

REDEFINING LEADERSHIP:
ACTS OF LEADERSHIP BEYOND A COLLEGE CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how millennials make sense of leadership in civic life beyond a college classroom. Competency-based learning, specifically as it relates to leadership development, was considered along with the importance of helping others make sense of leadership learning beyond theory to practical application. Competency-based learning considers the practical teaching points set in front of students and posits that they are helpful for making an often nebulous notion of leadership more tangible. The focus of this study was a group of undergraduate millennial-aged college students, selected from a *Leadership in Self and Society* course. Leadership itself has countless definitions. This study used the definition of leadership according to O'Malley, Fabris McBride and Nichols (2014) as "mobilizing others to do difficult work, work that is more provocative, engaging and purposeful" (p. 50). By examining meanings of adaptive leadership utilizing the described experience of a small subset of students who participated in a college leadership development classroom experience, this study built on a broader notion of how leadership is communicated and understood in a classroom and separately beyond in communities. In considering how operating from the frame of leadership as an activity not a position, data was gathered on how people make sense of acts of leadership and the ambiguity that comes with adaptive situations, by examining the words used to describe their lived experience using a phenomenological research approach. This study strived to build a foundation for other studies to consider articulation of lived leadership experience as a means of building competence within the field of adaptive leadership.

Keywords: adaptive leadership, millennial, leadership behaviors, sensemaking, teaching leadership

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DEDICATION

To my parents | Dave and Anita
Intensity, resilience, and whimsical curiosity are gifts from you.

&

Mentors | Carol, Jan, Peter and Polly
You inspire and invite me to be bold and brave.

CHAPTER 1 | Introduction

From the front of a room, a teacher stands commanding presence and the attention of sixty students. The students are anticipating learning something about an often elusive term, leadership. One expectation students hold of the teacher at the front of the room in that moment would be to lead. Lingering in silence longer than normal, the teacher asks the question where should we begin? The students sit confused, some frustrated. There is a separate monologue happening inside the heart of the teacher. She is actively assessing what is happening in that moment beyond theories of leadership that could be taught in a standard lecture format.

But can leadership be learned? Leadership practitioners would argue that if you create the right conditions including in a more fabricated classroom setting, leadership indeed observably happens. “Leadership, although difficult to teach, can be learned in a dynamic classroom setting where learners experience the very conditions that make exercising leadership challenging in the public and organizational spheres.” (Green & Fabris McBride, 2014 p. 37; Parks, 2005).

Back to the view from the front of a college classroom, the aspiration then would be for students to see the conditions that will make leadership difficult beyond college experience. With action happening live in the moment in an arena aimed at expanding viewpoints, along with space to discuss what learning is happening, this is not an ordinary college learning experience.

To understand how students makes sense of their leadership experience and what words are used to describe their learning, this study drew from millennial college students, in their own words, their perceptions, understandings and communication of the behaviors of leadership that have helped them while they were in a leadership classroom and beyond.

Statement of Problem

Can leadership be learned and can leadership be taught are two separate questions with a similar aim. Does the content presented in the classroom translate to more observable leadership behaviors when leadership learners return to other environments, ones calling for more leadership? How do students talk about leadership beyond a leadership classroom? President and CEO of the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), Ed O'Malley puts it this way, "we live in a world where the complexity of dilemmas, scope of opportunities, and range of choices, cry out for more people willing and able to mobilize others to do difficult work"(O'Malley et al., 2014). Kellerman (2012), a researcher and leadership practitioner, would agree with O'Malley's premise that more people are needed for change to happen, but she holds significant skepticism of the leadership industry:

The tireless teaching of leadership has brought us no closer to leadership nirvana than we were previously; that we do not have much better an idea of how to grow good leaders, or how to stop or at least slow bad leaders, than we did a hundred or even a thousand years ago... the enormous sums of money and time that have been poured into trying to teach people how to lead, over its roughly forty-year history, the leadership industry has not in any major, meaningful, measurable way improved the human condition (p. xiv).

She goes on to summarize her feelings toward the leadership industry as simply, "bottom line: while the leadership industry has been thriving...leaders by and large are performing poorly, worse in many ways than before, miserably disappointing in any case to those among us who once believed the experts held the keys to the kingdom" (p. xv). Kellerman perhaps holds a more realistic view of the leadership development industry and sets a stage for further research to

understand is any of this leadership teaching working? How are people actually experiencing leadership teaching? While the aspiration is to create environments where engaging, purposeful and provocative work of mobilizing people to more effectively lead on the issues that matter most to them, further research could contribute to determining whether this extends beyond a hoped for outcome. Ronald Heifetz (2004) argues for this type of leadership in his definition of adaptive leadership stating,

Leadership becomes necessary to businesses and communities when people have to change their ways rather than continue to operate according to current structures, procedures and processes. Beyond technical problems, for which authoritative and managerial expertise will suffice, adaptive challenges demand leadership that can engage people in facing challenging realities and then changing at least some of their priorities, attitudes and behavior in order to thrive in a changing world (p. 104).

This raises the question of is adaptive leadership pedagogy working to help people progress in this direction or should Kellerman's skepticism be embraced in her questioning of the impact leadership development writ large is making.

Research has been done in the areas of adaptive leadership, leadership development for students, and broadly on whether the Kansas Leadership Center framework helps people make greater progress, but more research around how people talk about their leadership development experience would be useful (Jolley, 2015). The framework this study will use to place a context around a common language for leadership is one developed by the Kansas Leadership Center from an intense listening tour across the state of Kansas answering the question what type of leadership will it take to make progress on the most daunting challenges? Since then, thousands

of people have attended trainings to learn these behaviors, principles and competencies (O'Malley, 2009a). By gaining a better understanding of the practical application and communication of these behaviors and their effectiveness in helping people make progress on what they care about most, practitioners and leadership scholars can become clearer on how one adaptive leadership framework resonates in real time. These findings may implicate future teaching specifically as it relates to adaptive leadership, how to talk about leadership development and help answer Kellerman's question of is the work of leadership development actually helping others?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how college students make sense of adaptive leadership both in a classroom and conversely in settings after they complete an adaptive leadership course. This study will use a longitudinal qualitative phenomenological design resulting in a description of themes and patterns. Adaptive leadership is defined broadly as mobilizing people to make progress on challenges that defy simple solutions, and require an individual to change behavior specifically around relating to others (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). The leadership behaviors to be studied derive from the Kansas Leadership Center's framework for adaptive leadership and are detailed in the appendix. Students consulted for this study are former students from the years 2013-2015 of an adaptive leadership seminar offered at an urban Midwestern University. This research is aimed to inform leadership practitioners and teachers of leadership on how one framework of adaptive leadership resonates and applies to experiences beyond a classroom.

Research Question

The focus of this research study was to determine how millennial students make sense of leadership beyond a leadership classroom setting. The primary research question is does adaptive leadership pedagogy make a difference in a millennials experience of leadership? Results from this research question will help communication and leadership scholars and practitioners gain a better understanding of how leadership ideas through teaching are understood over time.

Scope of Study

The research questions of this study are best addressed using qualitative research methods. Phenomenology was chosen specifically because this study seeks to address the “what” as it relates to a student’s lived leadership experience. To explore students perceptions of leadership behaviors experienced, this study collected data from phone interviews with a subset of participants one, two and three years out from the time of leadership course completion.

Participants are students at an urban Midwestern University varying in demographics, but are all Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, who completed an adaptive leadership weeklong seminar. Students completed the course between the years of 2013-2015. Participants in this study completed a qualitative survey composed of open-ended questions. Data collection from these open-ended questions, provides a detailed view of a student’s described lived leadership experience. The researcher asked open-ended questions in order to gather data to look for themes or patterns as they emerged. The qualitative survey used in this study presented students narratives describing their perceptions and understanding of leadership behaviors that were helpful in the classroom and beyond.

Definition of Terms

Adaptive Leadership

The term adaptive leadership was originally coined by Marty Linsky and Ron Heifetz in their work at Harvard's Kennedy School. They define adaptive leadership as a leadership framework to help individuals and organizations thrive in challenging environments (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). It is having the ability to endure change to challenge the status quo (Heifetz, 2004). The Kansas Leadership Center adapted and advanced this definition to include defining leadership as an activity, beyond a particular role or position.

Acts of Leadership

Varying slightly from the leadership behaviors outlined below, acts of leadership can be defined as observable experiments by an individual that change the dynamics to move a group forward. These are often beyond normal default behaviors of individuals and can be perceived as risky. Many of these likely include leadership behaviors, but may not always fit neatly into the adaptive leadership framework established by the Kansas Leadership Center (O'Malley, 2009c).

Leadership Behaviors

Leadership behaviors broadly defined are the competency and principle sub points developed by the Kansas Leadership Center as a framework for adaptive leadership. Listed in the appendix, these behaviors are a reference point each student experienced in their course. It is anticipated that the behaviors defined in this framework will show-up in the talk of students in this study. Research participants were all taught the basis behind these leadership behaviors and given an opportunity to "try them on" within the classroom context. Students were asked to

articulate which one of these behaviors was most helpful in a final exit paper and were asked questions around which leadership behaviors resonate after completing the course.

Millennial College Students

For the purpose of this study, college students are defined as students at an urban Midwestern University who enrolled in a weeklong seminar course on adaptive leadership. In addition all students studied fall within the millennial age range or those born between 1980 and 2000 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Selection of students to be interviewed was based on a final paper each student submitted to fulfill the requirements of the course while still an active student. Emphasis was placed on a subset of students who had varied experience, but articulated the course personally helped them. At the point of interview, or second data point interaction, participants varied in terms of whether they were still an enrolled student of an urban Midwestern University completing a degree or had reached degree completion and moved to the workforce or graduate education. The millennial college students serving as participants in this study vary in demographics, but were all active students in a week-long adaptive leadership seminar course selected from the years 2013-2015.

Significance of the Study

Learning how millennial college students understand and make sense of leadership behaviors beyond college classroom teaching, contributes to the scholarship on leadership development, specifically adaptive leadership. It also advances the conversation about how to effectively help others learn the exercise of leadership. Understanding how students make sense of a competency-based framework might also have implications on the teaching of concepts within the field of communication, business, healthcare and others focused on helping students

practice specific behaviors. This study's findings may be of value to the college students directly in asking them to process their learning one to three years after taking a leadership course. How students describe their leadership development experience might also teach something about the function of sensemaking within leadership. Findings may also be useful for institutions and universities that teach leadership. Exploring these specific leadership behaviors provides data relevant to the Kansas Leadership Center, the founding organization of the curriculum under study. Clarification on how students perceive the various leadership behaviors will also add value to how these behaviors are taught to future participants of similar leadership trainings and articulate words to provide clarity to the field of adaptive leadership. This also will add data to know if leadership development, writ large, is helping people or contributing to a larger sense of ambiguity within leadership development.

CHAPTER 2 | Review of Literature

Overview

This study explores how millennials make sense of leadership in civic life beyond a college classroom. Research for this study considered the history of leadership development to help inform the context of adaptive leadership today. A review of literature begins with a framework for the audience, those who consider themselves millennials based on age, followed by a brief history of leadership development and background on adaptive leadership to set the stage for the type of leadership classroom setting students in this study experienced. Competency-based learning, specifically as it relates to leadership development, will be explored along with the importance of helping others make sense of leadership learning beyond theory to practical application (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Gray, & Yerby, 1993). Competency-based learning considers the practical teaching points placed in front of students and posits that they are helpful for making an often nebulous notion of leadership more tangible and real. Making sense of leadership includes the application of sensemaking to help solidify both the learning from a classroom environment to practice adaptive leadership and the leadership competencies presented. The focus of this study is a group of undergraduate college students selected from a *Leadership in Self and Society* course. These students were asked to articulate their lived experience with leadership development specifically related to adaptive leadership and competency-based learning.

Through Millennial Eyes

A group of passionate, emblazoned dreamers ready to jump in and genuinely make a difference, millennial students populate college campuses each year eager to become equipped to

lead. But what specifically drives the hearts and minds of millennials? How do they communicate and what implication does it have on the leadership landscape? By becoming clearer on the audience in question in this study, a better sense might be gained on the implications of training a generation to lead. This generation is currently the largest in American history nearing seventy-eight million. In addition to being the largest, millennials will soon also be the most educated. (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). So what implications might the largest and most educated generation have on what Kellerman argues as a large lack of leadership? Referred to by researchers including Howe (1991) as a civic-oriented generation, they found millennials value virtues including “equality, optimism, cooperation and community” (p. 338). They go on to describe this segment of society as “Cute. Cheerful. Scoutlike. Wanted” (p. 335). High hopes for a generation raised to believe anything is possible.

Hope is not only imposed on this generation by others, but is also grounded in statements from millennials themselves. Rainer & Rainer (2011) state “the Millennials are a generation that has hope for the future. Indeed, they are a generation that, as a whole, wants to make a positive difference for the future. Nearly nine out of ten respondents indicated they feel responsible to make a difference in the world” (p. 6-7). This difference was found to be broader than self with a focus on how to positively impact others. Different from their Boomer predecessors, if millennials do achieve power, fame or wealth, it is in direct relationship to work for the common good (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). Millennials hold a deep sense that they can make a difference, and have a deep desire to make one in their lifetime. The ownership and responsibility of the endeavors ahead are understood and embraced as part of the realities of what it will take to lean into the challenges and opportunities inherent in the future millennials will inherit. This push-

pull of optimism and realism ends in a resolve to drive change. A major difference noted in the question of whose responsibility is it? This generation is not depending on any of the previous generations to accomplish what needs to be done. Rainer & Rainer (2011) state,

The expectations for the Millennials are high, expectations that are self-imposed. While others may have helped guide our beliefs, we have taken them on as our own. We believe we are going to accomplish great things. We believe we will make a significant difference in this world. We believe we can make an impact for the future (p. 38).

The others who guided this belief included parental prodding and praise leading to this worldview of optimism, strong belief in self and confidence amidst the strife inherent in life. Howe (1991) summarizes the outlook “as Mom and Dad gaze into baby’s big beautiful eyes, they wonder--we all wonder--what those eyes will someday see” (p. 343).

Millennials as a collective are desperately seeking authentic relationships (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Communication as part of establishing and maintaining relationships with others is a high value, not as a necessity, but as a want. Millennials see communication as something that happens anytime, anyplace without barriers or boundaries. The act of this connection with others leads to tangible change. Failing to understand the importance of this value and utilize it to inspire this generation equals failure to relate at their core (Rainer & Rainer, 2011).

