A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Diane Lange
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Northeastern University
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Abstract
A consistently effective and proven leadership development methodology has yet to be
developed (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2016; Beer, Finnstrom, & Schrader, 2016; Rowland, 2016).
Moreover, the variety of methodologies used for leadership development are numerous and the
experiences that influence leadership development are vast (Allio, 2005; Guskey & Yoon, 2009;
McCall, 2004; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). The purpose of this interpretive
phenomenological study was to discover the most salient methods of leadership development,
the significant people, and life experiences that influenced the leadership development of seven
organizational leaders. The question that guided this study was: How do leaders, who have been
in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years, make-meaning of their leadership development
experiences? The data gathered from this study lead to the development of the following
significant themes: 1. Passion for one’s industry or field is a prerequisite for leadership success;
2. Life experiences including those during childhood, enduring hardships and interacting with
influential people are foundational experiences that fundamentally influence one’s leadership
development; and 3. Progressive work experience along with personal and leadership
developmental activities significantly impact one’s leadership development. An unexpected
theme that emerged from the study was the lack of a leadership identity of five of the seven
participants. These findings will contribute to the strategies and methods used by those who are
developing leaders and by those who want to become leaders.

Keywords: leadership development, leadership development methodology, leadership
development and life experiences, leadership development and influential people, leadership
development and hardships, leadership development and childhood, leadership development and
work experience, passion, leadership identity, lack of leadership identity
Dedication and Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, who always told me I could quit if I wanted to. I never took her up on her offers and perhaps it was her approval of quitting that spurred me on. But later during one of my most difficult years she sent me a note that read, “With your courage and determination to make your dreams come true, you finished your classes to pursue your future. Now on with your thesis, and your degree.” This time she wanted me to finish, and I couldn’t let her down. Thanks, mom.

I would like to thank my family; my daughter, Lennay, who encouraged me as we were both pursuing a doctorate at the same time, my nephews, brother, and sister-in-law, whose inquiries about my progress boosted my resolve, and my cousin who asked me too often, “can I call you doctor, yet?” Also, I would like to thank my dear friends; Mary Lee, who always had a sympathetic ear, Dorothy, who requested help from above, and Kevin who helped me celebrate milestones with dinners out.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Leadership and leadership development have been discussed, researched, and written about for decades. The proliferation of leadership literature continues to grow through trade publications and peer-reviewed journals. A 2018 Google Scholar keyword search for leadership yielded approximately 3.9 million results, and a search for leadership development yielded more than 3.7 million results. Despite the wealth of literature written about leadership and leadership development, there remained several critical issues of controversy concerning leadership development, two of which were: a consensus had yet to be established on whether leadership development works, and if it will work, a scientifically based methodology needs to be established consisting of the most effective strategies for successful leadership development (Abrell, Rowold, Weibler, & Moenninghoff, 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Beer, Finnstrom, & Schrader, 2016; Brungardt, 1996; D. Collins, 2001; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hedges, 2014; Kutz, 2004; Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007; D. Rowland, 2016; Washbush, 2005).

This problem of leadership development was and is more than academic. Both scholarly and popular literature point to the necessity of developing strong leaders to ensure organizational growth and success (Amagoh, 2009; Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco, & Lau, 1999; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; D. Collins, 2001; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Zenger & Folkman, 2002). Indeed, if effective leaders are in constant demand, but the methodology for developing them is questionable or lacking, it is incumbent upon those in academia to continue the search for a credible, successful leadership development methodology (Atwater et al., 1999; Day et al., 2014; Fernandez & Perry, 2016;
Hedges, 2014). However, a developmental methodology cannot be agreed upon until it is understood how one becomes a leader. Once a clear understanding of how one becomes a leader is discovered, a methodology can then be reversed engineered to address the environments, situations, and experiences that were reported to be impactful toward the development of those who are successful leaders.

The intent of this doctoral study was to conduct an interpretive phenomenological study to describe and understand the leadership development experience of seven accomplished organizational leaders. This will benefit the study of leadership development because it contributed important data about the influential people and the critical life experiences that had been identified as important by those who experienced them in conjunction with their leadership development. The information gained from this study will also aid those who develop future leaders by recommending actions deemed important by those who participated in the study.

This chapter began with a brief overview of the research related to leadership development, its context, background, criticisms, and failures. The next section discusses the research problem and its context and background, followed by the significance of this research, my positionality statement and an explanation of the research question. The chapter ends with an explanation of the theoretical framework used in this study and a summary of this chapter.

**Statement of the Problem**

Leadership development is often cited and referred to in both academic and popular literature, and is a recommended practice for organizations (Amagoh, 2009; Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Pearce, 2007; Quatro et al., 2007; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012). Yet upon examination, a clear, critical theme of failure in leadership development is
evident. There is not enough research that provides answers about the effectiveness of leadership development, nor is there a mandate for proven strategies when designing leadership programs (Abrell et al., 2011; Allio, 2005; Brungardt, 1997; D. Collins, 2001; Gehret, 2010;). The lack of credible research coupled with the absence of verified methodologies results in a hit-or-miss, haphazard approach (Westbrook, 2012) to leadership development that can be overwhelming and frustrating to those working to become leaders, as well as for those who are directing leadership development initiatives. For anyone looking to become a leader or for those professionals who work to develop leaders, guidance and direction using tested, reliable, and replicable material is essential.

Context and Background

The Failure of Leadership Development

For decades, literature on leadership development has documented the failure of leadership development programs. The seminal 1950’s Ohio State Leadership studies demonstrated that participants could not sustain a desired post-training attitude change when measured by a follow up study, as the participants had regressed to pre-training attitudes (as cited in Beer, 2016). Atwater et al., (1999) and D. Collins (2001) agreed that research on leadership development was sparse and found mixed results from the research that was available. Allio’s (2005) research found “Most leadership training initiatives fail to produce leaders” (p. 1071) because leadership programs teach “theory, concepts and principles” (p. 1071) but fail to produce leaders who have “leadership competence” (p. 1071). Allen and Hartman (2008) agreed and reported that the sparsely available academic work had not connected leadership development theory to the methods used for development.
Indeed, Abrell et al. (2011) stated that current research had several flaws: (a) most of the leadership development programs only tested one or two leadership tasks; (b) few studies examined the effects of complex and longitudinal development programs; (c) very few studies empirically evaluated complex leadership training; and (d) the studies that had examined long-term or complex programs “are only randomly described and almost never evaluated empirically” (p. 206). Fernandez and Perry (2016) also addressed the lack of models and frameworks available for developmental methods and confirmed a lack of empirical evidence substantiating the success of leadership development programs. Additionally, Rowland (2016) asserted that leadership development fails because there was a “mismatch between leadership development as it exists and what leaders actually need” (p. 2), while Quatro (2007) called for a “reform of leadership development and management education” (p. 428) in favor of a new, holistic approach to leadership development.

Lack of Definition

Scarcity of reliable research is not the only criticism of leadership development: The definition of leadership itself is in question and many point to the lack of a sound definition as a foundational reason for the failure of effective leadership development (Day & Harrison, 2007; Gehret, 2010b; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Washbush, 2005). Bennis and Nanus (1985) stated that “decades of academic analysis have given us more than 350 definitions of leadership… but no clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders.” (p. 4). Washbush (2005) said that after 30 years of believing that leadership could be “defined, studied, and understood,” he is “coming to the conclusion that it cannot.” (p. 1078). Additionally, leadership is charged to be unscientific, because it does not benefit from a commonly accepted view or definition (Day & Harrison, 2007), while others claimed that a
leadership definition is ambiguous, open to personal interpretation, or lacking in dimension (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Bush, 2011).

The lack of a leadership definition directly affects the efficacy of leadership development. Not only is the definition of leadership in question, but an understanding of how one becomes a leader is equally elusive. Day and Harrison (2007) asked, “How can something that cannot be defined be studied scientifically? And more pertinent to the special issue topic of leadership development, how can something that is apparently indefinable be developed?” (p. 360). Allio (2005) and D. Collins (2001) claimed that the lack of a leadership definition has hampered the development of a tested and established leadership development model. Moreover, the absence of a theoretical model for leadership development (Brungardt, 1996; Toor and Ofori, 2008) is a direct result of the limited research on leadership development (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005).

Can Leadership be Developed?

In spite of this rather recent dilemma charging the lack of a definition and a theoretical model, leadership has been understood and taught since Plato (Brungardt, 1996). Ancient history explained Confucian leadership education which emphasized reading to ensure that the future leader had acquired the proper thinking, while Jesuit priests taught leadership through competitive situations among their students (Danzig, 1999). In 1877, John W. Ashton published a brief article in *The American Socialist*, in which he shared his key to leadership success as one’s ability to have his wishes carried out and one “who is respected and obeyed, and whose decisions are final” (p. 410). Indeed, leadership has been acknowledged and taught throughout history without the benefit of definition or theoretical model. Some of the behaviors and styles of leadership may have changed from that which may be expected today, but the results of
extraordinary leaders have always been to accomplish their goals with the help of others (Amagoh, 2009; Brungardt, 1996; Danzig, 1999; Day, 2000).

Current literature offered an interesting juxtaposition regarding the ability to learn and teach leadership. Brungardt (1997) asked the fundamental question, “If leadership can be learned, can it be taught?” (p. 82). Allio (2005) answered, “. . . while leadership cannot be taught, leadership can be learned.” (p. 1071). Many believe that leadership can be learned through a variety of teaching means and methods (Bennis, 2009; Block & Manning, 2007; Brungardt, 1996; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008). Furthermore, Kutz (2004) claimed that there is, “a consensus that leadership skills and abilities can be learned and developed . . . many aspects of leadership can be learned through skill development, competencies and experience” (p. 1).

The Price of Leadership Development

In spite of the foundational absence of a leadership definition and a theoretical base, organizations continue to spend valuable time and money in an effort to develop future leaders (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Day & Sin, 2009; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012). Studies reported in 2010 that organizations in the U.S. spent $12 billion (Ashford & DeRue, 2012), and by 2012 they had spent approximately $14 billion a year on leadership development (Hedges, 2014). Interestingly, Brungardt (1997) reported that $50 billion were spent annually on training in general and approximately 60% of the largest U.S. organizations offered leadership training for their employees. Fernandez and Perry (2016) reported that in 2000 the U.S. leadership training budget was approximately $45 billion and in 2010 only 25% of a $50 billion annual training budget was allocated for leadership development. These numbers indicate that over a decade the amount of money budgeted for leadership development remained stagnant despite an acknowledged leadership shortage.
(Ashford & DeRue, 2012; D. Collins, 2001; Johnson, 2009; Killion, 2007; Scarpati & Betts, 2017). Leadership development budgets could be another topic to research; however, a stagnant or reduced budget could be a contributing factor to the present leadership shortage. Additionally, the plateau in leadership spending could be a result of the hesitancy to spend money on a practice that yields questionable and unsubstantiated benefits to the organization (Brungardt, 1996).

Regardless of the dollar amount, U.S. organizations continue to invest precious time and money in leadership development despite the lack of research that substantiates the effectiveness of development (Abrell et al., 2011; Ashford & DeRue 2012; Brungardt, 1996), and the research that is available is, “riddled with paradoxes, inconsistencies, and contradictions (Klenke, 1993, p. 112). Further, Guskey and Yoon (2009) found that an insufficient number of studies—only nine out of 1,343—met their standards of “credible evidence” (p. 496), further indicating the need for credible research on leadership development.

**Significance**

It is imperative for leadership coaches and trainers, as well as human resource professionals and organizational development specialists, to understand how leaders develop. If those charged with the development of leaders in or for organizations knew with confidence that specific assignments, actions, systems, such as mentoring or coaching, topics, organizational relationships, and classroom techniques could support the development of a person from line staff to leader, the return on investment would greatly outweigh the costs of development.

Additionally, effective leadership development could save organizations the cost of mistakes made by incompetent leaders who make bad decisions or lack the knowledge, skills, and ability to inspire others (McCall, 2004). Moreover, if organizational leaders knew that
leadership development consistently resulted in high caliber leaders, organizations could allocate the necessary time and funds for training and development with confidence.

Further research to discover how leaders develop is imperative for the following reasons:

1. There remains a lack of understanding and documentation of an agreed upon, proven, and if possible, replicable path to leadership development (Abrell et al., 2011; Allio, 2005; Brungardt, 1996; D. Collins, 2001; Day & Sin, 2009). This is of prime importance because people recognize leadership when it is observed or experienced; and, equally obvious is the lack of leadership when it is missing. If the presence of leadership or the lack thereof can be sensed and identified, then there is a common understanding and acceptance of the concept of leadership.

Leadership has been acknowledged and taught for centuries (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Brungardt, 1996; Conger & Toegel, 2003; Danzig, 1999), and the lack of a definition or a theoretical foundation neither negated the concept nor prohibited leadership development throughout the centuries. But, now that organizational effectiveness requires a return on investment (ROI) for the time and money spent in leadership development, the practice of development must be authenticated and yield successful results. Therefore, continued research into what contributes to the development of a leader will offset the charge of an unscientific field (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 360) and contribute to the much needed understanding of how to develop leaders, especially when they are sorely needed (Abrell et al., 2011).

2. Billions of dollars are spent nationally on developing leaders without a demonstrated ROI for the benefit of the organization. Annual figures for money spent on leadership development were estimated at $12 billion in 2010 to $14 billion in 2012 (Ashford &
DeRue, 2012; Hedges, 2014) while the results and benefits of the investment is questioned and undocumented. Without further research, the practice of leadership development may be viewed as a waste of precious time and money, especially in an environment of limited time and financial resources.

3. Organizations that ignore and retain bad leaders put their organizations at risk in several ways. Poorly led organizations struggle to maintain and improve productivity. They also risk the morale and engagement of employees, as well as the organization’s reputation and its’ very financial well-being (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; D. Collins, 2001; Quatro et al., 2007). Furthermore, poorly led organizations risk the health and well-being of their employees, which may result in increased cost of health benefits due to increased disability claims (Colvin, 2014; Widmer, 2002).

No matter the organization’s product or service, whether it is for profit or nonprofit, disengaged and disgruntled employees negatively affect an organization’s goals, effectiveness, reputation and financial bottom line (“Tough talk about,” 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bennis & Thomas, 2004; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Brungardt, 1996; Bush & Glover, 2004; D. Collins, 2001; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Spreitzer, 2006; Zenger & Folkman, 2002). Researching how to develop leaders is of prime importance to the health of our citizens, our organizations, and our economy.

4. If leadership development continues as it stands without improved research, documentation, and verified methods of development, it compromises the respect and credibility of all who work professionally to develop leaders. Those who work in and for
organizations and strive to make organizational work life better and more productive so to help people and organizations attain their goals. If they are not providing an effective service to their organizations, they are failing to meet a necessary need.

Positionality Statement

**Background.** My interest in the subject of leadership development grew out of my position in Organizational Development at UHS (United Health Services), a major health care system in upstate New York. When I joined the hospital system, I was unaware of the function and mission of organizational development and thought I was just making a switch from teaching at the local community college to teaching adults in a corporate setting.

I was hired into a team of three people charged with developing an annual, mandatory training program, sanctioned by senior leadership to communicate corporate and industry initiatives (i.e. Customer Service, HIPAA training, etc.) to a hospital system of more than 3,000 employees. After working in that position for a year or two, managers started asking me to help them with problems they were having in their units. I was happy to help, but I didn’t have any idea what to do. I did try to help, mostly guessing—going on instinct and “flying by the seat of my pants.” I didn’t think I was delivering a quality service to these upset and frustrated managers, which bothered me, because I was dedicated to the mission of the hospital and I wanted to offer substantive, educated, professional help.

To that end, I enrolled in George Washington University’s School of Organizational Sciences and became a certified Leadership Coach. This program ignited my interest in leadership and set me on a coaching career within the hospital system that was unique within Organizational Development (OD). I found it to be challenging and personally fulfilling. I
believed that my additional education improved my ability as an OD specialist, who could possibly help individuals, managers, teams, and units, which ultimately helped the patients.

Research has consistently demonstrated that hospital units that have effective managers and lead positive and engaged employees, have units that work well in teams, offer patients better health care with improved outcomes and receive higher patient satisfaction (Shingler-Nace, & Zedreck Gonzalez, 2017; Tomey, 2009). As the only leadership coach on the system’s OD team, I believed I was contributing to the mission of the hospital and indirectly contributing to the health of my community.

After several years at UHS, our CEO, Peter McGinn, Ph. D., started a daunting organizational-culture change called the “Campaign for Excellence” (United Health Service 2002 Annual Report, 2002). The OD team was charged with introducing the campaign to employees, while communicating the values, mission, goals, and other information deemed important through our annual training sessions. In addition, we were charged with being active role models for the new organizational culture. I sat on several committees for the campaign. McGinn remained CEO and led the campaign for 5 years. It was during this time that I had direct experience with changing the culture of an organization from the inside under the direction of an inspiring leader.

Additionally, in 2006, I started a consulting business offering leadership coaching, training, and facilitation to companies within the upstate New York region. I worked with a variety of organizations in different fields including manufacturing, banking, government, nonprofit and education. Over the course of the years with UHS and serving client companies, I have had experiences that may have contributed to what may be called my research biases.
**Researcher bias.** Maxwell (2005) discussed in depth the issue of bias as a researcher in qualitative studies and suggests that we as researchers, can never sever our perspectives from our research as, “*Any view is a view from some perspective,* and therefore is shaped by the location (social and theoretical) and ‘lens’ of the observer” (p. 39). It behooves us to be aware of and admit our biases so that we can be on guard to conduct impartial, sound research.

As a practitioner, I have beliefs which may lead to biases about leadership development. I do believe that leadership can be taught, but I also believe that some people are born with either more or better innate leadership skills than others; and those who may be lacking in leadership skills may have a limited capacity to change their behaviors to become outstanding leaders. What I do not know is the developmental potential of each person and what may have influenced them to develop leadership skills that may have otherwise remained dormant. It is this curiosity, rather than my bias regarding limited potential, that guided my questions, so I could explore the leadership trajectory of the participants of this study.

**Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to add to the body of knowledge of how leaders develop. Specifically, the study investigated the significance of the people and events that have influenced and helped develop the leadership capabilities of seven leaders from different fields of practice.

The central research question for this study is: How do leaders who have been in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years make-meaning of their leadership development experiences?

**Theoretical Framework**

*Constructive-developmental Theory*
Robert Keegan, who was inspired by the foundational work of Piaget, advanced constructive-developmental theory (CD), a six-stage theory of cognitive development (Eriksen, 2006; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Hunter, Lewis, & Ritter-Gooder, 2011; Kegan, 1980; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006; Moss, 2005). This developmental theory offered a construct through which we can examine how people cognitively change as they grow. Though child development milestones are usually associated with age, in CD theory progressing from one stage to another in adulthood is independent of age. Constructive-developmental theory is not concerned with what people do or the content of their experiences, rather it seeks to understand the new thinking, organizing and meaning-making they adapt from their experiences (Eriksen, 2006).

Based on the work of Piaget, Keegan and others, constructive-developmental theory described six-stages, “balances”, or “order(s) of consciousness” (Eriksen, 2006, p. 291) that explain the stage development that people may pass through over the course of their lives. The stages of CD theory are stated briefly as follows:

**Stage Zero:** Stage zero is referred to as the incorporative balance and is purely survival driven guided by impulse and reflex. This is the stage of infancy and early childhood and is dominated by reflexes, developing senses, and learning physical movement.

**Stage One:** Stage one, or the impulsive balance, is ruled by self and one’s own needs and wishes. It is an impulsive stage that may have a punishment and obedience orientation. In this stage the needs and wishes of other people are secondary and only relevant if another person can support the primary person’s desires.

**Stage Two:** In Stage two, or the imperial balance, the person’s sense of self is becoming socially determined, based on the real or imagined expectations of others. In stage two
the person is not only aware of his or her own experiences but is also aware of the experiences of others. Additionally, the person now begins to identify others in terms of how they can satisfy their own needs. During this stage, the person begins to understand that others may have different goals from themselves and can begin to view others and their differences as a threat to his or her own desires. This stage is usually entered in preadolescence and marks the beginning of understanding the rules and roles of others.

**Stage Three:** Stage three, or the interpersonal balance, is when the person's sense of self is determined by a set of values that he or she has authored for themselves and is developed in adulthood. In this stage, abstractions and mutual relationships are developed as the person becomes fully socialized. The person now understands another’s point of view, and relationships become intrinsically valuable, rather than being based on the value or actions another person may offer. Research indicates that 70% to 80% of adults stay in stage three of development (Eriksen, 2006).

**Stage Four:** Stage four, or the institutional balance, is marked by a release of the person's sense of self that was previously bound to an earlier self-concept or history. A new identity is now rooted in his or her roles at their jobs and attached to the values and relationships in their organization. Furthermore, the person’s new sense of self is independent of other people and this new identity remains consistent across different relationships and environments.

**Stage Five:** Stage five, or the interindividual balance, is the last stage which very few people achieve. It is a consciousness that is developed later in life, usually past 40 (Eriksen, 2006), and is “responsible for systems rather than to systems” (Eriksen, 2006, p. 296). Stage five is oriented toward relationships and people. The person in stage five
values process over the product, is not personally defensive about not knowing the
answers and can tolerate conflict and differences of opinions. Only a small percentage of
people move into stage five, but most people achieve and stay in stage three (Eriksen,
2006; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Hunter et al., 2011; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987b; McCauley
et al., 2006).

Constructive-developmental theory offered the structure from which one can examine the
changes in thinking as people move from one stage to the next. Change is a dynamic process,
and CD theory asserted that as one moves into the next stage of development, thinking becomes
more flexible and less rigid, more tolerant and less dogmatic (Eriksen, 2006). As one moves into
a new stage, the old constructs are not eliminated, rather they are adjusted and incorporated into
a new thought process with new organization (Eriksen, 2006). The ability to add new constructs
to old ones and adapt a new thought process to accommodate the new construct is a watershed
event in a person’s development from one stage to the next. This movement into a new stage can
be revealed through the meaning-making that one shares.

Constructive-developmental theory emphasized the importance of subjective meaning-
making as the basis for one’s attitudinal change and resulting behavioral changes. Furthermore,
CD theory acknowledged the unique differences between individuals, but stated that “there are
striking regularities to the underlying structure of meaning-making and to the sequence of
meaning systems that people grow through”, (Kegan, 1980, p. 374). Constructive-developmental
theory explained how a person passes into a new stage of development, and how each new stage
has the same underlying regularities that other people who are in that stage also experience. As
one moves into a new stage, the individual builds and maintains his or her own new meaning-
making of a situation. It is this framework that uniquely positioned CD theory as an ideal
theoretical basis for this study, because it assumed that the individual experiences and the associated meaning-making are fundamental to the progression of stage of development as a leader.

In addition, one’s thoughts and behaviors remain consistent when the person is in a particular stage of development “except during periods of transition and evolution from one system (stage) to another” (Kegan, 1980). The process of moving from one stage to the next requires a change in thought along with a change of personal constructs. When these changes are made, one is then able to change their behavior. The goal of this study was to reveal the change in thoughts, personal constructs and behavior that reflected the development of a leader over the course of their life’s experiences.

The hallmarks of CD stages can coincide with leadership development, because the leader’s thinking, actions, behaviors, and styles change when they develop as a leader (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1996; Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; McDermott, Kidney, & Flood, 2011; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Olivares, 2011; Pillemer, 2001; Toor & Ofori, 2008). This theoretical framework has not been used often in leadership research, but, when it is used, it is primarily associated with studies that discuss leadership identity.

Although CD theory did not directly focus on the traits of leadership that are so often referred to in the leadership literature (Hunter et al., 2011; Kuhnert, 1990; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; McDermott et al., 2011), it did focus on the developmental stages and the process of change in thought and meaning-making that prompts the changes in behavior. It is this developmental process that leaders go through resulting from the influence of key people and experiencing critical events that were the focus of this study.
Critics of constructive-developmental theory. Though research that used CD theory is generally positive, McCauley et al. (2006) found mixed results, as well as “serious limitations in the body of research . . . including restricted samples and research designs.” (p. 647). A study by Day et al. (2014) conducted research on the psychosocial development of West Point cadets over the period of four years. Their results showed positive evidence of constructive-developmental changes in about 50% of the cadets, but their stage development was not strongly correlated to their leadership effectiveness.

In another study cited by Day et al. (2014), 67 executives took part in an executive development program that examined leader performance ratings through CD theory and found “a significant predictor of performance ratings from all rater sources (subordinates, peers, and supervisors)” (p. 75), and also found that CD theory offered the ability to predict leadership performance better than when compared to using the big five personality factors; however, the relationship was weak. Despite these precautions, Day et al. (2014) stated that “constructive-developmental theory provides a unique contribution to our current understanding of leadership and represents a fruitful avenue for future leadership development research” (p. 75).

Rationale for constructive-developmental theory. The rationale for using CD theory in this study was driven by the theory’s framework of change that is demonstrated by the hallmarks of different thinking, as one moves through the different stages. By framing this study through the CD lens, leadership development can be examined and explained in terms of the meaning-making shared by one who experienced significant events or influential people throughout their life and career. Given the process of development experienced by the participants, constructive-developmental theory offered a unique platform upon which the development from one stage to the next stage can be identified and tracked.
In this interpretive phenomenological analysis, data were gathered during participant interviews which revealed the meaning-making that took place throughout the leadership development of each participant. Employing CD theory as a theoretical base provided both a platform and structure for an examination and an explanation of, “how adults develop more complex and comprehensive ways of making sense of themselves and their experience” (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 634).

