DEVELOPING LEADERS FROM WITHIN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO
DEANS’ AND ASSOCIATE DEANS’ LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE AT
THE DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

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Abstract

With a projected 63 per cent retirement eligibility rate for its managers by 2017, the federal government is facing an urgent need for succession planning to prevent future leadership shortages (Mazur, 2014; Moyer & Winter, 2015). In spite of large expenditures on leadership development initiatives, federal agencies are not prepared to meet the challenge (Carman, Leland, & Wilson, 2010; Kelman, 2007; Kerrigan, 2012; Maltempo & Robinson, 2014; Rothwell, 2010). Although research shows that leadership development is influenced by social interactions, resources, and tasks situated in the context of the leadership practice (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Paglis, 2010), little is known about how they influence leaders’ individual developmental trajectories (Day & Sin, 2011; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to partially fill this research gap by gaining insight into the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to an organizational leader at the dean and associate dean levels of nine deans and associate deans promoted from within the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, a federal government school in California. The following research question guided the study: How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?

The study utilized Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology method based on Husserl’s (1967) philosophical approach to uncover the essence of the experience. Data from semi-structured interviews produced four themes: 1) interest in leadership, 2) leadership as a continuous learning process, 3) community influence, and 4) personal transformation. Findings illuminate factors and future directions in developing leaders from within an organization.

Keywords: Federal government, phenomenology, essence of experience, succession planning, leadership development, development trajectory, deans, associate deans
Dedication and Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Gary, whose love, support, encouragement, and excellent gourmet meals sustained me during this long journey. My children, Arthur and Anna were my “guiding lights” in moments of doubt and hesitation and a source of inspiration through their many academic accomplishments, their kindness, and their great sense of humor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This doctoral project centers on the phenomenon of becoming a leader within a federal government educational institution. More specifically, it seeks to understand and describe the essence of the experience of the leadership development journey of nine individuals who progressed from being non-supervisory employees to organizational leaders within the institution.

The chapter begins with statements of the research problem and significance, followed by a discussion of the researcher’s positionality and the introduction of the research question that will guide the inquiry. The next section presents the conceptual framework chosen as the lens for the study and discusses its role in guiding the present inquiry which is informed by situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Bandura’s (Bandura, 1977b) self-efficacy theory. The final section provides an overview of the limitations of the study and concludes with a brief chapter summary.

The Problem Statement

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008) indicate that baby boomer retirements will cause the number of employees in the civilian workforce to drop by 30 million between the year 2000 and 2020. By 2030, baby boomers will represent less than 6 percent of the workforce. Another Bureau of Labor Statistics report indicates that the federal government, with a cadre of over 43 percent of employees above the age of 50, represents the most aged workforce in the public sector and will be significantly impacted by the exodus of baby boomers from the workplace (Reichenberg, 2015). The Government Accountability Office predicts that by 2017, more than one-third of civilian federal government employees will be eligible to retire and that the number will continue to increase over the next decade (Toosi,
2012). The Office of Personnel Management estimates a much higher, 63-percent retirement eligibility rate for federal managers and executives by the same year, because management positions are typically held by older, more experienced organizational members (Partnership for Public Service [PPS], 2013). The above retirement projections combined with a trend of lower employee numbers entering the labor force due to a dip in population growth following the baby boomer generation will result in a wave of vacancies leading to gaps in mission-critical skills and lowered productivity (J. Hicks, 2014; Toosi, 2013). The federal government will be most critically impacted by shortages of employees in administrative and managerial positions (Kerrigan, 2012; Reichenberg), resulting in a great loss of leadership expertise, a potentially costly phenomenon referred to as “the grey tsunami” (Moon, Hoffman, & Ziebel, 2009).

Given the impending reality of projected vacancies in leadership positions, the federal government recognizes the urgent need for succession planning across all its agencies to prevent a future leadership vacuum (Mazur, 2014; Moyer & Winter, 2015). The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for civilian government employees regularly develops and disseminates guidelines on leadership succession planning and serves as a repository of information about “best practices.” Those include, for example, streamlined hiring procedures to attract talented individuals, more effective leadership development programs, improving retention, and creating organizational sub-committees for developing succession plans (Husar Holmes, 2012; PPS, 2013). While providing guidance, OPM strongly emphasizes the need for individual agencies to become proactive in conducting a demographic analysis to identify their future skill shortages and building individual succession planning programs in connection with their long-term strategic plans (Moyer & Winter). Recent budget cuts, government shutdowns, and hiring freezes have limited the ability of many government agencies to hire externally, necessitating a shift in
focus on developing leadership talent and potential from within the organization to fill future leadership positions (Kiyonaga, 2004; Rein, 2013). The key component of this leadership succession strategy involves creating a cadre of future leaders through growth and development opportunities for current employees (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013; Green & Roberts, 2012; Wallin, Cameron, & Sharples, 2005).

Building leadership capacity for the future has recently been recognized as one of the top priorities at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), a large foreign language school in Monterey, California (B. L. Leaver, personal communication, October 19, 2015). As a federal government educational institution, DLIFLC statistically falls into the category of an organization in which 63 percent of leaders are within two years of retirement (PPS, 2013). With 64 percent of its 2200 civilian employees currently at or above the age of 50 (DAA, 2015), the institute significantly exceeds the average workforce age in other federal government institutions. Because 98 percent of its faculty members come from foreign countries, DLIFLC represents a culturally diverse environment. It is also an organization with many top and mid-level leadership positions such as deans, associate deans, directors, and department chairs, two thirds of which may be affected by retirement within the next few years. Similarly to other federal government agencies, DLIFLC is very restricted in its external hiring which necessitates a strong and systematic focus on developing the leadership potential of current employees to prepare them for future leadership positions. Becoming proactive in developing a pool of future leaders is critical to DLIFLC’s continued success in fulfilling its mission of teaching foreign languages to military students (B. L. Leaver, personal communication).
Because of its importance for organizational success and productivity, leadership development has been the subject of extensive research in the past two decades (Day et al., 2014; Thomas, Jules, & Light, 2012). This has resulted in a growing body of research focusing on the nature of the leadership development construct, identifying it as a complex, multilevel phenomenon involving both individual and contextual factors, and interactive processes across organizational levels (Day, 2000; Higgs, 2003; Muir, 2014; Yukl, 2012). Numerous studies focused on identifying and analyzing skills and attributes needed for effective leadership with the goal of building taxonomies of competencies to be included in leadership development programs and initiatives (Lord & Hall, 2005; Morris & Austin, 2014; Naquin & Holton III, 2003; Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007). For example, recognizing the complexity of organizational environments, Day et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of integrating a leader and a leadership dimension to ensure a comprehensive approach to developing leaders. He defined the leader dimension as intrapersonal competencies such as knowledge, skills, self-awareness, confidence, motivation, and self-regulation needed to function in a specific leadership role. In contrast, the leadership dimension included interpersonal competencies required for understanding and supporting interactive processes within the social environment of the leadership practice by building collaborative networks across organizational levels, and creating and sustaining positive and productive relationships.

A relatively large body of research studies focused on examining and evaluating the application and effectiveness of leadership development processes used in organizations such as coaching, mentoring, classroom teaching, action learning, 360-degree feedback, and others (D’Onofrio, Wepner, & Wilhite, 2008; Getha-Taylor, Fowles, Silvia, & Merritt, 2015; Godinez & Leslie, 2015; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; McCall Jr., 2004; Morris & Austin, 2014).
Their findings indicate that to be effective, leadership development processes need to fit individual and organizational needs (Riggio, 2008), be based on well-articulated organizational objectives (Tourish, 2012), and demonstrate strong alignment with organizational strategy, culture and group processes (Kim, 2003; Yukl, 2013).

Research studies have demonstrated that becoming a leader requires developing not only technical and procedural knowledge about the job but also communication skills and understanding one’s role in relation to others in a work setting (Day et al., 2014; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). The latter is especially critical for leadership preparation in multicultural contexts, which are more complex and require a better understanding and acceptance of different perspectives (Alvesson, 2011; Walker & Shuangye, 2007). Research provides evidence that leadership development is aided by transferring knowledge from senior to less experienced individuals (Moon et al., 2009; Peet, 2012; Sankowska, 2013) and by building leadership self-efficacy beliefs in employees by current leaders (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Paglis, 2010). There is also a growing number of studies indicating that both these processes are supported by the transformational leadership style of current leaders and by their involvement in mentoring employees (Bush, 2011; Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hannah, Woolfolk, & Lord, 2009; Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014).

Research has provided a preponderance of evidence that leadership development is a situated process that is influenced by and should not be separated from the organizational context of the leadership practice (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Currie, Lockett, & Suhomlinova, 2009; Day & Sin, 2011; Kempster & Cope, 2010; Quatro et al., 2007; Roth, 2001). At present, in the federal government context, large sums of money are spent on leadership development processes and initiatives such as employee coaching, mentoring, 360-degree feedback, formal training and
certification programs. In spite of these efforts, many federal agencies are not adequately prepared to meet the challenge of projected leadership shortages and many of the processes are not effective in helping individual employees develop into future leaders (Carman et al., 2010; Kelman, 2007; Kerrigan, 2012; Maltempo & Robinson, 2014; Rothwell, 2010).

Although there is a growing number of studies on the implementation of leadership development processes and practices in the federal government, they do not explain how these processes contribute to individual development. In addition, many of the studies exhibit a lack of empirical rigor (Currie et al., 2009; Fernandez, Cho, & Perry, 2010; Kellerman & Webster, 2001; Kelman, 2007). Existing studies strongly support the role of current leaders in preparing employees for future leadership positions (Chun et al., 2012; Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Wang et al., 2014), but they predominantly utilize quantitative methodology creating a need for an in-depth qualitative inquiry into the role’s influence on individual development (Day et al., 2014; Solansky, 2010).

Studies have documented that leadership development is influenced by social interactions in the context of resources, social networks, tasks, and support systems in the environment in which the leadership practice is situated (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Paglis, 2010). However, at present, little is known about how these contextual factors influence a leader’s individual developmental path (Day & Sin, 2011; Day et al., 2014). The present study aims to partially fill this research gap by retrospectively exploring individual developmental trajectories of nine current DLIFLC deans and associate deans who successfully transitioned from non-supervisory employees to leaders over time. Understanding and illuminating the essence of the leadership development experience from multiple individual perspectives will help uncover individual and contextual factors and processes that may support developing organizational leaders at DLIFLC.
The study will have both theoretical and practical implications. It will contribute to the limited empirical research base on developing leaders in a federal government context by providing insight into the phenomenon from individual perspectives. Understanding the phenomenon will help DLIFLC’s decision makers evaluate current leadership development practices and create a framework for formal and informal processes that support development of individual employees into future leaders. There is evidence that transformational leadership is positively associated with good mentoring and follower development (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), and that both mentoring and transformational leadership lead to higher self-efficacy of employees (Chopin, Danish, Seers, & Hook, 2012; Hannah et al., 2008; Pillai & Williams, 2004). Understanding how these processes contribute to developing individual employees into future leaders will aid the institute’s decision makers in creating a tailored professional development program for DLIFLC’s leaders. The program may focus on helping the leaders develop a more transformational leadership style and enhance their skills in fostering future leaders through mentoring and building leadership self-efficacy. The study may additionally help current DLIFLC employees aspiring to future leadership positions gain insight into the essence of a leadership development journey from the perspective of current deans and associate deans who transitioned from faculty to leadership positions.

At a more global federal government level, the research study may aid policymakers and stakeholders in creating long-term succession plans. These plans may include enhancing leadership efficacy of current employees, mentoring employees by current leaders, and increasing access to developmental opportunities and experiences as possible strategies for preventing future leadership shortages in federal government educational institutions.
Significance of the Research Problem

The projected retirement of millions of baby boomers over the next two decades presents a unique sociological and demographic phenomenon with potentially far reaching consequences for societies, governments, and organizations (Bush, 2011; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). It will result in a heavy economic burden on organizations to fund pensions for large numbers of retirees and in significant financial losses caused by decreased productivity due to severe labor shortages in critical industries (Callanan & Greenhaus). One of the challenges for organizations across all industry types will be replacing the technical and managerial expertise lost when baby boomers exit the workforce (Kiyonaga, 2004).

As an “aging” federal government educational institution, DLIFLC is statistically at a high risk of losing over 63 percent of its leaders within the next few years due to retirement. Due to DLIFLC’s significantly higher average employee age compared with other federal agencies, the institute may soon be faced with leadership vacancies in the majority of its language programs. Since there is a strong relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009), shortages in leadership positions at DLIFLC may result in lowering learning outcomes such as its students’ foreign language proficiency results. The latter may pose a threat to national security as the institute’s mission is to prepare linguists for military missions around the world that carry a requirement for a high standard of proficiency in a foreign language. Substandard language proficiency of the institute’s graduates may increase the potential risk factor in those missions.

Given the bleak forecast on the labor market, organizations are beginning to extend the careers of senior employees through recognition practices as part of their succession plan to allow for more time to cultivate the next generation of leaders (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008).
Research shows that preparation of leaders from within helps organizations identify existing talent and facilitate knowledge transfer from experienced organizational members in leadership positions to junior employees (Carman et al., 2010; Gandossy & Effron, 2004; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). In spite of a large body of research on leadership development competencies, factors, initiatives, programs, and processes, there is a research gap on how they contribute to shaping the development trajectories of individual leaders (Day & Sin, 2011; Day et al., 2014).

A qualitative inquiry into the deans’ and associate deans’ experience of transitioning from faculty to senior leadership positions may help uncover strategies and processes that support leadership development in a culturally complex educational environment such as that of DLIFLC. Understanding the essence of the leadership development experience of DLIFLC deans and associate deans may aid the institute in devising a succession planning strategy focused on preventing projected leadership shortages by fostering conditions favorable to developing current employees into future leaders. Preventing a leadership vacuum at DLIFLC may have direct impact on its future ability to effectively train military personnel in foreign languages which is critical to the country’s national defense.

Due to its qualitative design, there is no assumption of generalizability of the study. However, insights from this study may help other federal government institutions similar to DLIFLC in understanding processes involved in developing employees into future leaders.

**Positionality Statement**

A researcher’s positionality is a complex, multifaceted, and ever present phenomenon as it relates to views, beliefs, and attitudes that constitute his or her identity (Parsons, 2008). If unchecked, some of these views, attitudes, pre-suppositions, and biases can influence a research study rendering it less objective or even unethical (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). Because this study
is exploratory in nature and uses qualitative research methodology, it will place the researcher in a position of direct involvement with the participants. As the main instrument in data collection and understanding and interpreting phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 2009), the researcher in the present study needs to identify her beliefs and biases to prevent them from affecting her research processes and findings. There are two main factors that have influenced the researcher’s identity formation and positionality beliefs most profoundly: (a) having been born and raised in Poland, and (b) her professional experience.

The researcher spent the first 24 years of her life in Poland, a country that was under the communist regime characterized by collective responsibility, inefficiency, diminished resources and control. Because of the latter, she often harbors strong views about more autocratic, top-down leadership styles as inappropriate and inefficient and tends to be critical when exposed to this kind of leadership. Because of her own bi-cultural identity resulting from having lived and worked in two different countries and her success in acquiring near-native English proficiency as an adult, the researcher needs to guard against associating a strong foreign accent with a lack of leadership effectiveness in others. These views are relevant because the study will be conducted in a multi-cultural environment in which participants may represent different cultures of origin and a range of proficiency levels in English.

The researcher also needs to be aware that because of her Polish cultural background she may not have had the experiences to correctly interpret “the words, practices, and experiences” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 26) of study participants representing different cultures. This awareness should guide her in creating conditions that would help her study participants express their experiences in a way that increases representation through “an acceptable mutual understanding” between them and the researcher (p. 33).
Another aspect of the researcher’s positionality is related to her relatively long tenure in leadership positions at DLIFLC, which has led her to develop strong views on what constitutes effective leadership. Having coached and mentored numerous individuals who have risen through the ranks to become organizational leaders, the researcher strongly believes that helping others develop professionally is a critical component of an effective leadership practice. Having personally experienced the journey from a position of a teacher of Polish to a School Dean and later the Dean of the Curriculum and Faculty Development division within the DLIFLC context, the researcher has familiarity with the phenomenon of becoming an organizational leader from within. The latter may introduce potential biases into the study in that the researcher may be inclined to interpret and analyze data through the prism of her own experience.

After working in different leadership positions at DLIFLC for the last twenty years, the researcher is very familiar with its organizational context and may personally know some of the study participants either as colleagues or former supervisees. Although conducting research in the researcher’s own setting can potentially add depth and quality to the qualitative data by facilitating trusting participant-researcher relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2015), it raises some concerns. Because of her diverse professional experience at DLIFLC, the researcher has often been placed in an “interventionist position” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010, p. 210). By mentoring other supervisors, providing guidance, coaching and training them, the researcher may be viewed as occupying the privileged “expert” position of a more experienced leader whom other supervisors often consult on academic and administrative matters. This personal experience may lead to an increased potential for reactivity, i.e., the participants’ tendency to provide responses based on their anticipation of what the researcher may want to hear (Maxwell, 2013).
also influence the findings, their interpretations and conclusions and will need to be continually monitored and addressed throughout the study.

The process of reflexivity in a qualitative study helps the researcher become aware of, address, and disclose any experiences, biases, judgements, and values that may influence the study by shaping the interpretation of the phenomenon under exploration (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in the present study will utilize different forms of reflexivity throughout all the phases of this study to monitor her positionality.

**Study Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain insight into the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to an organizational leader of deans and associate deans promoted from within DLIFLC. Specifically, this study seeks to understand and describe individual leadership development trajectories of nine individuals who experienced the phenomenon of becoming deans and associate deans at DLIFLC. The study is guided by the following central research question: *How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?*

**Theoretical Framework**

The role of a theoretical framework is to provide a foundation for building a system of theories, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations that guides and supports a research study (Maxwell, 2013). A useful and insightful theoretical framework “allows us to see profoundly, imaginatively, unconventionally into phenomena we thought we understood” thus helping explain reality (Mintzberg, 2005, p. 357). Because of its focus on gaining insight into the experience of employees becoming organizational leaders within a specific organizational
context, this study is guided by Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory (SLT). It additionally employs Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory.

The core assumption of SLT is that “learning cannot be achieved or looked at separately from the context in which it occurs” (Bell, Maeng, & Binns, 2013, p. 351). It further postulates that: (1) learning is grounded in authentic situations, (2) knowledge is acquired situationally, (3) learning results from social processes that encompass interactions, declarative and procedural knowledge, problem solving, perceiving, and thinking, and (4) learning exists in complex social environments comprised of individuals, situations, and activities (Stein, 1998). Since the experience under investigation is situated within the specific context of DLIFLC, SLT is selected as the main lens for understanding its essence.

By focusing on explaining individual development and learning through the prism of contextual factors such as resources, community support, problem solving and participation in practice (J. S. Brown & Duguid, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991), SLT overlooks the role of “individual agency” in learning and career development processes (Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2012, p. 480; Roth, 2001; Yakhlef, 2010). In contrast, self-efficacy theory, a component of Bandura’s (1986b) social cognitive theory, is firmly grounded in a view of human agency in which individuals proactively engage with their environment and whose actions and beliefs affect their development and career choices (Bandura, 1986a; Bandura, 2001; Lent & Hackett, 1987; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Pajares, 2002). Defined as “people’s beliefs in their capability to exercise some measure of control over their own function and over environmental events,” self-efficacy is a central component of human agency (Bandura, 2001, p. 10).

Because of the difference in their respective foci in explaining development processes, SLT and self-efficacy theory will be used in combination in this study as illustrated in Figure 1.
While SLT will help illuminate contextual elements involved in the DLIFLC deans’ and associate deans’ leadership development experience, self-efficacy theory will provide the lens for gaining insight into the individual agentic perspective on the process (Bandura, 2001). Together, the two theories will constitute a stronger lens for illuminating the essence of the experience of becoming organizational leaders at DLIFLC.

Figure 1. A graphic representation of the study’s theoretical framework

**Situated Learning Theory (SLT)**

SLT emerged from social psychology and it differs from earlier cognitive learning theories in that it rejects the notion of learning as an individualistic, acontextual process that takes place in the mind of an individual (S. Kemp, 2010; S. M. Kemp, 2002; Kempster & Cope, 2010). The theory rejects the separation of conceptual knowledge from the situations in which it is acquired and used and from the context in which learning processes are situated (J. S. Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Although SLT did not fully emerge until the last decade of the 20th
century, its main premise of learning as a function of social interaction and collaboration can be traced back to the work of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) emphasized that individuals learn better with guidance from others than on their own and that learning in authentic situations enables the progression from lower to higher cognitive skills. Vygotsky distinguished between an individual’s actual developmental level characterized by independent problem solving abilities and “the level of potential development” achieved through problem solving with assistance or in collaboration with “more capable peers” or more experienced individuals (p. 86). The ZPD, or the distance between these two levels, denotes an individual’s prospective development that is realized through interactions and tools present in the “socially rooted and historically developed” norms and activities embedded within the individual’s social environment (p. 56).

Lave and Wenger (1991), the key contributors to the development of situated learning theory, defined learning as a process inseparable from the “generative social practice” (p. 35) that is embedded in the norms and culture of the community within which it occurs. The community of practice defined by its shared cultural norms, collective knowledge, and resources provides the setting in which learning takes place through daily experiences, problem solving activities, and interactions. By engaging the learner in social activity, the community provides experiences necessary for the learner to create meaning through interpretation, reflection, and communication (Brown et al., 1989). The process through which new members of the community absorb its values, beliefs, and knowledge to become “full participants” or experts is identified as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, p. 29). Embedded in the content and context of the community, i.e., in its values, beliefs, tools, environment, power
structure, and situations, legitimate peripheral participation involves not only acquiring new skills but also a gradual identity formation (Lave & Wenger; Stein, 1998).

In their definition of situated learning, Brown et al (1989) emphasized the interdependence of activity as a source of experience and learning, the conceptual frame related to it, and the culture within which they both occur. Because concepts continually evolve with their application to new situations, activities, and negotiations, learning is a “continuous, life-long process resulting from acting in situations” (p. 33). Brown et al identified *cognitive apprenticeship* as a form of enculturation into authentic practices of a community through role modeling, coaching and mentoring by more experienced members of the community. These mentors, i.e., coaches, peers, or supervisors, promote learning by making their tacit knowledge explicit in the context of authentic activity through interaction and by creating opportunities for reflection. Interactions among community members involving authentic, problem solving situations lead to “the mutual transformation of existing knowledge” (Billett, 1996, p. 272).

Based on the problem of practice, this study will be guided by three tenets of Situated Learning Theory: (a) *context* defined as tools, resources, structures, situations, culture, and values; (b) *legitimate peripheral participation* consisting of relationships, interactions, roles, activities, practices, and tasks taking place within a community of practice situated in the context; and (c) *cognitive apprenticeship* understood as “enculturation … into authentic practices through activity and social interaction” involving modeling, mentoring and coaching by more experienced members of the community (J. S. Brown et al., 1989, p. 37).

**Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory**

The key premise of Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory is that people’s actions, levels of motivation, choices, and affective states are determined by their self-efficacy. As a system of
individual judgments and beliefs about one’s capability to organize and effect courses of action needed to attain a designated goal, self-efficacy beliefs directly influence one’s behaviors and choices of activities (Bandura, 1986a). Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy not only set more challenging goals for themselves but also exhibit a stronger effort and commitment in reaching those goals (Bandura, 1977b; Bandura, 1991). When faced with difficulties or failures, they are able to cope better and to persevere longer than individuals with lower self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2001). A strong sense of self-efficacy enhances individuals’ socio-cognitive functioning by fostering their interest and involvement in activities, motivating them to apply active cognitive information processing strategies, and helping them assume an analytic, reflective stance in complex decision making situations (Bandura, 1989).

Self-efficacy beliefs and expectations are not static and can be developed or strengthened over time (Bandura & Wood, 1989). Bandura (1977b) identified four primary information sources from which self-efficacy expectations originate and which contribute to their evolution: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. The source of mastery experiences is the most influential in lowering or strengthening self-efficacy expectations because it is based on direct evidence of an individual’s performance accomplishments. Prior accomplishments and repeated successful performance on a specific task can enhance expectations of personal efficacy which, in turn, generalize to other tasks and activities. Vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion contribute more indirectly by making “social comparison” inferences (p. 197) when watching others model a specific behavior or successfully perform a task and by receiving verbal encouragement or feedback respectively. The influence of physiological states on self-efficacy expectations is most visible when individuals face a stressful task or situation. By anticipating and reducing their emotional
arousal, i.e., feelings of anxiety or vulnerability, they can help reduce debilitating behaviors associated with it, potentially increasing successful task performance leading to an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy has been empirically linked to goal attainment and work-related performance (Bandura, 1989; Bandura & Wood, 1989; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b). Research also shows that self-efficacy beliefs “affect the direction of personal development” by aiding individuals in setting personal goals, choosing what challenges to undertake, and taking advantage of opportunities that exist in their social environment (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). In addition, self-efficacy expectations play a critical role in developing one’s career interests, making career choices, and pursuing professional and academic goals (Beverborg, Sleegers, & van Veen, 2015; Lent et al., 1994; Pajares, 2002). Because of its focus on the human agency in explaining behavior and interactions with one’s social environment (Bandura, 1977b), the self-efficacy theory has been selected as an additional lens for the study.

**Limitations of the Study**

The two main limitations of the study are related to its qualitative design. They include the low number of participants and the choice of the Constructivism-Interpretivism paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005) to frame the study. Because the focus of phenomenology is on gaining insight into the essence of experience through detailed and in-depth recollection and reflection within a specific context (Patton, 2015), the study will use a sample of eight to twelve deans and associate deans. In keeping with the nature of qualitative inquiry and the low number of participants, the results of the study will not be generalizable to other populations beyond the DLIFLC context.
Choosing an interpretative framework for the study encourages exploration of meaning-making through the eyes and experiences of the participants. This limits the quality of potential data to the degree of the participants’ openness, honesty, willingness to share their experiences, and their ability to recall and articulate their experiences. The interpretation of the data will be limited by the researcher’s ability to understand others’ experiences and interpret their perspectives and it may be shaped by the researcher’s own personal experiences and beliefs.

**Chapter Summary**

This doctoral study aimed to explore individual leadership development trajectories of eight to twelve deans and associate deans who progressed from employees to organizational leaders at DLIFLC. Illuminating the leadership development journey from the multiple perspectives of these individuals will help in the understanding and in being able to describe the essence of the experience of becoming a leader within a federal government educational institution.

The study utilizes a qualitative design of transcendental phenomenological approach as delineated by Moustakas (1994). Because of its focus on illuminating a leadership development path within a specific context, the study is guided by situated learning theory as its main theoretical lens and self-efficacy theory as the secondary one. Limitations of the study include its constructivist view, interpretative framework, and the limited number of participants. The findings represent the subjective meanings of the participants as interpreted by the researcher and are not generalizable to other contexts.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The primary focus of this literature review is the exploration of themes related to developing leaders from within an organization. As a complex, multilevel construct, leadership development involves both personal and interpersonal dimensions and reciprocal, interactive processes between individuals and their social environments situated within a specific organizational context (Bandura & Wood, 1989; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Day & Harrison, 2007; Day et al., 2014; Muir, 2014; Warhurst, 2012). The review illuminates the leadership development construct by addressing literature strands relevant to its individual and contextual factors and processes.

The review starts with a discussion of the literature on Leadership Succession Planning, followed by Leadership Development with sub-sections on Leadership Development as a Multi-Level Process, the Content of Leadership Development, the Process of Leadership Development, and Leadership Development in the Federal Government. The next sections present a review of the literature on Self-Efficacy, Mentoring, Knowledge Transfer, and Mentoring and Transformational Leadership. The concluding section includes a summary of the literature and provides a justification for this research study.

Leadership Succession Planning

Due to the bleak statistics on future workforce projections associated with baby boomer retirements, the anticipated shortages in leadership positions in private industry, education, and government have become a global concern (Bush, 2011). The leadership crisis resulting from these shortages can cause educational institutions to become less effective (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) and businesses to experience diminished productivity and a loss of competitive advantage
(Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). The risks associated with leadership shortages in federal government organizations are especially high because as an industry with the most aged workforce it faces the highest number of retirements in the next decade (Reichenberg, 2015; Toosi, 2013). Other contributing factors are its relatively slow hiring rates in the last three decades caused by reduced federal budgets (G. B. Lewis & Cho, 2011) and a demographic phenomenon of relatively low numbers of employees who entered the workforce directly following the baby boomer generation (Kiyonaga, 2004; Toosi, 2012). To offset the potential costs and risks associated with future leadership shortages, many private and public organizations have started devising strategies aimed at ensuring that a new, well prepared cadre of “replacement leaders” is available to take over leadership positions at the “transition point” (Reeves, 2010, p. 62). In spite of these efforts, currently about 70 per cent of succession planning programs do not succeed because of implementation problems and poor alignment with organizational strategy (Rothwell, 2010).

