take care of. For example, Ella’s account illustrated how she gave individualized consideration to facilitate individual staff’s development in different career pathways as follows:

There are the ones who can move up and you need to push them, because it's never a situation that I can say ‘I am the Department Head, you got promoted.’ It's never the
It involves a lot of people, involves external assessors. And all I can do is to help build and provide them with the resources; help them with their research proposals; help them grow. And there are some people you know may have difficulties and you have to help them consider alternatives and hopefully get them more leeway in terms of how they can grow their careers. So there are lot more difficulties in terms of people management when you are Department Head, and you don't have to face them as Program Director.

As evident in Hannah’s account, leaders had to develop increasingly sophisticated mental models to take into account more factors in decision-making and strike a delicate balance in aligning diverse interests. David’s account suggests that leaders’ engagement in complex decision-making accelerates their maturation as a person and as a leader:

The decisions would require me to have an overall picture of the whole thing, and also have communication with all the stakeholders... And finally I would come up with this decision. Decision-making allowed me to mature as a person.

**Increasing job complexity and novelty.** At higher leadership positions, leaders find themselves confronted with wider responsibilities, more complex environment and novel problems. As Francis described, when he moved to higher positions, “the challenges were becoming bigger and bigger.” Narratives from participants at different leadership positions delineates such differences across leadership levels. To illustrate, as an entry-level leader, Chloe believed that her success as a program leader is measured by the competiveness of her programs in the competitive market. She reckoned, “Program leadership is also very dynamic. We have new things and challenges emerging every day.” For her, keeping pace with dynamic
and novel job challenges is essential for program leadership. Other participants portrayed a more complex picture of leadership challenges at departmental, faculty or college levels:

David: When you become more like a school level, for example, budgeting and subsidy, then you are getting more complicated. You are not talking about the program, but talking about all the programs in your school, and the people’s background differentiation is even greater and the gaps become wider.

Ella: But when you are the Department Head, you have to manage those different types of people. They have different types of career aspirations; they have different needs, and so on. As Department Head, you have a lot more say in terms of people decisions - who to hire, how many positions, should you put it under this major or another major - those types of decisions. So it's lot more likely to have conflict comes up than when you're working as the Program Director.

Hannah: Previously maybe you just proposed one thing - very simple budgeting. But now the scope is wider, so you have to take into consideration more factors.

According to the above departmental leaders, a program leader’s job involves teacher management, and aligning the program vision with the overarching vision of the department. However, when they moved to departmental or faculty level, even greater responsibilities and challenges set in. They have to deal with wider program portfolio out of their own subject areas, significant budgeting and personal decisions of the department, and greater conflicts arising from increased people diversity. As Francis explained, when proceeding to college level, the leaders’ scope of responsibilities is even wider. His role focuses not only on internal functions, but also on relationship management with external relations:

But for the college level, the staff that you will be responsible for are a lot more. Also the area of focuses is different. At a college level, the skills that you required maybe more
generic because you are responsible for IT, campus facilities, HR, academics, blah, blah, blah. But for academic departments, you are only responsible for your own area - area that you are comfortable with.

Additionally, department heads also have to adapt to dynamic changes in external and internal environment and steer organizational change when necessary. As such, Anna asserted, “I would see the true differences between what I did and what I am doing right now,” which was echoed by David, “I think it is a different type of game.” Their claims highlighted significant change of job nature when progressing to the departmental leadership roles. Consequently, leaders have to develop increasingly sophisticated mental models in decision-making for effective coping. On the other hand, increased role demands also cause significant emotional burden to leaders. For instance, David and David cried out:

David: Sometimes you just feel helpless in resolving the differences.

Francis: To deal with internal conflicts is the biggest challenge I am now facing. Conflict between the administrative and academic staff is one part I am still struggling with.

In his remark, David used the word “helpless” to express his sense of inability to alleviate certain conflict situations. Similarly, David also used the word “struggling” to voice out his sense of vulnerability when confronting increased internal conflicts. Their accounts highlighted the potential threats of external challenges to leader’s mental well-being and self-identity. Such threats can be detrimental if not properly tackled, as Ella observed:
So far I haven't been on the news headlines. Ha-ha-ha (*laugh*). They can come very fast, I'm sure, in nowadays’ environment. It could be difficult, and I'm sure you know, *if you say the wrong thing and all of the sudden, you are in the dirt.*

Using a metaphor “you are in the dirt,” Ella vividly depicted how a leader’s professional image can be drastically jeopardized by stakeholders’ negative response to his/her words and deeds, especially when conflicts stir up negative publicity. To alleviate such threats, leaders either mobilize inner or external resources for successful coping, or withdraw from the challenge. In light of the earlier finding that diverse experience is a catalyst for leader’s growth, withdrawal from a challenge will mean to the leader a loss of learning opportunity. On the contrary, failures often incur emotional and credibility loss, although the leaders may derive significant lessons from it. Therefore, it is wise for leaders to choose the battle carefully.

*Progressive job assignment as warm-up.* In light of the above, it is vital for leaders to cope with challenges with manageable degree of difficulty as warm-up for the higher level.

The participants’ experiences lend support to the above proposition, as they described:

Chloe: Taking up the subject leadership was a kind of warm up for me to develop my leadership skills and to get to know how to manage a program.

Anna: When I joined the department I also took up functional post like a team leader. How to say, it is progressive, step-by-step.

Francis: As I told you, if you never had any experience in being-led, you can hardly be an effective leader. So that's why I always believe that if you want to be a leader, you must start from something very frontline, junior; and then you got some experience in following orders, and then you can start being a small leader in a small project, and then you can pick up more responsibilities. This is actually how I feel from my experience.
David: I think it is a *natural evolvement* of my personality, you know starting from my secondary school. Then I would continue to participate in different activities, which required certain level of leadership to be used in pushing things to move on… I guess it is more a *natural evolution*, I would say.

Hannah: And then I do find those experiences very useful, because from the first one, I laid a very good *foundation* on teaching and program development; on the second one, I did have the chance to get involved in new projects like new campus development. *That experience could help me to move on to the third one... Then my previous experience could accumulate.*

In the above accounts, participants used words like “*progressive,*” “*step-by-step,*” “*accumulate,*” and “*natural evolution*” to emphasize the longitudinal, progressive nature of leader development. Indeed, all of the participants advanced their leadership expertise step-by-step at each leadership level. According to David, leadership expertise may well be rooted in one’s personality and matured alongside with one’s lifespan development since adolescence. In their adulthood work life in higher education, they also gained exposure to leadership via committee works and ad hoc projects before taking formal leadership positions.

For example, Ella reckoned, “Committee at the university level helps, because you will get a better understanding of how the university functions.” After the leader obtained a formal position, those positions at lower level or narrower scope of responsibilities served as natural warm-up for the next level, as Anna, Chloe, David, and Francis’s experiences suggest.
Furthermore, Hannah’s account indicates that job assignments that expand leaders’ skill set also prepare them for coping with wider scope of responsibilities at higher level.

In sum, job challenges provide stimulating learning experiences that accelerate leader’s growth. Higher leadership positions are associated with increased expectations from diverse stakeholders, stronger accountability, increased job novelty and role complexity. Therefore, leaders have to develop increasingly sophisticated mental models to consider factors of increased complexity in decision-making. Additionally, increased leadership challenges also impose threats to leaders’ emotional well-being, credibility, professional image, and leader identity. Thus, it is advisable for leaders to choose manageable job assignments to accumulate adequate skill proficiency before advancing to the higher level. Leader development follows a pathway of progressive spiral.

**Performance assessment and feedback.** Apart from learning the hard way through trial-and-error, most participants considered that obtaining feedback from others might also help them adjust appropriately toward the right track and identify areas of improvement. For instance, Chloe considered frequent feedback from her supervisor during daily work very useful, especially when he “gave me direct criticism with examples.” Other participants also obtained clues to assess their leadership effectiveness. For instance, Ella observed positive signs in staff response after taking up the department headship, “There are far fewer fights.” Basically people
are putting me and other to function as a department.” Likewise, Hannah used external evaluation as an indication of her performance, “For the external verification, they got a “B” before. Under my supervision, it was an “A” – obviously that was a different result.” Above all, performance appraisal is the formal channel for leaders to obtain performance feedback.

Regarding its usefulness in facilitating leader development, Chloe and Benny shared contrasting experiences as follows:

Chloe: [In formal annual appraisal meeting], there was no written feedback. All they gave was just a rating, a number … there’s not much chance to talk. That’s what I hate most.

Benny: Most of the time it was two-way and we could write down the expectations of both sides and through this channel to discuss the way of improvement. That was an important aspect of the appraisal, rather than just negative feedback.

Actually, Chloe learned a lot from informal feedback from her supervisors in day-to-day interactions. However, the head of college, who had no direct work relationship with her, conducted her formal appraisal. The appraisal process became a one-way goal-setting lecturer of the big boss and form-filling exercise for the sake of formality. In response, Chloe used the word “hate” to express her immense frustration to such a bureaucratic approach. In contrast, Benny considered performance appraisal as a useful developmental process. It was conducted as a two-way dialogue between him and his immediate supervisor covering goal setting and areas of improvement. In this way, they were able to align his personal development goals with his performance goals. Chloe and Benny’s contrasting experiences show that performance
appraisal can be a useful leader development process when conducting in a two-way communicative fashion.

While performance appraisal provides feedback from supervisors, feedback from subordinates is also important for departmental leaders. Garvin and Hannah reported diverse experiences as well:

**Garvin:** If you are talking about the 360-degree feedback, I doubt it works in Chinese organization, because the Chinese is not used to such kind of evaluation, especially asking the subordinates to evaluate the supervisors.

**Hannah:** So I just asked them [subordinates] ‘How do you find me?’ ‘What do you expect from your Department Head’ I do want to learn more from my team what their expectations are; and I also tell them my expectation as well.

Hannah’s current institute has an open climate, which encouraged staff to spoke up and express their views. For example, when Hannah arrived, her subordinates frankly commented her “being very young - green in a sense.” As such, Hannah could directly seek honest feedback from subordinates. In Garvin’s experience however, he was difficult to solicit honest feedback from subordinates or even peers, because some Chinese cultural values (face-saving and social harmony) prevailed in his organization, making it sensitive to give negative feedback to those with equal or higher social status. Hence, 360-degree feedback may not be effective in such organizations. Instead, leaders have to assess subordinates’ responses via subtle clues, e.g., their emotional reactions, as Chloe did.
Support availability. Support is another key element of developmental experiences that can accelerate leader’s development. The participants received varied forms and magnitude of support from their organizations, and proposed a wish list of support that might accelerate their development of leadership expertise. In general, no participants received systematic support provided by their existing and previous organizations. This subtheme discusses their first-person experiences in various forms of support, including mentorship, career-related support, psychological support, organizational support, and leadership training intervention.

Mentorship as useful support. In the subtheme “Learning from others” under the Theme 2 “Advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice,” we have shown that an apprenticeship and mentorship relationship is conducive to leader’s development. However, out of the eight participants, only two participants’ organizations have piloted a mentorship scheme for junior leaders, and four participants “luckily” obtained informal mentorships in their social circle. Some participants commented on their experiences:

David: Of course, if you are the friend of your supervisor, then you learn a lot in a personal manner and on a personal level.

Ella: Well it’s not a system. It’s just someone I know, my old boss. And we're still in touch even though I've moved to another university.

Benny: Luckily I got some insights from senior people in our area. I got chances to get in tough and have direct conversations and meetings with them. I learned their ways of leadership, how they handled things tactfully and effectively.
From the above accounts, it can be seen that the three participants heavily relied on personal network to find suitable mentors to advise them on their leadership problems. Without a “systems” approach, luck is the determinant of mentorship availability. As David’s account suggests, luck can be interpreted as being dependant on uncontrollable factors in the leaders’ personal relationships whether there are: (a) good personal relationships between the leaders and their supervisors, and (b) supervisor’s willingness in investing time and energy in mentorship. Additionally, Ella and Benny’s experiences imply that luck can also mean the access to human capital in one’s social network. Their development could be accelerated if they were lucky enough to find a person who had the insights and solutions relevant to their problems. Otherwise, the mentors’ counsel may be too general to address the leader’s specific problems or developmental needs.

Furthermore, closeness of personal relationships also affects the intensity of interaction in mentorship. To illustrate, Benny could “very rarely” seek advice from his respectable social contacts when encountering big issues. He had to seek advice or help from peers instead. In contrast, Chloe and Anna were lucky to have their supervisors as their informal mentors. Both of them were able to “learn a lot” from their supervisor-as-mentors. Their intensive interactions were illustrated by Chloe:
My supervisor and I used to have coffee together *purposely*. We talked about how things worked, and he would tell me “You should not do this,” and gave me direct criticism with examples. I think this was very useful.

From Chloe’s narrative, we can identify three factors of effective mentorship. First, *purposely* arranged coffee meetings outside the office room provide a safe space for discussing pertinent issues in a relaxed and open atmosphere. Second, adequate meeting frequency ensures its *timeliness* in tackling problems arisen from time to time. Third, the meetings focus on reviewing the mentee’s actions with critiques and concrete examples, which foster the mentee’s reflective learning of leadership skills. In a similar vein, Anna also favored informal mentorship. She asserted:

I think it is difficult to make mentorship program a formal one. If I were not the Associate Head, it is *strange* to have someone to mentor you to be the Associate Head. So, I think it comes naturally.

Using contrasting rhetoric words, “*naturally*” versus “*strange*,” Anna stressed that mentorship should be a *natural extension* of her work relationship with her supervisor, rather than a formal relationship awkwardly imposed onto the leader as a mentee and a senior staff as a mentor. More importantly, mentorship has to be *relevant* to their leadership job to aid their reflective leadership practice. In contrast, the formal mentorship schemes in Chloe and Garvin’s institutions vividly demonstrated the awkwardness in such an arrangement:

Chloe: A Lecturer got a Senior Lecturer (SL) assigned to him, but the SL is never *available* and is not *willing* to tell you anything. If you ask them any official stuff like policy, they will give you the ‘official answers’, and/or draw you to the administrative
people. Nobody is willing to share anything because there is an absence of trust. But what we really need from the mentorship is the ‘real stuff’- insider information.

Garvin: So far the mentoring scheme, I think is at the very primitive stage. To me it is not working effectively, because it started only last year. We just tried 2 times. The top management just have one-to-one consultation with the mentees, but they don’t have the kind of the sense of developing systematically the leadership competences of the mentees. So, it is still more on a task-based (approach).

Both Chloe and Garvin’s observations show how formal mentorship schemes ran in an awkward, lip-service fashion without real substance for leader development. Chloe argued that the root of the problem was a lack of trust of the mentors in the mentees (protégé-leaders), thus the assigned mentors lacked the willingness to share how things really work. Instead, they just diplomatically offered some “official answers” to protect themselves. According to Chloe, the mentors’ lack of incentive to share and nurture protégé-leaders was due to their lack of job security, “I don’t think people are willing to share anything if they think that their success is at risk,” she pointed out. For her, commitment from the top management to people development in the whole organization is essential to make mentorship schemes work.

On the other hand, Garvin’s account sheds light on the structure and content of formal mentorship scheme. As the mentors and mentees (protégé-leaders) only met twice a year in a loosely structured manner. The frequency was insufficient for adequate interactions when comparing to Anna and Chloe’s successful experiences of informal mentorship. In addition, the format and content of discussion in mentoring meetings depended on individual mentors. As
the mentors were top management staff who do not have personal knowledge and trustful relationships with the protégé-leaders, a safe and open environment is lacking to enable them to have meaningful discussion of mentees’ pertinent developmental problems. The scheme eventually was implemented just for the sake of formality, as Garvin observed, “From my observation, it is just a chance for the mentees to interact with the mentors in a ‘formal’ way… So it is way to learn the perspectives from the mentor.”

Moreover, in the absence of clear guiding principles, effective methodology, and adequate skills among mentors, their mentoring tended to be a lecture of the mentor’s philosophy, rather than purposely focusing on the mentees’ pertinent developmental needs. Hence, to make the mentorship scheme effective, it is essential not only to develop better understanding in the developmental needs of the leaders, but also to train up the mentors’ mentoring skills.

From the above successful and unsuccessful mentorship experiences, it can be concluded that effective mentorship is contingent on the following conditions: (a) an established trustful relationship between mentor and mentee; (b) adequate mentoring skills of mentors; (c) a safe and open space for discussion in mentoring meetings, desirably in an informal and relax climate; (d) mentee-centered mentoring interactions, which purposely focusing on fostering mentee’s reflective leadership practice; (e) intensive mentoring interactions, which provide timely support to help mentee’s tackle pertinent issues arising from their leadership roles over time; and (f) top
management commitment to constructing an organizational environment conducive to people
development. From an organizational standpoint, effective mentoring support should not
depend on luck or mercy of individual supervisors. Rather, it is desirable to make it
systematically available at all departmental levels. To this end, it is vital for top management to
invest resources in training and adjust insensitive systems and organizational practices to
promote experience sharing among leaders across organizational levels.

**Career-related support availability.** As discussed above, one of the significant
contributions that mentorship made to leaders’ growth is to facilitate reflective practice during
their course of career advancement. Unsurprisingly, all participants considered career-related
support vital for their survival and success. Samples of their significant statements are quoted
below for further discussion:

Chloe: He [supervisor] taught me a lot of skills how to *survive* in a bureaucratic
organization.

Anna: When I feel something I need to handle with *care* and can’t go with my own way,
I’ll seek advice from him [supervisor].

Hannah: If I want to propose a new idea, I will get the approval from my supervisor first
and see how they think. They might think of some areas that I may have *overlooked* or I
don't *realize* there might be *problems* here. So I talk to them before I make that decision.

Francis: No, no, no. She was *not very supportive* actually. So I learned from the *mistakes*
I made.
As discussed earlier, departmental leaders, as mid-level management staff, are charged with the responsibilities to align expectations of diverse stakeholders, and lead their team to overcome novel challenges and move toward common goals. They inevitably have to deal with sensitive issues, vested interests, and unspoken rules in their organizations. Their reputation, leader image, and even career may be subject to the risk of falling victim to unexpected failure and political backlash to their initiatives. As the above accounts show, it is vital for the leaders to identify potential “problems” (Hannah) in their social contexts and handle them “with care” (Anna) and necessary “skills” (Chloe). Without supportive supervisors who share the skills, intelligence, and tacit knowledge of handling social dynamics, the leaders may have to learn the hard way from painful mistakes, as Francis did.

Additionally, some participants reported that peers could be a useful source of career support, as Chloe discovered, “I found it more effective by consulting other more experienced leaders so that I can get more tailored advice.” However, Garvin found it other way, “It is difficult to seek opinions from other colleagues.” In general, peers do have certain useful organizational knowledge; however, they may not necessarily have the incentives to share it with others. Hence, it is necessary for the leaders to proactively develop positive social relationships with their peers as allies and seek advice from various sources where necessary, as Hannah stressed:
Well, I do like to talk to different people, maybe through informal communication, I do learn different information, which is more important than the official channel. And I do think that getting information from different sources is important for triangulation first. Also, you can actually view things from different perspectives. Sometimes you have to hear what your team members said; sometimes you ask your boss; sometimes you ask others’ boss as well.

Hannah’s account reiterates the importance of unspoken rules in organizations. It also delineates her strategy of learning such tacit knowledge via active communications within her web of social relationships in the organization – team members, boss, and others’ boss. By doing so, she was able to validate the collected intelligence through triangulation from various sources, and develop a full picture of how things work in her organization.

Overall speaking, the participants’ experiences show that leaders can learn the unspoken rules in an organization and thereby tackling sensitive issues more swiftly when their supervisors have the knowledge and willingness to help them in an informal mentoring relationship. Otherwise, they might have to learn from mistakes. Moreover, it is an effective strategy for them to make use of social networks to learn tacit organizational knowledge. The availability of such support from supervisors, peers, and colleagues aid the leaders’ coping with novel job challenges and social dynamics in an organization, and provide useful input to accelerate their development in the course of leadership enactment.

**Psychosocial support availability.** As mentioned earlier, departmental leaders have to endure psychological stress when confronting difficult challenges. While career-related support
enhances the leaders’ cognitive problem-solving capacities, psychosocial support enhances the leaders’ psychological resilience to challenges. All participants recognized its importance as vividly illustrated in examples below:

David: If I always live in an _emotionally-stressed_ environment, I will get _crazy_, you know, before I learn anything. So I think in terms of whether the environment is _friendly_ to my emotion, then it is important.

Chloe: [Supervisor] viewed me as a _partner_, so we _fought_ for this program _together_.

Ella: The fact that the faculties are _behind_ me helps my _confidence_ a lot.

Garvin: It is the kind of _team atmosphere_ when you see the _whole_ team working toward the task and finally everybody has _gained_ something.

Using a strong rhetoric word “_crazy_” to express his feeling, David cried out for a friendly environment, which for him is a pre-requisite for effective development. In Chloe, Ella, and Garvin’s narratives, it is a sense of partnership (Chloe), or team spirit toward the same goal (Garvin), that boosts the leaders’ confidence (Ella) and inner strength toward external pressure.

Their positive experiences made a huge contrast to a bad experience Francis had:

Insider, you know could be _dangerous_. You have _no idea_ how your opinions and views spread to someone, some people; and those people could _twist_ what you said. So it was quite _dangerous_. Especially when I was with the University C, I had some _bad experience_… The University C is a _highly political_ environment.

By repeating the word “_dangerous_” when recalling his traumatic experience, Francis depicted his fear of seeking advice in a highly political, hostile social environment. He had “no idea” about the magnitude of distortion to his message and the scope of gossips spreading against
him, which all made him vulnerable to political attack. To compensate for his lack of psychosocial support within his organization, Francis turned to his external social network. He recalled, “They share their experience with us and I share my experience with them. And then – oh, I see, I’m not alone.” It can see that Francis was able to find a safe space for idea exchange and a sense of companionship in his external social circle. Uttering, “oh, I see,” his sudden realization of being “not alone,” told his profound solitude when working in a political organizational environment. Francis’s contrasting experience with others shows that a supportive organizational climate is the necessary enabling condition that makes psychosocial support available to facilitate leaders’ growth.

**Organizational support availability.** The above discussion suggests that organization has an irrevocable role in constructing an environment supportive to leader development. Out of 20 institutions that eight participants had prior work experiences, only four institutions (Anna, Chloe, Garvin, and Hannah’s current institutions) had introduced limited training intervention or mentorship schemes to support leader development. Two participants (Ella and David) reported a supportive climate in their departments but no specific supportive measures being taken. As David commented, “The organization, I think, has a rather passive role in terms of [leader] education.” In Ella’s case, she obtained personal support from her supervisor, rather than from the organization, as she pointed out “Our Dean has been very protective of me, and he
took up a lot of difficult decisions.” As mentioned earlier, two participants (Chloe and Francis) reported an unsupportive climate in their organizations, and Benny reported a lack of organizational support to his development. Overall, most organizations were rather passive in offering organizational support to leader development. In fact, the benefits of organizational support to leader development can be demonstrated in Hannah’s work experiences in different institutions:

Eventually when I moved on to other organizations, some of them were more resourceful. I got more support. Then, it was easier for me to learn more things. I can say there were less obstacles because sometimes when you are very tired, every little thing can stop you from learning. If you got the support - financially, or just time-off, or whatever - you are more motivated to learn more things.

Hannah’s account shows that when organizational support is available, leaders are more motivated to pursue personal development in leadership expertise. Organizational support was provided in different forms; for example, provision of training intervention, financial support, and time-off arrangement. To make these supports available, it is necessary for the senior management to commit resources in leadership training and development, formulate organizational policy that facilitate leaders’ professional development, and implement operational practice that are friendly to staff development. Additionally, such support initiatives send a strong message to the staff members about the organization’s commitment to
people development. Indeed, organizations can do more to support leader development, as other participants maintained:

Francis: A good organization always needs to prepare good exposure for the staff so that they could have professional development.