**Conclusion**

The intent of this doctoral study was to discover significant influences and experiences in the development of seven accomplished organizational leaders. Knowing the influences and experiences that significantly contributed to the leadership development of accomplished leaders is essential to the future design, development, and delivery of fundamentally sound leadership development practices.

The need for continued research is clear, because leadership development literature has not produced solid empirical evidence needed for unquestionable leadership development success. Meanwhile, organizations spend a substantial amount of money and time on leadership development efforts that often fail to produce a positive rate of return on their investment. In addition, the literature shared that the development of leaders is not a fast or easy process: It takes years for one to accumulate the knowledge, skills, behaviors, expertise and wisdom to lead complex organizations in a complex world (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Avolio & Lester 2011; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001; Brungardt, 1997; Day, 2000; Day, 2014; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Solansky, 2010; Wahat, Krauss, & Othman, 2013; Westbrook, 2012). Because leaders cannot be developed overnight, and development efforts are in question, it is imperative to study
the events and influential people that supported the leadership development of successful leaders, so if possible, these critical events and positive relationships can be replicated and used in the development of others. Furthermore, using CD theory to examine the process of leadership development provided a framework for identifying the internal-stage development and growth process of skillful leaders.

To follow is a review of the leadership development research that consists of the successes and failures of the development process along with a narrower focus on methodologies that have been reviewed as beneficial to the leadership development experience. The literature review highlights the needs that still exist and the possibilities that are promising to successfully develop leaders of the future.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A proven leadership development methodology remains elusive, and a literature search can result in a complex and multi-dimensional pursuit that can take many directions. The leadership development literature offered a disparate selection of topics deemed necessary for effective leadership development; learning specific skills, acquiring particular personality traits, adopting specific actions and behaviors, and adopting specific leadership styles (Amagoh, 2009; Cherry, 2014; McDermott et al., 2011; Northouse, 2010). Though these topics of leadership development are important they do not answer the question of this study: How would you describe your development as a leader? Narrowing the literature search revealed a thread that addressed specific methods used to develop leaders including formal classroom training, on-the-job experiences, coaching, and mentoring as well as seminal events and significant people who influenced those who became leaders. Given the focus of this study, it is this thread that was explored to further understand what contributed to the development of a leader.

This review began with a discussion of the need for leadership and the current leadership crisis due to significant deficits in leadership development procedures and techniques compounded by the retirement of the baby boomers. This is followed by a discussion of the lack of an agreed upon definition for both “leadership” and “leadership development”, as this absence is viewed as a fundamental cause of leadership development failure (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2016; Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Washbush, 2005).

The next section examined the significant issues of leadership development often cited that contribute to the failure of leadership development. Critics point to the absence of a comprehensive list of leadership competencies that could be used in the development and
measurement of leadership development programs. The next section reviewed the most frequently cited critiques of leadership development including reasons for leadership development failure, matters of inconsistencies and oversights in leadership development studies and leadership development methodologies. This is followed by a review of studies that offered various suggestions for improved leadership development along with effective methodologies. The suggestions for leadership development are followed by a review of leadership development successes and development methodologies.

The review continued with an examination of who should be a leader and why followed by evidence that leadership development is a time-based process that requires patience on the part of the individuals and organizations. Next, the review moved to promising methods for leadership development that included formal classroom training, workplace development including on-the-job training, action learning, and day-to-day work experiences, coaching and mentoring, and feedback. This is followed by a review of other influential life situations that are often unplanned and may include childhood experiences, momentous events, and hardships that can significantly impact one’s leadership journey. Finally, the review looked at important areas of agreement essential to the success of leadership development found in the literature and concluded with a summary of essential points to achieve leadership development success.

**The Necessity of Leadership**

Leadership development will continue as the need for leadership is great (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Greenwald, 2010). Challenges such as globalization, international trade, new technologies, shifting economies, limited resources as well as the rapid-fire rate of change will continue to stretch and test organizations large and small. Social changes and political upheaval threaten businesses and leaders must adapt to new ways to
preserve their financial stability and grow their businesses with new opportunities for the future (Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bush, 2011; Zenger & Folkman, 2002).

Organizations with extraordinary leaders are a matter of record, some of which are illustrated in *Good to Great* (J. Collins, 2001) in which Collins researched multiple organizations to compile a list of 11 great companies. While studying the leaders of these 11 companies, Collins discovered that these leaders had similar traits and behaviors that he labeled “Level 5” leadership. He found that “every good-to-great company had Level 5 leadership during the pivotal transition years” (p. 39).

Similarly, Kotter (1996), known for his work on change, asserted that successful organizations must learn how to adapt to change if they are to remain viable in an unpredictable world of economic, political, and social unrest. Starting in the 1970’s an unprecedented increased rate of change tested the leadership ability in organizations as they faced changes such as relocation, downsizing, process re-engineering, mergers, acquisitions, or new technologies (Kotter, 1996; Leonard & Lang, 2010). These new changes and the advanced rate of speed with which they appeared, required strong, strategic, knowledgeable leaders who could guide organizations through the multitude of change-induced pitfalls. Kotter asserted that extraordinary leadership is the linchpin that will determine the success of any organizational change and said that “this process is never employed effectively unless it is driven by high-quality leadership, not just excellent management” (p. 20).

The belief that effective and knowledgeable leaders are essential to the health and growth of organizations is a widely-held belief regardless of industry, size, for profit or non-profit (Day, 2000; Dunham-Taylor, Fisher, & Kinion, 1993; Tirmizi, 2002). Extraordinary leaders establish
cultures that inspire employees by delivering consistent communication, building trust, and establishing a clear vision that generates excitement and creativity. Further, these leaders empower employees to do their work, collaborate in creative teams, share knowledge, and develop employees as leaders (Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Cogaltay, 2015). Great leaders build outstanding organizations (J. Collins, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Zenger & Folkman, 2002), which can benefit the social, political and economic health of our society.

A Leadership Crisis

There is evidence of a leadership crisis. Ashford and DeRue (2012) stated that “there is a leadership talent crisis brewing” (p. 146), and support for this statement came from the results of a world-wide survey that indicated “70% of North American employers experience a dearth of leadership talent” (p. 146). Further, the problem in Asia is worse with, “88% of organizations indicating concern about a looming shortage of leadership talent” (p. 146). Ashford and DeRue (2012) suggested one reason for this shortage might be that organizations make a critical mistake of confusing leadership with supervisory positions. In fact, the authors suggested that supervisors often do not exhibit leadership qualities and/or behaviors and this confusion between title, authority and leadership puts organizations at risk of failing to meet its goals. Another reason for the shortage of leadership may be due to employees relying on organizations for leadership development rather than taking responsibility to develop their own skills and careers (Ashford & DeRue, 2012).

Leonard and Lang (2010) offered another reason for the leadership crisis and cited that organizational leaders fail an estimated 40 percent of the time. They attributed this failure rate to a rapidly changing business environment in which leaders must possess a widening repertoire of skills and competencies to survive in an environment of limited time and resources. Worse yet,
Leonard and Lang (2010) cited a report by an outplacement firm that stated, “CEO failure rates doubled from 1999 to 2004 and then doubled again in 2005” (p. 226). They concluded that prospective leaders must be better learners and have access to improved leadership development with new tactics to better prepare them for a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, the leadership crisis is heightened by the rapidly increasing rate of retirement among baby boomers (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Evans, 2008; Killion, 2007). This demographic phenomenon, often referred to as the “pig-in-the-python” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 70) has had an impact on all organizations, government agencies and on society in general as a result of the largest “brain drain” (p. 73) to occur in history. In 2006, the oldest of the estimated 78 million boomers retired, and that exit is expected to last for 25 years with the end of the mass exodus culminating around 2030 (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008).

As a result of this a “call to action” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 74) has been made to organizations in the United States to address the looming labor shortage, which includes those in leadership positions. Further, Callanan and Greenhaus (2008) cited the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which reported that in 2000 the baby boomers were 48% of the workforce, but in only 10 years their numbers fell to roughly 20% of the workforce. The BLS projected that by 2020, approximately 30 million boomers will exit the workforce leaving a “Leadership Vacuum” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 73). The leadership crisis, fueled by the continuing retirement of many more leaders, further solidifies the need to research and implement proven leadership development strategies.

**Leadership Definitions Are Lacking**

The literature is rife with criticism of current leadership development. A predominant thread of the literature asserted that current approaches to leadership development do not work
and one reason suggested is the lack of an agreed upon definition of leadership from which leadership development can be built (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Beer et al., 2016; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Gallagher, 2017; Hedges, 2014; Rowland, 2016).

Many leadership scholars have cited the lack of a consistent and agreed upon definition of both leadership and leadership development as the root problem for leadership development success (Cogaltay, 2015; Day, 2000; Day & Harrison, 2007; Gehret, 2010; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Lynas, 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Senge et al., 1999; Washbush, 2005a). Indeed, there exists a wide array of definitions of leadership including: (a) “leadership has been traditionally conceptualized as an individual-level skill...a complex interaction between the designated leader and the social and organizational environment” (Day, 2000, p. 583); (b) “a set of processes or dynamics occurring among and between individuals, groups and organizations” (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003, p. 12); (c) a “social influence process by which an individual motivates followers to move towards a particular goal or mission” (Avolio & Lester, 2011, p. 236); and (d) “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Further, Northouse (2010) defined leadership as a process that involves influence, it occurs in groups, and it involves common goals (p. 2-3).

Notably, the above definitions start at the individual-level skill, and become more complex so as to include process, social interactions, groups, organizations, and goals. The variation in definition and complexity has not been settled with authority or consensus, and the definition of leadership remains unclear. Hartley & Hinksman (2003) explained why the definition of leadership is so important to the success of leadership development, “Unless there is a clear and agreed approach to the concept of leadership and an agreed framework, then
leadership development practices may be inappropriate for the kind of leaders which the organization is aiming for…” (p. 9).

The term leadership development also has a variety of definitions, from an approach that is (a) “oriented toward building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges (i.e., development)” (Day, 2000, p. 582), (b) to a process of “expanding the collective capacity of the organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003, p. 9), that includes (c) “every form of growth or stage of development in the life-cycle that promotes, encourages and assists the expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one's leadership potential and performance” (D. Collins, 2001, p. 44). This wide array of definitions of leadership development make it difficult to design an effective development plan with a specified goal.

**Significant Issues in Leadership Development**

The literature addressed a variety of issues that are either lacking or insufficient for successful leadership development. In addition to the deficits and failures, examples of successful leadership development are included. Other significant issues include a look at who should be developed as leaders and the time commitment essential for successful leadership development.

**Leadership Competencies**

The lack of a clear and agreed upon definition for both leadership and leadership development prompted Kutz (2004) to ask if there are universal leadership competencies. The literature included behaviors and skills typically associated with leadership, however the scholarly literature has not developed a sanctioned, complete list of leadership competencies.
Given the multitude of definitions for leadership and leadership development, it would follow that leadership competencies may too, be incomplete or inconsistent.

The question of universal leadership competencies is interesting in that without defining the competencies the ability to measure results for organizational leaders and developmental programs is limited, if not impossible (Kutz, 2004; Zenger & Folkman, 2002). Zenger and Folkman (2002) listed sixteen competencies that are divided into categories of (a) Character; (b) Personal Capability; (c) Interpersonal Skills; and (d) Leading Organizational Change. Though the literature discussed many behaviors and skills associated with leadership and leadership styles, additional discussions of universal competencies were not found during this review.

The issue of leadership competencies prompted several questions: if leadership competencies are absent, are they necessary? Should leaders be held to similar standards of competence much like doctors or engineers? And if so, how would these competencies be measured and evaluated? Zenger and Folkman (2002) argued that their list of competencies is a guide from which to begin building competency goals when developing leadership development programs. Defining leadership, leadership development and perhaps leadership competencies would be a starting point to improve the effectiveness of leadership development programs.

**Critiques of Leadership Development**

Allio (2005) said that leadership development programs do not work because they promote leadership literacy by teaching theory and principles, but that knowledge does not produce competent leaders. Further, he added doubt to the practice of leadership development entirely by stating, “Paradoxically, however, while leadership cannot be taught, leadership can be learned” (p.1071). In the context of this study, Allio’s statement leads to three important questions, the first of which addresses the focus of this study: If leadership cannot be taught, how
does one become a leader? Second, if leadership cannot be taught, should leadership development programs be offered? And finally, given the assertion that leadership development programs do not work, what is the reason for the failure? The literature offered a variety of reasons why leadership development does not work and the most salient are offered below.

The lack of empirical research is an oft cited reason for leadership development failure. Allio (2005) stated that “the academic community, unfortunately, has yet to contribute many new paradigms for leadership or useful models for teaching leadership” (p. 1075). Others agree that scholarly work has done little to connect leadership theory with actual methods and processes to use in leadership programs (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Additionally, critics pointed to poor quality in description, evaluation, and scope of the research studies (Abrell et al. 2011; Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training, 2012). Others referred to a gap in studies on topics such as long term development programs, or on connecting leadership theory with methods, and connecting developmental design with the organizational environment, goals and values (Abrell et al., 2011; Bennis & Thomas, 2004; D. Collins, 2001; Day, 2000; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Gehret, 2010; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Wahat et al., 2013).

The paucity of empirical evidence and the questionable quality of some studies (Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012) leaves organizations and leadership development practitioners alike, searching for effective content and methodology when designing leadership development programs. This means that without knowing what works in leadership development, organizations will continue to invest millions of dollars and significant time and resources on programs that may not yield valuable results (Abrell et al. 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008;
Additionally, the scholarly material that is available is frequently criticized as inconsistent in both methodology and context. Brungardt (1997) claimed that research has not contributed to a solution for teaching leadership development and pointed to how five different approaches to leadership development (trait, behavioral, situational, power-influence, and transformational) can cause confusion as each has its own distinct patterns, styles, and skills. Indeed, the vast array of leadership styles (transactional, transformational, servant, laissez faire, leader-member exchange, democratic, authoritarian, strategic, situational etc.) adds to the confusion of what defines leadership as well as how to train prospective leaders. International research by Bush & Glover (2004), discovered that the nature and content of leadership development is similar around the world, but they also stated there is a lack of an “appropriate blend of content and process for different needs and different stages of leadership” (p. 4).

Inconsistent scholarship is a result of varying and confusing developmental content. Some studies focused on roles, others focused on processes and skills, while other programs focused on leadership styles and behaviors (Pearce, 2007). To illustrate, one study of nurse manager leaders focused on planned change, communication, conflict, group dynamics, systems theory, and oppressed group behavior (Block & Manning, 2007) while a quantitative experimental study tested the development of transformational leadership by assessing participant progress in four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence; individual consideration; inspirational motivation; and intellectual stimulation as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Hassan, Fuwad, & Rauf, 2010; Parry & Sinha, 2005).
Criticism of inconsistency is often accompanied with a call for reform of leadership development (Beer et al., 2016; Block & Manning, 2007; Hutchinson, 2017; Kim & Mauborgne, 2014; Quatro et al., 2007; Spreitzer, 2006). Quatro et al. (2007) concurred with the criticism and called for reform in response to high profile news headlines of unscrupulous leaders. This proposed reform would be based on a holistic perspective for leadership development using the ACES model, which developed leaders in the analytical, conceptual, emotional, and spiritual realms of development. The authors called for reform based on the fact that, “we view the understanding of leadership and its requirements as a moving target that can change with time” (p. 430). Given the consistent criticism of overlap, change, and inconsistency, adding a new framework to the already confusing leadership developmental constructs, could add to the confusion rather than offer clarification.

Others have pointed to poor developmental design in leadership programs that have been in practice. Outdated development models continued to treat leadership in a traditional, command-and-control, hierarchical context (D. Collins, 2001; Kalman, 2012; Rowland, 2016; Wahat et al., 2013) that primarily used formal classroom training to educate participants in theory (Allio, 2005), and isolated their learning to the classroom away from the hands-on, day-to-day challenges of their organization. This method failed to prepare leaders who could sustain their organizations’ development and tackle the challenges of the future (Allio, 2005; Beer et al., 2016; Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training, 2012). However, critiques of leadership development studies also include suggestions for leadership development success.

**Suggestions for Leadership Development**

Suggestions for improving the developmental design and the quality of the leadership programs are many, but the most relevant are reviewed here. First, the literature said that
leadership development needs to change from formal, classroom training to developmental programs (D. Collins, 2001) that bridge the gap from theory and scientific evidence to hands-on practice (Day, 2000; Fernandez & Perry, 2016). Because leadership takes place in organizations, it is contextual (Allen & Hartman, 2008) and is a, “a complex interaction between the designated leader and the social and organizational environment” (Day, 2000, p. 583). Hutchinson (2017) suggested designing developmental programs with the 70-20-10 approach: 70% of the program should be on-the-job training, coaching, and mentoring and formal learning; 20% focused on developing a rigorous participant selection method; and 10% of the program connecting talent management with the leadership development program.

Birman et al. (2000) conducted a survey of leadership development programs for teachers that used “reform” activities including study groups, mentoring, and internships which proved successful in developing professional and leadership competencies. The study identified three structural features that resulted in the leadership development of the teachers: (a) form (use of the “reform” activities); (b) duration (number of hours spent on the activity and span of time of program); and (c) participation (groups of co-workers versus individual participation).

In the same year, Day (2000) published similar results after reviewing leadership development and said leadership has traditionally been viewed and taught as an individual practice. He stated that viewing leadership as an individual practice, “ignores 50 years of research showing leadership to be a complex interaction between the designated leader and the social and organizational environment” (p. 583). Indeed, studies showed that when developing leaders learn in active environments with others they know, the experience fosters support, networking and a shared professional culture (Birman et al. 2000).
A study of leadership development in Malaysian organizations (Wahat et al., 2013), found that leadership development is a lifelong process that starts from childhood and continues to the workplace fostered by experiential learning. The authors found that experiential learning curriculum should include a connection to the organization with discipline specific content and the use of methods that will connect leadership theory with the specific organizational environment. Others have suggested that organizations need to fully integrate their leadership program with the organization’s values, goals, culture, and specific industry (Amagoh, 2009; Beer et al., 2016; Gallagher, 2017). Further, many agreed that the best leadership development programs offered learning in the workplace which included on-the-job-training, Action Learning, and everyday work experiences (Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Hutchinson, 2017; Kutz, 2004; Leonard & Lang, 2010; McCall, 2004; McNamara et al., 2014; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Rowland, 2016). These methods “provide opportunities to learn from their work rather than taking them away from their work to learn” (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004, p. 26).

A lesser theme in the literature advocated for a shift of responsibility on to the organizations regarding their readiness, support, culture of learning, and their hierarchical structure to achieve successful leadership development. To that end, some called for organizations to transition from traditional hierarchical structures with individual leaders to new models of boundary-less organizations with teams whose members are interchangeable leaders depending on the challenge or initiative (Beer et al., 2016; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Hutchinson, 2017; Kalman, 2012; Wahat et al., 2013). This organizational restructuring would mean a shift in power from the individual to the team where interchangeable leadership would depend on specific situations or processes (Gallagher, 2017).
Further, organizational willingness to support new learning is essential. Beer et al. (2016) cited the seminal Ohio State Leadership studies that showed most of the participants in a development program had regressed to pre-training levels except those who worked for bosses who endorsed and practiced what was taught. Additionally, organizations need to have psychologically “safe” environments (Beer et al., 2016; Brown & Posner, 2001; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Rowland, 2016) to allow apprentice leaders experimentation with new skills in work related activities that are intended to benefit the organization, but may fail (Amagoh, 2009; Ashford et al., 2012; Cawthorn, 1996; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Westbrook (2012) advocated for the support of the staff by reducing workload and improving time availability, based on the fact that employees in today’s business environment are typically overworked with little time to spare. A culture of support also requires a shift in values that views leadership development as an investment in human and intellectual capital which increases the social capital for the organization (Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Day, 2000). Ultimately, successful leadership development requires an organizational awareness that “leadership development is not a program; it is an organizational commitment” (Block & Manning, 2007, p. 94).

Leadership Development Successes

While there are studies that offer criticism of current approaches to leadership development, there are also studies that report leadership development success. In an experimental study, Hassan et al., (2010) reported a “significant and positive effect” (p. 1) of motivation on transformational leadership development. Results showed a positive impact on the transformational behavior of the participants’ as well as positive satisfaction scores from the
participants’ employees. In addition, the training showed a positive relationship between pre-training motivation and the effectiveness of training.

Abrell et al., (2011) conducted a study of a transformational leadership development program in Germany that was evaluated at three, six, nine and 12 months after training was completed to give a more accurate report on the long-term effects of training. There were 25 participants in the program and the methods used in the study were group-based training, feedback, and peer coaching intervention. The results showed: (a) there were positive, long term results, but no change at the three-month follow-up; (b) participants’ transformational leadership (as assessed by their direct reports) improved at six months and later; and (c) participant leadership performance (as assessed by their supervisor) and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior (as assessed by their direct reports) improved over time. The study also found that key factors for achieving positive results with a transfer of knowledge and behavior change depended on: (a) the trainee; (b) the organizational environment; (c) the design of the program; (d) the ability to practice new behaviors; (e) the practice of receiving feedback; and (f) the length of time of the program.

Booz Allen wanted to improve their leadership pipeline and in so doing, created a new approach to development published in a case study (Hutchinson, 2017). They developed a 70-20-10 design model with 70% of the program dedicated to on-the-job experiences, coaching, mentoring and formal classes, 20% was dedicated to developing a stringent selection process, and 10% of the program was an initiative that connected talent management with the leadership development program. The results showed strong support and feedback (with 96% of participants responding “agree” or “strongly agree”) that the program was a "worthwhile
investment of time” (p. 112). Respondents also reported that the program expanded their networks with more senior leaders and helped to improve their strategic thinking skills.

Block & Manning (2007) reported on a study in a health care setting where 92 participants were trained in an eight-day certificate program that combined classroom instruction, experiential learning activities, case studies, self-assessment, practice skill development, and projects. Participants and their supervisors rated the program positively and participants reported a positive impact on their confidence, inclination to lead, awareness of when to lead, improved communication skills, problem solving, handling of conflict, and ability to lead change.

In a qualitative study conducted in Malaysia (Wahat et al., 2013), five top ranking managers from public, government and private organizations sought to explore the effect of experiential, informal and incidental learning on leadership development. The data produced three methods for effective leadership development: (a) the use of informal mentoring; (b) the use of reflection and observation; and (c) the use of challenging assignments. Further, participants shared that: (a) the most valuable lessons often came from on-the-job informal experiences; (b) it is crucial to connect activities of leadership with the organizational goals; and (c) leadership development is not just the responsibility of the individual or the organization, but rather is a combined effort between both the individual and the organization.

Indeed, McCall (2004) who has conducted many qualitative studies has advocated for experiential leadership development and stated, “the primary source of learning to lead, to the extent that leadership can be learned, is experience” (p. 127). McCall (2004) asserted that formal programs and classroom trainings are the least useful method to develop leaders and concurs with Allio (2005) who said while leadership cannot be taught, it can be learned. Results such as
these indicated that experiential learning is a strong method of leadership development (Allio, 2005; McCall, 2004; Wahat et al., 2013).

**Who Should be Developed as Leaders**

Another important thread of the literature raises the question, who should be developed as leaders? Interestingly, the literature seems to be split into different camps: those who believe organizations must carefully screen those whom they choose to participate in leadership programs (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Cawthon, 1996; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hutchinson, 2017; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012), and those who believe that leadership should be developed at every level (Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Bush, 2011; D. Collins, 2001; Day, 2000; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Raelin, 2004; Westbrook, 2012). Those who believed candidates should be carefully screened posited that organizations should develop a demanding screening process (Hutchinson, 2017) and candidates that are chosen should have strong motivation, a sense of morality, a positive attitude and potential for growth (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005).

Those who believed leadership development should be offered at every level of the organization often spoke from a systems perspective, with the idea that the entire organization can benefit from leadership development throughout the organization. (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Day, 2000; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Raelin, 2004). Additionally, those who advocated for leadership at all levels, believed in a fundamentally different view of organizations. Beer et al. (2016) claimed that organizational leaders still embrace a widely-held belief that organizations are “an aggregation of individuals” (p. 4) when in fact organizations are “systems of integrating elements…” (p. 5). This system of integrated elements includes the organizational structure, the processes, and the roles and responsibilities of the members. Beer et al. (2016)
emphasized that these elements drive organizational performance and it is the relationship between these elements that can either help or hinder behavior change within an organization.

Ashford and DeRue (2012) discussed leadership in terms of title versus the ability to influence (which is a skill that resides in employees at any level of the organization regardless of title). Brungardt (1997) stated that if leadership can be learned, then it can be taught, therefore, it is essential to tap the leadership abilities of everyone regardless of where they may work in the organization. Allied health professionals agreed and said, “intentional leadership assumes everyone has the ability to lead, at least circumstantially” (Kutz, 2004, p. 2) and therefore everyone could benefit from training in a foundational leadership development program.

Advocates of the Great Man Theory, however, rejected the idea that anyone can learn to be a leader and therefore advocated for rigorous selection methods because, “It seems obvious that humans cannot develop talents they do not have” (Cawthon, 1996, p. 2). “Leaders are born different from their followers. It is not simply a matter of learning to lead” (p. 3). Others added to the argument by declaring that character is the foundation for ethical leadership and therefore, emotional intelligence, morals and core traits of character, essential for successful leadership, cannot be learned (Allio, 2005).