Although succession planning is a concept dating back to the beginning of human societies (Reeves, 2010), it has just recently gained momentum in organizations as they begin to understand the potential dire consequences and high costs of not being prepared for the mass exodus of their most knowledgeable employees (Hoffman & Hanes, 2003; Peet, 2012; Perlman, 2010). Perlman defines succession planning as “the systematic and deliberate preparation for future changes of leadership in key positions and strategies for identifying individuals to meet future needs” (p. 48). Since baby boomers’ knowledge and expertise are viewed as an organization’s “intellectual capital” (Perlman, p. 48) and its “increasingly important assets” (Hoffman & Hanes, p. 68), many succession planning processes focus on strategies of capturing, transferring, and preserving this knowledge before it is permanently lost (Hoffman & Hanes).
Leadership expertise is considered especially valuable to organizations because leaders are typically the most senior and experienced organizational members and because their positions are of key strategic importance to individual organizations (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Research has consistently demonstrated a positive link between leadership effectiveness and organization improvement and between leadership and organizational learning, innovation, and financial success (Gothard & Austin, 2013; Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003; P. Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Zagoršek, Dimovski, & Škerlavaj, 2009). The complexity of present day multicultural and technologically advanced work environments requires leaders not only to develop technical competencies and procedural knowledge about the job but also communication skills and understanding one’s role in relation to others in a work setting (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). This is especially critical for leadership in multicultural contexts which are more complex and require a stronger understanding and acceptance of different cultural perspectives (Walker & Shuangye, 2007). Due to the critical role of leaders within organizations, the development of future leaders to replace the ones leaving the workforce constitutes “a central part of any succession planning strategy” (Bush, 2011, p. 787).

In a literature review of organizational leadership exit strategies in the nonprofit, public, and for-profit sectors, Gothard and Austin (2013) identified recognizing and developing leadership potential from within organizations as a critical component of succession planning and management. Developing leaders from within helps provide “a reliable supply of talent” (p. 276) to fill leadership vacancies when needed and create a cadre of future leaders whose competencies are aligned with the mission and vision of the organization (Gothard & Austin). It is also considered effective in providing a rich context for experiences needed for leadership
learning to progress from “performance-centered” to “transformational kinds of lessons” needed for the development of “advanced leadership skills” (McCall Jr., 2004, p. 130).

Due to the person-dependent quality of organizational knowledge most of which resides in the leaders’ experience (Kiyonaga, 2004), organizations consider active involvement of current leaders in “growing” future leaders a crucial element of their succession planning strategy (Carman et al., 2010; Gandossy & Effron, 2004; Moyer & Winter, 2015). Research provides ample evidence that transformational leaders are especially effective in supporting and guiding follower development (Dvir et al., 2002; O’Brien, Martin, Heyworth, & Meyer, 2008; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Existing research also strongly supports mentoring employees by current leaders as an effective organizational knowledge capture mechanism (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Clayton et al., 2013; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Peet, 2012; Starks, 2013; Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001) and a widely recognized tool in succession planning (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009; Hean, 2009; D. Hicks, 2011; McCall Jr., 2004; Roddy, 2004). In a quantitative study of 62 matched mentor-protégé pairs in formal mentoring programs from two different companies, Raabe and Beehr (2003) examined the effects of mentoring relationships on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intentions. Their study identified a strong link between these outcomes in supervisory relationships and no link in mentoring relationships involving external consultants. The study results indicate that mentoring functions should be performed by supervisors to maximize mentee outcomes (Raabe & Beehr).

Although companies are still developing and perfecting their succession planning tools (Kiyonaga, 2004), leadership mentoring is strongly emerging as a “highly effective and relatively low cost” succession planning strategy (Reeves, 2010, p. 63). Thompson (2010) pointed out that
“leadership development should not be left to chance” (p. 99). It requires a proactive approach of including succession planning in companies’ strategic processes that involve high levels of planning, support, and commitment by senior leaders (Roddy, 2004). In a mixed method study Thompson (2010) surveyed and interviewed 48 assistant principals from 39 secondary schools in Australia and identified a strong link between participants’ professional development plans and the schools’ strategic plans. Although the participants chose their development priorities based on the strategic plans, the link was much weaker between the latter and their career plans. The study demonstrated that both professional development and career planning should become explicit components of strategic planning to ensure effective leadership succession (Thompson).

Learning organization culture characterized by norms and values that support organizational learning has also been identified as a critical factor to succession planning (Jo & Joo, 2011). Organizations with a strong learning culture create an environment “in which people widen their focus from the immediate outcomes of their performance to the continuous learning” (p. 361). Jo & Joo’s quantitative study involving 452 employees demonstrated a strong impact of organizational culture on organizational members’ knowledge sharing intentions and practices. The participants’ perceptions of learning organization culture were strongly related to their willingness to share knowledge with others. Starks (2003) identified a “need to create an environment that encourages attempts to reconcile, synthesize, document, and transfer critical, job-relevant knowledge” (p. 227) as one of the key leadership responsibilities in dealing with challenges of succession planning.

Due to the intergenerational complexity of today’s workplace in which four generations of employees often work side by side (Starks, 2013) and the sensitivity associated with planning replacements for retiring leaders, creating a supportive learning environment may be difficult
One strategy is to involve current leaders in helping “develop an organizational climate of trust” (Gothard & Austin, p. 273) to avoid communication breakdowns, a lack of commitment and poor cooperation which are detrimental to the effectiveness of knowledge sharing processes (Meier, 2011). Gothard and Austin’s literature review of leadership succession in for-profit contexts suggests that there is no single best succession planning strategy. They proposed a model for preparing future leaders that relies on close cooperation across organizational levels and a combination of self-reflection, mentoring, constructive feedback and other processes to ensure “a shift from traditional replacement models to a modern comprehensive succession managing approach” that reflects “the reality of today’s organizations” (p. 275).

Succession planning strategies and processes must be selected and adapted to account for differences in organizational contexts (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009; Bush, 2011; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Even seemingly similar contexts such as those of primary schools in England have been confirmed to represent major differences in organizational needs, processes, and personnel competencies (Rhodes & Brundett). A comparison of education sectors of England and South Africa identified significant differences between the more “distributed” educational context in England and a more “centralized” one in South Africa in which the government is involved in selecting future school leaders (Bush). Bozeman and Feeney also identified significant differences between organizational contexts in for-profit and public organizations such as, for example, a lack of competition, mandatory EEO rules governing advancement opportunities, and interconnectedness of the federal government organizations. Due to this contextual diversity of organizations, the one-size-fits all approach to succession planning does not work and there is a strong need for “local solutions” that fit individual contexts (Bush, p.
These solutions must include a context specific assessment to identify needs and priorities followed by “talent identification and development” (Rhodes & Brundett, p. 331). Researchers especially caution against direct application of theory and lessons learned from the private sector to public organizations (Bozeman & Feeney; Peet, 2012; Reeves, 2010) even though the latter are currently lagging behind in their succession planning (Roddy, 2004).

There is growing concern among researchers and practitioners that although private industry is busy devising aggressive succession strategies, these strategies are still considered a “largely foreign concept by public agencies” with merit systems such as federal and local governments (Carman et al., 2010; Maltempo & Robinson, 2014; Reeves, 2010, p. 63). The latter is especially critical in the case of the federal government because by the year 2018 even its youngest baby boomers will start reaching retirement age (Toosi, 2013). Succession planning is not “a one-time activity” but a long term process (Reeves, p. 63) requiring that significant attention and resources be devoted to it (Hoffman & Hanes, 2003; Moyer & Winter, 2015). Federal government organizations need to develop leadership succession strategies based on “values and results-oriented practices for identifying, nurturing, and rewarding future leaders” appropriate to their own organizational reality (Gandossy & Effron, 2004, p. 35; Mazur, 2014).

**Leadership Development**

The critical importance of developing leaders as a key to organizational success is widely recognized across all industry types (Pearce, 2007; Thomas et al., 2012); however, the systematic study of leadership development has been gradually emerging only in the last two decades (Day et al., 2014). As leadership roles grow in complexity due to the social, political, economic, and technological developments and challenges modern-day companies face (Ashford & DeRue, 2012), the leadership construct continues to evolve resulting in changes in the conceptualization
of leadership development (Day & Harrison, 2007). One of the characteristics of this evolution is a shift from an authority-based, “leader-centric” concept of leadership to that of a shared process within a social structure of the organization involving high levels of interdependence between individuals, groups and roles (p. 361). The shift necessitates a view of leadership development that goes beyond a reductionist concept of building individual skills to one encompassing dynamic processes and contextual influences needed for preparing leaders to deal with complex challenges and group processes in today’s organizations (Pearce). Top-down leadership development frameworks that lack focus on multi-level individual group influences are considered one of the main reasons for a “leadership crisis” in US companies in spite of billions spent on leadership development programs (Ashford & DeRue, p. 146).

**Leadership development as a multi-level process.** Recognizing that leadership in present-day organizations involves complex cross-level, multidirectional interactions and influences, Day (2000) identified a need for a more comprehensive view of leadership development that encompasses developing both human and social capital within organizations conceptualized as leader and leadership development respectively. The leader development dimension emphasizes building individual leader’s intrapersonal competencies including skills, knowledge, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, confidence, and personal power needed to perform effectively in an organizational role. In contrast, leadership development focuses on building interpersonal competences and skills a leader needs for creating and sustaining positive work relationships and networks, enhancing collaboration, and understanding interactive processes within the social environment of their leadership practice. The leader and leadership development dimensions constitute a view of leadership development as a multi-level phenomenon in which individual leader development forms the foundation for building group
level and organizational level leadership competencies (Day & Harrison, 2007). To be comprehensive and effective in developing leaders able to “engage across organizational boundaries” in today’s complex work environments, leadership development must integrate both the leader and the leadership dimensions (p. 370). However, typical leadership development programs still focus mainly on short term interventions with individual skill building as the main objective with little regard for complex, interactive processes needed for leaders to relate to their followers and others in today’s work environments (Muir, 2014).

In a review of empirical literature on leadership development from the last 25 years, Day et al. (2014) proposed a model for integrating the intra and inter dimensions in leadership development efforts by examining them through content and process lenses. While the process or the “how” lens analyzes mechanisms and practices of leadership development in organizations, the content or the “what” lens focuses on factors that play a role in it. For example, the content lens applied to the intra dimension of leader development include cognitive abilities, problem solving skills, self-development, self-awareness, motivational characteristics, experience, and career orientation views. Examples of content factors in inter dimension of leadership development include creating positive learning environments, cultural communication competences, and an ability to facilitate and maintain quality relationships across organizational levels.

**The content of leadership development.** Lord and Hall (2005) viewed leadership development factors as a three-level progression in skills acquisition needed for a leader’s gradual evolution from a novice, through an intermediate to an expert level. For the progression to occur, not only “quantitative and qualitative” changes in one’s knowledge base are required but also a shift in self-knowledge and information processing capabilities (p. 593). According to
Lord and Hall’s model, the novice level includes generic knowledge, problem solving skills and a leadership conceptualization as an individual identity, while the intermediate level includes domain specific skills and increased awareness of self in relation to others. At the expert level, leaders possess “principle-level knowledge,” and a well-developed understanding of unique situations and others’ values, identities, and emotions which supports their full engagement in social processes within the organization (p. 594).

While Lord and Hall’s (2005) model of leadership development suggested a linear evolution from leader to leadership competencies, Quatro, Waldman, and Galvin (2007) advocated a more holistic approach simultaneously targeting the development of four leadership domains: analytical, conceptual, emotional, and spiritual. Riggio & Lee (2007) identified emotional competencies, “people skills” and communication strategies as content areas critical for developing leaders who successfully relate to peers, followers, and supervisors within fast-paced, and often shared-leadership environments. A study by Smith & Foti (1998) pointed to the importance of self-efficacy building as a critical component for leadership emergence. There is also evidence that increased self-efficacy results from experiencing and reflecting on positive leadership experiences and that strong self-efficacy beliefs motivate individuals to seek and engage in more development opportunities.

In a case study of early career professionals in a Jewish non-profit organization (Morris & Austin, 2014) found that in addition to increasing cognitive capabilities, socio-cultural awareness and providing opportunities for learning from experience, leadership programs need to focus on developing leaders’ self-reflection skills and identity formation. They defined the latter as the development of being a leader that encompasses the ability to identify with “something bigger than oneself” as a core value and “creating space for self-transformation” (p. 127). In
some cases leadership development needs to involve taking a critical look at one’s identity and the values one holds as a leader. Based on an 18-month ethnographic study, Nicholson & Carroll (2013) concluded that effective leader development for complex leadership realities should involve not only critical self-awareness but sometimes also “identity un-doing” by challenging one’s beliefs, assumptions, and biases (p. 1244).

**Processes for leader and leadership development.** Because effective leadership practice requires both intra and interpersonal competencies, processes for developing leadership capacity in organizations need to integrate strategies for both leader and leadership development (Day et al., 2014). To be effective, leadership development processes need to “fit the requirements of both the organizations and the leaders undergoing development” (Riggio, 2008, p. 390) and demonstrate alignment with organizational strategy, culture and group processes (Yukl, 2013). For this to happen, leadership development processes must be based on well-articulated organizational goals and objectives (Tourish, 2012) and conceptualized not as a one-time, short term event but as an on-going evolutionary learning process resulting in developmental trajectories of individual leaders (Day & Sin, 2011).

Research studies show that organizations use a variety of processes for developing leadership potential including, for example, coaching, mentoring, 360-degree feedback, action learning and classroom training (Day, 2000; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). However, in spite of these efforts, there is a need to improve leadership development programs in the United States and Europe (Riggio, 2008). One of the reasons for the lack of success of some leadership development programs is the common assumption that leadership development is the sole responsibility of organizations and not individuals (Ashford & DeRue, 2012). Because of this finding, Ashford & DeRue identified active involvement of leaders across organizational levels.
in leadership development processes as a possible strategy for increasing their effectiveness.

Another strategy involves conducting a thorough needs assessment to identify individual leaders’
development competencies and needs before designing and undertaking leadership development
initiatives (Thomas et al., 2012). A recent longitudinal study on leader development involving
first-year university students further underscored the importance of identifying individual
development needs before designing leadership development programs and activities (Day &
Sin, 2011). The study demonstrated that leaders’ initial effectiveness levels result in different
development trajectories and are influenced differently by the same development processes.

In some cases, leadership development processes utilized by organizations rely too
heavily on programs involving leadership training courses (Day, 2000). While leadership
training can be effective in facilitating individual skills acquisition (McCall Jr., 2004), it
typically focuses on concepts related to “solving known problems” removed from authentic
leadership experiences and therefore cannot fully prepare leaders for complex organizational
realities (Day et al., 2014, p. 64). There is also evidence that skills attrition can occur after
leadership training. A recent study of public managers in a three-day leadership training
program demonstrated that within a short time after the training the participants experienced “a
clear decay in conceptual skill effectiveness” acquired in the program (Getha-Taylor et al., 2015,
p. 303). Rather than using classroom teaching as the main strategy, leadership development
efforts should encompass multiple interventions spread over time that involve quality
interactions of the leader with a “full range of stakeholders” across all organizational levels
(Conger & Fishel, 2007, p. 454).

D’Onofrio, Wepner, and Wilhite (2008) demonstrated the role of interaction in leadership
development in a six-year longitudinal narrative study of 27 education deans. Using a four-
dimensional framework of leadership development including intellectual, emotional, social and moral components, the researchers determined that through interactions within their social environment, the deans underwent an evolution in their self-concept and self-awareness. Because of this evolution, they started engaging all dimensions for problem solving in contrast to relying mainly on the intellectual dimension at the beginning of the study.

Because its situated property causes cognition to be “distributed across the material setting, lie in group interactions, and be embodied in practices” (Roth, 2001, p. 30), leadership development processes involve complex interactions between leaders and their organizational and social environments (Day et al., 2014). There is growing evidence that “state of the art” leadership development is best achieved within the “context of on-going organizational work” where learning can take place through authentic, lived experiences without taking people away from their work (Day, 2000, p. 582; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kempster & Cope, 2010; Muir, 2014). Quatro et al. (2007) cautioned against a narrow approach to leadership development practice by demonstrating that some leadership domains cannot be fully developed without engaging the leader’s job and organizational contexts respectively. In their taxonomy of leadership development, the researchers identified a classroom setting as particularly well suited to developing leaders’ analytic skills but not as an effective context for leaders’ development in the conceptual and emotional domains. Both the conceptual domain which includes, for example, creativity and qualitative analysis skills, and the emotional domain encompassing self-monitoring, empathic understanding, and persuasive communication can only develop within the job context through practice and reflection. The development of a leader’s spiritual domain of integrity, deeply held assumptions, and self-reflection requires strategies and cultural values embedded in the organizational context (Quatro et al.).
Individual leaders’ developmental trajectories are influenced over time by social interactions in the context of resources, tasks, and social networks that exist in their work environment (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Day & Sin, 2011). Social networks can provide developmental aid through task, career, and social support and by facilitating access to resources and developmental opportunities (Bartol & Zhang). Interactions with the communities of practice in which leaders’ daily work is embedded, provide the context for the leaders’ experience and for the “mindful engagement” and reflection on the experience needed for the emergence of their leadership self-efficacy and identity in relationship to others (Ashford & DeRue, 2012, p. 149; Day et al., 2014; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McCall Jr., 2004; Warhurst, 2012). Warhurst’s study conducted in a government setting demonstrated that learning from experience is critical to leadership development but that reflection opportunities on the experience are necessary for it to result in the development of a leader’s identity and self-efficacy.

In spite of considerable interest in leadership development due to its importance to organizational success, it suffers from a relatively “underdeveloped empirical and theoretical base” (Day, 2000, p. 581; Riggio & Lee, 2007). One of the gaps in the literature on leadership development involves relatively limited knowledge on how leadership development processes develop over time (Day & Sin, 2009). Day & Harrison (2007) identified time as a critical element in the understanding of leadership growth processes and pointed to a significant literature gap on longitudinal studies involving the interaction and integration of leader and leadership development processes. Another gap in the literature involves the neglect of “the serious consideration of organizational cultural context” in leadership development (Alvesson,
Leadership development in the federal government. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the U.S. federal government organizational context from that of the private sector is its sheer size. As the country’s largest employer of over 4.2 million military and civilian employees, and comprised of many subordinate agencies and departments, it represents a wide range of missions, functions, and performance goals (Kelman, 2007; O'Leonard, 2011). The recent influence of globalization coupled with budget cuts, mass baby boomer retirements, new technologies, and fluctuations in funding initiatives such as leadership development, has contributed to the increased complexity of the federal government agencies’ environments (Koonce, 2010). This complexity is exemplified by the Army which is currently experiencing an increase in “complex global missions,” interdepartmental challenges, and manpower reductions simultaneously (Godinez & Leslie, 2015). The new organizational realities have necessitated an evolution in the approach to leadership in the federal government. Effective leadership can no longer be viewed as a top-down, individual effort of a senior executive but as a “collective endeavor” that transcends organizational and inter organizational levels (Leslie & Canwell, 2010, p. 303).

Federal government agencies increasingly recognize that building leadership capacity is a high priority for them (Currie et al., 2009; Leslie & Canwell, 2010). Effective leadership is not only a key to effective succession planning (Wallin et al., 2005), employee satisfaction, productivity and performance (Turner, 2007), but it also facilitates knowledge transfer among employees and helps reach strategic goals (Reinstein, Sinason, & Fogarty, 2012). A report by the US Merit Systems Protection Board (Grundmann, 2010) demonstrated that in spite of the
federal government’s focus on leadership development, its supervisors do not receive enough development opportunities to do their jobs, 51 percent do not receive any performance feedback, and many are rated as low performers by their employees. The report further indicated that some agencies fail to hold leaders accountable for inadequate supervision practices and utilize faulty selection processes that give priority to technical skills and neglect leadership potential and expertise. Another report “Unrealized Vision: Reimagining the Senior Executive Service” (2009; as cited in Koonce, 2010) examined the state of federal government leadership development programs and initiatives and called for a comprehensive review and overhaul of these programs. Based on the report, Koonce (2010) identified multiple inadequacies in these programs. They included a lack of onboarding programs for new leaders, not enough effort spent on developing future leaders, underutilization of certain development strategies such as coaching, and poor strategic alignment with succession planning goals.

Recognizing that federal government leaders need preparation to function effectively in complex roles that involve building social connections within and outside their organizations (Sun & Anderson, 2012), many agencies started devising programs targeting specific leadership competencies. For example, the Army Management Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, KS uses the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ALRM) of competencies as the basis for its leadership development curricula for civilian leaders (Godinez & Leslie, 2015). In 2006, the Department of the Army created the Army Civilian Education System (CES) that provides online and traditional-format leadership development courses for Army civilians at different stages of their careers. The Army Civilian Leadership and Training Development website describes these courses as ranging from foundation classes to specialized development courses for senior leaders (http://www.civiliantraining.army.mil/sitepages/CourseCatalogLeader.aspx). Another
program for senior leaders at the U.S. Federal Securities and Exchange Commission offers three-day seminars and courses on managing change, effective communication, relationship building, giving feedback, and situational leadership (Westbrook, 2012; Westbrook, 2015).

In spite of the efforts of many government agencies to provide leadership development programs, much remains to be done. There needs to be an even greater increase in development opportunities for army civilians who have traditionally received much less leadership development than their military counterparts (Godinez & Leslie, 2015). Another area that needs attention is expanding development opportunities for federal government leaders beyond training courses to include a blend of strategies already widely used in the private sector such as coaching, mentoring, 360-degree feedback, and opportunities for successful, challenging assignments (Godinez & Leslie; Koonce, 2010; Reinstein et al., 2012; Turner, 2007).

Research on leadership development in the federal government is still relatively scarce and lacks “intellectual and pedagogical maturity” compared to that of the private sector (Currie et al., 2009; Fernandez et al., 2010; Kellerman & Webster, 2001, p. 486). It is not only prone to using limited methodologies and less rigorous theoretical frameworks for data collection and analysis but it also often utilizes approaches that cause polarization between scholars and practitioners (Kellerman & Webster). Although the field is gradually expanding, it still needs more “scholarly firepower” to be directed towards exploring processes that contribute to the success of developing leaders in the government sector (Kelman, 2007, p. 226).

**Self-Efficacy**

Although the term “self-efficacy” was first introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977, the construct itself has “a short history, but a long past” because it was first operationalized in multiple psychological research studies on aspirations and performance expectations in the 1930s.
and 1940s (Kirsch, 1986, p. 340). As a set of beliefs in one’s ability to mobilize cognitive and motivational resources and courses of action to complete a task within a specific context (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998a), self-efficacy carries an agentic function of determining individual behaviors and choices (Bandura, 2001). The latter makes it a key component of Bandura’s (1986b) social cognitive theory which defines learning as a cognitive process resulting from reciprocal interactions among the elements of a triadic system including the environment, personal factors, and behaviors (Bandura, 1977a; Bandura, 1986b). Self-efficacy affects a person’s behaviors by determining one’s goals, decisions to engage in specific activities, the level of commitment to those activities, and the motivation to persevere when faced with setbacks and difficulties (Bandura, 1991).

The “reciprocal causation” between the elements of the triadic system in social cognitive theory casts people in the role of both “producers as well as products of social systems” (Bandura, 2001, p.1). Individuals influence their environments by the goals they set for themselves and the types of activities they choose to undertake. Their self-efficacy beliefs determine the direction of their own development and influence their involvement in professional activities by reducing fear of failure and increasing resolve and persistence in reaching goals and interests (Beverborg et al., 2015). Participation, in turn, results in changing the environment and strengthening individuals’ sense of self-efficacy through successful performance (Bandura, 1977b; Bandura & Locke, 2003). An individual’s strong sense of controllability of the environment helps support a strong sense of self-efficacy leading to setting more challenging goals and ultimately to better performance. Lack of perceived controllability lowers self-efficacy beliefs even when the task is “achievable” resulting in lower motivation, commitment, effort, and engagement (Bandura & Wood, 1989).
The environment influences self-efficacy indirectly through an individual’s cognitive appraisal of contextual factors that include “the social, situational, and temporal circumstances under which events occur” (Bandura, 1977b, p. 200). Information on environmental factors such as available resources, social networks, support systems, task difficulty, learning and development opportunities undergoes a process of cognitive evaluation and transformation determining the individual’s aspirations, engagement, performance choices and success. In turn, individuals reflect on their mastery experiences, i.e., successful performance resulting from their effort, and appraise them which leads to an increase in their self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b). By exerting more cognitive effort leading to active involvement in complex tasks and activities and to more persistence when facing challenges, people with high self-efficacy beliefs are better equipped to utilize opportunities in their environment than those with low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 1991; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Beverborg et al., 2015; Chen, 2013).

Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory explains self-efficacy mechanisms in terms of an outcome expectancy, i.e., beliefs that a specific behavior will or will not produce a specific outcome and a self-efficacy expectancy which denotes beliefs in one’s task performance capability (Maddux & Stanley, 1986). The self-efficacy expectations are assessed along three major dimensions: magnitude, strength, and generality (Bandura, 1977b; Maddux & Stanley, 1986; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998a). The dimension of magnitude relates to one’s assessment of the task complexity and difficulty level at which one can perform ranging from low to high. The dimension of strength denotes one’s degree of certainty about being able to perform the task at the identified level of difficulty and is directly related to the likelihood of successful performance. Generality, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which one’s efficacy beliefs are generalized to different tasks and situations. Bandura distinguished between specific and
general self-efficacy beliefs. Specific self-efficacy is a dynamic and highly contextualized belief system operating “selectively across different activity domains and under different situational demands” (Bandura, 1997, p. 42). In contrast, general self-efficacy is a trait representing one’s generalized beliefs and estimates of performance achievements not tied to specific situations, tasks, and contexts (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b).

Mechanisms of self-efficacy “regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes” and ultimately determine its quality which has been substantiated by a wide variety of cross-disciplinary research studies (Bandura, 2002, p. 270). For example, Stajkovic & Luthans’ (1998b) meta-analysis of 114 studies found a strong connection between self-efficacy and organizational performance. Other studies demonstrated a strong link between self-efficacy beliefs and academic persistence and achievement (Lent et al., 1994; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, & White, 2014) and between self-efficacy and career interest, choice, and development (Andrews, Bullock-Yowell, Dahlen, & Nicholson, 2014; Betz & Hackett, 1986; S. D. Brown & Lent, 1996; Bullock-Yowell, Andrews, & Buzzetta, 2011; Chen, 2013; Conklin, Dahling, & Garcia, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013; Olson, 2014; Wright et al., 2014). There is also strong empirical evidence positively linking self-efficacy with leadership effectiveness (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin, & Jackson, 2008; Hannah et al., 2008; McDaniel & DiBella-McCarthy, 2012; Paglis & Green, 2002; Paglis, 2010; Ramchunder & Martins, 2014; van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

**Leadership self-efficacy.** Leadership self-efficacy (LSE) is “a specific form of efficacy associated with the level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leading others” (Hannah et al., 2008, p. 669). Despite the preponderance of empirical evidence linking self-efficacy with leadership performance and effectiveness, the leadership efficacy
construct still lacks a well-defined and generally agreed upon theoretical foundation (Anderson et al., 2008). Since self-efficacy is a domain specific construct (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 1977b), the divergence among scholars in defining and studying LSE is related to the lack of agreement in the literature on the definition and components of the leadership construct (Paglis, 2010). In one of the first attempts to create a taxonomy of leadership efficacy, Paglis and Green (2002) defined leadership self-efficacy as a person’s belief that he or she can successfully lead groups by setting a direction for them, building commitment to change processes through relationships with followers, and working collaboratively to remove obstacles to change. Their survey study involving 150 managers and 415 direct reports measured leadership self-efficacy along three dimensions: direction-setting, gaining followers’ commitment, and overcoming obstacles to change. Although the study found a strong link between the commitment and direction setting dimensions and the managers’ perceived willingness to lead change efforts, the resulting self-efficacy taxonomy was restricted to leadership tasks involved in implementing change (Anderson et al., 2008).

In an effort to develop a more comprehensive leadership self-efficacy taxonomy based on a less narrowly defined definition of leadership, Anderson et al. (2008) interviewed 44 executives about their responsibilities, views on leadership effectiveness and development strategies, deriving 88 leadership behaviors. Those behaviors formed the basis for 18 LSE dimensions each of which consisted of three to eight specific LSE beliefs. For example, the dimension of solve consisted of beliefs related to the leader’s ability to process complex information, and apply their respective experience, technical knowledge and skills to solving business problems effectively. Examples of other LSE dimensions identified by Anderson et al. include project credibility, mentor, serve, self-discipline, and motivate.
Other research emphasized an even broader conceptualization of the LSE construct by expanding its definition to a multi-level perspective that included an additional dimension of leaders’ influence on developing followers’ self-efficacy. In their review of LSE literature Hannah et al. (2008) proposed a conceptual model that distinguished leader efficacy from leadership efficacy defined respectively as beliefs about individual leaders’ behaviors and behaviors focused on developing individual and collective follower self-efficacies. A number of studies have identified transformational leaders as especially effective in building their followers’ self-efficacy through positive feedback, guidance on tasks leading to mastery performance, and by expressing confidence in their followers’ abilities (Hannah et al.; Jung et al., 2003; Lyons & Schneider, 2009; Pillai & Williams, 2004; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010; Tims et al., 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Enhancing leadership self-efficacy. LSE has been established as a strong predictor not only of leadership performance but also of leaders’ engagement and motivation to lead (M. Allen et al., 2014; Cho, 2015). Recognizing that leaders often successfully perform similar tasks in different roles and dissimilar situations, Hannah et al. (2008) expanded Bandura’s (1977; 1997) dichotomous view of specific versus general self-efficacy by conceptualizing these two forms of self-efficacy in leaders as generalizable across performance domains and measurable along the same continuum. They also demonstrated that leaders with a wider repertoire of self–efficacy beliefs are considered more effective and more adaptable across multiple leadership domains. Because LSE promotes leaders’ flexibility, adaptability and effective engagement, developing strong leadership self-efficacy beliefs in current and future leaders is critical to the leaders’ effectiveness in meeting and overcoming challenges in today’s complex and dynamic organizational contexts (Anderson et al., 2008; Hannah et al.). There is a need to “cultivate
multiple competencies to meet the ever-changing occupational demands and roles” (Bandura, 2001, p. 11). Because self-efficacy not only “precedes competent performance” (Anderson et al., p. 606) but also determines individuals’ developmental paths through the choices they make (Bandura, 2001, p. 10), strengthening self-efficacy expectations should be the focal point of leadership development (Paglis, 2010).

