

A Qualitative Exploration of Effective Leadership Development Programs and Leadership Process on Succession Planning and Organizational Performance

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Abstract

Leadership is a valuable resource of an organization, and its effectiveness potentially impacts organizational efficacy and productivity. This qualitative single case study includes the possible impact of ineffective leadership development programs for succession planning on organizational performance. Leadership effectiveness comes from the perspective of 17 participants from across the organization of interest. A total of 11 themes and 71 sub-themes that underscore leadership development as iterative emerged from the study. The themes highlight the prominence of informal leadership development efforts, the effectiveness of alignment with exemplary leaders, and leadership practices. Consequently, the effectiveness of leadership development programs is assessed through a leader's behavioral indicators and traits, exposure to exemplary formal and informal leadership practices, and an organizational culture that enables personal growth. Analysis of the information retrieved from the study confirmed that aspects of the problem statement of this study exist in the organization MNUS. The study included identifying the need for a direct measure of the impact of leadership development programs on the performance of an organization. Leadership development programs are an area of further study.

Keywords: effective leadership, leadership development, exemplary leadership

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Developing high-potential leaders for succession planning within organizations and across industries on a local or global spectrum is a recognized challenge in leadership development (Hruby et al., 2022). The importance of leadership in organizational development and the interconnectedness of organizations in today's world increases the impetus for effective leadership and demands a strategy of business continuity that supports the retention of organizational intelligence (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Corporations and government agencies recently invested billions of dollars in developing leaders' competencies, skills, and abilities through leadership development programs (Boerma et al., 2017). Corporate leaders in the United States recorded over \$14 billion yearly spending on leadership development to improve the capabilities of leaders and nurture new leaders (Gurdjian et al., 2014). The common assumption is that an organization's investment in its leadership development activities, employees, and financial and technical resources contributes to the leadership capacity of the individuals, participating groups, and the organization (Boerma et al., 2017). However, the increasingly dynamic environment in which organizations exist and operate threatens successful leadership development, succession planning, and organizational performance (Beryl et al., 2020; Swensen et al., 2016).

Leadership development incorporates different activities that typically occur over time and focus on increasing the implementation of an organization's leadership capacity (Holt et al., 2018). These actions include competencies development through the art of leading people, the science of business management, coaching and mentoring, and didactic and reflective learning (Ullrich et al., 2021). Leadership development also includes a broad spectrum of needed leadership capabilities. The culture and design of an organization are essential fundamentals of leadership development (Swensen et al., 2016). Therefore, the governing body of an organization plays a vital role in establishing an organizational philosophy of leadership training that seeks to optimize the benefits of developing existing and new leaders through focused programs. Today's leaders face the challenge of fostering the right culture

for self and organizational efficacy (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Despite the annual multibillion-dollar investment in leadership development in the United States (Gurdjian et al., 2014), limited studies exist to explore effective leadership development programs for succession planning and the potential impact on organizational outcome and performance, specifically in a multinational setting.

1.2 The Problem

The general problem in this study was the lack of effective leadership development programs for succession planning and the potential to reduce organizational performance. Holt et al. (2018) stated that the components and resulting effectiveness of leadership development programs are experimental, resulting in inadequate leadership skills for succession planning in organizations. Seidman et al. (2020) supported the view by explaining that leadership training and development programs gained increasing traction; however, limited evidence exists on the program's effective implementation and measured benefits on organizational performance. Ullrich et al. (2021) also established the need for leadership development programs; however, managers and staff are poorly prepared and supported in role transitions, resulting in poor organizational performance and decreased knowledge retention. Ulvenblad and Cederholm Björklund (2018) indicated that leadership development programs, to a certain extent, address the emotional intelligence characteristic of self-leadership, which focuses primarily on the leadership of followers, excluding self-leadership skills and strategies, resulting in implications of the deficiency in succession leadership education. The specific problem was the possible lack of effective leadership development programs for succession planning in a multinational organization in the northwest United States, potentially resulting in a reduction in organizational performance. The problem statement is relevant in assessing the effectiveness of leadership as a process and the concept of developing participants for succession planning through leadership development programs.

1.3 Assumptions

Qualitative research includes assumptions and metaphysical conceptions inherent in this study. The research method for this study is a single case study qualitative method, which is assumed appropriate for real-world studies (Goldsmith, 2021). The method centered on an organization and uses multiple sources of evidence to support this study. The first assumption is based on the philosophy that the findings from a single organization are adequate to inform discussions on the problem statement (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This study reflects on a multinational organization in the northwest United States; therefore, the assumption of a single case study holds. The second assumption is that the study participants will respond openly, truthfully, and knowledgeably to the research questions and problem statements. The interview questions are open-ended, which enables the extraction of an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The participants needed a comfortable environment and were less apprehensive to provide open and honest responses. According to Hift (2014), using open-ended questions for a study taxes the cognitive thinking of respondents. This type of thinking mitigates the risks associated with the lack of openness and encourages the free flow of information. The assumption is that participants in secondary scholarly research also maintained integrity by giving open and honest responses to the questions posed in the related research. The accuracy, completeness, and robustness of the study's findings, conclusion, and recommendations rely on the precision and inclusiveness of the participants' responses in all sources in this study. For the primary research, participants were offered anonymity to mitigate apprehension of possible consequences. Participants are referred to in pseudo-names.

The third assumption of this study was that participants share their lived and observed experiences and not the perspectives of others. A prerequisite assumption is that participants were identified and engaged in the study based on their participation and engagement in the organization's leadership development programs. A list of participants in the organization's leadership development programs in recent years came from respective functional areas by the gatekeeper for the organization. The participants were approached for their interest and consent to partake in this study. The fourth assumption of this study was that the participants voluntarily partook in this exercise and were sincerely interested in sharing their perspectives. The participants were free to discontinue the research if compelled to. However, the researcher clearly explained the purpose and scope of the research to obtain the interest and commitment of participants who are deliberate, motivated, and diligent in their involvement.