Relationships and a sense of optimism lead this generation to be focused on community, both creating community and being an integral part of one. Mediators of conflict and connectors to bring peace, relationships lead to community efforts. Howe and Strauss (2000) describe this movement as “a new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial

(rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds” (p. 216).

Beyond a desire to serve and be in relationship with others, millennials are willing and seeking relationships that inspire learning. Teachability leads this generation to be close to their parents, respectful of authority and seeking close mentoring relationships. There is a hunger to learn and a seeking of others who are willing to model leadership. Millennials do not pretend to have all of the answers in the ambiguity facing them, but instead carry humility alongside a healthy level of confidence. Rainer and Rainer (2011) state, “This is the generation that may teach us how to respect people again....They are not only willing to listen to you; they want to listen to you. But they want you to take time to guide them and to listen to them as well. They are eager to learn from you” (p. 282). The eagerness and willingness to learn may open a space where this generation is willing to learn leadership and then boldly act.

This potential millennials see in themselves has led to an urgency to move to action. Defined as impatience in the eyes of previous generations, this generation has nobler definitions including a propensity to hustle. They have a world to change and are ready to get to work. They are ready and ready now. Researchers Howe and Strauss (2000) described this longing in their early research stating, “Pressure is what keeps them constantly in motion --moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done” (p. 184). Pressure and a hurried sense of purposefully moving the needle on the challenges calling out for more leadership motivates this generation of dreamers to move beyond dreams to put in the effort necessary to see change. Coupled with hope, teachability, a civic, others-orientation and

confidence in their abilities, the future through millennial eyes seems promising and ripe for leadership learning.

While these highlights of millennials paint a glowing description, some research points to concerns of entitlement this generation claims. Millennials in their desire to hustle are impatient. This impatience often leads them to complain often about their unused potential to employers and others who do not give them the opportunities to use their talent. Rainer and Rainer (2011) found “96 percent of millennials feel they can do something great, and 60 percent feel strongly about it. They are ready to do something. They are ready to make a difference. And they are ready now” (p. 169). This urgency led many to request for opportunities and for some millennials to harbor resentment toward Boomers they described were the reason their talents were not being fully utilized (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). Howe, Strauss and Rainer also in their glowing remarks on millennials stated a skepticism related to whether the stated ambition would translate into actions (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Millennial researcher, Jean Twenge in her study calls millennials generation me and found they value extrinsic and materialistic facets of culture over concern for other people (Twenge, 2012). Studies also found empirical support stating millennials perspective on others as “less concerned with and less emotionally burdened by others suffering and disadvantage” (p. 1046). This led Twenge to speculate that millennials also possess narcissistic personality traits contributing to their lack of concern for others. This calls to question whether this is a generation primed and ready to exercise leadership for greater good beyond self-interest.

Making Sense of Leadership

As millennials continue to see with wonder their surroundings as Howe (1991) suggests, an ability to make sense of them in a broader context holds utility. Sensemaking as a method of communication and teaching is used to help people ‘see more clearly’ (Weick, 2011).

Sensemaking becomes of central importance due to its ability to create the primary space for meaning to materialize to influence action (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). This meaning making research suggests is made through words and by describing experiences. Weick and Sutcliffe (2005) argue that “communication is a central component of sensemaking and organizing,” stating

We see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances. As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it (p. 413).

Drawing on language to make sense of circumstances also helps make sense of chaos, a primary function of sensemaking (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2005). It also serves as an educational tactic to help concepts make sense and could provide some evidence for why the tie for a common language in leadership is powerful (Hall, 2011). This tying together of leadership and sensemaking is important as exercising leadership holds implicit or explicit lessons to be learned. Reaching a level within people to clarify the muddy ambiguity of situations in the adaptive nature of leadership is a strength of sensemaking as sensemaking always starts at chaos (Weick, et. al.,

2005). To begin to deal with the chaos and ambiguity, mutually dependent people search for meaning and then move on. Progress in leadership means changing deep seated internal knowing and imagining ways of moving forward that might not be readily available. Making sense of adaptive challenges and what is deep within a heart including challenges that do not have one method or way of solving make the understanding complicated. These times are where sensemaking can and should take place to be able to step into the moments to name the chaos, help dig to what is really happening and then move to productive action before precedents get set (Weick, et. al., 2005). Questions a practitioner can ask in these moments include ‘what is going on here and what can be done next?’ (Weick, et. al., 2005). Sensemaking is considered within the framework of a leadership development classroom and program, specifically in the *Leadership in Self and Society* class in this study as a model for leadership development learning and communicating. The concerning societal realities of what is happening outside the classroom, propels the need to increase others’ capacity to make progress as individuals and communities (Easterling, 2013). Simplified, this underscores the importance of isolating what needs to happen first before taking action. How those exercising leadership make meaning of their activities could increase their effectiveness and successful progress toward their purpose and what is driving their desire to lead (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015).

This study proposes that sensemaking utilizing communication within adaptive leadership is necessary and could be done more effectively within leadership development classrooms and activities in communities. Sensemaking defined by Weick (2005) “involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (p. 409). By gathering an understanding of how sensemaking can help

people makes sense of complex challenges to then move to action, specifically to acts of leadership, a broader framework and case for the importance of sensemaking in adaptive leadership teaching and work can be made.

History of Leadership Development

It is easy to forget that only a few centuries ago, an ability to shape and control the trajectory of the circumstances in which you lived was not a prevalent notion to the masses. Memories of stories from previous generations ending with ‘and that is the way it has always been’ provide a glimpse into these simpler to define times. Leadership, or a way to act to change the way things have always been to better circumstances, eventually became commonplace and a way to create forward momentum (Chrislip & O’Malley, 2013b). Today, leadership is a term underscored within most sectors of society including organizations, civic groups, political spheres, religious entities, news media, education, and one that arguably reaches most facets of our lives. But what is leadership exactly? Traditional views and history point to leadership in those with power and at the peaks of hierarchical charts (Burns, 1978). To some, leadership is a privilege reserved for a select few or the elite guiding forces of civic life (Heifetz, 1994; Chrislip & O’Malley, 2013b). With close to three million hits on how to define leadership, setting a definition is important for grounding this study. This study has the premise that leadership means mobilizing others to do difficult work, work that is more provocative, engaging and purposeful (Heifetz, 2004; O’Malley, et al., 2014). This leadership model believes that leadership is an activity, not a position of authority and that anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere (Heifetz, 2004; O’Malley, et al., 2014). Bold claims backed by a notion that leadership is not currently working to elicit noticeable change in organizations and communities (Easterling, 2013).

Backing up from where leadership is today, the study of leadership and discovery of theories began in 1841 with what became known as the “great man” theory. This theory set-up the belief that leadership came from inherited traits. Women were intentionally left out of the running for this positional and genetic disposition of leadership (Heifetz, 1994). Moving beyond this theory, researchers particularly those with a situationist perspective argued leadership men engaged in was much more about what was going on around them historically and much less about what was innately going on inside them. Heifetz (1994) outlines this by stating, “what an individual actually does when acting as a leader is in large part dependent upon characteristics of the situation in which he functions,” (p. 17). Shortly after situationist theory, contingency theory emerged, which looks at leadership based on what is needed within a particular situation. This orientation allowed scholars to expand the field to look at transactions of influence where a person gains followers and capacity to lead over time (Heifetz, 1994). All of these theories assume that leadership happens in large part due to the actions of people, many of whom hold positions of authority. Easterling (2013) summarizes this saying, “virtually all efforts to strengthen civic leadership focus on individual leaders,” (p. 51). This individual look or view of a leader is shared throughout many theories including the great man theory and also one that enters the realm of communication, discursive leadership.

Discursive leadership considers individuals, specifically the discourse shared by leaders to promote progress. Fairhurst (2008) describes discursive leadership saying “leadership is exercised when ideas expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them” (p. 6). Discourse provides a helpful process by creating a call to consider larger systemic issues, seeking patterns over time. This

loftier, longerterm view, looks beyond one idea expressed. This process doesn't separate individuals from the society completely as Fairhurst argues that in most of discursive leadership, individuals and society are inseparable. While focusing on the individual leading, Fairhurst considers dynamics that relate to power and who receives power or influence. Fairhurst (2008) states "by contrast, discursive scholars tend toward a much more encompassing view of power and influence, one that likely integrates their various forms and conceives of them in both positive and negative terms within a particular system" (p. 516). This focus on self within leadership and a more inclusive view of power and influence may help in broadening viewpoints both of self and the larger system. Even at the individual level, time and taking a longer view is helpful as selves develop over time (Fairhurst, 2008).

Although even today many would argue that leadership begins with an individual, there has to be a broader orientation and purpose beyond self. Leadership theorist James McGregor Burns (2013) challenges scholars to consider that leaders should be calling followers to a higher moral level seeking to serve others for the common good, naming this theory of leadership transformational. Burns (2003) goes on to state:

Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the processes of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy, described by Bernard Bass as an enhanced 'sense of meaningfulness' in their work and lives. By pursuing transformational change, people can transform themselves (p. 25-26).

Transformational leadership gets to the heart and values inherent in leadership which drive people to want to change behavior. With this view, leadership could be applied to adaptive work,

which Heifetz (1994) says consists of “learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior” (p. 22). A call to participate in work that is difficult, beautiful and good for the sake of transformation, this theory and definition of mobilizing others sets the foundation for this study of helping students understand the usefulness of viewing leadership in terms of adaptive work. Stemming from a long history with multiple definitions of leadership, an ability to adapt to change might lead to more noticeable progress within communities where one engages.

Adaptive Leadership Pedagogy

In this exercise of leadership defined as mobilizing others to do difficult work, an important initial distinction is made in adaptive leadership between adaptive work and technical problems. The field of adaptive leadership was developed by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, two leadership scholars and professors at the Harvard University. Heifetz (2004) argues this adaptive approach is a foundational setting for leadership:

Leadership becomes necessary to businesses and communities when people have to change their ways rather than continue to operate according to current structures, procedures and processes. Beyond technical problems, for which authoritative and managerial expertise will suffice, adaptive challenges demand leadership that can engage people in facing challenging realities and then changing at least some of their priorities, attitudes and behavior in order to thrive in a changing world (p. 104).

Adaptive work requires one to evaluate values and purpose to decide they are willing to withstand working for the long haul on deep, daunting challenges with no clear solution (Heifetz,

2004). A dichotomy is created between technical challenges and adaptive ones. According to Green and Fabris McBride (2015):

Technical problems live in people's heads or logic systems. They are susceptible to facts and authoritative expertise. Adaptive challenges live in people's hearts and stomachs. They are about values, loyalties and beliefs. Progress on them requires the people with the problem to do the work, and the work involves refashioning deeply held beliefs (p. 13).

Adaptive challenges are concerns facing our companies and communities that are crying out for more leadership. An example of an adaptive challenge is the story of a child living in the state of Kansas who leaves a playground to board a bus home each weekend. Prior to boarding the bus, he quickly consumes the contents of a snack pack donated by a local food bank, knowing it will be the only food he will eat until returning to school the following Monday. This child is not alone leading to a larger systemic view of poverty including 2:10 children suffering, 134,000 in the state (Green, 2014). This short narrative including data of one issue--poverty-- merely highlights a list of numerous adaptive challenges not listed and reaching beyond the borders of Kansas. Making progress then requires a commitment to practicing a new way of leading to engage others in a shared purpose (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015).

But leadership, on a broad scale, seems to still be largely elusive. Why? One does not have to look far to realize that simple technical solutions or leadership development alone will not make a large enough dent to make progress quickly. The issues are complex, solutions are unknown and timelines are long. The complexity Kegan and Lahey (2009) point out in their study on people's Immunity to Change is "often misunderstood as a need to better 'deal with' or

‘cope with’ the greater complexity of the world....Coping and dealing are valuable skills, but they are actually insufficient for meeting today’s change challenges” (p. 11-12). They communicate the change plot as simply “we are in over our heads” (p. 30). The struggle to change not only shows up in individuals, but also in systems. The illusion exists that there are broken systems including organizations or families. There is a notion that organizations therefore need to change and become unbroken. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) argue “there is no such thing as a dysfunctional organization, because every organization is perfectly aligned to achieve the results it currently gets” (p. 17). A clear gap exists between the current reality of the situation pleading for more leadership and the aspiration of what the situation could be if progress were made. Some reasons for this gap include: it is hard to define a problem let alone find a solution, people would rather not be bothered by challenges and assume someone else will take care of them, leadership is risky and people would rather not take risks, there is a conflation of leadership/management and authority placing the locus of responsibility on authority, it requires engaging a lot of people and finally you really have to care (O’Malley, et. al., 2014). Since the dysfunction works for some, an orientation needs to shift on how to mobilize others more effectively to adaptively change (Heifetz et. al., 2009).

This gap and the disequilibrium the gap causes, often leads to conflict. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe the challenge existing with leadership “is to work with differences, passions, and conflicts in a way that diminishes their destructive potential and constructively harnesses their energy” (p. 102). Most people tend to avoid conflict, but an ability to tease out the underlying differences preventing progress helps to more clearly diagnose adaptive challenges (Heifetz et. al., 2009). Conflict presented as deeply seated values is one of the unique

hallmarks of adaptive challenges and opportunities present in leadership learning. Upon completing seventy-five years of research, psychologists James Baldwin and Heinz Werner defined optimal conflict as containing: a relentless presence of frustration, quandary or problem, designed for one to feel the limits of current knowing, something one deeply cares about and providing an environment of sufficient support to not become overwhelmed with the conflict or able to diffuse it (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). This orientation supports the need to create a holding environment or container to constructively experience conflict. For the purpose of this study, the holding environment is a college classroom where facilitators orchestrate constructive conflict to learn about adaptive leadership through a teaching pedagogy called Case-in-Point. An important component of an effective holding environment is a shared language, which will be discussed later in the building competence section of this study.