Bandura identified four sources of self-efficacy information that can be used to strengthen self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977b; Bandura, 1989). First and most influential are mastery experiences related to one’s performance accomplishments. As individuals reflect on and evaluate their past performance successes and failures, their efficacy beliefs are adjusted up or down. Repeated success leads to strengthening self-efficacy expectations which generalize across tasks and situations. The second source, vicarious experiences, involves raising one’s self-efficacy by observing others successfully perform specific tasks and inferring one’s own sense of achievement and positive ability judgements from the success of others. Verbal persuasion, the third source, works by inducing a sense of self-efficacy expectations when others express encouragement, belief in one’s abilities, and provide positive feedback. The final source, physiological states, indicates that emotional states such as stress or anxiety evoked by threatening or stressful situations can lower perceived self-efficacy expectations, and if not reduced, can result in debilitating performance.

Self-efficacy expectations can be successfully created and enhanced using the above sources of information, for example, by engaging individuals in progressively more complex tasks tailored to their capabilities to ensure consistent success (Bandura, 1989; Cho, 2015). Training can also help develop skills and produce “more generalized and lasting effects” on self-efficacy that are transferable across task and activity domains (Bandura, p. 733). For example, a
study involving 165 undergraduate students enrolled in a leadership course, demonstrated significant gains in the students’ leadership self-efficacy as the result of the course (Keating, Rosch, & Burgoon, 2014). In addition to training, Paglis (2010) suggested increasing leadership self-efficacy by designing interventions utilizing a combination of the four self-efficacy sources. Some of the recommendations included improving confidence through carefully structured developmental leadership tasks that allow exposure to challenges and successes in low risk situations, assistance in reducing workplace anxiety and stress, and role modeling paired with confidence-building feedback from supervisors. Mentoring by a more experienced person such as a supervisor can influence self-efficacy development through both vicarious experience and verbal persuasion because mentors often serve as role models and provide encouraging feedback and psychosocial support in the form of counseling or listening to their protégés (Chopin et al., 2012; Hezlett, 2005; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Paglis (2002) demonstrated a correlation between role modeling by superiors of managers and their leadership attempts. However, having a mentor who serves as a role model is not enough; the effectiveness of mentoring in improving leadership self-efficacy depends on the quality of the mentoring relationship (Chopin et al.).

People operate not only as “agents of action” but also as “self-examiners of their own functioning” which allows them to activate cognitive self-reflection mechanisms needed to evaluate their mastery experiences to determine their future courses of action and self-development paths (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). In a recent study involving 447 college teachers, Beverborg, Sleegers, and van Veen (2015) demonstrated that higher self-efficacy increased the teachers’ self-reflection leading to more engagement in learning and willingness to ask for feedback therefore engaging one of the mechanisms for increasing their future self-efficacy beliefs. McDaniel and DiBella-McCarthy (2012) advocated development of LSE through
refinement of leadership skills, actively pursuing feedback opportunities from multiple sources, and making self-reflection a constant component of leadership practice. By regularly collecting and analyzing data about their performance, leaders can increase their self-reflection which promotes “clarity” of goals, motivations, and values. An experimental study by Fitzgerald and Schutte (2010) demonstrated a significant increase in leader self-efficacy as a result of a reflective writing intervention.

The transformational leadership style has also been identified as one of the factors promoting the development of self-efficacy (Hannah et al., 2008; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Leaders who exhibit this style increase their followers’ self-efficacy because some of the transformational leadership dimensions parallel self-efficacy information sources (Nielsen & Munir, 2009; Pillai & Williams, 2004). Transformational leaders model behaviors and clarify goals through idealized influence, give emotional support and provide developmental opportunities and mentoring through the dimensions of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration respectively (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985). A recent study of 395 supervisor-employee dyads demonstrated a strong positive influence of supervisory transformational leadership style on employee creativity and self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2014). Another study provided empirical evidence that transformational leadership leads to enhanced task performance, higher self-efficacy beliefs, and higher perceptions of social support when dealing with a stressful and complex task (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). Runhaar et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and teachers’ self-reflection and asking for feedback when the “learning goal orientation” was low (p. 1159). Hannah et, al (p. 688) identified the importance of viewing and investigating the development of leaders’ efficacy “as a cycle of positive development.” In this cycle, increased efficacy would lead to
pursuing more developmental opportunities which, in turn, would result in an increase and widening of leaders’ self-efficacy over time through increased experiences and self-reflection. The latter would gradually lead to “upward spiraling of self-efficacy” and the leader’s performance (p.688).

Leadership is situated in a specific organizational context (M. Allen et al., 2014; Cho, 2015; Warhurst, 2012), and therefore contextual factors such as organizational climate and culture may influence leaders’ self-efficacy (Hannah et al., 2008). Other contextual factors that influence self-efficacy include leaders’ perceived job autonomy, availability of resources such as adequate staffing and funds, and an organizational culture that encourages risk taking and is open to change (Paglis & Green, 2002). In addition, managers’ LSE can be related to their perceptions of their employees’ performance quality. Paglis and Green demonstrated that higher perceived initiative, cooperation, and work quality of the subordinates, resulted in higher self-efficacy beliefs of the managers. The above findings underscore the importance of setting and communicating realistic performance standards for employees to increase their potential for successful performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b). Social support at home and at work including workplace networks were identified as critical to career choice self-efficacy (Olson, 2014) and self-efficacy oriented towards work-related learning and self-development (Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003).

In spite of ample empirical proof that “probability of successful performance …. is a function of strength of self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1977b; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b), multiple gaps exist in the literature regarding the leadership self-efficacy construct. Anderson et al. (2008) identified the scarcity of and a general fragmentation in studies that investigate the link between leader’s self-efficacy and leadership effectiveness, especially in the area of assessing
specific self-efficacy dimensions relevant to the leadership domain. Hannah et al. (2008) also indicated a low body of research on leadership self-efficacy and a significant gap in assessing the relationship between general and more domain-specific leadership efficacies across a range of different contexts and situations. Another gap involves a very limited number of studies dealing with “contextual antecedents of leadership self-efficacy” and environmental factors that play a role in shaping leaders’ beliefs about their leadership efficacy (Paglis, 2010, p. 777).

**Mentoring**

Mentoring can be defined as a process in which an experienced and more knowledgeable individual (often a supervisor) serves as a role model and is committed to helping a less experienced person “develop leadership skills and advance within the organization” (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011, p. 17). Although the value of mentoring in leader preparation has been firmly established (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006), there is little agreement among scholars about the nature of mentoring processes and mentoring relationships. A recent qualitative review of 200 published articles on mentoring identified a wide range of differences in mentoring duration, structure, and processes (T. D. Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008). Another review of mentoring studies published in research journals from 1980 to 2009 uncovered 40 different definitions of mentoring used in empirical literature (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011) thus demonstrating the complexity and dynamic nature of the mentoring construct.

Among the many mentoring dimensions studied, protégé benefits resulting from a satisfying mentoring relationship are an area well documented in research studies (Chun et al., 2012; Haggard et al., 2011). In the early research on mentoring, Kram and Isabella (1985) identified two categories of mentoring functions and the resulting protégé benefits, a. *Career-enhancing* functions aimed at coaching, providing job-related feedback and visibility,
opportunities for more complex job assignments, access to information, and strategic career advice, and b. *Psychosocial functions* focused on role modeling, emotional support, counseling, acceptance, and personal feedback that help protégés “develop a sense of professional identity and competence” (p. 111). More recent research has confirmed mentoring as a strong predictor of protégé career outcomes such as better job satisfaction, career success, performance improvement, personal growth, and increased confidence as a result of mentoring (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). It has also demonstrated a strong relationship between role modeling present in a mentoring relationship and protégés’ personal learning, job attitudes, skill development, and their “understanding of their job context” resulting in less role ambiguity (Lankau & Scandura, 2002, p. 787).

Although research has consistently demonstrated better career satisfaction and commitment and more positive work-related attitudes in mentored individuals compared with their non-mentored counterparts (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005; Buchalski, 2000; Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012; Haggard et al., 2011; Hezlett, 2005; Lankau & Scandura, 2002), most of the studies focused on informal mentoring relationships (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000) or did not distinguish between the formal and informal nature of the mentoring relationship (Haggard et al., 2011). Ragins, Cotton, and Miller defined formal mentoring as relationships developed “with organizational assistance or intervention” or formal programs in which the assignment of mentors and mentees is accomplished “by a third party” (p. 1179). Formal mentoring is quite prevalent in organizations, but there is relatively little research on its outcomes in comparison to informal mentoring even though the degree and types of benefits may vary between formal and informal mentoring relationships (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller). One of the exceptions is Chao, Waltz, and Gardner’s (1992) field study which found significant differences in socialization, job
satisfaction, and salary between mentored and non-mentored individuals. The study also confirmed that informal mentoring resulted in more career-related support than formal mentoring. The differences in outcomes between formal and informal mentoring can be explained by a higher degree of motivation and interest in protégés in informal relationships due to the voluntary nature of the mentor-protégé pairings (Chao, Waltz, & Gardner). In contrast, Ragins et al’s study using a sample of 1162 employees provided evidence that the level of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship has a stronger impact on employee attitudes than the formal or informal nature of the mentoring.

Not all mentoring relationships are equally successful. Ragins et al. (2000) placed mentoring relationships along a continuum from “very satisfying” to “dysfunctional” (p. 1178). Others provided examples of a negative side of mentoring in unsuccessful mentoring relationships in which mentors took credit for protégés’ accomplishments; there was a lack of mutual respect, and individuals demonstrated unprofessional behavior or feelings of jealousy (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005; Eby, Butts, Durley, & Raggins, 2010; Hicks, 2011). Formal mentoring relationships may be more prone to dysfunction due to the typically non-voluntary mentor-mentee selections associated with them that may result in placing non-compatible or disinterested individuals in a mentoring relationship (D. Hicks). Since “mentoring holds both the great potential for enhancing career success as well as the possibility of contributing to career blunders,” understanding why some mentoring relationships work and others do not is an important first step in preventing mentoring dysfunction (Baugh & Sullivan, p. 425). Another critical step is to provide effective mentor education (Garvey & Alred, 2000) that focuses not only on improving specific mentoring strategies but also on the development of mentors’ self-reflection and feedback skills (D. Hicks). Ensuring positive and effective mentoring
relationships is especially important because previous mentoring experiences influence current and future beliefs about mentoring of others (Young & Perrewé, 2000). However, there is still a gap in the literature on studies that examine characteristics, behaviors, and qualities of successful, high-performing mentors (Day & Harrison, 2007) and on “the interaction of leadership development programs and the influence a mentor has on a protégé’s view of himself or herself as a leader” (Muir, 2014, p. 351).

Research indicates that supervisors may be better mentors for employees than non-supervisors (Chun et al., 2012; Raabe & Beehr, 2003; Scandura & Williams, 2004). For example, Scandura and Willams’ quantitative study determined the following: a. supervisors were more accessible to their protégées because of more frequent interactions; b. supervisors provided higher levels of career mentoring than non-supervisors; and c. mentoring by supervisors contributed to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and thus “might be important to career success” of protégés (p. 464). Supervisory mentors are also perceived by their protégés as providing more career-development functions than non-supervisory mentors (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). The latter can be attributed to the fact that supervisory mentors, by occupying a higher place in the organizational hierarchy than protégés, have easier access to information and can provide more coaching and a “full range of career mentoring functions” (Haggard et al., 2011, p. 289). Supervisors in mentoring relationships with aspiring leaders may additionally be able to provide their protégés better job-related learning opportunities. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) conducted an exploratory study in an educational setting in the United States to assess aspiring principals’ learning and preparation for administrative positions in three different cohorts of the same preparation program. The study demonstrated that leadership mentoring focused on practice-based experiences and situated learning based on “authentic
problems of practice in schools” provided the best preparation for the role of a school principal (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, p. 276). Role modeling and career development support have also been identified as unique functions of a high quality leader-protégé mentoring relationship (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000).

Although research on mentoring outcomes tends to be “protégé-centric” (Chun et al., 2012), some studies have indicated that mentors also benefit from a mentoring relationship. Benefits for supervisory mentors include becoming more reflective about their leadership practice and deriving satisfaction from protégé success (Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010; Lipscomb, Martin, & Peay, 2009). There is also a positive relationship between mentoring functions and mentor outcomes such as transformational leadership, organizational commitment, and affective wellbeing with the career support and role modeling functions directly contributing to an increase in mentors’ transformational leadership behaviors (Chun et al.). Supervisory mentors involved in a successful mentoring relationship can also receive positive feedback, recognition, and respect from their protégés (Hicks, 2011).

Due to its many well documented benefits, mentoring has gained recognition as a valuable tool for professional development (Bough & Sullivan, 2005; Bush, 2011; Chun et al., 2012; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Garvey & Alfred, 2000; Young & Perrewé, 2000) and a personalized, inexpensive way to train employees within an organization (Buchalski et al., 2000). Successful leaders identify mentoring as a beneficial and indispensable component of preparing them for a leadership position (Dunbar & Kinnersley). Mentoring employees by current leaders is especially beneficial as a succession planning strategy leading to preparation of future generations of organizational leaders from within (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Bush). “Improving mentoring skills of organizational leaders is to make them better leaders” (Buchalski
et al.) and it helps them avoid dysfunctional mentoring relationships (D. Hicks, 2011). It also aids them in developing an organizational culture that supports retrieving, validating, and transferring their knowledge to their potential successors (Peet, 2012; Swap et al., 2001).

**Knowledge Transfer**

The concept of knowledge transfer as a “fundamental process of civilization” and a key element of learning can be traced back to ancient times (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). However, its recognition as one of the central components of organizational theory and a critical sub-process of organizational learning (Argote, 2011) has been firmly established only in the last two decades since the publication of Nonaka’s influential articles in the 1990s (Paulin & Suneson).

Viewing knowledge as an organizational asset, Nonaka (1994) recognized the need for organizations to create conditions that facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge to maintain their competitive advantage. He argued that conceptualizing knowledge as an organizational asset and focusing strategic decision making on constantly supporting, acquiring, exploiting, and creating new knowledge are conditions necessary for securing organizational profitability, performance and high product quality. Building on his assumptions about learning as an interactive, subjective human process influenced by individual beliefs about reality, Nonaka rejected a static organizational paradigm, which views organizational learning as efficient information processing and problem solving and introduced a dynamic, two-dimensional theory of organizational knowledge creation. The epistemological dimension contrasts *explicit knowledge* transmitted in formal, semantic language with *tacit knowledge* involving cognitive and technical elements including person specific beliefs, schemata, skills, and mental frameworks, while the ontological dimension denotes the extent of social interaction between individuals who share and develop knowledge (Nonaka).
The increased complexity of organizations characterized by multifunctional teams, globalization, and information technology has, in the last decade, solidified the role of knowledge transfer in organizational knowledge management practice necessary for maintaining organizational adaptability, effectiveness, and competitiveness through organizational learning (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). It has led to its recognition as a tool for preventing knowledge deterioration due to organizational downsizing (Schmitt, Borzillo, & Probst, 2012) and a mechanism for organizational knowledge capture before employee retirements (Moon et al., 2009).

In spite of the expanding utilization of the construct of knowledge transfer in knowledge management and organizational learning research and practice, there is no agreement on its definition among scholars and practitioners. The multiple interpretations of the construct reflect not only researchers’ diverse views but also the diversity of contexts to which it is applied (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). For example, a simple on-line search of the term “knowledge transfer” brought up 22 different definitions. The heterogeneity in the interpretation of the construct is further illustrated by Ward, House, & Hamer’s (2009) narrative review of research literature on knowledge transfer in a healthcare setting in which they identified 28 distinct knowledge transfer models. Through a thematic analysis of the models, they distinguished linear, cyclical, and multidirectional types of knowledge transfer processes and proposed five distinct knowledge process components, e.g., context analysis or problem identification and communication.

The form of transfer involving “an exchange of knowledge between a source and a recipient unit” (Sankowska, 2013, p. 87) can be observed through changes in the performance of recipient units and may be facilitated or hindered by various organizational processes and factors.
Among these factors, trust has been identified as positively related to knowledge transfer success and the stimulation of both organizational learning and innovation (Sankowska). Knowledge demonstrability, i.e., the extent to which its merits are valued by a recipient group, is also viewed as critical to “unlocking knowledge transfer potential” (Kane, p. 643). A study grounded in Tejfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory additionally identified a group’s superordinate social identity defined as a strong sense of belonging as one of the factors facilitating knowledge transfer by promoting knowledge consideration processes in recipient groups (Kane, 2010). In illuminating the multi-faceted nature of the knowledge transfer construct, the above studies underscored the importance of organizational context in transferring and creating knowledge (Argote & Miron-Spektor). They also identified leadership practice as a key factor in “nourishing organizational trust” and creating “a circle of knowledge transfer, creation, and innovativeness” in an organization (Sankowska, p. 96).

Mentoring employees to become future leaders as part of current supervisors’ leadership practice is increasingly recognized as an effective knowledge transfer mechanism (Starks, 2013). The process of mentoring creates conditions for sharing a mentor’s tacit and explicit knowledge with protégés (Peet, 2012). Nonaka (1994) conceptualized knowledge creation and sharing as patterns of interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge dimensions. While explicit knowledge can be shared through routines, language, documents, and formal instruction, tacit knowledge is embedded in an individual and is “deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context” (Nonaka, p. 16). Tacit knowledge can be created through processes of internalization and socialization which involve “learning by doing” and sharing experiences to create meaning respectively (p.17). Mentoring of future leaders by current
supervisors provides opportunities for both processes. First, protégés in this type of mentoring relationship often have an opportunity to perform leadership tasks within the norms and culture of their work context which gives them a chance to assimilate explicit knowledge through experience and convert it to implicit knowledge (Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012). Secondly, by observing their mentors and engaging in discussions and self-reflection, protégés undergo sense making processes that help crystallize their future leadership identity. By serving as mentors to others, current leaders also benefit by increasing their own transformational leadership behaviors which makes them better mentors and, in turn, helps their protégés become transformational leaders in the future (Chun, Sosik, & Yun).

**Transformational Leadership and Mentoring**

Studies have shown many similarities between mentoring processes and transformational leadership behaviors (Buchalski, Gibson, & Tesone, 2000; Chun et al., 2012; Scandura & Williams, 2004). For example, a phenomenological reading of mentoring literature from across different disciplines identified coaching, role modeling, and sponsoring among mentoring attributes (Roberts, 2000). Another study found that mentor coaching behaviors facilitated communication with the mentee and improved the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Solansky, 2010). The above mentoring attributes correspond with individualized consideration (creating learning opportunities for protégées, coaching) and idealized influence (role modeling) in transformational leadership behaviors. An examination of learning processes in mentoring relationships demonstrated that protégés learned most frequently by observing their mentors (Hazlett, 2005) and that role modeling desired behaviors by mentors was found to be an important component of mentoring effectiveness (Buchalski et al.). The above conclusions
confirm a strong link between idealized influence, a component of transformational leadership based on role modeling, and the effectiveness of mentoring processes (Buchalski et al.).

Because of the overlap in mentoring and transformational leadership attributes, it is possible to conclude that transformational leaders may be more effective than transactional leaders in creating successful mentoring relationships (Chun et al., 2012). A study in a medical setting found that transformational leadership behaviors by doctors helped facilitate a more effective mentoring relationship (Jung et al., 2003). Another study found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee empowerment (O'Brien et al., 2008). Since empowerment is at the core of a mentoring relationship it is possible to assume that transformational leaders are more effective than transactional leaders in mentoring their employees (O'Brien et al.). Due to the dynamic nature of mentoring relationships and the dependence of their effectiveness on a constant readjustment and redefinition of mentor-mentee roles based on individual perceptions and interactions, transformational leadership with its individualized consideration component may be critical in determining the success of a mentoring relationship (Lucas, 2001). However, role clarification as a core component of transactional leadership may also play a role in the process. In an experimental study, Zagoršek et al. (2009) compared the impact of transformational and transactional leadership on organizational learning. The results indicated that both leadership styles have a strong positive impact on cognitive and behavioral employee changes but the impact of transformational leadership was slightly stronger. Since learning is at the core of a mentoring process, transformational leaders might be better mentors than transactional leaders (Zagoršek et al.). However, another study indicated that transactional leadership behaviors also support certain aspects of the mentoring process such as, for example, “protégé receipt of mentoring functions”
(Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). The above studies indicate the ambiguity present in current research on the role of transformational and transactional supervisory leadership styles in influencing the effectiveness of employee mentoring (Lucas). They also underscore the need to better understand the influence of transformational and transactional leadership on employee learning in different organizational contexts (Zagoršek et al.).

Since mentoring and transformational leadership theories are complementary to some extent, increasing transformational leadership behaviors in an organization may impact the quality of supervisory mentoring practice (Scandura & Williams, 2004). Studies show that training can be an effective tool in increasing transformational behaviors in leaders (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Chun et al., 2012) and that both mentoring and leadership effectiveness can be enhanced through professional development (Buchalski et al., 2000; Garvey & Alfred, 2000; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Scandura & Williams, 2004). Research also indicates that mentors should be trained to be more transformational in their behaviors to enhance the effectiveness of their mentoring practice (Buchalski et al.; Chun et al.; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Some researchers also suggest that training supervisors in both transformational leadership and mentoring can improve employee attitudes and performance outcomes (Chun et al.; Scandura & Williams).

**Literature Review Conclusion**

The literature review has indicated that the projected retirement of 30 million baby boomers by 2020 will open the floodgates to severe shortages in leadership positions, especially in industries such as higher education and the federal government (Dohm, 2000; Reichenberg, 2015; Toosi, 2013). The impending reality of potential loss of technical and leadership expertise due to this shortage has forced organizations to face a critical need to prepare a succession
planning strategy (Gothard & Austin, 2013; Hoffman & Hanes, 2003; Kiyonaga, 2004; Roddy, 2004). Although this need is recognized by federal government organizations, they lag far behind the private industry in developing leadership succession models and in implementing effective succession planning strategies focused on the development of future leaders (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009; Reeves, 2010; Roddy).

Creating a pool of future leaders through growth opportunities for current employees (Wallin et al., 2005) and developing leadership potential through mentoring employees by current leaders are among the key components of leadership development strategy (Clayton et al., 2013). The value of supervisory mentoring in leader preparation has been firmly established (Bough & Sullivan, 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Bush, 2011; Chun et al., 2012; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Garvey & Alfred, 2000; Young & Perrewe, 2000), but there is a lack of research on the nature of the most effective mentoring processes, practices, and relationships (Day & Harrison, 2007; Muir, 2014), especially in multi-cultural environments (Lankau & Scandura, 2002) such as that of DLIFLC.

Research provides evidence that developing leadership potential in organizations involves not only transferring knowledge from senior to less experienced individuals (Moon et al., 2009; Peet, 2012; Sankowska, 2013) but also building leadership self-efficacy in employees by current leaders (Hannah et al., 2008; Paglis, 2010). There is growing evidence that both these processes may be aided by the transformational leadership style of current leaders involved in them (Chun et al., 2012; Hannah et al., 2009; Lyons & Schneider, 2009; Tims et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014). Although self-efficacy plays a critical role in developing leaders, there is a lack of studies on the relationship between general and domain-specific leadership self-efficacy beliefs
(Anderson et al., 2008; Hannah et al., 2009) and on the role of contextual and environmental factors in shaping individuals’ leadership self-efficacy (Paglis, 2010).

The literature review has demonstrated that leadership development is a complex, multilevel process involving both intra and inter-personal factors and processes (Conger & Fishel, 2007; Day, 2000; Day et al., 2014; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Lord & Hall, 2005; Yukl, 2012) and that is situated in and cannot be separated from the organizational context in which it occurs (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Currie et al., 2009; Day & Sin, 2011; Kempster & Cope, 2010; Quatro et al., 2007; Roth, 2001). Although individual federal agencies spend large amounts of money on leadership development programs, there are few empirical studies that examine leadership development within the federal government context (Currie et al.; Fernandez et al., 2010). Studies that do exist, often exhibit a lack of “intellectual and pedagogical maturity” (Kellerman & Webster, 2001, p. 486) and “weak empirical grounding or theoretical rigor” (Kelman, 2007, p. 227).

Although existing studies strongly support the role of current leaders in preparing employees for future leadership positions, most studies use quantitative methods creating a need for a more in-depth qualitative inquiry to better understand the issues related to its effectiveness (Solansky, 2010). The literature also indicates a significant gap in qualitative studies on leadership development processes over time (Day & Harrison, 2007; Day & Sin, 2009; Day et al., 2014) and on the influence of organizational cultural contexts, especially high diversity ones, on leadership development of individuals (Alvesson, 2011; Satu & Teodorescu, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the essence of the deans’ and associate deans’ experience of transitioning from employees to organizational leaders within DLIFLC. By understanding the essence of the experience situated within a federal government educational
institution such as DLIFLC, this study aims to contribute to the currently minimal research base on developing leaders in the federal government context. Understanding the experience may also contribute to illuminating leadership development factors and processes that will aid DLIFLC in devising effective succession planning strategies for preventing leadership shortages in the future.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature strands that inform the current study focusing on developing leadership from within a federal government academic institution. It defined and examined leadership succession planning processes and reviewed empirical studies revealing factors and processes involved in leadership development and the state of leadership development in the federal government. It also synthesized research on leadership self-efficacy as an important component of leadership development and provided an analytical overview of empirical studies on knowledge transfer, mentoring, and transformational leadership discussing their role in developing leaders.

As a multi-level concept, leadership development involves multiple individual and contextual factors and processes (Day et al., 2014). The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to understand these factors and processes by exploring the essence of the experience of deans and associate deans becoming organizational leaders at DLIFLC.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Question

The problem of practice guiding this study was the imminent shortage of leaders in the federal government that will be caused by projected mass baby boomer retirements in coming years (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Green & Roberts, 2012). The study aimed to understand the essence of the experience of becoming a leader within a federal government organization. More specifically, it focused on gaining insight into the essence of the experience of DLIFLC deans and associate deans who were initially hired as faculty members and later promoted to senior leadership positions. Understanding the essence of the experience of becoming a senior leader from within DLIFLC may help the institute devise appropriate strategies that help prevent projected future shortages in candidates qualified to fill vacant leadership positions. To obtain a rich description of the experience, the study was guided by the following central research question: How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?

Research Paradigm

Since the study focused on gathering, analyzing, reconstructing and understanding the individual experiences of the participants and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences, it was guided by the Constructivism-Interpretivism paradigm. The Constructivism-Interpretivism paradigm views knowledge as socially constructed thus assuming the existence of multiple realities created by individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). The study sought to understand these multiple realities by gaining insight into the participants’ individual, “lived” experiences and their perceptions and interpretations of these experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).
Within the frame of the Constructivism-Interpretivism paradigm, the researcher’s role is to help bring the participants’ experiences “to consciousness” through inquiry and reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). As the “facilitator of multivoice reconstruction” of the participants’ experiences (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 99), the researcher was personally involved in gathering data and got close to the study participants. In keeping with the axiological assumptions of the paradigm, the researcher brought her own values, beliefs, biases, and perspectives into the study. Rather than eliminating these perspectives, she acknowledged and “bracketed” them as well as addressed them throughout the study in a direct, honest, and transparent manner ensuring that they did not influence the participants’ perspectives.

Research Design and Tradition

Because the study was interpretative in nature and sought to explore the individual, unique experiences of the participants who have transitioned from faculty to senior leadership positions at DLIFLC, it utilized a qualitative methodological approach. The qualitative approach supports uncovering “constructs or behaviors that are unique to an individual” and not generalizable, universal “laws and behaviors” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Patton (2015) identified 12 core “strategic” principles that need to work in tandem in qualitative research, all of which will be integrated in the present study. Perhaps among the most salient of these principles are illuminating participant’s verbatim accounts and meanings “through rich, in-depth qualitative data,” doing “justice” to each participant and situation in the study “through attention to the particular,” and integrating data “through a holistic perspective” (p. 75). The study applied the first two principles in the data collection stage by obtaining “thick descriptions” of each dean’s and associate dean’s perspective, account, and feelings related to their experience and viewing each account “as a unique entity with its own particular meaning” within a specific context (p.
The research question in the study anticipated a variety of responses and perspectives which were fully captured in their uniqueness and then combined to form a more holistic understanding of the essence of the experience.

The specific approach within the qualitative research tradition selected to guide this study was transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994). Because transcendental phenomenology uses experience as data for understanding human behavior and searching for meanings and essence, it was well suited to gaining insight into DLIFLC participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon of their evolution from employees to organizational leaders. Phenomenology is an approach whose epistemological underpinnings acknowledge the centrality of human experience and intuition in uncovering the truth (Dowling, 2007; Moustakas).