1.4 Limitations

This study contains limitations synonymous with qualitative research's subjective characteristics. The single case study qualitative research approach requires collaboration with participants to establish a trust-based relationship to support the free-flow expression and disclosure of individual views and experiences. Establishing relationships introduces an element of bias, which amplifies the subjective characteristic of the qualitative research approach

(Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020). According to Teh and Lek (2018), bias can potentially undermine the validity of the findings. Therefore, the situation is imperative for assumed and known biases disclosed through reflexivity and their existence acknowledged with a possible explanation of the impact and probable control strategy that is implemented. The potential for subjectivity is a characteristic of this research methodology. Therefore, the limitation does not invalidate the research and the research findings.

Another limitation relates to the adequacy of the sample size used in the study. The requirements of the study include a sample size of 15 to 30 participants to provide in-depth insight. The study limitation includes the input of 17 participants who provided detailed insights based on their experiences and perspectives. The key factor is the participant's degree of trust and ability to provide detailed, complete, and true responses. Trust enables communication behaviors and honest feedback for increased optimism in the process and, ultimately, the research findings (Ruan & Durresti, 2016). A compromise between the trustworthiness of the participants and the researcher could impact the quality of outcomes. The subjective, dynamic, context-dependent nature of trust presents complexities that are amplified by the inability to ascertain the proportion of available and required trust (Ford et al., 2017). A participant could engage and contribute to a level of transparency and openness; however, transparency does not guarantee the adequacy of the information given.

1.5 Delimitations

The definition of a study's boundaries, scope, and conditions mitigates the possibility of generalized misunderstandings resulting from the lack of clear delimitation between the perspectives and the conceptual remit (Contador et al., 2021). Delimitation could arise from the conscious inclusion or exclusion of a group of the population sample from the study by the researcher. It could also be a result of limiting the exploration of the problem statement to certain elements of the concept or framework. This qualitative single-case method recommends using a small sample size of 15 to 30 participants. The participants were identified as leaders and individual contributors aspiring for leadership responsibilities from across the organization who would have experienced or participated in the organization's leadership development programs. None of the qualified participants from the population group were eliminated or excluded from partaking in this study. There was also no reduction in the scope of the study. However, participating in the study was completely voluntary, and participants were allowed to discontinue participation at any time if they felt compelled to do so. Therefore, no delimitation was expected or experienced in this study.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Leadership development and leadership as a process gained significant traction recently, with industries demonstrating a commitment to making and developing leaders (Boerma et al., 2017). Establishments in the United States alone invest over \$14 billion annually on strategies and practices to develop and improve the capabilities of leaders and nurture new and existing leaders (Gurdjian et al., 2014). The common assumption is that the investment in leadership development activities of an organization will translate to improved leadership capacity of individuals, participating groups, and the organization. Developing high-potential leaders for succession planning within organizations and across industries remains a recognized challenge in developing leaders (Hruby et al., 2022). Leadership development is a continuous activity (Holt et al., 2018). The situation includes the development of competencies through the art of leading people, the science of business management, the service of coaching and mentoring, and didactic and reflective learning (Ullrich et al., 2021). The situation incorporates attention to a broad spectrum of leadership capabilities that require understanding the theoretical components and application. Despite the significant continuous investment in leadership development in the United States, limited attention has been given to exploring effective leadership development programs for succession planning (Ullrich et al., 2021) and the potential impact on organizational performance. This study reflects on reducing the gap in research specifically relating to leadership development programs and practices in a multinational organization in the northwest United States.

1.7 Research Questions

This qualitative study comprises three central research questions and several sub-questions exploring further details. The first and third questions explored the perspectives and the reasons for failure and success. The questions are exploratory rather than measurable and are not bound by preconceived opinions of the research topic (Moore et al., 2021).

2. Method

The research methodology for this study aligns with the flexible design for qualitative research, primarily focused on

the qualitative method of data collection but is characterized by plasticity to incorporate some quantitative information. The qualitative research approach allows for inductive logic and a comprehensive approach informed by the participants' experiences. The flexibility and responsiveness based on context gathered from interviews and emerging theoretical concepts are central to the appropriateness of the research design and method. Hays and McKibben (2021) supported the argument that qualitative research lends to a big-picture representation that describes the experienced situations. The flexible design enables the incorporation of clarity on the approach and the multitude of factors affecting the position. The research problem and questions guide this choice of research design. The process of triangulation negates the limitations of utilizing a single study option (Noble & Heale, 2019).

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study are partakers and contributors to the organization's leadership development events and programs. Participants include individual contributors on the career path to leadership roles, line managers, talent managers, and existing leaders responsible for service, operation, and people management. Participants were tenured employees whom the company has employed for at least a year. The expectation is that the tenure allows for understanding the organization's learning culture. The learning culture also supports the exploration of pertinent leadership development programs and the implementation of learned concepts. The stipulated minimum tenure was to allow for time in which participants experience and assess the effectiveness of prevalent leadership development programs on succession planning and organizational performance.

2.2 Population and Sampling

Selecting the population and sample for this study in considering the effectiveness of leadership development programs required an assessment of the program by participants. The methodology used to identify the appropriate sample of participants incorporates consideration for inclusive, diverse perspectives to arrive at an appropriate model that provides significant implications to help explore, identify, and build on best practices to support organizational leadership development initiatives (Longenecker & Insch, 2018). The ideology was to support leadership development for succession planning and sustaining organizational performance. Population and sampling are the main essential methodologies for general and social research in influencing the generalization of the research findings (Elfil & Negida, 2017). The consideration of this study was for purposive sampling.