Case-in-Point

The orchestration of optimal conflict within a classroom is a balance of presenting information and allowing learning to surface from what is already in the room. Teaching in and of itself then becomes an act of leadership (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015). There is a belief among a network of leadership practitioners that leadership can be taught (Parks, 2005). Creating the spaces that mimic what life looks like beyond a classroom, in civic spaces and communities is trickier. Marty Linsky and Ronald Heifetz also developed a methodology called Case-in-Point (CIP) to practice adaptive leadership. CIP creates a practice arena to surface cases of leadership to increase effectiveness with less risk than people's normal civic or professional spaces (Heifetz, 1994). Beginning with the premise that whatever is needed to learn about leadership is fully present in any group, CIP methodology provides experiences that are immediate and

surface their own unique learning (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013a). Case-in-Point teaching compels learners to practice leadership competencies in real time, in the protected space of the classroom, in an environment resembling the real-life situations in which they want to make a difference. For an instructor of CIP, one must view a group as more than a collection of individuals. Instead, the class explores itself as a social system, one whose dynamics tend to mimic patterns in the larger social environment. One reason this teaching methodology is used in classroom-based settings is because Case-in-Point creates an intensity that echoes civic life (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015). Heifetz and Laurie (1997) describe this as creating a holding environment where a necessary amount of pressure and optimal conflict is needed to push people to act.

The orientation within a college classroom is unique because Case-in-Point moves students beyond a teacher-student, authority-learner dichotomy traditionally seen in a lecture-based learning environment. Those trained in facilitating Case-in-Point have an ability to surface what is going on in the room-- issues including race, power, authority orientation, factions, etc. to help students learn something about leadership. A facilitator might make an observation, ask questions to surface interpretations, use silence, or directly call out a student to help students move beyond their normal way of thinking and default behaviors. Because of its uniqueness, this environment often leaves participants in classroom experiences utilizing CIP pedagogy struggling to make sense of what exactly is going on in the classroom.

The work of CIP is difficult and disorienting primarily because it points to people's "piece of the mess" and behaviors that are making them ineffective (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013a). Digesting and placing the learning of this work is taxing and requires ways of coping with a new experiential approach to deal with ambiguity. Since the classroom holding

environment mimics that of civic spaces, including organizational and community dynamics beyond a classroom learning experience, difficulty with sensemaking extends to these spaces as well (Heifetz, 1994). Creating a shared language through competency-based learning methods and providing mechanisms for sensemaking then become important to hold students steady through the adaptive piece of leadership. While empirical evidence exists to suggest Case-in-Point is a useful pedagogy to teach and learn leadership, it is important to note little research exists on the topic to prove actual effectiveness.

By gaining a clearer understanding of the need and potential for more people to be able to exercise adaptive leadership along with creating the conditions through the practice of teaching to make the ideas more real, the nebulous notion of leadership begins to become tangible. Greater clarity is needed to truly understand how adaptive leadership resonates beyond theory and practice in the classroom to the common articulated ideas of participants after a shared experience. Similar to Case-in-Point, this study hopes to surface a case for the importance of themes in clearly articulated descriptions of a leadership development experience to continue to inform the practice of adaptive leadership.

Building Competence

Within the walls of a leadership development classroom or experience lies an expectation that some sort of content will be taught. The context for this study-- an undergraduate leadership classroom--adopts the approach of teaching competencies of leadership to set a groundwork for the practice of the adaptive nature of the work. A high level look at competency-based learning is useful in understanding the framework chosen for this study, one created by the Kansas Leadership Center. Competency-based learning shows up in many disciplines from medicine to

education, business to communication. A focus is currently on competency-based learning within higher education. A prescribed approach to reach a definition of competency-based learning considers that set learning objectives are established, instructional methods are aligned with learning outcomes, student success is clearly measured with a structured process and curriculum is adjusted based on these outcomes. Within competency-based learning, a balancing act exists between the use of theory in teaching and practice (Rivenbark & Jacobson, 2014). In the field of communication, competency-based instruction is evaluated based on the establishment of criteria for performance where judgement of competence can be evaluated and the application of concepts to improve skills related to communication. The first determines whether a course is achieving its objectives and the latter helps students determine if the course material is impacting their lives (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Gray & Yerby, 1993). In leadership development, competency-based learning is seen as helpful in creating repetition which leads to a shared language helpful in solidifying learning. Parks (2005) states:

A central dynamic in this process is that though this language and the patterns of behavior to which it points may initially seem obscure, it gains power as it names and interprets one's own experience in the past and in the present more adequately than would otherwise be the case. Access to new language offered within case-in-point teaching and learning provides a vehicle for conveying into one's own awareness aspects of reality they were previously unrecognized--embedded in the unconscious or present only in peripheral awareness--where, unnamed, they are close to invisible (p. 127).

An ability to share a language and consistent framework proves helpful in creating common words to articulate a shared experience. Courses integrating competency-based learning within

the communication field are called hybrid skills courses which help students understand the communication process and the ability to apply the concepts (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Gray & Yerby, 1993). This application of concepts contributing to the understanding of a broader process has application in the field of leadership. One framework to create a shared language and competency-based learning outcomes was created by the Kansas Leadership Center and is a centerpiece in this study. This competency-based framework has not been tested and the setup of the learning environment students experienced does not hold rigidly to the structure of teaching competencies then testing application. While the aspiration is for competency-based learning to contribute to a student's ability to make sense of leadership, this study aims to determine whether competency-based instruction is useful within leadership development.

Kansas Leadership Center

The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) enters this scene as one organization committed to being a catalyst for change on daunting issues with the creation of a competency-based leadership framework. Founded in 2007, the charge to the KLC was to create a process for leadership that would make communities healthier and more prosperous. KLC president and CEO Ed O'Malley (2009c) claims:

We also believe developing civic leadership capacity in others – which is our charge – is a deep and daunting task that requires more know-how than we collectively possessed when we began the KLC effort. This led us to design and implement a process of engagement with Kansans about the nature of our state's civic challenges and the type of leadership necessary to make progress on those challenges (p. 9).

A theme has emerged in the efforts of the KLC showing the capacity to exercise leadership must come much more from individual credibility and skill rather than from positions of authority (O'Malley, 2009c). This leadership work is heart and soul work. Students and community stakeholders will not exercise leadership unless they deeply care about something beyond themselves. The risks of leadership are too great; only when the heart and soul are engaged in the work do the risks of leadership seem worth it (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013b).

The Kansas Leadership Center set out to create a curriculum that mirrored the type of leadership that would aid in this heart and soul style of leadership and went to the source of those they serve (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013a). Through a listening tour with Kansans in 2007, they created a competency-based framework which includes five principles and four leadership competencies: manage self, diagnose situation, energize others and intervene skillfully. This framework was the primary content students were taught in the *Leadership in Self and Society* course.

Diagnose Situation

In a fast paced life it is easy to want to jump to action. Action is expected, and people have been conditioned to respond and quickly. Before gaining a better understanding of the information, assumptions are often made that enough is known to make an informed decision. With adaptive problems, the questions one asks are often more important than knowing the right answers (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). O'Malley and Cebula (2015) describe this propensity for action:

Few people probe deeply enough to identify the smart risks that will lead to real progress.

We diagnose situations on two levels: surface and profound. Most of us spend our time

on the surface, clarifying what we think we know and then reacting to these preconceptions (p. 12).

Diagnosing the situation includes the leadership behaviors: explore tough interpretations, distinguish technical and adaptive work, understand the process challenges, test multiple interpretations and points-of-view, take the temperature and identify who needs to do the work (O'Malley et. al, 2014). Before jumping to action, it is better to begin to understand the situation from all angles.

Energize Others

Making progress on adaptive challenges is not for the faint of heart or something that can be accomplished by an individual. Energizing others is when stakeholders from all levels, those usually heard and those less usual voices, are engaged and working together on the challenge. Energizing others is not easy and requires intentional action to create a trustworthy process among a variety of factions (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). Energizing others includes the leadership behaviors: engage unusual voices, work across factions, start where they are, speak to loss, inspire a collective purpose and create a trustworthy process (O'Malley et. al, 2014). Leadership is not an activity that can be done absent the engagement of others, therefore energizing others to come along for the journey is a necessary component to gain traction on challenges.

Manage Self

Often the greatest barrier to progress lies within an individual, their baggage, ego, sense of control and desire to be right. Change is scary and the fear can drive one's actions more than a desire to move beyond the status quo. A willingness and ability to look inside oneself to begin to

act differently is the core of this competency. Making progress will require one brave enough to step beyond their comfort zone into a space of unknowing on behalf of something they deeply care about (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). Managing self includes the leadership behaviors; know your strengths, vulnerabilities and triggers, know the story others tell about you, choose among competing values, get used to uncertainty and conflict, experiment beyond your comfort zone and take care of yourself (O'Malley, et. al, 2014). By first gaining enough awareness on one's normal tendencies and hesitations to lean into uncertainty, steps can be taken in the direction of a higher purpose worthy of stretching oneself.

Intervene Skillfully

What is often seen as it relates to leadership is the interventions that lead to greater progress. To truly intervene skillfully is to do so with intentional and purposeful action often in the form of repetitive experimentation. Since the climate of adaptive challenges is such that change happens rapidly there is no clear way of knowing whether an intervention will stick until one tries something and then something else (O'Malley & Cebula, 2015). Intervening skillfully includes the leadership behaviors; make conscious choices, raise the heat, give the work back, hold to purpose, speak from the heart, and act experimentally (O'Malley, et. al, 2014). The work of intervening skillfully is difficult and the risks are inevitable, but these two costs are worth it for someone who cares enough about something to withstand the steady and relentless activity of intervening skillfully.

Principles of Leadership

Holding the four competencies together is a foundation of five key assumptions in the form of leadership principles. 1. Leadership is an activity, not a position. 2. Anyone can lead,

anytime, anywhere. 3. It starts with you and must engage others. 4. Your purpose must be clear. 5. It's risky (O'Malley, et. al, 2014). These principles work in concert with the competencies and add substance and clearer content to the work of adaptive leadership.

Engaging Others

Beyond the competency-based approach of providing bulleted sub-points of leadership behaviors, lies the reality of real issues driving the relevancy of these behaviors being put into action in classrooms and communities. The type of challenges including childhood poverty described above, by their very nature, cannot be solved by one person. Leadership does have to start somewhere and with at least one person caring enough about an issue to raise a hand or a voice to make progress for a deeply rooted purpose (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013a). Research on the power of engaging others can be couched under the stakeholder theory frame, which believes that individuals should not be looked at as a means to accomplishing end goals, but rather an important end to making progress and therefore should have a substantial voice in the outcome (Dawkins, 2014). This model allows for the diminishing of power dynamics and an inclusive nature that invites many to participate and have a significant impact on the outcome of the challenge (Dawkins, 2014). Including diverse voices in the dialogue to consider different interests and allowing adequate time for the interests to be vetted makes the approach inclusive and interesting (Maak & Pless, 2006).

The nature of this work opens the floor for a more productive dialogue as a key metric for progress to be made (Dawkins, 2014). This theory continues to breakdown a leader-follower dimension to minimize authority structures. Researchers Maak & Pless (2006) claim "in a stakeholder society, leadership has to reach beyond traditional leader-follower concepts. Here,

the leader becomes a coordinator and cultivator of relationships towards different stakeholder groups” (p. 109). By engaging stakeholders in the process for the exercise of leadership, the efforts are more sustainable and an interconnectedness is established when working to achieve a common vision. This work is challenging due to the difficulty in getting many voices to be heard, others to share responsibility and in the time it takes to “level the playing field” between authority levels. (Maak, 2007, p. 108).

Engaging others might naturally lead to questions of space and engaging them where? Communities, often broadly defined, are one stage where the exercise of leadership is begging to take place (O’Malley, 2009b). Encouraging stakeholders to take on active engagement helps to foster the wellbeing of communities (Maak & Pless, 2006). To understand community engagement you also have to first understand the boundaries of community. This understanding is not always straightforward as it may consist of groups of people who represent similar or shared interests. There are three factors that do characterize community: geography, interaction and identity (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010). Those communities who establish a primary identity based on their geography simply mean that they have people who live within the same geographic region, but might not know or interact with each other. Interaction identified communities do not hold the confines of a place-based method of distinction for community, but rather rely on relationships between people. Communities holding the marker of identity orientation are typically a group of people who share values, stories and experiences, but they also might not live in the same location. Since there are differences in the definitions of community, one could argue the difficulty in determining where to exercise leadership and engage in community (Bowen et. al, 2010). This still does not diminish the

importance of the notion that the exercise of leadership must engage others and the impact this engagement of leadership can have on the prosperity of communities (O'Malley, 2009a).

Stakeholder theory and the notion of community provide a broad look at the importance of engaging others in a way that decreases ambiguity and helps to make better sense of complex challenges. Setting an appropriate context for where the work of adaptive leadership matters, in community around issues that matter most to each student, raises the bar on making sense of this leadership framework beyond ideas of leadership behaviors. Considering the competency-based learning model specifically under the Kansas Leadership Center's framework of leadership more data is needed to determine how students make sense of leadership beyond a college classroom.

By gaining a better understanding of the common ways millennials engage differently through the exercise of leadership in their communities and in a leadership development classroom utilizing a competency-based approach to learning; along with an understanding of how millennials make sense of experiences, scholars and practitioners can expand the base of knowledge around the impact leadership has in a changing society. This work will continue to refine the training efforts to change individuals' behavior and learning for greater progress and more defined purpose. Bringing together concepts of adaptive leadership, building competence and pausing to make sense of leadership, research can begin to explore how students articulate and make sense of their leadership learning experience to gain a better understanding of the exercise of leadership in a college classroom and beyond in community.

This leads to the question this study raises which will be studied using a phenomenological approach:

RQ1: Does adaptive leadership pedagogy make a difference in a millennials experience of leadership?

Onward

The summary of the book *Teaching Leadership* by Green and Fabris McBride (2015) ends with an inspiring picture of the beauty and challenges of leadership neatly stating “leadership brings with it a tension between holding to your purpose and meeting others where they are. A tension that can be lessened with compassion, intention and creativity” (p. 240). Based on previous research by Heifetz, Weick, Buerkel-Rothfuss and others, becoming smarter on the impacts of a sensemaking and a competency-based approach to adaptive leadership could lead to broader understanding of leadership for a 21st century generation. After reviewing previous literature on millennials, adaptive leadership, competency-based learning and sensemaking, this study combines these to create a firmer foundation to impact future understandings of leadership under these frames. A study on adaptive leadership through the experiences of the leadership development of college students will aim to continue to provocatively facilitate a discussion to create an even more compelling picture for those striving to exercise leadership.

CHAPTER 3 | Methodology

Overview

A detailed review of literature supports the need for leadership behaviors continuing beyond a college classroom and greater clarity on how others make sense of leadership. The purpose of this study was to explore how college students make sense of adaptive leadership both in a classroom and conversely in settings after they complete an adaptive leadership course. Studying students who have completed a weeklong adaptive leadership course at an urban Midwestern University created a basis for this study. By studying a subset of college students through qualitative research, valuable data was discovered related to adaptive leadership, key leadership behaviors and practical application of leadership learning.