Garvin: The top management encourages collaboration. Even though in some scope beyond their KPIs, the central administration is willing to help. That’s the collaborative culture.

Chloe: And their [top management’s] short-sightedness is the major hindering factor for leaders’ growth. If they focus on short-term things, and leaders’ growth is something long term. So I think this will discourage people to learn how to lead.

The above accounts shred lights on different aspects of organizational support.

Francis’s suggestion focuses on the establishment of organizational practices that enhance career-related support. As discussed in the subtheme “challenges as catalyst for growth,” exposure to challenging job assignments and novel tasks can accelerate leader’s reflective learning of leadership expertise. In light of this, organizations can introduce organizational practices that provide wider job exposures to enrich leaders’ on-the-job learning experience.

On the other hand, Garvin’s account aligns with earlier discussion on the lower-level theme “psychosocial support availability,” which is an important enabling condition for leader development. As Garvin suggests, top management should be committed to fostering a collaborative culture that enhance experience-sharing and collaborative problem solving. This requires top-management to lead as a role model, and to encourage collaboration through careful
design of incentive systems and criteria of measuring staff performance. All these, as Chloe has suggested, require a long-term commitment of the top management on leader development, because supportive organizational climate and effective leaders all take persistent effort to develop over a considerable period.

**Leadership training intervention.** Training intervention is one of the most explicit form of organizational support on leader development. Among the eight participants, only two participants (Anna and Hannah) reported that their organizations offered short training courses in leadership and management for departmental leaders, suggesting that HEIs in Hong Kong did not make adequate investment in leader development.

Those skeptics may argue such training courses may not be job relevant, as Chloe speculated, “The instructors are not in my situation, they are not even in my field. So I don’t think they can relate directly how I do things.” On the contrary, Anna and Hannah considered training courses useful for developing their leadership competence, as they noted:

Interviewer: Do you find it useful for your own development?
Anna: Yes, I got some *useful tips*, and also I think the other things are important because we can have the opportunities to share and *exchange ideas* with other colleagues within our faculty. Also, we can expand our *network*.

Hannah: *It was like an EMBA course tailor-made to the situation here…* It *helps* because the concepts are *applicable*. They wanted us to write a case study on the management theories, how you are going to use those skills or knowledge in your daily work. So we had to think of the real scenario and then to apply the concepts… And then some of them
were about handling staffing issues, how to make decisions, how to find opportunities. So they were very practical. I think it's good.

From the above, we can see that usefulness of leadership training courses depends on whether they are practical enabling the leaders to apply useful tips and concepts learned to their real-life workplace problems. In Hannah’s case, the training course was designed like an intensive application-oriented mini-MBA course. In Anna’s institution, the leadership training course was structured as a series of workshops with hands-on experience, as she described:

- It tried to give us some hands-on experience to us about different leadership styles, their pros and cons, how we feel about it… We had some simulation games so that we can have hands-on experience, say for example, how to handle a difficult situation… Colleagues were asked to do role-play. It was very interesting.

Anna felt the course interesting as it engaged the leaders in applying different leadership concepts to real-life problems. In addition, it fostered collaborative learning among the participants and thereby facilitating their idea exchange. As both Anna and Hannah suggested, another side benefit of the training courses is to help extending the leader’s social network within the organizations, which can enhance their psychosocial and career-related support resources. As Hannah explained, “It helped us to know more about each other and learn from different aspects. And because of that connections and network, it's easier for us to do things.”

Additionally, Anna and Hannah’s positive learning experiences in leadership training courses further enrich our earlier discussion on the usefulness of formal leadership study. They lend support to the argument that conceptual knowledge may help leaders transcend the
limitation of their experience by integrating their experiential knowledge with conceptual knowledge. An application-oriented approach is proved effective in facilitating knowledge application and synthesis.

**Summary of Theme 3.** Under this theme, we provided a rich account of how three interweaving developmental experiences accelerate leader’s growth under three major subthemes: (a) challenges as catalyst for growth; (b) performance assessment and feedback; and (c) support availability. In an organization, higher leadership levels inherently impose onto the leaders with wider job responsibilities, increasingly complex role demands and novel job challenges, and greater external expectations on accountability. The participants’ experiences show that job challenges often stimulate leaders’ motivation for learning. Challenge is a catalyst for leader’s growth but also a double-edge sword because tackling challenge is a risk-taking behavior. Failure to overcome a challenge may jeopardize a leader’s self-efficacy, credibility, and acceptance by others. As such, carefully choosing the manageable challenges is vital for leader’s survival and success. In this regard, leader development is deemed as a spiral of progressive development, in which leaders accumulate sufficient skill proficiency at a manageable level as preparation for the higher one.

On the other hand, there is a limitation that one can potentially learn from a particular experience. Hence, effective leaders intentionally seek for enriching developmental
experiences to transcend the limitations in current mental models derived from existing experiential knowledge. Widening one’s exposure through challenging job assignments and novel experiences expands leaders’ skill sets and perspectives and enables them to develop more sophisticated mental models to get prepared for wider responsibilities required at upper leadership levels.

Apart from learning the hard way through trial-and-error, obtaining feedback from others, especially immediate supervisors, help leaders reflect on their practice more timely and effectively. Learning is affected by the quality and intensity of feedback received during daily informal meetings and formal appraisal process. The participants’ diverse experiences suggested that performance appraisal can be a useful leader development process when adopting a two-way communicative approach, and avoiding a top-down bureaucratic style of merely giving ratings and recording faults. Unfortunately, most participants depend on luck to obtain meaningful performance feedback from their supervisors, typically due to a lack of open and supportive organizational climate to people development, and lack of skills and willingness of leaders’ supervisors in offering adequate feedback. Apparently, there is a pressing need for fostering a people development climate and enhancing the mentoring skills of senior managerial staff in nurturing protégé-leaders at lower levels.
Support is another key element of developmental experiences that can accelerate leader’s development, including mentorship, career-related support, psychological support, organizational support, and leadership training intervention. Trust between leaders and their supervisors often leads to natural extension of their working relationships to informal mentoring relationship. Effective mentorship allows protégé-leaders learn not only task-skills but more importantly, hidden rules of how things work in an organization. To make mentorship effective, other than trust, it is essential to focusing on the leaders’ pertinent practicing issues, and providing a safe space for genuine reflection as well as adequate and timely feedback. In the participants’ experience however, mentorship support largely depends on personal initiatives of individual leaders’ supervisors and thus was not common. Although a few HEIs launched formal mentorship schemes, their effectiveness were hindered by a lack of collaborative climate and incentive system to encourage experience sharing.

In addition to mentorship support, leadership training courses that are designed to facilitate application of conceptual knowledge to real-life problems are found useful to help leaders transcend the limitation of current mental models through integration and differentiation of experiential knowledge and conceptual knowledge learned. Unfortunately, only a few HEIs offered leadership training courses to departmental leaders. Furthermore, leaders’ leadership expertise and credibility can be enhanced by career-related support, such as purposeful
placement of challenging job assignments and committee works that enhance leaders’ visibility in the organizations. Moreover, psychosocial support provided by supervisors and colleagues enhance the leaders’ resilience to challenges and motivation for self-development. Nonetheless, to provide robust organizational support to departmental leaders, it is indispensable for HEIs’ top management to commit adequate resources in providing enriching developmental experiences, leadership training and development intentions, and formulate developmental-friendly policies and organizational practices to construct a supportive climate to leader development.

**Theme 4: Personal drive as impetus for growth**

Besides a supportive environment, individuals’ inner motivation gives impetus to leader development. Based on the participants’ first-person experiences, it is found that their personal drives are manifested in three subthemes: (a) career aspiration, (b) Self-awareness of development needs, and (c) Motivation to develop.

**Career aspiration.** In business and many other sectors, where organizational hierarchy is designed in a highly structured fashion, aspiration to higher-rank positions is often the motivating factor for individuals to climb up the career ladder. As described in Theme 1 however, departmental leaders in HEIs are often passively assigned to the leadership positions. Against this backdrop, what different career aspirations do departmental leaders in HEIs possess? How do their career aspirations drive their pursuit for greater leadership effectiveness? On
these questions, the eight participants showed diverse motives toward their career development as departmental leaders. Firstly, four participants working in the research or teaching departments were often driven by a sense of responsibilities to address institutional needs, as they opined:

Anna: And I thought it was part of my responsibilities, so I accepted his invitation… Of course if someone wants to be promoted, he or she will be willing to take up functional posts, otherwise, everybody will see that as hot potato.

Chloe: I also thought I had to do more to sustain my performance; for example, like what are the new things I really want to implement, to address some of the current problems, or some of the new ideas I really want to put my philosophy into practice that I was unable to do when I was not the full Program Leader.

Ella: The department was going through some difficult time - it was highly divided. I was in department meetings to see how people were fighting, screaming on one another, and so on. And I don't want to see that... I want to do something for the department.

David: Seriously, I don’t feel comfortable being considered as an Associate Dean. In fact, many of these opportunities of course I would accept. But many of them, sometimes would be reluctantly accepted. I know if I don’t accept it, the situation will become worse. I will be better accepting it than not accepting it.

The above academic-growth leaders were reluctant to assume leadership positions because for them, as academics, leadership position is just a means to construct an organizational environment conducive to achievement of scholarly goals (i.e., improving research or teaching), rather than an end itself. Their decisions to assume leadership roles were driven by a sense of “responsibilities” (Anna) to “do something for the department” (Ella and David) to help rescue
an undesirable situation, rather than personal ambitions toward higher positions or power.

Anna’s analogy between “hot potato” and the image of leadership highlights these leaders’ salient emotional response – fear – toward the leadership role as an identity-threatening experience (c.f. subtheme “increasing expectations on accountability” in Theme 3). Against this backdrop, they accepted a leadership position with a sense of personal sacrifice rather than a sense of personal glory. For instance, David explained his emotional struggle behind his decision to accept the associate deanship:

If the environment is not in order, then you know what I mean, it is really difficult to achieve my objective. At least I have to make sacrifice not to make the environment worse.

David reiterated several times his mixed feelings of accepting the leadership position with words like “don’t feel comfortable” and “reluctant” and “sacrifice.” Such emotional struggle is attributed to the conflict between organizational needs and personal career goals.

Ultimately, these academic-growth leaders’ career goals are toward scholarly achievements in terms of research or teaching excellence, as Ella and David admitted:

Ella: My interest is really in the academic, and I like research and so on. And I did not really plan to taking up an administrative role… It was not planned as like “This is my career, I want to do this; I want to do that.”

David: I think in the whole sense, in my career I want to achieve something obviously, which may not be measured by my position and level. I want to train the best students, OK.
As David stressed, their academic-growth career goals cannot be “measured” by leadership “positions and levels.” Their long-term pursuit is not directed toward higher leadership positions. Inevitably, they saw their leadership roles as an interlude in their lifelong academic career path, which is different from the typical phenomenon in non-academic organizations, as Ella illustrated:

It’s perfectly legitimate for someone who is a Head today and become a regular faculty member the next day. I guess it’s far more difficult for businesses to do that. I mean you can’t really change your card and say you’re no longer a manager. That doesn't work. But in academia, it’s a lot more acceptable. I guess anyone in the academic leadership role, he or she needs to keep in mind that it is not a position to hold on forever.

Ella’s account reflects a traditional view of academic leadership as a periodical role rotation. According to this view, “being led” and “leading” under an autonomous academic culture and flat organizational structure do not imply a subordinate-superordinate power relationship that typically exists in a hierarchical organization. Instead, a leadership position means to them a set of duties and responsibilities to be discharged for the common good of the department. Hence, academic leaders feel “legitimate” to switch between the two roles anytime.

Contrary to the above academic leaders, the four participants who worked in more business-like education and training departments possessed career goals relevant to their
personal advancement. Hence, they actively sought opportunities for higher leadership positions in their career, as they shared below:

Garvin: Because in the last decade, the education sector was expanding, so I grasped different opportunities in the sector and now serving my current capacity.

Benny: It could be predicted that there were big opportunities there [in higher education sector] to expand, to develop. So I joined the force.

Hannah: Actually it's not about a leadership position - It's the drive to try different new things because I got bored quite easily (laugh). So I like challenges and changes a lot.

Francis: Of course, you know I like challenges. And I also would like to see it as the way you would get promotion sometime in the future.

Garvin and Benny represent many of those people who entered the self-financing education institutions to seek for better career prospects amid the rapid expansion of the sector under the educational reform. On the other hand, Hannah embraced leadership challenges to seek excitement from novel experiences. She took initiatives in seeking higher leadership positions as a means to satisfy her aspiration for an exciting career life. Similarly, Francis also disliked the boredom of a stable job. He considered promotion to higher leadership levels as his career goal, which is demonstrated in his explanation of making a career move:

Because I had been with the institution for 8 years already. I felt a bit bored. As I could see if I was promoted, what kind of job I could take up. Not much challenges I could see.

From Francis and Hannah’s accounts, we can identify another type of career aspiration that is different from that of those academic-growth leaders. These career-growth leaders are
motivated to avoid the boredom of keeping the status quo and thus seek for new challenges at higher leadership positions to enrich their career or life experiences.

In sum, two types of career aspirations were identified from the participants. Those academic-growth leaders perceived academic leadership as an interlude during their academic career, in which they sacrificed their academic career for a period to help address pertinent problems in the department that may ultimately affect their scholarly pursuit. In contrast, those career-growth leaders were motivated to pursue for a sense of progression throughout their careers. They persistently look for new challenges at higher leadership levels to enrich their life experience. Comparing to the academic-growth aspiration, a career-growth career aspiration is more compatible with the long-term, progressive perspective of leader development.

The above finding raises an important question: How will different career aspirations affect leaders’ motivation and self-awareness of their improvement needs? This question will be addressed in the following two subthemes.

**Self-awareness of development needs.** As departmental leaders adopt a learning-by-doing approach to developing their leadership expertise, their ability to identify self-development needs in tandem with changing task requirements can significantly affect their maturation as effective leaders. As Hannah contended, “I don't know how you define effectiveness. Effective leaders I think have to be *adaptive.*” Indeed, all participants,
regardless of their career aspirations, demonstrated considerable degree of self-awareness of their needs for adaptation when their leadership roles changed, as illustrated below:

Hannah: I think keep learning new things and keep adapting and updating things are important, especially in these few years in the academic field, there are a lot of changes. So we have to keep learning fast and then change things accordingly.

Francis: When you ask, “How do you identify your learning needs by yourself?” You must have some reflection all the time. Throughout the time when you take one job at a time, you must have some reflections on how can I do better? If I made a mistake, how can I do better next time? Blah, blah, blah. If I can't do better, why can’t I? Is it because I'm lack of knowledge, lack of experience...blah, blah, blah? Then sort it out. This is how I did to better reflect on myself.

Garvin: From my experience in that organization, I was still using my own leadership style. I didn’t change that much. On the other hand, when I have to communicate with different colleagues, then I need to adapt.

Anna: I think I don’t have sufficient skills to manage different parties because over the past few years we have sort of reforms. We need to launch new programs, sharpen our competitive edge, do marketing and branding, develop new initiatives to synergize the colleagues of the whole department to work with other departments. So I think I don’t have sufficient leadership skills to manage the complexity of recent changes.

David: This is the difference as I progress to a so-called higher level. You need to have an even better understanding of how the world works. So you don’t just look at your own discipline. You look at the bigger part of the world.

From the above narratives, a number of dimensions of self-awareness can be identified.

According to Hannah, “keep learning fast,” or even “learn ahead” is the only way to keep pace with, and adapt to environmental changes. As such, self-awareness is the starting point that triggers subsequent adaptive learning actions. Effective leaders also need to exercise discipline.
in maintaining *constant self-awareness* to keep their development a continuous process. For Francis, self-awareness is achieved by “*reflection all the time,*” which reiterates the important role of self-reflection in the learning-by-doing approach delineated in Theme 2 “advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice.” Reflective practice involves an active introspection process of self-questioning. During this process, as Garvin suggested, leaders have to diagnose what leadership skills are required in a *situation* and discern whether a change in leadership behavior is warranted. By doing so, they are able to identify the needs of learning new *skills* (as shown in Anna’s account), or the needs of developing more sophisticated *leadership philosophies* (as shown in David’s account). Such development needs analysis is often triggered during leaders’ transition into higher leadership positions. However, self-awareness of development needs is also necessary during daily leadership enactment; for example, as Chloe illustrated:

>If I have to *reflect* on it personally, I would say *the room for improvement* is I am too much buried in *daily operational tasks*; and what I am lacking is actually to sit down and think about the *strategic direction* of the program; and not just to handle firefighting every day.

In the above account, Chloe was able to identify her areas of improvement through retrospection to her daily work life. Through retrospection, she was able to identify limitations in her current way of working and refine her approach. As she put it, “*We have new things and challenges emerging every day.* *I take that as learning as you go.*” On the other hand,
although self-awareness often triggers adaptive learning behaviors, as Garvin and Ella argued, there is a limitation on the extent of making behavioral change:

Garvin: I think the starting point is to understand what kind of person you are. And then you pick up your leadership style. Of course, I am not talking about changing your behavioral style. Sometimes when you deal with different tasks and different people, your behavior will be different - I mean the way of persuading people may be different. But eventually, you will stick to your own style, rather than changing it completely.

Ella: Say, I'm an introvert, I could never go out and go to the bar, you know, to go with my colleagues and other industry professionals, pack their back and drinks, blah, blah, blah. I can never be that type of leader. It's not something I'll learn to become… because I will never be good at it. And it would be out of my skin, I would I hate doing that.

Using the words “never” and “hate,” Ella warned strongly that maladaptive behaviors that crash with a leader’s personality will cause strong ambivalence about the self, thereby making such behavioral adaptation unsustainable. Garvin and Ella’s accounts imply that adaptive behaviors has to be rooted in one’s personality (see Theme 5 in this chapter). As Garvin contended, understanding about the self (i.e., values, mental models, and behavioral patterns) is necessary for leaders to evaluate the compatibility of a behavior style with their personality. Leaders with self-understanding are able to determine the limit of their adaptive behaviors. Beyond such limit, they need to prepare themselves to give the position to the “right person,” as Ella opined. As mentioned earlier, it is perfectly legitimate for scholars like Ella to redirect their career track back to research or teaching if they decided to step down from a
leadership position. Giving up a leadership position may not be a difficult decision for academic-growth leaders. However, for those career-growth leaders, who have been focusing on an educational management career track like Garvin, giving up a leadership position is much more costly. Moving to an organization compatible with their personality becomes the solution to resolve the abovementioned personality-role conflict.

To conclude, regardless of diversity in career aspirations, all participants showed strong self-awareness in their developmental needs, which is underpinned by their personal ideals (sense of responsibility or sense of personal achievement) relevant to discharging their job responsibilities as academic leaders. Indeed, in order to perform their leadership role effectively in dynamic environment, leaders have to cultivate a habit of constantly diagnosing situational demands and thereby developing advanced skills, behavioral patterns, and leadership philosophies through constant self-reflection during their leadership enactment process. However, leaders with an academic-growth career aspiration may not see the need of developing their leadership expertise over the long run. In addition, as leaders’ adaptive behaviors have to be rooted in, and compatible with their personality, leaders need to develop adequate self-understanding to keep behavioral change within the zone of compatibility and avoid causing personality-role conflict. Thus, maintaining constant self-awareness about the situation and the self is a pre-cursor for persistent leader development.
Motivation to develop. As the saying goes, “where there's a will, there's a way.” While self-awareness informs the areas of improvement, self-improvement effort sustains only when individuals are self-motivated. Their outlook toward challenges and magnitude of motivation affect their perseverance in developmental pursuit. Based on participants’ accounts, challenges can be conceived in two aspects, namely job demands and set back (see subtheme “challenges as catalyst for growth”). Holding a positive or negative outlook toward challenges may determine whether one can endure challenges instead of regressing back to the comfort zone.

Interestingly, most participants showed a positive outlook toward challenges, as illustrated in the examples below:

David: Certainly all environments will help people to learn if you are willing to learn. So it is not an environment thing. Really, it is whether you like to learn from the environment. As I said, whether you want to learn from the world.

Hannah: Well, to me staying positive is very important. Even though he [supervisor] gave me a lot of different things – some people may complain about heavy workload – I do see them as chances for me to touch on different things.

Francis: Of course you know I like challenges. And I also would like to see it as the way you would get promotion sometime in the future… So I decided to move, even move out of my comfort zone.

Chloe: Well, I would say I am motivated by both Theory-X and -Y. By X, it is because some of the program leader’s responsibilities are more like hygiene factors. If you don’t do it, you will be penalized… I think Theory-Y is because I’m a high achiever. I am motivated by my conscience to discharge fully with my responsibilities.
David’s account emphasizes the primacy of the will in individuals’ learning from lived experience. In other words, leader development has to be a self-directed endeavor. Without the will to learn, one cannot benefit from the developmental experiences provided by the environment. From this perspective, Hannah was able to see various job assignments (i.e., developmental experience) in a positive light as developmental opportunities rather than “workload.” As such, they were willing to “move out of the comfort zone” like Francis did.

Note that although their behaviors were similar, their motivations were different. Both David and Hannah were largely driven by intrinsic motivation, i.e., a desire to develop a better understanding of the world or their works. This, for instance, is demonstrated by Hannah’s assertion: “I think myself to be quite ambitious or aggressive (laugh). I want to conquer it [challenge] (laugh), because I wanted to find out what was wrong.”

On the other hand, as Francis and Chloe’s accounts suggest, extrinsic motivation also played a part in fueling challenge-seeking intention. As Chloe confessed, “I am motivated by both Theory-X and -Y.” On the one hand, she had a personal urge to “make an impact on improving things” in her programs; on the other, she was driven by an urge to “be accepted” as a leader and avoid “penalty.” Essentially, a sense of insecurity was a pushing factor for her. By contrast, although Francis felt “very excited to be exposed to different things,” aspiration for career advancement has been a significant motivator to him, which served as a pulling factor for
him. Effects of extrinsic motivation on a leader’s perseverance may decline over time, as shown in Francis and Ella’s accounts:

Francis: But of course age matters. You know, like me right now, sorry no more challenges because I think have got enough challenges already!

Ella: I guess I'm not very keen on being a leader or administrator. It depends on what the needs and opportunities are. I could be very happy coming and going back to complete academia. Ha-ha-ha (laugh).

We can see that Francis’s appetite for challenges subsided when reaching certain age, which indicates decay in the motivating effect of career ambitions on challenge-seeking intention.

On the other hand, Ella had been at the outset an unwilling leader, who accepted leadership position because of organizational needs. Her lack of career interest in leadership role reduced her motivation of pursuing long-term development of leadership skills, which contrasted sharply with those with strong career aspirations to leadership positions. Clearly, career goal significantly affects leaders’ motivation to lead and thereby perseverance in self-development.

Overall speaking, extrinsic motivation may not sustain leaders’ persistent self-development over the long run.

As mentioned earlier, another form of challenges is setback. Facing increasingly challenging jobs and novel problems, setback is inevitable in a leader’s work life. From a developmental perspective, setback signals a need for adaptive learning to correct exposed deficiency in a leader’s current state of expertise repertoire. However, strong self-regulation is
the precursor empowering leaders to withstand the emotional burden triggered by challenges.

This was shown in all participants’ accounts, as demonstrated in examples below:

Anna: When you are in difficult situation, I will try to think positively, but sometimes it is not easy. I need to keep up myself. Yeah, I think it is part of the process… From this perspective, to be psychologically prepared for the contingency, I would understand change is a process, a journey.

Garvin: Well, my own way is to stay positive. It is true. I just think there is always a way out, even though the final outcome may not be as desirable as I expected. So, if I decide that it cannot be resolved, then I just forget it – It is out of my control. But if it is manageable, we can find a way to fix it. So it is just about working out a solution.