2.3 Data Collection

The planned data collection for this study was primarily virtual interviews. The data collection plan commenced with identifying participants from the population sample. The data collection approach followed purposive identification of the population of participants from individual contributors, human resource management, talent development groups, partakers in leadership development programs, and leadership circles. The participants were with the deliberate insight the organization's gatekeeper provided. The gatekeeper, a leadership team member, was first identified and approached for consent to use the organization as the subject of the case study. The permission request letter was issued to the gatekeeper. The connection with the gatekeeper follows a series of exploratory discussions on the site selection, activities during the study, and the planned approach for presenting the findings (Kay, 2019). The gatekeeper's input is integral to identifying representatives from the sub-groups of the population and, by inference, the successful planning of meaningful data collection (Kay, 2019). An inclusive sample size with equal representation of male and female participants was envisaged; however, Moser and Korstjens (2018) noted that the sample size, inclusion, and exclusion criteria for sampling emerged during the data collection. The consent of the participants was sought following the approval of the IRB to commence the data collection. The consent of the participants includes the right to withdraw from the study at any time; however, steps are taken to address any privacy concerns that participants may have and, to protect their identity, to encourage their full participation.

The data collection plan and approach follow a circle of interrelated activities in which the commencement of the data collection process was the determination and definition of opening-ended research questions focused on understanding the phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviewees were identified through purposeful sampling to categorize their perceived ability to inform the research (Ames et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020). Next, the practical mode of the interview emerged. The interview type was primarily one-on-one interviews conducted virtually by web-based platforms. The virtual nature of the interviews was driven by the predominant adoption of the policy of working from home, which places most interviewees in remote locations. Data came from using audio and visual recordings to capture responses to the interview questions for completeness. The interviews took place at the interviewee's convenience. An hour was allocated for each interview, and time adjustments were planned so that the interview was not rushed; however, all interviews were within the allotted time of one hour. The situation required the interviewee's consent before engaging in the research, and the interviewee reserves the right to

discontinue their involvement in the interview. Chime video-enabled meeting management system was used to conduct and record the meetings and transcribe the meeting recording. The NVivo 14 qualitative software analysis tool was used for data analysis to identify the emerging themes from the interview transcripts.

2.4 Instrument

This study used the recommended qualitative studies interview technique and will utilize semi-structured questions instead of following a strict formalized list of questions. This method is because of the varying familiarity between the researcher and the interviewees. The semi-structured interview method typically consists of a dialogue between the researcher and interviewee, guided by predefined interview questions supplemented by follow-up inquiries and probes for further clarity. This method allows for more transparency and encourages two-way open communication.

2.5 Data Collection

The data collected for this study was through web-based platforms, which are prone to ethical challenges of online data collection. The exponential growth of data collection due to supported web-enabled techniques requires moral responsibility for privacy protection, data authenticity, clarification of data ownership, and trust in data collection (Utts, 2021). This process includes statistical thinking, which understands basic statistical principles and the implications of violating them.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from the research received was analyzed to attain abstractions and a logical presentation of the emerging themes on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of leadership development programs for succession planning in MNUS. The analysis used was coding, applied to categorize, and organize information based on closely examining what emerges from the data (Deterding & Waters, 2021). The conceptualization of coding requires reliance on data analysis tools that group information to reveal a bias-reduced pattern, thereby moderating the potential to undermine the validity of the research findings (Teh & Lek, 2018). Data comes in all sorts of forms, sizes, and content. This process makes data analysis, mainly qualitative data, challenging for researchers. Qualitative data coding does not often come with a predefined coding scheme. The challenge is applying a consistent assessment to reading, assessing, and interpreting the data.

2.7 Reliability and Validity

I used a web-based interview platform to conduct the interviews with the identified sample of participants. The participants' privacy includes using pseudonyms and relying on semi-structured interview questions. This method ensures openness, free flow of information, and the possibility to ask follow-up questions for clarity. This method enables completeness in capturing information and complete understanding to provide correct analysis and interpretation of transcribed notes. The reliance on Chime technology software for transcribing recorded interviews and the use of tried and tested NVivo software programs for data analysis provided a level of assurance of the reliability of this study (Maher et al., 2018). Human intervention still plays a significant part in creatively interpreting and presenting the data generated through the computer-aided qualitative research program. However, the technology-assisted program allows for the analysis of complex and cumbersome information, thereby complementing the reliability of the study. As with the validity, the reliability of qualitative research does not focus on quantitatively defined indicators of good or bad; nonetheless, rigorous standards of reliability and validity are appropriate for evaluating qualitative research findings (Spiers et al., 2018). Triangulation requires validating evidence for coding and identifying themes from different sources. For this research, the coding is enabled by NVivo, which recognizes shared occurrences in the interview scripts. The interview notes will also be discussed with respective participants at the end of their interview for review and further clarification. This process is primarily to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the information captured by the researcher and, by inference, the validity and accuracy of the narrative captured for the study. The validity of research from the reader's perspective is also an important consideration. This method is addressed by including anecdotes from the interviews with participants in the study to confirm the originality of the information.