Chapter three describes the methodology, phenomenology of this study beginning with a discussion outlining how college students were selected, data collection, data analysis, credibility of the data and limitations.

Seeking to understand the story and experience of students and their lived leadership experience, phenomenology was selected as this study's research methodology and most effective way to capture students experience with leadership behaviors. Phenomenology aims to thoroughly understand experience of a set of people (Creswell, 2007). By considering a person's experience as they are living it, phenomenology gets a high level, but detailed view of how someone makes sense of, perceives and remembers their life (Patton, 2002). Since phenomenology seeks to make meaning of a particular experience, it is important that each of the participants have adequate experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Students were chosen using purposive sampling by analyzing a final paper they wrote at the time of taking the

course. The researcher was looking for a described profound experience at the time of course completion prior to arranging for interviews with students today. The data gathered is dependent on the participant's studied knowledge and articulated experience to provide insights.

Phenomenology as a qualitative research method does not seek generalizable information, but rather a deep exploration to obtain a detailed depiction of a lived experience. (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990).

Selection of Students

The urban Midwestern University in this study, offers a weeklong seminar course titled: *Leadership in Self and Society* with a primary purpose of helping students to identify and make progress on a personal leadership challenge. Students take the course for a variety of reasons including because some majors require a leadership course be completed to receive a degree. Regardless of level of initial interest, students are asked to rent two ideas upon entering the classroom. First, they need to bring a personal leadership challenge they are currently facing and care deeply about. Second, that leadership is an activity, not a position or title of authority meaning anyone can exercise leadership anytime, anywhere including an expectation that each student is present practicing acts of leadership live in the classroom (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013a).

Students were chosen purposively from rosters of *Leadership in Self and Society* courses between the years of 2013-2015, total pool of 170 students, minus a handful each year not falling within a millennial age range. Consistent with other qualitative research studies, this study follows with a small sample size seeking to get a more detailed sketch of lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Twenty students were identified as interview prospects and asked to participate

in this study. Fifteen of the twenty responded. Data saturation was reached with five students per year 2013-2015, for a total of 15 students in three years of the data evaluated. The 15 students who participated in this study included a diverse group-- a close to even split of male and female students with a wide range of undergraduate academic majors and workplaces they are operating in beyond the course. All were in the millennial age range, ages 16-34 with most being between 20-24. Additionally these students participated in the courses during three different years. The split of students from each year of the course spanning 2013-2015 was even 5-5-5.

Table 3.1 | List of College Student Participants

Alias First Name	Gender	Major	Year of Course Completion
Garrett	Male	Exercise Science	2014
Jackson	Male	Psychology/Pre-Med	2014
Katie	Female	Exercise Science	2013
Ahmed	Male	Business Administration	2013
Ginny	Female	Psychology	2015
David	Male	Business Administration, Management	2015
Levi	Male	Mathematics	2015
Nancy	Female	Elementary Education	2014
Winston	Male	Public Health Science	2013
Bill	Male	Pre-Med/Chemistry	2013
Hope	Female	Communication Sciences and Disorders	2014
Maci	Female	Nursing	2015
Allie	Female	Dental Hygiene	2015
Drew	Male	Management Information Systems	2014
Leslie	Female	Psychology	2013

Data Collection Methods

Two forms of data collection were used in this study to first select students who had an impactful experience and then to evaluate lived leadership experience in the season following their leadership learning experience.

Final Paper Analysis

As part of the requirements for the *Leadership in Self and Society* class, students are asked to write a final reflective report answering the primary question of which Kansas Leadership Center principle or competency sub-point resonates most with you and your experience beyond a leadership classroom? Four secondary questions are also asked within the written instructional prompt:

1. Why did you choose your principle or competency sub-point?
2. What have you learned since your leadership course experience about this concept?
3. Why did it resonate with you?
4. What still is not clear or is challenging your current framework related to this concept?

Students are asked to submit this report four days following the last day of class as their final and as a large portion of their class grade. The papers were read to find fifteen students who articulated an impactful experience at the time of paper submission.

Primary Interview

A set of open-ended questions were asked to students in telephone interviews. Students were not presented with their initial answers to their final reflection report to have in front of them during the interview. Van Manen (1990) suggests that you try to keep participants focused closely on their lived experience as they are living in it to stay true to phenomenological

research. Presenting them with their final paper would detract from this purpose. The intended outcome of these interviews was to get as detailed as possible account of a student's experience and articulation of leadership as they have experienced it over time. Stemming from the overall research question: Does adaptive leadership pedagogy make a difference in a millennial's experience of leadership?, General interview questions were asked including:

1. When you think about your leadership course experience what leadership ideas do you remember?
 - a. What is it about that idea that stuck with you?
 - b. How have you applied this idea beyond the leadership course?
2. What leadership ideas are still unclear or challenging?
3. What would you share with a peer who has not gone through this leadership course experience?
4. From where you sit today, how do you define leadership?
5. Have you shared all that you think is significant related to your leadership course experience?

These questions were followed up with additional probes as needed to get a clear and complete picture of experience and definitions of articulated terms.

All fifteen interviews were conducted via telephone and digitally recorded to later be transcribed verbatim into a written format for analysis. Students were emailed a copy of the IRB form and asked to send back a signed copy prior to their scheduled phone interview. The researcher also overviewed the clauses asked in IRB and asked for a verbal yes approval to participate in this research study while the recording was running. The researcher used an

interview guide of primary and secondary questions to ensure some level of consistency between interviews. Written transcripts were used as raw data to perform the phenomenological analysis. The transcript files were coded via number not by name to prevent researcher bias.

Method of Analyzing and Organizing Data

Analyzing the data followed Moustakas (1994) procedural method for phenomenology. First, all of the data including the papers and interviews were reviewed from a high-level lens to get an overview of emerging themes. Each statement was given equal value initially and then later sorted to eliminate repetitive or non-useful data (Moustakas, 1994). The remaining relevant information was then organized into significant statements each only including only one significant theme. Significance was determined by which statements directly related to the primary research question (Moustakas, 1994). Significant statements were recorded in a spreadsheet and grouped in themes. This highlighting of themes among the significant statements is called horizontalization (Creswell, 2007).

Codes were created based on significant statements that emerged to categorize broader themes. Overall this methodology seeks to understand the “what” the students experienced and then describe the “how” the experience occurred (Creswell, 2007).

Credibility of the Data

To validate the trustworthiness of this study, an external audit of the data was performed by two additional trained researchers. The additional researchers were presented with the full scope of each step of the analysis for 40% of the 15 students evaluated or 6 of the interviews. The two additional researchers sought to confirm that the data indeed substantiated the findings. These additional researchers verified the findings based on the data present.

In addition to having the data checked by two additional researchers, each student was allowed to review the transcript of their interview via email to verify it matched their described experience. This process is called member checks (Creswell, 2007). Students were asked to respond confirming the accuracy of the data and present any alternative interpretations to be considered. Feedback from students was included in the final findings.

Role of the Researcher

With the intent of following good phenomenological research practices, mention of the researcher's background related to this study is important. Prior to performing the research, the researcher evaluated her own perception of the phenomenon under study. This process is referred to as bracketing and allows a researcher to set any biases aside prior to performing research (Creswell, 2007). The researchers previous experience included classroom time with students, professional experience with the Kansas Leadership Center and assumptions held regarding the outcome of the study. The researcher has worked on a teaching team to help teach this subset of students during the weeklong seminar class at Wichita State and is committed to working with students and better understanding this specific leadership curriculum. The researcher believes in the effectiveness of the Kansas Leadership Center principles and competencies in helping people to more effectively exercise leadership and therefore bracketed this belief. Due to the researcher's professional role as a member of the staff at the Kansas Leadership Center and as their former instructor, students may have perceived the researcher as an authority on the leadership subject matter which could have impacted responses to the interview questions. Responses to the final papers submitted were for a final course grade, which could have impacted the answers presented and depth of explanation. With prior knowledge of how students

experience the leadership class structure and curriculum, the focus of the researcher shifted to understanding a student's perspective on specific leadership behaviors. Each interview was performed with an acute focus on only what students shared.

Summary

This chapter overviewed the methods and process to conduct the study. Fifteen students were chosen to participate which led to fifteen analyzed final papers and fifteen completed interviews. Interviews were conducted via telephone and followed a standardized script of a primary and secondary question. Upon completion, interviews were transcribed and sent to students for review.

Data analysis is outlined in terms of the procedure used by the researcher to organize and assess the data. A system of coding was created with a coding chart. Credibility and trustworthiness of the study was cross-examined by two additional researchers and by students who participated in the study to confirm accuracy of transcript and analysis of theme findings. The researcher discussed role in relation to the students studied to distill any bias. Chapter four goes on to present the findings of this analysis.

CHAPTER 4 | Findings

The 15 in-depth interviews conducted produced over 100 pages of transcribed data, 442 minutes of audio recording and nearly 46,000 words. From the transcribed data, 324 significant statements were identified. Significant statements can be defined as quotations from transcripts that increase a researcher's understanding of a participant's experience of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). From the significant statements 25 meaning units were determined and grouped into 6 themes listed in the table below.

TABLE 4.1 | Themes

Theme 1	Leadership Defined
Theme 2	Focus on Others
Theme 3	Practice and Process of Leadership
Theme 4	Engage Wholeheartedly
Theme 5	Personal Journey
Theme 6	Course Description

Theme 1 | Leadership Defined

The theme *Leadership Defined* consisted of 73 significant statements and 5 meaning units (Table 4.2). The quotes contained in this section are direct articulations from students and examples of this theme. All of the students were asked to define leadership through one question at the end of the interview guide. Students discussed the concepts that resonated the most including the distinction between leadership and authority, the idea that leadership is something you do, characteristics that they see in a leader, the importance of progress for a greater good and

a willingness to accept responsibility to do something. The quotes throughout this section are examples of significant statements which contribute to a larger theme.

Table 4.2 | Theme 1 | Leadership Defined

	Meaning Units
1.1	Leadership is an Activity
1.2	Leadership vs. Authority
1.3	'Leader' Characteristics
1.4	Progress for Greater Good
1.5	Do Something

1.1 | Leadership is an Activity

Several of the students articulated the idea that leadership is an action or something you do. Students noted a sense of agency and a realization that they too could do the act of leading. This doing of leadership in the eyes of millennial students opened the floor for anyone and everyone to engage in the leadership. This view of leadership they stated meant they were implicated. Hope said “There is a chance to be a leader somewhere, no matter what you do. You can be a leader in your family, with your friends, with your job, literally anywhere...the skills apply across the board and are valuable.” The context of where to lead was not described as specific for students which some stated opened up many possibilities.

Another distinction within the grander idea that leadership is an activity is that leadership does not have to be a grand gesture, but rather is seen in smaller actions. Allie stated

Leadership is stepping up to the plate when it is needed and taking initiative. It does not have to be a big grand scheme things or big showing but it is small things, adopting a pet,

taking a stance, stepping up and being better than you were the day before in any part of your life. Leadership is seen everywhere. It is one of the most important things in life. It can be small to large, does not have to be a lot of people, it can be a ton of people.

These distinctions are different than students were previously taught to believe about leadership. Jackson articulated the good in different definitions of leadership saying “there are lots of different ways to lead. I think that's good for the world because the world requires a lot of different approaches.” Removing the notion that leadership is only reserved for large gestures, personalized the efforts for many students and also opened up opportunities to lead in the lives of those they cared most about.

One student expressed questions under this frame of leadership as an activity and the idea that leadership can be anything. Katie stated, “The big question for me is how exactly do you lead? There is no clear cut step way for you to lead because leadership is such a dynamic complex thing. I have a good idea of what it is, but then I do not know how to do it.” There was a desire for some of the students to see clarity and something to point to and say ‘yes that is it, that is leadership.’ Other students liked the space, ambiguity created in the action and felt every little step along the process of leading is more important than declaring the end result as leadership.

1.2 | Leadership vs. Authority

Related to the idea of leadership is an activity, many students also expressed the distinction between leadership and someone who holds a title or position of authority. Rhetoric to describe authority included those who are high up, the concept of power, titles including president, CEO, policeman, governor, someone who holds a position or title, successful, climbing ladders, leader an individualistic. These depictions and distinctions were simply stated

by some and stated with a tone of disdain or rejection by others. Leslie portrays the distinction saying,

Leadership is an action, not a position, so I think that it is so important to think about literally anybody can exercise leadership. It does not matter if they are the President of the United States or if they're a student on a college campus because it does not matter what your title is. Sometimes that does help, because you have this authority that people already respect, but it doesn't mean that somebody that is in authority is a leader.

The concept of holding reverence or respect for authority was seen in several comments. This respect was held for the function of the title or position and disconnected from the actions of the person who holds authority. Many students shared the view they held coming into this course included one of striving for a position because they considered holding a position meant they were leading. Upon completing this course, Jackson said "I think since taking the class, I definitely put more effort into paying respect to the title of leader rather than pursuing the title of leader." This student and others stated the distinction that the pursuit should be in trying acts of leadership, not reacting to gain a status or title.

Although there was reverence stated by some students, there was also skepticism inherent in many of the statements in relation to those in authority and a sense that you instead needed to evaluate someone based on actions versus title alone. A title was not sufficient in the eyes of these millennial students to constitute leadership. Jackson said "there is a difference between a leader and someone who practices leadership. We see a lot of people have the title of a leader. They think they are a leader, but they are not really doing anything. They are not really leading." Nancy agreed with the sentiment of watching to see what someone in authority does before

claiming that they are leading saying “it is not necessarily the person who is given the title of power or authority, but it is who shows leadership whether that be an action or words, but mostly action.” There was a longing and desire in students to see more action and less claims of leadership due to holding a title or position of authority.

A few students struggled with the difference with this view of leadership when they tried to express this view within a workplace or environment outside of this course. Although, they noted that they liked the distinction it was seen as different and conflicting to the one those they most interact with hold. Drew expresses this struggle stating, “utilizing these ideas in the workplace can be extremely challenging. When I go to work the word leadership is used as authority.” There was an expression of frustration and an eagerness to help people see differently and that leadership is not synonymous with authority. The word leadership itself posed problematic for many due to the varying societal definitions. Drew goes on to state:

I think that the leadership word itself is a little overused and confusing to a lot of people because you hear the word leader. When you go around one day you might hear the word leadership and it be used in five or six different ways. If I am using it then I am usually thinking of motivating and empowering others and that a leader is not tied to a role or it is not tied to what authority means.