Benny: I am not emotional. I usually won’t take an emotional approach towards challenges or bad experience… I would say I wish to have a positive mind towards bad things. We should always think positively, act positively and express it clearly to my team members.

All participants overwhelmingly stressed the importance of “keeping it up”, i.e., keeping a positive frame of mind when encountering problems and setbacks. This, as Anna admitted, “is not easy.” Being aware of such threat to psychological well-being, they adopted effective psychological adjustment strategies. The first is anticipation. By recognizing that change is dynamic, they were able to enhance her tolerance of ambiguity and thus become “psychologically prepared the contingency.” Second, by conceiving herself as part of a “change process,” Anna was able to delay her self evaluation of performance outcome, thereby protecting her self-efficacy, as she argued, “I can’t say this is the end and whether I am successful or not, because I am in the process.” Anticipation helps leaders adjust their expectations on
performance outcome and protect them against psychological shock arisen from unexpected situations. By doing so, they can keep their motivation for constructive problem solving and adaptive learning at the same time preventing destructive self-doubt from hurting self-esteem. Benny referred it as avoiding an “emotional approach” to setback, as he put it, “My first reaction is that I want to take care of it, handle it as soon as possible and evaluate how serious the damage it would occur.”

Garvin’s account demonstrates another psychological adjustment strategy – attribution. Garvin’s reflection on an undesirable performance outcome started with an evaluation of whether the outcome was due to controllable or uncontrollable factors. We can see that self-reflection on setback involves a self-assessment and redefinition of one’s internal locus of control when necessary. Adaptive learning happens only when things were perceived to be within one’s locus of control, as Francis recalled:

At that time, I learned how to be patient. That means if there's something that you cannot change, then just be patient and watch. But in the meantime, you just try to do your best in your own boundary.

On the other hand, attributing an undesirable outcome to uncontrollable factors help let go undue anxiety, self-doubt and frustration and preserve self-efficacy and self-esteem. As such, a clear self-understanding of locus of control is important for leaders to preserve emotional well-being from setbacks and keep self-development within a manageable pace (see also
subtheme “progressive job assignment as warm-up”), as Francis exhorted, “So I think that as an effective leader, you have to have a great clear mind (pause), patience, so that you know how to handle things that you cannot control.”

In a different light, Benny’s account extends the importance of positive thinking beyond personal level to team levels. According to him, leaders’ positive thinking triggers positive words and deeds, which ripple through leaders’ circle of influence and shape staff morale through leader-follower interactions. In this way, positive thinking is communicated to the subordinates, and fosters efforts of collaborative problem solving at the team level.

**Summary of Theme 4.** This theme delineates how leaders’ individual differences (career aspiration, self-awareness, and motivation to develop) affect leaders’ momentum of developing leadership expertise. Firstly, two types of career aspirations are found among participants. Career-growth leaders were driven by a career ambition toward higher leadership positions throughout their career path. Academic-growth leaders were driven by a sense of responsibility to address an organizational need within a limited time span. For these leaders, their long-term career goals rest in excellence in research and teaching, rather than higher leadership status. Such differences in career aspiration affect their self-regulation, i.e., capacity to adapt their behaviors to tackle dynamic leadership challenges in the long term. A long-term career goal toward leadership is associated with self-regulation in leader development over the long run.
On the other hand, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations affect individual leaders’ perseverance in adaptive learning when confronting job challenges and setback. Intrinsic motivators include personal ideals, e.g., vision for better organizational environment, programs or students; and vision for personal achievement. Whereas extrinsic motivators include desire for higher status, desire for acceptance, and fear of penalty. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations stimulate individual leaders to assume ownership of their personal development and endure adversities during their career as leaders. Leaders with strong career ambition and learning motivation embrace job challenges as developmental opportunities, rather than workload. Nevertheless, leaders driven more by extrinsic motivations may link to weaker persistence because their motivation is contingent on external factors.

Secondly, adaptive learning requires constantly identifying areas of improvement to cope with job demands. Underpinned by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for adaptive learning, leaders are able to develop strong self-awareness of their development needs to inform subsequent self-development efforts. They have to cultivate a habit of engaging in constant environmental diagnosis and self-reflection to advance their leadership skills, behavioral styles, and leadership philosophies over time. However, leaders’ adaptive behaviors have to be rooted in, and compatible with their personality. Adequate self-understanding is necessary to keep personal adaptation within the zone of compatibility and avoid causing personality-role conflict.
Personality-role conflict that exceeds one’s scope of adaptability is associated with increased turnover intention and reduced motivation to lead.

Lastly, persistent improvement effort has to be sustained by individuals’ motivation to develop, which is affected by their outlook toward challenges. Effective leaders try to maintain a positive frame of mind toward job challenges and setback, which are inevitable in their work life. Positive thinking affects not only individual leaders’ words and deeds of enduring adversities, but also ripples through the team levels to foster collaborative problem solving through leader-follower interactions.

Specifically, leaders deploy psychological adjustment strategies of anticipation and attribution to protect emotional well-being. Anticipation is a defense strategy that helps leaders to enhance their *tolerance of ambiguity* and get prepared against emotional shocks arising from contingent job challenges. By recognizing themselves as part of the change process, leaders are able to adjust their *expectations* on task performance, thereby reducing undue stress and anxiety when confronting challenges. By doing so, leaders can avoid an emotional response to setbacks, and focus their energy on rational problem solving. When confronting setback, effective leaders also reflect on and redefine their *locus of control*. By differentiating controllable versus uncontrollable problems, attribution strategy allows leaders to let go the frustrations and focus on
improving areas that are controllable. In this way, leaders protect their self-efficacy and self-esteem against destructive self-doubt.

Theme 5: Leader maturation through cumulative learning

As discussed in Chapter II Literature Review, leader development is widely conceived as a progressive spiral in which leaders gradually achieve mastery of leadership expertise over time. In parallel, individual leaders also develop more in-depth understanding about the self, in terms of self-efficacy and leader identity. This process is depicted in three subthemes: cumulative learning, self-efficacy, and leader identity development.

**Cumulative learning.** As Theme 2 “advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice” shows, an important part of leader development is that expert leaders at higher levels demonstrate more sophisticated leadership models than those at lower levels to confront increasingly complex challenges. Their mastery of leadership expertise is resulted from cumulative learning from practicing experience over time, as Chloe described, “Well, I think it [my growth as a leader] is an ongoing learning process,” which is echoed by Benny, “I think everything is accumulative.” He further elaborated:

I would say my perspectives changed over time when I needed to deal with different levels of people, more complicated matters and when I learned how to manage multiple tasks. That means we should evolve and find more long-lasting, sustainable way of effective leadership, rather than short-term effective leadership.
Benny’s account shows that his perspectives of effective leadership is not static. His quest for “long-lasting, sustainable way of effective leadership” indicates his conception that a leadership model effective in the short-term may not be sustainable over time when coping with increased task complexity and diverse social relationships. Therefore, he deliberately kept his leadership perspectives evolving in tandem with heightening job demands. While Benny’s development focus was leadership skills and techniques, David demonstrated a more complex and abstract thinking about leadership and life. He provided an excellent account on the construction of leadership philosophy from a social constructivist perspective:

I love to know more about the world always. I think that will help me as a whole person, not just a leader. As a whole person, I need to survive, then I need to understand the world. So to understand the world, I do a lot of things. I do the talking with different people, reading books, or just read anything I come along that can help me to know more. I think understanding is knowing how the world works, how different people within the world work.

For David, understanding how the (social) world works is essential to survival for any individuals, not just for a leader. As the social world consists of complex interweaving relationships among diverse actors and multifaceted contextual factors, simple models about life and leadership fail to enable leaders to discern task demands, act wisely, and achieve expert performance. Thus, developing the wisdom to “see through” situational complexities was deemed far more vital for a leader’s survival than acquiring specific techniques, as he opined:

History says that there are so many factors, so many different persons leading to different factors interact with different persons in an event. All these things are so complex. For
those people who can see through these complexities, I think they can have a better chance to survive. So, this is one of the things I learned. *I don’t learned any particular technique. I don’t think there are techniques there, but there are some wisdom, some wisdom about that if you try to understand the whole story, especially for a leader... To make the right decision, you have to see through all these complexities, noises, to make a decision.*

According to Benny and David, effective leaders have to take initiatives in acquiring various possible learning experiences to advance the skills, expertise, or even worldly wisdom about leadership and life. Moreover, sophisticated leadership models were resulted from their effective use of higher-order thinking in knowledge construction, as illustrated below:

Francis: Overall, these years let you become a lot *more mature person*, because you won't see things from a single point; you *see them from different perspectives*. And you learned how to balance the interests of different groups. You learned how to *apply different tactics on different people* when you manage them.

Garvin: But from my past experiences in working with *different* institutions, I think I learned *different* work ethics and attitudes of *different* colleagues, I am sure from these *accumulated experiences*, I can apply them to deal with current challenges here.

These accounts show that during the maturation process, expert leaders accumulate larger repertoire of leadership expertise and tactics learned from different experiences. More important, Francis’s account shows that expert leaders apply higher-order thinking of differentiation strategy to evaluate the applicability of a tactic to specific contexts. As such, they are able to analyze the characteristics of a novel situation and choose suitable tactics and strategies accordingly, as Garvin illustrated. Further to knowledge differentiation strategy,
most participants also adopted another knowledge construction strategy – integration, as shown below:

Hannah: I think that from different positions I can get different experiences. Eventually I can consolidate all I have learned.

Francis: Formal training gives you the structure and formal knowledge, which is very important. This is like an interface and the structure of knowledge so that you can internalize all these knowledge and observation into your own doing.

Garvin: When I learned about the business discipline, I understood different people have different personalities and choose different ways of leading people. Actually, it was not a kind of trial-and-error. There would be different kinds of leaders. When I work in an organization, this understanding gives me a background sense to identify why and how the management in that organization works. If I don’t have that kind of background, I won’t be able to tell or distinguish and rationalize the behaviors of the leaders. When I understand that, when I work long enough, I understand the culture, the way of doing things, I can try to accommodate and use my own leadership style to work in this organization. So to me, I don’t think it is a trial-and-error approach. I just develop myself throughout the process.

Anna: When I know this is the way, I can’t tell whether this is learned from books, workshops, or my supervisor. It is difficult to differentiate, but I think these three sources are important.

The above accounts suggest that knowledge differentiation does not imply that the knowledge and skills acquired from different experiences were compartmentalized in a leader’s mind. Rather, higher-order thinking of synthesis strategy was functioning. The leader evaluates the newly acquired conceptual and experiential knowledge (in Francis’s words, “knowledge and observation”) and “consolidate” them into his or her existing “structure of
knowledge,” i.e. schemas or mental models. This explains why Anna was unable to tell the source of a specific tactic when applying it – Through knowledge integration, new knowledge is “internalized” and forms an integral part of the new whole; and synthesis of basic level skills forms more sophisticated leadership models. Garvin’s account offers an example to this notion.

His business training gave him the conceptual knowledge, which laid the foundation of his knowledge base. Then, work experiences in different organizations added to his knowledge structure and enabled him to understand different leaders’ behaviors in different cultures. Through integrating all of prior learning, he then developed his own style. The notion that new understanding is built on current state of knowing has profound implications on the trajectory of leader development, as Francis and Ella opined:

Francis: I'm interested in all my experience to become a leader step by step. I started my career as a frontline teacher and then moved up to coordinator, academic leader, course director, and college director, blah, blah, blah. I think I cannot miss any link in this chain. Missing any of it, I cannot become an effective leader to me.

Ella: I guess it doesn't start when you assume the position. I guess leadership or whatever you call it, you start building some of that even without a formal title… I think it’s an ongoing process. When you assume a leadership role, it just like one of the clicks, and you get to do A, B, C, and D and you can make these decisions. But a lot of that has started long before.

Both Francis and Ella’s accounts suggest that expert leaders’ development of leadership expertise is an ongoing maturation process, which occurs over a considerable long period, even before leaders assumed a formal title. This process is visualized by Francis as an image of
“chain,” and by Ella as a number of “clicks.” For them, the trajectory of development for leadership parallels with the leaders’ career ladder. Hence, it is deemed as a stage-based, “step-by-step” process – like doing the “A, B, C, and D.” As each step is the building block for the next, in Francis’s view, jumping a career stage will be like “missing any link in this chain,” and thus harmful to leader development. This point explains the rationales behind the subtheme “progressive job assignment as warm-up” in Theme 3.

In sum, leader development can be conceived as an ongoing maturation process in parallel with leaders’ career advancement trajectory. Leadership expertise is the outcome of an accumulative learning process over a considerable long period well before a leader assumed any formal leadership title. Throughout their career, expert leaders not only acquire a larger repertoire of leadership skills, conceptual and experiential knowledge from different work experiences, but also apply higher-order thinking to differentiate and integrate newly acquired knowledge into their current state of knowing. By doing so, they are able to integrate basic level skills and knowledge into increasingly sophisticated structure (i.e., mental models) of leadership expertise. As the new is built on the current state of knowing, step-by-step career advancement is in line with the progressive nature of leader development.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy about leadership is one of the important components of leadership identity, which is an integral part of a leader’s general self-identity. The interplay
between self-efficacy and leader development is explored in this subtheme. We can first compare the participants’ experiences before and after coping with challenges:

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<th>Before Coping with Challenges</th>
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<td>Anna: I would say I was competent and effective because the changes were not so fundamental and complex. But right now I can’t say I am very effective.</td>
<td>Hannah: [Overcoming subordinates’ hostility] is important because it helped me to build up my confidence in dealing with different kinds of people – nice ones or some not so nice.</td>
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<td>Chloe: I am confident in doing tasks well. But in terms of motivating people, because I am not managing a big group, I am not really confirmed that I have that kind of competence.</td>
<td>Ella: Well, over the past few years, I’m glad that the department has been functioning a lot better, ha-ha-ha (laugh)… I think I’ve become more confident. The fact that the faculties are behind me helps my confidence a lot.</td>
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In Anna and Chloe’s cases, they developed a strong sense of self-efficacy from their previous work experiences. However, their self-efficacy does not necessarily endure when confronting unfamiliar situations. This is because the effectiveness of their leadership approach under such a situation has not yet been validated in actual practice (in Chloe’s words, “not really confirmed”). As Hannah and Ella’s accounts shows, self-efficacy is linked to leaders’ self-evaluation of specific task performances. Positive self-evaluation (i.e., perceived success) brings a sense of achievement and enhances self-efficacy. Although the above suggests that development of self-efficacy can be task- and context- specific, other participants exhibited stronger self-efficacy across novel situations:

Garvin: To me, I am quite confident that I can deal with that… I am sure from these accumulated experiences, I can apply them to deal with current challenges here.
Investigator: Does being new create a threat to you?
Benny: Uh, it is not a threat to my leadership.

David: I actually seldom think about that. I think it [assuming a leadership position] quite 
natural. Sorry, I am not being boastful on this issue. I just try to do my best, and 
that’s it, basically. Yeah.

Although Garvin recognized that “To deal with internal conflicts is the biggest challenge
I am now facing,” he expressed a strong sense of self-belief and self-confidence. His
self-confidence was derived from evaluating the contextual applicability of his accumulated
experience against current task requirements (dealing with people issues). Since he considered
his available tactics and strategies applicable to the current challenge, his self-efficacy endured in
this situation. From Garvin’s account, we can see that situational evaluation helps leaders to
extend self-efficacy in novel situation where their leadership expertise is applicable. Their
internal locus of control expands accordingly.

We can imagine that when leaders accumulate larger repertoire of leadership knowledge
and tactics from diverse experiences, thereby enlarging the contextual applicability of their
leadership expertise. In this scenario, expert leaders develop stronger self-efficacy across wider
contexts and thereby stronger internal locus of control. This may explain why Benny did not
feel threatened by the new organizational environment. Likewise, David’s claim “just try to do
my best” indicates his strong internal locus of control arising from a strong self-efficacy.
From the above analysis, we can conclude that successful coping enhance leaders’
self-efficacy in a specific context. Accumulative learning and evaluation of situational
applicability of acquired leadership expertise enhance leaders’ self-efficacy in wider leadership
domains and thereby their internal locus of control. Expert leaders with large repertoire of
leadership expertise thus possess strong self-efficacy and internal locus of control in their general
self-efficacy. While the above discussion depicts the effect of leader development on
self-efficacy, Francis and Hannah’s narratives tells the other side of the story – the effect of
self-efficacy on leader development:

Francis: So as effective leaders, we always need to have introspection and also
self-reflection on what we did and how we could do better in the future.

Hannah: Actually I think because I considered myself prepared for that position then I
strived to get the opportunity. Ha-ha-ha (laugh).

With a successful career history, Francis had strong confidence in himself as an effective
leader. That enabled him to maintain strong motivation for ongoing self-improvement during
leadership practice. This suggests general self-efficacy enhances leaders’ motivation to develop
in putting self-improvement effort. In this regard, self-efficacy and leader development has a
mutually reinforcing relationship.

Hannah’s story represents an exemplar. In the above account, she portrayed an image of
a person who possessed strong general self-efficacy and a strong desire to seek new development
opportunities. However, she was a very different person when she was offered a leadership position in her early career – she actually felt unconfident and reluctant. Her transformation began with a significant experience that boosted her self-efficacy. She successfully dealt with hostile challenges from subordinates who had much longer seniority than she did. Over time, she also gained wider exposure from new projects and tasks.

These successful experiences not only enhanced her self-efficacy in task domains, but also in her general learning ability, as she appraised, “I consider myself as a fast learner because I'm not afraid of learning new things. I like it.” Same as Francis, Hannah exhibited highly positive attitude toward learning, and strong adaptive learning ability. Possessing such a strong self-efficacy, she embraced challenges as testing ground for her ability, “I would say when there is a time of staff turnover, it provides me with good opportunity to show my ability,” she claimed. Ultimately, her successful transformation illustrates that successful development experiences enhance leaders’ self-efficacy, which in turn reinforces their motivation to self-development and ultimately fuels a benign cycle of progressive development.

**Leader identity development.** Leader identity is a sub-identity of oneself regarding the self-concepts of his or her role as a leader. As detailed in the subtheme “self-awareness of development needs” in Theme 4, understanding the self and task demands is the pre-cursor of leader development. On the other hand, leader’s growth and maturation also shape the
development of leader identity, which is captured in this subtheme.

Leader identity development involves interactions among a leader’s role demands, self-identity, and surrounding social relationships. A leadership position brings a new social role, and a set of expectations attached to it, to a leader’s self-identity. They discussed their professional roles as follows:

Chloe: I think professionally there are certain goals that I must fulfill to be in line with the organizational goals so that I can sustain the program.

Ella: I suppose being the middle management so to speak, one of the challenges is to take the department, and somehow take what you have and try to align it with the objective of the faculty and the university. I think those are the major challenges.

Francis: Of course, the number one decision I made is whether this decision is for the interest of the organization – that is very important. If that decision is for the sake of the organization, then we have to do it.

Anna: As I see, universities should be the institutions which can provide innovation for the society, so transformation is important for universities.

As we can see, most participants, regardless of their leadership levels, were cognizant of the role demands attached to formal leader titles imposed by the organization – first and foremost – as the persons to align the team (faculty members) and their actions with organizational directions and goals. As Ella pointed out, their professional role as mid-level managerial staff requires them to align and integrate diverse expectations from senior management and faculty members with their own. Anna’s account indicates that expectations
from the wider social environment also play a significant part in defining the leader’s role
demands. Ella’s account further illustrates this point:

> You need to align it with the faculty and the university's objective in order to function. I mean on top of that, of course students, industries, and all the stakeholders come into play. Otherwise that department can be one happy department and you are so happy that the ship sinks.

A leader’s role demands call for the construction of a professional self in his or her
identity. Leaders have to internalize the leader identity imposed by the external social
environment. A leader identity is developed by internalizing and integrating the professional
self with the current self-identity, which is not a straightforward process, as it involves redefining
the self, and triggers immense cognitive and emotional responses to a potential identity crisis.
These complex psychological reactions to becoming a leader were portrayed in participants’
accounts below:

David: Once you become a leader, then you are a different type of person. I don’t feel
comfortable with that.

Chloe: In my personality, I never like to be a leader.

Ella: I definitely don’t see myself as natural [leader]. Ha-ha-ha (laugh).

For David, the emergence of a new professional identity (leader) is salient to his original
self-identity, making him to question whether he will become “a different type of person.” For
him, a leader is not just about a new title or social status, but more important, a set of values,
competences, duties and social relationships that signify the essence of “leadership” expected in
this social role. As David put it, “I would say the position itself is one thing. Whether you are a leader, whether you have so called ‘leadership’ is another thing.” His argument indicates a leader identity beyond formal position, which recognizes that leadership is an enactment process among the leader and his or her followers. Meanwhile, Ella’s unnatural feeling implies that a leader identity was still foreign to her and not yet fully integrated into her self-identity. She had to acquire a new set of attitude, outlook, concepts, and behaviors to act like a leader, which was illustrated by others:

Chloe: Actually, I just pretend well, because I realized leader have to perceived competent and have competence in substance. So I am still learning competence in substance over time. But I think I am personally quite weak in perceived competence.

Garvin: Now, I think an effective leaders need to build up a role model for the teammates and convince them that he is able to lead them in proper way, say in a very complex manner.

Hannah: So I think to become a role model is very important. I tried to convince them not by just telling them how to do it, but demonstrating to them it is possible to do things in a different way,

Chloe’s narratives demonstrate that leader identity development involves not just cognitive and behavioral changes relevant to leadership expertise (substance), but also image management tactics to establish a credible leadership image perceived by others (perceived competence). Both Garvin and Hannah adopted the same image management strategy – positive modeling – to build a leader image with credible competences. By contrast, Chloe, as
a beginning leader, struggled to strengthen her leader image, as she narrated:

My personality may not at all be acceptable or compatible with organizational culture…

Like… I don’t care if they don’t call me with my title. But some people in my organization may perceive I am not taking things seriously, I am not experienced. I don’t know how to talk in the official manner like the Legislative Council members. I think this is an area to be developed. I am actually learning about that. For example… the way I show my friendliness may be perceived as they don’t have to take me seriously. So I have to exert certain bureaucratic things, yeah in my way of writing emails, asking people to do things.

Chloe found that her easy-going personality and informal style were incompatible with a formal organizational culture. Realizing that her lack of a credible leader image, she decided to learn the use of formal language, academic and professional title, etc., to signify her authority in interpersonal communications. Besides role demands and stakeholders’ expectations, social values also influence leader identity development. Women leaders’ behavioral adaptations in the male-dominant social environment give a perfect example. Chloe for instance, handled her way of giving instruction to male subordinates with extra care, “Personally I don’t like to be leading guys… the most important thing is how to protect the dignity, pride of guys.” In light of the traditional norm dictating women’s submissive role to men, she felt uneasy and sensitive in handling the power relations with male subordinates.

According to Anna, women’s traditional submissive image also jeopardizes women
leaders’ identity development. Women are often perceived as less authoritative, as she explained, “You know, women are more concerned about harmony and human relationship.”

To project an authoritative image, Hannah adopted more assertive and masculine behaviors, “I had to be more assertive in my previous job... my husband said I became a different person after becoming a leader - very tough. But I am not that tough in this job now.”

Their stories suggest that as a leader needs social acceptance to sustain a credible image, social environment inevitably shapes leader identity development. Hence, redefining a new self involves an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the current self against the professional self defined by the social environment to identify areas to be changed. Leader identity development then is part of a learning process in which a leader adapt the self to fit role expectations. Francis, Hannah, and Chloe lent support to this perspective:

Francis: If you talk about your personal aspiration, when you were inexperienced, of course you aspired yourself to be a leader. Actually, when you move on, you are a leader already; it is about demonstrating how you can sustain to be a leader. And how to sustain to be a leader you need to strengthen your other skills.

Hannah: Effective leaders, I think, have to be adaptive... You have to learn faster than the others, so that you can have the opportunity to train others, because you are the leader.