My personal experiences with leadership development programs and the leadership process emerged so they do not lead to bias. To mitigate the researcher's perspective, bracketing of the data is undertaken. Data triangulation is also implemented to enhance precision by identifying themes and coding and mitigating fundamental biases and errors in the information (Cypress, 2018; Noble & Heale, 2019). Bracketing is affected to alleviate preconceived perspectives on themes in the researcher-participant dialogues (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021; Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021). The concept of bracketing focuses on suspending all preconceived experiences, particularly during data collection and analysis in which there is direct participant engagement. Dörfler and Stierand (2021) indicated that bracketing out the

pre-understandings, beliefs, and values increases the probability that the researcher will keep an open mind, eliminate personal opinions, and adequately capture the narrative. However, limitations to the concept are identified. The application of bracketing is influenced by the researcher's judgment on where bracketing should be applied (Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021). Therefore, full disclosure by the researcher is based on trust. Owning and fully meeting the responsibility of open and honest sharing of personal experiences by the researcher supports the validity of the research. Therefore, this researcher ensured the validity of the research was maintained by performing participant checks and confirming the researcher's interpretation of what they said. This strategy ensured that the interpretation and participants' words aligned with what they meant to say.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Leadership Development Concepts

Based on the findings of Hruby et al. (2022), the advancement of high-potential employees and new leaders in global corporations is a challenge in leadership development. The multinational organization in the northwest of the United States (MNUS), which is the subject of this case study, is a global organization. MNUS is a multinational customer-centric technology company that operates with a diverse workforce from different cultural backgrounds. The diversity in team composition enables creative thinking and diversity of perspectives (Seo et al., 2017), which promotes innovative ideas (Boone et al., 2019). However, the organization is exposed to the issues of cultural citizenship and the possibility of complexities associated with global societies (Beaman, 2016; Kristinsson et al., 2016).

MNUS leaders improve the customer experience through service and product offerings. The corporation maintains a competitive edge in the industry within which it operates (Hunitie, 2018; Joiner, 2019). The company's recognition of the importance of effective leadership and relational dynamics can be deduced from its leadership principles (Lämsä & Keränen, 2020). The conceptualization of leadership principles demonstrates the responsibility in leadership fairness, empowerment, openness, and trust. The emphasis is on developing people through philosophies reflecting soft skills and promoting technical skills (Abraham et al., 2021; Clark & Harrison, 2018; Frich et al., 2015; Modisane, 2018). Leadership development is an iterative process, so leaders are never done learning but continuously seek to develop themselves and their team (Shankman & Gigliotti, 2021). This philosophy relates to the principle of hiring and continually developing the best employees (Cauwelier, 2019). The basis of this concept is that leaders proactively identify leadership potential in high-performing employees and seek to create paths for the growth and development of other leaders. The direction of leadership, the culture, and the principles of an organization significantly influence the organization's capabilities and performance (Lapshun & Fusch, 2021). Consequently, leadership deliberately encourages individual and collective ownership of pursuing environmental conduciveness for employee growth, maintaining superpowers, and developing individual areas of weakness.

Leadership programs of MNUS include mentoring, coaching, people management, managers, and leaders' geographical circles. The geographically dispersed area coverage of the organization allows for virtual and hybrid working; therefore, trust is paramount (Lapshun & Fusch, 2021). The leadership development program's structure brings existing leaders, aspiring leaders, and high-performing individuals together through peer-to-peer engagement strategies that build leadership communities, enable knowledge sharing, and ultimately foster skills development in virtual and in-person work situations. The advantage is that aspiring leaders can observe and learn from the governing behavior through formal and informal mediums and vicarious experiences in a social context (Chuang, 2021). The shortfall is that the learning of the aspiring leader limits the leader's knowledge and conduct and the learner's confidence to probe and challenge observed perceptions (Lian et al., 2022). The approach incorporates skills that support creating a productive, higher performing, more diverse environment, leading with empathy, and supporting the team's personal and professional development. The adequacy of the programs forms part of this study.

3.2 Characterization of Leadership

The concept of leadership evolved over the years. According to Northouse (2019), the pioneering formal definition of leadership emerged from the nineteenth-century theme of power, control, and dominance to impose, invoke action, and commitment from followers. Subsequent characterization of the concept focuses on behavioral elements to influence and motivate, through words and actions, to steer the trust of others and their willingness to act (Reed et al., 2019). In a critical review of 44 peer-reviewed articles, Reed et al. (2019) found that the most common definition of leadership was focused on motivating followers to actualize specific goals and for positive organizational change. Of the articles reviewed, 37 defined leadership or aspects of leadership, and 40 listed relevant aspects of leadership competencies. The predominant definition of leadership reflects leadership as a process combining established approaches and theories rather than formal positions. In alignment with the findings of Croft and Seemiller (2017)

and Muff et al. (2022), the identified leadership competencies were mostly interpersonal and self-management skills. Minimal assessment exists regarding the effectiveness of the leadership activities and process, and no assessment of the effectiveness of leadership development or leadership development programs. Articles that presented types of assessment reflect on behavioral-based tools assessing individual attributes that are conceptually related to leadership or self-assessment of learning objectives in leadership courses (Croft & Seemiller, 2017; Muff et al., 2022). The gap in the research amplifies the problem statement addressed by this study. Hunitie (2018) defined leadership as a process involving all persons with management responsibility, from supervisor to top executive. A recognition of the integral partnership role of followership, regardless of the hierarchical complexities of the organizational structure, exists. Leadership's singular goal is achieving predetermined goals through efficient and effective deployment of resources (Rangus & Černe, 2019).

3.3 Historic Perspective of Leadership

The Great Man Theory. Thomas Carlyle's Great Man Theory of 1841 is the first formalized theory on leadership. The theory characterizes leadership as a product of innate traits of greatness, power, and might, which are apparent only in men and are impossible to develop or learn through experience (Rüzgar, 2019). According to Rüzgar (2019), leadership traits are only inherent in great men who were sent by God as heroes and became leaders through the process of hero worshiping. The great men were prophets, priests, and military and heroic figures with leadership traits that enabled the influence and power over others, thereby shaping human history. The concept of leadership in contemporary research fervently contradicts the great man theory. The evidence of creating leaders and leadership development, which is the primary consideration of this research, demonstrates the obsolescence of the great man theory. Contemporary leadership focuses on the deviation from dominance and recognizes the integral component of collectiveness and the relational aspect of leadership (Hillen et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2020), which was initially formalized through the trait theory.