A few students cautioned against this lifting up of authority as leadership and the implications that has on how they show-up to their work in this world. Nancy worried about the outcomes that lead to an individualistic view of leadership. She said “America praises people who climb the ladder and have success based on their position. We want people to get promotions and we praise men who spend two hours at home and all their hours at work. They

never see their kids. And that is just how it is in America. It is the individualistic concept that ‘The more I do, the better I am.’” The rejection of what striving for a title of authority was met with a suggestion to not be bound by the limitations of authority and instead embrace the freedom that comes from embracing leadership as something that happens and is available to everyone. A clear shift in ownership of the work of leadership was revealed by many including Nancy who said “A lot of times people wait for the people with ‘leadership abilities’ to make changes. Leadership does not have to be from someone else, it can be within your group or sphere of people.” Jackson said the concept of leadership versus authority stayed with him years later because it spoke to his “passion for being outside of the box.” He went on to state a fear of authority stifling this passion with others staying in the pre-determined authority-oriented line. “They would try to just do exactly what they are told and they could be capable of so much more.” Capable of so much more was a shared sentiment lending to the excitement millennial students shared regarding leadership not only being reserved for those with a title.

1.3 | Leader Characteristics

When asked what is leadership, several of the students began to describe characteristics that made up a leader. There was a wide variance in the characteristics described. Characteristics surrounding how to relate to others on a systemic level included (1) an ability to challenge them, (2) get more people involved, (3) intuitively read a group, (4) identify the skills of others, (5) motivate others to do work, (6) make connections and network and (7) an ability to lead a team. Katie offered some advice to a leader related to interacting with others stating “Don’t let your own ego and pride cloud your judgement or your compassion toward another individual.” Additional characteristics described were more individual in nature in relation to the person who

is leading including being emotionally intelligent and socially active, servant-hearted, humble, efficient and respected by others. One student held the notion that leadership should not exclusively be looked at as an individual. Jackson describes leadership as “someone who is part of the group or contributing to a cause. By that definition, a leader is also inclusively a member of a group.” These characteristics were described as helpful for a ‘leader’ to possess in relation to how they help someone to mobilize and interact with others.

1.4 | Progress for Greater Good

Most of the students expressed a desire to see leadership related to progress or movement forward. A repeated phrase by several of the students was progress for the greater good. This outcome of progress was expressed as important to students because it was for something beyond themselves. Leslie said “leadership is working toward something that you think would impact more than just yourself. A goal for helping the greater good.” Jackson agreed with Leslie regarding the purpose of leadership stating “the purpose of leadership is to work for a greater or bigger cause. That could be change or just uniting people, educating people or promoting something.” This focus on something bigger than self was described by students as inspiring and worth it related to exercising leadership.

Progress, according to students can only be made when others are involved. Maci stated “leadership is the ability to motivate others to be part of a greater good.” Students when making statements like these also mentioned how they see this concept alive in their own lives today. Some referred to experiences within other courses and experiences at the university while others described experiences in their workplaces. David when describing this progress within volunteer

work in which he is engaged, gave a nod to how long progress can take when you are trying to invite others:

Leadership skills have helped me identify that there's important work that can be done, that can have an impact, that does not require everything from me, but just requires the right conversations with the right people. Maybe challenging some people on the approaches that they're taking or what they're working on. And playing a much longer game. I'm starting to see that other people take on projects and it works great for a year and then it goes away. But I'm really hoping that by building a coalition of people to work together that we can build an organization that is much better than we have currently.

This idea that progress takes time and a continual investment did not detract students from wanting to engage.

1.5 | Do Something

Throughout the discussion of acts of leadership, some students expressed a desire and necessity to jump in and do something. One student, Ahmed, in particular spoke passionately around this idea saying "leadership isn't necessarily some complicated thing. It's just something that you have to do." Some students saw leadership as a choice or something they could choose to do. There was an urgency expressed for some in relation to the challenges that they care about most. Ahmed related it to dreams saying "When people learn what leadership is, it's like that moment when you get excited about something and chase after it. I chase after my dreams. I realize if I want something I can't let anything stop me." Students spoke about how they wanted others to experience this feeling of ownership and passion too. Levi shared that "leadership is

cyclical, it builds, it’s inspirational leadership in a sense. Leadership is being able to overcome your own struggles by helping people do the same.” The talk around doing something to engage others while being motivated yourself was a common and shared thread throughout students experiences.

Theme 2 | Focus on Others

The second theme, *Focus on Others* consisted of 68 significant statements and 4 meaning units (Table 4.3). Students discussed a strong desire to focus on and include others in the process of leadership. The functions of including others consisted of the importance of listening to others, giving a voice to the voiceless, engaging stakeholders, and mobilizing others. Students saw the importance of others both in the classroom work and jobs and communities. The quotes showcase significant statements which contribute to the larger theme.

Table 4.3 | Theme 2 | Focus on Others

	Meaning Units
2.1	Listen to Others
2.2	Voice to Voiceless
2.3	Engage Stakeholders
2.4	Mobilize Others

2.1 | Listen to Others

In relation to lessons learned within the classroom related to leadership, many students mentioned the importance and lesson of listening to others. Several of the comments related to the power of listening to others’ stories. Leslie said “I was really in tune, listening to people’s

threaded stories throughout what they were saying.” This listening to others’ stories required some focused attention, articulated as different than before taking this course.

A large portion of the listening related to increasing in the understanding of others and their perspectives. Katie described this saying “You learn to engage people respectfully. You learn to listen to people. You learn to listen to a large group of people.” Listening in the eyes of millennial students did not necessarily equal agreeing with the points of view, but there was important info gained through the process of hearing another person’s perspective. Allie described this as “You don’t have to accept everything, but you do have to listen.”

One student who now works within the medical profession described the usefulness of this learned listening ability within his daily work. Winston said

You have to really listen to the people you're working with. You can't let them do that just by delegating tasks and having them do exactly what you say. You need to let them have some freedom and express themselves a little bit. You also want to involve the patients in every aspect and be able to listen carefully and listen well. Then assist them in making what is the best medical decision for them personally and medically. I would say that the class has taught me, through being a better listener, to treat my patients better.

Greater depth was a positive outcome of students newfound ability to listen to what they heard from others.

2.2 | Voice to Voiceless

A theme of giving those without a “public” voice to speak was a theme that emerged through several of the interviews. Similar to listening and related to leadership not being attached to a title or position of authority, students described a desire for others to have a voice. The

statements included phrases including “give the voiceless a voice,” “making people feel valued,” “loudest voice doesn’t equal the biggest impact.” Asking questions to gain greater understanding of others was shared as a tactic for helping to hear from a different subset of people than the more usual voices.

A handful of students spoke to the effects of privilege and how it decreases the ability for some to be heard. They spoke to wanting to reverse this trend and allow the voiceless to have a public voice. Nancy shared her definition of leadership as “using your social capital, your privilege, your voice to stand up for people that need to be stood up for and helping to change lives. Using the things you have in your life to speak up against injustices, wrong and try to change things to better impact people.” Nancy is now a teacher at a Title I school in Kansas and shared that she sees images of injustices and people unable to be heard on a daily basis. Her concern stemmed from a view that the people who have privilege, power and authority get to make all of the decisions. Within this process the people whose opinions matter, those invested in the issues often get lost.

Another repetitive theme was the idea that the loudest voice might not always be the one with the most powerful thing to say. For example, Katie was working to recognize someone who was more shy and “read the group, not just the people who were speaking and introduce their ideas, as well as my own.” Leadership in the eyes of the students was not only reserved for those who insert their voice frequently into discussion, but found in quieter individuals too. Students also spoke to a misperception of these quieter people as not caring or expressing apathy. This is not always true and should be tested by listening to these quieter voices. Allie shared “after

taking this class I realized that sometimes the people who don't say anything have the loudest voices. The ones that say one or two words have the loudest voices, the biggest impact.”

Giving a voice to the voiceless was also seen as important in that it showed value for others, a value millennial students expressed as important to them especially related to leadership. Katie described the risk in discrediting quieter voices as

If you aren't listening, understanding people's personalities and if you're basing your leadership off of your ability to deal with people who have large personalities, you're going to lose the respect of the people who are more soft-spoken. They're going to feel undervalued by you and that is the opposite of what a leader should be making people feel like.

Missing the voices of those who are not invited to leadership conversations was considered too great of a cost for many of the students to bear when thinking about exercising leadership. They wanted others to feel included and valued regardless of the volume and frequency of their voice in the conversations.

2.3 | Engage Stakeholders

The term *stakeholder* was raised by several students, more specifically in relation to the importance of engaging stakeholders. Stakeholder was defined by Leslie and others as “people that have a stake in the issue.” This engagement included making sure the right people were at the table to participate in the conversations leading to progress. Nancy described how you determine who gets a seat at the table as “whatever decision is being made, who is it impacting?” She went on to give a personal example stating “for example, with teaching and budget cuts, teachers and principals need to be a part of that conversation since they're the ones whose lives

are going to be impacted by it.” Some students talked about stakeholders in relation to being conscious to meet the needs of those who are stakeholders around the issue that they care about most. David described this as “doing a better job at meeting the needs of the people who are stakeholders. So in a business you are wanting to meet the needs of the stakeholders who are involved.” The work of being a stakeholder and engaging others as stakeholders students alluded to be taxing, but worth it. David said

It’s worth it because I really value being a stakeholder. To be able to engage with people who actively want to make things better and who show-up and have open eyes and engage with each other, not every time, but the ones who do more times than not. When you are able to help an organization make progress and you can celebrate, you can be a part of that. But even when it doesn’t work out, there’s such a wonderful thing about just being a part of a community. There’s a belonging to it. Of being a community member.

This belonging was described as a literal stake in the work. The feeling of belonging is why stakeholders as a function of leadership was elevated in the eyes of students.

2.4 | Mobilize Others

The majority (37 out of 68) of the significant statements under the larger theme of *Focus on Others* fall under the auspices of mobilizing others. Mobilize others was articulated in several different terms including (1) empowering, (2) inspiring, (3) motivating, (4) helping, (5) creating space, (6) inviting, (7) involving the well-being of and (8) connecting with others. David put it simply in relation to leadership stating “leadership is working with other people. Leadership is the capacity to work with other people to make progress on hard organizational challenges.” This activity of working with others was a welcome concept versus the concept that leadership is an

individual activity. David goes on to state “It’s not me working alone on this...It’s that I’m trying to engage with other people to have an impact on the way that they do what they value, to get them to work together.” This orientation of involving others within the work, students spoke to as being a more selfless approach. Nancy described this as someone “who does things for people not just for fame and accolades, but who seeks to improve other people’s lives through their actions and words.” This is important because as Bill states leadership “involves the well-being of others.” This act of leadership was described as separating your needs and setting them aside for the needs of others, regardless of if they will return the deeds for you.

Students described a shift in the focus of the leading to being strongly on relationships being built. This act was different for some including Jackson who stated “I was trying to connect with them in any way I could. Just doing all of that made me feel like I was committed to it [leadership]. I was practicing that commitment which is something I don’t think I did a lot in the past.” By shifting the focus to more on relationships there was greater peace described around some of the ambiguity inherent in the adaptive nature of the leadership students experienced. Ginny said “the idea of me being focused more on the relationship, the interactions between people rather than the outcomes helped me focus on the specific interactions and how they played into the final outcome. I was willing to not be sure about what the outcome was going to be.” These interactions within relationship with others, students repeatedly stated made leadership worthwhile.

The phrase and notion of ‘leading from behind’ was stated by a couple of students as an important position to take in relation to mobilizing others. This was described as a willingness to get behind someone in their dreams and strive to do whatever it takes to push them forward.

Ahmed described this in relation to the business team who now works for him “I see what they can do, how creative they are, you know what kind of things they can accomplish now that they know they have someone behind them.” Bill had a similar experience with those in which he engages and described leading from behind as “motivating those around you to feel empowered that they can have decision rights to fully express their creativity and abilities to add the most value in a given situation.” This willingness to take a backseat and more of a supportive role of others’ aspirations was stated as one of the highlights for students related to leadership. Not having to hold the attention of others all of the time, but rather give it away to others was still seen as an important act of leadership. Jackson found this to add to his feeling of humanity and focus of leadership “which is to help other people feel welcomed in the group, help them accomplish the goal that the group is trying to accomplish and being a more conscientious person. A person, not just a leader.” There was a personalized identity within this statement that was important beyond just being part of a larger collective group.

Theme 3 | Practice and Process of Leadership

The third theme, the *Practice and Process of Leadership* consisted of 81 significant statements and 6 meaning units (Table 4.4). Students discussed with great clarity concepts that they remembered from the course and how they relate to the broader practice of leadership. The components of the practice and purpose of leadership consisted of the meaning units listed in Table 4.4 below. A sampling of quotes from the significant statements reveals rhetoric around each of the concepts contributing to the larger theme of the practice and process of leadership.

Table 4.4 | Theme 3 | Practice and Process of Leadership

	Meaning Units
3.1	Adaptive Nature
3.2	Connection to Concepts
3.3	Willingness to Experiment
3.4	Broader Perspective
3.5	Conflict Present
3.6	Process of Leadership

3.1 | Adaptive Nature

When students discussed the nature of the classroom environment for the course, many of the conditions described could fall under the grander notion of being seen as adaptive.

Descriptions of life beyond the classroom were similar in the eyes of these students. Depictions of this concept included the idea that people think differently, a preference to remain agile when handling situations, a feeling that there was a lot more to understand and sentiments including a desire for absolutes and quick fixes that were not present were shared. The distinction of adaptive was contrasted against situations that were more technical by some of the students.

Hope describes adaptive problems stating “you can’t just quickly fix it. It’s something you have to work hard to figure out.” Within her context of working with patients living with new physical realities she relates that “we talk a lot about adaptive challenges as figuring out what it means now that your life looks very different.” Leslie also added to the definition saying “there’s not usually one way to get to the right answer.” Students described this difference in thinking specifically within a classroom as disorienting, but necessary within a broader context in students workplaces and communities.