Chloe: I would say I am more like being forced to have this identity growing very fast and firm within myself because I have to take up the role and accountability. So I have to believe in myself.
Anna: I would describe *I learned to be a leader* – I won’t say I am an effective leader – through on-the-job training.

From the above quotes, we can see that leader identity is internalized in tandem with in leader’s growth when the leaders develop strong self-belief in their abilities. In other words, leader identity development is a byproduct of leader development. On the other hand, a quest for leader identity also motivates leader development, as highlighted in Hannah and Chloe’s narratives above. Thus, leader identity development and leader development is a mutually reinforcing spiral.

Adaptability, for Chloe, is vital for her personal effectiveness and thereby building of a credible leader image and identity. The focus of her identity is on herself, the “me.” Whereas for Hannah, adaptability matters not only at individual level, but also for the whole team, the “we.” She was cognizant of a leader’s duty of leading subordinates by teaching them way.

On this, Ella offered a different view as follows:

I think the leadership style works or not *really depends on what you are*. I don't think I can *really change* - maybe a little bit in terms of outlook- but there is a limitation to how I can change myself. I mean *beyond that it is not me*; and I cannot do.

I wouldn't mind taking up more administrative works, but I need to be *careful about my personal development* or career development in terms of the combination of academic and administrative work that I do, because if *I move solely into the administrative role, then my academic part suffers*, and I don’t want that.

A distinct contrast between Ella and Hannah’s accounts tells their different beliefs about the *self* in relation to social environment. Emphasizing adaptability, Chloe and Hannah placed
the primacy of social roles over the self. By contrast, Ella insisted on the primary of the self over social roles. In her narratives, we can find three identities, the self as a person, as an academic, and as an administrative leader. In defining her professional selves, she was unwilling to lose her academic identity built in the past. Moreover, she set a limit to the extent that her self-identity can be tailored for the role demands – “beyond that it is not me.” We can see that redefining a new self-identity involves careful trade-off between the gain and loss of certain part of the old self. Additionally, holding a belief that there exists a real self, Ella emphasized behavioral consistency and continuity in the identity development process. In light of this, leader identity development is conceived as a process of integrating the self with cumulative experience, as Ella maintained:

It's not like you are in a leadership position, or you assume a leadership position and then all of a sudden, you have to go into that. I think a lot of that has started [before you have a formal title].

For the above reason, David felt uncomfortable with a possible loss of the current self when a new identity was implanted; and as Chloe showed, twisting the current self could trigger emotional conflict. For them, the congruence between a leader’s old and new self is critical to maintain psychological health in leader identity development, which reiterates the point raised in the subtheme “self-awareness of development needs” in Theme 4 – adaptive behaviors has to be rooted in one’s personality. Note that a congruent leader identity forms the basis for authentic
leaders, who are able to gain trusts from others by consistent words and deeds (see subtheme “earned credibility and trust” in Theme 1), as Garvin pointed out:

When you try to twist your personality, you may be effective in a medium term, but to me it is more important that I can build trust with my teammates. It is better to be consistent in all times. At the end of the day, if your teammates find out you are acting differently, it will hamper your long-term relationships with them.

Other than imposing potential threat onto a leader’s self-identity, assuming a leadership position also changes a leader’s social relationships. For instance, David was bothered by being called a leader, “Psychologically, I don’t really like to be called a leader (laugh). Really I don’t. I can say that I don’t really like to be a position of leadership… This is my psychological problem. I don’t feel comfortable.” Being identified as a leader, David felt losing his long-held membership in the “peer group” (“we” – those being led by the bosses), although becoming a new member of the smaller “management team” (“they” – those bosses giving orders at higher up). Gain in a new membership may not compensate the loss of peer-group membership and may cause a sense of isolation and solitude, and reduce the psychosocial support available to new leaders (c.f. subtheme “support availability” in Theme 3). To avoid the above threat, most participants stressed an egalitarian perspective and rejected the leader-follower divide in work relationships:

Chloe: Well, I would say I would like to minimize the differences in our titles as I am a leader and they are team member. I don’t like to be in control, aggressive in decision-making.
David: I like to influence people; I don’t like to be dominant. Sometimes people, especially Chinese I think, expect leaders to be ego-dominant persons, which I don’t really feel like that way… Even I am in a position of leadership, I don’t believe that I am superior, or whatever.

Garvin: To me, I think nowadays even though you call somebody a leader, he still needs to be a good team player. They need to give a sense of humor and be approachable, instead of say, a power-oriented leadership style.

Hannah: I am a leader but in a sense I don't identify myself as someone of higher authority, very senior, and ask them to listen to my orders. That is not my style. So instead, I stay positive and just try to be quite friendly with my team and tell them what I expect - although we are friends, I do have my expectations.

In the above accounts, all participants were vigilant of the hierarchical power relations carried by the leader titles. Note that a stereotype of leader’s image that they described was a dictatorial leader who was “aggressive” (Chloe); egocentric, “dominant,” having a sense of superiority (David and Hannah); “power-oriented” (Garvin); and “giving orders” (Hannah). A dictator stereotype reflects a leader identity external to the self as someone who is exercising power out there on “me.” Despising such a dictator stereotype, the participants portrayed an idealized leader image, which is a team player who is likable (“a sense of humor”), “approachable”, and “friendly.” Such a leader ideal reflects a leader identity that had transcended personal authority and centering on relationships with subordinates, which is illustrated in Garvin and Benny’s narratives regarding their emphasis on staff relationships as leaders:
Garvin: I am a good listener and approachable... Also, I tried in every meetings to help them, to ease their concerns and difficulties… And then I would decide how their needs can be accommodated without hampering the overall objective of their functions and tasks.

Benny: First, I let them know I am here to help them to achieve more, and help them to overcome the difficulties… Let them understand well that I am part of the team.

According to Garvin, Hannah and Benny’s accounts, a leader is not just an ordinary team member, but also someone who can help to resolve common problems and set goals. It can be seen that their leader identity had transcended personal concerns (personal level) and centered on leader-follow relationships (relational levels), and even larger organizational purposes (collective level). As Hannah illustrated, when leaders become mature, there is a shift of focus in leader identity from individual to collective levels:

In the past you might be more focused on yourself - how to develop yourself, how to learn different things - but now you have to pay more attention to helping your team members to build up different skills; to helping them grow because I do consider that if you want a strong team, everyone has to be a strong shoulder.

From Hannah’s account, we can see that when leaders developed adequate leadership expertise, they are able to develop strong self-belief in their capabilities as leaders, i.e., a developed leader identity (c.f. subtheme “self-efficacy” in Theme 5). Their established self-confidence underpins their broadening perspectives about their roles beyond the self to relational and collective levels. A collective leader identity encourages leaders to reject the notion of autocratic leader, embrace the ideal of transformational leaders, who sees leadership as
a collective process, and empower followers’ capacities in their daily leadership enactment (c.f. subtheme “transformational vs. managerial leadership” in Theme 2).

**Summary of Theme 5.** This theme delineates the leader’s maturation process and its interactions with leader’s self-efficacy, and self-identity. Leader development is conceived as an ongoing maturation process in parallel with leaders’ career advancement trajectory. Leadership expertise is the outcome of an accumulative learning process throughout an individual’s lifespan development, especially during their work life. From different work experiences, leaders acquire a repertoire of leadership skills, conceptual and experiential knowledge. Expert leaders are able to apply higher-order learning to differentiate and integrate lower-order knowledge and skills into sophisticated knowledge structure of leadership expertise. As the new self is built on the current state of knowing, stage-based, step-by-step career advancement is conducive to progressive leader development.

Self-efficacy is positively associated with leader’s maturation. Advance in leadership expertise enhances the odd of successful coping, which in turn enhances leaders’ self-efficacy in specific contexts. Accumulative learning through knowledge differentiation and integration further enhances leader’s ability to operate effectively in novel situations and wider leadership domains, and thereby enlarging their internal locus of control and self-efficacy. On the other
hand, stronger self-efficacy also enhances leaders’ motivation to develop as leaders. Thus, leader development and self-efficacy constitutes a mutually reinforcing relationship.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provides a rich account of the multifaceted, interweaving, and longitudinal nature of leader development based on eight participants’ lived experiences in their personal, social and historical contexts. From an interpretative analysis, five superordinate themes have been identified and presented one by one. The major findings are summarized as follows:

**Theme 1: Top-down approach in leader selection and promotion**

1. HEIs in Hong Kong widely adopt a top-down approach in leader selection to address managerial concern on operational efficiency and manpower needs, typically in a haphazard and obscure fashion.

2. Departmental leaders are selected based on their academic credentials, cooperative personality, and seldom on their leadership competences.

3. Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, credible image, and trust from significant others are deemed vital for leaders to sustain their positions when engaging with increasingly diverse work relationships across organizational levels and unit boundaries. Leaders build trustworthy and credible images through
establishing behavioral consistency in prolonged relationships with others, impressive record of accomplishment of achievements, and image management tactics.

4. A leader’s reputation and popularity can spread around via his or her social circle and the Internet.

**Theme 2: Advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice**

5. While program leaders develop managerial leadership skills to ensure smooth program operation within established guidelines and procedures, departmental leaders tend to integrate managerial and transformational leadership approaches and lead staff forward by gaining their buy-in for common vision, goals, and directions.

6. When advancing to higher leadership levels, leaders’ roles are expanding from personal leadership to local leadership and ultimately to organizational leadership.

7. Leaders at higher levels tend to integrate managerial leadership approach with participative leadership approach to motivate subordinates and to align the expectations between the management and the subordinates through upward and downward communications.

8. Leaders develop more complex leadership expertise dominantly through on-the-job learning in the workplace, which places a strong emphasis on reflective practice through observation, deliberate practice, and self-reflection. Through reflective
practice, leaders engage in higher-order learning through differentiation and synthesis of lower-order skills.

9. While successful experience boosts leaders’ self-efficacy, negative experience often stimulates leaders’ motivation for self-improvement through self-reflection.

10. Learning from others (vicarious learning) is an effective means for departmental leaders to advance their leadership expertise. Beginning leaders can benefit substantially from apprenticeship or mentorship under a role model. Observing and learning from others in the social network help leaders, especially those at higher levels, evaluate and reflect on their leadership approaches.

11. To a certain extent, reading books (e.g., biography and history) helps leaders understand how human beings cope with different situations and inspires them to learn the lessons that enhance their leadership expertise.

12. Leaders enhance their leadership effectiveness through constantly reflecting on the applicability of their leadership strategies and tactics to maintain their fit with the work contexts in terms of organizational structure, cultural norms, historical practices, and interpersonal dynamics.

13. Individual leader’s intention of learning is contingent on the congruence of his or her personality with cultural values. Severe personality-cultural conflict is associated
with psychological confusion, ambivalence, reduced motivation to develop, and increased turnover intention.

14. Leadership expertise developed through learning by doing is confined by the scope of experiences. Formal leadership study may help leaders transcend their limitation in the mental models developed from experiential knowledge, but also provide a robust conceptual framework for leaders to analyze problems and facilitate the integration of conceptual and experiential knowledge.

**Theme 3: Rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth**

15. Higher leadership levels are associated with wider job responsibilities, increasingly complex role demands and novel job challenges, and greater external expectations on accountability.

16. Increased job challenges require the leaders to develop sophisticated leadership expertise for effective coping, which link to leaders’ motivation for learning.

17. Challenge is both a catalyst for leader’s growth but also a potential threat to leader’s sustainability. Failure to overcome a challenge may jeopardize a leader’s self-efficacy, credibility, and acceptance by others. As such, leader development is deemed as a progressive spiral, in which leaders accumulate skill proficiency at a manageable level as preparation for the higher one.
18. There is a limitation that one can potentially learn from a particular experience.

   Effective leaders thus intentionally seek for enriching developmental experiences (e.g., challenging job assignments and novel experiences) to expand leaders’ skill sets and perspectives and enables them to develop more sophisticated mental models and get prepared for higher leadership levels.

19. Feedback from supervisors and others is deemed useful for leaders to better reflect on their practice. Learning effectiveness is linked to the quality and timeliness of feedback during leaders’ daily enactment.

20. Performance appraisal may provide developmental feedback to facilitate leader development if it is conducted in a two-way communicative approach.

21. Departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs felt receiving inadequate meaningful performance feedback to aid their development due to a perceived lack of open and supportive organizational climate, and senior managerial staff’s lack of incentives and mentoring skills in people development.

22. Support is another key element of developmental experiences that can accelerate leader’s development, including mentorship, career-related support, psychological support, organizational support, and leadership training intervention.
23. Effective mentorship allows protégé-leaders learn not only task-skills but more importantly, hidden rules of how things work in an organization. Effective mentorship requires (a) trust between the protégé-leaders and mentors, (b) a clear focus on pertinent issues, and (c) a safe space for genuine reflection and feedback.

24. Although HEIs in Hong Kong seldom provide leadership training interventions to departmental leaders, leaders consider them useful to facilitate their application of conceptual knowledge to real-life problems and extend their social network.

25. Leaders’ leadership expertise and credibility are positively linked with career-related support (e.g., purposeful placement of challenging job assignments and committee works) that enhance leaders’ visibility in the organizations.

26. Psychosocial support provided by supervisors and colleagues is positively linked to leaders’ resilience to challenges and motivation to develop.

27. To construct a supportive climate for robust leader development, top management’s commitment is deemed indispensable to invest resources in training and development, and adopt developmental-friendly policies and practices.

**Theme 4: Personal drive as impetus for growth**

28. Leaders’ individual differences (career aspiration, self-awareness, and motivation to develop) affect leaders’ drive for development.
29. Career-growth leaders are driven by career ambitions over the long term, whereas academic-growth leaders consider leadership positions as an interlude in their academic careers. They are driven by a sense of responsibility to address an organizational need that may affect their achievement of long-term scholarly pursuit, rather than higher leadership status.

30. Long-term career goal toward leadership is positively associated with leader’s self-regulation (i.e., capacity to adapt their behaviors to tackle dynamic leadership challenges) over time.

31. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations link to individual leaders’ perseverance. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations stimulate individual leaders to assume ownership of their personal development, embrace job challenges as developmental opportunities, and endure adversities during their career as leaders.

32. Leaders driven more by extrinsic motivations than intrinsic motivations may exhibit less persistent because their motivation is contingent on external factors.

33. Underpinned by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for adaptive learning, leaders are able to develop strong self-awareness of their development needs and cultivate a habit of self-reflection.
34. It is deemed vital for leaders’ adaptive behaviors be rooted in, and compatible with their personality. Adequate self-understanding allows one to keep adaptation within the zone of compatibility and avoid causing personality-role conflict.

35. Persistent self-improvement effort is linked to individuals’ motivation to develop, which is affected by their outlook toward challenges. Effective leaders are able to maintain a positive thinking, which helps them endure adversity and foster collaborative problem-solving at the team level via communications.

36. Leaders deploy psychological adjustment strategies of anticipation and attribution to protect emotional well-being. Anticipation enhances a leader’s tolerance of ambiguity to get prepared against emotional shocks arising from changes, challenges, and setbacks. Adjusting locus of control, attribution allows leaders to let go the frustrations to causes that deem uncontrollable and focus on improving controllable areas. In this way, leaders protect their self-efficacy and self-esteem against destructive self-doubt.

Theme 5: Leader maturation through cumulative learning

37. Leader development is conceived as an ongoing maturation process in parallel with leaders’ career advancement trajectory. Leadership expertise is the outcome of an
accumulative learning process throughout an individual’s lifespan development, especially during their work life.

38. From different work experiences, leaders acquire a repertoire of leadership skills, conceptual and experiential knowledge. Expert leaders engage in higher-order learning to differentiate and integrate lower-order knowledge and skills into sophisticated knowledge structure of leadership expertise. As the new mental models are built on the current ones, stage-based, step-by-step career advancement is deemed conducive to progressive leader development.

39. Self-efficacy is shown to be positively associate with leader’s maturation. Advance in leadership expertise enhances leaders’ self-efficacy in specific contexts. Accumulative learning enhances leader’s ability to operate effectively in novel situations and wider leadership domains, and thereby enlarging their internal locus of control and self-efficacy.

40. Self-efficacy links positively to leaders’ self-motivation to develop. Thus, leader development and self-efficacy constitutes a mutually reinforcing relationship.
Chapter V: Discussion of Findings, Implications and Conclusion

天將降大任於斯人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，所以動心忍性，增益其所不能。（《孟子，告子下篇》）

When Heaven is about to destine this person for great responsibilities, it first inflicts suffering on his mind, toil on his sinews and bones, and hunger on his body. It exposes him to poverty and confounds his every endeavor. In this way, his heart is inspired, his character is tempered, and his incompetences are improved. (Mencius, Gaozi, Part II (F. Chan Trans. 2016))

Overview and Major Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how eight departmental leaders in Hong Kong’s HEIs make sense of their leader development experiences over time. The famous quote of Confucian Saint Mencius (372-289 BC) above captures the essential elements of leader development identified in Chapter IV in this study, i.e., that enduring challenges, hardships, and persistent trial prepare leaders with adequate resilience, motivation, and competences for great service.

As discussed throughout this paper, leader development is understood as a longitudinal development process grounded in individual leaders’ interaction with the social world (Day et al., 2009). In line with the social constructivist view of leadership and leader development, this study adopted an IPA approach to explore the central research question: How do departmental

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leaders in Hong Kong higher education institutions think about their experiences of development as leaders? Using the IPA approach, the researcher strived to make sense of the participants’ subjective experiences in leadership growth grounded in their personal, social, and historical contexts. This study identified five superordinate themes from the data analysis: (1) top-down approach in leader selection and promotion, (2) advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice, (3) rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth, (4) personal drive as impetus for growth, and (5) leader maturation through cumulative learning.

In line with the socially constructive nature of leader development, this study adopted Kegan’s (1980, 1982) constructive-developmental theory as the theoretical lens. Built on seminal work by Herbert Fingarette (1963), Kegan (1982) maintained that sensemaking, or “meaning making” in his words, includes a scientific process of theory building and an existential process of generating the vision that serves as the context of one’s commitment. The remainder of this chapter will discuss how these themes relate to the theoretical framework and extant literature to draw implications for practice and future research. Limitations of the study will be discussed before any conclusions are drawn.
Discussion of Findings

Theme 1: Top-down approach in leader selection and promotion

This theme has depicted how social and organizational contexts shaped leader development at the academic departments of HEIs in Hong Kong. HEIs in Hong Kong have widely abandoned the shared-governance model and adopted a top-down approach in leader selection to address managerial concerns, typically in a haphazard and obscure fashion. This finding suggests that the situation in the Hong Kong higher education sector is a miniature of the international trend depicted in higher education literature. Since the 1980s, when Hong Kong jumped on the bandwagon of neo-liberal reforms proliferated in the western world (Cheng, 2009; Harris, 2008; Mok & Cheung, 2011), HEIs in Hong Kong had changed their management approaches from the collegial shared governance model or “organized anarchy” (Cohen et al., 1972), which emphasizes professional autonomy and respect of collegiality (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Sporn, 1996), toward a business-like managerialist model, which embraces the logics of “corporatization, competitiveness, commercialization” (Robertson, 2010) and the pursuit of “world-class universities” in terms of global rankings (Altbach et al., 2010; Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Mok & Cheung, 2011).

Under such managerialist imperatives, leadership is deemed as the key to achieve higher education reform objectives and effectiveness; and leaders in HEIs are thus given the managerial
mandate to become more entrepreneurial and efficient to cope with reduced public funding and increased external monitoring (Altbach, 2008; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Head, 2011; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Tomlinson, 2004). A top-down leader selection and promotion approach found in this study is in line with the shift to a managerialist governance model documented in the literature.

The abovementioned literature provides the background underpinning the finding that academic credentials were highly valued in leader selection. Under the reform directives, on the research front, HEIs are given the policy mandate to achieve world-class university status through achieving research excellence in the international ranking contest, whereas on the teaching front, HEIs have to compete in the “educational services” market based on the principles of financial accountability and responsiveness to stakeholders (Eddy, 2010; Mok, 2005, 2008b; Mok & Cheung, 2011; Spiller, 2010).

These new economic imperatives require institutional commitment to bringing about swift conflict management and proactive strategic management (Kok & McDonald, 2015; Robertson, 2010; Sirkis, 2011; Taylor, 2004). This is because traditionally, department heads and leaders are not the only leaders in university departments (Cooper & Burgoyne, 2006). A shift from a shared governance model to a managerialist model causes significant changes in organizational structure and cultures in HEI departments, thereby triggering unique leadership
challenges to departmental leaders (Christensen, 2011; Ek et al., 2011; Mok & Cheung, 2011; Postiglione & Shiru, 2011; Stayer, 1990; Tierney, 1988). In the reform transition, effective leaders in HEIs should not only be responsive to external demands for organizational renewal and managerial efficiency, but also promote forward-looking collegiality that sustains unique academic traditions (Aasen & Stensaker, 2007). This study shows that the literature is applicable to the Hong Kong context, which is changing under reform imperatives similar to the western world. As such, departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs in this study emphasized the importance of interpersonal skills for them to balance competing views and interests among faculty members against diverse stakeholder demands to gain acceptance from faculty members.

This study shows that other than excellent interpersonal and communication skills, credible image and trust from significant others are vital for leaders to sustain their positions. Leaders build trustworthy and credible images of themselves through behavioral consistency and maintaining an impressive record of their achievements in prolonged relationship with others. This vividly demonstrated that leadership is a social process of claiming and granting leadership identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). In fact, building a credible image is essential for leaders’ sustainability. To this end, other than building a record of achievement, leaders also deploy image management tactics (to be discussed in Theme 5).
According to the literature, subordinates’ higher trust in the supervisor increases organizational commitment during organizational change (Neves & Caetano, 2006). Subordinates’ trust in their supervisors also mediates the relationship between information support, social political support, and psychological empowerment and thereby organizational citizenship behavior (Y. H. Chan, Taylor, & Markham, 2008). The participants’ emphasis on trust in the leader-follower relationship supported a social-constructivist and relational view of leadership.

According to Schein (2010), managing internal group and interpersonal relationships is “one of the most important functions of leadership” (p.93), and developing the norms of trust, intimacy and friendship is critical to the functioning of any group and organization. Authentic leadership theory (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005) contends that authentic leaders achieve authenticity through authentic actions and relationships with subordinates and associates, which are characterized by a) transparency, openness, and trust, b) guidance toward worthy objectives, and c) an emphasis on follower development. In this context, positive modeling is the primary means for authentic leaders to develop their followers. The participants in this study embraced authentic relationships and positive modeling in their leadership practice. They strived to establish trust in prolonged work relationships, in which leaders and subordinates established reciprocal commitment to collaborative works. They
emphasized “being part of the team” and reciprocal commitment in the leader-follower relationship. This is consistent with literature, which claims that shared emotional experiences create a sense of intimacy or “groupness” among team members, which is important glue for effective teams (Schein, 2010).