Still others believed in a middle ground (Brungardt, 1996) where people can and should learn to be leaders, but still need to have the “raw materials” (“Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012, p. 33) necessary for successful leadership. Kutz (2004) conceded that some people are born with a natural ability to lead, but nonetheless, leadership skills can be learned and developed through experience. Avolio and Lester (2011) agreed stating, “leaders are born and made” (p. 230) and explained, “overall, some of our leadership potential appears to be encoded in our DNA or our personality. Yet a substantial amount of variance remains
unexplained, leaving open the possibility for leadership interventions that can make a positive
difference in the long-term potential of individuals” (p. 236).

Finally there are those who believed leaders are not born, but are made and become
leaders through life-long experiences that started in childhood and continued to mold and
develop the person throughout their lifetime (Bush & Glover, 2004; Murphy & Johnson, 2011;
Wahat et al., 2013). This line of research suggested that these experiences can come from formal
and informal learning, significant experiences, work experiences as well as significant people
that are influential in one’s life. Despite the controversy over who should be the leaders, there are
successful leadership development studies which lend confidence to the belief that leadership can
be learned.

**Leadership Development is a Process**

There is no predetermined timeline that can anticipate when one will become a leader as
developing leaders takes time (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Avolio & Lester
Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Solansky, 2010; Wahat et
al., 2013; Westbrook, 2012). Indeed, leadership development is a process that involves three
significant changes: a change in thinking; a change in behavior; and a change in identity (Allen
& Hartman, 2008; Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Avolio &
Lester, 2011; Birman et al., 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001; Pearce, 2007). While a change in
one’s thinking may take place in a flash, a change in behavior requires practice (Day et al.,
2014). Much like becoming a concert violinist, developing and fine-tuning leadership skills
requires practice, patience, and repetition.
Further, a time commitment from the organization is crucial for successful leadership development (Abrell et al., 2011; Amagoh, 2009; Collay, 2014; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; McCall, 2004; Westbrook, 2012). In a fast-paced culture with limited time and financial resources, organizations are often looking for short term training, stand-alone classes or workshops that are often deemed unsuccessful and wasteful (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). If organizations are ready and willing to develop their leaders, they must have an understanding of the time commitment they should be willing to invest, “The long term success of a leadership development initiative requires an organizational culture that considers developing future leaders as a long term strategic priority” (Block & Manning, 2007, p. 94).

Through the course of one’s career and leadership journey, leaders must participate in activities that continually develop their skills, but the development shouldn’t be haphazard or without a structure. Brungardt (1997) said that leadership development should involve activities that are ordered in a “hierarchical sequence” (p. 83) that develops the prospective leaders from the early stage of an apprentice to the seasoned professional leader. Additionally, learning to lead means learning how to behave differently which involves a change in ones’ psyche and this change happens over time through experience (Allio, 2005). Development is a process and research found that “it takes a minimum (not an average) of 10 years of intense effort to achieve expert performance” (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008, p. 23) in any field, including leadership.

Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro, and Reiter-Palmon (2000) cautioned that those who work to develop leaders should not fall into the trap of believing leadership development will just naturally happen the same way for everyone. Skill development is dependent on one’s ability to learn in their environment and is a function of individual ability. Avolio & Lester (2011) reported that 30% of one’s ability to lead is determined by genetics and the rest of one’s ability
resides in one’s goals, cognitive ability, developmental readiness, confidence, self-regulation, and motivation.

To further understand how vital skills are acquired over time, Mumford et al., (2000) conducted a study of army leaders that yielded important information regarding the progression of leadership development and the skill levels necessary to achieve the next level of leadership. In this study, Mumford et al. (2000) conducted a cross-sectional study among six different grade levels of U.S. Army officers and as the grade level increased, so too did the levels of knowledge, problem solving skills, systems level skills and social skills increase. Overall, the study showed that specific experiences resulted in higher functioning leadership skills. The kind of experiences that were developmentally beneficial to higher levels of leadership included: (a) problems with multiple components; (b) long-term planning; (c) unique and poorly defined problems; (d) diverse experiences; (e) autonomy; and (f) boundary spanning (p. 106). This is significant for those who are developing leaders past the apprenticeship stage to the next level of skill development.

Several important lessons in leadership development were discovered from this study: 1. experiences that are useful in one stage of development may not be useful later; 2. acquiring knowledge and skill mastery in early leadership development transforms to knowledge in higher levels of leadership skill development; 3. as leadership talent develops, leaders begin to apply principle-based knowledge along with the ability to apply complex thinking and creativity to solve difficult problems; and 4. senior leaders must be able to develop solutions to complex problems and assess the impact throughout the organization.

This study and others demonstrated that leadership development must be viewed as a process that involves increasingly complex skills. If this becomes an overriding principle of
leadership development, then training and development must be approached as a series of incrementally designed assignments and activities that take place over the course of years. The above discussed methods of development coupled with principles of effective design, will develop a foundation for effective in leadership development.

**Promising Methods of Leadership Development**

Much has been written about leadership development, the methods that work and those that appear least effective. This literature search discovered many developmental methods that have been used including formal classroom instruction.

**Formal Classroom Training**

For topics that need to be understood conceptually, the classroom is an excellent format. However, many sources have claimed that classroom training has mixed results at best, and most likely will never produce leaders because it cannot transfer the training content into significantly changed behavior (Allio, 2005; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Collay, 2014; Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2010; Gehret, 2010; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hedges, 2014; Kalman, 2012; Kutz, 2004; McCall, 2004; Quatro et al., 2007; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012; Rowland, 2016; Senge et al., 1999; Solansky, 2010). However, while there is a place for classroom training, it should not be used as a stand-alone method, and when it is used, it should be “strategically relevant, powerful, and well-timed (Quatro et al., 2007, p. 435). It is important to understand that classroom training has limits and cannot change our “psyches or conduct” (Allio, 2005, p. 1072). The commonly held belief is that leadership development must be contextual, so new skills and behaviors can the practiced on-site which in turn changes employees from the inside out.
Beer et al. (2016) posited that the classroom may indeed be best for use after one has experienced “immersion” (p. 8-9) in on-the-job challenges. In his example participants were eager to enroll in classroom training after experiencing a situation first-hand and where the new knowledge felt “relevant and useful” (p. 9). Thus, the most useful classroom training may be positioned after participants have experienced on-the-job activities (Bright & Crockett, 2012), where discussions can solidify their new knowledge and augment their understanding of leadership and leadership theory. Therefore, formal classroom education does offer several benefits for leadership development including: (a) the delivery of leadership literacy and theory; (b) an easy environment in which to set up classes for learners; and (c) economies of scale as classrooms can accommodate many participants and once content is developed, it can be reused (Fernandez & Perry, 2016).

This belief appears to be having an impact on how organizations are spending their development and training time. Training published its 2015 Training Industry Report (Staff, 2015) in which it reported that organizations used formal classrooms for approximately 46% of their training hours, which is down from 47% in 2014 and significantly down from 85% in 1995 (as reported in ASTD) (Day, 2000). Small companies used classroom training 54.6% of their training time, midsize companies used 43.4% of their training time in the classroom, while large companies used formal classroom training the least – only 37.4 % of the time (Staff, 2015).

Workplace Development

One of the most often reported methods for successful development was from workplace experience. Workplace experience can generally be divided into on-the-job training, Action Learning, and everyday work experiences.
**On-the-job training.** Day (2000) asserted that the way to understand leadership is to practice it within the context of the work. On-the-job training (OJT), sometimes referred to as work-based learning (Bush & Glover, 2004), or job experience and assignments (Kutz, 2004) is a phrase that has been used for years and generally refers to learning what is necessary for successful execution of the job. Sometimes, OJT may be as simple as an assignment intended to improve or increase skills, but there are other effective OJT methods that can develop leaders (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003). In fact, Allen and Hartman (2008) listed activities for leadership development through skill and competency building (p. 3-4) that included on-the-job activities. Some of the activities included: (a) just-in-time training, which is offered at the time knowledge is necessary and may be in the form of videos, classes, or webinars; (b) developmental assignments, which are intended to both teach and develop the individual and are easy to design and inexpensive to use; and (c) personal development plans in which the individual designs his or her training and the employee is ultimately responsible for the implementation.

Another OJT tactic included job enrichment plans in which the job is "enriched" by other responsibilities and the goal is for the individual to have more tasks, more control and a more meaningful job experience (Allen & Hartman, 2008). In addition, many organizations have used job rotation which is a planned development tool that moves people to different jobs within the organization to expose them to different environments, company sectors, and departments. The goal is to increase the connection between the business goals and strategies and the rising leader (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Quatro et al., 2007). Job rotation is a common practice used by industries including medicine, banking and manufacturing (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Amagoh, 2009; McCall et al., 1988).
Additionally, challenging or “stretch” assignments are used as a workplace tool to develop leaders. (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; McCall et al., 1988). Many leaders have suggested that it was through these work situations that they learned a great deal and developed invaluable leadership skills (Allio, 2005; Brown & Posner, 2001). Indeed, Ashford and DeRue (2012) stated that “over 70% of leadership development occurs as people go through the ups-and-downs of challenging, developmental experiences on the job” (p. 147).

However, some have criticized the lack of support for the employee when engaged in an OJT project. In addition, and depending on the organization, the experience may be harsh if the assignment is not successful. If failure is an outcome of the project, the participant may become defensive, may have lower job satisfaction and may not learn valuable lessons from the project in spite of its’ outcome (Amagoh, 2009; Beer et al., 2016; Birman et al., 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001; Bush & Glover, 2004; Day et al., 2014; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003).

**Action Learning.** Action learning is another valuable workplace development tool and is highly rated. Action learning is defined as “a process and tool that enable individuals and groups to learn while solving problems and implementing actions” (Marquardt & Banks, 2010, p. 160) and must be designed to have “deep learning and real action” (p. 159). Action learning is different from other on-the-job experiences in that the learning is focused on skills that are determined by the individuals, group members and/or managers of those participating in the project (Leonard & Lang, 2010). This is different than both classroom programs and workplace learning where the curriculum or learning outcome is determined by facilitators or supervisors.

In 2005, *Business Week* named action learning the fastest growing technique for developing leaders. Moreover, a 2009 survey conducted by the Corporate Executive Board, found that 77% of the respondents ranked action learning as a “top driver” for developing leaders

Action learning is a popular methodology among both organizations and their employees. Companies like to see results from development activities, and the employees like the active method of learning. Conger and Toegel (2003) stated that research revealed two important facts about adult learning that made this method so popular: (a) most adults enjoy learning what is necessary and relevant for them in the present; and (b) the techniques used in action learning enable adults to develop “complex skills such as leadership” (p. 334).

There are several advantages to action learning including that it is loosely structured and teams can either be assigned a problem or decide on a business problem that they want to address. Given the problem, each team member decides for him or herself which skills or behaviors he or she want to develop and what lessons he or she want to learn. For a project to be an action learning event, it should have the following features: (a) participants learn by doing; (b) it is a team project; (c) the project addresses an organizational problem; (d) the team solves the problem; and (e) the team recommendations are required and presented (Conger & Toegel, 2003; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

Action learning also offers flexibility in a participatory team environment and because it is employee directed, it offers flexibility in the direction of the project. A goal of action learning
is to have participants: (a) work independently on their organizations’ real problems; (b) become actively involved in decision making and problem solving in a team environment; and (c) develop solutions to the current problems. Action learning requires that the participants experience the crux of leadership by incorporating the essential skills of critical thinking, assessment, effective communication, follow-through, and problem solving.

Despite the many positives, some critics have claimed that action learning has not always been implemented in ways that are beneficial to the learner. Criticism included flaws in intent and design, and poor implementation (Conger & Toegel, 2003). The primary flaw in intent is viewing action learning as a one-time event rather than a process which may include repetition. Unfortunately, this is difficult to consistently implement in all environments especially in rapidly changing work environments. Another flaw in design is not affectively instituting feedback and reflection, both viewed as an integral step in incorporating new leadership behavior (Conger & Toegel, 2003).

However, research showed that action learning is a powerful developmental method that can be a win-win for both the organization and the employees. If facilitated correctly organizations could have a return on investment between 5 to 25 times the cost to implement a program (Marquardt & Banks, 2010), and employees who participate will become effective leaders for their organization.

**Day-to-day work experiences.** Many of the articles reviewed, agreed that the day-to-day experiences at work are the best way to develop leadership skills. Brown & Posner (2001) reported that people learned to lead from three methods; trial and error, observation of others, and education (p. 2) and people reported that 75% of their learning came from a combination of learning on-the-job and observing others (p. 3). Indeed, job assignments, stretch assignments,
knowledge of the organization and feedback from others (Allio, 2005), job rotation, job enrichment and enlargement, and personal development plans (Amagoh, 2009), allowing failure in supportive environments (Avolio & Lester, 2011), and learning from others in a professional environment (Birman et al., 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001) are all everyday work experiences that grow prospective leaders. These interactions teach the employee work skills while learning to work with coworkers (Brungardt, 1996) and adapting an “executive temperament, and personal awareness and discipline” (Brungardt, 1996, p. 86). McDermott et al. (2011) agreed and declared that “Self-awareness and self-regulated behaviors are believed to foster optimal leadership development” (McDermott et al., 2011, p. 360).

**Coaching and Mentoring**

Coaching and mentoring are often used interchangeably in leadership development, which can be confusing. However, further research yielded clearer definitions and explanations of both coaching and mentoring.

**Coaching.** “Coaching involves practical, goal-focused, forms of one-on-one learning and, ideally, behavior change” (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004, p. 25). Coaching involves a “formal one-on-one relationship” (Ely et al., 2010, p. 585) so that the coach and coachee can assess and understand his/her leadership tasks and challenges.

Results of coaching as a leadership developmental tool have often been positive but varied opinions exist. In an experiment designed to explore the effects of leadership coaching on goal setting, self-efficacy, and causal attribution, Moen & Federici (2012) found no evidence that coaching was an effective developmental tool. Similarly, Parry & Sinha (2005) did not find a benefit from coaching, but suggested that their small sample size in their study might have been a factor. Indeed, several articles acknowledged that though coaching enjoys a good deal of
positive praise, there is scant empirical evidence to prove its worth (Day, 2000; Fernandez & Perry, 2016).

Despite this, there is literature that suggests coaching is an effective developmental tool that strengthens the relationship between the coachee and his or her goals. (Amagoh, 2009; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Beer et al., 2016; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Bright & Crockett, 2012; Bush & Glover, 2004; Ely et al., 2010; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Solansky, 2010; Leading the leaders, 2007; Westbrook, 2012). Indeed, it is often believed that coaching helps executives become more effective leaders and can offer a substantial return on an organization’s investment (Bond & Naughton, 2011).

Further, leadership coaching offers organizations significant benefits that would not otherwise be available as coaching focuses on the needs of the individual and the unique contributions that the coachee brings to the organization. Trained coaches bring unique skills to the individual and organization, and the client–coach relationship is a confidential and highly regarded relationship (Ely et al., 2010). In addition, results from surveys indicated that organizations do not always support their leaders and coaching helps to fill that gap (Bond & Naughton, 2011). Coaching helps leaders and prospective leaders transfer learning from the classroom and apply it to the work place. Coaching can also help the participant enhance his or her skills through brainstorming, encouragement, and by asking powerful questions, which can prompt self-awareness, self-confidence, and motivation (Bond & Naughton, 2011).

**Mentoring.** Mentoring is different from coaching and several definitions of mentoring include: (a) “the matching of a novice with a more experienced person in the same role” (Solansky, 2010, p. 676); (b) “a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced member
(mentor) and a less experienced member (protégé) of the organization or profession” (Muir, 2014, p. 351); and (c) an “experienced senior co-workers who shared knowledge, skills and experiences to assist the pathway participant to develop leadership competencies in a challenging, but supportive way” (McNamara et al., 2014, p. 2539).

But much like coaching, the literature said there have been few empirical studies on mentoring (Allio, 2005; D. Collins, 2001; Day, 2000; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Kutz, 2004; Muir, 2014; Solansky, 2010). Despite that criticism, mentoring is also highly regarded and often cited as an effective technique for leadership development (Allio, 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Birman et al., 2000; D. Collins, 2001; Day, 2000; Gehret, 2010; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hutchinson, 2017; Kutz, 2004; McNamara et al., 2014; Messmer, 2003; Muir, 2014; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Solansky, 2010; Wahat et al., 2013). Muir’s study (2004), found mentoring to have numerous vital benefits including: (a) it improved the mentees desire for learning which in turn contributed to the individuals’ self-direction and personal growth; (b) it helped the mentees understand the goals and perspective of the organization; (c) it encouraged the mentees’ development of problem-centered learning; and (d) it helped the individual develop his or her identity as a leader.

Mentoring was viewed as an important benefit for not only the individual but for the organization. Allio (2005) reported that 70% of Fortune 500 companies offer mentoring programs. Moreover, because the mentor is usually a senior level person in the organization, the mentee can observe work and conversations at a different organizational level than normally available and can interact with senior level employees thereby increasing the opportunity to develop key relationships vertically throughout the organization (Muir, 2014). This close tie with a senior level mentor is a linchpin between the mentee and the organizational goals, strategies,
and directions. Further, in an age of tight budgets and increased workloads (Westbrook, 2012), mentoring provides an affordable tool to: (a) offer guidance about office culture; (b) how to advance within the organization; (c) improve the motivation and competency of the trainee, and (d) improve employee satisfaction and decrease employee turnover (Messmer, 2003).

Feedback

Feedback was frequently mentioned in the leadership development literature as a stand-alone developmental method and is often cited as an essential step because it offers the recipients the opportunity to receive information about their behavior and skills from an observer’s point of view (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Hutchinson, 2017; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Quatro et al., 2007; Solansky, 2010). However, if feedback is not properly facilitated as a conversation rather than a lecture, it can result in problems because the feedback can be ambiguous, the recipient may not understand the feedback, or the person may learn the wrong thing and become defensive. However, if properly structured and facilitated (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004) feedback can be an effective method for development by allowing one to improve or correct behaviors (Parry & Sinha, 2005).

Influential Experiences on Leadership Development

Life Experiences

This literature review found that life experiences are a critical factor in leadership development. In particular, experiences including formal and informal learning, unstructured work experiences, significant life experiences, as well as significant people who made an impact on one’s life, values, morals, decisions, and directions, can contribute to the course of one’s leadership journey. This is based on the idea that some experiences may be “trigger events”
(Avolio & Lester, 2011, p. 249; Toor & Ofori, 2008) that affected a person in such a way that they were bolstered and inspired, or were affected by a hardship or tragedy that ultimately affected their values and decisions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1997; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Wahat et al., 2013). In addition, childhood experiences must be considered because they can make a significant impact on leadership development.

**Childhood Experiences.** The first signs of leadership can begin as early as childhood (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1996; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Wahat et al., 2013) in that early experiences are thought to inspire and predict leadership potential that can be fully developed in adulthood. Brungardt (1997) said leadership, "is a continuous learning process that spans an entire lifetime; where knowledge and experience builds and allows for even more advanced learning and growth” (p. 83). Further, he shared that “family influences,” “treatment by parents,” and “parental standards” are antecedents of leadership development, and that children who were raised in homes with positive, socially and physically active parents, who had high academic expectations and a strong work ethic, were more likely to seek leadership positions.

In addition, Brungardt (1997) said that children were predisposed to leadership if they were (a) were inspired by positive role models such as parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors; (b) reared by fathers who were highly educated; and/or (c) raised by parents whose interactions were positive, but grounded in an authoritative parenting style. (Conversely, children whose parents were negative, punitive, overly-protective, indulgent, negligent, and authoritarian were less likely to become leaders.) Additionally, positive interactions that continued through higher education and into early adulthood were found to have a continued positive impact on leadership development (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1996).
Murphy and Johnson (2011) claimed that it is important to understand the “seeds” of leadership and when they are ready to be developed in children (Avolio & Lester, 2011), and Avolio & Lester (2011) advocated for developing young people for leadership before the “actual self” is developed. The “actual self” here refers to the self-identity that is developed from early childhood up through early adulthood. They argued that, much like the window of opportunity that is age dependent for children to easily learn a new language, so too is leadership a skill that is dependent on a crucial time for development because “it makes sense to start leadership development before one’s earliest actual self is formed” (Avolio & Lester, 2011, p. 227).

Further, Avolio and Lester (2012) suggested that current leadership development may be conducted in a time-frame that is developmentally too late, which could impede the future leaders’ ability to learn the skills necessary and adapt the associated leadership identity. However, once an individual decides to assume a leadership role, then the experiences that follow should motivate and strengthen the individual further (Avolio & Lester, 2011).

In a meta-analysis of leadership development interventions reported by Avolio and Lester (2011), leadership development methods had a stronger impact on younger people (22 years and younger) compared to older leaders 45 and over. Indeed, Zenger (2012) reported that our organizations wait too long to develop our leaders, as the average age of development (at the time of the report) in organizations was 42. Avolio and Lester (2011) suggested we should develop our young people as early as possible, provide them with both challenging situations and support should they fail at the tasks (p. 238). Indeed, Toor and Ofori, (2008) stated that “Childhood is the time when individuals construct their personal identity and implicit leadership constructs” (p. 224).
However, it must also be noted, that early studies lead to the belief that personalities do not change past 30, but recent research has revealed that personalities can continue to develop until age 50 and that continuous development throughout one’s lifetime is possible due to environment, contextual situations, and one’s DNA (Avolio & Lester, 2011). In view of the evidence, beginning leadership development at an early age would be practical as well as continuing development with developing leaders to further advance their leadership skills.

**Momentous Events.** Momentous events are referred to by various names. Bennis and Thomas (2004) referred to them as “crucible events” and defined them as, “transformative experience(s) through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity” (p. 63), while Avolio & Hannah, (2008) called similar experiences “trigger” events that cause “disequilibrium” and can be the result of a positive or negative incident which can promote leadership growth if the person is developmentally ready. Toor and Ofori (2008) labeled these events as “tipping points” or trigger events which can include “significant people” and “significant experiences” (p. 213) and Brown and Posner (2001) referred to them as “critical incidents” or trigger events (p. 2).

No matter the terminology, the experiences have the potential to spark one’s leadership development, changing its direction, or possibly even derailing it entirely. Toor and Ofori (2008) explained that significant events are impactful because leadership takes place in a social environment among other people and those who are leaders or would be leaders, are influenced by other people in social environments. Therefore, one’s leadership can be influenced by “significant individuals’ and “significant experiences” (p.213).

However, as McCall (2004) pointed out, we do not know how people learn from significant events, nor do we know why some take away a positive or motivating lesson, while
others do not. To help people navigate significant events, Toor and Ofori (2008) suggested that researchers develop a taxonomy of critical or trigger events to understand the stages of leadership development which would assist those who may be working through such an event (p. 214). We do know, however, that support systems such as coaching and mentoring can help people develop a new point of view by encouraging reflection. Indeed, reflection can direct the individual to learn from a significant experience and walk away having learned something positive (Avolio & Lester, 2011; McCall, 2004; Wahat et al., 2013). Avolio and Lester (2011), asserted that “reflection has always been an important part of this type of learning, and more recent research into the impact of momentous events upon leadership development suggests continuous opportunities for individual growth” (p. 248).

**Hardships.** Unlike momentous events, hardships are always negative, difficult situations or a trying span of time, and, though painful to endure, leaders frequently cited them as a time that prompted personal growth (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Brown & Posner, 2001; Brungardt, 1997; Kalman, 2012; McCall, 2004; Wahat et al., 2013). Hardships can be very powerful, and Olivares (2011) shared several stories of leaders who were inspired by difficult times including the experiences of Howard Shultz, Fidel Castro, President Bush, and Jack Welch. Accordingly, Avolio and Lester (2011) reported a qualitative study of 125 leaders who experienced hardships including discrimination, loss of a loved one, job loss and rejection. They found that participants generally believed that the crisis was a contributing factor to their leadership strength and success. Participants added that it was the hardship that tested their personal strength and prompted their resolve and challenged them to “review their businesses
more strategically, helped them to manage their moods and developed their ability to remain calm under great stress” (Wahat et al., 2013, p. 299).

**Areas of Agreement for Leadership Development**

Three significant intersections of agreement on the most effective leadership development methodology was discovered. First, there is consensus on using several methods of development rather than relying on one method or primarily on classroom training (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Amagoh, 2009; Block & Manning, 2007; Hassan et al., 2010; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Pearce, 2007; Rowland, 2016). Though formal classroom training should not be abandoned entirely, it should be viewed as an adjunct to experiential learning. The classroom is the appropriate environment to introduce leadership concepts and theory as well as an environment for support, discussion, and reflection (Beer et al., 2016) for employees after they have participated in workplace development.

A second area of agreement included the intentional design of experiential development to include and connect workplace learning with organizational goals and strategies in conjunction with leadership theory (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Beer et al., 2016; Birman et al., 2000; Brungardt, 1996; Bush & Glover, 2004; Solansky, 2010; Westbrook, 2012; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). The integration of leadership theory with the organization promotes critical thinking, problem solving skills, systems level thinking and social skills, which are all associated with senior level leadership and achieved through workplace experiences and education. Other methods of development may include journaling, service learning, individual development plans, recognition strategies, individual assessments, networking, and simulations (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Amagoh, 2009; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003).
The third area of agreement was that time is a critical factor in leadership development. As previously discussed, learning, and adopting new behaviors is a complex process that takes patience on the part of the organization as well as the employee, and requires practice, fine-tuning, and time.