3.4 Contemporary Leadership Theories

The new millennium witnessed the proliferation of leadership theories that systematically enable leading for creativity and innovation, address toxic and dark leadership, and further strategic leadership development (Dinh et al., 2014). Contemporary leadership theories provide ideologies on positive psychological capacities, influences for positive reasoning, and climate for enhancing leadership. Shek et al. (2015) identified the contemporary theories as transformation theory, charismatic approach, authentic leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and ethical leadership approaches. Several researchers have given their perspectives on these concepts. Lee et al. (2020) provided a cross-cutting overview of these leadership theories based on an analysis of over 650 journal articles and publications about the evolution of leadership theories and an analysis of the trend. I propose that leadership focuses on transformational leadership, lead-member exchange theory, and implicit leadership theories. However, the focus incorporates leadership impacts, emotions, and complexity relating to ethical shared and collective types of leadership approaches.

Transformational Leadership Behavior. Described as the most popularly researched construct of new leadership theories (Hillen et al., 2017), transformational leadership includes valued ethics, standards, and strategic goals for high-performance expectations (Harris, 2018; Hillen et al., 2017). The concept purports a positive, empowering connection between leaders and followers, which elevates higher levels of morality and motivation and improves perceptions of self-worth and self-belief necessary to effect transformational change (Harris, 2018). The proposition is for a reciprocal relational connection between leaders and followers in which they raise each other to higher levels of morality and motivation (Harris, 2018). Shafique and Loo-See (2018) shared a similar perspective on the effectiveness and robustness of the theory by ascertaining that its intended and deliberative practice can enhance organizational survivability, productivity, and promotion of entrepreneurial activities.

Servant Leadership Behavior. Unlike other leadership theories that view and describe leadership as directive, egotistical, paternalistic, and authoritarian (Anderson & Sun, 2017), servant leadership is viewed from the perspective of servanthood (Spears, 1996). Coined in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf in an essay titled, *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf stipulates that true leadership emerges from the primary motivation to help others. Anderson and Sun (2017) defined servant leadership through 12 conceptually distinct dimensions of altruistic calling, persuasive mapping, courage, emotional healing, forgiveness, humility, covenantal relationship, ethical behavior, agape love, authenticity, value creation for the community, and holding followers accountable.

Authentic Leadership Behavior. Shek et al. (2015) conceptualized authentic leadership through defined capabilities, awareness of values, demonstrated confidence, resilience, and high moral character of a leader. Authentic leadership theory relies on the effect of positive psychological capacities and highly developed organizational context to

produce results of greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and followers (Shek et al., 2015). As with transformational leadership, much research promotes authentic leadership's potential impact in driving followers' creativity by raising positive emotions through fostering supportive, objective, and fair interactions (Xu et al., 2017). However, research on authentic leadership is less comprehensive than other leadership theories, and its emphasis on the psychological component of leadership is limited (Shek et al., 2015). The postulation that authentic leadership enables optimism and trust in followers (Stander et al., 2015) heightens the associated relevance of the construct today. The idea is for authenticity to lead and drive the development of followers who will be succession leaders.

Spiritual Leadership Behavior. An assessment of worldview will be incomplete without Godism as the centerpiece (Koukl, 2017). Classified as an emerging area of leadership theory, spiritual leadership strongly correlates with religious faith as the purpose of human creation and is akin to answering a divine calling (Sholikhah et al., 2019). The narrative of the “spiritual giant,” Prophet Elijah, explains his continuation of the prophetic-intermediary tradition of Moses through developing a new leader in Elisha and his demonstration of true spiritual leadership (Merida, 2015, p. 100). Shek et al. (2015) posited that spiritual leadership succeeds by creating a vision that centers around an organizational culture that establishes hope and faith. Spiritual leaders prioritize the needs of followers above self-interest (Shek et al., 2015). Jones et al. (2018) advocated for workplace spirituality; however, the researchers argue that the content of spirituality does not guarantee good character or effective leadership.

3.5 Constructs for Effective Leadership

The past decades included increased competition for leadership of organizations. This competition is owing to the complexity of leadership and the ubiquitous status quo of organizations (Kwok et al., 2018). The recent high-profile cases of corporation and government indiscretions, which led to prominent organizations' collapse and their leaders' fall, have impacted the demand for effective leadership (Kuenzi et al., 2020). These factors compel the awareness of cognizance of leadership and leadership concepts. Though leadership theories describe the types of leadership that explain the behavioral expectations of a leader, leadership remains a complex concept (Kuenzi et al., 2020). Organizations have become more conscious of the leadership models and the effectiveness of leaders of organizations (Shafique & Loo-See, 2018).

Leadership incorporates understanding how micro processes like emotions, beliefs, and perception and macro concepts like social interaction affect leadership-follower relationships and organizational performance (Dinh et al., 2014). Leadership requires continuous development and the creation of leaders to retain organizational knowledge and value. Dopson et al. (2019) explained the complexity of leadership as a contextual, processual, relational, social, political, and temporal phenomenon aimed at influencing the achievement of purposes. Consequently, effective leadership should have a broad perspective, with a demonstrated relational influence with followers to support achieving goal-aligned outcomes (Rangus & Černe, 2019). The goals provide clear assertions of the intent and purpose of an organization supported by a specified structure that categorizes roles for purposeful and maximum efficiency across verticals of the organization (Önday, 2018). Therefore, in investigating the requirements of effective leadership, the organization's culture and values are analyzed, and the leadership style and approach, the organizational workplace practices, and the mechanisms and tools for effective leadership development are explored.