Although the philosophical roots of phenomenology can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century and the writings of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, it has been practiced for centuries. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Woodruff, 2013), even Hindu and Buddhist philosophers practiced phenomenology during various forms of meditation when reflecting on their states of consciousness. The term phenomenology was first used in 18th century philosophical texts of Kant and Hegel, with the latter defining it as “knowledge as it appears to consciousness.” The term originates from the Greek words phaenesthai, to appear, to show itself, and phaino– phenomenon, which means “to bring to light, to place in brightness” (Moustakas, p. 26). The above terminology expresses the philosophical foundation of phenomenology in which phenomena constitute “the building blocks of human science” and the source of all knowledge (p. 26) through the study of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology originated from the disillusionment with natural sciences and their quantitative statistical methods. Edmund Husserl was especially critical of the application of
scientific methods in psychology and the Cartesian subject-object duality, viewing both as inadequate for explaining human behavior (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Influenced by Brentano’s concept of “descriptive phenomenology,” Husserl identified consciousness as “a co-constituted dialogue between the person and the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 23), and a key to understanding human experience through the study of conscious phenomena (Sanders, 1982). Intentionality, as the act of being conscious of something, is the main mechanism for discovering the essence of a phenomenon, i.e., the qualities without which it “could not be what it is” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 106). The textural and structural dimensions of a phenomenon emerge in an interplay between a noema and noesis, two components of intentionality, denoting respectively what is experienced and the way in which it is subjectively perceived (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl’s phenomenology is transcendental in that it utilizes subjective reflection processes for illuminating objects or phenomena as they appear to consciousness (Sanders, 1982). Rooted in the view that “the mode of direct vision is the primordial object-giving mode,” it utilizes epoché defined as freedom from suppositions as its fundamental principle (Husserl, 1967, p. 159). Epoché is achieved through bracketing, i.e., temporarily suspending the researcher’s beliefs and biases for the purpose of looking at a phenomenon in its pure form and uncovering its true essence. Bracketing is a component of phenomenological reduction that allows the researcher to “return to the self,” experience the phenomenon from “the vantage point of self-awareness” and capture its essence in a thick, rich description (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95)

**Site and Participants**

The participants of this phenomenological study were nine DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within the institute, who have served in their current position for at least one year. The latter was an indication of a successful completion of a one-year probationary
period in a new position, as required by the DLIFLC performance standards policy. Because the focus of phenomenology is on “core meanings” derived from a shared phenomenon, the study participants were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy, as they must have experienced the phenomenon personally to be able to describe it in depth (Patton, 2015, p. 106). Additionally, in keeping with the qualitative research goal to present multiple perspectives to represent the richness and complexity of the world (Creswell, 2012), the study employed the maximal variation strategy to select the final nine from a much larger pool of eligible DLIFLC deans and associate deans. Some of the criteria used to ensure the maximum diversity of perspectives were gender, age, cultural background, years of experience, and the DLIFLC School where the deans and associate deans are presently working.

Since one of the core principles of qualitative inquiry is to interpret the phenomenon under investigation through the prism of rich clues embedded in its context (Patton, 2015), the study was conducted at DLIFLC. As indicated on its website, DLIFLC is the largest accredited Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) foreign language school and is located in Monterey, California. It employs over 2000 civilian faculty members from more than 60 countries and approximately 500 military personnel representing different branches of military service. DLIFLC is a federal government institution whose vision and mission statements indicate a vibrant academic environment that blends many different cultures, including the military culture, where innovation and progress are held in high regard. It is also an environment with a bureaucratic infrastructure with multiple guidelines, rules and procedures that support its functioning. In addition to nine large language schools, DLIFLC includes academic support organizations such as the Directorate of Evaluation and Standardization and the Directorate of Academic Support. DLIFLC deans and associate deans are responsible for managing all
administrative and academic aspects of foreign language and academic support programs within their respective schools and directorates (http://www.dliflc.edu/).

**Recruitment and Access**

The researcher is employed at DLIFLC and therefore had easy access to the study site. After verbally requesting permission from the institute’s provost to conduct her study, she submitted an application for the institute’s IRB review. The DLIFLC IRB review is a two-step process including respective departmental and institutional-level evaluations of the scientific merit, mission relevance, operational feasibility, and ethical considerations of the proposed research. The required application form included a detailed description of the study purpose, scope, method, research design and procedures, strategies for the protection of human subjects, and a comprehensive statement about its potential value and relevance to the institute’s mission.

Once the DLIFLC IRB approval process was successfully completed, the researcher obtained from the Faculty Personnel department a list of deans and associate deans who were initially hired for a non-leadership position (e.g., as teachers) and who were promoted to current leadership positions a year or more ago. Each individual identified received an initial e-mail with a study description, an explanation that they were being considered for participation in the study, and a request to complete and return a brief biographical survey. The researcher followed up the e-mail with a reminder phone call to the individuals who did not respond within one week. Once the responses were received, the researcher reviewed the demographic data of all deans and associate deans who indicated interest in study participation, and applied the maximal variation strategy to select the final nine participants for the study. Afterwards, each study participant received an invitation e-mail thanking them for their participation and providing additional details about the study purpose, data collection protocols, and processes for ensuring anonymity.
of responses. The e-mail was followed by a phone call in which the researcher answered any additional questions or concerns on the part of individual participants and established the best time and place for individual interviews with each participant.

**Data Collection**

In keeping with the phenomenological data collection protocol delineated by Moustakas (1994), the study employed in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection strategy. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participants’ work setting such as their private office or a conference room. They lasted between 70 and 90 minutes. Research consent from each individual participant was obtained prior to their interview using the protocol shown in Appendix A. The first few minutes of the interview were devoted to verifying details of the demographic data obtained from each participant and providing an opportunity to answer any concerns or questions the participant may have had. This was followed by a brief social conversation to put the participant at ease and to create a relaxed atmosphere conducive to facilitating the recollection process critical to answering questions fully and truthfully (Moustakas, 1994). The interview commenced once permission to record it and to take notes was obtained from the participant. Each participant was reminded that a selected pseudonym would be used and that they should avoid using real names during the interview process to help ensure anonymity.

Although the interview protocol included a series of open-ended questions prepared in advance, as shown in Appendix B, these questions were supplemented during the interview with additional follow-on questions to achieve the richest and most comprehensive account of the participant’s experience. The researcher took notes during the interview to capture the participant’s demeanor, pertinent details about the interview setting, and other contextual clues
and factors potentially helpful in interpreting the meaning of the participant’s experience (Patton, 2015). All interviews were recorded using a high quality portable digital voice recorder and were professionally transcribed by a transcription service. Completed transcripts of each interview were returned by the transcription service within five days. The researcher reviewed each transcript for completeness and accuracy, and screened it for any information that may have potentially identified the participant (e.g., the name, school, and department). Afterwards, all the participants received a copy of their individual interview transcripts via e-mail to reassure them about confidentiality and to give them an opportunity to verify the accuracy and completeness of the information. Within three days of receiving feedback from each individual participant, the researcher e-mailed a thank you note to that participant expressing gratitude for their participation in the study. Throughout the whole data collection process the researcher kept a detailed journal to capture pertinent details about the process, themes that emerged, and to document her own thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

**Data Storage**

Files with interview data were downloaded from the recording device to a personal, password protected computer within 24 hours after the interview. A back up copy of the file was kept on an external hard drive in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s residence. All transcripts, interview protocols, and documents including those tying the participants to their pseudonyms were also kept in the same locked cabinet. The researcher was the only person with access to the research data. After six years, all the study data and documentation will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

Following Husserl’s philosophical approach, Moustakas (1994) thoroughly delineated transcendental phenomenological methodology and defined its core processes of *epoché,*
transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. In addition to the dimension of bracketing, phenomenological reduction consists of horizontalization, the latter involving the initial examination of all data components from the vantage point of equal weight and importance. The purpose of phenomenological reduction consisting of both pre reflective and reflective components is to arrive at a complete textural description of the phenomenon (noema), i.e., “the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self” (Moustakas, p. 34). The goal of imaginative variation, a reflective process of exploring the meaning of the phenomenon from multiple perspectives by using imagination, reflection, and multiple frames of reference, is to arrive at a structural description. The structural description “provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience” (p. 135) by analyzing how feelings and thoughts connected to the phenomenon arise (noesis). The final process in phenomenology, the synthesis, consists of integrating all textural and structural descriptions “into a unified statement” of the essence of the experience (p. 100). The study applied the above processes in a phenomenological method of data analysis developed by Moustakas based on an adaptation of Van Kaam’s (1959; 1966) approach. The method includes the following steps:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping of meaning units (horizontalization)
2. Reduction and elimination of redundant meaning units
3. Clustering of meaning units into themes
4. Final identification and validation of themes
5. Constructing an individual textural description for each participant
6. Constructing a structural description of each participant’s experience
7. Developing a composite textural-structural description for the group as a whole
As the initial step in the data analysis process, the researcher re-read all transcripts while listening to the interview recordings to fully verify their completeness and accuracy. She imported verbatim interview transcripts into NVivo 11, a software package designed by ©QSR International, for assistance with organizing, accessing, and analyzing raw data. With the help of the software program, the researcher analyzed interview data following Saldana’s (2013) First Cycle and Second Cycle coding procedures. The First Cycle coding process involved reading each transcript line by line, re-reading segments such as sentences or paragraphs, reflecting on the content, and generating a preliminary code for each unit of meaning. In this stage of Initial coding, i.e., identifying and comparing discrete data components, the researcher used In Vivo as the primary coding strategy. This strategy made it possible to generate codes using direct quotes from the text of the transcripts to capture the essence of meaning through the language of participants (Saldana). The researcher additionally used a combination of Process and Description codes to “connote action in the data” through the use of gerunds (p. 96) and to identify an evolving topic category respectively. At this stage of the process, following the principle of horizontalization, all the codes were initially treated as equally relevant to the experience (Step 1) to be later analyzed for the purpose of eliminating repetitive or overlapping expressions (Step 2). The latter step involved identifying and retaining only invariant constituents, i.e., expressions that are necessary and sufficient for understanding, abstracting, and labeling the experience.

The Second Cycle procedure was completed using the Pattern coding strategy (Step 3). This strategy involved grouping initial codes into more “explanatory or inferential codes… that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 86). The identified themes were next finalized using a verification process based on the
constant comparison method (Step 5). The constant comparison method utilizes cyclical, interactive processes of “comparison and reflection” of reading and re-reading transcripts, comparing data categories, coding and re-coding data components, and memo writing (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). Next, the relevant themes were used to prepare for each participant an individual textural description of the experience that included verbatim quotes from participants’ interviews (Step 5). The textural descriptions were derived through transcendental phenomenological reduction processes of bracketing and horizontalization. The purpose of bracketing is to achieve a sole focus on the research question and topic by excluding everything that is unrelated, while horizontalization ensures that all statements and perceptions are initially treated as equally relevant. The textural descriptions illuminated the noematic or perceptive dimension of the experience by including “thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas that portray what comprises an experience” as it appears to one’s consciousness through reflection (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47).

The next step in the analysis process involved developing for each participant an individual structural description of the experience (Step 6) that denoted the underlying, unifying principles and “conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). The structural description reflects the noetic dimension of a phenomenon by focusing on ways in which it is experienced. The structural description was derived through the process of imaginative variation or reflecting on the phenomenon from different perspectives, frames of reference and possible polarities of meaning. The final step in the data analysis involved synthesizing the individual textural and structural descriptions to construct a composite description of the “meanings and essences of the experience” (p. 121) for the participants as a whole group (Step 7).
In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, the data analysis process primarily utilized inductive methodology in which sets of themes and patterns of meaning are constructed gradually by analyzing and organizing individual data components “from the bottom-up” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Throughout the entire research process acknowledging and documenting the researcher’s thoughts, procedures and processes, bracketing her “orientation to the phenomenon,” and cross-checking interpretations with participants were the strategies used for ensuring study validity (Donalek, 2004, p. 516).

**Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

**Validity and reliability.** Because of the connection between the validity and reliability of a study and the researcher’s ethics and credibility (Patton, 2015), the researcher needed to ensure “intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence” (p. 570) throughout the study. She also needed to ensure that the study was conducted ethically by addressing her positionality early in the study and by maintaining transparency about her theoretical orientation (Merriam, 2009). Because of the researcher’s personal experience with the phenomenon under investigation in the study, there was an increased potential for researcher bias through the introduction of subjective interpretations and preconceptions. Another potential concern was reactivity or the degree to which the researcher’s involvement in the study influenced participants’ responses in that they provided responses based on their interpretation of what the researcher expected or wanted to hear (Maxwell, 2013).

The above potential threats to validity were addressed through multiple forms of safeguards and processes. In keeping with phenomenological methodology, the researcher rigorously applied the analytical principles of epoché and bracketing by setting aside her “understandings, judgements, and knowings” about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).
and consciously holding it “up for serious inspection” as it “presents itself” (Patton, 2015, p. 575). The researcher employed the strategy of reflexivity by identifying and reflecting on her biases, beliefs, assumptions and conclusions through regular introspective journal entries. She used analytic memos during data analysis and filed notes throughout the study to maintain a detailed and clear account of study methods, procedures, and decisions and to capture observations and insights about study processes and participants’ reactions (Saldana, 2013). The researcher also used prolonged engagement with the participants through frequent personal contact as a strategy for building trust and reducing the potential for reactivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure accuracy of data and their interpretations the researcher employed regular member checks by involving study participants in the verification of the correctness and interpretations of data (Merriam, 2009). As part of this strategy, all the participants received a copy of the description of the individual textural and structural description of their experience and verified the researcher’s accuracy in representing the experience.

Phenomenological processes are emergent, inductive and require retrospective reflection on the part of the study participants “to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105; Patton, 2015). To evoke participants’ reflection on the experience that would potentially yield a rich description, the data collection process included semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. To ensure no hidden researcher biases in the interview questions and to evaluate their effectiveness in eliciting detailed and rich descriptions of the participants’ experience, the interview questions and protocols were pilot-tested prior to the data collection phase of the study. The piloting involved a dean and associate dean who personally experienced the phenomenon and who were not included in the study. Feedback from the two individuals helped the researcher get a better feel for the interview
questions and brainstorm strategies for adding probing questions during the interviews to elicit a more in-depth recollection of the experience.

Reliability referred to in qualitative research as dependability or consistency denotes the degree to which data are credible and their interpretations by a researcher are “trustworthy” (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). In addition to the strategies described above, the researcher ensured the dependability of the study by reducing the possibility of errors in data analysis through becoming proficient in NVivo 11 software applications through on-line tutorials provided by QSR International. As part of this process, she developed facility in the correct use of the software for organizing and analyzing data by completing a practice cycle of inputting and analyzing data obtained during the piloting stage of the study. This helped guarantee effective utilization of the software to ensure consistency and accuracy of coding processes during data analysis. The researcher additionally sought feedback from colleagues with expertise in qualitative research on her code lists and their thematic clustering as a strategy for evaluating the reliability of her data analysis.

**Protection of human subjects.** Participation in this study did not present obvious risks to the participants as the study seeks to understand their experiences and did not involve any treatment with potential consequences. However, some of the participants may not have wanted their views, opinions, and experiences attributed to them personally. The researcher ensured participant anonymity by not disclosing the participants’ real names and by using pseudonyms when referring to the participants, their specific schools or any other information that might have identified them. Interview transcripts were carefully screened for any references with potential to identify the study participants. During the recruitment process the purpose and methods of the study were made very transparent and all potential participants were advised about the voluntary
nature of their participation. The method of participant selection was free of bias and employed sampling procedures commensurate with methodological requirements for qualitative research. Before the start of the data collection process, informed consent was obtained from each participant. As a token of appreciation, all the participants in the study were compensated for their time with a $15 gift certificate to a popular local coffee shop.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methodology used to investigate the identified problem of practice through an inquiry into the essence of the leadership development experience of DLIFLC deans and associate deans. The study was guided by the following research question: *How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?* The study employed a qualitative research design of transcendental phenomenology and primarily used an inductive data analysis approach based on Moustaka’s (1994) adaptation of Van Kaam’s (1959; 1966) multi-step protocol.

The nine study participants were selected without bias using purposeful sampling and maximal variation strategies. The primary data collection strategy included in-depth, semi-structured interviews in which a series of open-ended questions were utilized to encourage participants’ reflection on their experience. Prior to the interviews all data collection protocols and interview questions were piloted with two participants not included in the study.

The researcher employed multiple strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. These included documenting and providing detailed accounts of decisions made in the study, maintaining prolonged engagement with the participants, frequent member checks, seeking feedback from researcher’s peers, and utilizing the strategies of reflexivity and bracketing.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The following chapter presents the findings that emerged from semi-structured interviews with nine DLIFLC deans and associate deans who have served in their current positions for at least one year. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to an organizational leader of deans and associate deans promoted from within DLIFLC. Specifically, this study sought to understand and describe leadership development trajectories of ten individuals who experienced the phenomenon of becoming deans and associate deans at DLIFLC. The study was guided by the following research question: How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?

To protect the anonymity of the study participants, all of whom work in the same large government organization, individual demographic information is synthesized into a combined profile of all participants. The chapter begins with a presentation of the participants’ combined profile followed by individual textural and structural descriptions of each participant’s experience. The chapter concludes with a composite description of the meanings and essence of the participants’ experience which emerged from the synthesis process of their textural and structural descriptions. The composite description is derived from the identification and description of the following four major themes: 1) interest in leadership, 2) leadership as a continuous learning process, 3) community influence, and 4) personal transformation.

Participants’ Combined Profile

The study participants were five men and four women who had been initially hired at DLIFLC for non-supervisory positions and were later selected for mid-level leadership positions, culminating in their accession to the position of dean or associate dean. All the participants
started their career at the institute in a position related to teaching, either as a foreign language teacher or as a faculty trainer. They respectively progressed through one to four middle management positions, for example, as program manager, department chair, deputy director, assistant dean, branch chief, or project manager before getting selected for their current position.

Of the nine participants, three were native speakers of English while the remaining six were born in a foreign country and learned English as a foreign language prior to coming to the United States. Regardless of their native language, three participants were fluent in one other language while the remaining six spoke between two and four additional languages. The average length of the participants’ employment at the institute was 16.5 years which represents a range of eight to 30 years for individual participants. As a group, the participants represented 48 years of cumulative leadership experience in their current positions with four of the participants having served in a position of dean or associate dean for a little over two years.

Participant: Adam

**Textural description.** Adam came to the institute as a language teacher. Although he enjoyed teaching all aspects of the language and providing his students with a lot of speaking and reading practice, he also sought additional challenges from the very beginning of his employment. Within the first year, he completed all the necessary requirements to be certified as a language tester, which qualified him to administer oral proficiency tests in his language to Department of Defense personnel in addition to his teaching duties. When given an opportunity to work on a DLIFLC taskforce for planning and organizing student immersions abroad, Adam eagerly accepted it and actively participated in creating the first immersion working group in his school. He described his initial experience at the institute as follows:
Since I started with DLI, I was … I mainly wanted to learn every aspect of the job of teaching and also to help my team leaders and volunteer with my department chair to do extra work. I heard about this immersion concept from my department chair then, and I volunteered to represent the department and ended up actually leading the way for the whole school to establish their first immersion program.

Although focused mainly on improving his language teaching skills, Adam recognized that he was “intrigued by the principles of leadership” since earning his undergraduate degree with a minor in leadership studies. He was especially interested in what he termed as “the American principles of leadership,” which he conceptualized as focusing on “the growth of others” and on “helping others to do better.” After one year of teaching, Adam interviewed for a job as an assistant project manager and moved to a testing department where he worked with a team involved in language test production and validation. The job provided him not only with an opportunity to develop new skills but also to interact with leaders across organizational levels which he credited with his better understanding of the “DLI environment” and the realization that “there is always a need for good leaders” within it. Among those leaders he encountered two individuals who became role models through their “positive impact on the workplace” and who helped him crystalize his own view of leadership. They helped him understand that “…if you have something really good to offer and you have good ideas, and you really want to improve the environment of work, it’s definitely leadership, it’s a way to express that.” Adam credited these individuals with “inspiring” him to pursue a leadership path at the institute although, at the time, he was aware that, due to the institute’s academic rank system, assuming a leadership job with more responsibility would result in a different job title but not in an actual
promotion or a salary increase. He felt that “the reward comes from contributing and being part of the group that would actually lead DLIFLC to do better.”

After two years as an assistant project manager, Adam competed and was selected for a department chair’s position in a language program where he focused on managing academic and administrative aspects of the program, mentoring teachers, and teaching a foreign language part time. When reflecting on a difficult situation involving a conflict between a group of students and their teachers, Adam recalled two additional people whose “wisdom” he often fell back on when trying to solve problems and who served as his “personal role models.” One of those role models was his mother who raised a large family on her own and who taught him to always strive to do his best, to persevere, and to never stop “learning new things.” The other one was a military colonel whom Adam described as his “teacher by doing” and who exemplified to him that a leader needs “to earn and not demand respect” from others and that “leadership power was really about empowering people.”

When Adam moved on to his current job of associate dean after three years as a chair, his responsibilities grew in scope, often requiring him to make important program decisions on his own and leading projects that involved working with units outside the institute. He explained how these responsibilities contributed to his understanding of leadership:

Having to do that myself and being out there on the road and trying to establish these training detachments, hiring the right teachers, training them, and at the same time meeting the standards and expectations of the field commanders to reach their goals in the field. All of that was really something that formed my appreciation and also my understanding of what is leadership.
Adam also commented on how fortunate he was to have had many “informal mentors” from among peers and supervisors who “were open for discussions and talking about frustrations on the job.” He singled out his former supervisor, John, who believed that leadership development “comes from experience” as his most influential mentor. One of John’s strategies was to assign Adam tasks with limited instructions to give him an opportunity to learn. Adam expressed the following thoughts on that experience:

   Every time I tried to go back to him and ask him for more details and more instructions, he would be reluctant to give me a lot of details because he believed and then later on he explained that he really wanted to give me an opportunity and a chance to fail, meaning that he want me to be myself, to be authentic.

   When reflecting on his leadership journey of the last few years, Adam pointed out that although he was “still evolving” as a leader, he was now “a more compassionate” leader who was able “to find a better balance between task and relationship” in his decision making processes. He described himself as a person with more confidence, an increased understanding of others, and “a clearer perspective” on what is important when interacting with people.

   **Structural description.** Early in his career at DLIFLC, Adam realized the importance of “diversifying” his experience as a key to his professional growth and promotional opportunities. When still a language teacher, he sought opportunities to get involved in curriculum development, test writing, management tasks and other additional duties. He considered these experiences a good way to “get noticed” by demonstrating that he was excelling at his job and was ready for more responsibility.

   I was really fortunate throughout my career to both volunteer and be asked to lead certain projects and the energy that I brought to these projects was a good indicator to my bosses
then that I’m trustworthy and I can accomplish these jobs. I would say in terms of wanting to be a leader you need to remember that also you have the job that will take you in that direction, if you do it to the point that you are so good at it that people cannot ignore you … Be proactive to show evidence that you’re ready for promotion.

He recognized that while he himself created some of the opportunities to expand his professional experiences by “being proactive” and volunteering, many more were provided by his supervisors, especially those who served as his mentors.

Adam viewed mentoring as an important component in his growth as a leader as well as his current leadership practice towards his subordinates. He described the influence of his mentor, John, on his development in the following manner:

I had a framework that I worked with but he did not cap my creativity and my ideas when it comes to accomplishing tasks. I think just working with that individual helped me a lot in learning more about myself, learning more about how I act and interact and react to others in high stake situations and it also gave me the necessary grounding as a leader.

One of the growth areas Adam experienced, which he considered very helpful in his current leadership practice, was his newly developed ability to distinguish between “attitudes” and “behaviors.” He noted that when dealing with difficult employees, he reminds himself that his focus should be on “changing their behavior and not on their attitude” and that, as a result, “the change in attitude may follow.” He was aware that he used to spend too much time “trying to manipulate or change people’s attitudes in the workplace” and that his new approach made him more effective as a leader.

Another aspect of Adam’s transformation was an increase in his self-awareness. He noticed that in the last two years he had become much more confident as a person and a leader.
He cautioned that “excessive confidence” could be negative because it might be “seen as being cocky and not caring” and could be a “turn off for a lot of people.” He expressed his view of “positive” self-confidence in a leader as the ability to support and “take care of his employees” and “giving them a window of opportunity to do things” even if there is some risk of failure. Recognizing that in DLIFLC’s multi-cultural environment manifestations of one’s confidence may be perceived differently by different individuals, he offered the following insight:

The confidence aspect, it also has a dial to it and through the years of experience I learned how to have that balance and I sometimes dial down that sense of confidence that could not be translated necessarily in all cultures as a good thing.

Adam’s increased self-awareness also manifested itself through his realization that to be truly effective as a leader he needed to build “a political capital” with his employees. He described it as a process of helping them, supporting them, being consistent and earning trust and loyalty by “showing evidence to your followers that you are really capable of doing everything you promised.”

While contemplating his transformation into a “more mature” leader who is “at peace with his decisions” because he knows that he is “an ethical” leader who “is putting people first,” Adam identified some processes that contributed to it. They included, among others, formal and informal training events involving leaders at the institute and beyond and taking the time to reflect on his experiences. The former exposed and gave him a “sense of belonging” to the “DLIFLC community of academic leaders” and made him aware that “what’s out there in terms of leadership practice and issues” is “part of a bigger system.” He described the role of the latter in helping him learn from mistakes:
Because you don’t want to repeat the same mistakes you made in the past and sometimes you just say, “it’s the time, it’s the circumstances,” it’s easy to blame it on external factors. Reflecting, what it does is not necessarily putting the blame on yourself but you’re really unfolding and unpacking the whole situation and seeing where you stand in that spectrum and how you reacted and if there is a way that you can make it better.

Participant: Annemarie

Textural description. Prior to moving to the United States, Annemarie worked as a journalist in her native country where she also took on additional part-time jobs such as teaching, tutoring students and editing newspaper articles. Although she liked her first job as a foreign language teacher at DLIFLC, she left it after only six months to be reunited with her family in a southern state where she lived and worked for about 12 months afterwards. During that period of time, an individual from DLIFLC’s personnel office periodically contacted her to inquire about her availability to return to the institute since there were shortages of teachers in her language. After some negotiations, she decided to return and resume her position as a foreign language teacher at DLIFLC, which she had left a year earlier.

Annemarie recalled that she really liked what she was doing as a language teacher and did not plan on moving into a leadership position. She described herself as someone who “is always involved in everything” and for whom “doing extra things is considered normal.” Her constant involvement in additional projects and initiatives “caught the eye of other people in the department” and she was soon asked to serve as a team leader. Although in that position she did not manage employees, she was responsible for leading a team of six teachers and for planning and administering a language program for approximately 30 students. When a new curriculum project started, her hard work and potential were recognized once more and she was asked to
move to a different department where she could work on that high visibility project. She recalled that the project was complex and that because of her technical expertise, in its critical phases, she often had to be “in charge of almost everything.” Serving as a team leader on the project, while she continued to develop her specialized knowledge in course development and educational technology, she was often called upon to assist her program manager with his duties. They often included “scheduling the workload,” “managing the workflow” and coordination between her department and other support organizations and language programs within the institute. She continued these duties in addition to managing 16 employees and multiple projects when she was competitively selected to be a chair in the same department three years later.

When Annemarie became an assistant dean she learned a lot about the “operational side” of managing a program by dealing with budgetary and contract issues. In reflecting on that period in her professional life, Annemarie emphasized that she considered herself fortunate to have been a teacher and a developer because that experience enabled her to better guide her employees. She stated: “I’m able not only to help them but also to see if they are on the right path.” She also recalled that when the department was understaffed, she spent many hours working “overtime to accomplish all the tasks and projects.” Annemarie had “no regrets” about working long hours because she “loved doing” her job and she “learned a lot about how to be a manager.” She mentioned that her “inspiration” came from Steve Job’s saying “when you love what you do, you don’t have to work a day in your life.”

Becoming a dean of the organization where she had worked for a few years “seemed like a natural progression” to Annemarie because she felt that she had the requisite “institutional and technical knowledge” needed in that position in addition to the required “people skills.” However, she was initially reluctant to apply for the position, which she explained as follows:
Even though people sometimes perceive me as somebody who is career driven and as somebody determined to get to the top, I was never like that. My goal was to do my job well, to do it right … but somebody always saw something in me and I was approached by several people who encouraged me to apply and to give it a chance.

Encouraged by others, Annemarie did apply and has been serving as a dean for approximately two years.

**Structural description.** Although Annemarie did not have leadership aspirations, she had progressed through various middle-management positions to become a dean. She described herself as an “extroverted introvert” who “was challenged as a child to be a creative thinker” and who “was raised to speak freely,” to voice her opinions, and “to stand up” for what she believed in. Proactive by nature, Annemarie acknowledged that because of her tendency to “turn any problem into a solution,” when facing a task or a dilemma she absolutely could not solve on her own, she often reached out to others in the DLIFLC community “who might know.” She also “learned by observing other people” some of whom were her supervisors, by “shadowing them,” and “paying attention to many different elements” which she could emulate in her own practice. Adopting a reflective stance towards those role models, she was selective about what she chose. She provided the following explanation of how she learned from them:

> If I combined 20% here, 30 here, and 50 over there, I would have one person that would be really a role model for me…I loved one person’s energy and focus…I liked that the other one was able to say things directly without beating around the bush and that another person was able to say things in a nice and calm way but get the same results.