Meanwhile, this study illustrated that gender bias belittled women leaders’ image as credible and competent leaders. As Anna voiced out, people generally associate the “powerful” and “high social status” of leader image with men, rather with women, making women leaders more difficult to construct a congruent women and credible leader identity. Some of them also encountered strong resistance at the beginning. According to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), intersecting social dynamics and relations interact in various ways in shaping the racial, social, historical, and structural aspects of violence against marginalized groups, such as women of color (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Intersectionality theory argues that people live intersecting, layered, identities in their social experiences. As such, “mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality” constitute individuals’ subjectivity and identity construction (Nash, 2008, p. 2). Being a member of multiple social groups in terms of race, gender, class, and professional background, etc., one simultaneously experiences the advantages and disadvantages associated with these social groups (Moorosi, 2013). Under dominant social groups’ exercise of power in the political processes of inclusion and exclusion,
marginalized social groups are put in the disadvantaged positions and deprived of their rights and benefits (Cho et al., 2013). For instance, women’s and ethnic minorities’ progression into managerial positions has been hindered by the so-called “glass ceiling” and “closed circle” due to gender bias and racial discrimination (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Cultural stereotypes about women, men, and leaders also play a part in jeopardizing women’s enactment of leadership. In traditional gender roles, men are bread earners and women are homemakers. Women are expected to be more communal, i.e., being compassionate, soft-spoken, friendly, whereas men are generally perceived to possess agentic qualities of being aggressive, forceful, self-reliant, domineering and individualistic, which are associated historically with successful leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Perceived role incongruity between the communal traits associated with women and the masculine agentic traits ascribed to desirable leader prototype results in biased evaluations of women on important leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Leader identity construction is a social process of claiming and granting leadership identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Social norms impose descriptive beliefs (common expectations about what members in a social group actually do), and prescriptive beliefs (consensual expectations about what members in a social group ought to do), which shape how people are judged in social contexts (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Consequently, women leaders may
suffer from double bind or two forms of prejudice against them: those women who behave in communal ways to fit the descriptive expectations are perceived as lack of leadership qualities; and those women who behave in agentic ways to fit the prescriptive expectations on leaders may be criticized for violating their gender role expectations. Either way, they may be easily perceived as lacking the “right” leader qualities. Such double standards of competence lead to biased judgment and resistance against women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Recent empirical studies support that masculinity of leadership stereotype still exists, although it has decreased over time and in educational institutions (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Hence, women leaders have to work extra hard to overcome double standards imposed on them as illustrated in this study.

For instance, Chloe pointed out:

The most important thing is how to protect the dignity, pride of guys… I think we have to work harder to earn the credibility to show that we can be competent in terms of knowledge, expertise and experience.

In a similar vein, Hannah reflected:

As a woman leader, I have to work harder to convince other people, especially at the very beginning. I had to be more assertive in my previous job… my husband… said I became a different person after becoming a leader - very tough.

Hannah’s account illustrates how women leaders shape fluid identities as feminine women and assertive leaders (Fuller, 2010). Literature concurs that women leaders have to work harder to be both more agentic and more communal than men to become top leaders (Rosette & Tost, 2010). In sum, the lived experiences of women leaders in this study vividly...
illustrated how intersecting gender and leader identity played out in the Hong Kong HEI contexts.

**Theme 2: Advancing leadership expertise through reflective practice**

Theme 2 has shown the process of how departmental leaders advanced their leadership expertise to cope with increasingly complex job demands through reflective practice. The participants’ experiences showed that when leaders’ roles expand from program to departmental levels, their approaches shifted from managerial leadership (emphasizing effectiveness in getting the jobs done) to transformational leadership (emphasizing staff buy-in for a common vision). It was also found that higher leadership positions were associated with greater complexity in leadership tasks and challenges. Advance to higher leadership positions demanded more sophisticated leadership models that are suitable not just at personal, but also at dyad, team, or organizational levels.

The evolution from personal to organizational leadership is in line with a shifting emphasis in leadership literature from leader-centered to relational and organizational perspectives of leadership (Dinh et al., 2014). According to Zenger and Folkman’s (2009) leadership model, professionals at stage I contribute dependently like apprentices. Stage II leaders demonstrate personal leadership competences and are able to contribute independently like colleagues. Stage III professionals attain local leadership competences, who are able to
contribute through others like mentors. Professionals reaching stage IV achieve organizational leadership competences, acting as sponsors of organizational initiatives, are able to lead others through vision. The participants in this study demonstrated the characteristics of this stage-based leadership model. To illustrate, Chloe’s transition from a deputy program leader to a formal program leader position exemplified a transition from Stage I to Stage II leadership, which involved apprenticeship-style learning from her supervisor. Benny, Ella, Francis, Garvin, and Hannah, emphasized leading by giving support and guidance like mentors to subordinates. They exhibited Stage III leadership. Anna, David, Francis, Ella, and Hannah were learning or practicing the way to lead the department forward through establishing common vision and direction, which is a characteristic of Stage IV leadership.

Consistent with Zenger and Folkman’s (2009) leadership model, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) classified three broad categories of leadership capabilities for development: leading self, leading others, and leading organizations (McCauley et al., 2010). According to McCauley and her colleagues, leading self means effective self-management of thoughts, emotions, and actions. This includes self-awareness (e.g., Anna, Chloe and David), the ability to balance conflicting demands (e.g., Ella and Francis), the ability to learn (e.g., Anna and Hannah), and leadership values, i.e., honesty, integrity and personal drives that engender trust and credibility with others (e.g., Benny, Chloe, Garvin, and Hannah). The next level (leading
others) involves the ability to build and maintain relationships, the ability to build effective workgroups, communication skills, and the ability to develop others (McCauley et al., 2010). In this study, all participants emphasized these capabilities. Lastly, leading organizations involves management skills, the ability to think and act strategically, the ability to think creatively, and the ability to initiate and implement change (McCauley et al., 2010). Interestingly, participants in this study discussed the importance of managerial skills, strategic thinking, change management, but little about creative thinking.

From a social constructivist lens, leadership and leader development are social construction processes in which the leaders’ thoughts and behaviors shape and are shaped by social systems through sensemaking (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Komives et al., 2006; Middlehurst, 2008). According to constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982), leadership experience, like any human experience, is not what happens to leaders, but what meaning they construct from what happens to them. Indeed, the core of Kegan’s (1982) theory “does not lie so much in its account of stages or sequences of meaning organizations, but in its capacity to illuminate a universal on-going process (call it ‘meaning-making,’ ‘adaptation,’ ‘equilibration,’ or ‘evolution’)” (p.264, emphasis added). Kegan sees the self evolves as a psychic institution in the process of negotiation with the external environment. His idea resonates with open systems theory and conceives a person as an open system, which strives to maintain homeostasis in
dynamic environments through self-regulation, i.e., integration and differentiation of environmental feedback (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

In this regard, leader development, as a form of cognitive development, is a lifelong evolutionary process of making sense of the experience of adaptive problem solving. Problem solving requires human cognition prior to action—cognition informs actions; actions cause thinking (cognition); and the effectiveness of adaptation depends on accurate sensemaking (Day et al., 2009). Hence, one’s ways of knowing guide his or her actions. As David reflected, “knowing how the world works” helped him as “a whole person, not just a leader” because such knowledge is vital for survival.

From the constructive-developmental lens (Kegan, 1982), each leadership position level (i.e., program, department, faculty, or college level) represents a level of environmental challenges that require a corresponding level of leadership competences for effective coping (McCauley et al., 2006). As David put it, being an associate dean is “a different kind of game” than being a program leader. However, a leader’s developmental movement does not occur automatically. During the transition, leaders have to equip themselves with the necessary expertise to prepare for the higher levels; or they will be locked into one stage (Kegan, 1982; McCauley et al., 2006; Zenger & Folkman, 2009).

According to Kegan (1982), evolution of meaning construction results in a new sense of
the world, i.e., the deep structure of psycho-logics (schemas and mental models of leadership)
from relatively simple to complex forms through a series of “evolutionary truces,” which
“establish a balance between subject and object” (p.28), or self and other, or organism and
environment. An evolutionary truce represents both an achievement and constraint for meaning
construction, which possesses both strengths and limitations in the current way of knowing. As
he put it, “Every new balance is a triumph over the constraints of the past evolutionary truce”
(p.90). From this perspective, promotion to a higher leadership position results in the loss of
current evolutionary truce, as existing leadership models are no longer adequate for coping with
increased challenges. For instance, Anna felt that she was no longer as effective as she was
after her promotion to the associate department head position. That event triggered a new
development movement to acquire more advanced leadership expertise.

According to Kegan (1982), reconstruction entails “not just a new level of social
perspective, but a new organization and experience of interior life as well” (p.91). Hence,
leadership is conceptualized as a knowledge structure with layers and segments of leader
characteristics (i.e., leadership implicit theories, principles, skills, and mental models) (Mumford,
Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). From a systems perspective, the evolving self or psychic
institution (Kegan’s term) as a self-organizing system becomes intelligent enough to define and
refine any underlying logics, behavior, and identity through reflexive learning or learning to
learn (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Such metacognitive capacity enables self-organizing systems to achieve resilience, which refers to “a system’s ability to survive and persist within a variable environment” (Meadows & Wright, 2008, p. 76). Hence, leader development is a process of development and application of leadership knowledge structures underpinned by lived experience (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2006).

In this study, leaders at higher levels were able to overcome the limitation of current evolutionary truce and deployed sophisticated leadership models to cope with increasingly complex problems, thereby gaining acceptance from their supervisors and subordinates. Their evolution from personal to local and organizational leadership offers empirical evidence for Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), who linked constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1980, 1982) to the evolution of leadership practices.

According to Kuhnert and Lewis’s stage-based model, leaders at stage 2 (Imperial stage, lower-order transactional leadership) lack an ability to reflect on their goals and are defined by set agendas imposed on them. Program leaders who have to follow institutional guidelines and policies fit with this definition. Those at stage 3 (Interpersonal, higher-order transactional leadership) develop the new ability to reconcile their personal needs with the needs of followers and achieve their goals by obtaining mutual support in reciprocal interpersonal relations through maneuvering promises, expectations, obligations, and rewards. This is in line with the behavior
of some program leaders and associate heads who strive to solicit subordinates’ commitment through reciprocal commitment. Lastly, leaders reaching stage 4 (Institutional, transformational leadership) have developed a subjective frame of reference that defines their selves. Holding self-authored values and performance standards, they are able to convert followers to their way of thinking and integrate their values into the work group.

In this study, those participants who strived to obtain staff buy-in through articulating common visions, goals, and directions exhibited stage 4 leadership behaviors in Kuhnert and Lewis’s leadership model. Built on Kegan’s works and other scholars, Day et al. (2009) developed an integrative approach of developing expert leaders with six theoretical propositions. The above finding supports *Proposition I: expert leadership can be differentiated from novice (less expert) leadership.*

In this study, the eight participants were from diverse professional backgrounds and career tracks. Two of them (Anna and Francis) have acquired prior leadership education, four (Chloe, Ella, Garvin, Hannah) received management-related education, and two (Benny and David) had no relevant education. They rarely relied on formal education to advance their leadership expertise. As this study is a qualitative one, we cannot measure and analyze the relationship between the participants’ prior education background and their mastery of leadership expertise. Interestingly, some participants’ (e.g., David and Garvin) skepticism toward
leadership education echoed the severe criticism over the theory-practice disconnection of management education in leader development, which make managers and leaders overly reliant on subjective sensemaking (see Schandt, 2005).

To overcome such disconnections, Schandt (2005) exhorted that effective leaders must be “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983), who are able to integrate reflective learning with managerial sensemaking. This is because leaders’ behavioral model in complex and ambiguous environments should not only be Act–Make Sense–Act, but also Act–Make Sense–Reflect–Make Sense–Act. In other words, effective leaders should be able to engage in reflexive learning to redefine self-held norms, logics, and mental routines (in Kegan’s word “deep structure”), and reflexively adjust them to enhance resilience (Maturana & Varela, 1980). In leader development, metacognitive ability, conceptualized as a leader’s capacity to engage in the process of “second order thinking,” is an important component of leader development readiness, which leads to “greater self-insight, less maladaptive processing, and changes to deeper self-structures” (Hannah & Avolio, 2010, p. 1184). Hence, leader development should not only pay attention to how to make sense, but also to learning how to learn. As Schandt (2005) argued,

Knowing how one learns requires practice and experience with self-reflection and reflective judgment. Self-reflection includes examining one’s own behaviors, learning styles, and assumptions about knowledge. This self-knowledge contributes to the manager’s ability to identify uncertainty, disorienting dilemmas, and surprise. (p. 188)
The ability to reflect from the constructive-developmental lens signifies the highest stage (Stage 5) of evolutionary truce – interindivdual balance, in which the self can separate from the “psychic institution,” or self-identity, created in Stage 4 (Kegan, 1982, p.101). Such separation allows the self to act as a subject to treat the psychic institution and the underlying deep structure as an object and reflect upon “the regulations and purposes of a psychic administration” in light of new experience (p.103). Thus, reflection is an important metacognitive process that leads to transformative learning, in which critical reflection upon deep structure and the assumptions behind actions is conducted to develop emancipatory knowledge (Black, Soto, & Spurlin, 2016; Cranton, 2011; Mezirow, 2000).

From this perspective, experiential learning is central to leader development (Day et al., 2009). Theories of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), which are rooted in the works of Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, contend that learning is best considered not in terms of outcomes but as a holistic process of constructing knowledge resulted from the course of adaptation to the world. All learning is relearning, in which what is learned is reconciled and integrated with current ways of knowing. Disagreement or unsuccessful coping stimulates learning, in which learners ponder between “dialectically opposed models of adaptation to the world” (Kolb and Kolb, 2005, p.194).
According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), an experimental learning cycle consists of four steps: active experimentation $\rightarrow$ concrete experience $\rightarrow$ reflective observation $\rightarrow$ abstract conceptualization. Action is the most important part of learning; and the actor assumes the primary role of learning. Along this line, Day et al. (2009) argued that leader development involves the elements of action learning as it focuses on solving real-world problems and leads to intentional development through continuous action, learning, and reflection. Indeed, empirical studies support the notion that action learning is effective for integrative, collaborative conflict resolutions and the development of leadership skills (Leonard, 2015; Leonard & Marquardt, 2010; Snell, Eagle, & Van Aerde, 2014).

From the constructive-developmental perspective (Kegan, 1982), leaders’ advancement in leadership expertise involves recurring differentiation and integration of meaning construction through reflection upon previous experiences in one’s life. Since successful coping relies on effective application of knowledge principles, leadership expertise can be conceptualized as a set of skills that can be mastered by individuals over time (Day et al., 2009). Hence, expert performance is achieved by extended deliberate practice and mediated by acquired complex skills and physiological adaptations (Ericsson et al., 2007).

Consistent with extant literature, this study found that the participants cited on-the-job learning as the most significant source of learning, followed by learning from others (especially
supervisors), and formal training. This is in line with similar survey results. To elaborate, the most cited survey conducted by Morgan McCall and his colleagues at the CCL found that 70% of successful managers’ greatest learning moments came from on-the-job learning, 20% from learning from other people (mostly their boss), and 10% from courses and reading (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996). Their 70: 20: 10 model of learning and development has been widely quoted by training and development professionals to emphasize the importance of experiential learning in executive development. A recent survey of 13,000 leaders found that the ratio had been changed to 52: 27: 21, which highlights the growing importance of formal education in leader development (Byham, 2015).

In this study, the participants placed a strong emphasis on reflective practice, i.e., deliberate practice and self-reflection. They constantly reflected on the applicability of their leadership strategies and tactics to maintain their place within work contexts in terms of organizational structure, cultural norms, historical practices, and interpersonal dynamics. Their behavior aligned with literature that suggests leader development is a dynamic process of fitting leadership behavior with the environment (Day et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014). Their emphasis on reflective practice also supported the values of experimental learning (or action learning) to leader development.

While successful experience boosted participants’ self-efficacy, negative experience
often stimulated their motivation for self-improvement through self-reflection. As such, they learned much more from negative experiences than positive ones because when things were smooth, they were less motivated to learn. Schön (1983) classified reflection into two types: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action refers to unstructured reflection that individuals engage in during the course of an experience, which involves intrapersonal and interpersonal inquiry and interpretation of leaders, whereas after-action reviews (AERs) are a typical example of reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983).

Empirical leader development studies support the idea that reflection through AERs promotes experience-based leadership development (DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012). While failed experiences have long been considered the most powerful learning sources, recent research finds that systematic reflection on both failures and successes better enhances leader development (Ellis, Carette, Anseel, & Lievens, 2014). The literature suggests that the participants in this study had a blind spot in ignoring the learning value of reflection upon successes. This suggests practical implications regarding how to provide leader development interventions.

Other than learning from reflective practice in natural workplace settings, learning from others (i.e., vicarious learning) is another effective means of leader development. In particular, beginning leaders benefited substantially from positive modeling through apprenticeship or
mentorship. Observing and learning from others helped the participants, especially those at higher levels, evaluate and reflect on their leadership approaches in practice. This finding is consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which stresses that learning may not necessarily only result from behavioral outcomes (e.g., trial and error), but can also follow from observing other’s behaviors and their consequences.

According to Bandura (1977), a learner, as an observer, progresses through four stages: observation, retention, motor reproduction, and reinforcement. Social learning thus heavily relies on modeling in three forms: (a) live model, i.e., a real person demonstrates the desired behavior; (b) verbal instruction, i.e., a person describes and instructs the learner how to perform the desired behavior; and (c) symbolic modeling, i.e., demonstration by real or fictional characters in the media (Bandura, 1977).

Social learning theory offers a theoretical explanation for studies finding that leader development can be accelerated when the participants’ supervisors act as positive role models (live models) and offer timely and in-depth advice (verbal instruction). Additionally, biography and history books allow the participants to learn from symbolic modeling and understand how great people engaged with the world and learn from others’ experiences. Learning through the narrative accounts of others’ experiences provides learners with a rich context to immerse their thoughts and emotions within the story to facilitate changes in attitude, perspective, and
knowledge (Day et al., 2009). Empirical study supports reading and reflection as an effective pedagogical tool for leader development (Jefferson, Martin, & Owens, 2014).

In this study, most participants cited the opportunities to observe and learn from their bosses as the most effective way to learn, provided that their values were aligned. This finding is consistent with social learning theory that contends individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if (a) the behavior has functional value, (b) it results in valued outcomes, and (c) learners concur with the model (Bandura, 1977). Thus, modeling success depends on a number of factors, including the model’s credibility, the degree of vividness in behavioral display, and perceived similarity between the observer and the model (Day et al., 2009). This explained why, in this study, mentorship schemes were ineffective when mentors were assigned to the protégé leaders—namely they lacked prior personal relationship, knowledge, and willingness to help the mentees.

According to Day et al. (2009), skill acquisition is a two-stage process in which procedural knowledge (knowledge about how to automate leadership performance in task environment) is acquired through deliberate practice after acquiring declarative knowledge (factual knowledge about nature of leadership) and integrating various processes required to complete a leadership task (knowledge compilation). Day and his colleagues call this the skill-competency-expertise continuum: “A novice must acquire relevant leadership skills
(through gaining relative declarative and procedural knowledge), build strategic and adaptive competencies, and finally develop expertise through years of intentional practice” (p.186).

This study found that leadership expertise developed through learning by doing is confined by an individual’s scope of experiences. As David argued, every experience has a scope; and he might become a different person if he worked in another university. This finding is consistent with Kegan’s constructive-developmental perspective that a human’s order of development influences what they can become aware of, and therefore, describe and reflect on change, since the evolution of schemas results from confirmation, differentiation, and reintegration of the schemas with the social environment (McCauley et al., 2006).

Compared to those participants who were skeptical about leadership education, those participants who did receive formal leadership study or training (e.g., Anna, Francis, and Hannah) were able to transcend their limitation in their leadership mental models by integrating experiential knowledge with conceptual knowledge. This suggests that those leaders who are solely reliant on learning by doing may lack adequate declarative knowledge to compile with procedural knowledge in order to build strategic and adaptive competences (Day et al., 2009). By contrast, those who received structured leadership education acquired a robust framework for better integration of conceptual and experiential knowledge.
According to constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982), development movement is triggered when existing mental models and deep structures cannot cope with increased task complexity. As such, advancement to higher leadership levels may not only result in incremental change, but also transformational change. In this regard, structured leadership education may be more effective in helping leaders to broaden their awareness and illuminate their reflection on their leadership practice from a fresh light. As a result, these leaders were able to transcend their order of development beyond the limitations in current lived experience. This finding concurs with empirical literature claiming formal training and academic programs are one of the key developmental experiences (McCauley, DeRue, Yost, & Taylor, 2014).

In this study, participants at higher stages and higher leadership positions were able to integrate lower stage leadership models to form more sophisticated leadership approaches to fit diverse contexts. For example, they adopted a blended leadership approach that mixed managerial leadership with a participative leadership approach, and transactional leadership with transformational leadership to motivate diverse subordinates and to align the expectations between the management and the subordinates. The above finding supports Day et al.’s (2009) Proposition 3: Basic level skills combine to form complex and multifaceted leadership competencies.
This study showed that the leaders at higher-level positions tended to integrate managerial and transformational leadership approaches. Leadership literature concurs that a blended leadership approach is effective to manage contemporary HEIs with both managerial and academic goals (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). On the one hand, departmental leaders’ roles have become more strategic and managerial in nature; and they have to embrace a broader conception of leadership that is entrepreneurial, forward looking, and responsive to external demands (Christensen, 2011; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Postiglione & Shiru, 2011; Tourish, 2012).

On the other hand, leadership that undermines collegiality, autonomy, participative decision-making, and fairness, is likely to be ineffective, and damaging to the commitment of academics in the context of academia (Cooper & Burgoyne, 2006; Kok & McDonald, 2015; Wang & Berger, 2010). Hence, leaders in HEIs have to recognize the importance of academic culture and master the skills of consensus building with diverse constituent groups to frame and implement change using collaborative communication and decision-making approaches (Eddy, 2010; Sirkis, 2011; Yukl, 2010). As such, effective departmental leaders have to integrate paradoxical behaviors in a blended leadership approach, such as being participative and directive; approachable and distant; as well as internally- and externally visible (Collinson & Collinson, 2009).
In this study, leaders at higher positions had been shifting their roles from specialists to generalists during career advancement. This finding is consistent with the premise of skills-based approaches to leader development that “the higher the organizational level, the greater is the complexity needed by a leader to perform effectively” (Day et al., 2009, p.120).

According to Kegan (1982), every growth is accompanied with losing some of the old self until a new evolutionary truce is reached. During the transition, some generic skills (e.g., cognitive skills and interpersonal skills) are preserved and become more proficient while some new skills (strategic skills) are acquired, and some (e.g., teaching skills or research skills) become vulnerable to loss. For example, some participants like Francis accepted the loss of teaching skill, while others like Ella were concerned with the potential loss of research expertise and credential. Thus, they tried to remain active in research while being a department head.

Above all, academic leaders have to face their changing identities and make deliberate choices.

Additionally, this study found that all participants, regardless of their rank and experience, were able to advance their leadership expertise through reflective practice via on-the-job learning, self-reflection, self-study, and formal education. This supports Day et al.’s (2009) Proposition 5: Intentional practice in leadership is needed to reach a level of expert leader performance. Among them, some participants (e.g., Francis, Garvin, and Hannah) paved their way to higher leadership levels by actively seeking new projects and challenges as sources of learning.
Others, like Anna, Chloe, Ella, reported the positive effects of apprenticeship or mentoring support on their leadership growth. Their experiences made a significant contract with those who received less or no developmental support (Benny, David, Francis, Garvin, and Hannah).

Nonetheless, given that this was a qualitative study, we could not measure the effect of different developmental support on accelerating individual leaders’ development. In addition, we could not quantify and measure the relationship between the constructs of leadership competences and deliberate practice. This may warrant future studies in the future.

**Theme 3: Rich developmental experience as catalyst for growth**

Theme 3 has illustrated how enriching developmental experiences, which consist of challenges, support, and feedback, accelerated leader development. According to Kegan (1994), people grow best where they “continuously experience an ingenious blend of challenge and support” (p. 42, emphases added). Built on Kegan’s premise and research findings, the CCL model contends that developmental experience is most powerful when containing three components: assessment, challenge, and support (McCauley et al., 2010). The importance of these three components to leader development is discussed below.

**Challenge.** From a developmental perspective, leadership itself is a developmental challenge. Transition to higher leadership position levels represents higher levels of environmental challenges that require more sophisticated leadership competences for effective
coping. As David put it, being an associate dean is “a different kind of game” than being a program leader. To cope with increased challenges, the participants in this study considered on-the-job experience as the most significant developmental experience. The following findings in Theme 3 provide a rich illustration of such a developmental spiral: First, higher leadership levels carry wider job responsibilities, increasingly complex role demands and novel job challenges, and greater external expectations on accountability. Then, increased challenges in turn stimulate leaders’ motivation for learning how to adapt to increased role demands. This concurs with the theoretical viewpoint that leading is learning by doing (McCauley et al., 2010).