Organizational Culture and Values. Leadership development incorporates different activities that typically occur over time but commences with an organizational culture that prioritizes interventions that enhance the organization's leadership capacity (Holt et al., 2018). The leader of an organization has an important role to play in defining and upholding the culture and values of an organization. This premise includes the responsibility of ensuring the embedment of a learning culture. An organization with a learning culture focuses on supporting the growth of employees and identifies high-performance employees for leadership development. This extends to competencies development through the art of leading people, the science of business management, coaching and mentoring, and didactic and reflective learning (Ullrich et al., 2021).

Leadership Style and Approach. In considering the problem statement of this study, the principles of transformational leadership theory and practice hold a close alignment. The concept incorporates idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, factors that are considered relevant in motivating action and results (Shaw et al., 2018). Bouwmans et al. (2017) explored the relationship between transformational leadership, team learning, and achievements. Bouwmans et al. found a positive relation between transformational leadership and team outcomes and, by inference, the development of team participants. The findings of the research identify four key defining principles of transformational leadership. The four principles are idealized influence, which relates to charisma and demonstrative personality; inspirational motivation, which stimulates

followers through the empowering words of the leader; intellectual stimulation, which ignites creativity and innovative thinking; and individualized personal consideration. The strengths of the transformational leadership approach are ideals for leadership and referenced in measurable themes of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) as requirements for effective leadership and leadership development.

The transformational leadership theory and approach relate to constructs for this study because of their impetus as a leadership framework. However, the leadership approach has gaps and partial assumptions (Kollenscher et al., 2018). Micro interpersonal leadership models, such as transformational leadership theory, rely on elements of bias that impact organizational outcomes. Andersen (2015) indicated that transformational leadership is more appropriate within social and political contexts and not at the organizational level.

Coaching Interventions. Coaching and mentoring are key leadership development programs that advance self-awareness of individuals and leadership capabilities (Ayeleke et al., 2019). The construct investigates the skills and networking that complement the experience required for leading compared to those possessed by the coachee and catalyzes to transform the client awareness around solutions, answers, and shifts that will help them to achieve goals and thrive (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). Coaching focuses on building solutions and abilities to achieve positive emotions and outcomes by implementing effective leadership development strategies that promote behavior (Gan et al., 2021). The effectiveness of coaching depends on the coach's ability and efficacy and the recipient's full engagement (Grant & O'Connor, 2018). As with leadership, coaching is a partnership in which both participants must align to attain transformational change. The coaching is contingent on enhancing positive affect, increasing self-efficacy, and developing action steps in agreement (Grant & O'Connor, 2018).

Trust is key to the success of a coaching program. The challenge with this is that trust is subjective, complex, and prone to the dynamics of idiosyncrasy and cognitive thinking (Chua, 2018). Direct and open dialogue that challenges the coachee's cognizance toward identifying possible hidden issues is vital. Active listening is crucial for establishing meaningful connections based on mutual respect between a coach and coachee (Spataro & Bloch, 2018). Leadership development programs require effective communication; therefore, the solution-focused coaching and appreciative inquiry models, which support resilience and increase self-efficacy, provide results through an enhanced approach and development action (Grant & O'Connor, 2018). The success of a coaching program is highly dependent on the coaching exercise's quality and the coachee's commitment (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016). Coaching supports people's development. Consequently, it is a defining variable of leadership development programs.

Mentoring Service. As with coaching, mentoring provides powerful interventions that an organization can implement to develop leaders and improve human performance (Viera, 2021). Coaching and mentoring are theoretically distinct concepts that cannot be easily disentangled (Stokes et al., 2021). Both are deeply rooted services of people development. The key distinction is that coaching is typically more task-oriented, focusing on working with the coachee to discover possibilities to succeed in specific job responsibilities. Conversely, a mentor is usually a more experienced person with a broader role to develop the mentee's skills and capabilities (Viera, 2021).

Mentoring relates to the social learning theory in which leaders are role models to other leaders and followers. The ideology is that developing leaders learn vicariously through the experiences of the tenured leader in a social context (Chuang, 2021). The relevance of the theory is the philosophy that promulgates the development of followers and leaders through observation, reflection, and emulation of governing behaviors through formal and informal mediums (Lian et al., 2022). Hughes et al. (2022) stated that the process is more effective than formal training because it presents unbounded real-life challenges that teach unique leadership lessons. However, the limitations of the process are that its success is based on the tenacity of the recipient to extract valuable information and learn from the leader's experiences. Consequently, the remit of learning limits the leader's knowledge. Mentoring is relational and characterized by attentiveness, care, focused values, and mutual trust. The learning and growth of the parties involved are intertwined and interdependent (Snoeren et al., 2016). The effectiveness of leadership development programs is impacted by the efficacy of mentoring and coaching programs, which form part of the program (Viera, 2021).

Effective Dialogic Communication. Leadership practices incorporating effective leadership development programs potentially strengthen leadership competencies, enhance innovative skills, and positively influence leadership succession planning (Frich et al., 2015; Modisane, 2018). The practices integrate leader-follower dynamics (Aitken & von Treuer, 2021), which require effective communication and relationship building, which are key leadership behaviors to influence and motivate followers.