When reflecting on her growth and development as a leader, Annemarie stated “I was lucky that along the way I had good colleagues and good leaders who helped me shape and
form.” While acknowledging that she “learned a lot from everybody,” Annemarie credited one of her former supervisors, Isabella, with the most profound impact on her development. Assuming the role of an “informal mentor,” Isabella, who was very experienced and effective in dealing with people herself, taught Annemarie “how to convey what I want to say without somebody feeling threatened” by including her in special meetings and counseling sessions. She often assigned tasks that seemed beyond “the scope” of Annemarie’s responsibilities because “she knew that I could handle it” therefore providing developmental opportunities. As the result of Isabella’s mentoring, Annemarie was also able to overcome some of her natural shyness and disinclination to take advantage of opportunities for herself. Annemarie recalled that in those situations:

There was no asking because she knew if she asked me I would say ‘no, you know, we can let somebody else go.’ There was no choice. I was never asked. I was literally pushed because that’s the way to help me get out of my shell.

Overcoming difficult situations and her ability to reflect on them was another source of development for Annemarie. One example she provided was that having earned her doctoral degree in a very demanding program as a non-native speaker of English who often struggled with terminology “helped me articulate things and express myself better and tailor my speech to the audience. Prior to that, I just stopped.” Another example involved a “painful experience” of “backstabbing” by some of Annemarie’s former colleagues whom she had trusted, supported and helped acquire new skills. In retrospect, Annemarie felt that “that bad phase was the best experience” for her since it made her “self-reflect” trying “to find the cause” for what had happened. Below is how she described the effects of the process:
That self-reflection helped me see things clearly and helped me grow as a manager and a leader - knowing what to say, what not to say, what the boundaries are. Thinking that somebody is friendly when in reality they are not. Paying more attention sometimes to non-verbal communication than I used to and also relying on what people say, not what I want to hear. That's one experience. I like to turn whatever is negative into positive.

Annemarie described additional ways in which she had changed by reflecting on her own experiences. The experience of often being the only person in the department who knew how to do a specific job in the past, taught her “the hard way” that knowledge “needs to be shared.” As the result, in her own leadership practice, she made an extra effort to ensure conditions for the “transfer of knowledge” from one person to another so that “at least two people know the intricacies of a specific task or job.” She described another transformation that came from the realization of setting the same high standards for others as she had for herself:

I expected of everybody what I expected of myself and that was not the right approach.

For example, when people were hired, I expected them to know how to do their job. When they didn’t, I got frustrated. I changed a lot. My patience grew exponentially…I am more open to accept that people don’t know some things and may come to work without some knowledge.

This realization contributed to her conviction that “leadership is about helping others grow and about doing the right things” and that “sometimes even making mistakes, that’s leadership, too, and learning from them.”

Participant: Charles

Textural description. For Charles, coming to the institute as a language teacher some twenty years ago was “a dream come true.” He emphasized multiple times that teaching
grammar, vocabulary, and the culture of the language had always been his “cup of tea” and something he truly loved and enjoyed. He had previously worked as a counselor for political affairs and as a diplomat at the United Nations. Although he found those jobs interesting because they allowed him to meet interesting people such as heads of states and foreign dignitaries, coming to DLIFLC to teach language was what he really wanted to do.

Charles continued teaching when he assumed the role of a team leader, a non-supervisory position in which he was responsible for guiding and overseeing a teaching program for about 30 students together with a group of five to seven teachers. He emphasized that he “had to accomplish a lot” to be able to “work with the team and to be a language instructor at the same time” which required that he “divide his time between these two functions.” He also felt that some of the functions he performed at the time such as planning the curriculum, preparing weekly schedules, and coordinating tests, were really helpful to him later when he became a department chair.

During the 10 years he held the position of team leader, Charles had no “leadership aspirations.” He recalled:

It never crossed my mind to become a supervisor until I'd say ten or eleven years after I'd started working at DLI when some of my colleagues approached me and encouraged me to apply for leadership positions because obviously they saw something in me or they noticed something in me and they would just suggest, "Why don't you become a supervisor, Charles? You'd be a great department chair.”

When reflecting on what motivated him to apply for the department chair’s position, Charles shared an anecdote. He said that while he was still resisting the idea of applying for a department chair position, a former student of his who returned to the institute for an advanced course came
up to him after graduation and asked: “Charles, what are you still doing as a team leader after all these years? Why don’t you move up and pursue something else? You have done your share of teaching.” He recalled that although somewhat taken aback by the student’s directness, when he went home and reflected on her words, he concluded that “she was being honest” and that “she really meant what she said.” After reflecting on the student’s comment and his career at DLIFLC for a few more days, Charles came to the conclusion that “perhaps it was time to try something new” and decided to apply for the position. He served as a department chair in two different programs before getting competitively selected for his current position of associate dean.

**Structural description.**

For Charles, moving from language teaching to a position of leadership was “not an easy transition.” He recalled that “it required many days, weeks, and months of getting used to working with upper management and with teachers as my subordinates.” He admitted that although he liked being in a leadership position, he occasionally “still missed those years of classroom teaching.” He described his initial years of leadership as “stressful,” partly because he was not quite prepared for “crisis situations, personality conflicts, putting out fires,” and “communication breakdowns” when dealing with his “multi-cultural faculty.” Although the initial “experience was quite challenging” for him, he stated:

> Somehow, I survived because I persevered. I was patient. I listened. Listening is a very important skill that a supervisor needs. Some people don't have that. You need that as a supervisor and that has helped me tremendously to become a better leader and a better supervisor. I'm much more confident dealing with my faculty or any other faculty at DLI.

In addition to his increased confidence as a leader, Charles felt that he gradually became “much more assertive” once he accepted that “we are not always going to be liked by
everybody.” He considered dealing with diplomats from different countries in his previous job as helpful to him when facing difficult work situations because it helped him understand that each person was different and may need to be approached differently. One of the “breakthrough moments” in his leadership practice was when he realized that some things were beyond his control and that it was “perfectly fine” to share that with his faculty.

At first I thought I could help them with every situation, then I realized that I didn’t have the power, I didn’t have the information, I didn’t have the resources to help them, and then somehow they felt that I did not contribute to their problems. We needed to acknowledge that first in order to make progress on solving the issue.

When faced with a work dilemma that he could not solve on his own, Charles always made an effort to learn “who the key players were at the institute” and which offices to contact for getting answers to questions about specific procedures and requirements. One of his strategies was also to consult and observe more experienced colleagues and others he considered role models. He stated:

I consulted those who had more experience and were more witty, more practical, more analytical than me, and I picked their brain often to come up with the best solution to whatever crisis or situation I was facing… I spent time observing them, watching them perform their jobs. I learned from their tactics, from their techniques, from their strategies, what to do in certain situations, the kind of body language that they were using, the kind of tone of voice that they were using, the way they were being patient with their faculty.
While “taking strategies” and “learning new tools” from some individuals, Charles differentiated between those role models he admired and considered effective and those who showed him “how not to act” because they were “condescending or disrespectful to others.”

In addition to his “hands-on” experience, Charles credited workshops and other training sessions involving participants from outside DLIFLC with helping him transform into a “more effective and confident” leader. Sharing information with colleagues from other government agencies and the private sector helped him see that they had similar issues, that he “belonged” to a larger community and that he was “not the only one.” The interaction with others helped him develop a habit of reflecting on “moments” in his leadership practice when he felt he “was successful” and when he “was not successful,” comparing them and thinking what he could have done differently. Charles recalled a particular mentor who made sure to send him to available training and workshops and who “guided” him when he first became a department chair teaching him “how to be calm” in any situation. For Charles, whose “first love” was teaching, leadership is a continuous process of learning as expressed in his statement:

It's been a wonderful journey. I have no regrets. On the contrary, I look forward to a few more years of continuing to be a leader, a mentor, a big brother, an advisor, a counselor; because you know that in this business, we wear many hats and now it comes naturally to me.

**Participant: Henry**

Textural description. When he arrived in the United States in the mid-nineties, Henry was hoping to continue pursuing an athletic career as a long distance runner. However, having sustained an injury, he had to change course which resulted in a decision to accept a position as a foreign language teacher at DLIFLC. It was not until he became a team coordinator working with
five teachers in a non-supervisory role two years later that he started thinking that he "could contribute to the institute in a different capacity." Although he "was very happy teaching the language and working with a team of teachers" he felt that he "wanted to have an opportunity to experience a true supervisory position." That opportunity arose in 1999 when he applied and was selected for a position as a department chair in which he was responsible for managing a language program with 25 teachers who taught the same foreign language. Henry served in that position for close to six years before accepting a position as a director of a language program with eight different languages at DLIFLC’s satellite campus on the East Coast. He felt that the relative diversity and complexity of the program with multiple languages would provide “an additional challenge” to his "capabilities and skills." He relocated back to the West Coast some four years later to serve as an associate dean of a multi-language program for three years, subsequently applying and getting selected for the dean’s position in the same program.

Although Henry came to the institute "by accident" he really liked teaching and did not immediately seek a leadership position. He stated: “when I started working at the institute, all I had in mind was to just teach the language that I love the most.” His interest in holding a leadership position developed gradually, partly because he was looking for a “challenge” but mainly as a result of having observed some people in management positions whom he considered ineffective. One of his observations concerning those individuals was that in spite of having worked at the institute for a long time, they never made the “cultural switch” and consequently they "managed their programs the way they had been managed in their homeland." As Henry gained more knowledge about the institute's mission and organizational culture, he felt more strongly that although he "did not know the mechanics of the job or the workload," he could
“improve things” if he served as a supervisor. When reflecting on his reasons for applying for the chair’s position, he observed:

I could do a better job in terms of providing support to teachers...by showing them the highest respect, motivating and inspiring them, being there for them...and by providing a better working environment for them. That was the driving force for seeking that position.

That same goal of providing support to others was one of the reasons he applied for the associate dean’s job in spite of “the lack of monetary incentives” associated with taking on additional duties required in higher level positions.

Henry attributed his decision to apply for a dean’s job to one of his mentors, Mark, who was his supervisor at the time and the dean of the program in which Henry worked as an associate dean. Henry recalled that upon finding out that Mark would soon leave the institute to take a prestigious job at another organization, he was getting ready to start working for someone else. He stated that it had not occurred to him that he “would be the one taking over the position” because he “was very comfortable with being an associate dean and doing a good job.”

It was Mark who, after having pointed out Henry’s accomplishments as an associate dean, “initiated the thought “of Henry applying for the dean’s position as a way to “maintain the excellence of the program” they jointly managed. Henry shared the following recollection:

So I listened very carefully and I probed my former supervisor to give me more feedback and he was frank and he stated to me that he thought I could maintain the program by moving to that capacity. That's what marked the initial idea to compete for the dean's position.
**Structural description.** Henry strongly believed that his development as a leader and the success he was able to achieve in his current position as a dean were the cumulative result of his experiences in all the leadership positions he had held prior to becoming a dean. He maintained that the reason he was able to learn so much from his experiences was because of the support and guidance of his supervisors who served as mentors to him and who “saw the potential” in him. He described the influence of one of his mentors, a school dean of the school where he had first started as a supervisor, in the following way:

> Very consistent and very compassionate when she needed to be as well. Working under her supervision, I think, marks the best start of my career as a supervisor at the institute. That's the first experience in shaping my professional character and also in enhancing my innate capabilities to have a smooth upward mobility consistently throughout my career.

Henry’s mentors fulfilled multiple functions therefore influencing his development in different ways. They provided “inspiration” and served as influential role models which Henry exemplified in the following statement about his former supervisor, Mark:

> Just working with him and observing how he handles crises and how he deals with his employees and the highest sense of integrity and transparency I saw every day….the most unselfish supervisor I've ever had. He definitely influenced the way I approached work at the institute.

Henry’s mentors provided “a safe environment and the autonomy” for him “to make mistakes and to reflect on them” and to reflect on his “supervisory skills and to improve.” It also helped him “improve dramatically” his “confidence level” which he stated was much lower in his early years as a supervisor. He recalled that his mentors “were always there” for him; especially in “crisis situations” and that they instilled in him a sense of being “one of them” and “part of the
same team.” The latter often translated into Henry being asked to perform some of his supervisors’ duties in their absence. The following is his reflection on that:

I was doing those duties with difficulty because I said, “Well, I am doing my own job as the chairperson, why would I act as dean when the dean is absent?” I didn't discover that it was helpful to me until I took over those associate dean and dean positions. Then I saw that it was good for me because they saw in me the potential to perform those duties in the future. I feel blessed to have had them.

In addition to learning from experience, Henry mentioned workshops and professional training offered to him as a chair and associate dean by the institute as a source of his development. He explained that by teaching him how to deal with the “daily routine of the job” and with “dramatic program changes,” those workshops helped him “become a better manager.” He distinguished management or the ability “to run a program at a practical level” from leadership which he defined as “more than just managing the mechanics of the job, but working with people, inspiring them and being a role model for them.” He described his professional transformation as a shift from being “more a manager” to being a leader:

Because I wanted to meet deadlines, I wanted to make sure that the instructors I supervised produced their very best, that students are assisted, too. I monitored time and attendance very rigidly. It's not the case now for the last few years. I approach my job more as a leader than as a manager to definitely inspire people, show them the respect that they deserve and those managerial duties are the last things I'll think about.

Henry’s transformation was facilitated by his opportunities to reflect on the “mistakes” he had made at work which helped him “build a sense of inner strength and deal with crises also at a personal level.” He commented: “I give credit to the crises that I encountered in the workplace
in shaping the strength that I have to deal with anything that might come across my path.” He offered an insight that his personal and professional growth, “especially in terms of managing crisis became intertwined” and provided the following explanation:

I owe that again to the challenges I have had at work: working with multi-cultural groups, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and also immense degree of personalities. Sometimes you have multiple personalities in just one person you deal with. It does equip you with the strength to deal with all predictable and unpredictable situations.

**Participant: Margaret**

**Textural description.** Margaret recalled that since early childhood, she always assumed leadership roles by “gathering groups of kids” to work on a project, engaging her friends in games and by organizing concerts and plays for their parents. This trend continued during her grade school years when she actively participated in different organizations, often leading new initiatives and organizing school-wide events. To her, the role seemed quite natural since she “was surrounded by leaders” in her own family. She explained, “My grandfather and both of my parents occupied leadership positions I kind of was surrounded by leaders all my life.”

Prior to joining DLIFLC, Margaret held leadership positions in other educational institutions. For example, in addition to her job at a research institute, she worked as an ESL coordinator at a public school where she supervised 15 employees and did “a lot of administrative/management work.” She came to DLIFLC almost 10 years ago to teach a foreign language. She recalled being able to fit easily into her teaching role at the institute due to receiving “on the job training” early on that included learning about the curriculum and teaching methodology and because of her prior experience in various academic settings.
Within the first year of her teaching career at DLIFLC, Margaret was often asked by her department chair to take care of “additional tasks and assignments” such as giving presentations or conducting a research project. She herself also “took initiative, made suggestions” and went beyond her job assignment to assist her team leader by taking on some of his responsibilities such as writing class schedules, preparing reports, and conducting student counseling sessions. In her second year of teaching, Margaret “started seeking additional challenges and responsibilities” and became even “more involved” in performing the team leader’s duties. When a department chair’s position was announced, she “felt ready for a new challenge” and applied for the job. She served as a department chair for five years before her application and selection for the dean’s position she is currently holding.

**Structural description.** Although Margaret came to the institute with some leadership experience, she felt that “going into a leadership position” was like “stepping into a little bit of the unknown.” In spite of her strong feelings that she was ready for “new opportunities” and an “interesting job” in which she would have “more ability to make independent decisions and change things,” when applying for the chair’s position, Margaret “had doubts.” She described those feelings in terms of her “lack of confidence” and commented:

I didn’t believe in myself as much as others believed in me. I guess I was lacking a little bit of confidence. Perhaps it’s coming to a different country or a different field. Even when you know something, you think “OK. I am daring, but what if I cannot do this?” Because people were encouraging me, I applied... I always had people who told me that I can do it and that I should move forward. When people I trust encourage me, I usually prove to be pretty good at what I do.
She credited her supervisor, her colleagues, and her “trusted grandfather” with providing her with the support and encouragement to try applying for the position.

She recalled that she was “more confident when starting as a dean than starting as a department chair” and felt that her experience as a chair paved the way to her confidence in her ability to perform the dean’s job. She provided the following insight:

Becoming a dean, in a way, I was surprised to learn that I actually know what to do.

There were some more administrative areas like filling out forms and certain procedures that I didn't know. Things related to the specifics of the school, like culture or the way things are done here. Other than that, I felt confident that I know my job.

Having served as a chair for five years also helped Margaret understand and support the needs of the department chairs under her supervision better and provide guidance and mentoring to them.

She described this process as follows:

I supervise chairs, and I have to help them grow as well, and we have mostly new chairs in my school. I feel like I can help them with my advice and guidance because I went through most of the situations that they have, I went through them myself. Or I experienced them in some ways and whatever I don't know I trust my intuition.

In addition to being able to help others better, Margaret described her own transformation as a process of becoming “more confident and more competent” and better able to adjust her leadership style to the needs of “the groups of people” she worked with and to “the situation.” She stated that initially she “started as a very accommodating type of leader” who was “doing a lot of work herself” and whose “kindness was often perceived as a weakness.” She “learned to be more assertive and more direct” but admitted that she needed to continue “perfecting” her assertiveness.
Throughout her career, Margaret always recognized the need to develop because “if you remain the same there is no growth in you.” She attributed her own learning and development to multiple processes and individuals including herself. The latter was illustrated by her tendency to be proactive in creating "on-the job" learning opportunities by going beyond her immediate assignment, dealing with challenges and taking the initiative to solve problems in what she called "sink or swim situations" at work. She maintained that to be effective "you have to do your own homework, you have to dig out the answers, figure out the solutions, and seek help." She derived a lot of "job satisfaction" from "taking something raw and turning it into something polished." She felt that "once you do it a certain number of times, all of a sudden you realize, wow, I learned to do it and you immediately feel like you just stepped one level up."

One of the strategies Margaret relied on when faced with a situation in which she could not solve a problem, was analyzing the situation, writing down key questions and contacting selected individuals who she thought might have the necessary expertise to help her. She also learned from observing others, especially her supervisors who often served as her "guides" and by seeking feedback from them. In turn, they "saw potential" in her and provided her with "challenging assignments" and encouragement "to move forward." She believed that "our best "teachers" are challenging people and situations" and felt fortunate to have had supervisors who gave her "additional tasks" and told her "you see, you can do this."

Margaret also learned by reaching out to the DLIFLC community by contacting the personnel office for help with complex personnel issues and by networking with other DLIFLC deans who were more experienced than herself. She recalled some organized training that was helpful to her, especially workshops that involved participants from other government and
private industry organizations. Those participants offered "unique ideas" that she could try out in her own organizational setting and provided a forum for “an open discussion.”

Leadership to Margaret was a continuous “learning process” and a necessary ingredient for one’s growth and transformation as a leader. She encapsulated this belief in the following insight into her own learning:

In a way it is impossible to stop, you should continue growing. The bigger the field that opens up to you, the more you feel like there is so much to learn. You go a little bit higher, and the field is a lot wider and that really teaches you modesty. You feel your own limitations and opportunities for growth.

**Participant: Matthew**

**Textural description.** Having grown up on the West Coast, Matthew was looking for an opportunity to return there after 10 years of attending college and working outside his home state. Accepting a position as a curriculum development specialist at DLIFLC made it possible for him to resettle with his family back in California. He worked in that capacity for two years until faculty shortages in his language made it possible for him to switch to a foreign language teaching position at the institute. The language program was growing and he soon started working as a team leader. In addition to teaching, he was responsible for planning and coordinating an academic program for a team of six teachers and approximately 30 students. Matthew's experience in the team leader's role contributed to his ability to compete for a branch chief's position in the same program. His new job was equivalent to a department chair's position in a smaller program and included a supervisory component, starting Matthew's "supervisory role" at the institute.
Three years into his branch chief's job Matthew learned that a new organization specializing in intermediate and advanced programs was being created at the institute. He accepted a non-supervisory position in the new organization because he felt that it was an opportunity "to broaden" his "perspective in terms of what the bigger mission was beyond just initial language acquisition work" he had been focusing on in his department. His prior experience made it possible for him to quickly move into the role of a deputy director in the new program. He worked very closely with the director, "acting on her behalf many, many times because she was traveling a lot." He summarized that experience in the following manner:

That gave me the chance to do a different type of supervision and let's say, develop some new leadership skills with a multi-cultural effort because we were a mixed team. I used that as a very important learning step, because the opportunity to work with teachers from several different backgrounds was I think tremendously important and I think I felt, again, I felt comfortable in that situation.

Further expansion of the program led to the creation of a department chair's position for which Matthew applied and was selected. The program continued to grow allowing him to "be offered and accept a larger role, a senior leadership position" as a dean.

Matthew’s initial goal after coming to DLIFLC was to assume "a permanent teaching position." He recalled: "I was a teacher of language and that's what I really wanted to do, it was to teach my language." However; he recognized that when he transitioned into a leadership role, he "felt comfortable doing it." He considered his experience as a director of a study abroad program prior to coming to DLIFLC as instrumental to giving him the necessary experience and confidence. He stated: "I directed a summer study abroad program and I was doing already a good deal of managing and administrative type work." Coming to DLIFLC made him realize that
he had “a great deal of learning ahead” of him due to the uniqueness of the government context of the institute. He “took it seriously” and “was actually energized by the nature of the organization” recalling that it gave him “a lot of satisfaction to do this kind of work.”

**Structural description.** Matthew welcomed the opportunity to work at the institute and appreciated its multi-cultural nature and “dynamic atmosphere” resulting from multiple priorities, constant new challenges, and a need to be flexible. Although he admitted “thriving” in this type of atmosphere, he was also aware that he needed to make some adjustments in his teaching and later in his leadership practices. One of the areas of his transformation needed for him to work effectively at DLIFLC was developing strategies for working in a team environment. He recalled that during his graduate studies and teaching prior to his DLIFLC career, he was in a program with a less commonly taught language and often was in a position of being the only teacher in the department. Below is his description of that experience:

You learn a certain amount of how to be self-sufficient and independent and learning some things because you don't have, necessarily other team members to rely on. It forces you to do a lot of things. I think that helped in creating opportunities and developing skills that maybe teachers from more commonly taught languages don’t have; maybe they don't have those chances to broaden their perspectives.

Although Matthew valued his “self-generated” experience resulting from “working on your own,” he was much “energized” by the support and learning opportunities resulting from working closely with others. He commented that “it was easy to pick up a lot of good habits and traits” when working with colleagues in similar positions or with the supervisors who became his mentors.
Matthew recalled having had “superb mentors” who happened to be his supervisors and who influenced him in multiple ways because of their “different styles.” As a branch chief, Matthew encountered Thomas, who inspired him by calmly reacting in “chaotic situations” and setting an example of how to manage his time at work better and to delegate some tasks to avoid taking large amounts of work home. In addition to sharing technical knowledge about the job, Thomas instilled in Matthew “a sense of pride” in his accomplishments and a habit of reading books on leadership, reflecting on them, and relating information from them to his own leadership practice. His next mentor, Amy, was “very willing to share her knowledge” and put Matthew in “charge of the program” during her frequent business trips. By coaching him on her job duties and the clients’ expectations before each trip, Amy inadvertently helped Matthew develop “that institutional understanding and the nuts and bolts of the job.” He provided the following summary of Amy’s influence on his development: “I look at that mentorship especially as really giving me that background knowledge I needed to move on and to be able to do this kind of work.”

Another mentor, Richard, whose “visionary style of leadership really struck a good cord” was instrumental in helping Matthew develop “a broader perspective” in his job as a dean. By taking the time to discuss and analyze decisions and “the bigger context” surrounding them, Richard enabled Matthew to change from a “very detail oriented person” to someone who was “not afraid to take risks” and who started thinking “in broader, strategic terms.” Although the latter was “not necessarily a natural tendency” for Matthew, he realized that to be effective in running a very dynamic program, he needed to see “the big picture.” He provided the following insight about his mentoring relationship with Richard:
Richard was more visionary and that's something that, it's not necessarily a natural tendency I have, to think way, way out there. He just opened my eyes to different ways of thinking; broaden the perspective a little bit. It allowed me to dream about things, because usually I'd be too tied up in the details to see the forest for the trees. We were constantly bombarded with statistical reports and counting this and counting that. We were doing a lot of that type of very busy work, very detailed work, which I found perfectly fine, but there was not a lot of time to do strategic planning or thinking in a broader sense.

When reflecting on his leadership journey, Matthew mentioned additional people whom he credited with helping him grow as a leader. His “number one role model” was his father who instilled in him “a sense of fairness and patience” and “understanding the importance of honesty and hard work.” Another influential person was a professor in college who taught Matthew “the best techniques for teaching language” which helped lay a foundation for his successful teaching and later language program management career at DLIFLC. One additional area in Matthew’s growth as a leader stemming from his mentors’ influence was his increased understanding of others. He shared an insight on his improved ability to deal with “difficult people” in his organization:

Again, part of it is that I tell myself “okay, try to understand. What is it that they're looking for? What pushes their buttons?” I'll just try to do that. Try not to take things always personally that may be just a personality trait of the person; it's not necessarily personally directed against you. That's just the way some people are. That's learning. Yeah, there have been some difficult people and I was trying to understand their motivations and ideas.
For Matthew, moving to a leadership position was a “conscious decision” motivated by an opportunity “to fill a void” and “to make a difference.” Leaving the branch chief’s job to move to another department where he saw his chance to contribute to “a new program by bringing a sense of structure and organization” was “a dramatic turning point” for him because he was leaving a program he really liked. He commented that although his accession to the dean’s position was “fairly quick” he had paid his “dues” by serving in middle management positions and taking on additional duties when in those positions. He considered those “an important component” that allowed him to learn “what the institute was about” and provided him with “exposure to the different missions and functions” at DLIFLC. In acknowledging that a lot of his learning was helped by working with and “emulating” others, he emphasized his own focus on helping others grow in the following way: “I’ve done my best to provide an example and a role model that others can follow.”

**Participant: Patricia**

**Textural description.** Prior to her arrival at DLIFLC, Patricia enjoyed a very successful and rewarding career in higher education and other academic contexts. She came to the institute shortly after having earned her doctoral degree in education and joined a department specializing in providing professional development to DLIFLC faculty. “Because of having lived a very dynamic life and having done many things,” she was initially concerned about the possibility of “getting bored” or experiencing “burn out” and recalled coming to the institute “with great trepidation.” However, after an initial adjustment period, she was pleasantly surprised that the job was “an excellent fit” for her. She commented: “I was very motivated to work really hard and to invest a lot in what I was doing because I liked it” and admitted to putting “an inordinate amount of hours” into her job.
Although Patricia initially had “no aspirations towards leadership,” with her increased involvement in course development projects as a lead designer and her role as the Faculty Advisory Council president for the department, she had multiple opportunities to “practice informal leadership.” As a result, she started seeing herself as “a trustworthy agent” for her colleagues which gave her the impetus to apply for the program manager position when it was announced. When reflecting on her selection, she recalled that in her first job “from early on” she “was very productive” which “did not go unnoticed” and that she “was rewarded by being entrusted to assume this leadership position.” She also noticed that at DLIFLC “a promotion is usually a promotion into management” in contrast to other academic settings familiar to her. She made the following observation:

I think that DLI is a little bit unique in that the career track, the career path is generally towards supervision. In other universities or other organizations is isn’t about going into management, it’s about going into research and development or going into, you know, other things. The way DLI does it is different.

As a program manager, Patricia and her team had access to “many professional development opportunities and great workshops” which she appreciated a lot and wanted to maintain. She captured her desire to do so in the following way:

There was always something exciting going on and I think as I became a manager it just became this strong feeling. My recognition of how important this really was intensified and I was determined to do everything I could to help keep that going.

Patricia’s decision to apply for the assistant dean position in a language school was motivated by “the desire to be closer to the language teaching process,” since she “had never been a DLI teacher” herself. Although the job seemed “like a natural progression” to her,
Patricia soon discovered, that it focused heavily on administrative tasks and did not allow much room for teaching-related functions. She reflected on that and on her decision to apply for the dean’s job as follows:

I was supervising people but I was not supervising teachers so I had lost that synergy and that loveliness that goes with working with colleagues and I didn’t have that but then an opportunity for deanship came up and I, I went after that, too. So it was all, you know, kind of that movement towards, I want to say, personal growth and professional growth in contributing to the organization…I just wanted to keep moving, I didn’t want to get stalled, lest I crash.

**Structural description.** Patricia’s path towards leadership was influenced not only by her “desire to do things that were new” but also by her strong belief in the value of “continuous improvement” through learning and development. Although she came to the institute as an experienced professional, she often took advantage of available professional development opportunities in the form of specialized workshops and sought additional ones, often paying for them herself. For her, development was a continuous dynamic process of self-reflection and self-assessment “to identify areas where one needs development” and taking the initiative to meet those needs. For example, as the program manager she travelled to a different state for a week-long conflict resolution course because she “felt that this was something that was missing” in her “experience.” Patricia attributed her success in getting promotional opportunities to her ability to take what she “had already learned and marry it to all the new stuff.” She emphasized that becoming a program manager increased her ability to create and maintain an “organizational culture” that offered professional development opportunities for all employees and expressed the value of the latter in the following way:
For other people and for myself, of course, too, because I would benefit from that but I mean this whole notion of trajectory. It wasn't just my trajectory it was for everybody and I also saw this kind of a crescendo, you know, that there was really no limit to what we could achieve if we just keep investing in ourselves.