As discussed in Chapter II, education literature indicates that higher education reforms have imposed extra challenges onto HEI leaders, on top of task complexity embedded in leadership positions. Like HEIs in western countries, Hong Kong HEIs have undergone the New Public Management reform initiatives aimed at increasing organizational efficiency in delivering greater value for money, wider higher education access, and better competitiveness in global competition (Altbach et al., 2010; D. Chan & Lo, 2008; Cheng, 2009; Mok & Cheung, 2011). HEI leaders are under strong pressure to strengthen their leadership to satisfy increasing public accountability and create better quality output with less public money (Christensen, 2011). Such demands often represent conflicting goals and priorities (Tourish, 2012), which result in escalating leadership complexities in academic departments. As a result, departmental leaders
have to “fill increasingly different roles and encounter different aspects of the environment” (Raines & Alberg, 2003, p. 34).

As Burke et al. (2012) pointed out, “Leading in today’s school environment is not for the weak of heart or mind. The demand for such leadership requires a complex integration of skills and knowledge, enacted through the contextual adaptation of distinctive styles” (p.113, emphases added). Concurring with the findings in Theme 2 of this study, Burke and her colleagues’ remark stresses not only the importance of educational leaders’ cognitive and affective strengths, but also their ability to integrate skills for adapting to new contexts. Indeed, leaders in transition must upgrade their expertise to master difficult situations. Mastery of sophisticated leadership expertise is attained through critical reflection on the experiences of wrestling with challenges (see Theme 2). Otherwise, they will be locked up in their current development stage (Kegan, 1982; McCauley et al., 2010; Zenger & Folkman, 2009).

Challenge, being the most potent developmental experience, stretches leaders out of their comfort zones to question the adequacy of long held assumptions and habits. Hence, an ideal challenging experience should push leaders to let go of ineffective, habitual models and approaches, and acquire new competences (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010). The Center for Creative Leadership suggests that challenge comes from four sources: (a) job novelty, (b) difficulty goals, (c) conflicts, and (d) dealing with adversity (McCauley et al., 2010).
Recent research found a positive relationship between challenging assignments and job performance for early-career leaders. However, such positive effects begin to diminish at some point for mid-career leaders (Carette, Anseel, & Lievens, 2013).

The participants in this study also experienced the four sources of challenges in their leadership growth journeys. To elaborate, all participants substantially learned from job novelty, like engagement in new projects and job transitions (job promotion, moving to new organization). Difficult goals cited by all participants included accepting high-level responsibilities. Resolving conflicts, e.g., gaining cooperation without authority in projects and committee work were useful in the early leadership stage; and creating change was beneficial to those charged with organizational leadership responsibilities (e.g., Anna, Ella, Garvin, and Francis). Lastly, all participants considered overcoming conflicts, hardships, and setbacks as having a profound impact on enhancing leadership skills and identity. For instance, they told stories about tackling resistant subordinates (e.g., Benny, Francis, Hannah), crisis and failures (e.g., Chloe, Ella, David, Francis), difficult bosses, and hardships (e.g., Chloe, Francis, Garvin). Nonetheless, Francis’s outcry of “no more challenge” showed exhausted motivation to take on challenges at later career stages, which helps explain Carette et al.’s (2013) finding regarding the diminishing effect of challenges on job performance.
Meanwhile, an insight drawn from the present study is worth noting: There is a limitation that one can potentially learn from an experience. Its implication to leader development is profound. From the open systems perspective, survival is contingent upon matching requisite variety with the dynamic environment (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1966). Thus, broadened leadership capacities enhance leaders’ adaptability and resilience in dynamic environments. As this study has shown, effective leaders intentionally seek for diverse experiences (e.g., challenging job assignments and novel experiences) to widen their knowledge structure scope. Empirical studies support the conclusion that leaders who have a broad range of challenging leadership experiences are more effective than those who do not, for example, in terms of strategic thinking and promotion prospects (Dragoni, Oh, Vankatwyk, & Tesluk, 2011; McCauley et al., 2014). The finding in this study supports the theoretical view that a variety of challenges is crucial for leaders’ growth because they widen the range of capabilities that leaders need (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2014; McCauley et al., 2010).

On the other side of the coin, this study also showed that challenge is a double-edge sword and can be both a catalyst for growth but also a threat to a leader’s sustainability. Failures may jeopardize a leader’s self-efficacy, credibility, and acceptance by others. In this regard, leader development should be structured as a progressive spiral, in which leaders accumulate skill proficiency at a manageable level as preparation for a higher one. This is
supported by the literature. As Kegan (1982) argued, seeking growth is a risk-taking endeavor. Similarly, leadership enactment involves risk-taking with the leaders’ personal stakes (McCauley et al., 2010). The implications of this finding are twofold: First, for the leaders themselves, it is wise to choose the right battle. Second, support from others is valuable to leader’s growth.

From the constructive-developmental perspective, leaders feel challenged when situations demand competences beyond their current expertise (Kegan, 1994). The degree of challenge is the gap between a leader’s capacity and situational demands (McCauley et al., 2010). According to Kegan (1982), challenges cause disequilibrium to the self through identity crises, and thus can cause emotional disturbances for leaders. For Kegan, psychological pains like stress and grief are “about the resistance to the motion of life” (p.264). To restore internal balance and resolve identity crises, the leader in transition has to reconstruct the relationship between the self and others; leaving behind a consolidated self before a new self emerges. Failure to do so may weaken the leaders’ identity and lock them up in current evolutionary truce (Kegan, 1982; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). For example, Ella encountered a ‘sink or swim’ approach to leader development, which is indeed risky in that it places leaders in positions where they are ‘in over their heads’ and should be avoided (Kegan, 1994). Instead, it is crucial for leader development interventions to take into account a leader’s developmental readiness and keep developmental experiences within his/her zone of proximal development (Avolio &
Day et al. (2009) referred to developmental readiness as “how prepared an individual is to benefit and learn from a developmental experience” (p.24).

Assessment. Assessment and feedback provide leaders with information about their current strengths, weaknesses, and the gap between the current and desired state. Assessment can be made by others, formally and informally, or by the leaders themselves (McCauley et al., 2010). This study found that the participants relied on self-assessment and feedback from supervisors and others to reflect on their leadership practice. Resourceful and willing bosses were deemed most helpful in giving task- and career-related feedback. In addition, the quality and timeliness of feedback obtained in daily operation had a strong impact on leaders’ development. This supports the literature that incorporating multiple sources of external feedback into the reflective practice is able to help leaders identify blind spots in leader development (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016).

In general, assessment should clarify situational demands, the leader’s desired career goals, and others’ expectations as well as the leader’s own. Thus, good assessment should be personalized, context-specific, and developmental (McCauley et al., 2010). This study found that effective mentorship facilitated the participants to learn not only task-skills, but also (more importantly) the hidden rules of operating in their organizations.
On the other hand, this study found that effective mentorship requires three enabling conditions: (a) trust between the protégé-leaders and their mentors, (b) a clear focus on the protégé-leaders’ pertinent practicing issues, and (c) a safe space for genuine reflection and feedback. Because of this, in providing formal feedback through performance appraisal, a two-way communicative approach should be adopted while a top-down grading approach should be avoided. Unfortunately, this study found that departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs often received inadequate developmental performance feedback due to a lack of an open and supportive organizational climate in addition to senior management’s lack of incentives and mentoring skills in facilitating leader development.

**Support.** This study found that support enhanced leaders’ chance of successful mastery of challenges and obstacles. The participants mentioned various forms of support, including mentorship, career-related support, psychological support, organizational support, and leadership training interventions. As discussed earlier, informal mentorship by competent and helpful bosses provided useful feedback and practical wisdom to the participants. In the cases of Anna, David, Ella and Francis, career-related support (e.g., purposeful placement of challenging job assignments and committee works) was particularly useful for boosting leaders’ visibility in their organizations and claiming of leader identities.
Moreover, the participants highly valued support from others, such as present and former bosses, peers, family members, friends, etc. Psychosocial support enhanced the leaders’ resilience to challenges and motivation for self-development. Empirical studies support the idea that bosses’ positive modeling (showing) and guidance of declarative knowledge (telling) accelerates transitioning leaders’ role knowledge acquisition and behavioral change over time (Dragoni, Park, Soltis, & Forte-Trammell, 2014). Support helps leaders cope with the pain of development and maintain a positive outlook, self-efficacy, and motivation to learn (McCauley et al., 2010). Support via coaching or mentorship can help leaders make the most out of challenges and assessment received (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016).

According to Kegan (1982), during leaders’ transition, the holding environment, or, using Kegan’s term “culture of embeddedness,” shapes human development through performing three functions of confirmation (holding on), contradiction (letting go), and continuity (staying for reintegration). A supportive holding environment is conducive to individuals’ developmental movement (Kegan, 1982; McCauley et al., 2010). Support makes leaders feel that their developmental efforts are valued and thus replenishes their self-regulatory strength in confronting a challenging situation (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010).

Moreover, support from situational factors, such as organizational culture or norms and procedures, is paramount in providing resources for leader development (Day et al., 2009;
A supportive environment is a key factor of promoting leader developmental readiness (Reichard & Walker, 2016). The present study illustrated this point with positive and negative cases. For instance, Anna and Hannah benefited from their institutions’ supportive climates, which offered resources, training opportunities, and time-off arrangements to support their development. They found application-oriented training courses useful to facilitate the application of conceptual knowledge to real-life problems. Moreover, they were able to extend their social networks by attending training courses. By contrast, working within managerialist and high-powered distance cultures, Chloe, Francis, and Garvin felt strong cultural conflicts with their personalities and had to struggle between whether to adapt or to quit.

On the other hand, hostile and a competitive culture also made the work environment unsafe for Francis to seek career and psychological support from coworkers and bosses. Research shows psychological safety plays a critical factor for learning in team and organizational settings (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Adequate support makes leaders feel safe in discussing their weaknesses without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or punishment (Day et al., 2009). Without it, leaders will be less motivated to take on challenges, leading to higher turnover intention (Rosch & Villaueva, 2016).
From a constructive-developmental perspective, managerialist, high power distance, and competitive organizational cultures and climates are not the holding environments conducive to leader development as they fail to perform the confirmation and continuity functions for personal development (Kegan, 1982). These findings have profound implications for supporting leader development at the organizational level.

To summarize the discussion of Theme 3, it is evident that developmental experience forms the core of leader development. Organizations can accelerate leader development through constructing experience-driven initiatives (McCauley et al., 2014). More importantly, however, leader development should not neglect the value of constructing an organizational climate conducive to personal growth and leading by helping to encourage the growth of others’ (Avolio, 2016; Reichard & Johnson, 2011; Reichard & Walker, 2016). In fact, growing evidence indicates that a supportive culture and support from senior management are the strongest drivers of employee learning, organizational commitment, and talent retention (Cao & Hamori, 2015; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Without it, leaders learning and practicing any idealized leadership approach may lead to misalignment within the wider organizational context, thereby causing confusion and ineffectiveness (Day et al., 2009; Van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & van Meurs, 2009). In contrast, successful organizations are able to link the following key elements together to create desirable leader development outcomes: the process to
identify talent, the process to identify and construct developmental experience, the ability to place talent into suitable developmental experiences, the ability to serve as a catalyst for enhanced learning, and the ability to utilize business strategies with a career-long perspective (DeRue & Myers, 2014; McCauley et al., 2014).

This calls for a systemic approach to leader development at an organizational level. To bring about these developmental initiatives and generate a supportive climate capable of enabling the conditions for robust leader development, top management should be committed to deploying developmental-friendly policies, practices, and resources in training and development. For instance, some successful organizations purposefully use a variety of interventions for both protégé-leaders and bosses to catalyze leader development, including: feedback from multiple sources, making bosses accountable for developing others, online training and processes, workshops of relevant tools and knowledge before job assignment, workshops and programs for network building, special attention to job transition points, developing methodology for deliberate practice, and group briefing and debriefing sessions for projects (McCauley & McCall, 2014).

**Theme 4: Personal drive as impetus for growth**

Theme 4 has delineated the effects of individual characteristics on leader development over time. Specifically, it showed that interaction of three individual characteristics, namely
motivation to develop leadership, career aspiration, and self-awareness of developmental needs affected leaders’ drive for development and thereby their persistence in developmental pursuit. In a similar vein, the CCL model stresses that leader development depends on two interrelated functions, namely a variety of developmental experiences and individual ability to learn from experience, which consists of factors such as motivation, personality, and learning tactics (McCauley et al., 2010).

The preparedness of a leader to benefit from a particular developmental experience is referred to as leader developmental readiness (LDR) (Day et al., 2009). It is defined as “both the ability and motivation to attend to, make meaning of, and appropriate new knowledge into one’s long-term memory structures” (Hannah & Lester, 2009, p. 37). LDR affects the pace of leader development from developmental experiences (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014; Doh, 2003). According to Hannah and Avolio (2010), LDR consists of two higher-order constructs—motivation to develop and ability to develop. Motivation to develop is stimulated by personal interests and goals, learning goal orientation, and developmental efficacy; whereas ability to develop is enhanced by self-awareness, self-complexity, and meta-cognitive ability (Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

**Motivation to develop.** As one of the main components of LDR, motivation to develop provides the primary impetus for mobilizing developmental pursuit (Hannah & Avolio, 2010;
Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). As Theme 2 and Theme 5 have shown, persistent pursuit of diverse development experiences and engagement in deliberate practice are key to attain mastery of leadership expertise and higher levels of performance (Day et al., 2009; Ericsson et al., 2007; Reichard & Walker, 2016). However, wrestling with challenges and persisting in deliberate practice are inherently laborious and not immediately rewarding.

Despite this, leaders with strong motivation are most likely to intentionally set challenging developmental goals, seek developmental experiences, and persist in overcoming obstacles and setbacks (Reichard & Walker, 2016). Because of that, experts are better than average and low performers in making continued effort to practice the skills they formerly lacked (Coughlan, Williams, McRobert, & Ford, 2014). In short, strong motivation is the precursor of expert performance indeed.

Reichard and Walker (2016) advanced a conceptual model of LDR, which outlines the antecedents and outcomes of LDR. The first and foremost antecedent to motivation to develop is the discovery of one’s passion and purpose as a leader (see further discussion in the career aspiration section), which leads to motivation to lead, thereby motivation to develop leadership as well as development of leader identity (see Theme 5). Further, motivation to develop fosters a leader’s ability to develop leadership, which comprises the components of learning goal orientation, developmental efficacy, persistence, and metacognitive ability such as
self-awareness and self-regulation. The interactions of motivation, ability to develop leadership, and supportive environment maximize leader development outcomes in relation to the development of leader efficacy, complexity, and skills (Reichard & Walker, 2016).

**Passion and purpose as a leader.** The participants in this study, regardless of their career goals, were passionate about both personal growth and the growth of followers and students. For instance, academic-growth leaders Anna, David, and Ella took on leadership positions as a means to improve teaching, which they truly cared about, whereas Benny, Francis, and Garvin looked for leadership opportunities as a means to unleashing their potential and accomplishing career growth. Both types of passions motivated participants with different career goals to learn how to become effective leaders.

Bronk and McLean (2016) argued that purpose in life and harmonious passion are central components of leader developmental readiness. Purpose in life is “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once personally meaningful and at the same time leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self” (Bronk & McLean, 2016, p. 31). Passion is a strong inclination to invest time and energy into an activity, in which a person attaches personal affection, significance, and meaning to make it part of their self-identity (Vallerand, 2012). Passion energizes individual leaders and even their followers to engage in deliberate practice to attain mastery of leadership skills (Ericsson et al., 2007).
Using his famous chariot metaphor, Plato argued in the dialogue *Phaedrus* that purpose steers the horses of passion, whereas passion moves individuals toward the goal (Bronk & McLean, 2016). Research shows that autonomous internalization caused by intrinsic values leads to harmonious passion, whereas controlled internalization by extrinsic factors results in obsessive passion (Vallerand, 2012). To illustrate, guided by a sense of purpose and passion for education, the participants in this study were committed to advancing a cause that concerns not only their personal meaning, but also their contributing to the common good of their department and the students within it. Their life goals and passion for education brought a clear purpose to their leader development. Moreover, they inspired faculty members to pursue a common goal through transformational leadership practice (Bronk & McLean, 2016).

Research has found that living a life rich in purpose and meaning, continued growth, and quality social relationships leads to positive life outcomes, such as a deeper sense of hope, flourishing, psychological well-being, and satisfaction in life (D. W. Chan, 2009; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2011). Similarly, harmonious passion contributes to positive engagement, enhanced performance outcomes, and meaning in life (Vallerand, 2012; Vallerand et al., 2008). The effect of life purpose and passion on subjective well-being and life satisfaction are mediated by the action of engaging in potentially painful goal pursuits, or self-regulation, rather than hedonistic activities (Franks,
Chen, Manley, & Higgins, 2015). Meta-analysis by Klug and Maier (2015) disclosed that the process of successful goal pursuit, rather than the outcome, significantly correlates with subjective well-being. The underlying mechanism can be explained by self-determination theory (SDT), which argues that self-regulatory processes satisfy one’s innate needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008). In sum, life purpose, passion, goal pursuit, and the gratification derived from making progress in life mutually reinforce each other to fuel the leader development spiral.

**Career aspiration and motivation to lead.** Goal orientation reveals individuals’ internal motivational processes that shape their self-regulation, i.e., task choice, goal setting, and effort mechanisms (Day et al., 2009; Tsui & Ashford, 1994). Logically, career aspiration has a strong impact on self-regulation by directing motivational processes and goal setting processes. As motivation reflects a drive to achieve a goal in life, a leader’s motivation to be a leader is the precondition for persistent leader development (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016).

A leader’s motivation to lead influences their decision to take up leadership roles. Motivation to lead is influenced by valuing three aspects of leading: affective identity (emotional value), social normative dimension (social value), and noncalculative dimension (utility value) (K.-Y. Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). To illustrate, this study identified two types of career aspirations among the participants. **Career-growth** leaders were motivated
to realize their long-term career ambitions and passions for influencing others. They had an affective motivation to embrace a leader identity. By contrast, academic-growth leaders considered leadership positions as an interlude in their academic careers. Their motivation to lead was social normative, i.e., they took up leadership roles temporally because of a sense of responsibility to tackle certain organizational problems, which affected the achievement of the long-term scholarly goals of all faculty, including themselves. They took up the extra workload and stress not because of tangible rewards or higher positional status. Their motivation thus was non-calculative. In any case, however, these diverse motivations to lead all fostered their motivation to develop leadership after assuming the leadership roles.

**Behavioral outcomes of motivation.** Literature suggests that motivation comprises three behavioral outcomes: attention (focus of thoughts or actions), effort (amount of resources spent on task performance), and persistence (a choice to maintain the focus and effort) (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). Persistence to make progress is maintained by an individual’s conscious effort in drawing upon internal mental and physical resources, which are referred to as self-regulatory strength or will power (Day et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the act of goal pursuit consumes self-regulatory strength and impairs subsequent self-regulation, resulting in a phenomenon called ego depletion (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). To combat ego depletion
and sustain their effort in the self-regulatory process, leaders have to replenish their motivational and physical energies before they are exhausted.

Individual leaders’ self-regulatory strengths are contingent upon a number of factors, including their mental frame, career goals, and personal dispositions. In this study, all participants were able to maintain a positive outlook toward challenges, which fueled their self-regulatory strength and thereby sustained their self-improvement efforts. This finding supports extant literature that motivational and framing factors can replenish self-regulatory strength (Baumeister et al., 2007; Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010).

Additionally, as Benny, Francis, Garvin, and Hannah demonstrated, a long-term career goal toward leadership sustains a leader’s self-regulation in the long haul. In contrast, academic-growth leaders like Anna, David, and Ella strived to avoid fully focusing on managerial leadership to maintain their scholarly identities. Perceiving leadership roles as an interlude in their academic careers, they wished to step down from the leadership roles ultimately. Thus, persistence in leader development was linked to career aspirations of individual leaders.

According to the VIE theory of motivation (Vroom, 1964), leaders’ motivation to develop leadership results from their appraisal of its valence (value of being leaders), instrumentality (perceived link between leader development effort and performance outcome), and expectancy (belief in ability to improve) (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016). It was evident that
career-growth leaders and academic-growth leaders placed different valence on their leader roles, thereby affecting their instrumentality and the expectation of their pursuit. Consequently, they invested different amounts of motivational effort and persistence in leader development over the long haul.

To elaborate, career-growth leaders had autonomous internalization of leader identity, and exhibited harmonious passion for leader development, whereas academic-growth leaders had controlled internalization of leader identity and exhibited obsessive passion (Vallerand, 2012). A controlled internalization is triggered by intra- and interpersonal pressure arising from uncontrollable contingencies (e.g., responding to organizational needs, or avoiding criticism by others), and obsessive passion risks causing negative affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences (Vallerand, 2012). Both obsessive passion and avoidance orientation reduce the motivation to maximize learning from experience and ultimately hinder persistence in self-development (Rosch & Villanueva, 2016).

SDT studies indicate that only controlled internalization depletes self-regulatory strength; on the contrary, autonomous internalization or harmonious passion actually vitalize self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The above discussion shows that differences in career goals and personal outlook affect motivation to lead, and thereby motivation to develop, as well as the attention, effort, and persistence necessary for leader development. This supports Day et
al.’s (2012) *Proposition 7a: Self-regulatory strength accelerates the ongoing learning and development of leaders.*

**Effects of personality on motivation to develop.** According to Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental theory, the deep structure of personality generates an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. The participants in this study, regardless of their career goals, embraced job challenges as developmental opportunities and endured various adversities encountered. Their personality traits displayed strong *resilience* and *openness to experience*. Moreover, Francis, Garvin, and Hannah appeared to be more *extroverted*, whereas Anna, David, Ella were introverted but *conscientious* of their responsibility to the faculty. All of them were highly proactive in seeking challenges and achieved fast-track career success. In sum, their behaviors support the literature that understands personality traits of resilience, openness to experience, and conscientiousness as having positive effects on motivation to develop leadership.

**Hardness.** When confronting challenges and setbacks, the participants in this study were *tough* enough to withstand the emotional whirlwind of confronting challenges and focused on rational problem solving. A tough and resilient attitude is referred to as *hardness*, which is conceptualized as “the existential courage that facilitates facing stresses directly and learning from transforming them to advantage” (Maddi, 2013, p. 227). As a personality trait, hardiness results from the integration of *attitudes* that provide the courage and *motivation* of striving to
turn potential disasters into growth opportunities (Maddi, 2006). Hardiness is not only more powerful than optimism and religiousness in coping with stresses, but also leads to enhanced performance, meaning, fulfillment, and physical and subjective well-being (Maddi, 2006, 2013). As discussed earlier, purpose in life and passion toward one’s career are major sources of courage and motivation that underpin the leaders’ hardness to strive for worthy goals. In this way, hardiness brings leaders the existential courage to replenish their self-regulatory strength.

**Openness to experience.** Openness to experience includes six dimensions: aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, active imagination, wide interests, attentiveness to feelings, and original ideas, whereas its close related ally, *extraversion* involves assertiveness, excitement seeking, positive emotion, and gregariousness (McCrae & John, 1992). As demonstrated by David, Francis and Hannah, these personality traits made them excited to seek for challenges and to “learn widely” while not “get[ing] bored.” Their stories support the theory that leaders who are extroverted, open to experience, and who have strong learning orientations tend to accumulate more challenging experience, achieve higher levels of competence, and better prospects for promotion (De Pater, van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009; Dragoni et al., 2011; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009).