Effective communication requires assertive, focused practice and mindfulness of the audience (Chandler, 2018). A leader can support the development of the communication skills of other leaders by establishing a safe environment

and a culture that promotes transparency, open communication, and trust (Armengol et al., 2017; Spataro & Bloch, 2018). Straube et al. (2018) supported the sentiment by advocating for a reliance on vertical and horizontal communication, particularly in today's world, where organizations operate with diverse, global teams. Armengol et al. (2017) postulated that leaders must invest in the structure, approach, timeliness, and quality of their organization's communication strategy. Communication is continuous and is essential to the success of a leadership development program. Leaders communicate effectively, content is complete, and give constructive feedback. Leadership development programs should incorporate focused attention and investment in communication development. Improved, free, and open communication promotes an environment for dialogue, which supports an atmosphere of perceived honesty and psychological safety feedback (Spataro & Bloch, 2018).

4. Results, Findings and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Themes Discovered

Data on participants represent 47% male and 53% female. Fifty-three percent of participants have a tenure of between 1.5 and 4 years at MNUS, with the remaining 47% having a tenure of between 4 and 11 years. The participants are from different levels of the hierarchy of the organization. Participants include individual contributors on career development paths to leadership (18%), line managers (35%), talent managers and affiliates (29%), and existing leaders (18%). The diverse levels of exposure to leadership development allow for a broad perspective. Forty-seven percent of participants recognized as African American, 41% as Caucasian, and 12% as Asian American. The diversity of participants provides an inclusive representation of the workforce. The participants responded to the unstructured interview questions of this study to allow for holistic responses on positive and negative experiences of leadership programs. A total of 11 themes materialized from the responses.

The first theme, which is a program that achieves effective leadership, represents the categorization of participants' responses on the effectiveness of the leadership development program that was experienced. While some participants highlighted the benefits of formal and structured programs, others benefitted from informal ones. However, a general agreement on the effectiveness of the different leadership development programs attended is captured as sub-themes that inform the theme. The sub-themes that contribute to the definition of the theme include exposure to leaders and leadership talks, effective communication, the opportunity to network with leaders, a collaborative partnership between aspirants and leaders, building trust, opportunities for growth, and the buy-in of leaders to the programs being offered. The observed sub-themes align with the suggestions of Abraham et al. (2021) that leadership development seeks to promote soft skills of trust, effective communication, and collaboration.

The second theme emerging from this study is that credibility in actions and behavior achieves effective leadership. The theme includes sub-themes related to emotional intelligence, the importance of competence of leaders, creating an environment of psychological safety, the effectiveness of mentoring, having the vision to lead, and leading with empathy, transparency, and accountability. The revealed sub-theme and references align with the interpretive analog that credibility in the actions and behaviors of existing and aspiring leaders supports the development of effective leaders. Many of the participants made specific references to the identified sub-themes. However, the inference was drawn from some participants' narratives aligned to the sub-themes. The theme amplifies the essence of credibility in actions, which also incorporates authenticity with a sense of accessibility, enabled by the autonomy to lead following the experience of leading. The theme, credibility in actions and behavior achieves effectiveness, emerged from the contribution of 100% of the participants of this study.

The third theme of this study aligned with exemplary leadership practices. Alignment with exemplary leadership means that the responses to the interview questions provided references that are affiliated with aspects of exemplary leadership practices. The theme's coding is enabling others through actions, modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, and encouraging the heart. As with theme two, the coding for theme three was not specifically used in all narratives the participants gave. The references to exemplary leadership were descriptive rather than a stipulation of the terms defined in Kouzes and Posner's model. The sub-themes deduced from the descriptions made by participants in the narratives imply an association with the inferred sub-theme, thereby defining the theme. Theme 3 addresses the impact of experiencing an exemplary leader in the leadership development program. Most participants (88%) contributed to the definition of this theme.

The narrative informed theme 4 of all (100%) of the participants of this study. The theme highlights the informal approach to most leadership development exposures and elements of the informal programs, which are represented by the sub-themes. The sub-themes that define the theme are highlighted through the narrated experiences. These themes are categorized as working with a mentor or mentors, role-playing and acting, the value of social learning, engaging a coach, working with a sponsor or advisor, and proactively initiating needed development. The theme

highlights the benefits of an informal approach to leadership development. However, the interventions, as with formal approaches to leadership development, are largely impacted by commonplace challenges and the tenaciousness of the participants (Viera, 2021). The theme contributes meaningful insight to this study through the input of all study participants.

The inadequacies of leadership development programs emerged as theme 5 of this study. The theme includes observed factors that highlight inadequacies in development programs. The factors collated from participants' narratives include the criticism that no new leadership skills emerged after attending a leadership development program. The leadership development program was inadequate owing to its omission of the practical application of leadership practices and emphasis on leadership theories, as well as the ineffective process for selecting participants for the program. Other factors are the absence of a clear path to leadership roles after completing the program, observation of bad leadership, the limitations of the applicability of the leadership development program beyond aspiring individual contributors, and the focused attention on intelligence quotient (IQ) over emotional quotient (EQ). This study included the effective and ineffective aspects of leadership development programs. Therefore, these five are relevant for a holistic investigation of the problem statement.

This study's sixth emerging theme materialized from identifying leadership development as a continuous process. The theme is informed by participants' references to leadership as a process involving creating more leaders. The participant's insights demonstrate that 82% of the participants align with leadership development as a continuous process. The iterative process implies an ongoing nature, which was also referenced as programs designed for leaders to develop. The sub-themes associated with this theme highlight that effective leadership requires practice and that leadership development provides the opportunity to turn theory into practice. The participants highlight the importance of creating effective leaders at all levels of the organization. The focus on practice supports the emerging theme of leadership development being a continuous process.