Chapter Summary

The research began with an often cited criticism that leadership and leadership development lack agreed upon definitions. The literature claimed that without an agreed upon definition, it is difficult to know how to develop someone for a role that is not well defined (Cogaltay, 2015; Day, 2000; Day & Harrison, 2007; Gehret, 2010; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Lynas, 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Senge et al., 1999; Washbush, 2005). Another frequent criticism is the lack of empirical studies to support claims that leadership development has been successful. In fact, it is often stated that leadership development is failing (Allio, 2005; Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

The two most often cited reasons for leadership development failure were: (a) the lack of credible, well-designed academic studies; and (b) a disconnect between leadership theory and an established methodology to teach leadership (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). In addition, critics cited poor quality in the descriptions, evaluations, and scope of the studies, and too few longitudinal studies or studies that connect development with the organizational goals (Abrell et al., 2011; Bennis & Thomas, 2004; D. Collins, 2001; Day, 2000; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Gehret, 2010; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Wahat et al., 2013).
Along with the critiques of leadership development the research included suggestions for addressing the deficits, one of which was improving the design of developmental programs. Important design changes for developmental programs included: (a) less formal classroom time and more workplace hands-on learning; (b) connecting workplace learning with leadership theory and the goals of the organization; and (c) emphasizing the skills of working and leading in a social environment (Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Hutchinson, 2017; Kutz, 2004; Leonard & Lang, 2010; McCall, 2004; Mcnamara et al., 2014; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Rowland, 2016).

The literature also addressed the issue of who should be developed as leaders. Some believed leadership should be developed at all levels of the organization (Ashford et al. 2012; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Beer et al., 2016; Day, 2000; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Raelin, 2004) while others believed leadership cannot be taught because leaders are born. Another group believed that leaders are both born and made (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1997; Kutz, 2004; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012) and a last contingent believed that leaders are not born but are made through life-long experiences (Bush & Glover, 2004; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Wahat et al., 2013).

The research discussed many methods of developing leaders however, this review narrowed the scope to include only those that were deemed most effective to include: coaching and mentoring; feedback; action learning; on-the-job training; day-to-day workplace learning; and formal classroom training. Additionally, the research discussed the influence of one’s life experiences including childhood, momentous events, hardships and significant people in relation to the effect they had on leadership development.
This review also substantiated that leadership development is not a one-time event but rather a long-term process that involves many facets of the person (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Avolio & Lester 2011; Birman et al., 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001; Brungardt, 1997; Day, 2000; Day, 2014; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Solansky, 2010; Wahat et al., 2013; Westbrook, 2012).

The literature also offered agreement on several aspects of leadership development including that: (a) one method of leadership development is not adequate; (b) learning must take place in the context of the organization and in a social environment, connected to the organization’s goals and strategies; and (c) leadership development is a long-term process.

The information in this review has served as a solid foundation for this qualitative study. Given the scope of this review, the study was able to ask valuable questions to uncover affective methodologies, significant events, and influential people that contributed to the development of successful leaders.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how leaders develop. Though leadership development is a singular process, there are commonalities of experiences that may help to promote such development. Therefore, the central research question for this study is: How do leaders who have been in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years make meaning of their leadership development experiences?

Research Paradigms

A paradigm is a “worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts…” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). The paradigm guides the researcher’s approach and leads to the methods used in a study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). In this study, the guiding paradigm that directed the methodology was the social constructivism (Creswell, 2007) paradigm, which is often used in qualitative studies.

The social constructivism paradigm offered the researcher the opportunity to understand the world in which participants live and work through careful listening and asking open ended questions (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Equally important is what social constructivism does not do; it does not impose structural laws or theories to drive the data-collection process; rather, it uses an inductive process and relies on the shared views and meanings of the participant’s life events to gather data and drive results. These subjective interpretations of the social world in which the participants interact, are derived from meaning-making that may have been previously understood or discovered during the interviews (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005).
Both the social constructivism paradigm and the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005), rely on the interpretation of the researcher in concert with the participant, as the researcher guides the participant during the interview, and together they “create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). It is this dynamic between researcher and participant that mandates the constructivist researcher to remain fully cognizant of his or her views, personal experiences, culture and history which have an impact on how he or she interprets what the participant is sharing about his/her interpretation of social experiences.

Research Design

Given the varied reviews of leadership development success, this study sought to understand what existing leaders report as being important to their development as leaders. Though one’s leadership journey is a solo event, the leadership literature states that there are similarities to be shared (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Birman, et al., 2000; Danzig, 1997; Wahat et al., 2013). Some commonalities may be as general as workplace experiences, while other critical events may be as specific as a traumatic event in one’s life. The goal of this study was to discover and understand the critical events and people that influenced a developing leader, along with the meaning-making the participant attributed to the event or influential person that had an impact on his or her development as a leader. Thus, a qualitative study was well suited to provide the platform for discovering this information.

In this qualitative study, through the use of interviews, “rich and interesting data” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 66) were gathered from participants. This design was appropriate, if not necessitated by the social constructivism paradigm, and allowed for the problem of leadership development to be explored through inductive analysis, where the data are gathered, and the
patterns of experiences are built from the “bottom-up” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). In this qualitative study, data were gathered through conversations with participants who explained their life events and interpretation through meaning-making, which otherwise could not be gathered through quantitative methods.

A qualitative study is used when a “problem or issue needs to be explored” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39) with a group of people who experienced the situation in question (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Additionally, qualitative studies are especially useful when it is necessary to understand “complex, detailed” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40) information, as qualitative studies are designed to yield descriptions about specific experiences and the subsequent impact the experience had on the participants. Through the participants’ words, the researcher gathered detailed information of the “participant’s lifeworld” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 53) and attempted to establish an “insider’s perspective” (p. 53). Indeed, leadership development is a complex endeavor that can benefit from the in-depth information discovered in a qualitative study.

Additionally, a qualitative study allowed the researcher to approach the problem in a holistic manner (Creswell, 2007). This is an important consideration for a study in leadership development, as a qualitative study allowed the researcher to follow threads of content that may have contributed to a much larger picture for successful leadership development. The leadership literature provided invaluable historical progress of leadership development, its successes, and failures: Equally valuable was the unique information uncovered from participants’ first-hand experiences, opinions and meanings that can only be discovered during a qualitative study. Data gathered from a qualitative study may be new information, not previously considered germane for the problem or situation, which in turn may be key in developing new ways to treat long-term problems such as leadership development.
Research Approach

This qualitative study used an Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) methodology. Phenomenology is intended to delve into the details of a participant’s significant events in his/her life, and the interpretive function is required to make sense of the participant’s experiences and his/her subsequent meaning-making.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

An IPA approach has two requirements: to “understand and ‘give voice’ to the concerns of participants” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 102); and to interpret and make sense of the data gathered (Larkin et al., 2006). In the book, Nursing Research: A qualitative perspective (2001), Oiler-Boyd, succinctly explained the phenomenological process (as cited in Donalek, 2004):

Perception is original awareness of the appearance of phenomena in experience. It is defined as access to truth, the foundation of all knowledge. Perception gives one access to experience of the world as it is given prior to any analysis of it. Phenomenology recognizes that meanings are given in perception and modified in analysis. (pp. 96-97)

IPA has a “theoretical commitment” (Smith & Osborn, p. 54) to the participant and assumes a tight link between what the participant says and what he or she is thinking and feeling emotionally. However, this connection can be fragile or fragmented; the participant may struggle to find the right words to describe the incident, may have difficulty expressing the meaning of the event, or the participant may not want to divulge personal information (Smith & Osborn, 2008). When issues such as these happen during an interview, the researcher uses interpretation to overcome or account for these situations.
Further, IPA acknowledges that the only data that can be gathered are what is shared by the participant, and this information is a second-hand account of what is remembered (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the compilation of data is never a first-hand account of an event, so the researcher must construct a “coherent, third-person, psychologically informed description” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104), which is as close to the participant’s meaning as possible. Given this, it is clear that the IPA methodology of data collection will never be perfect or complete (Larkin et al., 2006); however, if the researcher can strive to understand the world of the participant in a “sensitive and responsive” (p. 110) manner, then a third-person account can yield an accurate image of the participant as he or she presents one’s self to the world. To ensure a true IPA methodology, the IPA researcher must commit to the actions of “exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means by which our participants make sense of their experiences” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 110). This information gives rise to the imminent need for interpretation in the IPA.

**Interpretation and Hermeneutics.** Interpretation is an essential tenet of IPA methodology and therefore includes hermeneutics, which is the theory of interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA assumes that people naturally look for meaning in the events and experiences of their lives (Smith et al., 2009) and, when offering information about their life events will often attempt to understand what the issue means on a deeper level. According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA combines “empathic hermeneutics” with “questioning hermeneutics” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53), which guided the researcher to empathize with the participant in an effort to understand the issue from the participant’s point of view. The questioning hermeneutics required the researcher to interpret meanings about the situation or participant through questions asked during the research analysis.
In addition, IPA takes place in an “interpretation loop” or a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009) process. Prior to the interview, the researcher examined her biases, history, culture, and world experiences that she brought to the study. Because these world experiences can never be deleted, they influenced the perspective from which the researcher approached the study and guided the direction of the study through the questions asked of the participant. The participant, in turn, interpreted his/her experiences in response to, and along with, the researcher’s direction, questions, and comments. Finally, the researcher interpreted again, by using the questioning hermeneutics, and interpreted the findings of the study. An IPA required that the researcher objectively assessed the interpretations made during all parts of the study: prior to the interview, during the interview, and when interpreting the final results of the study (Donalek, 2004; Jones, 2001; Ponterotto, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008, Smith et al., 2009).

Idiography. In addition to interpretation and hermeneutics, idiography is the third guiding component of an IPA study (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography is concerned with “the particular” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29) as presented from two perspectives. First, an idiography is concerned with the particular details one describes who has experienced the phenomenon being studied. Second, idiography allows for examination of the particular way in which the phenomenon is experienced and understood from a participant’s individual context or environment (Smith et al., 2009).

This phenomenological study interviewed seven leaders who have each experienced a leadership journey and have held leadership positions for at least 10 years. Though each participant experienced leadership development over the course of years, each did so within different environments and professions. Each person experienced different details and had
unique perspectives from within his/her environment, and their experiences and perspectives may be applicable to the phenomenon of leadership development.

Therefore, idiography encouraged the examination of particular and unique details and experiences of each participant to contribute to a generalized phenomenon. In this phenomenological study, before general claims can be made about the journey of leadership development for most people, the details of each individual’s experiences were gathered and validated as pertinent to the phenomenon of leadership development.

The Role of the Researcher. During an IPA study, the researcher had two roles: to get close to the participant to discover his/her point of view and world experiences; and to interpret the data (Larkin et al., 2006). To achieve both requirements, the researcher had to become immersed in the participant’s world, as observation is not enough (Smith et al., 2009). The role of the researcher during the interview was critical, as the researcher became an “active co-participant” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 64) by carefully listening and following important and possibly unexpected threads in the interview to uncover data that may have not been anticipated. Further, the researcher sought to uncover the participant’s meaning-making by asking powerful questions to prompt revelations and new thinking. “Successful interviewing requires engagement and sensitivity” (Donalek, 2004, p. 516) on the part of the researcher. During the interview, the researcher explored the participants’ significant events and their meaning-making, so that along with the participant, the researcher began to understand the meaning of the event.

Further, given the researcher’s history, thoughts, beliefs, values, and assumptions, her self-knowledge was a critical piece of the study. Though one can never fully know the depth of one’s own preconceptions, the researcher engaged in “bracketing” or the mental practice of putting aside “the taken-for-granted” world (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13), which encouraged the
researcher to enter the conscious world of the participant. Rowlands (2013) stated, “Acts of consciousness include things such as seeing (and perceiving more generally), thinking, remembering, desiring, imagining, emoting, anticipating, dreading, and so on” (p. 522). Though the researcher’s preconceptions were temporarily bracketed, they were available to the researcher throughout the study, especially for in-depth questioning during the interviews and during interpretation. Through the process of “reduction” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 14) the researcher adjusted her perceptions to see things in a new light; either seeing a broader perspective or a narrower focus especially when engaged in meaning-making discussions with the participants.

Additionally, the researcher’s beliefs, history and preconceptions were critical to the phenomenological study. Indeed, Donalek (2004) asserted that a true phenomenological study must include the researcher's beliefs in the analysis and stated that, “The researcher's thoughts, responses, and decision-making process should be acknowledged and explicated throughout the entire research process” (p. 516). IPA methodology required that the researcher balance multiple abilities, i.e., to conduct a pertinent interview, to empathize, to listen actively, to bracket preconceptions, to adjust perceptions when necessary, and to incorporate her worldviews when interpreting the data and meaning-making gathered during the interviews (Donalek, 2004; Jones, 2001; Maxwell, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

**Influential Phenomenology Theorists.** Phenomenology is “a philosophical approach to the study of experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11) and has a history dating back to the nineteenth century. Several influential theorists exist in the development of phenomenology, but the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre are especially relevant to this study.

**Edmund Husserl.** Franz Brentano (1838–1917) and Carl Stumpf (1848–1936) pioneered phenomenology, which grew out of a branch of philosophy dedicated to understanding human
existence. Husserl (1859–1938), a student of Brentano, led a second phase of phenomenology, sometimes called the “German phase” (Jones, 2001). Husserl believed that if a person could accurately understand the essential qualities of an experience, then his/her understanding could help others who experienced similar situations. Further, Husserl believed that to truly experience something, one must turn away from everyday experiences and look inside to develop the perception of these experiences and become conscious of them, rather than take them for granted as just an everyday experience.

Husserl suggested using “reflection” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12) as a method to experience the consciousness necessary for true understanding of an event. Additionally, he introduced the term “intentionality” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13) as a mental state or attitude to adopt when one is exploring the object (event or experience) of one’s consciousness. Indeed, it is Husserl’s “phenomenological method” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13) that used the tactic of intentional reflection which is at the core of the meaning-making conversations and questions that take place between the participant and researcher during an IPA interview.

**Martin Heidegger.** Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) also an influential theorist during the same period, advanced phenomenology to include ontology (Jones, 2001), a philosophical approach to the “nature of reality” (Creswell, 2007, p. 248), which seeks to answer the question, “When is something real?” (p. 248). Additionally, Heidegger developed hermeneutics (Jones, 2001), and questioned if knowledge can exist outside of an “interpretive stance” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

In an important departure from Husserl, Heidegger introduced the word “Dasein,” literally translated as “there-being” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16), which explains Heidegger’s belief that the human experience is rooted in the world with “things, people, relationships and
language” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16). This is an important turn in phenomenology in that
Heidegger sees Dasein as a universally experienced, constant condition of human existence, as
people are immersed in the world, and human consciousness is formed within their worldly
perspective. This worldly experience, connects all humans, as we all share commonalities and
this view is compatible with the social constructivism paradigm of this study. Thus, the concept
of hermeneutics and the practice of interpretation are possible, as everyone shares certain
worldly connections that are universally understood.

Jean-Paul Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre, the third of three significant theorists for this study,
added a new dimension to phenomenology. Sartre developed his philosophy over the course of
three stages: first, he began with a morbid period; then he advanced a second more academic
period which had less skepticism; and finally he developed a third phase, which concentrated on
phenomenology and ontology along with facets of Marxism (Jones, 2001). During this final
phase, Sartre proposed the idea of psychoanalytic existentialism, an important step and one that
is fundamental to the social constructivism paradigm of this study.

Existential psychoanalysis “emphasizes human existence as characterized by thinking
(reflection), freedom, choice and human responsibility” (Jones, 2001, p. 368). This phase of
Sartre’s philosophy asserted that people naturally seek meaning to their existence, and this
process is “action-oriented, meaning-making, self-conscious which engages with the world we
inhabit” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). Indeed, Sartre’s addition to phenomenology is a logical next-
step launched from the works of Husserl and Heidegger and successfully brings together a
complementary set of actions to achieve meaning-making.

Fundamental to this study is Sartre’s assertion that the human journey is about
developing oneself, and that development is dependent on one’s position in the world, the actions
and choices that are made, one’s social environment and individual history. Despite the freedom one may have, it is within the person’s social context that determines his/her development. It is Sartre’s belief that the human experience is “more about becoming than being” (Smith et al., p. 20) and becoming is at the crux of this study, as this study investigated how people became leaders.

Indeed, the IPA methodology is well suited for this study. Through the use of interpretation, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA encouraged the development of an in-depth picture of leadership development for each of the participants. This picture included details of situations, actions and reactions, thoughts and behaviors followed by the meaning-making for these situations which contributed to the leadership development of the participants. The use of IPA did not restrict participants in choosing answers from previously ordained choices, nor did it presuppose the experiences, impact or meaning-making that are responsible for leadership development. Indeed, IPA allowed for the discovery of new and previously unknown and unacknowledged situations and events or actions that may be added to the existing body of knowledge of how people become leaders.

Participants

An IPA study required that participants have experience with a particular situation or phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). To achieve this requirement, the study had a purposive participant sample rather than a randomly selected group of participants. The purposive sample of participants were selected based on their experience because “they ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). This study recruited community and organizational leaders who have worked to influence people to achieve their organizations’ goals.
In addition, the purposive population can be homogenous in that they should all have had experience with and/or an understanding of the research question (Smith et al., 2009). Indeed, a purposive, homogenous sample of leaders with progressive leadership responsibility was recruited for this study.

**Sample population**

In addition to a purposive, homogenous sample, this study’s sample was a criterion and convenience sample (Creswell, 2007). The participants were a criterion sample, as they all experienced leadership development. To determine participants for the criterion sample, the researcher screened for participants with leadership titles and a minimum of 10 years’ experience in leadership positions. Further, the researcher chose the definition of leadership by Northouse (2010) to further guide the decision-making process; leadership “is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 2). Therefore, all of the participants had progressively increased their leadership responsibilities with supervisory, managerial, and leadership experience relevant to this definition and the functioning of their organization.

The second consideration for a sample was convenience, as participants in this study are leaders in a region in and around a small northeastern tri-city area. The area was once the home of IBM’s development and manufacturing, and was the economic engine that supported a middle-class lifestyle for the region. However, the 1980’s brought a down-turn in IBM’s profitability and over the course of a decade, IBM left the area along with many smaller support businesses and industries. The result was a devastating downturn of the upstate New York region economy. Today the area continues to struggle, but has found some economic relief with the
growth of “Eds and Meds”; an expanding, competitive, nationally-ranked state university and the regional expansion of a growing health care system.

Despite the economy in the region the researcher was able to recruit well-qualified participants who held leadership titles of president, vice president, chief executive officer, director, assemblywoman, and county executive. Further, the researcher sought to include participants from different industries and included participants from manufacturing/exporting, technology-based, systems-solutions/manufacturing, health care, state and local government and academia. All participants are residents of the researcher’s wider community and were available to the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Choosing to recruit participants who possess advanced leadership titles and who have held leadership positions over the course of at least 10 years increased the possibility of uncovering extensive developmental experiences, significant stories, and meaning-making.

**Sample Size**

Seven participants were interviewed for this study. During each interview, the researcher accomplished an “in-depth engagement” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 51) and achieved a “detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence” (p. 51) of leadership development experiences.

**Recruitment and Access**

For this study, the researcher recruited the participants through an introductory letter followed up with confirming telephone calls and/or emails. The researcher did not personally know five of the seven participants, as they were recruited from community organizations or government positions. Two of the participants were known personally to the researcher: one had previously worked within the same organization with the researcher; the other participant was a
casual acquaintance introduced to the researcher over twenty years ago. All interviews were conducted at the participant’s professional offices, which was at the discretion of each participant. A $25 gift coupon was offered to thank each participant for his/her time, but three participants either refused to accept the coupon or donated it to charity.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected by the researcher in individual interviews. During the confidential interview, all comments during the participant interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Audio for each interview was recorded on the researcher’s Android smart-phone and computer. Once each interview was complete, the recordings were uploaded to Temi.com, a transcription service that ensures confidentiality and protection of data: “When you upload files to Temi, they are securely stored and transmitted using TLS 1.2 encryption, the highest level of security available. Files are transcribed by machines and are never seen by a human. Other Temi users can’t see your files unless you share links to your Temi transcripts” (Kenny, 2018).

The average length of each interview was 60 minutes, and there were no unforeseen problems or situations that required a second meeting.

**Confidentiality of Data and Data Storage**

All participants were assigned pseudonyms and referred to by pseudonyms throughout the study. In addition, all data were stored on the researcher’s computer, on two external drives and on Google Drive and Dropbox. Data were and continue to be protected as the researcher’s computer, and external drives are password protected. After the study was completed, written, submitted, and approved, all data, both written notes and computer files, were destroyed or
deleted. Further, all participant release forms are stored in the researcher’s fire-proof, home safe for three years, after which time, they will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

Once data were recorded, they were sent to the transcription service, Temi.com. The researcher has experience with in-depth interviewing as a leadership coach (certified by George Washington University, Graduate School of Organizational Sciences) and as a writer, and producer of corporate video productions (trained in a master’s program at Syracuse University, Newhouse School of Communication: TV, Radio, and Film). In the past, the researcher gathered in-depth data from content experts, recorded on audio/visual equipment, then transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interview content by hand. Given that experience, a computer program was not used for coding the data in this study. The researcher coded all of the data by hand after employing the Six Steps of data analysis, as described below.

Qualitative studies are intended to collect data “in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37) and subsequently offer a report that included a “complex description and interpretation of the problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Analyzing the data gathered from seven participants proved to be a daunting task. To that end, this researcher employed the guidelines offered in six steps of data analysis (Smith et al., 2009) as follows:

- **Step 1:** The first task for the IPA researcher was to become immersed in the data to assume a focus on the participant. Multiple readings of the interview transcript were advised, as a first read-through of the data was overwhelming. Repeated readings allowed the researcher to become more familiar with the flow of the interview, the participant, his or her issues, thoughts, feelings, and subtle meanings that may not have been succinctly articulated. It was also during
this first phase of reviewing the transcript that the researcher began to make notes about first impressions of the interview.

- **Step 2:** The second level of analysis examined the details of the interview and it is recommended that the analyst begin notetaking. Rules for this step are not required but developing a “comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83) was required. During this step, the researcher began to compile a “descriptive core of comments” (p. 83), which closely reflected the participant’s meaning. Further, making note of the things that were important to the participant allowed the researcher to begin to see connections and relationships in the data. At this early stage of notetaking, referencing people, places, and items of importance to the participant as well as making notes of words or phrases that the participant used helped to build the foundation for the later stages of analysis. In addition to these descriptive and linguistic comments, conceptual comments that have an interpretive focus were recorded. At this stage of data analysis, the researcher began to reflect on her own personal experiences to further understand and interpret the participant’s world.

- **Step 3:** The third level began the interpretive phase of analyzing the data, as the researcher began to develop “emergent themes” through closer examination of the compiled notes (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). At this point the researcher moved from the “particulars to general levels of abstraction” (Creswell, 2007, p. 46). This step required that the researcher no longer concentrated on the details of the transcript but made an “analytic shift” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91) to working with the notes. This step assumed confidence in the notes from the exploratory stage, so the development of emergent themes accurately reflected the participant’s concerns.
This step also included dissection, chunking, and reordering of the notes from the transcript (Smith et al., 2009) which allowed the researcher to connect relationships, patterns, and thoughts that were expressed throughout the interview to develop into emergent themes.

- **Step 4:** This step included the search for the connections among the emergent themes that have developed. This is the step of analysis where the researcher discovered the critical themes, how they connected with other themes, and what was discarded. The researcher used multiple techniques to accomplish an organization or pattern that felt true to the issues critical to the participant.

- **Step 5:** Once emergent themes were arranged in terms of relationship and/or patterns, the researcher moved to the transcript of the next participant starting again with Step one. The challenge in Step five was to treat the transcript data from the new participant with fresh eyes. IPA required that the analyst bracket the ideas and emergent themes from the past participant as much as possible, to stay true to the idiographic commitment of IPA, and to examine the particulars of each participant. The researcher repeated step one through four for each of the participants to allow emergent themes to come forward.

- **Step 6:** This last step of analysis was the final plateau, where all emergent themes from all of the participants in the study were analyzed through step five. Now they were broadly examined to discover the patterns that existed among all of the cases. Upon completion of this final organization of themes, a master table of superordinate and subordinate themes were developed for the IPA study (Smith et al., 2009).

Once the superordinate themes were established, the researcher was well prepared to begin the analysis of connections, relationships, and patterns, which is a “slow, step-by-step process for the particular to the more holistic” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 104). It is during this phase
that the researcher looked for multiple levels of interpretation. Indeed, interpretation sometimes began on a superordinate level and worked down to include specific language used in the interview, and sometimes the analysis started on a micro level and connected “the part back to the whole” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 105). It is after this thorough analysis and interpretation were accomplished that the final report was generated.

These six steps of analysis guided the researcher from the initial data-gathering phase through to the abstract dimensions by looking for patterns across multiple participants. According to Creswell (2007), Smith & Osborn (2007), and Smith et al. (2009), the goal of the IPA is to mine rich, detailed data that accurately represents the world and experiences of the participant.