**Conscientiousness.** According to the five-factor personality model (McCrae & Costa, 1987), conscientious people, being dutiful, achievement oriented, diligent, and self-disciplined,
have greater persistence and motivation to learn. They are also systematic, detail oriented and deliberate in processing information, thus enabling them to be more accurate in processing ambiguous information (McCrae & Costa, 1987; McCrae & John, 1992). For example, Anna, Chloe, and Garvin were dutiful, achievement oriented, and self-disciplined in learning how to make achievement and discharge their responsibilities.

With regard to the experiential learning process, Ellis et al. (2014) argued that performance improvement is a function of experience (failed vs. successful) and reflection focus (correct and erroneous actions) aimed at reducing the misfit between existing mental models and task demands. Improvement through after-event-review (AER) is maximized when reflection focus is placed on both correct and erroneous actions, especially when reviewing failed experiences (Ellis & Davidi, 2005). As reviewing failures can be harmful to self-efficacy and psychological safety, both conscientiousness and openness to experience help leaders to maintain emotional stability, thereby boosting the effectiveness of reflective practice in leader development (DeRue et al., 2012).

**Goal orientation.** This study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations affect individual leaders’ perseverance (self-regulatory strength) in adaptive learning when confronting job challenges and setbacks. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined orientation of motivation as “the underlying attitudes and goals that give rise to action,” or the why of actions (p. 54). Intrinsic
motivation reflects one’s natural propensity to learn and assimilate, whereas extrinsic motivation reflects varied degree of autonomy between external control and self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empirical tests of self-determined theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) show that strong self-determination (i.e., high intrinsic motivation, low external motivation) and motivation levels (i.e., high on all types of motivation) are most associated with favorable need satisfaction, job performance, and work environment perceptions (C. M. Moran, Diefendorff, Kim, & Liu, 2012).

According to goal orientation (GO) theory (Dweck, 1986), people with a learning goal orientation (LGO) love to learn new skills by mastering new situations, whereas those with a performance goal orientation (PGO) tend to validate their competence by seeking positive evaluations (i.e., “prove goal orientation”) and avoiding negative judgments (i.e., “avoid orientation”). Recent studies tend to conceptualize GO as a quasi-trait that can be malleable by situations (Culbertson & Jackson, 2016; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005).

DeShon and Gillespie’s (2005) motivated action theory posits that: (a) all actions are goal-directed; (b) goals are hierarchical; and (c) higher level goals inform the purpose of action (the why), and lower level goals provide specific actions (the how) to accomplish higher-level goals. Top level goals are self goals related to agency, affiliation, and esteem, followed by principle goals concerning growth, fairness, structure, and social value; whereas at the second level is achievement goals of mastery approach, performance approach, and
performance-avoidance approach, and at the bottom level *action plan goals* include feedback seeking, impression management, resource allocation, and problem exploration (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). According to motivated action theory, GO represents activated intermediate-level goals, which shape the pattern of goal striving behaviors in the self-regulatory processes (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005).

From the perspective of motivated action theory, all participants in this study had similar self-goals. However, possessing varied principle goals, they exhibited different achievement goal orientations and action plan goals. To illustrate, Chloe possessed the stronger principle goals of fairness and social values (“to be accepted”). She demonstrated relatively strong performance goal orientation and extrinsic motivations. Impression management became a major component of her action plan goals. On the other hand, Ella possessed stronger principle goals of growth and social values (“sense of duty in organizational crisis”). She demonstrated strong learning goal orientation and extrinsic motivation (“sacrificing personal academic pursuit to meet organizational needs”). Thus, she was reluctant to allocate too many personal resources in leader development over the long term as she wished to step down any time in the future. By contrast, Hannah possessed strong principle goals of growth (“personal growth” and “career growth”). As such, she demonstrated relatively strong learning goal orientation and intrinsic
motivation to accomplish her career goal. She proactively pursued action plan goals of feedback seeing, impression management, resource allocation, and problem exploration.

Among them, Hannah was most committed to leader development. Ella was motivated to develop her leadership skill to the extent that her academic leadership identity was unaffected. Chloe was less persistent in developing leadership when things were smooth because her primary motivation was to gain acceptance and avoid her bosses’ negative appraisal. In sum, compared with leaders who seek performance goals via extrinsic motivation, those with strong learning goal orientation and intrinsic motivations were more persistent in leader development.

This finding concurs with personal-goal literature that suggests leaders with strong learning and career-growth orientations are more motivated to engage in self-development pursuits and more skilled at self-regulation (Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010; Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Research shows that people with a prove-PGO tend to avoid setting challenging goals, and those with an avoid-PGO set easier goals, whereas those with LGO tend to set challenging goals and are more likely to consistently improve performance over time (Culbertson & Jackson, 2016). Moreover, leaders with a strong LGO are not afraid of seeking negative feedback, whereas those with a strong prove-PGO tend to seek positive feedback, and those with a strong avoid-PGO seek less feedback (Culbertson & Jackson, 2016). Overall, strong LGO enhances systematic reflection (Ellis et al., 2014).
Additionally, tackling challenging assignments simulates a higher positive-activating mood in individuals with a LGO than those with a PGO (Preenen, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2014a). While promotion-focused people experience higher life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement endeavors, prevention-focused people experienced equal levels of life satisfaction from self-protection activities (Lafrenière, Sedikides, & Lei, 2015). Over the long term however, leaders with promotion- or learning- focus are more successful than prevention-focus individuals in managing daily challenges, task performance, and achieving promotion-type goals (Franks et al., 2015; Preenen, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2014b). This supports Day et al.’s (2012) Proposition 7b: Learning goal orientations facilitate development of leader expertise through the use of self-regulation strategies.

**Self-regulation as metacognitive ability.** The participants in this study actively participated in self-directed learning activities to advance leadership expertise. This reflected their strong metacognitive ability of self-regulation to develop leadership (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). As discussed in Theme 2, evolution of the self is dependent on developing capacities for self-regulation and sustaining self-autonomy (Kegan, 1982). Self-regulation includes task choice, goal setting, and effort mechanisms in addition to emotional management (Day et al., 2009; Franks et al., 2015; Tsui & Ashford, 1994). Empirical studies show that the ability to maintain emotional stability predicts the effectiveness of systematic reflection, and thereby work
and life success over time (Ellis et al., 2014; Goleman, 1998b). Hence, self-regulation, as one of the components of developmental readiness, is central to steering people’s deliberate effort to transcend beyond an average level of performance (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Ericsson et al., 2007). Hence, self-regulation is one of the most critical metacognitive abilities for leader development.

As discussed in Theme 2, leader development involves risk-taking in overcoming problems beyond the current state of one’s capacity. From Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental perspective, leader development involves not only cognitive and behavioral processes, but also emotional processes. Emotional conflict is a by-product of development when leaders are torn between conflicting goals arising from different realities. Whether a leader can successfully manage his/her transition depends on his/her ability to achieve “the relaxation of one’s vigilance, a sense of flow and immediacy, a freeing up of one’s internal life, an openness to and playfulness about oneself,” including the “experience of not knowing” (Kegan, 1982, p.231). As Kegan (1982) maintained, evolution of the self is dependent on developing the capacities of self-regulation and sustaining self-autonomy.

According to Kegan (1982), self-regulation enables individuals to unfreeze existing deep mental structure during their evolution to higher developmental stages. The evolved leader resolves developmental conflict through self-regulation of internal impulses and through his/her
work with others, thereby maintaining intrapersonal and interpersonal balance. Thus, self-regulation performs a critical function throughout the leader development process in terms of goal setting, behavioral and affective adjustment, and self-monitoring (Day et al., 2009; Tsui & Ashford, 1994). It directs a leader’s attention and internal resources away from the self and toward planning, implementation, and monitoring of problem-solving efforts (Day et al., 2009).

As Mälkki (2012) showed, successfully coping with unpleasant emotions arising from a developmental crisis is an enabling condition for critical reflection. Without such capacities, a leader’s attempt at growth may become unsettled and result in uncertainty, self-doubt, and entrapment into the status quo (Diddams & Chang, 2012). In this regard, Goleman (1998b) argued that the ability to manage emotions and motivate oneself, empathy, and self-regulation (self-control and trustworthiness) are major components of emotional intelligence, which accounts for work and life success much more than expertise or intelligence quotient (IQ).

Apart from emotional management, another key function of self-regulation is to set reasonable goals within what Vygotsky (1986/1934) called the zone of proximal development (Day et al., 2009). A developmental challenge that far exceeds a leader’s current capabilities can overwhelm him or her cognitively and emotionally (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014; Kegan, 1994). This was evident in this study. Just like Francis and Hannah felt “bored” by overly stable jobs, whereas David burst out that too difficult colleagues would drive him “crazy,”
Franks et al. (2015) found that too many and too few challenges are equally damaging to a leader’s career and mental health. Thus, effective self-regulation is a necessary component of subjective well-being.

To avoid ego-depletion during the self-regulatory processes, the participants in this study deployed psychological adjustment strategies of anticipation and attribution to protect subjective well-being. Anticipation enhanced a leader’s tolerance of ambiguity and get prepared against emotional shocks arising from challenges and setbacks. Adjusting their locus of control and attribution strategy allowed leaders to let go of frustrations caused by perceived uncontrollable problems and focus on improving matters that were controllable.

In psychological literature, the cognitive and perceptual process of attributing success internally and failure externally is referred to as self-serving bias (Myers, 2015). Self-serving bias and delayed performance evaluation help to protect leaders’ self-esteem against self-doubt when reflecting on their own weaknesses (Diddams & Chang, 2012). However, people with self-serving bias may reject the validity of negative feedback and thus fail to learn from failures and unsuccessful experiences. According to Duval and Silvia (2002), self-serving bias involves the interaction of two systems: one that compares the self against standards and one of causal attribution. Success and failure attributions are moderated by self-awareness and by the ability to improve. When self-awareness is high, only failures that cannot be improved will be
attributed externally, successes and failures that can be improved will be attributed internally (Duval & Silvia, 2002). The behaviors of the participants in this study were consistent with the literature.

In the presence of strong self-awareness and self-monitoring, anticipation and attribution strategies essentially involve adopting suitable mental frames to avoid resorting to psychological defense mechanisms that block self-reflection (Diddams & Chang, 2012). From Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental perspective, meaning making of the external world and the self is mediated by psychologic and shaped by self-regulation. Positive framing and motivation are found to fuel self-regulatory strength (Baumeister et al., 2007; Hagger et al., 2010). In contrast, emotional instability is associated with extreme, ineffective leader behaviors (Kaiser, LeBreton, & Hogan, 2015). Hence, effective psychological adjustment strategies enhance the participants’ self-regulatory strength to endure adversity and promote collaborative problem solving.

**Self-awareness as metacognitive ability.** This study found that the participants were able to develop a strong self-awareness of their development needs and cultivate a habit of self-reflection. Self-awareness illuminates leaders’ strengths and weaknesses against the ideal state, thereby helping them set realistic developmental goals and take appropriate actions based on goal monitoring (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014; Hall, 2004). Furthermore, it deepens leaders’ understanding of their implicit theories, goal patterns, and patterns of
self-reflection to avoid maladaptive processes and improve self-regulation (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). These processes are critical in facilitating leaders’ growth and continuous learning to reach expert performance over time (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014; Hall, 2004). Therefore, self-awareness is fundamental to leader development readiness, especially for authentic leaders (Gardner et al., 2005; Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

The second aspect of self-awareness found in this study is emotion monitoring. From a long-term perspective of adult development, Goleman (1998b) argued that emotional awareness is an important component of emotional intelligence leading to work and life success. As learning from challenging experiences involves both cognitive and affective processes (Kegan, 1982), self-awareness enables leaders to better understand and regulate their thought processes, hence fostering effective problem solving and learning from experiences (Black et al., 2016). As such, self-awareness enhances a leader’s capacity to engage in reflective practice and transformative learning (Mälkki, 2012; Mezirow, 2000). This study supported the literature by showing that the participants were able to monitor and maintain their emotional stability to facilitate effective problem solving and learning not only individually, but also at team levels through positive communication.

The third aspect of self-awareness found is clarity of the self. Self-concept clarity refers to “the extent to which self-beliefs (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and
confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable” (Campbell et al., 1996, p. 141).

Self-awareness generated by metacognition deepens a leader’s understanding of their implicit theories, goal patterns, and patterns of self-reflection (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Thus, they are better able to adjust their leader development approaches to maximize learning from developmental experiences, for example by shifting to a learning orientation and in-depth processing of learning experiences (Black et al., 2016). Hence, leaders with self-insight should be more capable of incorporating new knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes (KSAA) into their deep knowledge and identity structures (Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

Moreover, self-awareness enhances leaders’ ability to make meaning of development and increases leader developmental readiness (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Self-concept clarity consists of self-knowledge and self-consistency (Schlegel et al., 2013). Thus, self-awareness, positive self-regulation, and positive self-development are core components of effective authentic leaders in leadership literature (Avolio, 2010, 2011; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Other than self-knowledge concerning personal strengths and weaknesses, self-awareness also refers to one’s knowledge and trust in the thoughts, feelings, motives, and values behind one’s own actions (Avolio, 2010; Gardner et al., 2011). Through self-reflection, self-awareness brings clarity to a leader’s self-concept (McCauley et al., 2010), which enhances leaders’ ability to make meaning of development through strengthening the
ability to determine how new knowledge and understanding integrate with current deep knowledge and identity structures (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Self-awareness enhances LDR because self-insight regarding one’s underlying interests, purpose in life, and goals guiding actions leads to autonomous internalization or harmonious passion, which brings greater top level self-goals of agency, ownership, and thus self-regulatory strength in leader development (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

The fourth aspect of self-awareness found is that the participants were aware of not only intrapersonal processes, but also their impact on others. To illustrate, David was conscious of when and how to exercise his positional power, and Benny, Chloe, Ella, and Garvin were cognizant of their roles in advising subordinates on task-related or career development issues. They were also sensitive to subordinates’ responses to their leadership decisions and behaviors. This level of self-awareness indicates a shift of focus on the self to the followers’ cognition, which enhances the leaders’ social influencing skills in managing dyad and team-level leadership (Black et al., 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005). Their behaviors were in line with a relational perspective of leadership and demonstrated a tendency toward fostering self-development on the part of the leaders and their followers, which is one of the characteristics of authentic leadership (Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The ability to be cognizant of the impact of their words and deeds on others enables leaders to better perform
their roles at interpersonal and group levels (Avolio, 2010, 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; McCauley et al., 2010).

The fifth aspect of self-awareness is the negotiation of self-identity with social demand. From Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental lens, entering into a new social role often imposes a threat to one’s inner balance. Leaders in transition feel vulnerable and grief over the loss of balance because “all disequilibrium is a crisis of meaning; all disequilibrium is a crisis of identity” (Kegan, 1982, p.240). Conflicts in the need for inclusion (approval from others) and differentiation (personally authored identity) may cause psychological tensions and even problems.

As shown in Theme 2 and Theme 4, the participants’ intention of learning depended on the congruence between his or her personality with the role demand and wider organizational cultural values. Severe personality-cultural conflicts will trigger confusion, ambivalence, and eventually turnover intention. As such, leaders’ adaptive behaviors have to be rooted in and compatible with their personality. Adequate self-understanding allows them to keep adaptation within the zone of compatibility and avoid causing personality-role conflicts. To illustrate, Ella and Garvin emphasized the importance of maintaining a true self and behavioral consistency to build trust-based relationships with others in the process of adaptive learning. As Ella asserted, “beyond that it is not me.”
Behavioral consistency and displaying a true self, i.e., behavioral transparency, are two essential components of authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Self-awareness is the prerequisite of authentic leadership behaviors (Avolio, 2010). Only those leaders who have in-depth self-knowledge and salient leader identity will be more confident and consistent in their actions than others with less self-awareness about their leadership capabilities (Avolio, 2011; Day et al., 2009).

The notion of true self, as raised by Ella, is significant to the self-concept. Theory of social self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) argues that individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships with others; therefore, self-definition contains personal, relational, and collective levels. From the constructive-developmental perspective (Kegan, 1982), people engaging with the social environment have to decide changing which parts of the self (as psychic institution) and the environment to maintain self-identity (differentiation) and acceptance by others (integration). That creates a separation of a sense of true self versus the actual or false self. True self represents a sense of knowing “who am I really” based on spontaneous authentic experience, whereas the actual self is the expression of the self through outward behaviors. The alienation of the actual self under excessive social pressure creates the false self as a defensive façade (Schlegel, Hicks, Davis, Hirsch, & Smith, 2013; Winnicott, 1960). A strong sense of
false self may lead to a lack of spontaneity and existential meaning (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011; Winnicott, 1960).

The self is not only the source of meaning, but also the internal compass in making life decisions. When making life decisions, people tend to adopt a self-to-prototype matching approach, and choose the option that matches their self-concepts with the behaviors of the prototype (Cheryan & Plaut, 2010; Schlegel et al., 2013). Research shows that critical life decisions and goal pursuits that are concordant with the self will generate greater decision satisfaction and subjective well-being (Schlegel et al., 2013; Schlegel et al., 2011). Thus a developed identity with better self-knowledge is linked to career decidedness, commitment, and satisfaction (Schlegel et al., 2013). Better self-knowledge is essential for enhancing an individual’s ability to make satisfying life decisions and reduce personality-role conflicts, for example when making career decisions (Lent & Fouad, 2011; Nakao et al., 2010). Consistent with the literature discussed above, this study found that adaptive behaviors have to be rooted in and compatible with their own personality. This finding also supports Day et al.’s (2012) Proposition 7d: Self-awareness will facilitate the development of leader learning and expertise.

Effective self-to-prototype matching requires clarity of self-concept (Schlegel et al., 2013). Other than self-knowledge concerning the intrapersonal understanding of one’s strengths and weaknesses, i.e. thoughts, feelings, motives, and values behind actions (Avolio,
(2010; Gardner et al., 2011), self-awareness also includes an interpersonal dimension, defined as “the extent to which people are conscious of various aspects of their identities and the extent to which their self-perceptions are internally integrated and congruent with the way others perceive them” (Hall, 2004, p.154). Hall’s (2004) definition echoes Winnicott’s (1960) notion of the true- and actual-self and emphasizes their congruence. Research has shown that better congruence between the true and actual self leads to better subjective well-being (Schlegel et al., 2013).

In the leader development context, self-awareness of both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes is essential for maintaining self-regulation and self-autonomy. As such, an important aspect of self-awareness is the understanding of what internal and situational factors have shaped one’s strengths and weaknesses, such as personality traits, preferences, and experiences (Day et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010). As Theme 2 in this study has shown, self-awareness is the outcome of reflective practice and learning from others, which brings inconvenient truths about personal weaknesses and salient role-conflicts to the foreground. This supports literature that people acquire self-knowledge through a number of means, including social comparison, self-perception, feedback from others, introspection, and self-observation (Schlegel et al., 2013). On the other hand, from a personal development point of view, personal transformation occurs
when individuals acquire clear self-concepts through critical reflection (Cranton, 2011; Mezirow, 2000).

In sum, the above discussion concerning the relationships among personality, career aspiration, self-awareness, and self-regulatory strength supports the idea that the development of leaders, especially authentic leaders, involves profound change in self-awareness and self-identity (Avolio, 2011; Day et al., 2014; Day et al., 2009; Mälkki, 2012). The finding showed that leaders with strong hardness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, learning-goal orientation, and extraversion have stronger motivation to develop leadership. On the other hand, self-awareness of career aspirations, passion in education, and purpose in life affects the participants’ motivation to lead, thereby motivation to develop, and thus self-regulatory strength in leader development. In turn, the self-regulation process brings better clarity to one’s self-concept in relation to role demand. Such increased self-awareness informs subsequent self-regulation processes, namely goal setting, goal operation, goal monitoring, and emotional management. The outcome of self-regulation is the evolved deep structure in leadership knowledge and identity. In this regard, the interactions of personality, career and life goals, self-awareness and self-regulation shape the development process and pace of turning novices into expert leaders. In sum, findings in Theme 4 support Day et al.’s (2012)
Proposition 7: Individual differences between leaders influence the rate and direction of the spirals of identity development and leader development.

Theme 5: Leader maturation through cumulative learning

Built on the first four themes, Theme 5 has depicted the trajectories of leader development as a multi-level and longitudinal maturation process in parallel with leaders’ career advancement trajectories. From diverse biographical backgrounds and career paths, each participant accumulated leadership expertise throughout their lifespan development, especially during their work life. For instance, David reflected that he started to develop leadership skills during his secondary education and voluntary service at the church, whereas Anna learned about leadership from her bosses when working at a school and a social service agency.

Philosophy-trained Benny learned to be a leader after he engaged in business start-ups. Some of them, such as Benny, Francis, Garvin, and Hannah, proactively sought new job assignments and projects to expand their professional competences to accelerate their career advancement. Further, many of them treated committee work and ad-hoc projects as the warm-up exercise for higher leadership roles. Accumulation of these life experiences contributed to their leadership growth. This supports Day et al.’s (2009) Proposition 2: The development of leadership expertise occurs as a result of identity changes that take place throughout the lifespan, but particularly in adulthood.
**Self-complexity and leader development spiral.** The above finding adds empirical support to the social constructivist perspective of leadership, which conceptualizes the enactment of leadership as an ongoing process that occurs within a specific social context, and leader development as an ongoing adaptive learning process within it (Day et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Middlehurst, 2008). From the open systems perspective, individual leaders are open systems operating in the dynamic environment; they have to match their requisite variety with the diverse environment (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1966). The participants in this study acquired requisite variety through integrating various skills and conceptual and experiential knowledge from the accumulation of experiences throughout their work and life. Their ability to differentiate and integrate new knowledge into the self-system, or deep structure, is referred to as *self-complexity*. Like self-awareness and metacognitive ability, self-complexity results from leader development and simultaneously promotes leaders’ ability to develop (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Reichard & Walker, 2016).

Self-awareness developed through metacognitive reflection enhances a leader’s ability to learn from experience, i.e., second order thinking of learning how to learn. In this way, self-complexity enables leaders to develop an increasingly complex understanding of leadership. Extension of leadership expertise in turn increases self-complexity and results in a progressive developmental spiral over time. Over the long-term, leaders’ patterns of self-regulation in
leader development result in a positive (or negative) growth trajectory (Reichard & Walker, 2016). This finding supports Day et al.’s (2009) Proposition 4: The development of expert leadership follows a longitudinal trajectory that parallels the development of expertise in other domains.

Meanwhile, Day et al. (2009) argued that leader development should be seen as a dynamic and nonlinear process that is more like a web of development with “different strands of varied development trajectories depending on the given contextual influences,” rather than a ladder (p.220). However, this study found that the participants used the image of a “chain” to emphasize that a step-by-step or stage-by-stage approach is more conducive to leader development, given its accumulative and progressive nature. Indeed, this conception better aligns with the constructive-developmental perspective of leader development as a stage-based lifespan development process, in which expert leaders at higher leadership positions were able to deploy higher-order learning strategy to integrate lower-order leadership knowledge and skills into higher-order knowledge structures.

Nonetheless, differences in the images of leader development as a chain and a web of development warrant further discussion. An explanation is that since each level of leadership position (program, departmental, faculty, or college levels) carries a respective set of role demands defined in the HEIs’ organizational hierarchy, leaders at different leadership positions
inevitably have to acquire the set of leadership expertise (requisite variety) that matches the role demands of the respective levels. Thus, as shown in Theme 2, in tandem with the advancement of leadership positions, leaders exhibited more sophisticated leadership competence starting from personal, to local, and ultimately to organizational leadership stages (McCauley et al., 2010; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). This lends support to the view that participants’ leadership growth follows a stage-based model over time.

On the other hand, participants’ lived experiences suggested that they followed different paths of advancement between two leadership levels. From the perspective of open systems, the participants had to achieve equifinality by producing different solutions to arriving at this end state (Hatch & Cunliiffe, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1966). Under the notion of equifinality, they ended up achieving similar developmental outcomes in terms of requisite variety. In this regard, individual leaders’ between-level progression may be conceived as a transformational and discrete change, whereas the whole trajectories of leader development follow a stepwise and gradual evolutionary process along their career ladders.