In addition to the importance of “strengthening” job-related, “on the ground qualifications,” Patricia believed that participating in “events across the institute” and “generating excitement about the organization and what can be achieved” were keys to becoming and developing as a leader. Her own transformation resulting from those two forms of engagement included “increased confidence and belief” in herself and “knowing DLI better” which allowed her to become “much quicker to recognize the implications both locally and across the institute” when dealing with issues or problems. The latter helped her make the necessary transition from “always trying to fix things” herself to being able to “leave them to the appropriate people” which she considered an important step towards “reaching maturity” as a leader.

Patricia’s first job at the institute had “a shaping effect” on her development. Because she “was treated like a smart person, talented and capable…welcome as one of the guys and trusted from the start” to fully participate in projects, she felt she “was given space” to accomplish things. As part of “a team of facilitators,” Patricia was also immersed in an environment in which “reflective processes” were consistently used in course development and facilitation projects that constituted the core function of the organization. Those processes involved taking a team approach to projects, “talking with other colleagues, then going back fleshing things out,” workshop co-facilitation, reflecting on workshop experiences, and seeking, providing and responding to “honest feedback.” She characterized those processes a “hugely
helpful re-visitation of everything [she] had done for the last 20 years” She commented that “it created this whole matrix in my mind of facts and fiction about teaching” and the “appreciation of experiential learning” and “I don’t see myself getting off that track.” Patricia mentioned the usefulness of some of those strategies in her current practice and stated that “a dean is an ultimate facilitator because you can’t be a good leader if you don’t listen and you can’t be a facilitator at all, so it’s a very natural fit.”

Patricia’s development as a leader was influenced by people whom she considered mentors. Even though she stated that did not have “a long mentoring relationship with anybody,“ she referred to two of her former supervisors and her husband as her mentors. One of the supervisors “was a model of selflessness in terms of mentoring and helping.” Although she appreciated his help and benefited from it “tremendously,” she commented that “in retrospect,” when she gained more experience, sometimes “a wider area could have been created to help me figure things out for myself.” She described the influence of the other supervisor and its usefulness when dealing with difficult situations such as what she called “coming under attack randomly” at work:

[He] said a number of things that sort of rung in my ears over the years including “never doubt yourself”… and I often thought I have to doubt myself all the time…I don’t need to doubt my qualifications, I don’t need to doubt my motivation. It helps to have that idea, sort of as my mantra because I know who I am, I know what I can do, and I know what I have done…I think my supervisor was frequently in that position so I think that’s where it was coming from and that really resonated.

While acknowledging that her “supervisors at one point or another have all been very helpful,” she saw the value of the influence of her husband whom she characterized as a “great listener.”
She emphasized that his feedback often caused her to reflect on work-related situations and gain more self-awareness and expressed that “our conversations over the years have made me really revisit my motivation and help me develop more confidence in my decisions.”

Another area in which Patricia gradually developed more confidence and awareness was related to understanding and working with other people. Some of the learning came from her experience of having been in a position of supervising former peers which she recalled as a complicated transition for her. She stated that initially “there was an awkwardness about enforcing rules” but that she “found a way very nicely, in a no-nonsense kind of way to let people know what they need to be doing.” That successful experience helped Patricia develop “antibodies” that helped her deal with difficult situations later in her career. She described herself as being more assertive rather than having the “defensiveness typical of most new supervisors.” She additionally stated that she did not need to “hide behind regulations” in getting her point across and that she became “more direct” when communicating with others.

Considering communication a crucial component to leadership effectiveness, Patricia felt that leaders should take responsibility for cultivating “zones of honesty” that would encourage employees to share information and “be able to speak the truth without fear of repercussion.” She stated that “we can’t have a healthy organization if everyone is muted.” She recognized that there were sometimes cultural differences in her employees’ willingness to contribute ideas and solutions in meetings and indicated that she used some of the facilitation strategies she had learned earlier to encourage participation in a positive way. Patricia felt that “all legitimate leadership is in a sense servant leadership because we are here to take care of people…to make sure that they are successful” and to facilitate conditions that encourage “working together, yes, for the good of the organization and for themselves, too.”
When asked what leadership meant to her, Patricia responded that she was deeply inspired by Richard Adams’ children’s novel “Watership Down” and its main character, Hazel, a rabbit responsible for “leading a group of rabbits out of a danger zone.” She described Hazel as “a regular old rabbit who has a leadership role thrust upon him and whose secret to success is that he cares about his rabbits.” She explained that as the leader, Hazel recognizes that he’s in there with them but he still has the credibility…he is not the leader because he is the smartest, he’s not the leader because he is the strongest, he is the leader because he’s the best synthesizer of information and because he knows who to task with what, he knows how to delegate. He is also very brave and does not doubt himself. Or if he does, he does not second-guess himself. He makes a decision and he goes with it.

Patricia added: “I am aware that my scope is bigger and I think I’m getting better as the synthesizer of information.”

**Participant: Robert**

**Textural description.** Although Robert joined DLIFLC as a foreign language teacher, and held the position for five years, he recalled that he had “actually always been interested in applying for leadership positions.” He came to the institute with prior experience both in leadership and in foreign language teaching and hoped “to be able to blend” his “expertise in both fields by managing a language program. He had gained his leadership experience by “managing small and large teams” when working as a manager in the hospitality industry while his foreign language teaching expertise had come from his former career as a teacher of English as a foreign language.

While working as a teacher, Robert took on additional duties such as becoming a team leader for two years which involved in addition to teaching a full load of classes, guiding the
academic program for 30 students and leading a team of six teachers. In spite of his extensive professional experience, he continued focusing on “growing professionally” and became an oral proficiency tester and a diagnostic assessment specialist both of which required developing additional highly specialized skills. He recalled:

When I decided to take on additional assignments even though there were no additional monetary rewards - that was my way to grow professionally. I decided to invest in myself to enhance my skills as an educator, as a learner and as a leader.

Robert’s decision to invest in himself also involved earning a master’s degree while teaching full time and working on a doctoral degree in education with a curriculum and instruction specialization which he was able to complete within five years.

Robert realized the goal of combining his leadership and foreign language teaching expertise when he applied and was selected for a position as a director of a language training detachment, a DLIFLC satellite language program located in a different state. While in the job, he was able to assume responsibility for and manage another satellite program concurrently. After three years, he became the regional director for eight satellite language programs.

Applying and getting selected for the dean’s job seemed to Robert like “a natural progression” from the regional director’s position. He provided the following explanation: “I was a regional director for over two years and I was already managing 50% of the division’s workforce, so becoming the dean for me was just really expanding my already existing position.”

**Structural description.** Robert’s initial desire to assume a leadership position at DLIFLC in the future strengthened when he began to realize that there was a need “to modify things and enhance operations…to serve DLI and the faculty better.” He stated that “if the team leadership wasn’t up to standard, the whole team suffered and even though the team tried really
hard to work harmoniously…the team was not productive.” When observing the existing leadership practice through the prism of his own experience, he sometimes “noticed areas for improvement” and was aware that the opportunity to be part of that process “was a huge motivator” for him. He remarked:

And I thought that I had something to contribute to that and I was willing to be part of the change that was needed at the institute. I pretty much came to this realization from my third week at DLI that there was some work to be done within management to influence the whole process in a good manner.

Robert believed that “you need to be able to invest in yourself through your education, through your work, and through your efforts to set yourself up for success” and was proactive in doing so. His conviction that “growth comes from learning” led him to pursue academic degrees and acquire new on-the-job skills which often included taking on additional “projects, initiatives” and responsibilities beyond his job assignment. He considered playing “an active role in the community” through research and publications which were important components of setting oneself “apart from others” when trying “to move forward in the organization.” He also learned by “approaching other people and seeking advice” when he needed to make a difficult decision and felt that he benefited “from the many years of experience they had on the job.”

Although Robert encountered some examples of ineffective leadership, he was fortunate to have “many good models to follow” and “supportive supervisors” who sometimes served as his mentors. He stated that “this mentoring often took the form of discussions and suggestions…and negotiating decisions.” He described the latter as “a lot of back and forth,” looking at decisions “from many different perspectives,” and reflecting on them. For Robert the “most valuable aspect of the mentoring process” included providing an appropriate balance of
“the trust and the support” necessary to create conditions for his “independence to become autonomous.” Robert recalled that when he first became a director, he was geographically separated from his immediate supervisor which caused him to “have to depend on [himself] a lot” in his new job although he had “a very supportive supervisor.” In retrospect, he viewed that situation as a positive learning opportunity and provided the following explanation: “It allowed me to quickly learn about the operations and about leadership because I had to do it on my own.”

When reflecting on how different he was as a leader in his current position compared to his first supervisory job, Robert stated that he had “the same level of confidence,” but that his “vision became sharper” and his “goals became clearer.” He provided the following explanation:

When you are an initial entry leader, your vision might not be as clear as it is when you advance. When you advance, your goals become more specific and you understand that there is more complexity to what you are trying to do…As I grew in experience, I realized that there is always more to how things work.

One area of complexity which Robert considered of critical importance to successful leadership in a multi-cultural context such as that of DLIFLC involved understanding people. He cautioned against making assumptions about how “a person is going to behave in a certain situation” based “on where they come from” and “treating them that way.” He emphasized that being a good leader involves “listening to people…and learning about them as individuals not as cultural products” and stated:

Our business is about people. If we want people to succeed we have got to give them the vision, the tools, the space, and then the power…as you grow as a leader, you don’t gain more power, you just serve more people.
Participant: Sophia

Textural description. When Sophia’s application for a foreign language teaching position at DLIFLC was accepted, she felt “honored” because the job “sounded so exciting and appealing” to her. At the time she was teaching English as a second language in her home state and although she liked the job, she had “no hesitation” about moving to California. She attributed the latter to the fact that her degree was in foreign language education which made the prospect of becoming part of the DLIFLC foreign language teaching faculty an excellent opportunity to use her “training and skills” in that area.

Even though Sophia initially did not have any plans to become a supervisor, she always believed in “taking opportunities” to learn about the institute and enhance her academic and technical skills. She recalled going to professional conferences by often “paying her own way” and sometimes devoting her weekends to participating in academic events that she considered useful to her professional development. Her skills and dedication to the job were “noticed” and she was asked to join a newly formed department assuming “an interim administrative position” that allowed her to schedule and coordinate activities with all the language schools at the institute. Two years later, Sophia joined a department specializing in providing professional development to the institute’s faculty where she had “many opportunities to read academic journals, study and learn a lot about teaching methodologies.” During that time, she “was also encouraged” to take on an additional collateral duty in the institute’s EEO office where she “was given an opportunity to grow and learn” beyond her academic interests. She recalled learning a lot about the purpose and function of the institute’s “many offices” and about “managing human resources” to include hiring processes, conflict resolution, and counseling strategies.
Learning about human resources, which Sophia considered a “previously unknown area” to her, “opened up another interest” which resulted in her application and selection for a chairperson’s job in a small department. She eventually left the department to become a chair in a much larger language program and after a few years applied for her current job as the dean. While holding full time leadership positions, Sophia continued to develop academically by taking the initiative to earn her second master’s degree and a doctoral degree in educational leadership. She believed that “going further in your education gives you the credibility for the knowledge and the experience you already have.”

**Structural description.** By combining her academic education and experience with the knowledge of “human resources” she acquired through her collateral duties, Sophia came to the realization that “if you become a supervisor, you don’t just need to know about effective teaching techniques.” To her, effective supervision meant blending academic expertise with “knowing how to use your resources, how to hire, how to fire, how to give counselling, and how to listen to people.” Although Sophia initially “did not have the aspiration to be a supervisor,” her interest in a leadership position developed when she realized that she had a strong background in both the academic and the administrative fields. She stated:

> I felt that I have both of these areas in my background and that it can help me do this job, hopefully. At least I know where to go to get help. I felt like I won’t know all the answers but I will have resources, and I know where to go for help.

She considered understanding how to access resources that exist within a bureaucratic organization such as DLIFLC an important component of effective supervision and one’s ability to create developmental opportunities for oneself and others. She stated:
We work in a very complex organization and sometimes it’s difficult to wade through the bureaucracy. You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves, make the phone calls, go in person, and untangle the web… you get opportunities if you take the time to work through all of those networks and offices and every hurdle, because there will be hurdles.

Sophia’s own “developmental opportunities” came from multiple sources. In addition to attending conferences and “going back to school” to get advanced academic degrees, she learned by interacting with senior colleagues and supervisors who sometimes served as her role models and mentors. One of those informal mentors was an office mate who encouraged her to try new things and who was willing to listen to her rehearse presentations or speeches and always provided encouragement and constructive feedback. Another individual whom she referred to as “one of the most powerful mentors” was a woman in a leadership position who “encouraged growth and development” of employees by allocating funds to send them to professional conferences and offsite events. She was very generous with her time when explaining to employees the role of different offices at the institute and coaching them on strategies for dealing with conflict. She also served as a role model by “being poised and very professional at all times.” Sophia described the influence of others in the following:

I’ve had a lot of interactions with people who have just shown me the value of not being afraid of working hard and seeing the product, the fruits of your labor that you could be so proud of because you did everything possible to do your best work.

Some of Sophia’s former colleagues and supervisors became part of what she referred to as her “unwritten networking connections” - a support system of “informal mentors.” Because she trusted them and “valued their judgement,” she felt “comfortable talking with them about some challenge” she was facing even though they no longer worked together. She appreciated that
“they would listen and just ask questions” to allow her “to come up with [her] own options and solutions.” She recalled that throughout her career at the institute she “got nods from people” and encouragement to try new things.

Sophia’s interest in applying for the dean’s position was partly influenced by her interactions with DLIFLC deans in meetings and task forces. Observing them and having “a closer working relationship with them” allowed her to understand the dean’s job better and led her to the conclusion that she could not only do the job but also have “greater opportunities to make changes.” She described that “aha” moment in the following manner:

I need to do more and I can do more. I can make a bigger contribution and I want another challenge. That came about from interacting with people who were at the senior, second-line supervisor level and I realized that I had some knowledge and skills and I thought that I had the right attitude and that I was ready for that challenge.

In addition to “taking the initiative,” being proactive, and interacting with others in the DLIFLC community, Sophia was able to grow professionally and succeed because of her ability to turn setbacks into opportunities. She mentioned that when she did not get selected for the dean’s position the first time, instead of getting discouraged she decided “to turn that into a positive thing.” She concluded: “what came out of it was that I realized that I needed to grow more and learn more, and it was a great experience.” Another key to Sophia’s success involved maintaining a balance between her family responsibilities and her professional life. For example, she recalled that it took her “many, many years” to get her second master’s degree because she avoided taking classes in the summer to be with her children. She felt fortunate to have had “supervisors who recognized the importance of family and health” because it made it possible for her to “give a hundred per cent” to her family while “being a fully dedicated employee.”
When describing her transformation as a leader, Sophia stated that she learned to be more extroverted and had more confidence. She said: “I have institutional knowledge, and that gives me a sense of confidence” and the ability “to go into new situations more confidently.” Although very proactive by nature and ready to “move things fast,” Sophia also realized that not “all people are ready to move that fast.” When reflecting on situations when she worked with others on implementing a new idea or project and trying to do it at her “pace,” she commented:

In retrospect, I probably wanted to change things too fast. I needed to spend more time in the relationship area and meeting people where they were…I’ve had to learn to be a little bit more patient and perhaps be a little bit better listener, to see what they were experiencing.

Sophia saw herself as someone who “is supportive and who gives feedback to people” and commented that she was still working on “learning how to give more direct feedback” in a way that makes it clear that its purpose is “developmental.” She identified “development of people…by mentoring, coaching, and encouraging them” as her primary “way to give back” to the institute from which she had “gotten so much” herself. She stated:

I would like to be seen as someone who is empathetic, supportive, and who helps people grow… I think those are some of the traits that I’d like to be known for. It’s how I see myself. I don’t know if others see that in me. I would like for that to be kind of my legacy. That I mentored and coached them and encouraged them to become the leaders of the future at DLI.

**Themes and Composite Description**

Although each participant’s experience included some unique elements, the synthesis of their individual meanings and descriptions of the experience uncovered multiple common
threads that were present in all their accounts. These common threads are presented through the identification and description of the following four major themes: 1) interest in leadership, 2) leadership as a continuous learning process, 3) community influence, and 4) personal transformation. As illustrated in Figure 2, each of the major themes additionally encompasses three sub-themes relevant to the underlying essence of the experience.

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*Figure 2.* A thematic representation of the participants’ experience. It includes themes with accompanying sub-themes that emerged from the research study.

**Theme 1: Interest in leadership.** The participants’ stories indicated that their interest in holding a leadership position developed over time after they had arrived at DLIFLC. With the exception of Robert, none of the participants had “leadership aspirations” (Sophia) when they joined the institute, including Margaret, Charles, and Matthew who had previously held leadership positions in different organizations. Although Robert knew from the start that he
might apply for a leadership position “to blend together” his teaching and leadership expertise, he recognized that his resolve to do so strengthened considerably in his first few years at DLIFLC. A more in-depth illustration of what triggered the participants’ interest in leadership and how it developed over time is presented through the sub-themes of a) love of teaching and getting noticed, b) realizing one’s potential, and c) desire to be a change agent.

Love of teaching and getting noticed (1a). Regardless of their educational backgrounds, professional experience and reasons for coming to DLIFLC, all the participants expressed their love and enthusiasm for teaching. Sophia found her teaching job “exciting and appealing” and felt “honored” to be part of the institute’s foreign language teaching faculty while Charles stated that teaching was his “passion” and that he sometimes missed it. For Patricia, who was a faculty trainer and in contrast to the others did not teach language but courses for language teachers, the job was “an excellent fit.” Adam admitted that he still taught language whenever he had an opportunity and emphasized that there was “a lot of leadership practice in the classroom” because teachers constantly made decisions about the curriculum and meaningful ways to engage students.

The love and enthusiasm for teaching combined with personal qualities identified by the participants’ such as perseverance, high energy, dedication, curiosity, and commitment to professional growth, were the driving force behind their desire “to do a good job” (Annemarie). They also provided the participants with the impetus for seeking additional responsibilities beyond their immediate job assignment of teaching. All the participants listed numerous projects, extra functions, and new initiatives they either volunteered for or accepted beyond their regular duties. For example, they served on task forces, curriculum design teams, innovative
technology projects and often worked overtime without compensation to ensure the success of a project, to help their team or “to learn every aspect of the job of teaching” (Adam).

Taking on additional responsibilities and succeeding in them resulted in others noticing the participants’ dedication, skill, and potential and, in numerous cases, encouraging them to apply for a leadership position. Annemarie recalled that when she worked on a complicated course development initiative, her contribution “caught the eye of other people in the department.” She stated that her colleagues and supervisors “saw something” in her that she herself did not see at the time, and “pushed” her to apply for a department chair’s position because they believed that “she can handle it.” Similarly Margaret who often “sought additional challenges,” felt that she did not believe in herself “as much as others believed” in her and recalled that her supervisors encouraged her to compete for a leadership position because they “saw potential” in her. Charles recalled that he was very happy teaching and that the thought of serving in a leadership position “never crossed [his] mind” until some of his colleagues and a former student approached him with the idea.

Realizing one’s potential (1b). Encouragement from colleagues and supervisors played a key role in triggering the participants’ initial interest in holding a leadership position at DLIFLC and continued to be a motivating factor throughout their leadership journey. However, the participants indicated that one of the most influential sources of their belief in their own leadership potential and their desire to move forward on a leadership path came from their own successful performance. Excelling at their jobs, taking on additional duties and helping out their colleagues and supervisors which sometimes included filling in for the latter during their absence, made the participants realize that they “knew everything about the job” and were ready for the “next step” (Margaret). Margaret recalled:
I worked closely with the students and right away with the team leader getting really into the depths of student management, administration, and counseling and any team-leader related assignments… Pretty much after the first year, I felt I learned enough about the job and by mid-second year, I started seeking additional challenges and responsibilities.

When taking on additional projects and assignments, the participants often served in informal leadership roles which “peaked” their interest in a more formal leadership position (Margaret). For example, after successfully leading a project and serving as a Faculty Advisory Committee president, Patricia started seeing herself as “a trusted agent” of her colleagues and realized that she was interested in applying for a supervisory position. She felt ready for it and maintained that “you cannot underestimate informal leadership” in helping one prepare for a supervisory job. The majority of the other participants served in a team leader’s capacity prior to applying for a formal leadership position involving supervision of others. As team leaders they had an opportunity to perform numerous tasks related to leading a team and making academic program decisions at the team level without the formal supervisory component. That successful experience made them realize their leadership potential and desire to utilize it when they “started noticing” that they “could contribute to the institute in a different capacity” (Henry). After serving as a team leader for a couple of years, Henry came to the following realization:

I wanted to have the opportunity to experience a true supervisory position that would challenge my capabilities and skills to manage not only language programs but also manage a group of people. I competed for that position and that was the first position I held as a supervisor at the institute.

Feelings of accomplishment and success about performance in their current job and in the additional responsibilities they undertook, continued to propel the participants towards each
consecutive level of leadership and made it seem “like a natural progression” (Annemarie, Patricia). Robert recalled feeling very comfortable when he advanced from the position of regional director to dean because he “was already managing 50%” of the program, and becoming a dean meant that he was just “adding the other 50%.” Once the participants realized their leadership potential and their interest in holding a leadership position, they became more proactive in looking for developmental opportunities that would lead them to their goal. At that point, excelling at their jobs, in addition to serving as a motivator, became a more conscious strategy for moving to the next level of leadership as described by Adam:

In terms of wanting to be a leader, you need to remember that also you have the job that will take you in that direction, if you do it to the point that you are so good at it that people cannot ignore you…Be proactive to show evidence that you’re ready for promotion.

Desire to be a change agent (1c). Although all participants were aware that in the DLIFLC system taking on a leadership role does not involve an academic rank change or a salary increase, it was not a deterrent to them. They were motivated by an opportunity to “contribute to the organization” by bringing about “positive change” (Henry) which they felt was more doable the higher they went in the organizational hierarchy. Margaret remarked that her “goal was never to be in charge of someone” but to have her “hands untied to have the ability to decide, to make changes” and to “work with others and make change happen.” Matthew wanted “to make a difference” by “stepping up to a challenge…where you see a void or a lack of other alternatives” and his desire was to institute changes that would bring “structure and organization” to a program in which they “were lacking.”
In most participants, the desire and commitment to be change agents strengthened as the result of encountering negative role models, i.e., leaders they considered ineffective in their roles, and by observing the influence of their “poor leadership” on the workplace (Robert). When describing a manager whom he considered very unsuccessful in providing support to her employees, Henry felt that, if given the opportunity, he would be able make changes to “create a much better working environment” for employees. He stated that “observing that person was the driving force for [him] to seek the position.” Sophia also felt that she “could do a better job in some ways” when she came across what she considered frustrating decisions by some leaders that did not allow “the right opportunities to make change.” After encountering a situation in which employees were discouraged from expressing their opinions, Patricia became determined to help change the organizational culture into one that “encourages honest communication” and felt that it was easier to accomplish as “you climb higher in the organization.” Robert expressed his motivation and desire to be a change agent in the following way:

I really felt that change needs to start at the top not at the bottom. In the first three years as a teacher, I noticed that there was a lot of focus on trying to change the teachers and how they do things when I realized that it wasn’t really the teachers who were the problem…and that’s when I decided that I should try to start that change.

Theme 2: Leadership as a continuous learning process. The participants identified their learning and development as essential components of every stage in their leadership journey. Their narratives not only illuminated the nature of that learning, its processes, and its influence on shaping their leadership path but also demonstrated ways in which their leadership experience, in turn, influenced their growth and development. The description of the reciprocal link between the participants’ learning and their leadership trajectories emerged from the
following sub-themes: a) investing in yourself, b) learning from experience, and c) overcoming difficult situations.

**Investing in yourself (2a).** “If we keep investing in ourselves, there is no limit to what we can achieve.” This statement by Patricia accurately captured the participants’ shared belief that their professional development and learning were the key not only to their promotional potential but also to their development and success as leaders. Since they all believed that “growth comes from learning” (Robert), they invested time, energy, and often personal resources in educating themselves by identifying, creating and utilizing existing professional development opportunities. All the participants indicated that they were very proactive in taking advantage of formal and informal training offered at the institute although they felt that not enough opportunities were provided. For example, Adam and Henry both recalled attending weekly discussion sessions on leadership topics and specialized professional development workshops which helped him “learn how to be a better manager” (Henry). Charles felt that such professional development “helped tremendously” in improving his “computer skills, leadership skills, management skills, and how to supervise difficult people” and made him “much more confident dealing with [his] faculty.” Patricia also highly valued professional development workshops at DLIFLC, especially those offered by visiting scholars, but when she identified a specific area where she needed more expertise to enhance her job effectiveness, she arranged and paid for specialized courses offered elsewhere. In addition to “internal leadership training” at his school, Matthew often took the time to attend “boring, bureaucratic” training which “had to be done” because it helped him develop specialized skills needed in his job such as processing contracts.
Sophia’s investment in her development consisted of not only participation in workshops available at the institute but also attending professional conferences, often on weekends, and earning both a masters and a doctoral degree. She recalled the challenge of balancing her job and family responsibilities for years with working on her degrees but had no regrets because she believed that “your education gives you the credibility for the knowledge and the experience you already have.” For Annemarie earning a doctoral degree was difficult because she was not used to the educational system in the United States but she stated that “that education helped [her] grow.” Robert emphasized that his decision “to invest” in getting a PhD was motivated by the knowledge that he “would not have been able to compete for the dean’s position” without it.

Another form of investing in their own learning many participants engaged in was volunteering for additional duties such as an oral proficiency tester, a diagnostic assessment specialist or, as in Sophia’s case, performing EEO-related functions. Those additional assignments although not associated with “monetary rewards” (Henry) gave the participants an opportunity to develop additional expertise in areas related to foreign language education and leadership that set them apart from others. Robert recalled:

I decided to invest in myself to enhance my skills as an educator, as a learner, and as a leader…If you don’t take on initiatives and more projects, you are really not investing in yourself. That investment will move you forward and help you set yourself apart from the rest. Because if you do what the masses are doing, what is going to set you apart? It is your smarts that will set you apart.

*Learning from experience (2b).* On the job experience was described by all participants as a major source of their learning and development. For example, Charles identified “hands-on learning on the job” as his “best school” and “best weapon” in being able to make his transition
from teaching to leadership. Other participants emphasized that their experience in each job they had held had a “shaping effect” on them (Patricia) and prepared them for the “challenges of the next position” (Henry). Adam felt that his teaching experience made him a “better leader” while Sophia and Patricia credited their acquisition of public speaking skills and feedback and mitigation strategies critical in a dean’s position to their prior experience as faculty trainers. Margaret stated that she “actually knew what to do” when she became a dean because having served in a chair’s job gave her confidence and prepared her for the dean’s role. That preparation included acquiring procedural, administrative, and “people” skills and the ability to “effectively help and guide” the department chairs currently under her supervision because she understood “their challenges” having experienced them herself. Similarly, Annemarie felt that the expertise she had acquired “in the trenches” as a content developer was instrumental to her effectiveness in guiding and supporting her project teams in her present role as a dean. For Matthew having paid “his dues” by going through several positions before becoming a dean was “an important component” of learning. It taught him “so much of what the institute was about” by providing “that broader exposure to the different missions and different facets and functions that one had to work in.”

The participants identified multiple conditions, processes and mechanisms they all considered important in facilitating their learning from experience. Those included, among others, autonomy, room to learn from mistakes, observation, and an increased scope of responsibility. Robert stated that “the ability to operate autonomously” was what allowed him to learn core elements of each job he had held because he had “the right attitude” and also “the right support” from his supervisors. Adam recalled that having to make autonomous decisions in the process of establishing a new program “formed” his “appreciation” and his “understanding of
what leadership is.” While the participants strongly believed in autonomy as a vehicle for learning, they considered having an opportunity to learn from their own mistakes equally important. For example, Henry attributed his learning and success as a leader to his past supervisors “being there for him” when he “made mistakes” and letting him “discover the mechanics of the job” without “judging every single mistake.”

The participants also learned by interacting with and observing colleagues and supervisors who served as positive or negative role models and whose “tactics, strategies and behaviors” they either tried to emulate or avoid respectively (Charles). Annemarie exemplified the latter by always trying to ensure that, in contrast to her former supervisor, in her program more than one person had expertise in a specific area. That practice helped her avoid what she considered an inefficient way of running a project employed by that supervisor. The participants’ learning additionally stemmed from their opportunities to perform tasks that went beyond the scope of their immediate responsibilities and sometimes beyond their “comfort zone” (Henry). The most prevalent example of such a task provided in the participants’ accounts of their experience, was temporarily taking on their supervisors’ duties during their absence. Although sometimes challenging, the experience provided “a very important learning step” (Matthew) towards the next level in their leadership journey.