**Trustworthiness**

The attitude of one or some of the participants may have been a threat to this study but did not prove to be a challenge because obtaining rich, thick descriptions was accomplished, as all of the participants were positive, forth-coming and generous with detailed and in-depth information.

Issues that presented the greatest threat to trustworthiness included researcher bias and familiarity. However, only two of the participants were known personally by the researcher, and the last contact with them was several years ago. In addition, the researcher did not have previous information regarding the topic of the study, so all of the information shared by the participants was new information for the researcher.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Protection of human subjects was and continues to be accomplished through: (a) exclusive use of the researcher’s Northeastern University’s email account for communication
with the participants (as prescribed by IRB regulations); (b) all of the locations for the interviews were chosen by the participants; (c) all participant names are held confidential by using pseudonyms; (d) securing all data in password-protected accounts; and (d) only contracting with Temi.com, which is bound to stated standards of confidentiality.

This study required that participants talk about their leadership development, which did not present a threat to participants’ physical or emotional safety. All of the participants willingly agreed to finish the participant interview.

All seven participants signed consent forms prior to this study, as required by Northeastern University and the IRB. The researcher’s IRB application was approved and met all specifications, as outlined via Northeastern University and the IRB, as supervised and advised by Kate Skophammer, IRB coordinator, *College of Professional Studies.*
CHAPTER 4: Findings

This chapter reviewed the findings gathered during semi-structured interviews with seven leaders in a small tri-city area in upstate New York. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenology study was to discover the significant situations, people, or events that participants identified as momentous or having contributed to their leadership development. Further, this study sought to explore the meaning making that participants ascribed to specific factors or situations that influenced their leadership development. The guiding research question of this study is: How do leaders who have been in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years make-meaning of their leadership development experiences?

Participant Profiles

The participants in this study are leaders who had progressive leadership experience and, though a purposive participant sample was used, participants were recruited from various disciplines and industries which included health care, international manufacturing, politics and government, higher education, and manufacturing. Additionally, the sample included four men, three women, six of whom were white and one participant was African American. Following is a brief biography of each participant’s expertise and background.

Participant: Raye. Raye was the youngest and only daughter born into a family of four children. Raye and her brothers were raised with very high values and expectations and had “to be the best that we could be…very good at sports, very humble.” Her father said he didn’t have “average children” and they were encouraged to do excellent work “because that's what you're supposed to do, not for anybody to tell you ‘thank you.’” Because she was the youngest and only daughter, she found herself often competing for position and inclusion with her brothers and the neighborhood kids. Her father bought fuel for the Department of Defense and they lived abroad
on military bases. During her teen years, Raye had a rocky relationship with her mother who was a busy mom, a community activist, a social worker on the military bases, and an active member of her international sorority.

Professionally, Raye worked in progressively challenging positions in several stateside community colleges. In 2004, Raye joined a team to launch the American University of Kuwait (AUK) and became the founding Chief Student Affairs Officer. Soon thereafter, the Chief Academic Officer passed away and Raye assumed both roles for the first year and a half of its’ inception. She stayed with AUK for 13 years and subsequently returned to the U.S. where she is currently serving as Vice President for Student Development and Chief Diversity Officer at a community college in Upstate New York.

**Participant: Don.** Don’s role model was his dad who as school board president would often share with the family “what was going on in the school board.” Being exposed to those issues and overhearing calls from complaining constituents was Don’s “first foray into politics” and prepared him for some of the challenges he would later experience in his own political life. Later as a teen, Don worked as a lead camp counselor and was the captain of his sports teams. He also encountered some tough lessons from the man who coached him in both baseball and basketball.

Don’s first professional position was to serve as a teacher in a private boarding school serving at-risk youth. Later, he was assigned to lead the middle states reaccreditation process and then moved on to be Director of College Counseling in the admissions program. Subsequently, he joined a family planning program as the Director of Public Communication for South Central New York during which time he also ran for his first political office as a county legislator (part-time position) and won. In 2016, Don ran for and won the County Executive position and is now
leading a 2,000 person county administration with a $370 million budget with 30 plus
departments. Don’s biggest stressor and personal challenge is the urgency of trying to
accomplishing his goals for the county during his four-year term.

**Participant: Mark.** Mark is the second and youngest son in a family from a small village
in upstate New York. In the neighborhood, he was often discounted and ignored for being the
youngest, but once Mark got to Cornell he was able to shed the neighborhood status for one of a
bright industrial engineering student. After graduation, Mark worked with his dad in his GMC
truck dealership for a couple of years, but that didn’t work because admittedly, Mark doesn’t like
to be told what to do. However, Mark had his eye on a way of making money that he would
enjoy, “I thought I could start a saw-mill and make my living by buying and sawing lumber and
then selling lumber…I just started this as a hobby.”

Mark started with an antique mill as only a part-time operation. He was a hands-on, front-
line head sawyer and maintenance man, who ascended to be president of an east coast, multi-
location organization that sources hardwood, cuts, and kiln dries lumber. The business that
started as a hobby turned into a major hardwood international exporter, shipping hardwood to
China, Canada, Europe, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico. As the business grew,
Mark traveled extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe visiting saw-mills around the world to
become an acknowledged resource for the saw-mill industry. Mark has served on several boards
of directors of regional loggers associations and national hardwood manufacturing associations
and is currently phasing out of his saw-mill as he prepares for retirement.

**Participant: Matthew.** Matthew had a “Normal Rockwell” upbringing. His childhood
and teen years were an American classic; he went to elementary school in a three-room school
house, was the teacher’s pet and was chosen to do special tasks. Matthew worked on the middle
school newspaper, freshman party committee, the AV club, key club, prom committee among other activities and not surprisingly he was also identified by his peers as the one to organize school and social events. However, Matthew didn’t see himself as a leader; he saw himself as “kind of a nerdy, semi-nerdy, semi athletic, middle-of-the-road, typical kid.” In addition, Matthew has had a long-standing habit of asking questions, as his neighbor would refer to him as “the why kid.”

Matthew’s college years were no different; he was active in both academics and in student life. However, Matthew was quick to say that his leadership trajectory was possible due to two important factors; several key academic mentors in conjunction with the development he experienced while participating in co-curricular activities. These two factors guided him to a career in academia, starting in student affairs as activity director and then, through a series of moves and promotions, Matthew became the president of a community college in Wyoming and is currently serving as president of a community college in upstate New York.

Participant: Rose. Rose was the last child born to a 31 year-old mother and a 46 year-old father who had not planned on having another child later in life. Unfortunately, it was her mother who died when Rose was only 10, leaving her with a father who “wasn’t really interested in parenting a second child to adulthood alone.” Additionally, Rose’s older half-brother, 24 years her senior, was “insanely jealous” of her. Rose feared her father “was going to die” so she asked him to make a plan for her “because my biggest fear is that I would go to my brother.” Rose’s dad did raise her, but was sure to instill in her the need for a college education and the ability to be self-reliant because, “his experience with marriage was not positive.”

Rose’s experience with loss and the subsequent lessons from her father thrust her on a course of self-reliance and early leadership. Her leadership ability was quickly tapped during her
first job as an analyst, and it continued through every position she held. She became a vice president at 32 and progressed through a variety of health-care positions in both secular and faith-based institutions in different areas of the country. Recently, she was a vice president of strategy in a health-care system in upstate New York for 10 years, and is now the Service Line Strategy Officer in another health care organization in the upstate, New York market.

Participant: Elaine. Elaine was born to supportive, but over-protective and somewhat controlling parents who had, “very little tolerance for questioning the way things were done.” Stifling her natural curiosity and independent thinking from such an early age may have resulted in her adulthood struggle to overcome her shyness as she had to, “work very hard to just open my mouth in public.” But it was her passion and frustration at seeing injustice in the mental health system, the lack of an effective response from the state government and a local company that was responsible for a toxic plume that caused childhood cancer, and other social injustices that prompted Elaine to “find her voice.”

Elaine had worked on several political campaigns, and after seeing some of the candidates fall short of communicating an effective message, Elaine used her frustration to work through her fears and finally run for office herself. Though she experienced a couple defeats, her first political win was for a county legislature position and then, in 2004, she ran for New York State Assembly and won. Elaine remains in that position and is a passionate advocate for her constituents.

Participant: Ed. Ed was born to a farm family and ended up working for a U.S. based company that delivers advanced technological solutions for Amazon. Ed’s family owned and operated an apple farm in upstate New York, and, even though he was youngest, he was assigned to work in the family fruit stand doing what a nine- or ten-year-old bright child could do – run
the cash register, while the two older boys did the heavy lifting and other chores. After college, Ed’s career began in a manufacturing company in Syracuse, New York, where he developed compressor products and was promoted to his first managerial/leadership position.

Subsequently, he went to Boston to complete a dual master’s degree and was offered a position with a semi-conductor automation company that did business with big chip companies around the world. It was while working at this company that Ed was exposed to working internationally, where he spent significant time doing business in Japan, Taiwan, China, Korea and Singapore. These experiences offered Ed a new level of leadership development because, “each one of those pieces of travel forced me, or allowed me, to open my perspective and understanding of human nature and how different people in different cultures deal with challenges.” Leveraging that international experience, Ed has relocated back to upstate New York, where he is Chief Executive Officer at a U.S.-based, Japanese-owned subsidiary, that delivers “handling solutions” on a global basis with estimated annual sales of $750 million.

Analysis of the Data

An analysis of the data resulted in eight superordinate themes and three subordinate themes that were viewed as significant events or experiences or a personal mindset or paradigm, that contributed to, or impacted the leadership development of the participants. The eight superordinate themes and three subordinate themes are compiled below in Table 1 to indicate which participant indicated whether or not the theme was deemed impactful to his or her leadership development. Superordinate Theme Seven represented the participant’s change in thinking, while the three subordinate themes reflected a change of thinking in regard to leadership practices. Following Table 1, will be a discussion of each of the superordinate and accompanying subordinate themes that emerged from participant interviews.
Table 1. Superordinate Themes Subordinate Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Raye</th>
<th>Don</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Elaine</th>
<th>Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I don’t/didn’t think of myself as a leader.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Significant childhood experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experiencing hardships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Influential people</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Seeks development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Had hands-on experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Acquires and accepts new thoughts and/or perspectives (personally)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<th>Subordinate Themes</th>
<th>Raye</th>
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<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Elaine</th>
<th>Ed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7A: Responsibility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>7B: Teamwork</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7C: Buy-in</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Has passion for one's industry/project</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Superordinate Theme One: I do not or did not think of myself as a leader.** This theme unexpectedly emerged when participants were asked to reflect on when they first thought of themselves as a leader and the hesitance to self-identify as a leader was expressed by Raye, Don, Mark, Matthew and Elaine. Raye and Mark stated this belief in unequivocal language, while Don, Matthew, and Elaine hesitated to assume the title of leader. Raye first expressed this theme clearly:

> What first popped into my mind is ‘leader’ is your word, it's not mine. I'm in this role because I love it and I love the opportunity to be able to impact lives with a group of
people that I hope, want to impact lives in a positive manner too. I just get to sit in this frame because I’ve made a conscious decision to take responsibility, good, bad or indifferent, to take responsibility for our actions. And if that's the definition of leadership then, okay, but that's somebody else's word.

When Don was asked when he first thought of himself as a leader, he struggled with the answer, “That's a good question. I don't know if I've ever thought about that…I guess it depends on what you define as a leader.” After consideration, Don identified the behavior that he believed to be the determining factor for his title as leader:

I would probably say the first time that I really started to define myself as a leader was when I got elected as a county legislator… I really started to think of myself as more in a leadership role when people started to ask for my input.

When Mark was asked the same question, he echoed a similar sentiment:

I've never really thought about that– myself as a leader– even though I've led people.

Yea, I guess I'm a leader, but I don't picture myself as a leader of the company, president of the company, and I've never actively thought ‘boy you know, I'm a leader of people’. I never have, never have. Now that you mention it, I guess I am.

In response to the same question, Matthew and Elaine also expressed similar thoughts. Matthew explained that his peers would often pick him to organize social events. It was that experience that he identified as a possible first-time leadership position but added, “Oddly, I didn't conceive of myself, really conceive of myself that way [as a leader].”

Elaine’s debilitating shyness kept her in the shadows for a significant period of time before she gathered up her courage to step into leadership. Her shyness impacted her identity as a leader:
I pretty much forced myself through it… So I have become more comfortable with the idea of being a community leader, but really I was just setting out to be a community advocate. Like I came into it against my own better judgment.

Only Rose and Ed easily identified themselves as leaders. When Rose was asked when she first thought of herself as a leader said, “Well, I've been a leader for a long time whether I had a title or not.” In response to the same question, Ed recalled that it was when he was given responsibility for a project, that he first began to think of himself as a leader. However, an unexpected response came from five of the participants who did not perceive themselves leaders, not only in the past, but even now.

**Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development.** In exploring the impact of childhood experiences, all seven participants spoke about significant experiences that affected them and influenced their leadership development. Elaine and Rose experienced difficult lessons from family that would have long-lasting effects on their lives. Elaine was held back by her family dynamics, and though her parents were supportive in many ways, she attributed their controlling parenting style to her excessive shyness:

I’ll boil it down for you. [There are] two tracks in my development. One is supportive parents in terms of you can be whatever you want to be and we'll support you to do that. Fine. And I really appreciated that. On the other hand, two parents who were overly protective…too overly protective. I'm not sure the word authoritarian is the right word, but very little tolerance for questioning the way things were done, so I wasn't really encouraged to question things, speak up about things. So a lot of that shyness, I believe, comes from being stifled in terms of independent thinking. Whenever I asked, ‘why are
we doing it this way? ‘Because this is the way we do it.’ So you get that over a number of years and you get used to just not challenging anything.

In addition to excessive shyness, Elaine become extremely self-conscious which negatively impacted her self-confidence, “I used to be worried about what people would think of how I looked and how I sounded and how I was dressed…I used to think, why am I sitting at the head of the table?” These self-doubts subsided over time, but it took experience and success to finally overcome them. Elaine has now been in public life since 1999 having first served on the county legislature, followed by being elected to the state assembly in 2004. Through those years she has worked to overcome her shyness and build her confidence:

So success certainly has given me a level of confidence that is only increasing as I've gotten in the middle of my work. It's really a good feeling…That was the big challenge for me-to break out of that.

Like Elaine, Rose’s family experience was life changing, however Rose experienced what some might view as a traumatic incident as she lost her mom when she was a child. Rose explained the impact that losing her mother had on her young life:

I lost my mother at age 10 and my father wasn't really interested in parenting a second child to adulthood alone…in the world I lived in, it set me apart from the other kids. I suddenly knew I had a mother [that was] 41 and a father [that was] 56, and the 56-year-old is still alive. Instead, the youngest parent died and so it made the oldest parent a real risk.

The death of her mom prompted Rose to begin actively making plans for her life as she was now keenly aware of the impact of life and death on her future:
I remember telling my father I was afraid he was going to die and we had to have a plan for me and I wanted to know where I was going because my biggest fear is that I would go to my brother who was insanely jealous of this second child, even though there was a 24-year gap. And I wanted to know that wasn't gonna happen.

Much like Elaine who saw her family influence in two tracks of development, Rose had two tracks in that she experienced “hurt and pain,” but was also taught to be self-sufficient because her father, “wanted to have his own life and that necessarily meant that I had to have my own life.” Her dad provided for her materially, but left her to navigate the emotional pain of loss and self-sufficiency:

I had to have my own life and once I understood that without it being hurtful and, and it took a while to understand that, but once I did, those things allow you to let go of some of the hurt and pain that disables other people. I wasn't looking for somebody else to say I was okay. I learned that I needed to generate some of that myself. Maybe not all of it, but some of it.

Not only did she have to learn to take care of her own emotional health, Rose’s dad stressed that she needed to be financially independent, “He said to me, ‘You need to be able to financially take care of yourself.’ And his experience with marriage was not positive, so you can't rely on that and you need to be able to take care of yourself.” Rose summarized how those experiences contributed to her leadership skills, “And so, I became reliable because I was relying on myself. And I think some of that plays into the level of confidence I have…That's another in-charge way of thinking.”

In addition to the lessons he taught her about self-sufficiency and financial independence, Rose also saw her father as a business role model, “He always wanted to be a builder and at 43,
dropped everything and opened up his own company and ended up providing opportunities of work for others in his family.” Rose viewed this move as “brave and kind of courageous...So my father was a leader.”

Raye’s childhood offered very different lessons. Rather than lessons of death and early planning, she learned from fierce competition along with high parental standards and values that were stressed by her dad:

My father said he didn't have average children so we weren't allowed to bring in C grades...Just pushing you know, my brothers and I have to be the best that we could be. But also to be you know, very good at sports, very humble. You do work and you do work well, because that's what you're supposed to do— not for anybody to tell you ‘thank you,’ or to pat you on your back.

Further, Raye was the youngest and only daughter and had to compete with her brothers as well as with the other boys in the neighborhood. The competition with her older brothers and neighbor kids coupled with the expectation to be above average taught her how to “hold your own. And you have to not let them push you aside, so you just have to really kind of step up.” The benefits of being raised to have this competitive nature were identified early as Raye was “usually selected as team captain” and by the time she entered eighth grade her teacher “took me under her wing when I was playing sports...she told me that she wanted me to run for class president, school president.” Upon reflection, Raye could see that this is when others began to identify her as a leader.

Raye spoke about the people who had influenced her as a child starting with her eighth grade teacher and her father who was a strong influence. In contrast, Raye had a contentious relationship with her mother, “After I stopped taking ballet, I think my relationship with my
mother went downhill,” but as an adult Raye says, “As I look back on it, she was a consummate leader.” Raye explains, “But my mother was the wife. And my mother was a career woman, and she was also a community activist, she was a psychiatric social worker, and she always made dinner for us. She was truly a community activist.” Raye admitted that “I didn't really have an appreciation for all that my mother did until I was about 25…And then, you know, I spent years trying to be just like my mother.”

Much like Raye, Don didn’t appreciate the lessons he learned from a demanding man who coached him in both basketball and baseball, until later in his political life:

He was just one of those tough coaches, really tough coaches… I mean I was kicked out of practices for running the play wrong. And he was just extremely demanding. He was not what you would call a feel good coach or anything like that. He was the kind of coach that you knew that when you did something wrong he was going to tell you about it.

But now, Don can acknowledge the importance the lessons from that coach would have on his current leadership position, “I didn't know it then, but he was very, very demanding and he was very instrumental in my life because first of all I had to work for everything that I got.”

Currently as the county executive, Don is in a position where criticism is a way of life. He credits his experiences with this coach as one of the best lessons in learning how to respond to criticism:

But I really think what he really taught me was that you had to respond to act accurately to criticism…not immediately react to it. And I think having a coach like that taught me to keep my mouth shut and be very selective in what I say.

Don also spoke of his dad, who was his first role model, first as a father, and then as a politician, “Certainly my dad was a role model…and what he did at our house and raising me as a dad, that was a very meaningful experience.”
Ed developed confidence from an early age being raised as the youngest son in a farm family. He explained the impact of working in the family’s apple farm as a child:

All sorts of things need to be done to run a business and there’s only so many hands to do things. So at a very young age I was given different responsibilities. We had a farm stand and I was given the responsibility of running the cash register when I was probably only maybe nine or ten years old…So this was a good fit for me, but it's that kind of confidence I think, that helps the development.

Two of the participants, Elaine and Mark, spoke of being held back in their childhood and that once they were able to go out on their own, they were able to do what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. Elaine was held back by her shyness, but it was Mark’s birth order that made a difference to his status in the family, “I think as a child, you know, second, my brother was older, a year older than me and he was an A personality. My brother was always a leader in my family.” Mark’s status in the neighborhood was equally affected by his birth order as well as his physical size, “I was held back as a kid because I was the smallest… I was kind of held back because everyone was older me than me.” But once Mark got away from home and went to college, he found his footing and his drive:

So I wasn't the leader then. Then I got to college, and man once I got to where I could have my own business, yes, [I] took the reins and ran with it…When the opportunity came, I went—seriously! But I was not the leader I guess in high school.

Unlike Mark, Matthew spoke of his positive early school experiences and how they helped to boost his confidence for leadership as he progressed through grade school and middle school. Matthew explained that he was the “teacher's pet growing up… even though I was not a top academic student.” In spite of his average academic ability, he was given assignments and
encouraged to participate in many activities. Matthew connected the outcome of participating in co-curricular activities, to his ability to lead in his adult career:

I did think about how my career got going because of all the co-curricular stuff I was involved in…because of those teachers K through 12. All of those co-curricular experiences were a great education for me, – applying my classroom studies to real life stuff. I just did on my own at that point, cause I just kept doing what I'd always done in K through 8.

Upon reflection, all of the participants were able to recall childhood experiences, positive or negative, and directly connected the lessons from those experiences to their present success as a leader.

Superordinate Theme Three: Experiencing hardships can be an important factor in one’s leadership development. All seven participants spoke of hardships that impacted their development as a leader. Three of the seven leaders – Mark, Matthew, and Raye spoke of business hardships, while Don, Elaine, Ed, and Rose spoke of family hardships.

Mark spoke often and surprisingly positive about the impact of encountering hardships: “Well, like I said crisis creates opportunity. Best thing that ever happened to us in our life. I hate to say it. Crisis creates opportunity.” Mark started a very small, antiquated saw-mill in the mid 1970’s but in 1978, the old mill burned down:

We only ran seven, eight months a year…We were having fun without the fire, we would have probably continued to do that. So crisis created an opportunity. We had to rebuild, we got bigger, had no insurance, so we lost everything.

With the help of Mark’s partner, who had banking knowledge, they were able to put together an application for a business loan through the SBA “and because of our college
education, we were able to write that, you know, one inch thick application. That got us going.”

They were able to grow the business until again, in 2014 they experienced another fire:

Now, I think we were at a sweetheart moment, – everything was going so well. So we went from [where we were] in 2014. [We] had an old mill that was 100 percent paid for. Our debt wasn't that great. We had to put on more debt. Production went up, but now we needed more logs. So we built this great mill.

But fires were not their only challenge; economic recessions threatened the very future of the mill:

‘81, ‘82 was a recession. It was not good times… barely hung on. Thought of closing the mill and doing something else with the building…wasn't making any money, maybe a thousand bucks a year maybe two…Interest rates 20 percent, we had loans so it was almost a disaster.

At the time of the interview, Mark and the mill were on the brink of another serious economic hardship as the lumber industry is heavily dependent on trade with China, a major importer of American hardwood:

What happens in Washington is going to have a big impact. Big impact. If this tariff… if China retaliates with a tariff on lumber…I don't think we're going to be able to absorb what China does. Not easily. If China comes up with a 20 percent tariff … It's going to be a disaster… Yeah, bad, bad, bad. This is a big deal.

But after discussing leadership and the inevitability of crisis, Mark reflected on the issue of hardships and the differences between how people handle them:

There's always going to be a crisis. There's always going to be a challenge. Yeah. I don't care who we are, where we are. That's part of the game of being a manager; there's going
to be a challenge, and how do you look at it? Some people see something that's a roadblock and others say, ‘okay, let me at it. I want to solve that problem. I can do that.’

In *Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one's leadership development*, Raye shared how her family experience of being the youngest girl, experiencing intense competition and working to high standards taught her to “step up.” She remembered this lesson during a dramatic work hardship that would tax her professionally for almost two years. In 2004, while in Kuwait working as the founding Chief Student Affairs Officer for the American University of Kuwait (AUK) the Chief Academic Officer passed away unexpectedly, prompting Raye to step up:

- Instead of scrambling, you know, I was like, okay, I'll step into the role. Student affairs and academic affairs even though, the overall mission is the same, it's different and it requires different tactics… it required more strategic thinking…and I had to have a foothold remaining in my other role. So I had to not be worried about working tirelessly.

- At that time, AUK was only in their second year of operation and Raye and her team worked hard to keep AUK afloat. “It was a lot…a pretty tough year, tough, tough year and half or so.” Raye reflected on her thinking that kept her motivated and committed during such a difficult time:

  - I mean, mind you, we made it... but that took a lot, took a lot out of me and made me dig deeper because I go back to why are you doing this if you think this is all about you? You don't have to be here. We're not drafting you. So you know, this is the mission and this is what we have to do.

- Matthew experienced a lay off that took him by surprise and challenged his career that had been easily advancing up to this point. He was working in academia during a difficult
recession, and the governor comforted the citizens of Maine by stating that the economy was fine. However, in a matter of days, the governor laid off 200 administrative employees across the University of Maine system. Matthew had only been employed there two years as one of two people charged with developing a television-based, distance-learning network for the state.

Planning on permanent residence in Maine for the remainder of his career, Matthew had purchased a condominium, but now the lay-off necessitated a job search, “I spent six months unemployed looking for a job because of the recession, no one was hiring. So that was a tremendous learning experience. And very, very hard on every part of my being.” Matthew changed his tactics and started sending out resumes around the country because he thought he would “find a job in a month... So I married my wife, and left for Florida a month later…I ended up at Nova Southeastern University, which was the granddaddy of all distance-learning universities.”

In addition to the family hardship Rose experienced from the loss of her mom, Rose experienced family hardships during the adoption of her two children:

   We went through an adoption trial, took two years to get through…had to live with really almost unbearable uncertainty for a long time. And that certainly stretched my tolerance for uncertainty. You can live with – I'm living proof – you can live with a lot of uncertainty and live well…You know, but there is something about a moment or circumstances that raises people up.