Being able to adapt to differences, specifically differences within groups of people was another point of clarity falling under an adaptive frame. Allie said “not every system is going to be the same, thoughts the same, interpretations the same. Everything is always different and the biggest thing is being open to different things.” Students described the necessity to have an awareness around the difference and equally important, an acceptance of the differences. This acceptance of differences also lends to what students described as an acceptance to change. Inherent within making sense of adaptive leadership is an ability to change. Drew agrees stating “adaptive I think it's at its base the ability to change when needed. I think of adaptive that there's change altering at its base expect, adapting.” Although determined necessary, it does not necessarily mean it came easy to students. Levi expresses the difficulty in this shift in thinking saying

I need absolutes. Everything kinda floats in the air through conflictual interpretation. You start finding ambiguity in terms of what is correct or wrong, or what those words even mean in the first place. And so often times I find myself analyzing an issue from several perspectives understanding how each perspective has validity and invalidity to it, but at the end of the day I still have to make some kind of decision. I have to consider ok these things can all happen, what's the greatest outcome, what's the greatest good, or what is sustainable and also good.

Placing a framework for how to make decisions and outcomes allows for some structure and process to exist for this student within work that is more ambiguous. Drew echoed this shift in mindset speaking to a necessity to remain ‘agile’ when faced with situations that do not have clear outcomes. Agile for him was synonymous with adaptive.

Within all of the structure and defining of adaptive, as best students could define a more elusive term, they did determine the importance within the ambiguity. David when looking within the business where he works realized the systemic cultural implications for only thinking technically saying “you can’t make improvements in the outcomes of the system just by sticking to the technical aspects. Doing a better job of whatever the system is already doing will just produce more of the same results.” Many students were motivated to move beyond the status quo. They held excitement regarding what possibilities are available to them and what acts of leadership could be within their own unique systems. Hope summarizes the adaptive nature inherent in much of life stating:

Just going through life is an adaptive thing. There are technical aspects but a lot of it is different and navigating those as they come. I think some of those basic skills I use more than I realize. I mean life you can't control it and you just have to take it as it comes and I think having a positive aspect is a lot better than trying to resist it. You just have to figure out different ways of navigating things as they happen.

Students described this leadership course as preparing them for these realities and situations that were more ambiguous and less clear.

3.2 | Connection to Concepts

Part of the *Leadership in Self and Society* course these students participated included a competency-based framework for leadership created by the Kansas Leadership Center. The exact framework can be found in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. Many of the students related to specific concepts within this framework and described it as useful for helping them to make sense of leadership. The application of these specific concepts beyond the course, students found to be helpful. David

said “the course and study of leadership really defined my framework for how I understand how people behave and gives me insight into how different individuals with different values will react to things. I see how I am a part of that system. I have opportunities to make conscious choices and change how things go.” Hope agreed that this has been helpful and added that it was not just helpful within a classroom context, but in a variety of setting she has found herself in beyond the last day of the course. “The KLC way of leadership was helpful and wasn’t just geared toward one specific area of life or professionalism, but can be applied in multiple different settings and people.” The overall framework was a useful tool in framing a broader notion of leadership.

Some students mentioned specific concepts within the framework. Raising the heat was talked about the most and defined by one student, Garrett as ‘trying to stir the fire.’ This idea was defined as different and observably present within the classroom setting. Bill noticed “a lot of discussion of raising the heat and what to do when you raise the heat, observing how the heat was being raised and making interpretations about it before then intervening.” There was an intense curiosity around the idea and how it is done expressed by several of the students. Most concluded that although at times, uncomfortable it was ok to raise the heat on occasion. Levi noted “it’s ok to raise the heat and it’s actually valuable. There’s a way to do it intelligently and effectively.” This intentionality in raising the heat was seen by students as tricky, but important in intervening effectively.

Another concept noted more for its intrigue and elusive quality was *speaking to loss*. Bill said “it stuck with me because it was definitely one of the harder ones to learn and understand within that time period.” Although described as important, no student could clearly define what it looks like or how it is done. Bill continued in saying “I think speaking to loss is very powerful. I

don't know if it's the nature of speaking to loss, but I tend to procrastinate and not focus on what it means to practice it." The argument for a lack of understanding was attributed to *speaking to loss* not being modeled often or well. Within this described lack of understanding, there was an argument that part of this is because the act of speaking to loss is not modeled often or well. Jackson posed one possible reason related to maintaining a certain ego and image as a leader saying "a lot of big name leaders nowadays don't do it because they feel like they are above everyone else." This was stated as a concern and not the model to follow by students when thinking about their own leadership efforts.

Concepts under the competency of manage self were also mentioned by some including understanding how to manage your vulnerabilities and triggers and a desire to get better within the area of trigger management specifically. Triggers are defined by Heifetz as a reaction that is often uncontrollable and in the category of fight or flight type emotions (Heifetz, 2011). Ginny described manage self as the most useful concept for her to practice both within the class and beyond. She said the ability to manage yourself "helps you understand yourself, both where you're good and where you can improve. Those two understandings help you actually act being more aware of how you're acting. It helps you see both sides, where you're strong and where there's growth needed." An overarching framework including the ideas under manage self gave students language to point to in making sense of leadership, both where they are comfortable and where greater learning can still occur.

3.3 | Willingness to Experiment

Students described the classroom environment as lending itself nicely for allowing them to actively experiment with the doing of leadership in a safer environment than the ones they

face in life beyond the classroom. Drew said “that gave me an area where I could test out some of the learnings. I felt like it was a pretty safe area to experiment on some leadership challenges.” This practice arena and spirit with the classroom lent itself to multiple experiments and a willingness to try something regardless of the risk of failure. There was a willingness expressed along with intentionality and thoughtfulness related to actions.

Ginny described this as a willingness to try something and genuinely so without a guaranteed outcome. She said it is being “willing to let it happen without knowing how someone is going to react and being comfortable with unknown riskiness. After the course I felt more comfortable with being a little bit riskier where I have no idea how it’s going to turn out.” Ginny and others spoke to the idea that experimentation does not come without some risk. David agreed saying “when you’re engaging with people that’s risky because you could be rejected. You could fail. The organization could not make progress that you’re wanting it to and you could have invested all of that time, energy, emotions and relationships and not see fruits from it.” Within this riskiness was an inherent focus on being intentional in the way of acting. Ginny said it is “being willing and thoughtful about how I act. I view this as an actual process to choosing what I’m going to do rather than what creates an outcome.” Within the trying there was a genuine willingness in being comfortable letting go of knowing the outcome. For some including Ginny, this was markedly different and described as letting go of control including of what would happen as the result of individual efforts. Students mentioned that experimentation was a repeat action where they reload often and try again and again. This willingness led some students to conclude that experimentation was more about what you learn than the outcome of finding the correct answer.

3.4 | Broader Perspective

The most prevalent idea under the broader practice and process of leadership was what students described as a significant broadening of perspective. Students described this as increasing their ability to generate multiple observations and interpretations, and in turn using these interpretations to color the perspective they take on a particular situation. The process of gaining a broader perspective for many, including Maci, consisted of asking more in-depth questions. She said often the question “what do you mean?” was posed to reach a greater depth in discussions. This was described by her as an ability to “dig further into the conversation,” a process she said “was a little harder as I kept going.” This process was credited by some students to the KLC framework to generate what Bill calls “tools to think beyond what’s on the surface.” The purpose of digging beyond what is on the surface, students described as a value to deeply understand the different perspectives of others in the room. Hope described this work as the ability “to bridge the gap and ask lots of people questions to try to get all the information out on the table.” The usefulness of seeking more data or possible options students expressed as unique, challenging in practice, but helpful in determining what to do next.

One difficulty for students was that everyone had a different way of looking at the situation. Allie realized that “everyone’s interpretation is going to be different.” Hope found this to be a useful realization; it “was a good experience for me to remember that everyone had a different way they’re looking at things and different reasons for why they do and maybe don’t want to do certain things.” The practice of considering others and their thoughts moved the idea of interpretations beyond self. Allie described this as “taking observations of the entire situation going on not just how you feel. Lot of times I think about me, my feelings and my situation, not

the situation of the group or the whole or the entire problem.” Prior to this class some students held strongly held beliefs and opinions that they felt were best. Leslie said before the class she “would always think that my interpretation was the best one.” This was found to not be true or useful when trying to understand others. What was more helpful, but challenging, was considering thoughts that were different from what you think. Leslie compared this to her view prior to the class saying “it's always good to consciously think about other avenues that someone got to that conclusion with, or different interpretations of whatever happened.” This spirit of remaining curious was one students consistently mentioned as helpful in their broadening of perspective.

Prior to jumping to making interpretations, students shared about the process of *being on the balcony* for the purpose of trying to make sense of what was going on within the action. This metaphorical balcony helped in distinguishing the function of diagnosing the situation through observations and interpretations and the act of intervening. Students’ were surprised at the difficulty in slowing down long enough to simply observe. Allie saw “how quickly we jump to conclusions. Not taking the time to actually see the situation at its fullest, or the problem or relationship in its entirety.” The ability to stop and see a situation from all angles several students stated was an area where they would like to continue improving. Bill expressed a desire to increase capacity in this area saying “perhaps interpreting, giving multiple interpretations of what’s going on, specifically systemic ones, I find that I only start scratching the surface when I’m involved with days or weeks in that mindset. I can’t just flip it on.” This inability to flip on the ability to generate multiple interpretations and observations was expressed as frustrating, but still a necessary component in the practice of leadership.

3.5 | Conflict Present

Conflict, an unpopular concept within American society as well as this course, students discussed as being alive both in the classroom and in their environments today. They described what conflict is and how it is useful as a tool to help others engage fully. Levi explained how this shows-up in his daily life stating “sometimes there are issues I’m uncomfortable going into because I’m afraid or I have been afraid. I think it’s a matter of understanding what conflict can be, not just a tool for getting back. It’s an opportunity to create insight and to use that moment to really understand where people are coming from.” This insight and ability to not use conflict for sport, but rather as a tool to understand others came with some practiced intentionality. Winston said “I really saw things in a different light in terms of conflict management and the uses of conflict with intention.” The experience within the course helped with visible seeing and experiencing conflict, but several students said what has been most helpful is experiencing it in a less fabricated, more real-life environment. Winston explains “despite your leadership training or skills it can be difficult to manage inter-group conflicts. That’s where experience of the leader, not necessarily the course, make you better in the long run.” This was described in relation to the conflict inherent in working with difficult people, for Winston within a hospital work environment. The importance despite the discomfort students articulated makes conflict something to continue to lean into rather than avoid both within the classroom and beyond.

3.6 | Process of Leadership

Most of the students described the importance of continuing to practice the ideas learned in the course over time. Different than other courses where they experienced being asked to master the material and move on, this course called for a continual learning and practice years

later. Many students expressed interest in participating in multiple experiences similar to the one they experienced in the course. Drew described this continual learning process as one that is “going to take a few months or a year before you get in your rhythm and find a pattern that you can really start to thrive one. I think it’s something that if you want to continue developing you are going to have to continue to keep up on the learnings and keep experimenting.” This process of experimenting with the behaviors of leadership was described by some students as a repetitive and habitual activity, one to repeat often if any traction is going to be gained. Students described the usefulness of time in this course to learn by doing.

The word ‘process’ also appeared repeatedly in students statements related to the practice of leadership. The learning of leadership within this course was described as a process by some. Bill said “it was logical and had a process. Maybe that’s what helped it to stick with me. There was a set way of thinking, or a way of being taught how to think and how to react.” Regardless of the set process for the teaching, the applicability in real-time practice was not clear; rather, it was an interpretive practice. Bill compared leadership abilities to a muscle saying “with these concepts, they’re not so much tools as they are things that you really need to practice on and develop. It definitely is a skill that needs to be practiced daily.” This interpretative muscle in the face of uncertainty, students expressed was developed by imagining the what if questions from multiple people’s perspectives. Practicing this in their daily life and conversations made making multiple interpretations easier within the context of leadership.

The challenge inherent in the concepts themselves was alluded to within this call to practice on a regular basis. Ginny experienced this struggle in feeling like “all of the competencies are challenging because you never really feel like you’re finished with them. Every

time you feel like you've made progress you realize how much more there is to do. It's a good kind of challenging where it's not like you ever stop." Hope agrees with the concept of the learning never stopping and the difficulty in the learning saying "it's not necessarily something that you can just learn, it's something you're going to have to do. That's a lifelong process." The repeated theme about the engagement of others also showed up here in a few students describing the importance of others watching them through the process of leading. Leslie describes this saying "if you are trying to exercise leadership on something you're passionate about, in the end when others see the results, they are also changed just by watching you through the process." Students regardless of the realization that this would be a lifelong journey seemed energized to continue engaging in the practice and process of learning to lead.

Theme 4 | Engage Wholeheartedly

The fourth theme, *Engage Wholeheartedly* consisted of 42 significant statements and 4 meaning units (Table 4.5). Students expressed the power inherent in engaging in leadership how they termed it wholeheartedly which included showing some vulnerability, speaking from the heart, establishing presence and maintaining a spirit of optimism even in the midst of challenges. Students stated the usefulness of each of these components in their understanding of leadership and their engagement with others in environments beyond the course. A sampling of quotes from the significant statements reveals rhetoric around wholehearted engagement including each of the contributing components.

Table 4.5 | Theme 4 | Engage Wholeheartedly

	Meaning Units
4.1	Vulnerability
4.2	Speaking from the Heart
4.3	Presence
4.4	Spirit of Optimism

4.1 | Vulnerability

Students described a tricky, but useful idea sharing ideas under what they termed vulnerability. There were many examples and definitions, but an overall sentiment of bringing your whole self with you when engaging in leadership. Jackson shared “the step that ‘leaders’ forget is committing their whole selves and their hearts into whatever they’re trying to pursue.” Some of the students emphasized that by whole self they mean showing up with their core values and acting out of a place recognizing it is useful to have a grounding of ideals you hold tightly. Levi said “at the end of the day I would say a person still has to maintain a certain amount of truth to him or herself and in doing so really hold onto your core values. You can work with those because that’s what’s going to keep you sustainable and honest within yourself. People will be able to observe are you an honest person or not.” This idea that you need to show-up honestly was shared as important both in how students appreciated how others showed up in the classroom and how they are operating in the world today. Leslie shared “you can feel it within the relationships in the class, people sharing, empathy.” Some students expressed that due to the vulnerability in the course many of the relationships established with classmates remain today. Students also described the modeling of this behavior within the course as helpful in embracing

that vulnerability is a useful space to occupy. Nancy described this within a new friendship saying “she barely even knew us and she shared. What’s the point in pretending that she’s fine? She isn’t fine. And that’s what life is for. I get that now. There is no point in pretending you’re fine, if you’re not. Being vulnerable is just being honest with where you’re at, at that exact moment.” The authenticity shared with being vulnerable and the willingness not to pretend students expressed they wished would appear more often in moments of leadership.