**Overcoming difficult situations (2c).** One of the most influential sources of learning and development identified by all the participants was experiencing and overcoming difficult situations. When reflecting on conflict and crises situations he had to solve, Henry stated:

If you compare and contrast what I have been through and what I would possibly go through, I give credit to the crises that I encountered at the work place in shaping the strength that I have to deal with anything that might come across my path.
Similarly, Charles learned how to deal with people “from putting out fires and solving crisis situations” while Matthew attributed his ability to “not take things personally” to successfully dealing with difficult employees.” Dealing with teachers’ resistance to change taught Sophia that it was important to “diagnose readiness for change” before taking action, and Margaret learned by facing rather than avoiding situations she feared. She stated:

The fact that I was afraid to do something, let’s say to confront a teacher and tell this teacher “you need to do this and that.” But, once you do it a certain number of times, all of sudden you realize, wow, I learned to do it and you immediately feel like you just stepped one level up.

The participants provided numerous examples of adversity or difficult situations they had successfully dealt with in the workplace and indicated that a lot of their learning originated from taking the time to reflect on those experiences. When recalling a particularly painful experience of dealing with betrayal of trust on the part of people she had supported, Annemarie reflected on the situation and her reaction to it. She recalled: “I was trying to find a cause and that self-reflection helped me in seeing things clearly and helped me grow as a manager and a leader.”

**Theme 3: Community influence.** The participants’ accounts revealed a profound and multifaceted influence of their professional community on shaping their individual leadership paths. The nature and significance of that influence is demonstrated through the following subthemes that emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their experience: a) supervisor as mentor, b) interactions with others, and c) resources within the community.

**Supervisor as mentor (3a).** Although none of the participants experienced any formal mentoring, informal mentoring relationships played a significant role in their transitioning from non-supervisory employees to organizational leaders. Among those, mentoring by an immediate
supervisor was the most influential form of mentoring to which the participants repeatedly
directly attributed their own interest and success in leadership positions. Supervisory mentoring
relationships typically developed spontaneously during the day-to-day performance of duties and
often gradually evolved into a trusting, supportive bond that sometimes lasted after the
participants moved on to another job. Mentoring by supervisors occurred at almost every level
of the participants’ leadership journey and was important to them. Some participants indicated
that it played an especially critical role when they made the switch from a non-supervisory to a
supervisory position and that they benefited from their mentors’ advice, guidance, and support.

Informal mentoring by supervisors fulfilled multiple functions and took on various forms
therefore influencing the participants in multiple ways. For example, supervisors often served as
role models from whom the participants’ learned “how to deal with frustrations…in a positive
way” (Matthew) or “how to remain calm…even in the most stressful situations” (Charles). This
type of influence often resulted from the participants shadowing their mentors and observing
their interactions with others in meetings and other work-related situations. Henry captured the
influence of one of his mentors in the following statement:

Just working with him and observing how he handles crises and how he deals with his
employees and the highest sense of integrity and transparency I saw every day….the most
unselfish supervisor I've ever had. He definitely influenced the way I approached work at
the institute.

In addition to serving as role models, supervisory mentors often “inspired” participants to
try new things, to take advantage of professional development opportunities, and solve problems
on their own which increased the participants’ knowledge, skills, and confidence level. The
increase in the participants’ confidence in their own abilities and their motivation to progress to
the next leadership role, resulted from their mentors “challenging assignments” (Margaret) filling in during their absence and expressing faith in their abilities and encouraging them not to “doubt” themselves or their “qualifications” (Patricia). Additionally, mentors contributed to the participants’ professional growth by “encouraging creativity and autonomy” (Robert) while at the same time providing guidance and support within “an established framework” (Adam).

When facing a problem or dilemma, the participants often engaged their mentors in “professional discussions” which not only helped “broaden [their] perspective” (Matthew) but also made them feel that they “were part of the same team” (Henry). By providing “constructive feedback” and a “safe environment” for participants to “make mistakes and learn from them” (Henry), mentors stimulated processes of reflection and introspection on the part of participants. Adam recalled the influence of one of his mentors in the following way:

> I think just working with that individual helped me a lot in learning more about myself, learning more about how I act and interact and react to others in high stake situations and also gave me the grounding to deal with others as a leader.

**Interactions with others (3b).** While the participants considered their supervisory mentoring relationships most influential in helping them become organizational leaders, they provided examples of other interactions that also influenced them in that process. Among those were interactions with senior colleagues, family members, and other individuals some of whom were from other government or academic institutions. For example, Charles recalled that “hanging out with experienced colleagues” to be able “to observe how they interacted, spoke in public and solved issues” was very helpful to him throughout his career at the institute. Others considered “talking with colleagues and fleshing things out” extremely helpful in creating “synergy” (Patricia), “collaboration and interdependence” and a “support system” (Henry).
Observing senior colleagues successfully perform their leadership roles not only provided an opportunity to see how they dealt “with people and with technical issues” but it also increased the participants’ belief that they “can handle the job,” too (Annemarie).

Family members both provided emotional support and served as role models. Adam’s mother who raised a large family on her own due to his father’s illness, gave him inspiration to “keep learning” and was “a personal role model” in how to “take responsibility.” Matthew’s father taught him “the value of honesty and hard work” while Patricia felt that her husband’s patient listening, advice, and feedback helped her become a much more reflective leader. In addition to family members’ influence and support, the participants felt that they benefited from interacting with professionals from other organizations when engaged in shared projects or professional training. Margaret stated that when attending workshops with people from outside the institute, “you can be really open expressing your thoughts…and you learn that people in different organizations have similar experiences…but sometimes they offer you absolutely unique ideas.” For Charles interactions with people from outside the institute both from the public and private sectors, during training events, were “helpful and positive.” He felt that they increased his sense of belonging to a larger community of practitioners and found it reassuring that other institutions encountered “similar challenges” to the ones at DLIFLC.

**Resources within the community (3c).** The participants emphasized that understanding and utilizing resources available in the DLIFLC community was critical to their leadership effectiveness. Recognizing that DLIFLC was a bureaucratic organization, they all felt that “as a supervisor you really need to know how to use your resources” (Sophia). Those resources included, among others, understanding policies, protocols and regulations, “getting to know people in key positions” (Charles), and developing a working knowledge of the functions and
operation of administrative offices such as personnel or scheduling. Matthew stated that once he had “that institutional knowledge,” he was better equipped not only to deal with “the nuts and bolts” of his job but also to meet his clients’ needs. Charles felt that he became “more helpful” to his employees while Patricia indicated that realizing that there was a special office dealing with students’ disciplinary problems allowed her to do her job more efficiently. At that point she was “able to leave certain student issues to the appropriate people” rather than trying to “solve everything” on her own which used to be her practice. Sophia emphasized that there were many available resources at the institute and that knowing how to find and utilize them was the key to “taking advantage of everything that the Army…and DLI has to offer federal employees.” She considered “knowing how to use those channels” essential to a leader’s ability to provide employees with professional development opportunities, i.e., conference and training attendance.

In addition to formal administrative resources, the participants emphasized the critical importance of informal networks of trusted and knowledgeable individuals including peers, colleagues, or former mentors whom they could contact for advice on academic or administrative matters. Those “unwritten networking connections” (Sophia), in addition to serving as repositories of “academic knowledge” (Charles), provided guidance, reassurance, and other forms of emotional support. The participants emphasized that in their senior leadership positions there was an even greater need to develop and cultivate such networks to maintain a vibrant and “strong academic community” (Adam). Robert stressed that regular knowledge sharing with peers who had “many years on the job” served as an important resource while Margaret felt that she often benefited from her peers’ professional advice and emotional support. Sophia held a strong belief that for leaders to be effective in a complex bureaucracy such as DLIFLC, they
needed to have a good grasp on its resources and stated that without it, “it’s a foreign world out there.”

**Theme 4: Personal transformation.** The participants described their leadership journey as that of personal change and transformation. They noted a considerable shift in their beliefs about themselves, about others, and about their leadership practice. The transformation they experienced, is represented in the following sub-themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives about their leadership journey: a) reflection and changed self, b) better understanding of others, and c) desire to give back.

**Reflection and changed self (4a).** The participants provided numerous testimonials to their personal transformation which they considered the result of their experiences as well as their reflection on those experiences. While reflecting on their actions, experiences, decisions, and “mistakes,” the participants also engaged in self-reflection by contemplating and examining their own motives and behaviors. Annemarie recalled:

I liked to self-reflect and sometimes it cost me a lot because I would go home and think: “Have I said the right thing? Have I done the right thing? Could I have done this differently and what would happen if I did?”…that self-reflection helped me in seeing things clearly and helped me grow as a manager and a leader.

Participants’ self-reflection was often stimulated by their mentors or role models with the latter including both negative and positive role models. While observing those role models, the participants engaged in an introspective process of self-examination by comparing themselves to them, imagining themselves in similar situations and thinking about how they themselves would react. Mentors encouraged self-reflection through constructive feedback and by “taking the time” to engage the participants in discussing and analyzing their actions and decisions. Robert
reported that he had learned a lot about himself as a leader from the process of reflecting on his decisions which often started with his supervisor approaching him and asking, “how about looking at this decision from this perspective?” Supervisory mentors additionally provided support and “a safe environment” for participants to learn from their mistakes which Henry described as follows: “being there for me when I made mistakes and giving me the autonomy to reflect on my own supervisory skills and to improve.” Adam made the following statement about a supervisor who encouraged him to learn from his mistakes: “He was giving me an opportunity and a chance to fail, meaning that he wanted me to be myself, to be authentic … it helped me a lot in learning more about myself.”

Throughout their leadership journey, the participants experienced a major shift in their self-awareness and an increase in their self-confidence as leaders which, in turn, led to changes in their leadership practice. For example, Adam reported that “learning about himself” and gaining self-confidence allowed him to “gain more maturity” and become “a more grounded” and “a more compassionate leader” who was able to achieve “a better balance between task and relationship.” Charles became more assertive which helped him become “more tolerant” in his interactions with employees and improved his effectiveness in using DLIFLC resources. Annemarie, Patricia, and Sophia became “less easily frustrated” and “more extroverted” (Sophia) while Margaret was able to make a successful “transformation from an accommodating to a more assertive” leadership style. Matthew’s transformation involved, among others, an ability “to deal with ambiguity and frustrations better” and “to take risks” without “being afraid.” He stated that developing a “broader perspective” allowed him to “see the big picture” and “not just the details” and that he learned “how to delegate” which was “one of the hardest things” for him.
**Better understanding of others (4b).** As the participants grew in self-confidence and their self-awareness deepened, they became more reflective about others in the organization, which made them more attuned to the others’ needs, motivations, and goals. Matthew stated:

It's just understanding, again, understanding people and understanding what priorities they have and learning about what’s important to someone and what's less important…if nothing else, it's made me probably a better listener because I think there's lots happening that sometimes is not as apparent. It's not the visual thing, and you really need to listen well and ask good questions to understand.

Margaret emphasized that although technical knowledge was important, “understanding people” was even more critical for a leader. She pointed out that to be effective as a leader “you need to know how to find a key to the person…you need to somehow make a connection with people, learn how to persuade and how to inspire.”

Better understanding of others led to the participants’ changed leadership behaviors and to what they considered more effective leadership on their part, characterized by more meaningful interactions with their employees and others in the organization. Realizing that “you really have to build that connection between you and the workforce before you embark on anything big or innovative” improved Adam’s effectiveness in implementing change. Sophia also experienced the latter when she understood that “not everyone is ready at the same time” and that it was sometimes important to adjust “your pace” to that of your employees when introducing change. Charles understood that as a leader he would “not always be liked by everybody” but that treating everyone with dignity and respect “from the moment you start dealing with any individual” was a necessary foundation for interacting with others. Robert’s commitment to “be open to people” by treating them “as individuals” and “not as cultural
products” strengthened when he realized that one’s assumptions about others’ behaviors and motives based on their country of origin, were often “wrong and unfair.” Henry and Adam shifted their focus from more “management to leadership” and more “task to relationship” behaviors respectively when they realized that it was the key to inspiring and motivating employees by “creating a better working environment” for them.

Desire to give back (4c). All the participants indicated multiple times that attaining the senior leadership role had increased their desire “to give back” to the institute because they themselves “have gotten so much” from it (Patricia). As the participants grew in self-awareness, confidence, and experience, their concept of leadership started crystalizing into a role centered on helping others grow and develop professionally. Robert stated: “Our business is about people. If we want people to succeed we have got to give them the vision, the tools, the space, and then the power.” According to Patricia, “all legitimate leadership” was based on “helping people.” The participants felt that supporting employees in realizing their potential was the best way for them to “give back” and indicated that their ability to do so increased as they “climbed higher in the organization” (Patricia).

The participants gave back by emulating some of the strategies and opportunities they had experienced themselves due to their past mentoring relationships. For example, Robert focused on “engaging and involving people to help them grow and develop” and served as role model by exemplifying “principles of leadership” through his “actions.” Matthew tried to delegate some of his responsibilities to his employees as a strategy for them to “grow and learn” and he did his “best to provide an example and a role model they can follow.” Annemarie was always available to “provide guidance and help to her employees. One of Sophia’s strategies to give back was to share some of the knowledge and skills she had acquired from others. When
reflecting on something one of her former mentors had taught her, she stated: “I learned that from her, and that also gave me another benefit I could pass on to other people.” The essence of the participants’ desire to give back is reflected in the following statements: “As you grow as a leader…you don’t gain more power, you serve more people” (Robert) and “I would like for that to be kind of my legacy that I mentored people and coached them and encouraged them to become the leaders of the future at DLI” (Sophia).

**Composite Textural-Structural Description**

The purpose of the final step in the phenomenological analysis is to integrate “the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The essence constitutes “common or universal” qualities of the experience “without which it would not be what it is” (Husserl, 1991, p. 43). The essence of the experience of becoming an organizational leader from within DLIFLC is captured below in a composite description that emerged from the synthesis process of the participants’ textural and structural descriptions.

The DLIFLC deans’ and associate deans’ leadership development journey begins even before they become aware of their leadership aspirations. Consistent success in teaching and opportunities to take on additional duties lead to “getting noticed” by others in the organization and serve as an initial trigger of interest in assuming a leadership position. Positive interactions with leadership role models within the community of practice and supervisory mentoring relationships that evoke self-reflection and constructive feedback help this interest germinate and transform into a personal and professional goal. An increased sense of leadership self-efficacy resulting from these individuals’ reflections on their successful performance in informal leadership roles strengthens their resolve to become positive change agents, at the same time
fueling their desire to pursue the goal. A cycle of continuous learning ensues in which individuals undergo a transformation that includes not only increased professional skills but also a heightened sense of self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others. This growth and transformation constitute the essence of the experience which culminates in a desire to give back by supporting others in their future leadership journeys.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four presented major findings from the study in the form of textural and structural descriptions obtained from semi-structured interviews involving nine study participants. The participants were DLIFLC deans and associate deans who transitioned from non-supervisory to senior leadership positions at the institute. The participants’ in-depth, narrative accounts of their experience provided meaningful insight into their leadership journey. Common threads in the participants’ accounts and descriptions of the experience led to the emergence of four composite themes and twelve sub-themes relevant to the essence of the experience. The essence of the experience was derived through a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions of the participants’ experience and captured in a composite textural-structural description.

The next chapter will present interpretations of the findings by addressing how they relate to the central research question, the theoretical framework, and the literature review. The chapter will also discuss implications of the study findings for educational practice and provide recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4 and their implications for current theory, research, and practice. It starts with an overview of the study, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the research question, the theoretical framework, and the literature. The next section discusses implications of the findings for current research and provides recommendations for educational practice, centered on developing leaders from within an organization. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research, a discussion of the study limitations, and a conclusion.

Overview of the Study

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the federal government, with over 43 percent of employees above the age of 50, represents the public sector’s most aged workforce and will be significantly impacted by baby boomers’ retirement (Reichenberg, 2015). The Government Accountability Office reported that by 2017 over one-third of civilian federal government employees will be eligible to retire, (Toosi, 2012) while a 63-percent retirement eligibility rate was projected for federal managers (PPS, 2013). As a federal government educational institution, DLIFLC, a language school in California, statistically falls into the category of an organization in which two-thirds of leaders are within two years of retirement (PPS). With 64 percent of its 2200 civilian employees currently at or above the age of 50 (DAA, 2015), DLIFLC it also significantly exceeds the average workforce age of other federal government institutions.

In view of the projected vacancies in its leadership positions, the federal government recognizes the urgent need for succession planning across all its agencies to prevent future leadership shortages (Mazur, 2014; Moyer & Winter, 2015). Recent budget cuts, government shutdowns, and hiring freezes have limited the ability of government agencies to hire externally,
necessitating a shift in focus to developing leadership talent and potential from within the organization to fill future leadership positions (Kiyonaga, 2004; Rein, 2013). The main component of this leadership succession strategy involves creating a cadre of future leaders through development opportunities for current employees (Clayton et al., 2013; Green & Roberts, 2012; Wallin et al., 2005). The federal government spends large sums of money on leadership development processes, programs, and initiatives. However, many federal agencies are not adequately prepared to deal with the projected leadership shortages and many of the processes are not effective in helping individual employees develop into future leaders (Carman et al., 2010; Kelman, 2007; Kerrigan, 2012; Maltempo & Robinson, 2014; Rothwell, 2010).

Research has shown that leadership development is influenced by social interactions in the context of resources, social networks, tasks, and support systems in the environment in which the leadership practice is situated (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Paglis, 2010). However, at present, little is known about how these contextual factors influence the individual developmental path of a leader (Day & Sin, 2011; Day et al., 2014). The goal of the study was to partially fill this research gap by retrospectively exploring individual developmental trajectories of nine current DLIFLC deans and associate deans who successfully progressed from employees to leaders over time.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to an organizational leader of deans’ and associate deans’ promoted from within DLIFLC. The study was guided by the following central research question: How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders? Understanding and illuminating the essence of the leadership development experience from multiple individual perspectives was aimed at
uncovering individual and contextual factors and processes that may support developing organizational leaders at DLIFLC and other federal agencies.

The study utilized transcendental phenomenological methodology as delineated by Moustakas (1994) to collect data from nine DLIFLC deans and associate deans, through in-depth semi-structured interviews, on their unique, individual experiences of transitioning from non-supervisory employees to organizational leaders. The qualitative software program NVivo11 was used to store, organize and code interview data. The collected data were analyzed using the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis (Moustakas) in which processes of horizontalization and imaginative variation were employed to derive individual textural and structural descriptions, respectively, of the participants’ meanings and accounts of the experience. Next, through a synthesis process of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the essence of the experience of becoming an organizational leader from within DLIFLC was developed.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The synthesis of the participants’ individual meanings and descriptions of their experience uncovered multiple common threads that were present in all their accounts. This process generated four major themes related to the participants’ leadership journey: 1) interest in leadership, 2) leadership as a continuous learning process, 3) community influence, and 4) personal transformation. Each of the main themes was additionally subdivided into three sub-themes as was illustrated in Table 1. The next sections discuss the implications of these findings for theory, research, and practice.

The study employed a dual lens of Lave and Wanger’s (1991) situated learning theory (SIT) and Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory to illuminate the essence of the experience of
the participants’ leadership journey at DLIFLC. While SLT served to identify and explain contextual factors involved in shaping the deans’ and associate deans’ development path, the role of self-efficacy theory was to provide the lens for gaining insight into it by understanding the function of “personal agency” in determining its direction (Bandura, 2001). Traditional learning theories acknowledge but do not explore the interaction between “contexts and agents” (S. M. Kemp, 2002; Yuan & McKelvey, 2004, p. 67). Blending the SIT and self-efficacy theory perspectives as a framework for the study provided an effective tool for a deeper exploration of that interaction in the DLIFLC deans’ and associate deans’ leadership journey. Both theories guided the development of the interview questions and provided the framework for identifying and organizing the themes that emerged from interview data. As discussed in the following sections, findings from this study strongly support the key assumptions of both theories.

The SLT lens. SLT posits that learning is not an isolated activity in an individual’s mind but a process situated within a complex social environment comprised of cultural norms, individuals, material settings, situations and activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Since learning and cognition are grounded in authentic situations and result from social interactions within a specific context (Stein, 1998), they cannot be separated from it (Bell et al., 2013). The community of practice defined by its shared cultural norms, collective knowledge, and resources provides the setting in which learning takes place through daily experiences, problem solving activities, and interactions. Brown et al (1989) emphasized the interdependence of activity as a source of experience and learning, the conceptual frame related to it, and the culture within which they both occur. Within the SIT framework, “understanding of a concept is constantly under construction” (Bell et al., p. 351) and continually evolves with its application to new
situations, activities, and negotiations, denoting learning is a “continuous, life-long process resulting from acting in situations” (Brown et al, p. 33).

The study revealed through the participants’ stories that most of their learning and development as organizational leaders resulted from the activities, interactions and opportunities they experienced within the context of the DLIFLC community, thus supporting the core assumptions of SLT. For example, the participants’ initial interest in leadership (theme 1) was motivated by their love of teaching and getting noticed by others in the community (sub-theme 1a). The participants’ “passion” for the activity of teaching (Charles) led them to engage in additional projects and responsibilities exposing them to new tasks, activities, roles, and interaction opportunities within the community. The latter often resulted in the participants getting noticed by their peers and supervisors who, seeing their potential, engaged them in more complex tasks and activities and encouraged them to apply for a leadership position. Findings from the study also demonstrated that the participants viewed their leadership journey as a continuous learning process (theme 2) that was shaped by interactions with others (sub-theme 3b) and aided by learning from experience (sub-theme 2b) and by overcoming difficult situations (sub-theme 2c). The next sections interpret the study findings in more detail through the following tenets of SLT: (a) context, (b) legitimate peripheral participation, and (c) cognitive apprenticeship.

Context. One of the core assumption of SLT is that “learning cannot be achieved or looked at separately from the context in which it occurs” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 351). Defined as both the physical and social setting in which human activity takes place (Lave and Wenger 1991), context is comprised of tangible and intangible elements. Some of these include tools, resources, structures, cultural norms, practices, interactions and the declarative and procedural
knowledge of the communities of practice that exist within the context (Ardichvili & Yoon, 2010). The participants in this study used increased engagement within their context as a strategy for realizing their leadership potential (sub-theme 1b). Having developed interest in a leadership position, they started actively pursuing tasks and activities beyond their immediate job responsibility to acquire specialized skills and increase their exposure through participation in projects and institute-wide initiatives.

The study also demonstrated that the participants’ increased understanding of the DLIFLC context enhanced the effectiveness of their leadership practice by improving their ability to utilize resources within the community (sub-theme 3c). The participants stressed that they became more efficient in their jobs and better equipped to “deal with difficult situations” once they acquired “institutional knowledge” (Matthew). The latter included, among others, understanding government policies, regulations, and functions of the institute’s administrative offices and “getting to know people in key positions” (Charles). The participants also cultivated informal networks of trusted and knowledgeable individuals including former mentors and more experienced colleagues whom they contacted for advice when facing a problem or dilemma. These “unwritten networking connections” (Sophia) served as a source of not only academic knowledge but also emotional support within the participants’ community of practice.

As “a group of people who engage in a shared domain of interest, craft or profession,” a community of practice both shapes and is shaped by interactions within the context (Aadal & Kirkevold, 2011, p. 350). As practitioners “equipped with shared procedures for knowing and acting,” its more experienced members can help facilitate learning through collaboration and providing access to resources (Arnseth, 2008, p. 295; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The study participants’ collaboration with their supervisory mentors (theme 3b) and their interactions with
others (theme 3c) in the community played a key role in their ability to successfully transition to each consecutive level of their leadership journey. Observing and consulting more experienced peers and interacting with leaders from other departments helped the participants learn from others’ experience and knowledge and reflect on their own actions and decisions. Mentoring relationships encouraged “creativity and autonomy” (Robert) and facilitated participants’ learning from role models, participation in professional development opportunities, and gaining access to “resources that enhance… involvement in actions, discussions, and reflections” (Aadal & Kirkevold, p. 351).

Ling and Fraser (2014) posited that learning requires “authentic contexts” that provide “authentic learning tasks” that are “sustained over time, complex and linked” and can be found through “in situ work experience” (p. 70). The results of the study strongly supported Ling and Fraser’s claim, as they demonstrated that learning from experience (sub-theme 2b) was the main source of the participants’ growth and development. The participants described their “hands-on learning on the job” as their “best school” (Charles) for acquiring not only technical skills and competencies but also for “shaping” them into leaders who were better at understanding others (sub-theme 4b). The participants’ learning from on-the-job tasks and experiences was aided by others encouraging them to reflect on their performance and learn from their mistakes, thus supporting an “interactive” view of context in which “feedback loops” facilitate learning (Yuan & Mckelvey, 2004, p. 77). One of the most influential sources of the participants’ learning was facing and successfully overcoming difficult situations (sub-theme 2c) in their jobs such as “putting out fires and solving crises” (Charles) or “dealing with difficult people” (Matthew). These learning experiences supported the notion that “authentic” learning contexts include “the
complexities and the distractions of real-life situations” and solutions to unforeseen and sometimes stressful problems (Bose & Ye, 2013; Ling & Fraser, p. 70).

**Legitimate peripheral participation.** The process through which new members of the community absorb its values, beliefs, and knowledge to become “full participants” or experts is identified as *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). This “evolving form of membership” (p. 55) is *legitimate* and *peripheral* because new members, although admitted into a community of practice, have not yet developed into “full practitioners” (p. 121) who understand its “roles, identities, rules, and social structures” (Arnseth, 2008, p. 294). The latter is gradually accomplished through *participation* in the community’s day-to-day practice.

As aspiring leaders, the participants in this study often performed their supervisors’ tasks when filling in for them during their absence, volunteering to help out with their supervisors’ duties, and serving on projects and taskforces with senior leaders. This type of participation became a specific form of *learning from experience* (sub-theme 2b) that facilitated the participants’ transition into the next level of leadership.

“Legitimate peripheral participation moves in a centripetal direction” towards “mature practice” and “is motivated by the growing use value of participation, and by the newcomers’ desires to become full practitioners” (Lave & Wenger, 1991 p. 122). The above notion was supported by the study themes of realizing one’s potential (sub-theme 1b) desire to be a change agent (sub-theme 1c) and investing in yourself (sub-theme 2a). To fulfill their desire of becoming “full practitioners” the participants actively pursued opportunities to work closely with leaders senior to them and invested time and resources into their education to be able to compete for leadership positions at the next level. They also believed that becoming “a full practitioner”
in the DLIFLC senior leaders’ community would give them the tools to become change agents who could “create a better working environment” and implement “positive change” (Henry).

The transformation of “a newcomer” into a full member of a community of practice involves acquiring a new identity that “implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). The study participants gave evidence of their new leadership “identity” by describing their personal transformation (theme 4) that involved new knowledge, skills, and an ability to “take risks without fear” (Matthew) and to handle more complex tasks and situations. The theme of reflection and changed self (sub-theme 4a) revealed that the participants also experienced a major shift in their self-awareness and confidence as leaders by reflecting on their actions, mistakes, and decisions. Another aspect of the participants’ new leadership identity was their better understanding of others (sub-theme 4b) which guided them towards a more effective leadership practice through more meaningful interactions with other members of the community.

The study participants indicated multiple times that attaining their practitioner identity by reaching the senior leadership level in the organization increased their desire to give back to the community (sub-theme 4c) by helping others develop into future leaders. The latter supports the notion of “developmental cycles” which are used by communities of practice to “reproduce themselves” and ensure their continued existence (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 122). Those cycles are based on the continual practice of transforming new community members into practitioners by individuals who have already reached their full practitioner identity through legitimate peripheral participation.

Cognitive apprenticeship. Central to SLT, cognitive apprenticeship is a process that facilitates new community members’ “enculturation … into authentic practices through activity
and social interaction” needed for them to become full practitioners. It involves modeling, mentoring and coaching by more experienced members of the community in the context of “authentic activity” (J. S. Brown et al., 1989, p. 37). Cognitive apprenticeship is rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). ZPD emphasized that individuals learn better with guidance from others than on their own and that learning in authentic situations enables the progression from lower to higher cognitive skills. Vygotsky differentiated an individual’s actual developmental level characterized by independent problem solving abilities from “the level of potential development” achieved through problem solving with assistance or in collaboration with “more capable peers” or more experienced individuals (p. 86). The ZPD, or the distance between these two levels, denotes an individual’s prospective development that is realized through interactions and tools present in the “socially rooted and historically developed” norms and activities embedded within the individual’s social environment (p. 56).

The study findings revealed supervisory mentoring (theme 3a) as the predominant form of cognitive apprenticeship experienced by the participants. The participants’ mentoring relationships with their supervisors were informal and often developed spontaneously during the day-to-day performance of the job. They involved solving problems collaboratively, discussions about participants’ decisions, and providing encouragement and support to reflect on and learn from mistakes. This “scaffolding” and opportunities for “social construction of knowledge and reflection” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 351) were instrumental to the participants’ increased ability to deal with more “challenging assignments” on their own (Margaret). Mentors additionally facilitated the participants’ access to resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by sending them to professional workshops in which they interacted with peers from other departments and
organizations. By serving as role models and taking the time to explain the functions of the institute’s offices and positions, mentors facilitated the participants’ assimilation of the “roles…rules and social structures” (Arnseth, 2008) situated within the DLIFLC context.