**Self-efficacy and developmental efficacy.** Another finding in this study is that self-efficacy is positively associated with a leader’s maturation. Accumulative learning enhances a leader’s ability to operate effectively in increasingly wider leadership domains and even novel situations, thereby enlarging their internal locus of control and self-efficacy in diverse
and novel contexts. In turn, positive leadership experiences are likely to further entrench leader identity by increasing one’s self-efficacy for leadership and motivate a search for additional developmental experiences (Day et al., 2009). Stronger self-efficacy enhances leaders’ self-regulatory strength in putting forth self-improvement effort. Thus, leader development and self-efficacy constitute a mutually reinforcing developmental spiral. This support Day et al.’s (2009) Proposition 7c: A leader’s generalized self-efficacy will positively relate to leader development and learning.

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to a ‘belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). In the leader development context, leader efficacy is a leader’s level of confidence in his or her ability to lead effectively, whereas developmental efficacy represents his or her level of confidence in developing and applying specific knowledge and skills to certain leadership contexts (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). In this regard, developmental efficacy is a component of motivation to develop leadership.

Literature suggests that leader development involves intrapersonal changes in self-identity (Day, 2000, 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982) contends that individuals construct their understanding of self and progress from various stages of development (see Chapter I). Built
on Kegan’s works, Komives et al. (2005, 2006) advance a grounded theory of leadership identity development (LID), which delineates the process of how individuals change their views about the self and others, and finally internalize their leadership identity in the leader development process. Development of leader identity is affected by experiences in five categories of influence: a broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others (Komives et al., 2006). A broadening view of leadership reflects a change in the leadership perception as an external other, as positional, then as relational, and finally as a process. As illustrated in Chapter IV, developing self is dependent on strengthening self-awareness, self-confidence, interpersonal efficacy, new skills, and motivations. Group influences include engaging with and learning in groups. Developmental influences include influences from significant others, peers, meaningful developmental experience, and reflective learning. Finally, the leaders’ views on the self change from being dependent, independent or dependent, and interdependent with others (Komives et al., 2006). In general, the five themes identified in this study support the five developmental influences in Komives et al.’s (2006) LID theory.

Komives et al.’s (2006) LID theory delineates six stages of leader identity development: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. According to Komives et al. (2006), LID stage three corresponds to
Kegan’s (1982, 1994) third order of evolutionary truces, namely “interpersonal balance” where the self-other relation is at the dependent stage. LID stage four: leadership differentiated, corresponds to Kegan’s fourth order of evolutionary truces “institutional balance,” which is characterized with the ability of self-authoring and a sense of independence in the self-other relation. Finally, LID stages five and six correspond to Kegan’s fifth order of evolutionary truces “interindividual balance,” where a sense of interdependence in the self-other relation is developed (Komives et al., 2006).

Seen from the LID model, effective program leaders like Chloe had evolved from the Dependent stage and reached the Independent stage in their new area of responsibilities, where they established a salient leader identity with a sense of self-dependence and self-ownership. Further, departmental heads like Benny and Ella who were charged with organizational leadership responsibilities had reached the Inter-dependent stage, where they developed the capacity for intimacy by resolving the emotions between the self-system and another. Consequently, they were able to satisfy their need for differentiation (establishing a distinct self-identity) and inclusion (being accepted).

When assuming a leadership position, the participants rejected the dictatorial image of positional leaders. Instead, they were cognizant of the change in social relationships after assuming the leadership positions and their views of the self in their new social roles. Thus,
they tried to maintain closer bonds with faculty members as team members, developers, and guides. They not only exhibited advancement in their leadership mental models and behaviors, but also gained gradual internalization of a broader leader identity, moving from a leader-centric view of leadership to one with collaborative, relational, and processual perspectives.

Lord and Hall (2005) proposed that a leader's identity is central to the provision of an organizing structure of leadership knowledge and source of motivation for progression from novice to expert leaders. According to Lord and Hall (2005), as leaders develop, their identities shift in focus from individual (i.e., me), to relational (i.e., you and me), to collective (i.e., all of us) levels. Thus, leader identity experiences change in terms of its underlying level of inclusiveness. In this process, group dynamics and developmental influences affect leaders’ progress in the forming of a leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005). Moreover, as the participants’ lived experiences have shown, their leader development was accelerated or hindered by environmental factors, such as quality and timeliness of performance feedback, support availability from their bosses and peers, and the presence of a supportive or bureaucratic culture and climate. Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that the participants’ broadening views of leadership and the self-other relations support Day et al.’s (2009)

*Proposition 6: Leadership competence is formed through spirals of leader identity formation and change in the context of learning and development through leadership experience.*
This study finds that the participants were motivated to deploy image management tactics to establish and sustain a credible leadership image because gaining faculty members’ acceptance is vital for sustaining their leadership roles. This finding is consistent with social identity and impression management literature. Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) argues that the self concept is “comprised of a personal identity encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics and a social identity encompassing salient group classifications” (p.21, emphases in original). Built on Mead’s (1934) impression management theory, Roberts (2005) contended that self-identity is “validated through public recognition,” and perceived professional image is “derived from one’s perception of how others have experience his or her displays of personal identity characteristics and social identity affiliation” (p.688). Mead (1934) argued that during social interaction, the “I” expresses my intended self-image and simultaneously learns how others perceive the image about “me” from a cultural lens. Hence, identification can be understood as a dialectic synthesis of internal and external definitions of the self (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Integrating SIT and impression management theories, Roberts (2005) argued that individuals “proactively negotiate their personal and social identities during interpersonal encounters” to construct professional image (p.685). Aligning the desired image with the perceived image creates a credible and authentic professional image, which fosters positive
intrapsychic well-being, interpersonal relationships, and organizational outcomes. In short, professional image is constructed by individuals and validated by others during interpersonal encounters. This process is conceptualized in the leadership identity construction theory (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) as a relational identity construction process of claiming (for themselves) and granting (to others) leadership identities negotiated in social interactions. Through this claiming-granting process, individual leaders internalize leader identities, which are recognized through reciprocal role adoption and collectively endorsed within organizational contexts. From this lens, construction of a leader identity involves both an intrapersonal process of identity internalization, but also an interpersonal process of social co-construction among organizational members. Empirical tests of the leadership identity construction theory support the idea that when team members accept or reject an individual leader’s claiming of leadership, his or her leadership is perceived by members and observers to be heightened or weakened (Marchiondo, Myers, & Kopelman, 2015). In sum, the finding on the importance of gaining subordinates’ acceptance through image management tactics concurs with leadership identity construction theory (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

**Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative study set out to explore the lived experiences of eight departmental leaders with regard to their journeys toward becoming effective leaders. The purpose was
descriptive and explanatory. As such, the first limitation of this study was that the research findings are not generalizable as theories of causal relationships. Second, like most IPA studies, this study adopted a small sample size. It provided an in-depth account of the subjective experiences of eight departmental leaders from diverse disciplinary and career backgrounds in HEIs in Hong Kong. However, its methodological limitation confined the transferability of the research findings beyond the context of Hong Kong HEIs. Readers of this study are recommended to make use of the rich description provided in this study to ascertain the applicability of the research findings to their situations. Third, this study was interested in the leaders’ trajectories of personal development across different career stages over time. It was not intended to develop a normative model of training interventions for leader development. Fourth, given that all of the participants in this study were ethnic Chinese, the present study did not offer insights into leader development in cross-cultural contexts. Since faculty members are becoming ethnically diversified, leader development in cross-cultural contexts may represent a promising area for future research. Lastly, an IPA study involves a double-hermeneutic process. Thus, the interpretative account of the participants’ lived experiences was confined by the knowledge and skills of the researcher. Despite these limitations, this study has provided a rich interpretative account of how leader development processes are shaped by individual, contextual,
and temporal factors. These findings provide useful insights into the research and practices relevant to improving leader selection and accelerating leader development.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn from diverse literature to relate and contrast with the five superordinate themes identified in Chapter IV from the lens of constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982). Based on these in-depth discussions, we can conclude that the lived experiences of eight departmental leaders in HEIs in Hong Kong supported the relational, social-constructivist perspective of leadership and leader development as a multilevel, longitudinal personal maturation process across individual leaders’ lifespan development (Day et al., 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien, 2006). From the social constructivist lens m, leadership is a co-construction process of claiming and granting leader identity by individual leaders and their subordinates (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The bottom line is that gaining acceptance by subordinates and peers is vital for a leader’s survival and sustainability. In view of this theoretical lens, leader development is understood as an adaptive learning process in which individual leaders make sense of their leadership experiences of negotiating with social environments at personal, interpersonal, team, departmental, organizational, and macro levels.

As an adaptive learning process, leader development involves not only acquisition of leadership expertise, but also construction of leader identity over time. As this study has shown,
most departmental leaders relied heavily on reflective practice within their work environments to advance their leadership expertise through integration of lower-order skills into their knowledge structure. In tandem with their knowledge advancement, they gradually adopted increasingly inclusive leader identities. This is in line with stage-based leadership models and thereby stage-based leader development models. In this regard, mastery of expert performance in leadership is only achievable through persistent pursuit of personal growth over a leader’s career.

Given that leader development is the integration of new knowledge into the deep structure, individuals must assume ownership of their development through seeking new knowledge from different developmental experiences. To gain leadership wisdom, leaders must possess the goals, courage, energy and discipline to step out of their comfort zones and engage in the deliberate practice of leadership. Thus, individuals’ trajectories of leader development is affected by both contextual factors (organizational culture and climate, availability of developmental experiences, support, and feedback) and individual differences in terms of past experiences, personality (openness to experience, goal orientation, hardiness, conscientiousness), metacognitive skills such as self-awareness, self-complexity, persistence, self-regulatory strength, and, most important of all, personal aspiration to be leaders. All of these factors affect a leader’s motivation to lead and motivation to develop leadership over time. On the other hand, leader development is not just the personal businesses of individual leaders.
In their career development processes, organizations play an indispensable role in providing a supportive environment to accelerate leader development.

**Implications for Practice**

Policy makers of higher education in Western countries have put leader development at the top their agenda (Burgoyne et al., 2009). The findings of this study brought important implications on improving the practices of both leader selection and leader development in HEIs in Hong Kong. First, a key finding of this study is that leader development involves a lifespan quest for the discovery of the self and the world. As the saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. In a similar vein, mastery of expert leadership performance results from accumulated learning, in which leaders acquire an inclusive, integrated, and sophisticated deep structure of leadership philosophies and leader identity with a broadened view about their roles at relational and organizational levels over time. The message to emerging and existing leaders at all levels is clear: Never stop learning. In light of this, neither individuals nor organizations should approach leader development as a short-term, one-off training exercise. Rather, personal and organizational commitments to long-term and systemic leader development are critical for nurturing expert leaders in HEIs.

Second, in view of the important effects of individual factors on the trajectories of leader development over time, neither a ‘musical-chair’ approach nor an ad-hoc top-down approach to
leader selection will work effectively. When HEIs increasingly need teams of departmental leaders with competences and long-term commitment to dealing with growing leadership complexities, the leader selection and succession planning processes should consider not only candidates’ academic credentials, but also their leadership potential with regard to personality factors, career and life passions, persistence, and metacognitive skills.

Moreover, when organizations and academic staff are facing dynamic environment and development paths, job and career changes are becoming more frequent in contemporary HEIs. It is thus vital for HEIs to adopt a systemic approach to leader development in order to formulate organizational-wide strategies, measures, and practices to enlarge the pool of department leaders from diverse professional backgrounds. This will enhance the requisite variety, stability, and adaptability of the organizations in dynamic environment (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1966).

Third, this study found the primary role of reflective practice in leader development. This suggests that HEIs can accelerate leader development by providing relevant training to departmental leaders to promote good practices, tools, and skills necessary for becoming “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983). For instance, it is worth noting that the participants in this study were inclined to focus their reflection on failures and setbacks. This represented a common blind spot of ignoring the value of learning from successes. Relevant training
interventions in conducting systematic after-action reviews (AERs) will be useful to enhance the leaders’ ability to learn holistically from both successful and unsuccessful experiences.

Fourth, this study showed that leader development is grounded in developmental experiences, including challenges, support, and feedback. These developmental experiences provide fertile ground for leaders to engage in reflective practice. Thus, an effective approach to accelerate leader development is to provide existing or emerging leaders with enriching developmental experiences as catalysts for growth.

Fifth, this study illustrated the impact of personal aspiration and motivation on sustaining or hindering leader development. Taking on leadership challenges and engaging in persistent leader development endeavors require leaders to possess not only the existential courage to lead and learn, but also adequate physical and mental resources to sustain these efforts. This suggests that leader development interventions should not be confined to skill-based training. Rather, they should be broadened to help leaders enhance the self-awareness, motivations, and self-regulatory strength necessary for sustaining leader development. Moreover, HEIs have a primary role in designing career ladders and incentive systems that enhance and sustain the motivation to lead and development of departmental leaders.

Sixth, although there has been considerable skepticism on the value of leader education among departmental leaders, this study has shown that leaders achieve maturation through the
integration of various learning experiences into the deep structure. Hence, both structured study programs and informal experiential learning courses in leadership have value in helping leaders integrate and refine their leadership philosophies to become expert leaders. It is self-limiting for leader development to give up the acquisition of conceptual knowledge via formal study and rely solely on experiential knowledge.

Seventh, developmental challenges are inherently risky and threatening experiences to individuals (Kegan, 1982). As Avolio (2016) suggests, provision of developmental experiences should take into account the developmental readiness and psychological safety concerns of the protégé leaders. Developmental challenges should rest within individual leaders’ zones of proximal development and avoid getting over their heads (Day et al., 2009; Kegan, 1994). Therefore, effective leader development interventions should be structured in a way that allows protégé leaders to try out challenging assignments in a step-by-step manner as warm-up for more important leadership roles. A ‘swim-or-sink’ approach is hazardous to leaders’ learning and performance and thus should be avoided.

Eighth, while individual leaders should assume ownership for personal development, leader development should never merely be a personal concern. Organizations have an indispensable role and responsibility to provide enriching developmental experiences to accelerate leader development. In fact, a supportive culture and support from senior
management are the strongest drivers of employee learning, organizational commitment, and
talent retention (Cao & Hamori, 2015; DeRue & Myers, 2014).

To elaborate, protégé leaders learn best in the workplace from effective bosses.

Through working with effective bosses, protégé leaders learn from positive modeling and obtain
timely feedback in trustworthy mentoring relationships established informally in their work
relationships. However, effective leader development initiatives should also take into account
the readiness of context, followers, and peers (Avolio, 2016). An open and supportive
organizational climate and culture are the enabling conditions that encourage the passing on of
leadership wisdom from one generation to the next as a transformational process. Without that,
atttempts to introduce formal mentoring schemes and to provide performance feedback through
performance appraisal may easily reduce into bureaucratic lip service without real substance.

In sum, leader development has to be addressed at the institutional level to formulate effective
policies, practices, and strategies for effective leader development in a systemic approach
(McCauley et al., 2010).

Ninth, the availability of support in different forms (social, psychological, and
career-related) is essential to enhance leaders’ resilience to confront developmental stress.
Fostering sufficient levels of motivation throughout the trajectory of leader development is one
of the keys to successful leadership development interventions (Day et al., 2009; Rosch &
Villanueva, 2016). Availability of support is essential to foster leaders’ motivation to develop. Ultimately, HEIs play a key role and responsibility to construct a supportive culture and climate for leader development across organizational levels.

From the above discussion, it is evident that effective leader development has to involve different parts of the organizational fibers. Without a doubt, HEIs current reliance on individual efforts in leader development will at best result in winning a few small battles in a fragmented fashion and will hardly be able to claim victory in the war of organizational development. As Avolio (2016) contended, HEIs should not only focus on individual readiness to develop, but more importantly on the readiness of the “total leadership system” to sustain itself and succeed (p.12). Thus, a strong commitment on the part of HEI senior management to a systemic approach is necessary to construct an open and supportive culture and climate conducive to effective leader development. Only through a systemic approach will HEIs be able to deploy organization-wide strategies, policies, practices, and resources to construct an organizational environment with adequate enabling conditions to enhance the organizational readiness for leader development.

**Implications for Future Research**

Extant literature widely recognizes that leader development, like leadership, is an ongoing, multilevel, adaptive learning process negotiated in the dynamic social environment
This study provided rich narratives regarding how the interplay of personal, contextual, and temporal factors shaped the developmental trajectories of departmental leaders in Hong Kong HEIs. In addition to practical implications, the findings also pointed to promising areas for future research.

First, the findings in this study supported stage-based leadership models (e.g., Zenger & Folkman, 2009) and the views of leader development as socially constructive and lifespan development processes (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Expert leaders possessed qualitatively different levels of leadership expertise in their deep structure in comparison to less experienced, or novice leaders. However, as a qualitative study, this study did not measure the differences in leadership mastery among participants, the antecedents leading to such differences, and the underlying relationships among them. This warrants further study to identify the antecedents and their effects on leader maturation.

Second, this study demonstrated the importance of supportive bosses on protégé leaders’ growth, especially in the form of informal mentorship and positive modeling. Unfortunately, the implementation of formal mentorship schemes by HEIs has been unsuccessful. What are the critical enabling conditions and processes leading to effective mentoring relationship between protégé leaders and their bosses? These issues warrant further research effort into the practical significance of these conditions.
Third, this study highlighted the importance of organizational contexts as holding environments for enhancing leader development readiness. Total organization systems are important for enabling an integrated approach to leader development (Avolio, 2016; Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Unfortunately, most HEIs in Hong Kong (and presumably many other parts of the world) were not ready for leader development. The first step to address this problem is to develop a measurement scale of organizational readiness for leader development. Development of such measurement will pave the way for subsequent research on assessing the magnitude of the problems and provide valuable data investigating the relationships among the antecedent, processes, and outcomes of organizational readiness for leader development. These research efforts will not only generate scholarly interest, but also raise the awareness of policymakers and senior management in HEIs on the need for a systemic approach to leader development.

Concluding Remarks

For many people, life is a transformative journey through discovery of the self and the world. Gains in worldly wisdom often result in transformative learning from painful expeditions into the uncharted territories. So too is leader development. To become expert leaders, individuals have to possess the existential courage, drive, and discipline to step out of comfort zones and persistently make meaning from challenging experiences. From a
longitudinal lifespan development perspective, a myriad of personal, social, organizational, and temporal factors play out in the maturation process of an expert leader. Hence, leader development is both an individual and organization’s business. Orchestrated organization-wide efforts in a systemic approach are called for to foster leader development in academic departments for the betterment of HEIs – the powerhouse of a knowledge-based society.

End
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Appendix A

Recruitment email

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Forrest Chan and I am conducting a dissertation research for my Doctor of Education study at the College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University. The study seeks to explore how departmental leaders (i.e., department chairs, program directors, program leaders, and unit leaders) in higher education institutions make sense of their experiences of development as leaders. You are cordially invited to participate in this study and share your account and reflection of your experience.

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to one face-to-face interview, which will last approximately 60-90 minutes, at a mutually agreed time and private place. In the interview, you will be asked a few open-ended questions about your personal experience of development as leader over time. The interview will be audio-taped, with your consent and notes be written by me. All information provided will be kept confidential and will be destroyed within one year after the study is completed.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may quit at any time. Also, your participation and identity will be kept confidential. Pseudonym will be used to protect your confidentiality. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form (see attached) before the interview starts.

Should you have any questions at any time, please feel free to contact me at ******** or by email at chan.cheuk@husky.neu.edu. If you are willing to participate in this study, please confirm your acceptance by replying to my email at your early convenience. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Forrest Cheuk Tung CHAN
Appendix B

Approval Letter from Northeastern University IRB

Northeastern

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: September 22, 2015       IRB #: CPS15-09-04
Principal Investigator(s): Aitra Charles
                          Forrest Cheuk Tung Chan
Department: Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
        Northeastern University
Title of Project: Development of Departmental Leaders in Hong Kong
                 Higher Education: An Interpretative Phenomenological
                 Analysis Study
Participating Sites: N/A
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection
Appendix C

Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Atira Charles (principal investigator)
Forrest Cheuk Tung Chan (student investigator)
Title of Project: Development of Departmental Leaders in Hong Kong Higher Education: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been selected because you have been identified as someone who has a lot to share about your experience of development as a departmental leader in a higher education institution.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how eight departmental leaders in Hong Kong’s higher education institutions (HEIs) make sense of their experiences of development as leaders over time.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to be interviewed on a one-on-one basis. The interviewer will invite you to respond to some open-ended questions about your personal experiences of development as leaders over time and how personal and contextual factors affect your development. To ensure capturing what you say, our conversation will be audio recorded. After that, we may ask you follow-up questions via email/phone, and invite you to comment on the interview transcript and analysis of the interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. Within one week after the interview, we will also send you the transcript for verification purpose. Where necessary, we may contact you to ask follow-up questions. When the draft data analysis is available, we will also email you the draft and invite you to comment whether the analysis reflects your perspective.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
We do not expect participating in this research will cause any risks, harms, discomforts or inconvenience to the participants.
**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help you reflect on your personal development experience as a leader, and help contribute to this research, which potentially informs policies and programs in leader development.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your participation in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project. Specifically, the following measures will be taken:

- Participants’ responses will be collected in personal interview in private, secured space that the participants chose.
- Pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of participants. Their responses, when quoted, will be reported in anonymity or with pseudonym.
- Data records and matching table of pseudonym will be stored at two different computers, and are all password protected. Hard copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet.
- All data and documents will be destroyed within one year after the research is completed.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

If you do not want to take part in the study, you do not have to do so.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

We expect that participants in this study will suffer from no harm. No special arrangements will be made for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Forrest Chan (Tel: +852 9727 8320, Email: chan.cheuk@husky.neu.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Atira Charles (E-mail: a.charles@neu.edu), the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

No.
Will it cost me anything to participate?
No.

Is there anything else I need to know?
To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria: (a) holding an academic leadership position in a tertiary institution; and (b) having at least five year of leadership experience.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

____________________________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Forrest Cheuk Tung Chan

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Title: Development of Departmental Leaders in Hong Kong Higher Education: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

Interviewee (Title and Name): ________________________________
Interviewee’s Institution: ______________________________________
Interviewee code: _____________________________________________
Interviewer: __________________________________________________
Date and Time: ___________________ Venue: ______________________

Part I. Introductory Session Objectives (5 minutes)

Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, go through the informed consent form with the interviewee and invite him/her to sign if he/she has no further question.

Introduction
Thank you for meeting me for an interview. You have been selected because you have been identified as someone who has a lot to share about your experience of developing your leadership. I am a Doctor of Education student at Northeastern University. My dissertation research focuses on development of departmental leaders from their perspectives. Hopefully this will bring new insights into departmental leaders’ growth from novice to expert levels and what personal and contextual factors affect their development to become effective leaders over time.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. To meet our human subjects requirements at the University, you must sign this Informed Consent form. Basically, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 60 to 90 minutes. During this, I have several questions to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions?
(Turn on recorders)
Part II. Interviewee Background (10 minutes)
1. Could you tell me briefly your journey of becoming a leader?

Part III. Main Questions (30 – 45 minutes)
2. Could you tell me briefly your journey of becoming a leader?

Part III. Main Questions (45 – 75 minutes)

My study seeks to understand your experience of leader development. I am going to ask you some questions about your key experiences in your journey of development as a leader, and how personal and contextual factors affect your development to become effective leaders over time.

3. What factors have affected your journey of developing as a leader?

4. How do you see yourself grow as an effective leader over time?

5. How have your perspectives about effective leadership changed over time?

6. In retrospect, what incidents and life experiences have significantly contributed to your growth as a leader? How?

7. How has your work environment affected your growth as a leader?

8. What have you done to develop yourself to become an effective leader?

9. In retrospect, what might have been done to better develop your leadership?

Ask participants if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.