Although expressed as important, some students struggled with how to be personally vulnerable themselves. David states

I walked away from Dr. Davis’ course really struck by vulnerability and the importance in the emotional appeal and the human to human appeal as really the single most important tool and also realizing how risky it was. I have to raise the stakes for myself. I have to show whoever I’m trying to engage with, I have to show them more of myself, I have to show them more of what I value or more of what my fears are. And that still has to be done strategically. I think it is a challenge area for me because even though I have respect for this concept, it’s still not something I’m not comfortable doing. It’s not something I’ve done much and it seems risky to me still.

As he described the challenge inherent in engaging vulnerably, he also expressed significant hesitation. This David attributed to a lack of understanding of how it is done effectively and also fear in how he would be perceived. This described perception of risk in being vulnerable when the stakes are high, personally resonated with several students. Some expressed that there was no way around showing up vulnerably, others are consciously working to avoid moments where they experience vulnerability.

4.2 | Speaking from the Heart

One of the concepts from the Kansas Leadership Center leadership framework that was discussed as most useful is the concept of *speaking from the heart*. Several students mentioned that this was the concept that they remember the most and desired to practice. When describing speaking from the heart, many students viewed the practice of speaking from the heart lacking in those working to lead. Jackson expressed it as something that leads to his skepticism of a ‘leader’ saying “they're not genuinely invested in what they're trying to lead which is one of the big reasons that I see someone that I think no you're not leading. Putting your heart into it, speaking from the heart. I think that's a really big hurdle.” Some students discussed that speaking from the heart expressed commitment and the practice of commitment to an issue. The difficulty in the doing of speaking from the heart they expressed led to less people committing. Katie expressed practically how she helps someone share from a different space saying “if you say what's on your mind there's a million things. But if you say what's on your heart? They understand. That's going to evoke a different response than what's on your mind or what's your gut on this?” Some students beyond Katie mentioned the usefulness in helping others make the distinction of what is on your heart versus in your head or gut.

A few students expressed the danger in never speaking from the heart. This was described in how it stifles emotions that could be useful to learning and movement. Levi shared those emotions and the reason that people shun them or push them away is because they can be painful or destructive, but they don't have to be. They really can be areas of deep insight and actually profound movement. And so by learning how to speak from your own heart for example, knowing when is it ok to show your own vulnerability to connect

with someone emotionally that way and to have a response to help them see your perspective, that's life and if you shun it that's probably the most dangerous thing you could do. A leader should be able to really cultivate that and channel it effectively.

When done well a distinctly different heart to heart connection is established. Garrett said "I think good leadership is a heart to heart connection in that they can trust you and have faith in you and believe in you. You do that by reaching someone's heart. Once you have that heart to heart connection then they really trust you and value you. In return you'll get their best."

When speaking from the heart happens a few students shared that they see people pause and genuinely think about their answer. Katie said "they almost always pause and take a minute to gather their words. Like there is a lot they would like to say. It is something they feel passionate about. I either look for almost slower softer kind of speech and just connecting on a very intimate level." Students expressed a desire to improve both personally in speaking from the heart and inviting others to do the same.

4.3 | Presence

Some students spoke to a few things that impacted how they show-up or what could be termed under a larger frame of *presence*. Nancy defined it as "authentic. Present means being vulnerable, physically and emotionally present where you're at." She also expressed this in relation to decision making saying "if you're making a decision that's going to impact people, you need to be a part of whatever it. Physically be part of that group." Jackson agreed with Nancy and underscored the need for those leading to make it a priority to be present. "It's being physically and emotionally present. Contributing as much as you can to whatever you're doing. Also looking to the future and looking to the past to learn from it. Then going forward. Not just

going along with it.” Being a part of something, invested to where you are not just going along with it, students expressed as an act of leadership.

This sense of presence expanded beyond physically and emotionally showing up to talking about the spirit you should carry in your presence. Ahmed noted that passion is something to carry with you because it will help you to chase after what you care about and do it regardless of the cost. Ginny spoke to being in a good mental space to be able to act in leadership. She spoke to the importance of the correct timing and allowing yourself time and space to regroup when stressed. Garrett used his experience on an athletic team to speak to the importance of remaining calm in a situation. This presence has allowed others to listen to him when he speaks calmly. Nancy spoke strongly about the need for others including those in the millennial age range to stop feeling like they have to show-up with their act together. She gave a real example related to budget realities facing the school where she is teaching stating “Life is messy. People who are leaders can be real and say “I don’t know what the heck we’re going to do to solve this budget crisis, so let’s gather together and figure it out.” In terms of how one should show-up there was no consensus, but agreement that you have to be present and fully physically and emotionally to have an impact on the issues where you are working to make some progress.

4.4 | Spirit of Optimism

A few of the students expressed a genuine feeling of optimism related to the future and opportunities related to leadership. With this optimism came a sense of empowerment to do what others are not brave enough to do. Jackson said “I’m very appreciative of that idea and that sentiment of doing things that no one else would dare do. I think that based off my life and even

before my life, doing those sort of things can have very profound and meaningful effects.” He spoke of a family who took a bold risk to move to the states before he was born for the opportunities present. This modeling by his family led him to feel willing to dare greatly in his own leadership endeavors. David also spoke to an optimism and a sense that he wants to be a part of a greater effort to make a difference. He stated:

I take an optimism away. At first when you’re engaging with adaptive leadership or with a systemic theory of organizational life, it’s almost like there would be a pessimism to it because you look at how many things don’t make a difference. But then when you look at more of the tools that are available, when you look at a whole leadership framework like by the KLC and there are things that do work. Funny that this is in the context of being a millennial, but as a millennial I’ve got these big eyes going out into the world and I want to make the world a better place, make things more fair and include more people and that’s really tough. There are a lot of things that initially would dissuade me from that optimism, but studying leadership like I was at the end of college really gives me hope because I know of tools that I can use and skills that I can work on so that I hopefully have a full rich life full of being engaged in communities and organizations and being able to make the kind of difference, make the kind of interventions that I would like to.

This spirit of optimism even when faced with the reality of the challenges David experienced highlights a resilience and willingness to engage in work students described deeply matters. David and others expressed the tools learned in this course contributed to them feeling more equipped to lead and therefore more optimistic in their efforts. This idea that there is space to make a difference and tools available students expressed started with what they saw when taking

the course, but expanded beyond to their jobs and communities today. Jackson experienced this sense of optimism while in the class in a moment he described as significant vulnerability. He stated

I learned that there are a lot of good people in the world I guess. I wouldn't consider myself a cynic, but with the things we're seeing in the media and all the tragic things. There's this kind of idea that people are inherently bad. In that kind of moment when I made myself pretty much the most vulnerable I've ever been in my life, getting the support that I wasn't expecting at all was a very pleasant surprise. So I think people can surprise you in that they are good.

Millennials may be predispositioned to think optimistically, desiring to make a difference based on generational research, but this course adds some grounding for this generational assumption. One thing students expressed certainty around is that remaining optimistic was worth the effort and a contributing factor in their desire to make a difference.

Theme 5 | Personal Journey

The fifth theme, *Personal Journey* consisted of 30 significant statements and 2 meaning units (Table 4.6). Many students expressed how the course and practice of leadership was a personal journey for them and led to personal transformation and making more intentional choices. A sampling of quotes from the significant statements reveals rhetoric around this described personal journey including what was described as transformation and intentional choice.

Table 4.6 | Theme 5 | Personal Journey

	Meaning Units
5.1	Personal Transformation
5.2	Intentional Choice

5.1 | Personal Transformation

Most of the students spoke to a sense that something changed within them as the result of taking this course. By the end of the week-long experience many described that they were different or in a different place mentally and emotionally than they were prior. This transformation for some took place immediately and for others developed in the years after taking the course. Some referred to the feeling that the most success they saw during the class structure was the personal change. Allie shared “success in this context was about learning more about myself and how to handle myself in a situation.” Bill said “it’s been a lot of personal work. I’ve used a lot of the ideas for my own personal gain.” Many students spoke to not only realizing a personal work within themselves, but a moving beyond spaces inside of them that were not serving them well. Levi shared “when I took the course I wasn’t in a good emotional place, I was working through depression. This really helped me challenge some things that I knew were true. It changed a lot in me and pushed me to actively reshape. It helped me get out of that to move past certain elements of my emotion in terms of pushing myself to do the things I would have normally not done.” David shared the feeling that this reshaped his views in a useful way communicating: “After studying adaptive leadership and taking Dr. Davis’ course, I see the world differently and it has changed, it’s been important for my well-being.” Bill described the course impact of helping students to reach their “max potential.”

Some of the students alluded to this reaching of max potential by stating the course and framework for leadership gave them greater confidence. Others mentioned a shifting realization that they had more to give in their leadership efforts than they believed prior to taking this course. Maci expressed the shift in how others within her sorority experienced her saying “they’ve helped me and others with our self-esteem and I’ve been given a chance to lead. I think they considered me and that this was something more to be a part of.” This sense of having new opportunities and confidence some described as immediate, while others expressed it happened over time. Winston shared “the class was transformative for me. It opened up my eyes to a whole different side of what leadership means. From that day forward, I was able to take what I learned there and implement it into the few leadership roles I’ve had since then. I became a much better team member.” Students were eager to share the personal transformation that took place along their personal journey, including how others in their lives perceptions of them changed regarding them and their abilities. The transformation for some led to greater opportunities externally and for many a different sense of internal positive change.

5.2 | Intentional Choice

When asked to reflect on the shift in thoughts and actions through personal transformation, many expressed that this shift in behavior stemmed from an intentional choice. There was a willingness expressed to jump into action with both feet, but not after first taking a careful assessment of the situation. Ginny said “I’m able to think about my actions before I do them or after to think through what were my motivations, balancing that with eventually you have to do something.” An awareness was expressed that led to the intentional thought before acting for some. Bill shared “I’d realize that a lot of things had been triggering me to rely on

default behaviors that I used to be able to control as opposed to act recklessly. Recognizing that I can be a better thinker, I can be a better person if I can control my triggers, observe my behavior a little bit better in certain situations.” Movement beyond these default behaviors by students was defined as personal progress.

Related to triggers or what could be described as places that lead to less intentional actions Levi expressed a measured assessment within himself saying “Internally there are often things that are wiser to do than what I may perceive or want to do. I may be aware of this or I may not be, but in terms of exploring it within myself it allows me to challenge what I marginally am aware of, but choose to ignore. I think that has been the most powerful thing.” For some, this internal assessment led to some external actions that others noticed as a shift due to intentional choices. Maci said “after this that's when I decided to take on more of a leadership position in both nursing school and my sorority. That was a big change to people. I was just a member. I was just there. That changed a lot and helped. I think everyone saw that in myself. I was more willing to get involved. I wasn't as before.” There was an excitement expressed in each of the voices of those who shared marked changes in the intentionality of choosing to lead and acting differently. Many students contributed this directly to their participation in this course.

Theme 6 | Course Description

The sixth theme, relates to the description of the course each of the students participated in which served as the centerpiece for this study on leadership. This theme consisted of 29 significant statements and 4 meaning units (Table 4.7). Many students expressed the intensity of the course and a caution to future students to remain open-minded. The idea of learning in community and expression that this was a ‘life-changing’ experience for many were also

described. A sampling of quotes from the significant statements reveals descriptions of the course in the words of former students.

Table 4.7 | Theme 6 | Course Description

	Meaning Units
6.1	Intensity of Environment
6.2	Open-minded Frame
6.3	Learning in Community
6.4	Profoundly Life-changing

6.1 | Intensity of Environment

Each of the students were asked to describe their experience including what they would share with someone who has not had a similar course experience. Many described emotions speaking to the intensity of the environment and the emotions that come with such intensity. Katie said it was “Frustrating. Exhausting. Draining, mentally and physically and all of the above.” Ahmed agreed saying simply “it was pretty intense.” Allie described it as “one of the most grueling weeks of your life.” Part of what contributed to this intensity was what some described as a less than controlled environment. David said “in the leadership course you get to practice the activities you’re studying and in a not entirely controlled environment. I often do try to engage people’s curiosity and say go try this new thing that is different than other things that you’ve experienced.” Garrett described this as being “put in pressure situations. One to see how people would react and at the same time different people had breakthroughs.” Regardless of the expressed intensity of the classroom environment, all who described this phenomenon said it was

useful to their learning about leadership. Katie mentioned the application beyond the course describing it as a “soft opening to society.”

6.2 | Open-minded Frame

Many of the students would give their peers who will take this course in the future the advice to remain open-minded. Some described this in relation to expectations around their own abilities as a ‘leader.’ Winston said “don't go into it expecting that you already know how to be a good leader. Go into it with an open mind, a fresh mind.” Others described the usefulness in keeping an open mind in relation to expectations in the course and other students. Allie shared “keep an open mind. Try to observe what’s going on around you and take it all in. Don’t shut down.” Levi shared a similar sentiment stating “keep an open mind, understanding where other perspectives come from and utilize multiple interpretations.” This understanding of other perspectives and being open to multiple interpretations was a high value for most of the students who spoke to keeping an open-minded frame. Drew said “be completely open to new ideas, be willing to go out of your comfort zone and try new things.” A willingness to go outside of one’s comfort zone and create space for others to do the same was communicated as one of the distinguishing hallmarks of this course. Levi shared “the class is more of a workshop if anything. It’s designed to make people really challenge themselves personally. That said if you’re taking the class for a workshop-based purpose, to understand where people are coming from, you must maintain an open mind and be ready and willing to be challenged.” Students articulated this open-minded posture as useful in the course experience and in their understanding of others in experiences beyond the course.

6.3 | Learning in Community

A few students gave a nod to the sense of community that the course environment fostered. Bill described

It's definitely a sense of community. There's definitely an environment that's unique to any environment you'll ever be in. It's a laboratory. It's a place where you can make mistakes. I think that's huge. It's a unique experience and it comes with a great community afterward. You can relate to others who have taken the course. They know where you're coming from. This community comes with other things you can do that you couldn't do before. You leave with a completely new mindset of handling situations.

Within that community. It has its special perks when you've been through it with others. Several students mentioned that they still have relationships with others who took the course the same year they did and emphasized the usefulness in not feeling 'alone,' but with others who shared an experience and a desire to use what was learned to better themselves and their unique contexts.