The self-efficacy lens. Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory posits that people’s choices, motivation levels, behaviors and affective states are determined by their self-efficacy beliefs. As a system of individual judgments and beliefs about one’s capability to organize and effect courses of action needed to attain a designated goal, self-efficacy directly influences one’s behaviors and choices of activities (Bandura, 1986a). Individuals’ self-efficacy beliefs determine the direction of their own development and influence their involvement in professional activities by reducing fear of failure and increasing resolve and persistence in reaching goals and interests (Beverborg et al., 2015). The study participants reported that their interest in leadership (theme 1) developed as the result of their successful performance and getting noticed by others (sub-theme 1a) for their accomplishments. Their “motivation to lead” (M. Allen et al., 2014, p. 310) increased as they gained more confidence in their ability to perform leadership tasks, often after serving in informal leadership roles. At that point they started seeing themselves as future agents of change (sub-theme 1c) and became proactive in seeking out and taking advantage of opportunities “to set [themselves] apart” from others (Robert) by further developing and demonstrating their “leadership potential” (Adam). The latter included, for example, serving on complex projects, performing tasks beyond current job responsibilities, filling in for their supervisors, and investing in themselves (sub-theme 2a) by pursuing advanced academic degrees. The participants’ self-efficacy related to their successful performance in the above listed areas increased their belief in their leadership potential, illustrating that an increase of self-efficacy in one performance domain may influence it in another (Chen, 2013; Kirsch, 1986).
Self-efficacy determines whether an individual is able to initiate coping behaviors and persevere when faced with difficulties, obstacles or failures (Bandura, 1977b; Bandura, 1989; Bandura & Wood, 1989). The study supported the above premise through the participants’ numerous accounts of experiences in which they encountered and were able to overcome adversity. Rather than give up, when facing difficulties, the participants assumed an “analytic” and a “task-diagnostic focus” (Bandura & Wood, p. 290) by reflecting on those experiences and “learning from mistakes” (Adam). For example, when Sophia did not get selected for a dean’s position the first time she applied, she requested feedback from one of the selection committee members and made a decision to earn a doctoral degree. Patricia’s early leadership experience involving supervision of “difficult” former peers helped her develop “antibodies” for dealing with conflict at work. Henry credited the “crisis situations” he had successfully overcome in “shaping [his] strength” to deal with “anything that might come across” his path. The study findings revealed that overcoming difficult situations (sub-theme 2c) increased the participants’ belief in their ability to deal with difficult situations in the future, thus increasing their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs and expectations are not static and can be developed, weakened, or strengthened over time (Bandura & Wood). Bandura (1977b) identified four primary information sources from which self-efficacy expectations originate and which contribute to their evolution: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states.

**Mastery experiences.** Mastery experiences are considered the most influential of the four sources of self-efficacy in lowering or strengthening self-efficacy expectations because they are based on direct evidence of an individual’s performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977b). As individuals reflect on and evaluate their past performance successes and failures, their efficacy
beliefs are adjusted up or down. Repeated success leads to strengthening self-efficacy expectations which generalize across other tasks, activities, and situations. Although successful performance is a critical component, changes in self-efficacy are not a direct result of performance accomplishments but of how individuals “process the information that previous performance generated” (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998a, p. 70). The cognitive appraisal of an individual’s performance (Bandura) in the form of evaluations derived from self-reflection is necessary to facilitate changes in self-efficacy.

The present study findings revealed that the participants’ increase in self-efficacy came from their successful performance and their reflection on that performance. The study additionally expanded the understanding of the role of mastery experiences in enhancing self-efficacy by demonstrating that negative experiences that resulted in overcoming difficult situations (sub-theme 2c) led to a stronger, more lasting sense of self-efficacy. When reflecting on those situations, the participants always indicated that they engaged in deeper self-reflection to better understand the situation, their role in it, and what they “could have done differently” (Charles). This more intense quality of self-reflection surrounding the participants’ successful performance under difficult circumstances might provide at least a partial explanation for their more enduring sense of self-efficacy resulting from it.

**Vicarious experiences.** The second source, vicarious experiences, involves raising one’s self-efficacy by observing others successfully perform specific tasks and inferring one’s own sense of achievement and positive ability judgements from the success of others (Bandura, 1977b). All participants had supervisory mentors and peers who served as their role models. Observing those role models in meetings, in interactions with others, and during other work-related functions, made the participants feel that they could also “do it” (Margaret). For example,
Sophia recalled that observing senior leaders on a project made her “realize that [she] had some knowledge and skills,” she “had the right attitude” and that she “was ready for the challenge” of applying for a dean’s position. One interesting finding from the study was that in some cases observing negative role models whom the participants did not respect or consider effective in their jobs, increased the participants’ resolve to not emulate their behavior. It also increased their belief that in similar situations or when performing similar tasks, they could do “a better job” (Robert) than those role models. Making “social comparison” inferences (Bandura, p. 197) by observing both positive and negative role models contributed to the increase in the participants’ self-efficacy.

**Verbal persuasion.** Verbal persuasion works by inducing the sense of self-efficacy expectations when others express encouragement, support, belief in one’s abilities, and when they provide positive feedback (Bandura, 1977b). Verbal persuasion played a critical role in the development of the study participants’ initial interest in leadership (theme 1) but also in their continued proactivity in realizing their potential (sub-theme 1b) by pursuing developmental opportunities and tasks. Eight out of nine study participants had “no leadership aspirations” (Patricia) until getting noticed by someone (sub-theme 1a) who “believed in” them, told them: “you see you can do this” (Margaret), and encouraged them to apply for a leadership position. The participants gave many testimonials to the influence of their supervisory mentors and peers on their self-efficacy beliefs by expressing their belief in them and in their potential. Margaret stated: “I didn’t believe in myself as much as others believed in me” and that she “sought additional challenges” because others “saw something” in her. Supportive feedback from mentors encouraged the participants to reflect on their actions, performance and decisions and was instrumental in helping them quickly recover and learn from their mistakes.
Physiological states. The influence of physiological states on self-efficacy expectations is most visible when individuals face a stressful task or situation. By anticipating and reducing their emotional arousal, i.e., feelings of anxiety or vulnerability, they can help reduce debilitating behaviors associated with it, potentially increasing successful task performance leading to an increased sense of self-efficacy. In the present study, mentors often contributed to the participants’ “dramatically improved confidence level” because they “provided a safe environment” by showing support and “always being there” for the participants “in crisis situations” (Henry). They also “taught” the participants “how to be calm in stressful situations” (Charles) by making them feel “part of the team” and by modeling “calm behaviors.” When faced with a potentially stressful situation, the participants often used resources within the community (sub-theme 3c) to consult informal networks of peers and former mentors for advice and emotional support.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

Chapter Two focused on the exploration of literature strands related to developing leaders from within an organization. An analysis of the findings from the study in relation to the reviewed literature is necessary to achieve a deeper understanding of these findings by reflecting on them in the context of what is already known. The subsequent sections provide such an analysis following the main themes from the literature review: Succession Planning, Leadership Development, Leadership Self-Efficacy, Mentoring, Knowledge Transfer, and Transformational Leadership.

Succession Planning. Findings from the study demonstrated that although the participants did not identify an existing systematic succession plan at the institute, they were acutely aware of the risks associated with not developing a cadre of future leaders (Peet, 2012).
Robert stated: “if we don’t have a pool of people we can look at when we need new leaders…we will have a hard time as an organization filling leadership positions at different levels.” When reflecting on their own leadership development path, the participants recognized that their ability to realize their leadership potential (sub-theme 1b) was greatly aided by their supervisors’ involvement and support in creating and finding developmental opportunities for them. The latter led them to the realization that recognizing and developing leadership talent in employees should be a critical succession planning component (Gothard & Austin, 2013) at the institute and that they, as current leaders, had a role in it. The willingness to take on that role was expressed through the participants’ desire to give back (sub-theme 4c) to the institute by focusing on the “growth and development of others” (Adam). All the participants identified “helping people to be successful” (Patricia) and to “become the leaders of the future at DLI” (Sophia) as important components of their leadership practice.

**Leadership development.** The multi-level complexity of the leadership development construct was underscored by Day’s (2000) conceptualization of it along the leader and leadership dimensions. The leader dimension emphasized building individual leader’s intrapersonal competencies such as self-awareness, confidence, skills, knowledge, motivation, and personal power required to perform effectively in the leader’s role. In contrast, leadership development focused on building interpersonal competences needed for creating and sustaining positive work relationships, enhancing collaboration, and understanding interactive processes within the social environment of the leadership practice. The study findings supported the multi-level view of leadership development in which individual leader development becomes a foundation for building group-level and organizational level leadership competencies (Day & Harrison, 2007). In the accounts of their personal transformation (theme 1), the participants
identified multiple ways in which they experienced a *changed self* (sub-theme 4a) and a significant increase in competencies needed for *understanding others* (sub-theme 4b). The two types of transformation experienced by the participants and resulting from experience, self-reflection and interactions within the community, corresponded to the development of their leader and leadership dimensions respectively.

The progression from a novice to “expert” leader requires not only “quantitative and qualitative” changes in one’s knowledge base but also a shift in self-knowledge and information processing capabilities (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 593). The participants’ accounts of their transformation placed them at the expert level, characterized by “principle-level knowledge” (p. 594) and a well-developed understanding of others’ values, identities, and emotions required for their full engagement in social processes within the organization. The participants identified a variety of processes that aided their development into “mature” (Adam) and expert leaders. Those processes ranged from formal training, learning from on-the-job experience, mentoring by more experienced individuals, observing role models, understanding and utilizing resources existing within a bureaucratic organization, and interacting with others within the DLIFLC and the larger federal government community.

**Leadership self-efficacy.** Leadership self-efficacy (LSE) is defined as the belief in one’s ability to lead followers by setting a direction for them, working collaboratively to reach goals, and cultivating relationships needed for building commitment to change (Paglis and Green, 2002). Since self-efficacy is a domain-specific construct (Bandura, 1997) and leaders perform a variety of roles and tasks, LSE includes multiple dimensions reflecting competencies required in those roles and responsibilities (Anderson et al., 2008).
The study participants’ testimonials indicated that the development of their LSE occurred gradually and was initially influenced by an increase in their self-efficacy in other domains, not directly related to leadership. Early in their DLIFLC career, their successful performance in non-leadership positions led to an increase in their self-efficacy in a variety of domains, for example, teaching, solving problems, making curricular decisions, dealing with customers, and handling multiple priorities. Later, the participants’ vicarious experiences from observing other leaders and verbal persuasion in the form of positive feedback and encouragement (Bandura, 1977b) helped transfer their general self-efficacy beliefs into the more specific domain (Kirsch, 1986) of their LSE. At that point, the participants started actively pursuing leadership development opportunities and opportunities for advancement into leadership positions which supported the notion that “academic and career-related choice” is influenced by one’s self-efficacy beliefs (Lent et al., 1994).

The above findings add to the scant body of knowledge about the relationship between general and more specific types of self-efficacy (Hannah et al., 2008). They also supply additional insight into the interplay between the four self-efficacy sources identified by Bandura (1977b). Although the study supported the critical role of mastery experiences in self-efficacy development, it did not fully support Bandura’s notion that they were the most influential of the four self-efficacy sources. The participants’ experiences indicated that mastery experiences were the most influential source of their general self-efficacy at the beginning of their leadership journey. However, vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion became equally important in developing their LSE at the point of their transition from a non-supervisory to a leadership position and continued to play a critical role throughout their leadership journey. This indicates that the strength of the influence of the self-efficacy sources is relative and should be evaluated
in the context of their interaction with each other and the stage of an individual’s leadership development process.

**Mentoring.** The study findings indicated that mentoring relationships played an important role not only in developing the participants’ *interest in leadership* (theme 1) but also in shaping their leadership path. The participants reported that they had experienced informal mentoring by senior colleagues and by their supervisors with the latter playing a more influential role in their development. Informal mentoring relationships are not pre-defined and the mentors’ and protégées’ roles constantly evolve by expanding and contracting as the result of interactions and perceptions of the individuals involved (Lucas, 2001). The participants’ mentoring relationships evolved naturally from professional interactions and lasted for different lengths of time, typically ending when the protégé moved to a different job assignment. In some cases, the mentoring relationship continued beyond that point but there was less frequent contact and its focus typically shifted to the psychosocial functions of emotional support and affirmation (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

As protégés in supervisory mentoring relationships, the participants experienced all three key mentoring functions of *vocational support, psychosocial support,* and *modeling,* as identified by Lankau and Scandura (2002). Vocational support included job-related coaching and instruction and assigning challenging tasks that helped the participants develop critical thinking skills through problem solving. For example, Adam recalled that his mentor provided minimal instructions in the form of a general “framework” when assigning a complex task to give him an opportunity to learn. As illustrated in previous sections, the participants experienced many forms of psychosocial support when their mentors listened to them, helped them in stressful situations, encouraged them to learn from mistakes, and made them feel “part of the team”
(Henry). The modeling function helped the participants “develop a sense of professional identity and competence” (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 111) by observing their mentors’ behaviors.

Supervisory mentoring occurred at almost every level of the participants’ leadership journey, but it was especially important to them when they transitioned to their first supervisory position. At that critical point in their career, mentoring served the role of a “professional induction” into the participants’ new leadership role (Hean, 2009, p. 163). One of the supervisory mentoring functions most valued by the participants as they progressed through the leadership ranks was that it promoted critical reflection which, in turn, enabled their personal transformation (theme 4). The latter supports the notion that mentoring needs to go beyond the traditional model of apprenticeship (Hean) based solely on explicit knowledge transmission to help protégés develop their leadership potential.

Knowledge transfer. The participants underscored the role of knowledge transfer in their development by describing their leadership journey as a continuous learning process (theme 2). They identified multiple processes and sources within the DLIFLC context through which they accumulated their explicit and tacit knowledge needed to serve effectively in a leadership position. Explicit knowledge is visible in formal routines, written rules, language, and artifacts and can be acquired through formal training and overt instruction (Nonaka, 1994). In the theme of investing in yourself (sub-theme 2b), the participants identified their acquisition of advanced degrees and participation in courses and workshops offered at the institute among the sources of their explicit knowledge. When describing their learning from experience (sub-theme 2b), they identified additional sources, for example, observing others do the job, completing new assignments with supervisors’ help, participating in projects, and reading and learning about DLIFLC offices and regulations.
Since tacit knowledge includes values, beliefs and unwritten rules embedded in individuals and in specific contexts, its transfer requires more complex processes of internalization and socialization which involve learning by doing and sharing experiences to create meaning respectively (Nonaka, 1994). The participants’ personal transformation (theme 4) was at least in part, due to the tacit knowledge they acquired through their interactions within the DLIFLC community. One of the significant sources of their tacit knowledge involved mentoring relationships with their supervisors which engaged them in discussion, self-reflection, and sense-making processes that helped them form their identity as leaders (Chun et al., 2012).

**Transformational leadership.** Although only two participants referred to themselves and their former supervisory mentors as transformational leaders, all described many transformational behaviors on the part of the supervisors whom they considered influential in helping them become leaders. The transformational leadership behaviors most frequently exhibited by the participants’ supervisors included individualized consideration and idealized influence (Bass, 1995). The supervisors used individualized consideration when coaching and mentoring the participants, encouraging their autonomy, helping them reflect on their decisions, and providing them with “developmental opportunities on an on-going basis” (Avolio & Bass, 1995, p. 202). Idealized influence behaviors involved providing opportunities for the participants’ to learn by observing their supervisors and other role models in a variety of tasks and situations. In some instances, the participants’ supervisors displayed inspirational motivation by explaining “the big picture” (Matthew) and displaying enthusiasm, optimism, and commitment to organizational goals. The participants indirectly referred to the same transformational leadership behaviors when describing their desire to give back (sub-theme 4c) by supporting the growth and development of current employees.
Implications for Educational Practice

Findings from the study support multiple conclusions for application in educational practice focused on developing leaders from within a federal government organization. The primary conclusion that emerged from the findings indicates that interest in leadership and leadership self-efficacy develop and are shaped by experiences and interactions within the job context. The participants’ accounts strongly supported the critical role of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977b) in both these processes. The ensuing implication for practice involves increasing mastery experiences early by engaging employees in progressively more complex tasks tailored to their capabilities to ensure consistent success (Bandura, 1989; Cho, 2015). These may include increasing employees’ autonomy in task performance, providing opportunities to fulfill functions beyond their current job level, and encouraging engagement in projects and initiatives in which they can develop competencies by performing leadership functions informally. The participants identified observing role models and getting feedback on task performance from their supervisors as the predominant sources of their vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion respectively. However, they also indicated that although very helpful, these processes often occurred spontaneously or sporadically and had to be sought out as they were not an overt component of their supervisors’ practice. Creating a formalized system for employees to learn by shadowing and observing others and receiving regular, focused performance feedback in an atmosphere of trust and support would help better utilize vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion in building leadership capacity.

Warhurst (2012) stipulated that leadership is “more about the leader’s sense of self and her or his skills per se” (p. 474). Based on the essence of the study participants’ experience, it is possible to conclude that their path to successful leadership involved a lot of learning that
included but went beyond developing specific, technical job-related skills. It required an acquisition of different types of tacit and explicit knowledge that increased the participants’ self-awareness, their understanding of others in the organization and their ability to identify and effectively utilize resources within their organizational context. The participants identified mentoring by supervisors as one of the primary mechanisms responsible for their growth and development. Although supervisory mentoring created opportunities for training and learning from experience, and through critical reflection, the participants’ access to it was sometimes incidental and person-dependent. They also indicated that formal training involving interactions with leaders from other government and academic institutions was very helpful in developing their “institutional knowledge” (Charles), but that there was not enough of it offered. The above conclusions indicate a need for cultivating processes for knowledge sharing at DLIFLC that would incorporate a more organized approach to supervisory mentoring by making it an expected and regular component of the supervisory responsibility. Increasing opportunities for formal training focused on exchanges of experiences and ideas with peers from other institutions should also be an added component.

The final conclusion from the study supported the notion that developing future leaders requires investing in current leaders. The deans’ and associate deans’ reflections revealed that their supervisors played a crucial part in shaping their developmental path. Given the role of supervisory mentoring in developing future leaders, it is critical to ensure that supervisory mentors have the necessary mentoring skills for building leadership capacity in employees (Roddy, 2004). Educating current leaders to be better mentors may include developing skills in assessing employees’ development needs, creating opportunities for mastery experiences that target specific competencies and development goals, giving feedback and helping employees.
build their leadership self-efficacy though self-reflection (Beverborg et al., 2015). Many mentoring processes correspond to and are supported by transformational leadership behaviors such as individualized consideration and idealized influence (Chun et al., 2012). Helping current leaders develop a more transformational leadership style through training and professional development (Bass & Riggio, 2006) may also enhance the institute’s ability to develop organizational leaders from its employee ranks.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Through the participants’ rich descriptions of their experience, the present study identified important personal and contextual factors that constituted the essence of the leadership development journey of nine deans and associate deans within DLIFLC. The findings demonstrated that interest in leadership and leadership self-efficacy develop through interactions and experiences in the work context. A more in-depth inquiry into the specific mechanisms and processes that support the development of leadership self-efficacy may potentially contribute additional insights to the findings and conclusions of the present study.

Findings from the study revealed that the deans’ and associate deans’ leadership journey at DLIFLC involved a significant personal transformation that included not only increased skills and competencies but also a changed view of self in relationship to others. These findings could be enriched through a longitudinal study that would follow and examine the leadership development path of a number of individuals through observation over a longer period. This type of study may provide additional insight into the nature of the personal transformation of leaders promoted from within an organization and may further illuminate the relative value of processes involved in it.
The study uncovered supervisory mentoring as an influential component in shaping the leadership development trajectories of the study participants throughout their leadership journeys. Mentoring can take many forms and involve multiple functions, processes, and content areas (Kram & Isabella, 1985). A study that specifically focuses on examining these mentoring components may help identify essential factors needed for a supervisor-employee mentoring relationship to be successful in a government setting.

The study was limited to gaining insight into the leadership development experience of a relatively small number of participants from one federal government organization and therefore its findings are not generalizable to other contexts. Using findings from this study as a foundation, a larger-scale quantitative or mixed-method study could be designed to examine factors involved in developing leaders within different government organizations. Results from such a study may uncover processes that would have implications for educational practice in multiple federal government contexts.

**Summary**

The current qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to uncover the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to an organizational leader within a federal government organization. Nine DLIFLC deans and associate deans who experienced the phenomenon were selected using purposeful sampling and maximal variation strategies. Van Kaam’s phenomenological method (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze data from semi-structured interviews, producing a composite description of the essence of the participants’ experience reflected in the following four themes: 1) interest in leadership, 2) leadership as a continuous learning process, 3) community influence, and 4) personal
transformation. As presented in Figure 1, each theme additionally encompassed three sub-themes relevant to the underlying essence of the experience.

The study utilized a dual lens of Lave and Wanger’s (1991) situated learning theory (SIT) and Bandura’s (1977b) self-efficacy theory to illuminate the essence of the experience of the participants’ leadership journey. Both theories guided the development of the interview questions and provided the framework for identifying and organizing the themes that emerged from interview data. Findings from this study strongly supported the key assumptions of both theories and aligned with the reviewed literature. By uncovering and illuminating individual and contextual factors involved in developing leaders from within DLIFLC, the results provided answers to the research question that guided the study.

Conclusions drawn from the study findings led to recommendations for educational practice related to developing employees into organizational leaders at DLIFLC. The recommendations included a) increasing mastery experiences early in employees’ career to help build their expertise and self-efficacy through engagement in more complex tasks in which they could succeed; b) creating a formal system for employees to learn by shadowing and observing others and receiving regular, focused task performance feedback (vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion); c) cultivating processes for knowledge sharing at DLIFLC that incorporate a more organized approach to supervisory mentoring and maximizing opportunities for interactions with peers from other government and academic institutions; and d) investing in current leaders by educating them to be better mentors and helping them develop a more transformational leadership style through professional training.

The present inquiry created an opportunity for nine DLIFLC senior leaders to reflect on their own leadership journeys. This process of recall and retrospection helped them examine in-
depth not only their individual leadership path but also their own role in developing future leaders at the institute. The examination of the participants’ individual leadership trajectories yielded the description of the essence of their shared experience. The results, conclusions and recommendations from this study illuminated personal and contextual processes that may help guide current DLIFLC employees and aspiring leaders on a path to a senior leadership position. Although limited in scope by a relatively small number of participants within one specific federal government setting, the study laid a foundation for future research. A follow-on in-depth inquiry into specific aspects of the leadership journey uncovered in this study such as supervisory mentoring or the development of leadership self-efficacy in employees may provide additional insights into the process. A larger scale mixed-method design examining leadership development processes in multiple government contexts may yield results that would be generalizable to other federal government settings.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, School of Education

Name of Dissertation Advisor: Dr. James Griffin

Name of Principal Investigator: Ms. Grazyna Dudney

Title of Project:

Developing Leaders from Within: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Essence of Deans’ and Associate Deans’ Leadership Development Experience at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC)

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask any questions you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you would like to participate. If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will provide you with a copy for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you had been originally hired for a non-supervisory position and later have transitioned into a senior leadership position within DLIFLC. Your stories about your leadership development journey may provide insight for the institute needed to create processes that support developing employees into future organizational leaders.

Why is this research study being done?

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to illuminate the essence of the experience of becoming a leader within a federal government organization. More specifically, it focuses on gaining insight into the essence of the experience of DLIFLC deans and associate deans who were initially hired as faculty members and later promoted to senior leadership positions. Understanding the essence of the experience of becoming a senior leader from within DLIFLC may uncover individual and contextual factors that will help the institute devise appropriate strategies for preventing future shortages in candidates qualified to fill vacant leadership positions.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to a one-on-one semi-structured interview in which the researcher will ask questions about your experience related to becoming
a Dean or Associate Dean. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded using a high quality Sony digital voice recorder to ensure the accuracy of collected data. For the purpose of the study, you will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used during the interview to ensure your total anonymity.

The interview will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher or by a reputable transcription service. The researcher will carefully review all transcripts for accuracy and completeness and screen them to ensure that they do not include any information that may potentially identify you as a participant. The researcher will make the transcript of your individual interview available to you so that you also have an opportunity to verify its accuracy, completeness, and anonymity. As part of the member checks strategy for ensuring the internal validity of the study, the researcher may also ask you to review and comment on her preliminary analysis of findings to ensure that her interpretation of your experience is correct. As a follow-up, she may request an additional meeting or phone session with you if there are questions or anything needs to be clarified. This meeting may last 15-20 minutes.

Where will the study take place and how much time will it take?
The interviews will be scheduled outside of work hours at a time and place most convenient for you. The main semi-structured interview will last between 75 and 90 minutes. After the initial analysis, your interview transcript will be e-mailed to you and, if you choose to review the transcript, the process may take an additional 10-15 minutes. The researcher may additionally request a 15-20 minute follow-up conference if there are any areas that need clarification.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
No psychological, social, financial or physical losses should be incurred during this study. Participants’ identities will not be disclosed at any point in the study. However, due to the relatively small number of participants, limited pool of potential participants, and the in-depth nature of interview questions, there is a minimal risk of participant disclosure associated with participation in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, the information gathered in this study may contribute to identifying processes conducive to developing future leaders at DLIFLC.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in the study is confidential and your participation will be anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to any information that may identify you as a participant. All files, transcripts, and documents will be kept in a password-protected file and in a locked cabinet.
accessible only by the researcher. All the documentation related to this study will be destroyed after a period of three years.

**If I do not want to take part in this study what choices do I have?**
Participation is entirely up to you, therefore, you may choose to participate or not participate in the study.

**Can I stop my participation in the study?**
Yes. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may decide to withdraw at any point, even after the study begins.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Ms. Grazyna Dudney, **Dudney.g@husky.neu.edu**

Dr. James Griffin, **jam.griffing@neu.edu**

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570; e-mail: **irb@neu.edu**. If you wish, you may call anonymously.

**Will I be paid or my participation?**
No. However, the researcher will offer a $15 gift certificate as a thank you for your time.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no cost associated with this study.

**I agree to take part in this research**

__________________________________________                       ___________________
Signature of person agreeing to participate                                                 Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix B

Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Institution: Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Interviewee (Pseudonym): ______________________________________________________

Interviewer: Grazyna Dudney

Part I: Introduction (5-7 minutes)

Objectives: To build rapport, describe the study, describe elements included in the informed consent form, answer any questions the participant may have.

Introductory Protocol (text to be read to the participant)

You have been selected for this interview because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experience of becoming an organizational leader and more specifically, about how to transition from an employee to Dean or Associate Dean. The research project focuses on the experience of becoming a leader from within DLIFLC. Through this study, I hope to gain insight into the essence of the experience from the perspective of individuals who were originally hired for a non-leadership position and who are now Deans or Associate Deans. I hope to uncover and understand individual and contextual factors that support building leadership potential and capacity among current employees with the purpose of creating a cadre of potential future leaders for the institute when the time comes to fill vacancies caused by retirements. [Go over the Consent Form, answer questions, and ask the participant to sign it].

Because I want to make sure to capture everything you say accurately and completely, I would like to audio tape our interview. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording device]. I will also be taking notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. As an extra precaution, to ensure anonymity, from now on and throughout the interview process, I will not be referring to you by your real name but by your chosen pseudonym. I will be the only person with access to the interview tapes which will be eventually destroyed. The transcribed data may be used for future...
research studies. However, only a pseudonym will be used to label the transcripts. After the interview is transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review to ensure accuracy and completeness.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than about 90 minutes. During this time, I will ask several questions. It may be necessary for me to interrupt you in order to move to the next question. Do you have any questions at this time?

**Part II: Interviewee Background (3-5 minutes)**

**Objective:** To establish rapport and to verify information obtained in the brief biographical survey (included in the initial invitation e-mail).

- What is your current job title? How long have you worked at DLIFLC?
- How long have you served in your current position?
- What position were you initially hired for at DLIFLC?
- What other jobs (if any) have you held at the institute?
- What is your native country/native language?
- How long have you lived in the United States?

**Part III: Interview (75-90 minutes)**

**Objective:** To gather data with a rich description that addresses the following research question: *How do DLIFLC deans and associate deans promoted from within describe their experience of becoming organizational leaders?*

*One of the main things I am interested in learning about and understanding in depth is your journey from first being an employee at DLIFLC to becoming a Dean or Associate Dean. I would like to hear about your experience described in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you to reflect on the experience and to answer my questions as fully and in as much detail as you can. Your responses may relate to personal, academic, professional or other pertinent experiences. If you mention other people, such as faculty, colleagues, or supervisors, please do not mention their real names. Please remember that I will be using a pseudonym for you in order to protect your identity.*
Interview Questions

1. *Could you please describe in your own words your journey from being an employee at DLIFLC to your current position?* Please reflect on it and provide as much detail as possible.

2. *How and when did you become interested in applying for a leadership position?*

3. *What experiences during your tenure at DLIFLC do you associate with your personal and professional growth?*

4. *Can you describe any formal and informal training and development that influenced your interest in becoming a leader?*

5. *In reflecting on your journey towards becoming a leader, what was most helpful?*

6. *Based on your experience, what do you think DLIFLC can do to help foster developing employees into future leaders?*

Part IV: Closing the Interview (2-3 minutes)

Objectives: To thank the participant for his/her participation, to review the next steps in the study process and to answer any questions the participant may have.

*Thank you very much for participating in this interview. I’ll email a copy of your transcript to you within the next week so that you can review it by [date and time].*