   Additionally, the health of her children presented serious problems as, “one child has had mental health problems with bipolar illness. The other [child] lost all of her hair at age 14 because she has an autoimmune disease which changed the trajectory of her high school experience.”
While Ed was in college, his father suffered a heart attack which caused uncertainty for him, his family, and the health of the family’s apple business. Ed was a freshman in college at the time and, “one of the questions was what was going to happen to the family business and should I stay in college or should I come back and, you know, take a much more active role in the family business.” As it turned out Ed did not need to quit college because, “my father pushed me to stay in college, of course.” But, Ed shared:

The process of realizing that there's some responsibility that you have being part of the family and part of this business that's allowing you to go to college. So it changes your perspective about what your responsibilities are and maybe what is important and what isn't important.”

Ed’s experience, much like Matthew’s was scary at the time and taught him valuable lessons, but they were situations that were rather quickly resolved. However, Don experienced a family hardship that would give him great insight into issues that he would later have to deal with in his political career. In or about 2010, Don found out his brother and sister-in-law were active heroin addicts and had stolen all of Don’s wife’s jewelry. Don had to press charges and his brother went to jail. Don explained, “It was really shocking…besides all the family issues that came out as a result of it…the relationship I had with him, the jewelry was not really the big thing.”

Aside from the family issues which was “a crazy story and very intense story,” Don learned lessons and gained insight into an unknown world that would impact his ability to lead a county which was also struggling with the same addiction:

I wouldn't have understood the challenges and all the problems…the effects of why people do it… I mean just having your own brother and your sister-in-law, you know,
right into it. So from addiction to incarceration to the legal process, to the drug court to
treatment, to employment and family issues and everything in between. Where the system
works, where it doesn't work. I had a really good idea…everybody has a different story
about it, but I had a definitely different perspective than had I not had a family member,
very close family member, go through that.

Much like Mark, who said ‘crisis creates opportunity,’ Don admitted that in spite of the
difficulty for him and his family, “That was probably the best example of an event that happened
to me that got me to really understand that particular issue…But I think that at least in this
county, I think we're making some progress with that.”

Similar to having had impactful childhood experiences, dealing with hardships and
learning from them, emerged as a powerful theme for successful leadership development that
was shared by all of the participants.

**Superordinate Theme Four: Influential people contribute to one’s leadership
development.** This theme resulted from discussions in which all of the participants
acknowledged people who had a substantial influence on their leadership development. The
impact of the influential people on the participants’ leadership development were rooted either in
childhood experiences or in adulthood work experiences, however, the impact of influential
people on one’s childhood was discussed previously in *Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood
experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development.* Following is the data
gathered regarding the information shared about influential people from adult work experiences.

Matthew and Don were the only two participants who had experienced working with
either mentors or a coach. Matthew had several mentors throughout his career who had similar
experiences and could shepherd him through his transitions and challenges. Matthew kept in
touch with several of his mentors and shared an example of a person he met while a student in community college:

He's a good friend and mentor to this very day. He was the director of student activities at the time, and later became vice president and dean of students and acting president. He's still a friend and mentor to this day and he's the one that really got me into the student development profession, which was basically most of the first half of my career…I think that's a critical dynamic for people who want to be good leaders.

When Ed first became a vice president at the semi-conductor company, he was given a professional development coach. He reflected on his experiences while working with the coach and his response to the feedback, “I think it was useful to create self-awareness, to have almost a mirror reflecting back upon you around what you do and how it affects others, and what other people are hearing you say or are interpreting.”

In spite of the positive lessons Ed took away from professional coaching, it didn’t come without some discomfort as Ed found it surprising to hear how others might interpret his words and actions:

I think it's always difficult to hear that kind of feedback. I don't think it was as difficult as it was surprising for me [about] the way you say things in your body language and you're unaware of things that you do that either put people at ease or make them very nervous, make them feel confident or somehow demean them.

Don, Mark, Elaine and Rose all had positive experiences with co-workers who influenced their development. Don shared that he has “an executive staff that I bounce a lot of my thoughts off of” and he appreciates their special talents, as he credits Colleen as “the conscience of the administration” because she keeps him on track when he is at risk of compromising too much.
His chief of staff, Haley, is “just one of those natural-born leaders that she’s really good at figuring out how we get from point A to point B.” Don concluded that successful leadership is a team effort, “So part of being a leader is making sure you have the right people in place and then trusting that those people are going to get in and do a good job, but also do what your agenda is.”

Much like Don’s sentiment about his staff, Mark’s first comment about leadership was in reference to his team, “I think one of the keys to become a leader, you need to surround yourself with good people.” And Mark’s team has been very important as his partner, Stash, had “knowledge in banking and knowing some bankers…we would get some loans through the SBA …because of his knowledge of how banking worked.” Several years later, when Mark wanted to expand they hired Tom who, “had the attributes of what I thought would be a leader.” Later, Mark hired Bruce to run the mill, “I had to delegate it to a person that I felt was an A personality and someone that I thought was also a leader and give him the reigns.”

As an assemblywoman, Elaine benefits from the support of other women in the assembly. “[It is beneficial] having peers who can share their own experiences with that. We have a very supportive group of women legislators.” But she would not be working in New York State government, without having had the chance meeting with a person who inspired her to finally run for office. At Cornell University she saw Bobby Kennedy give a speech for an hour and a half on environmental issues. His voice was raw and he could barely speak. She was amazed that he had the stamina to continue and wanted to know how he did it, so she approached him and asked him that very question. He looked down at her and said, “Well, it’s because I’m pissed off. And I said, ‘Wow! I'm pissed off too.’ And he said, ‘Well, why don't you do something about it?’ I said, I think I'm going to do just that.”
In only her second job, Rose was lucky enough to work for someone who offered her crucial feedback that she was smart enough to heed. She reported to a man who was the director of special studies over the mental health center and also a psychologist. He noticed two things that he believed Rose needed to address. The first was that she would often come to a conclusion in meetings long before the rest of the team and she would try to “push the conclusion.” He told her, “That puts you in a position of shutting down everybody else's attempt at problem solving,” and she would need to find a way to hold back. Rose shared her response to that insightful feedback, “I thought that was critical as I look back on it and [it changed] my whole approach in groups where I was way out here and they weren't quite with me.”

The second thing he told her was “Someone like you is going to be prone to getting defensive.” He advised Rose to identify when she was getting defensive and told her she needed, “an intervening strategy.” Rose admitted that she could:

feel it physically…and so I would use that as a trigger and instead of speaking, my one command to myself was ‘shut up’. And the more times out of ten that I could do that, the more effective my role. I would say those two things critically influenced [my]success.

Later on, Rose would work for a CEO and it was important for her to, “see someone who was a good listener, soft spoken, not command and control run an entire health system, and I think that had a lot of influence on me.”

However, not all influential people have been positive role models or inspiring leaders, and sometimes people are influenced by those whom they believe to be poor leaders. Raye, Rose and Matthew had experiences with poor, uninspiring leaders that had lasting effects on their own leadership.
Raye explained that having bosses who were bad leaders was “just as educational as somebody who took me under their wing and was a good mentor to me.” When she worked with a “bad leader” she felt responsibility to the team. “I have always tried to make up for it, particularly if it was somebody above me, so it wouldn't be so damaging to the rest of the environment. And that is very exhausting.”

Raye shared an experience in which she had a disagreement with the president of AUK over whether or not a student could participate in graduation:

So he called me in. He's chewing me out! Up one side and down the other. So, I just lost it. He didn't last long…I had put up with that and tried to protect my team because, you know, he came in and he changed the organizational structure and I'm sucking it all in so it doesn't hit my team… it was very damaging to the culture of the institution and very hard to get back. And I don't think AUK has ever recovered really from that.

Like Raye, Rose also worked for a negative leader who was the CEO of another health care system for which she worked:

It did some inverse teaching to me. I watched things being done in a way that I thought would not lead to success and in fact didn’t. It was reaffirming. It was reaffirming to me of my sense of what real leadership is, and it's not hierarchical, it just isn't.

Matthew shared a story of working for a difficult college president who turned everything upside-down:

The new president came in and all bets were off. Everything changed – everything. And he was hell on wheels. That president – the entire senior leadership team turned over in the first 18 months. Now the college needed help. The residential college needed help and he all but killed the distance college, he all but killed it.
All of the participants experienced influential people who would either inspire outstanding leadership through positive, affirming actions or act in such a negative way as to impart lessons of what one should not do as a leader.

Superordinate Theme Five: Seeking development is a positive step toward leadership development. All of the participants did acknowledge that they seek development to become better leaders, however, the kind of development that they accessed was varied, and not all of it was the typical leadership development seminars one might expect.

Ed and Raye were the only participants who pursued higher education to advance their careers into probable leadership positions. Ed left the workforce to pursue a dual master’s degree in manufacturing engineering and an MBA with an international operations focus adding that the program also had “a good smattering of leadership.” When Raye was working as an admissions counselor, she wanted to advance her career to chief student affairs officer so her boss, who was also the president of the school, advised her to pursue her doctorate degree. Raye would not have been able to advance to the positions she has held throughout her career without her doctorate, and it is questionable whether or not Ed would have achieved his position without his degrees.

Once he achieved an undergraduate degree from Cornell, Mark never pursued graduate school, nor did he ever attend a leadership development course or seminar. However he has enrolled close to 20 of his staff members in a leadership development program offered in his county. The leadership seminar was first attended by one of Mark’s employees, Tom, who thought he could benefit from attending, as it was an intensive seminar requiring one day per week for six months. Mark was not too enthusiastic about it, “We said, yeah, okay. It's like we're rolling our eyes. So, Tom went to it and loved it and thought it helped him a lot…Then he started enrolling people he had hired into the same program.”
Tom enrolled 12 of his people as his department of the business grew. Subsequently, the county offered an intensive two-year program developed by a Cornell professor that required graduation from the first program and a recommendation from one’s boss to be admitted. It involved trips to New York City, Albany, and to Europe. Tom attended that leadership development program and now the business has their fourth employee taking the intensive seminar. Mark shared his evaluation of Tom and his team after taking the courses:

I think it has developed Tom from being the leader we thought he was, into being a very good leader. I think he's become a better leader because his communication skills are phenomenal…he's very concise, very organized. And the people that have gone through the program after Tom are the same; they're well organized. So, on a weekly basis I talk with those people and they're the same as Tom. It's like wow! Not the same kid I remember hiring 20 years ago.

As for Mark, he developed his leadership skills by acquiring competence through hands-on experience, “I think at the beginning I was a leader because I was on the front line and I was leading the charge.” But when Mark decided to expand the business and hire other people, he could then travel to develop industry-wide expertise, “Every winter I started going to Portland for a week or two looking at other saw-mills…I was going four times a year, probably visiting 20 different sawmills every year, probably 30.” Eventually he was serving on the board of directors of some of the regional logger’s associations and national hardwood associations. For Mark, industry-specific knowledge as well as day-to-day manufacturing knowledge was the key to his leadership success.

Despite Raye’s advanced degree, both she and Elaine expressed doubt in regard to the helpfulness of leadership development seminars per se. Raye said, “It's not like you're not going
to learn something new. To me it's more common sense in terms of how you treat people, how charismatic you are, how motivating you are.” Elaine agreed, “I find sometimes when people are trying leadership training, it's just not hitting the nail on the head because if you don't have a passion for something, there's no point in it.” However, Elaine does seek help from other disciplines:

I don't find those [leadership] types of classes to be particularly helpful. As a leader you have to figure out where your vulnerabilities are and I've gotten assistance in those areas… whether it's in terms of increased stamina or stress management or tension relief, I've been doing this type of work at a high level. So the training I've gone for is more about how to stay healthy in the middle of this, rather than how to do it.

All of the participants except Elaine and Mark attend regular leadership development seminars, but they are all industry specific: Don attends seminars for county executives; Matthew attends several seminars a year for community college presidents; Raye has attended seminars for city leadership, state programs for community college leadership teams and Harvard’s new president’s seminar; and Ed attends leadership seminars for presidents of manufacturing and high tech industries. Ed said he finds the seminars helpful, “In terms of leadership, but more seeing the industry through a different lens than what you get to see in normal daily fashion.”

Rose attends leadership seminars that are provided by her parent company that are for its health care providers within a faith-based environment. Rose finds the seminars to be helpful because, “They do a lot of formalized, faith-based development leadership formation. We do things called leadership development retreats and they happen every two months like clockwork.” Prior to working for this organization, however, Rose did not have access to
regularly scheduled development offerings so she volunteered. She would take time off to work in another organization helping an acquaintance develop her greening initiative and her global ministries initiative. Rose added, “And I would say that was a way to self-develop as a leader in another environment.”

When asked what they found valuable about the seminars, all participants, except Elaine, noted that meeting the other attendees was the most valuable part of the seminars. Raye explained that, “What I enjoyed most was the people…the interactions with people, participants, were of most value to me because I can read a book and understand that theory.” As a leader, Raye paid attention to the subtle things that she observed from the other participants, “I paid a lot of attention to how key note [speakers] and leaders in programs presented, carried themselves and presented themselves.” Matthew agreed and also benefited from staying in touch with industry knowledge:

Rubbing elbows with your peers—our place isn't as crazy as I think it is. Everybody's got the same problems — that's a good thing. When you're in a tough leadership position, to realize that the people who are doing what you do, are facing a lot of the same challenges and you can learn from them. You see institutions that are much more behind yours, gives you a sense of how much urgency there is for you to have within the industry to move in a particular direction.

Ed shared Matthew’s point of view, “I think you get to see the other people that are in your industry and how you get to hear either informally or formally the way that they are dealing with the problems that the industry faces.”

In addition, several participants spoke about the importance for leaders to develop their staff into leaders. Mark said, “A good leader, you have to teach skills.” Raye explained, “I'm not
just going to tell you this is something you gotta do, we're going to do this together, because I know it's a journey and I know how difficult it is.” Elaine agreed, “Yes, I coach candidates right now. I'm coaching a group of women candidates about speaking to a TV camera.” In addition, Elaine explained how she has worked to develop a relatively new and young staff member:

So she's gonna find her passions and then we're going to let her do some work in it.

Whatever it is, I'm going to let her run with it to get practice and learn how to make mistakes and see the results of her work.

Matthew summed up the sentiment about professional development both for oneself and for one’s staff, “I think encouraging professional development and finding ways to support professional development is absolutely critical.”

Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience. Participants shared that having and displaying competence is an attribute that is essential to leadership but it is something that is accomplished over time either through further education, developmental opportunities, or through on-the-job work experience. Raye shared how important it is to “be competent in your field…I'm not saying that you have to know the details, but you should be competent in your field…And you cannot effectively lead people if they know you don't have a clue about what they're doing.”

When Raye stepped in to fill the position of the Chief Academic Officer at AUK, she found that she didn’t have the competence or all of the skills required for the position, “It required more strategic thinking, it required me to get other people who I used to think were narcissistic to think about someone other than themselves.” During that time they were still hiring faculty, trying to meet enrollment goals and budgets, trying to brand the institution while getting ready for accreditation, among other tasks, some of which were new responsibilities for
Raye. While trying to accomplish all of this, Raye learned lessons in leadership about how to proceed in the face of opposition, with or without approval:

I needed to make these decisions because the bottom line is this, you can either get on board, or you don’t have to be. And so I had to work through all of that. You know, people get mad at you and it’s not really about you. I think at that time you also learned that everybody's not going to like you, but they'll respect you because again, competence comes in with the decisions that were made.

Much like Raye, Ed experienced leadership responsibilities when he was assigned to lead a design team that was a joint project with a Swedish company. This assignment required that he:

Deal with the international issues of running this project…it had technology licensing involved in it as well. So I get pulled into many of those different discussions along the way, so I had to make decisions, although maybe they were small relative to the type of decisions I make today, but they still had to consider the viability of the project and how it would affect people and how we would get the results we needed in the end.

Don was a teacher in a competitive, private, boarding school for several years before he was assigned two special projects that began to change Don’s leadership ability and his identity to one of a leader. While still a teacher, he was assigned to a special project of obtaining re-accreditation for the school. “They had me lead that process. That was probably my first true professional leadership position where people counted on me and I had to work with other people and there was a product that we had to put out.” After succeeding on the re-accreditation project, Don was promoted to director of college counseling, where he had to go out and sell their program, “I was put in a leadership position because I was representing my whole school and I was going out and I was talking to educational consultants.”
Rose’s years of experience in a variety of positions, in different areas of the country, in faith-based and secular health care environments have helped her to develop skills and learn lessons that have augmented her leadership abilities. She reflected on her development as:

Evolution, but there were some critical inputs in the evolution…I had enough diverse experience to be confident there’s more than one way to do it right, more than one way to get it done. And it relates to what environment you’re in and what assets you’re bringing to that environment and that’s how you pick the strategy you’re going to run with.

Though Mark founded his company in the mid 1970’s, he still progressed through different stages of the business and acquired different “positions” that developed his leadership skills. Prior to starting his business, however, he worked for his dad and learned early-on that he didn’t like taking orders. For Mark, learning that he liked doing things his way pointed him in an entrepreneurial direction. Once in his own mill, Mark was “Front-line, main head sawyer, main maintenance guy and everyone.” Mark shared, “So the knowledge of the process goes a long way in your ability to lead people. Plus they can relate to you. Real important…so I transitioned from being front-line in the middle to be very knowledgeable of saw-mills.”

When Mark, “decided to go for the gusto” and expand, he hired new people and then had to delegate responsibility. Over the past 10 or so years, he has delegated most of the day-to-day authority to others which enabled him to travel and acquire new knowledge, skills, and competence that promoted him to the new leadership positions including directing the lumber mill industry by sitting on several regional board of directors.

Matthew primarily credits his leadership development to his extensive experience in co-curricular activities. “My career got going because of the co-curricular stuff I was involved in because it lead me to be very involved in college. It lead to my early career in student services.”
Matthew’s leadership development took several turns including working at several colleges in distance learning, then moving into student services, and finally ascending to the presidency of several community colleges.

Prior to Elaine’s political career, she was an adjunct professor at a nationally ranked university in interdisciplinary studies, but after 10 years the funding was cut which eliminated her position. After that, she worked in community mental health for 15 years and saw first-hand, how the money needed to protect and aid a vulnerable population was often cut. All of these experiences added to her growing frustration which ultimately motivated her to take a stand, step out into the public domain, and run for office. With every position and every experience, Elaine learned and developed her confidence:

I was the campaign manager for a number of important races. I was the coach to candidates for a number of important races. We won some. We lost more than we won and [during] the last race I found myself so frustrated that I was really at the point of saying ‘just give me the microphone. I know what I'm trying to say. I can say it myself. You obviously are not really the person to carry the message.’

Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development. To identify whether or not a change in attitude or behavior had taken place, all of the participants were asked to describe a difference in thinking from one time to another, if, in fact such a change had occurred. All of the participants shared examples of a change in thinking, not just in terms of their own identity as a leader, but also in terms of leadership practices, behaviors, and beliefs.

All of the participants shared stories of their personal change in thinking. Raye was quick to acknowledge a change in thinking as she expected that all employees should be as passionate
about their work as she was, “I’d be like, why are you in this business if you’re not passionate about it?” Raye admitted that throughout her years in leadership, “I’ve learned that people don’t have to be mini-me's in order to be very effective at what they do.” Raye has come to understand that a leader should not surround themselves with people who are, “your reflection.”

When Don worked at the school he experienced changes to his thinking which included an acceptance of his identity as a leader as well as a change in some of his thoughts, actions, and beliefs. An attitude change that Don shared was the realization that he went from having a job with set hours, to being the leader of a county 24 hours a day. “When you're the county executive you're in it…you really can't get out of it. Things that are constantly occurring across a number of different departments, not just from nine to five or during a certain meeting time [but]- all the time.”

And another important attitude change that Don shared is the recognition that he is not in total control:

The job in general is very overwhelming at times. For a lot of reasons, some things are out of your control. And I think that's been a difficult one for me to wrap my brain around because I really would like to try to control as much as I can. But you're going to have employees that make mistakes. You're going to have things happening that you have no control over.

Mark’s most memorable change in thinking was when he decided to hire a replacement to run the mill, “As I started delegating authority, the first thing that had to happen was I had to delegate it to a person than I felt was a leader and give him the reigns.” But Mark had a hard time letting go:
I kept coming over to the mill and I kept wanting to be the guy and finally Bruce one day said, ‘hey, did you hire me to run the mill or just be your assistant?’ And he said, ‘if you want me to run the mill, you’ve got to stay over at the office more and let me run it.’

That was the moment that Mark realized he had to let go of control and like Don, had to trust his team. The transition from hands-on leader to one of a delegating and trusting leader, however, was not an instant or easy one. When Mark was asked if it was hard to make the transition he said, “I was a little offended at first. I really was, cause it was my mill! But like he said, If you hired me to run it, let me run it.” With that conversation Mark had an epiphany, “I was great for the mill, but the business wouldn't be growing as much and I realized that, so then it freed me up to do other things.”

The moment that Elaine saw things differently was during the interaction with Bobby Kennedy as discussed in Superordinate Theme Four: Influential people contribute to one’s leadership development when he asked her why she did not do something about her anger and frustration. Elaine acknowledged that, “was sort of a turning point where I realized that it wasn't about me. I had to set aside all of my own worries about being shy and about fear of being judged. What I was upset about was just too darn important to, to just keep quiet about it.”

Ed changed too in his attitude in several ways toward leadership as he progressed through his career:

I think it's the point where you stop thinking of yourself as delivering what is asked of you, almost a chore mentality. So I was asked to do this, this, and this. Check, check, check, I finished it. I can leave now. Versus suddenly you're the leader and all of those things need to be done. But what do we have to do next?
Ed demonstrated progressive development in his thinking as he went from a chore mentality to one of project planning and responsibility, and then to an even greater leadership paradigm:

It's about having a bit of forethought in vision around how are you going to accomplish this end goal. And then you have all sorts of thought processes around how regimented you should be, and what are the steps to go from point A to B to C? Invariably, you never accomplish all of those steps.

This flexibility in thinking that Ed described is a function of his development throughout his career, as he used to be much more rigid in his thinking and would easily become frustrated when processes took more time than he expected. But as he adapted new behaviors and new ways of thinking, he realized:

That not everybody thinks about things in the same way. And if you take away too much autonomy, you'll never really get there. You need a team of people that have differences and different competencies to get you to where you need to be.

Throughout her career, Rose developed new thinking about her worth and how she would fit into her organization as she experienced working on four merger and acquisition (M & A) experiences. Her first experience with an M & A was when she was the Vice President of Planning; she soon realized that she was expected to work on the merger that would result in only one Vice President of Planning. Rose admitted that she was, “rattled the first time” but said that she handled it much better by the fourth time:

I'm not thrilled about this, ‘but are there ways for me to manage through it? Yes, there are.’ Part is going through the valley of death and coming out the other side and looking
back and saying, ‘wow, I got through that. I'm still here on the planet. I'm getting another job. Life is all right.’ I would say that experience starts to reshape your sense of security.

In fact, Rose says that going through four M & A’s helped, “Put my sense of stability in myself as opposed to putting it in the organizational setting. And I think that's a fundamental thing that helps you as a leader when you're not asking the organization to stand you up.”

Rose experienced a sudden shift in her thinking when she worked for the CEO who marginalized her; he would sometimes punish people on the leadership team with “cones of silence.” Rose was often hurt by that treatment, and after two or three years, she had a paradigm shift, “One day my thinking turned around and I thought to myself, ‘what if becoming a part of the group would hurt them? And what if being this marginalized voice out here is the more valuable position to be in?’” In addition, rather than taking his actions personally, Rose thought about him and his inability to be a great leader because some people are, “on a leadership track and they hit that moment and they can't do it and they become disabled leaders.”

Throughout Rose’s life she has had to learn to live with uncertainty in both her personal life and her career: after the death of her mother, through the adoption processes of her two children, and then through four mergers and acquisitions among other situations. These experiences culminated in a significant change in Rose’s thinking about living with uncertainty, especially when leading organizations:

I think in the times that we live in, you have to be willing to go in and not know the answer... and I think in organizations we sometimes get frozen... here's what we want it to be, that we miss all the possibilities in the moment of crisis or the moment of uncertainty. And to me possibility lives in uncertainty. It doesn't live in certainty. There
are no possibilities in certainty; things are the way they are because they're certain. In uncertainty are where all the possibilities live.

A change in thinking for Matthew was the result of a “divine intervention” that prompted a “transformational experience” and changed not only his thinking about leadership, but the way he would lead people and his organizations. Matthew was sent to a meeting in California and it was his first time flying. He went to take his seat on the plane and there was the book, *Leaders*, “just sitting in my seat! So I picked up the book and I couldn't put it down. And it gave me a whole different view of leadership.” When asked what he changed as a result of reading the book, Matthew said:

[I] became less directive and more thoughtful about how to go about leading others. You know, there are different ways to do it besides telling people what to do or how to do it. And it just amazes me how much of an epiphany that book was. It was like, ‘I've been doing it wrong all these years!

Subordinate themes emerged as the participants discussed their change in thinking about three leadership concepts or practices that impacted their leadership development and their leadership success.