Themes 7 and 8 represent the emerging perspective on the measured impact of leadership development programs. Theme 7 represents the narrated measurements of the effectiveness of leadership development on organizational performance, and theme 8 denotes the undetermined impact of leadership development programs. Theme 7 includes sub-themes that represent measurements of the effectiveness of leadership development programs. The measurements, as narrated by participants of this study, include results from employee engagement and satisfaction, measures of leader satisfaction, the development of a bench of potential leaders to support the organization's growth, and organizational performance aligned to investment. Theme 8 emerges from the narrative that the impact of leadership development programs on organizational performance was not measured and the narrative that describes the difficulty in assessing a direct link between organizational performance and leadership development programs that are in place in the organization. The themes recognize the role of leadership in the measured outcome and performance of the organization (Bonner et al., 2016).

Themes 9 and 10 represent the emerging themes around culture. Theme 9 highlights culture blockers, and Theme 10 denotes a culture that enables successful leadership development programs. Theme 10 has more traction, with 94% of participants contributing to the definition of this theme. The sub-themes that define this theme include the reference to a culture created by leadership to drive results, the leadership principles of the organization, the de-emphasizing of the hierarchical structure, and the focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Theme nine highlights the toxicity of the culture and the possible impact as a culture blocker. Though theme 9 emerged from the input of 12% of participants, it is deemed impactful for a holistic exploration of this study. Also, the impact of a toxic culture and its potential to result in moral disengagement and impact organizational well-being is highlighted by Bonner et al. (2016). The final theme of this study emerged as the necessity of teamwork, which was highlighted by 82% of participants. The theme recognizes the essentiality of teamwork, the need for team direction, and the efficiency and effectiveness that is possible through teamwork through unique references.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Study

The study amplifies the potential for efficacy in continuous development in an organization. The continuous development integrates formal programs and informal leadership development practices through observations, experience, role-playing, and mentoring as professional services. However, the study does not include measuring the direct impact of development efforts on organizational performance, which is an area that is a recommendation for further study. The study findings could include exploring the impact of leadership development efforts and initiatives at different levels of an aspirant's career in the organization. The idea is to enhance leadership development at individual levels based on needs and assess the impact of the totality on the organization. The interview questions captured details to inform aspects of the study.

However, the findings of this study observed a gap in ascertaining a direct link between leadership development programs and organizational performance. The gap is a possible area for further study to establish quantifiable and qualifiable measures of the effectiveness of leadership development efforts on organizational performance. Where a direct link is ascertained, impactful activities or features can be managed to attain desired levels of effectiveness in development programs. The effectiveness of the program is implied rather than quantitatively established. The direct effect of informal leadership development practices on organizational performance is an area of recommended further study.

Applying this study to professional practice provides germane information that expands the current leadership body of knowledge. The understanding is informed by participants' responses to interview questions, which are driven by their experiences of what constitutes leadership development programs and leadership processes on succession planning and organizational performance. Scholarly researchers (Boerma et al., 2017; Rangus & Černe, 2019) highlighted the importance of leadership and investing in leadership development to attain levels of efficacy in inspiring the attainment of organizational goals.

However, the adequacy of the investment is uncertain. An area of consideration for further study is clarity on what is adequate as development practices across levels of the organization. Also, the effectiveness of the components of a leadership development program will provide valuable information for planning strategic solutions. The requirements may vary from organization to organization. However, the findings of this study suggest a gap, which is a potential area of further exploration. The discoveries of this study are relevant to the organization of interest; however, the findings apply to other organizations and the exploration of identified areas of future studies (Kindy & Magd, 2021).

5. Summary and Conclusions

The qualitative single case study constitutes effective leadership development programs, leadership behavior that supports the development of leaders and succession planning, and the impact of these constructs on organizational performance. The study, grounded primarily in transformational leadership, goal-setting motivation, and social learning theories, supports the concept that leadership development impacts organizational performance (Ullrich et al., 2021). The findings confirm that organizations implementing an effective leadership development program are more likely to benefit from strengthened leadership competencies. The advantages enable exposure to exemplary leaders and are observable through skills-enhancing and growth networks (Modisane, 2018). The narration of the participants of this study replicates the sentiment of Modisane (2018). However, the direct impact of experienced leadership development programs was not established through the findings of this study. The study highlighted the benefits of formal and informal leadership development practices and emphasized the effects of social learning. Leaders and followers learn and develop from the environment and the prevalent exposure to behavior.

The study participants did not identify a formal path to succession planning as part of their leadership development journey. However, evidence exists that succession planning and leadership development are intertwined. The results of this study show that an organization's culture fosters leaders' development. Organizational culture is reflected in the leadership principle of hiring and developing the best, which governs the organization's culture, which is the subject of this study. The concept of effectual succession planning relates to the efficacious development of leaders and others (McKee & Froelich, 2016); this is determined by the leader's effectiveness and dynamism (Holt et al., 2018). Leadership development initiatives build leaders with emotional intelligence and motivational, collaborative, and ethical behaviors that support a psychologically safe environment that promotes creative cognizance (Levesque-Côté et al., 2021). The leadership of an organization plays an integral part in establishing the culture and environment that supports the creation and development of leaders (Fontoura & Coelho, 2020; Nxumalo, 2020). Followers have an equally important responsibility to drive and occasionally instigate self-development. Leadership is a partnering relationship. Therefore, the input and dedication of both parties, leaders and followers, are essential (Lian et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

The results and implications of this study are relevant to inform the body of knowledge on leadership and identify factors that inform effective leadership development. The study constitutes the need to explore further leadership development and the measured impact on organizational performance. Using a mixed method design research may provide the framework for capturing quantifiable data alongside qualifiable data, which could explain and inform the implications of leadership development on organizational performance. The findings of this study support the need for leadership development and recognize that leadership can be created at all levels of an organization.

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