**Subordinate Theme 7A: New thinking about responsibility.** Several of the participants identified the critical event of having been given responsibility as the impetus that started a change in their thinking and the beginning of their identities as leaders. Ed shared, “I think it was the responsibility that I felt to deliver the project or product on time and on budget and to meet specifications.” Ed explained that once he was given responsibility for a project, his thoughts and actions changed in that he now thought about the project often and would sometimes feel the need to stay longer to make sure tasks were done.
Raye also viewed responsibility as one of the key differences in her thinking, “Number one in education, what you do impacts people's lives. And so that in and of itself is a lot of responsibility.” Knowing that she was responsible for the lives of others changed her thinking about her commitment to her students. Similarly, Don shared that he had, “a major piece of responsibility put on me” that would change his commitment to the school and would begin to change his identity as a leader. And Mark felt the responsibility of developing a new business from the ground up and having to know every position. “I was leading the charge. I was a worker, I was working actively, front-line, main head sawyer, main maintenance guy and everyone.”

Subordinate theme 7B: New thinking about teams. Another subordinate theme that emerged as part of acquiring new thinking, involved the awareness of the need for teams in order to achieve success as a leader. Ed believed that leaders, “need a team of people that have differences and different competencies to get you to where you need to be.” Raye also spoke to the importance of teams and explained that it is, “also important for leaders to not be afraid to surround themselves with people who are equally or even more talented than themselves.” Mark, who spoke highly of his team at the mill said, “I think one of the keys to become a leader, [is] you need to surround yourself with good people.” Rose has also had a long-standing belief in the need and power of teams, “I think I always believed that team-based anything was better than me alone. Always. I always thought the work product was better if there was some way to have diverse thinking involved in it.”

Once Don was elected County Executive, he fully identified with the leadership title, and had a fairly rapid change of thinking. He realized that:
There's no way I could single handedly lead a county that has a $370,000,000 budget, 2,000 people, and 30 plus departments. There'd be no way I could do that... So I had to make sure I got the very best people that would be able to kind of become extensions of myself and lead departments.

**Subordinate Theme 7C: New thinking about achieving buy-in.** Rooted in the concept of teamwork is the practice of getting buy-in from staff and the participants discussed its importance. Raye shared how she attempted to get buy-in with her teams, “You try to do the democratic thing and have everybody sit down at the table and...come to a consensus.”

Mark was a strong proponent of getting buy-in from staff and spoke of it often:

I think that being a real good leader, you get input from them. I think another thing is people want to be part of the solution. We always get people to buy-in, ‘What do you think?’ Instead of saying, ‘This is what we're going to do’, ‘What do you think about doing this?’ and they feel like they're part of the process. I think it's super important for people to buy-in.

Ed used different terminology, but shared a similar sentiment, “I would add the term of ‘shared ownership’ so that they feel ownership for their piece of that progression because if you don't have ownership it's really hard to push something.” Rose too, spoke of the importance of achieving buy-in and taking the time to ask, “What do you think and what are your ideas on that?” to achieve team consensus and unity.

Superordinate Theme Seven, and the three subordinate themes emerged as the participants shared stories that exemplified the importance of a change in thinking as leadership development progressed. Each participant was able to point to a difference in either their beliefs or actions that demonstrated their development as successful leaders.
Superordinate Theme Eight: Passion demonstrated for one’s industry or field is essential for leadership development. During all of the interviews the theme of passion emerged as all of the participants either said the word “passion” when describing their commitment to their work, or gave an example of their passion.

Raye was the first participant interviewed who early on stated that she, “used to think that everyone should be as passionate as I am” and added, “because I'll stand up on the chair and shout from the mountaintops that I think this is the best profession ever.” Her passion became obvious as she shared her stories about stepping up when needed, her belief in being the best she can be to serve her students, and her belief in leaving every place better than when she arrived. Raye’s passion continued to the end of the interview, “I'm in this role because I love it. I love the opportunity to be able to impact lives with a group of people that I hope want to impact lives in a positive manner too.”

Though Don didn’t use the word “passion,” his last answer of the interview conveyed his passion for his position in no uncertain terms:

I've never felt like I've got three years to do this; that's plenty of time. It's almost always I only have three years to get this done…that's what keeps me up awake at night... I feel like every day it's just ticking away from me.

When Mark was interviewed he never stated the word passion, but his voice, his excitement, and his motivation all indicated he has been a passionate leader, “Hey, when I do things, I do them in a big way…That was something I was just psyched on doing. But I think the big thing in a leader is someone who’s just motivated to get stuff done.” Not only was Mark motivated to do the work, he loved the work, because he started the business, “as a hobby. It was something I enjoyed doing. I liked it.”
Matthew never said the word “passion” in his interview either, but his leadership trajectory within education, both as a student and as an educator, has been long, consistent, and filled with enthusiasm and joy. His love of education was inspired by those he met dating back from his childhood on up throughout his career, because he appreciated, “just seeing people who were doing jobs I thought were interesting and asking them about it.” Rose spoke of the need for passion in successful leadership when she talked about her dad starting his construction company because he was, “able to connect with something that you have [he had] a passion for doing.”

Though Ed never used the word “passion” he too, displayed a long-term commitment to his industry and career. His years traveling to and working in Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Korea demonstrated not just follow-through for the sake of a job, but a determination and strong commitment to spend a significant amount of time learning different cultures for the sake of his company and industry. At the end of his interview, Ed talked passionately about his current position at his 97-year-old company and stressed that he is trying to, “Constantly blend the strength that we have in longevity, of employees, past practices, all of the things that has created this culture…and not lose the wonder of the great products that we've created so far and in the new products of the next stage that we're trying to develop.”

Elaine, one of the last participants interviewed, mentioned the word “passion” four times in her interview. She spoke of her development from a shy, “back-channel person” to a winning candidate who represents a district in the state of New York and how she went from being “aggravated” or “frustrated” to having the “passion” to step out and do something about it. She explained, that “if you don't have a passion for something, there's no point in it. You'll just be going through the motions. People can sense that—either you're going through the motions or it's all about you and your ego.” Further, Elaine shared that she develops her staff by understanding
what they are passionate about: “I think promoting leadership is finding out what people care about. If I'm going to try to teach how to be a leader, I might as well forget it. I just want to know, what do you like?”

**Conclusion**

Eight superordinate themes were identified as important events, steps, actions, or environments that were influential in developing leaders. Only *Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development* was delineated into three subordinate themes: *Subordinate Theme 7A: New thinking about responsibility; Subordinate Theme 7B: New thinking about teams; Subordinate Theme 7C: New thinking about achieving buy-in.*

*Superordinate Theme One: I do not / did not think of myself as a leader* emerged from the first interview and was shared by five out of seven participants interviewed. This is an important theme for this study as it is an indication of one’s identity formation as a leader (or lack of), which is believed to be crucial to leadership development.

*Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development, Superordinate Theme Three: Experiencing hardships can be an important factor in one’s leadership development, and Superordinate Theme Four: Influential people contribute to one’s leadership development* all acknowledge situations or environments that can have a substantial impact on one’s leadership trajectory, but cannot be duplicated for the development of others. However, all of the participants were able to share powerful, insightful, or significant stories that illustrated how impactful these people, situations, or events have been to their development as a leader.
Superordinate Theme Five: Seeking development is a positive step toward leadership development and Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience are both important to a developing leader in that both of these superordinate themes can be accessed by an individual or can be used by an organization, coach, or mentor looking to augment the leadership development of an individual. The responses that comprised the data for Superordinate Theme Five offered a variety of development activities that leaders have used including higher education, volunteer activities, travel, health services, as well as traditional leadership development seminars. Additionally, all of the participants interviewed shared significant accounts of the development that they experienced through their hands-on work that contributed to the emergence of Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience.

Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development and Superordinate Theme Eight: Passion demonstrated for one’s industry or field are both themes that emerged from the data shared by participants about their thought processes, internal motivations, and/or strong commitments. Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development was presented in two sections; 1. the superordinate theme was supported by the personal stories that illustrated how the participants had changed their personal constructs with time, and 2. the three subordinate themes reflected a change in thinking regarding responsibility, teamwork and achieving buy-in. Both Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development and the three accompanying subthemes illustrated an important step for those who wish to become leaders and for those who develop leaders: a change of thinking or a new direction of thought is necessary as one grows
and develops as a leader. *Superordinate Theme Eight: Passion demonstrated for one’s industry or field* gives insight into what prospective leaders should possess from the start, or would want to develop for leadership development within their chosen career path.
CHAPTER 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, Conclusions

The key to leadership development has been indefinable, moreover the success of leadership development is often disputed and frequently leads to more questions than answers. Indeed, the very efficacy of leadership development is largely unsubstantiated as it suffers from the lack of a succinct methodology and proven results (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Beer et al., 2016; Brungardt, 1996; D. Collins, 2001; Fernandez & Perry, 2016; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hedges, 2014; Kutz, 2004; Quatro et al., 2007; Rowland, 2016; Washbush, 2005). However, in spite of the differences of opinions and questionable results from existing leadership development methodologies, it remains a commonly-held belief that developing leaders is a critical endeavor for the sake of our institutions, organizations, and economic well-being (Amagoh, 2009; Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Atwater et al., 1999; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; D. Collins, 2001; Day et al., 2014; Zenger & Folkman, 2002).

The intent of this interpretive phenomenological study was to investigate the significant events and people that leaders identified as influential in their leadership development. The research question that directed this study is: How do leaders, who have been in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years, make-meaning of their leadership development experiences?

Interpretation of Primary Findings

Superordinate Theme 1: I do not or did not think of myself as a leader. Five out of seven of the participants indicated that they did not think of themselves as a leader, either in their past leadership positions or even in their current position. This response was discussed with Mark and Don, and the definition of leadership as defined by Northhouse was shared, “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northhouse, 2010, p. 3). After sharing this definition with both Mark and Don and
upon discussion and reflection, both were able to look back and acknowledge their identity as a leader. Mark said, “Then I'm a leader, even though I don't think of myself in that sense, but I know people follow me.” After using the words, “influence” and “inspire” when discussing the leadership definition, Don responded, “Yeah, I agree with you. I think those two words are very representative of what a leader is.”

The responses from the five participants and the development of this unexpected superordinate theme prompted concern. If the goal of this study was to investigate the significant events and people that influenced leadership development and five out of seven of the participants did not view themselves as leaders, were the wrong people chosen to participate in the study? Given the biographical information of each of the participants, it is clear that they all met the parameters of “leaders, who have been in a senior leadership role for at least 10 years.” This leads one to question why the participants did not see themselves as leaders. Ashford & DeRue (2012) asked the same question, “Thus, a fundamental question is why some people come to see themselves as leaders, or envision leader as a possible self, and other people do not. How do people discover the possible leader within them?” (p. 148).

To advance a possible explanation of this unexpected superordinate theme, a requisite review of the literature was conducted. Upon reflection, the literature thread that discussed the lack of an agreed-upon definition of leadership (Day, 2000; Day & Harrison, 2007; Gehret, 2010; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Lynas, 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Senge et al., 1999; Washbush, 2005) offered a possible explanation for the participants’ responses. Could the lack of an agreed-upon definition of leader and/or leadership have an impact on the development of leaders and on the identity of oneself as a leader? Indeed, the lack of a clear definition of leader and leadership may not only be an academic issue discussed in the
literature: it may result in a trickledown effect on the very leadership identity of those in the leadership pipeline. If a person does not view him or herself as a leader, how then can he or she be developed further in an intentional way? Day and Harrison (2007) addressed this question, “And more pertinent to the special issue topic of leadership development, how can something that is apparently indefinable be developed?” (p. 360).

Ashford & DeRue (2012) gave a possible answer, “The definition of leadership, the actions that are characterized as leadership, and who is (or is not) a leader are somewhat ambiguous and subject to personal interpretation” (p. 148). Indeed, five of the participant responses to this question indicated that their “personal interpretation” (p. 148) did not view either their positions or their actions and behaviors as those of a leader. Can it be suggested then, that the identity of leader for these five participants was inhibited by the lack of a universal, agreed-upon definition of leader and leadership? Moreover, if the definition was known by the participants, could that information have influenced their identities as a leader? This explanation is but one possible answer and there could be more including the issue of developing a leadership identity.

The leadership literature addressed the impact of leader identity on the success of leader development (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Pearce, 2007). According to Ashford & DeRue (2012), “Seeing oneself as a leader or having leader as a core part of one’s identity, is an important precursor to taking on leadership roles and engaging in actions to further develop one’s capacity for effective leadership” (p. 147-148). Yet, the lack of a leader identity did not impair the development of the five participants in this study, as they continued to develop as leaders in title, responsibility, and reputation.
This brings to question the background experiences of those who were participants in previously cited leadership studies: Were they referred to as leaders prior to or upon entrance into the studies? Were they exposed to previous leadership training that identified them as leaders? Ashford & DeRue (2012) described a POS approach, or positive organizational scholarship, which encourages organizations to consider leadership as an “identity or state of mind that anyone can enter” (p. 147). Indeed, if organizations recruit employees for leadership development and refer to them as leaders, would that impact the leadership identity of the participants?

There is no clear explanation for the Superordinate Theme 1: *I do not or did not think of myself as a leader* as this was an unexpected theme and follow-up questions were not anticipated for this response. Further, this study did not screen for or ask the participants about their leadership identity. However, it is clear that these five participants continued their leadership development in spite of their lack of a leadership identity. Certainly, their development as leaders was the result of countless factors that were not explored in this study. Indeed, all seven participants were in charge of their own development as Ashford & DeRue endorsed, “People need to be proactive with respect to their own development. They need to take responsibility for their own development by learning how to learn leadership from their own lived experiences” (p. 147).

Aside from the issue of leader identity, the leadership literature has debated whether or not leadership can be taught or even learned, which speaks to the issue of “development,” the practice at the core of this study. Can people be developed as leaders, and if so, is it possible to uncover influential developmental experiences, events, people, and methodologies? The literature asserted that some believe leadership can be taught (Bennis, 2009; Block & Manning,
2007; Brungardt, 1996; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008), and Kutz (2004) suggested that “many aspects of leadership can be learned through skill development, competencies, and experience” (p. 1). This study explored the effect of several experiences that the literature identified as influential on leadership development, one of which is the impact of childhood experiences.

**Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development.** Scholars continue to search for a better understanding of leadership development and the literature addressed the effect of childhood experiences on leaders (Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1996; Keller, 2003; McDermott et al., 2011; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Toor & Ofori, 2008; Wahat et al., 2013). While much of the research examined adult experiences, fewer studies looked at the impact of childhood experiences and development even though, “It is possible that development occurs more readily in childhood and adolescence than in adulthood because one's behavior, personality, and skills are more malleable at a young age than in adulthood” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 460). Indeed, Toor and Ofori (2008) stated that families who had highly educated fathers and both parents were positive, “less rejecting, less punitive, and less over protective” (p. 214), were more likely to have children who grew up to have “leadership behavior” (p. 214).

All seven participants shared stories of influential childhood experiences that each could link to their present leadership development. Matthew and Ed both experienced positive, encouraging, and nurturing environments which they credited to their early forays into leadership positions on up to their present positions. This information is consistent with the literature which substantiated the promising results of having encouraging and positive childhood experiences (Brungardt, 1996; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Toor & Ofori, 2008).
Don and Raye both had childhood experiences that challenged their self-confidence through tough competition and the setting of high standards. Don’s father was a positive role model, and his coach, who he remembers as difficult, taught him several tough lessons: success requires hard work; always give your best; and show respect by holding your tongue. Raye experienced a strong family work ethic, strict values, and competition which can result in, “more active, socially outgoing, constructive, and [children who] attempted more leadership” (Brungardt, 1996, p. 84). Despite Don’s difficulty with his coach at the time and Raye’s memories of having to live up to high expectations, these lessons may have taken place during a sensitive period, or “a time in life when skills are more easily and rapidly developed. Moreover, development that occurs in this sensitive period need not be seen immediately; instead, the effects of early influences may only become easily observed in adulthood” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 460). Both Don and Raye credited these significant lessons with their success today.

However, Elaine, Mark, and Rose all had somewhat negative recollections from their childhood experiences. Mark and Elaine both shared a common childhood experience of being held back and both stated that once they were adults and could act as independent agents, they were motivated to do things their own way. Mark was anxious to build his business, and Elaine was able to pursue a successful political career once she was able to “find her voice”. The leadership success for both Elaine and Mark would not have been easily predicted, as childhood birth order (Mark was the youngest) and parenting styles that are negative and authoritarian are not likely to produce leaders (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Indeed, an authoritarian parent:

may be punitive, and characteristically demanding with firm rules and control.

Unfortunately, this type of parenting is unlikely to result in leader skills related to innovation, communication, and entrepreneurship. Research suggests that teenagers with
authoritarian parents are socially incompetent and tend to have poor communication skills (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 463).

Rose, who lost her mother when she was only 10 years old, was the only participant whose experiences may be labeled as traumatic, which is defined as an event that, “commonly includes abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion and/or loss” (Cato, 2007, p. 7). Moreover, this incident may be labeled as complex trauma which is defined as; “1) chronic or multiple, 2) inter-personal, and 3) begins early in life” (Wamser-Nanney, 2016, p. 296) and, “Complex trauma occurs within the caregiving system” (p. 296). Certainly losing her mother, a caregiver, was a defining moment in Rose’s development as she realized she had to begin planning her own future at the age of 10. Given this incident, it is rather surprising that Rose was able to take control of her life at such a young age, as many survivors of trauma suffer from a lack of self-regulation, which is “a key developmental task that develops in the context of a secure and stable environment” (Wamser-Nanney, 2016, p. 296).

Not only did Rose survive the event, she excelled and became a leader. The literature on critical incidents may offer a reason why Rose was able to rise above her childhood trauma. According to Halquist & Musanti (2010), a critical incident could be a problematic situation that happens independently of the observer, that promotes reflection, and may be the impetus for personal change. However, according to Tripp (1993), it is the approach to a critical incident that is essential, “But like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation. (8, emphasis added),” (as cited in Halquist & Musanti, 2010, p. 450). In fact, in the interview Rose said, “And if you're a person of faith, what does Jesus or God say over and over again? That I will make out of the worst circumstance, something good. Something good will come out of that. I've always believed that.”
Indeed, this belief and faith may have been in part what contributed to her strength which allowed her to develop into the leader she is today.

In addition, Rose saw her father as a role model, and he raised her to be financially independent and well educated. As Rose stated, “In my world, women were always equal. I never thought any differently.” Perhaps, it was through her faith and from the lessons she learned from her dad that enabled her to survive her situation as she said, “There is something about a moment or circumstances that raises people up.” Furthermore, when Rose was asked when she first saw herself as a leader, she replied, “Probably long, long before I had a position that would suggest I was a leader.”

The participant interviews revealed that childhood experiences can be very influential on one’s leadership development. As with all occurrences, childhood experiences can be either positive or negative. The meaning-making shared by Mark, Don, Elaine, and Rose who all experienced negative events, gives valuable insight into the thoughts that contributed to the leadership development success of these participants. This data offers clearer insight for those who develop leaders as it suggests a direction of questions to ask those who have experienced negative situations that could encourage meaning-making with a positive lesson to be learned.

**Superordinate Theme Three: Experiencing hardships can be an important factor in one’s leadership development.** All of the participants recounted at least one hardship that impacted their leadership development though the situations varied in severity and length of time experienced. The literature addressed the impact of hardships on the development of leaders and referred to these events as “critical events,” “significant experiences,” “crucible events,” or “trigger events.” (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Bennis & Thomas, 2004; McCall, 2004; Toor & Ofori, 2008; Wahat et al., 2013). No matter the phrase used to describe
the event, the impact on the individual and his or her response to the event is what is important because the event causes “disequilibrium” which requires the person to assess and perhaps change their “self-construct” (Avolio & Hannah, 2008, p. 335).

Experiencing disequilibrium from an event is crucial because this is where meaning-making may begin, changes in self-constructs can be made, and new decisions about how to handle the event can be attempted. Meaning-making may also continue or take place long afterward. However, what is important to this study is that the ability to change one’s self-construct and address the situation in a new way advances the person’s leadership capability.

Both Elaine and Rose experienced growing up with family hardships and their experiences were discussed in Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development and will not be addressed in this section. Raye experienced the loss of her chief student affairs officer while working for the newly launched American University of Kuwait and “stepped up” to fill that position while still maintaining her original position. Don and Ed both had hardships that involved their families. Ed’s father had a heart attack while he was in college which threatened the continuation of Ed’s education. Ed’s hardship did not last long but it did impact his thinking about family and priorities. Don’s brother and sister-in-law, both of whom were heroin addicts, stole jewelry from Don’s wife. Don’s experience altered his knowledge, awareness, and position on drug policy as the county executive. This critical event resulted in personal disequilibrium, and in turn it prompted a change in his thinking about what addiction does to the addict, the family, and community. The change in his personal construct was a benefit for his county which also suffered from and continues to suffer from, the pain of addiction.
Matthew’s experience was that of an unexpected layoff that lasted for approximately six months, but he too was able to revise his self-construct. Mark was the only participant who experienced several significant hardships in his business: two devastating fires and several years of near bankruptcy. But Mark spoke very positively about the impact of hardships, as he often said, “Crises creates opportunity.” Because of the fires he rebuilt larger mills, and because of the near bankruptcies he changed the mill from a “green mill” to a “kiln-dried mill”, which offered vast income opportunities both nationally and internationally.

The participant interviews indicated that when hardships were experienced, the ensuing meaning-making and the change in one’s self-construct was an individual process that enabled each participant to further his or her leadership development. The meaning-making that each participant shared in both Superordinate Theme Two: Childhood experiences can be an influencing factor in one’s leadership development, and Superordinate Theme Three: Experiencing hardships can be an important factor in one’s leadership development offered glimpses into the process of thought and behavior change that took place. However, it remains a mystery as to why, when faced with a critical event, one person can assess his or her personal construct and have a change of attitude and behavior when another person cannot. It is probable that this will remain an unanswered question, and it is one that applies to a fundamental step of leadership development as well. Herein may lie the dilemma that will forever hinder leadership development success, as it impossible to predict who can engage in meaning-making and change a personal construct and who cannot or will not.

Superordinate Theme Four: Influential people contribute to one’s leadership development. The literature commonly acknowledges the influence that people have on leaders, as leadership is an emotional and social endeavor that is undertaken with and among other
people (Brungardt, 1996; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; McDermott et al., 2011; Wahat et al., 2013). People with whom leaders and potential leaders meet can be a source of influence on one’s leadership development both positively and negatively.

Three of the seven participants did share experiences they had with negative leadership. Experiencing negative leadership had a profound effect on the leadership actions of Raye, Rose and Matthew as they worked for negative leaders who were damaging, hurtful, or destructive. Matthew worked for a president who almost destroyed a program, Raye worked for president who insulted and berated her, and Rose worked for a president who used isolation and silence to humiliate, segregate, and control his leadership team. All three participants said these people taught them what not to do as a leader.

Aside from these negative lessons, everyone else reported positive and uplifting experiences from influential people in their lives. Mark, Ed, Rose, and Elaine spoke to the positive influence of mentors, coaches, bosses, and co-workers. Matthew spoke often and glowingly about several mentors with whom he connected throughout several periods of his career and stressed the importance of seeking mentors for career success. Ed was the only participant who worked with a professional coach whom he found to be very helpful. Mark spoke highly of his partners in the mill identifying their leadership strengths. Elaine was originally inspired to run for office after her fateful meeting with Bobby Kennedy and has since found support and encouragement from the Women’s Legislative Caucus in her state. Because leadership is a social interaction (Brungardt, 1996; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; McDermott et al., 2011; Wahat et al., 2013), it is no wonder that people have such a significant impact on the leadership trajectory of others. The results of this study further substantiate that positive leaders
can serve as a role models for good leadership behavior while negative leaders demonstrate behaviors to avoid.

**Superordinate Theme Five: Seeking development is a positive step toward leadership development.** The literature regarding leadership development identified a host of activities from coaching and mentoring to on-the-job experience and feedback, but it also clearly indicated that formal, classroom training is the least effective leadership developmental tool (Allio, 2005; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Collay, 2014; Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2010; Gehret, 2010; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003; Hedges, 2014; Kalman, 2012; Kutz, 2004; McCall, 2004; Quatro et al., 2007; “Relevant development: Effective Leadership Training,” 2012; Rowland, 2016; Senge et al., 1999; Solansky, 2010). However, several of the participants did discuss the importance of education. Raye spoke to the issue of competence and shared that she encouraged her staff to pursue higher education including doctorate degrees. Ed referred to formal education in his pursuit of a dual master’s degree, which also had “a good smattering” of leadership content.

Mark spoke highly of his and his partner’s undergraduate education which helped them get their first small business loan. Since that time, Mark has not pursued an advanced degree or participated in any formal leadership program though he has sent at least 10 staff members to a series of intensive leadership seminars offered by their county. Mark’s development continued organically as he sought on-the-job development which will be discussed in the next section, **Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience.**

Five out of seven of the participants attend industry specific leadership seminars. When asked what they found to be of value, all of the respondents found networking with the attendees to be of most value. Ed, Don and Matthew were interested in keeping informed about industry
issues and trends, and Raye liked to go to observe those who presented at the conferences. Rose found the faith-based seminars for her hospital system valuable because, “It keeps values closer to the surface.” Elaine was the only participant who did not feel leadership development was of any value and instead sought development that assisted her with her personal issues of health, stamina, and stress management.

Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience. As evidenced by all of the participant interviews and the leadership development material, it is clear that experience is the most effective way to develop leadership skills (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Allio, 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Brown & Posner, 2001; Day, 2000; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Quatro et al., 2007; Wahat et al., 2013).

Ed’s business travel to several Asian countries illustrated how hands-on experience is a powerful method of learning inter-cultural leadership skills. Raye’s experience in Kuwait of stepping up to fill the person’s position taught her many new lessons of leadership as well as business. Don’s first position as a county legislator helped him prepare for his position as county executive by giving him a bit of an inside view into county politics and dealing with criticism. Elaine’s experience running for office and losing gave her the experience and insight she needed to run again and win. Rose’s repeated merger and acquisition (M & A) experience, not only taught her how to do the M & A, but also taught her how to handle the emotional aspects of possibly eliminating her own job. All seven participants were able to share powerful stories of increased leadership experience along with improved leadership skills as a result of direct experience.
Superordinate Theme Seven: Acquiring and adapting new thinking or perspectives is necessary for leadership development. Critical to this study during the data-gathering stage was careful listening and prompt follow-up on any information that established new meaning-making and personal construct building that signified a progression of leadership development. This information was not only critical to the crux of this study to demonstrate development; it validated the use of constructive-developmental (CD) theory. CD theory provided the evidence of leadership development, as the six-stage model of cognitive development provided a platform from which one can examine new thinking, organizing, and meaning-making that emerged as a result of one’s experiences, (Eriksen, 2006; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Hunter et al., 2011; Kegan, 1980; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; McCauley et al., 2006). Indeed, the emphasis of this study is particularly focused on the meaning-making that leaders offered during the participant interviews that would give an indication of cognitive development as a result of specific experiences or the influence of significant people throughout their leadership development.

The movement of the individual through the first three stages of CD theory is not pertinent to this study as it happens naturally in most people; Stage Zero (Incorporative), Stage One (Impulsive), and Stage Two (Imperial) are indicative of infancy, childhood, and mid-adolescence, respectively. Stage Three (Interpersonal) is usually reached between 15 years of age and older and according to Eriksen (2006, p. 293), research found that 70% to 80% of adults stay in Stage Three. Therefore, the stage development that is critical to this study is the movement from Stage Three up to Stage Four (Institutional) or Stage Five (Inter-individual).

Table 3 below, highlights a few of the hallmarks of each of the six stages of CD theory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Stage 0</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Stage 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Infancy to 2</td>
<td>Up to ~ 7 years old</td>
<td>~ 6 to 15 years old</td>
<td>~ 15 years to adulthood</td>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallmarks</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Sees world revolving around self, wants, and</td>
<td>Behavior governed by needs, desires</td>
<td>Begin to see needs of others</td>
<td>Develops underlying principles/ ideology for</td>
<td>Develops multiple ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begins to see</td>
<td>impulses</td>
<td>Anything that blocks desires viewed as threat</td>
<td>Begin mutual relationships</td>
<td>social norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Begin empathy and reciprocity</td>
<td>Can separate self from other’s opinions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>separate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify with Institution/ organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from other</td>
<td></td>
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<td>objects</td>
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</table>

To further understand the movement or development into different stages, one must understand two different types of learning. Kegan (2009) explained the difference between learning information (informational learning) and learning in a transformational way. Simply put, “learning aimed at changes not only in what we know but changes in how [emphasis added] we know” (Kegan, 2009, p. 42). Therefore, learning information adds details or more facts to an existing activity or field of knowledge, but transformational learning changes how we know something.

Others conceptualize new learning as either horizontal or vertical; horizontal learning (informational learning) is acquiring more facts, new skills, or methods, whereas vertical
learning (transformational learning) involves, “seeing the world through new eyes, and changes in interpretations of experience and view of reality” (Hunter et al., 2011, p. 1804).

CD theory presumes that individuals proceed from one stage to the next higher stage because their present thoughts and beliefs are not beneficial to the present situation or the person perceives a threat and a change may alleviate it. As a result, the person begins to think about his or her situation in a new way and may question his or her current thinking to begin developing a new construct (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Eriksen, 2006; Helsing & Howell, 2013; Hunter et al., 2011; Kegan, 2009; Kuhnert, 1990; McCauley et al., 2006; Moss, 2005; Spano, 2015). It is the change to a new construct that is indicative of a developmental change in CD theory. Moreover, it is the meaning-making that the person engages in that allows the transformation to begin, “We do not only form meaning, and we do not only change our meanings; we change the very form by which we are making our meanings” (Kegan, 2009, pp. 44–45).

During the interviews, when asked a question about a change in thinking or behavior, the participants’ answers and stories demonstrated a move from Stage Three into either Stage Four or Stage Five. According to Kegan (1982), individuals within the higher two stages have “more problem solving strategies” (as cited in Kuhnert, 1990, p. 604) than lower stage people even though the “developmental stage of an individual only influences the capacity to act in a certain manner” (p. 603).

Raye demonstrated higher stages of problem solving when she stepped up to take the place of the chief academic officer in Kuwait. Similarly, Ed demonstrated higher stage problem solving when he traveled to several foreign countries to negotiate business contracts with foreign companies within foreign cultures. This required that Ed learn new information (horizontal learning) and then integrate the new knowledge into a new way of doing business (vertical
learning). Mark demonstrated movement to a higher stage development after each fire and a deep recession indicated by building bigger mills and going from a green to a kiln-dried mill. It is also possible that Mark has developed to stage five as he has now formed multiple ideologies with a decreased perception of threats, evidenced by his often stated philosophy “Crisis creates opportunity.”

Rose also demonstrated stage-five-level problem solving skills during several points in her development, from coping with the death of her mother to working on mergers and acquisitions and working for a leader who punished his staff through isolation. After working on several M & A’s, one of her new constructs was a stronger sense of security, “Instead of investing that sense of security in the organization you invest it in yourself” and she no longer saw losing her job as a threat. Further, Rose developed a new construct about living in uncertainty, “And to me possibility lives in uncertainty.” This meaning-making and development of new constructs reflect a higher level of problem solving. Her new construct regarding uncertainty is borne out of her business and family experiences and represents a willingness to go into unchartered waters to explore and find new possibilities.

The participants also demonstrated a change in thinking toward leadership concepts that emerged into three subordinate themes: Subordinate Theme 7A: New thinking about responsibility; Subordinate Theme 7B: New thinking about teams; and Subordinate Theme 7C: New thinking about achieving buy-in. Subordinate Theme 7A: New thinking about responsibility indicated that a new self-construct had evolved to view responsibility as a different level of commitment as Ed shared when he was given responsibility for a new project. Subordinate Theme 7B: New thinking about teams and Subordinate Theme 7C: New thinking about achieving buy-in go hand-in-hand as the participants began to see their team members, their contributions
and commitments as valuable, rather than a threat. All of these examples are indicative of the
participants’ movement from CD stage three to a higher stage of development.

Superordinate Theme Eight: Passion demonstrated for one’s industry or field is essential for leadership development. The theme of “passion” was an unexpected theme in the
design of this study, yet it could not be ignored as it was a clear theme that was repeated
throughout all of the participants’ stories, if not stated emphatically. Because this theme was not
anticipated, it required a new search of the literature to confirm and examine its presence in the
leadership literature. References to passion in leadership were found, but the word passion was
presented in two different ways: 1. As part of a definition of leadership or a leadership style, and
2. As a prerequisite for successful leadership, which was in concert with the sentiment of the
participants in this study.

A brief definition of passion was offered by Vallerand et al. (2003), “Passion is defined
as a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which
they invest time and energy” (p. 756). Pearce (2003), shared an explanation of the genesis of
passion in leadership, “Your passion about what you want to change grows from the foundation
of values that have been formed by your life experience” (p. 18), and “Every idea you hold
passionately has a background in your personal experience” (p. 21).

Often, passion is used as part of the definition for leaders: the definition for authentic
leaders said, “They are motivated by goals that represent their actual passions” (Shamir & Eilam,
2005, p. 398), and charismatic leaders, “point to the presence of a passionate vision…” (Ligon et
al., 2008, p. 313). Passion is also used to define all leaders, independent of leadership style
(Goleman, 2004; Sveningsson, 2006), and “Leaders passionately believe that they can make a
difference” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 3).
Leonard & Lang (2010) spoke about inducing passion if it is lacking by using action learning to “develop inspiring visions and passion” (p. 229) while others advised to look for passion before hiring staff, (Kalman, 2012, p. 30). Patel, Thorgren, & Wincent (2015), discussed the essential role of passionate leaders in a study on the financial performance of an organization where, “passion can help explain why some leaders may be more successful than others in performing under challenging situations such as a worldwide recession” (p. 221). The authors summarized, “In conjunction with the present study, this body of research on project leaders’ passion shows that passion indeed plays a role in enhancing performance” (p. 220).

Much like the study by Patel et al., (2015) the participants in this study used the term passion as both a precursor to leadership and the “secret sauce” for leadership success. In other words, if the person does not have passion for what they are doing, chances are they will not be a successful leader. Elaine said it well, “If you don't have a passion for something, there's no point in it. You'll just be going through the motions. People can sense that; either you're going through the motions or it's all about you and your ego.”

**Implications for Practice**

This study was designed with practitioners in mind: those who work in or with organizations to develop leaders and those who want to become leaders. The literature tells us that much more research needs to done to determine how to successfully develop leaders. However, this study has produced insight into strategies that may help to develop leaders from within organizations and better yet, may contribute to producing leaders organically from among the population instead of choosing those who some may think have leadership potential.

**Begin with childhood.** The literature has begun to offer a significant thread of research that acknowledged the importance of planting early seeds of leadership while children are young...
(Avolio & Lester, 2011; Brungardt, 1996; McCall, 2004; McDermott et al., 2011; Wahat et al., 2013). In concert with the literature, this study illustrates the foundational effects of events in childhood that are long lasting and have a profound influence on one’s leadership development.

**Assess motivation, look for passion.** The participants in this study either referenced passion or exemplified passion in their stories as a precursor to leadership success. From a young age, children should be asked what their interests are and should be encouraged to follow their passions. Assessment of passion and interest should start in adolescence and continue up through the young adult years. Even though young people are often unsure about where their passion may lie, an emphasis on exploring options to find what motivates them and gives them joy, should be stressed often. However, this would require an enormous cultural change, especially for at-risk children and those in poor areas who are in substandard schools and are less able to follow their dreams and passions.

**Introduce leadership as a topic in childhood education.** In 2012, Zenger told us that we need to begin developing leaders earlier. He told of teaching third and fourth graders the same leadership training he taught in corporations. Zenger reported, “I can’t help smiling when I think of a 3rd grader informing her parents that they were not focusing on the problem, but only on the person. From this we concluded that it’s never too early to teach leadership skills” (p. 1). Introducing the concept of leadership at a young age would enable children to understand the concept of leadership and classroom discussions could begin with questions such as, “Do you know any leaders?” “Why do we need leaders?”, “What do leaders do?” and “Would you like to be a leader?” Classroom conversations about leadership could teach the positive behaviors of leaders so that children could see the difference between negative experiences and those that are inspiring and uplifting.
Further, if children were exposed to a leadership curriculum, they could connect their daily role models to intentional leadership which could prompt a leadership identity from a very young age. Given that five out of seven of the participants in this study did not self-identify as a leader, it would be easy to assume that many people do not understand leadership, even when they are in leadership positions. Teaching children leadership would be an highly effective way of introducing the concept of leadership, increasing leadership awareness, and building the identity of a leader for any child who might be interested in becoming a leader.

Moreover, having leadership knowledge from a young age could prompt anyone to take intentional steps to become a leader rather than wait to be chosen as a leader, as is the practice in many organizations today. Conger (1993), said, “We can’t train tomorrow’s leaders with yesterday’s leadership training practices. The decade ahead demands a new set of competencies and a revamping of training methods” (p. 46). Indeed, training future generations of leaders starting from grade school would be a new method of training leaders that could result in drastically decreasing the leadership crisis that exists today (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Evans, 2008; Killion, 2007; Leonard & Lang, 2010).

**Continuous support for leadership development in organizations.** As all of the participants shared, continuous and long term practice was key to leadership development. All seven of the participants shared that continuous development with increased responsibility in an environment of support was critical to their development.

*Increase leadership identity in organizations through human resources, hiring practices, and developmental efforts.* Encouraging organizations to develop leadership identities among their staff would require organizational culture changes that would have to include, but not be limited to: 1. Work toward more boundaryless organizational structures with
shared leadership positions (Beer et al., 2016; Gallagher, 2017). The emergence of *Subordinate Theme 7B: New thinking about teams* and *Subordinate Theme 7C: New thinking about achieving buy-in* demonstrate that as the participants developed their leadership abilities, their thinking broadened in terms of the value of team members, their responsibilities, and contributions. This new construct allowed the participants to view team members as valuable contributors rather than subordinates restricted by title and rank.

This thinking emerged as the participants recognized the need for full participation and engagement from employees at all levels of the organization. As leaders, the participants learned that they could not accomplish their goals alone and organizational success demands valued contributions from all employees. If organizations could begin to identify the different skills that employees bring to the organization and reward them with interim leadership positions where and when their skill or knowledge is needed, employees could develop leadership skills more often and perhaps earlier, employee engagement would increase, and organizational effectiveness could be greatly enhanced.

2. Offer “psychologically safe” environments for people to practice leadership skill building without fear (Beer et al., 2016). In concert with the suggestion above, offering employees safe environments to practice leadership skills could greatly decrease our current leadership crisis by developing more successful leaders. Five of the seven participants in this study stressed the need for effective teams with high trust and excellent communication. To achieve both conditions, employees must be free from fear of reprisal, intimidation, or job loss. Indeed, Rose spoke of the intimidation she experienced when working for a negative leader and Raye spoke of the emotional impact on her when she was berated by her president. Developing a culture that is psychologically safe for employees to practice leadership skills without fear and
the constraint of titles and/or positions could enhance leadership skills and abilities while achieving organizational goals.

3. Develop leaders at every level of the organization as leadership is not limited to a title, a position on an organizational chart or a supervisory position (Amagoh, 2009; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Beer et al., 2016). Superordinate Theme Six: Leadership development is enhanced through hands-on experience emerged from the stories of five of the seven participants who shared that their successive leadership development was acquired through incremental, hands-on experience.

By identifying and acknowledging leaders at all levels of an organization, employees could experience more engagement, organizations could achieve greater effectiveness, and developing leaders could practice leadership skills more often and from an earlier age. Indeed, as evidenced by this study, development is an on-going process throughout the course of one’s career, as leadership development is a process that takes time (Abrell et al., 2011; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Avolio & Lester 2011; Birman et al., 2000; Brown & Posner, 2001; Brungardt, 1997; Day, 2000; Day, 2014; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kutz, 2004; Parry & Sinha, 2005; Solansky, 2010; Wahat et al., 2013; Westbrook, 2012).

**Provide intentional, progressive leadership experience.** All seven of the participants related stories of work experience that increased their leadership skills. None of the participants reported experiencing programs such as on-the-job training, action learning, job rotations, or cross training, however, Raye did experience holding two positions at once during a time of crisis. Organizations that are seeking to augment the skills and knowledge of developing leaders should consider programs such as on-the-job training, action learning, job rotations, or cross training as essential components of their in-house leadership development programs.
**Provide support: coaching and mentoring.** The literature often cites the benefits of both coaching and mentoring (Allio, 2005; Amagoh, 2009; Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Beer et al., 2016; Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Ely et al., 2010; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; McNamara et al., 2014; Moen & Federici, 2012; Muir, 2014; Solansky, 2010; Sparrow, 2016; Westbrook, 2012). Two participants spoke about the support they found from either a coach or from mentors. Organizational leaders or human resource departments could organize a network of mentors throughout their organizations who could provide support for employees in all business-critical units or departments. For the developing leader, mentors can be essential for getting hints and tips about navigating their way through the organization, act as a point of entry to other leaders throughout the organization for networking and business information, as well as sharing industry specific knowledge.

Coaching can be provided by either outside or internal coaches who give moral support, work on defining and working toward goals, and support behavior change. By providing on-going support from either mentors, coaches, or both, the organization could build a network of safety and support for those who are navigating their way through new and sometimes dangerous waters of leadership. This system of support could make the difference between failure and success, retaining staff, or having employee turnover. In addition, for those utilizing mentors and coaches, organizations could provide networking opportunities so that experiences and lessons learned can be shared.

**Acknowledge hardships and their lessons.** Both the literature and the participants acknowledged that experiencing a critical event or hardship had a positive impact on personal growth, self-awareness, and leadership skills (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Avolio & Lester, 2011; Bartol & Zhang, 2007; Brown & Posner, 2001;
Brungardt, 1997; Kalman, 2012; McCall, 2004; Wahat et al., 2013). However, no one wants to experience hardship and not many people talk about the lessons they learned from going through the experience. Some people may even see themselves as a failure for experiencing some hardships. Yet, there is much to be gained from sharing those experiences with others and discussing new personal constructs, such as the lessons Rose learned when dealing with the loss of her mother, how Elaine overcame her excessive shyness and fear of public speaking, Don’s experience with a drug-addicted brother, or how Mark faced destruction from fires and survived difficult financial times.

This is the kind of information that could be shared with developing leaders, but, when and how would that take place? Discussing the impact of hardships and the subsequent personal and leadership growth that resulted could be shared during group coaching or mentoring sessions or during classroom retreats. Up-and-coming leaders who could participate in safe group sessions where critical workplace incidents are discussed could experience support, hear new ideas and constructs, all while trying to get through their own difficult work-related situations. This kind of support in the fast-paced, mission-critical environment in which emerging leaders work, could make the difference between long-term success and leadership failure.

**Connect lessons to self-reflection and newly-built constructs.** Whether the developing leader is utilizing the assistance of a coach, mentor, or both, or working with leadership development specialists within an organization, the crucial step necessary at critical junctures is to debrief incidents and emotional responses, encourage self-reflection, examine identity issues, and encourage the possibility of building new constructs. Both Matthew and Ed spoke of the help they received help from either coaching or mentors. Though Ed had a relatively short-term
experience with a professional coach, Matthew had several, long-term mentors from whom he received encouragement and support through several vital points in his career.

Offering support for developing leaders may be nothing short of a safety-net that could rescue a struggling leader at the brink of failure or develop eager, novice leaders who will be better able to solve problems, think more in terms of the organization and less about their own ego. As the novice leaders develop into higher stages, new constructs enable them to function with fewer perceived threats and a clearer sense of issues at hand. Currently, this development is usually only done on an individual basis and, depending on the individual, may not be accomplished at all. However, with the help of leadership development facilitators, more potential leaders could make the transition to higher stages of development.

**Recommendations for Future Research:**

Burns said, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (as cited in Kuhnert, 1990, p. 596). Indeed, due to many issues including the individual and social nature of leadership, there are many aspects of leadership that may never be fully understood or quantified. Yet, leaders have always existed, and we know a leader when we see one. This prompts the question, if leaders exist, how can they be developed?

Research that studies the process of leadership development would be highly beneficial for organizations and individual leaders alike. The leadership literature decries the lack of credible research and the lack of substantive methods of development (Allio, 2005; D. Collins, 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Leonard & Lang, 2010; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; Toor & Ofori, 2008). The results of this study point to the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all methodology to leadership development and leadership development is a long-term process. To
that end, a longitudinal study of a limited number of specific methodologies could begin to
narrow the scope of the most effective tools when used in organizations.

In addition research on organizational systems of development are important because the
literature stated that one methodology is not adequate for leadership development (Avolio &
Lester, 2011; Beer et al., 2016; Block & Manning, 2007; Hutchinson, 2017; Quatro et al., 2007).
Longitudinal research of organizational leadership development systems could include the
establishment and implementation of organized systems of development and support such as
programs of intentional and progressive job assignments, job rotations, or action learning in
tandem with a coaching and mentoring initiative supplemented with regularly scheduled
classroom discussions. Whatever the methodology mix in the organizational system, a closer
look at a combination of promising methods implemented in an organizational setting for an
extended period of time would be extremely beneficial to those who develop leaders as well as
for organizations that want to develop future leaders.

A third area of research could study the leadership development of those who are in
economically depressed regions of the country. Indeed, this topic could include issues that
present obstacles to leadership development such as the challenge of finances or other limited
resources, and the ability to recruit and retain effective leaders. Further, leadership development
could be studied by demographic parameters such as income and economic regions. Studying the
leadership development of participants in economically challenging situations and by income
demographics could reveal valuable information for areas that are sorely in need of affective
leaders.
Conclusion

Leadership development remains a complex and sometimes mysterious phenomenon that is often not replicable. The experiences that impact leaders are specific to their life situation but offer lessons that can be learned to develop one’s leadership skills. Though there are methodologies that can be utilized to enhance leadership skills, the presumptive attributes for any leader are innate passion for the field or institution, the motivation to be a leader, and the ability to learn lessons and build new constructs that allow the leader to develop. These prerequisites are out of the hands of organizations or those who develop leaders, but assistance can be offered through organizations and development specialists, who are adept at facilitating learning, self-reflection, and growth.
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Appendix A
Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education
Name of Investigator(s): Diane Lange
Principal Investigator’s name, Student Researcher’s name: Dr. Sandy Nickel, Diane Lange
Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study on Leadership Development

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Diane Lange is inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
I am asking you to be in this study because you are an acknowledged leader in our community with 10 or more years of leadership experience.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to find out what experiences or influential people helped you to develop into a leader and how you have changed throughout the course of becoming a leader.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to tell me about situations, experiences or people that made an impact on you and your leadership development. I will also ask you to share some of your thoughts about the situations and/or how your thinking may have changed as you progressed throughout your leadership development.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
I will be conducting 6 to 8 individual interviews, and each takes place where each participant chooses to meet. Our meeting today should only take about 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes.

**Format for Signed Informed Consent Document**

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

I don’t believe there are any foreseeable risks or discomfort. However, if you feel uncomfortable with the questions in this study and would like to stop, please let me know and we will discontinue this interview.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help people who work to develop leaders, people who want to become leaders, and organizations who want to develop their staff into leaders, become more successful at leadership development.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. I am the only person who will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being a part of this project.

To protect your identity, I will assign you and each person a pseudonym, and everyone will be referred to in my dissertation by their pseudonym. The audio tapes will be transcribed by a transcription company, Rev.com, and they ensure confidentiality with 128 bit encryption and both the audio and video tapes will be stored in my home safe until my study is finished and approved. Upon completion of this project all of the audio and video tapes will be deleted, and all notes, and any other identifiable information will be shredded. In addition, all data entered into my computer is protected with a 2-step sign-on; first with a password and then with a PIN. And finally all correspondence regarding this study is only done over my Northeastern University email system, which is password protected.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you
may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Diane Lange at 607-772-8707. You can also contact Dr. Sandy Nickel the Principal Investigator at 987-369-6884.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email:n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

Yes, you will be given a $25 gift certificate to Mirabito Convenience Stores as soon as you complete the study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

The only cost you may incur is the cost of your time and the cost of driving to this site.

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

______________________________________________   ______________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                          Date

______________________________________________
Printed name of person above

______________________________________________   ______________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent                          Date

_________Diane Lange_______________________________________
Printed name of person above

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Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Diane Lange
lange.d@husky.neu.edu

Date
Diane Lange
115 Crestmont Road
Binghamton, NY 13905

Participant
Address

Dear ___________,

I would like to introduce myself and the purpose of my letter. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, and I am doing my dissertation study on Leadership Development. I’m contacting you because I would like you to be one of the participants in my study.

For my study, I will be interviewing 6 to 8 participants who are acknowledged leaders in our community who have at least 10 years of leadership experience. This study will only involve one individual interview that will last approximately 45 minutes up to an hour and 15 minutes at the longest. I am happy to schedule the interview at your convenience, and where ever you would like to meet.

During the interview I will be asking you questions about how you became a leader and what experiences or people in your life helped your leadership development through the years. Please note that all of the information you share during your interview, as well as your identity will remain strictly confidential.

I would like to follow up with you by telephone on _________ regarding your interest in participating in my study. If you are interested, we can set up the details as I would like to conduct the interviews during _______. Please know that your participation is strictly voluntary and again it will be held confidential.

I look forward to talking with you on ______________, and thank you for your consideration.

All the best~

Diane Lange
Appendix C
Interview Questions

Diane Lange
lange.d@husky.neu.edu

1. When did you begin to first think of yourself as a leader?
2. What was it that prompted you to begin thinking that you’re a leader? (if not answered from Question 1)
3. How did your thinking change from before you thought of yourself as a leader and once you began to view yourself as a leader?
   You can start by filling in the blanks:
   “First I did ___________________ and then/now I did/do ___________________.”
   Or
   I used to think ___________________, but then I thought ___________________.”
   Or
   “I used to be ___________________, but now I am ___________________.”
4. Did you have a work position that presented experiences or challenges that prompted or developed your leadership skills? If so, what were they and how did you respond to the situation(s)?
5. Did you have a life challenge or hardship that presented experiences or challenges that prompted or developed your leadership skills? If so, what were they and how did you respond to the situation(s)?
6. Do you have any people in your life that impacted (positive or negative) your leadership development? If so, how did they affect you and your development?
7. Did you have any childhood experiences that affected you or prompted you to be a leader?
8. Did you seek out any experiences or developmental activities on your own to augment your leadership development? Were they useful?
9. Do you have one thing you want me to know so I don’t forget about you as a leader?