6.4 | Profoundly Life-changing

When describing their overall experience with the course students were quick to share phrases including the value of the course, life-changing, influential to them personally. Jackson said "out of all the college courses I took, even though it was definitely the shortest, I felt that it was definitely the most profound. I got to focus on the actual learning and sharing experience. It gave me room to invest even more of myself into the class." Katie agreed saying "it has been one of the most valuable experience in my collegiate career by far." Drew agreed with Jackson and Katie, but expanded the application to his life today speaking to a lack of an expiration date. "For

me it was definitely one of the most influential classes that I took because those are the type of skills that you can use for the rest of your life. Those skills don't really become outdated which I think is one of the most valuable things that you can really learn at a university is the skills that don't expire." This sentiment of the impact felt led one student David to jokingly speak to the way he describes the course to others. "I have to rein myself in when I talk about adaptive leadership and Dr. Davis' course. If I don't I end up sounding like I've bought into some crazy worldview that's totally apart from how people view the world." This being set apart from the world and the far-reaching impacts the course had on many of the students interviewed was difficult for some students to adequately put words to in their describing.

One student, Bill emotionally discussed the outcomes of how he sees the experience presently reshaping his definition of leadership.

After the course, I felt broken down. I felt like I had been through boot camp and my way of thinking was completely distorted. I felt very vulnerable. But at the same time, I felt like I could take over the world. I felt like I was ready to reach some type of initiative where everyone would think underneath the heart. It was quite the experience. I have not felt two different highs at once like that in my life and of that magnitude by just talking to other people that I had never met in my life. It was very influential. It had a huge impact on me in the way I thought and the way I would continue to think. I knew that if I wanted to continue increase my capacity to lead, I would need to give myself the chance, to go back and dabble with this practice. Every session I learned something new. And that's what it is, it's just learning and if you want to get better at learning you just reinforce it from time to time. That's how I've ended up where I am now.

The experience of feeling two highs and the tension between them is interesting to consider in relation to adaptive leadership. This description by Bill lends to understanding the intensity and profoundness expressed by students. Within these vivid displays of described impact from the leadership course experience was a profound gratitude. Students expressed a sense that the engagement in this course was worth the investment and will continue to have benefits for years to come. They expressed a desire for more people to have a similar experience, many saying they advocate and actively work to recruit others to take the course in the years beyond their engagement.

While the majority of students studied expressed the profound impact this course had on them personally, two students expressed little or no personal impact. Garrett shared

Honestly since the class I haven't thought much about it. I wasn't a huge fan of the course. I remember thinking outside of that class I was kind of frustrated for that week. I felt like I'm probably a very traditional student. I want to go to a class, take a test, get a grade whereas that was the complete opposite of anything I've ever done. I would leave some days feeling like I don't know what I accomplished. I don't know what I learned.

Ahmed agreed and added he saw more impact on other classmates than himself saying "I don't remember so much of the leadership ideas as the effect the class had on some of the others.

Personally the class didn't have a huge effect on me." Both Ahmed and Garrett shared they identified more with traditional classroom settings and positions of authority where directives are clear and easily measured.

Summary

Each of the students articulated some unique distinction in how they define and describe leadership. Their lived learning experience in a leadership course led them to show-up differently, described as more wholeheartedly in their environments beyond the classroom walls, expanded their understanding about whose responsibility leadership is in practice and created a safe space to begin to practice acts of leadership which they expressed looked differently for each person in various contexts. These students spent intentional time looking for the answer to the question what does leadership look like in my own life? Many expressed the urgency in wanting to add their unique voice and contribution to a greater cause that required their individual attention both during the course and in their lives today. The description of leadership took a much longer view beyond quick fixes and easy solutions. Each left the course on their personal life journeys sensing a greater awareness of themselves and others. The possibilities and opportunities for each led to an optimistic disposition and an eagerness to begin experimenting. Individually they became more confident, but did not want to leave others behind expressing the cruciality of including other stakeholders to collectively make greater progress. They deeply desired to be vulnerably seen and accepted when they show-up at the table not having all of the answers with a spirit of curiosity and energy to lend their voice.

How did this redefining of leadership happen? One important reframing that opened the space for movement and further conversations was the idea that you do not need to hold a title or position of authority to be able to lead. Leadership was seen as doing, contributing, showing up fully present regardless of competence or sure knowing of outcomes. It was seen in the willing eyes of their millennial peers and the support of a classroom environment that challenged them

to lean in and try something, risking failure, but also with a guarantee of learning something they might not have known before. The experience included a useful leadership framework and common language that kept students grounded. There was a sense expressed that there was still more to be done in the process of learning and practicing leadership. This was not expressed as intimidating, but as something to look forward to in the years ahead. Many felt that experiencing this framework for leadership completely shifted the trajectory of their lives, how they see the world and how they hope to engage; often, bravely, wholeheartedly in acts of leadership.

CHAPTER 5 | Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership behaviors and the language millennial college students use to articulate and make sense of leadership in settings after they complete an adaptive leadership course. This study was centered on the following research question:

- Does adaptive leadership pedagogy make a difference in a millennial's experience of leadership?

This question was addressed in the summary and findings detailed in the results. Although articulations are considered throughout the results sections, the themes of *Leadership Defined*, *Practice and Process of Leadership* and the *Course Description* have a strong focus on the leadership course experience. The theme of *Focus on Others* expresses an essential component of how leadership should be exercised including an underscoring that leadership is not an individual activity. The final two themes, *Engage Wholeheartedly* and *Personal Journey* emphasize the individual influence and changes that occurred within hearts and spirits as a result of the leadership course experience. The exploration of possible meanings to each of these themes requires a thorough look at the findings tangentially with previous literature connected to this study.

Upon analysis of the 15 student interviews of students who have completed a weeklong adaptive leadership course at an urban Midwestern University created a basis for this study. By studying a subset of college students through in-depth interviews, valuable data was discovered related to how millennial students make sense of adaptive leadership. This study concludes

students made sense of leadership by expressing and claiming agency in leadership, leading with their whole hearts and desiring to exercise leadership in community with others.

Agency in Leadership

Students expressed that they personally were responsible for acts of leadership related to grander challenges they were facing within their communities, families, and workplaces. This sense of agency led students to consider the intentional choices they were making that were contributing to or hindering progress. Related to the idea that leadership is an activity, something you do related to a challenge or opportunity, opened a space for anyone including students fresh out of college to participate in fully. A spirit of enthusiasm for the work ahead and a willingness to carry the often burdensome yoke of complexity inherent in leadership, was seen as a responsibility they are willing to assume. Related to leadership development this may be good news for those who believe the responsibility of leadership should be held by the hands of many at all levels, rather than few with titles of authority. This expressed agency led students to dream about what could be through the lens of optimism related to future acts of leadership they plan to engage in over time with the help of others.

Engaging in Community

A sense of community both within the leadership course experience and beyond with others who genuinely expressed a similar belief that leadership is an activity, posits that leadership cannot and should not be done in a vacuum. The importance of engaging or mobilizing others was shared repeatedly as a component that cannot be missing for progress to be made. Students were eager to help others and openly experienced seeing challenges from many different perspectives of others. Embracing the idea that others are necessary in addressing

the challenges in communities and workplaces might create less competitors and more colleagues in sharing leadership. This focus on others more than self was a high value of millennial students tied to a desire for authentic relationships with diverse audiences. Learning within community was also expressed by many of the students as a key component of why they were willing to engage differently and what contributed to their increased understanding of leadership. The sense of not being alone in the daunting work related to leadership, was useful and expressed as highly connected to their strong value of relationships with others. Some students expressed a willingness to take more risks within a supportive community for greater good.

Leading with Vulnerability

Students when engaging in acts of leadership did not want to leave a piece of themselves behind. Rather, they repeatedly expressed the usefulness in bringing their whole selves to their work and allowing themselves to be fully seen by others. Researcher Brené Brown affirms this in her extensive research on vulnerability saying it includes “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” (Brown, 2015). This was expressed by some as uncomfortable upon first attempt, but necessary to be in authentic relationship with others. Leadership was described as something that was best done honestly, with your whole heart and with a willingness to speak from a place in your heart. When this type of leadership was experienced within the classroom setting, students described the establishment of a deeper connection that enhanced their willingness to boldly act. Within leadership training, an encouragement to act from a place of vulnerability might be useful in recognizing an individual’s values and fostering a wholehearted experience of learning and leading.

Connections to Previous Research

How is leadership articulated by millennials?

Millennial Leadership

There is a hunger that exists within millennials to be a part of something bigger than themselves to truly make a difference. Referred to by researchers as a civic-oriented generation; millennials value virtues including “equality, optimism, cooperation and community” (Howe, p. 338). The students studied displayed this civic-orientation including the values inherent with engaging from a place of core virtues. The themes of *Focus on Others* and *Engage Wholeheartedly* spoke to the optimism inherent in the hearts of this demographic as well as a genuine desire to not go at this alone. David talked about this optimism and desire to make a difference.

Funny that this is in the context of being a millennial, but as a millennial I’ve got these big eyes going out into the world and I want to make the world a better place, make things more fair and include more people and that’s really tough. There are a lot of things that initially would dissuade me from that optimism, but studying leadership like I was at the end of college really gives me hope because I know of tools that I can use and skills that I can work on so that I hopefully have a full rich life full of being engaged.”

David’s statement provides a picture of how millennial leadership could be described. This statement also includes the meaning unit of being engaged which other students expressed as important to do so in what they termed a ‘wholehearted’ way. There was a piece of themselves they hoped to bring to this work that is unique and authentic. Additional comments related to this sentiment can be found under the theme of *Engage Wholeheartedly*. Jackson shared that he did

not want to be someone who failed to bring his whole self to the work saying “the step that ‘leaders’ forget is committing their whole selves and their hearts into whatever they’re trying to pursue.” This wholehearted approach and desire to express vulnerability was different than previous millennial leadership research.

Additional connections to the broader narrative of millennial leadership are within the themes *Personal Journey* and *Focus on Others*. Relationships with others and the ability to work together to make progress was an important theme this study found. Through engaging with others in acts of leadership, millennial students described personal transformation and a new way of operating in the world after taking this leadership course. Howe and Strauss (2000) describe this movement as “a new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds” (p. 216). This was echoed in statements of students in their strong orientation to not go at leadership alone, but rather in community with others. Millennials studied sensed a pressing urgency to do something and to actively be seated at the table as an engaged stakeholder.

Howe and Strauss (2000) also give a nod to the hurried state in which millennials engage saying that they are “moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done” (p. 184). Ahmed spoke of this chasing in relation to his dreams “When people learn what leadership is, it’s like that moment when you get excited about something and chase after it. I chase after my dreams. I realize if I want something I can’t let anything stop me.” All of the students studied alluded to the responsibility each of them has to ‘get after it’ in exercising leadership and an eagerness to do so within their workplaces and communities. They recognized

that the learning of leadership will be a long journey, but one worth facing. For the exercise of leadership, a resilience must be present to keep learning through difficulties with a focus on the horizon not the immediate incremental progress gained. The energy and focus necessary to continue learning and trying, students seemed to possess a few years after the course, but adaptive challenges will require attention for longer. Curiosity was expressed in the continued pursuit of moving the needle on tough challenges and inspiring others to come along for the longer view of leadership. Some students said they inherently knew the humility it would require for them to stay the course and the diligence to keep going even after facing failure. To be able to instill the diligence, spirit of curiosity, focus and energy needed for adaptive challenges might be the unique niche leadership training similar to this course could provide.

Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz (2004) argues that “adaptive challenges demand leadership that can engage people in facing challenging realities and then changing at least some of their priorities, attitudes and behavior in order to thrive in a changing world” (p. 104). This ability to embrace shifting and uncertain realities students described happened in the course environment itself and also beyond to the where they work today. One student shared a description of playing a much longer game and determination of how much of yourself to bring to an issue relates to Heifetz assertion of the definition of adaptive leadership. This acknowledgement and understanding of the difference in challenge related to the timeframe and expectation of uncertainty was important in understanding the acts of leadership required. An understanding also reframed the expectation of what is required of students when facing challenges with no clear solution or certain outcome.

Students added an important distinction to the definition and what it means personally adding the necessity of engaging wholeheartedly. To survive the ambiguity and for the work of leadership to be worth it, they needed to embrace what they described as the power inherent in vulnerability. This vulnerability requires acting on a problem from a place in your heart rather than your head. Green and Fabris McBride (2015) describe where adaptive challenges reside which points to the importance of vulnerable engagement saying “Adaptive challenges live in people’s hearts and stomachs. They are about values, loyalties and beliefs. Progress on them requires the people with the problem to do the work, and the work involves refashioning deeply held beliefs” (p. 13). Levi expressed an acknowledgement of embracing values saying “ at the end of the day I would say a person still has to maintain a certain amount of truth to him or herself and in doing so really hold onto your core values. You can work with those because that’s what’s going to keep you sustainable and honest within yourself. People will be able to observe are you an honest person or not.” Students expressed being able to explore these values and spaces within themselves throughout the course experience and -- perhaps more importantly-- beyond in how they engage with others now.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) in their defining of leadership describe the conditions that help the engagement saying leadership “is to work with differences, passions, and conflicts in a way that diminishes their destructive potential and constructively harnesses their energy” (p. 102). Students found one of the most useful distinctions to allow them to participate constructively was under the meaning units of Leadership as an Activity and Leadership vs. Authority or the unhinging of leadership from a title or position of authority. Students also addressed and articulated experiencing conflict useful for their understanding of leadership related to adaptive

challenges. Winston said “despite your leadership training or skills it can be difficult to manage inter-group conflicts. That’s where experience of the leader, not necessarily the course, didactic, make you better in the long run.” The taste of conflict within the course helped them when they faced conflict in less-controlled environments. Hallmarks of adaptive challenges found in previous research including ambiguity, a distinction of who needs to do the work, engaging in a longer game and conflict inherent were articulated by students. Additionally, they placed a large emphasis on the inclusion of others, the idea of progress for ‘greater good,’ and the necessity of showing up to the work wholeheartedly from a place of vulnerability. The additions students added to how they made sense of adaptive leadership are interesting due to being ambiguous in definition. Clear metrics and definitions for how to include others, progress, greater good and vulnerability might not exist and be up for the interpretation of one exercising leadership. This lends to an argument of creating a practice environment to try these ambiguous components of adaptive leadership in a safer environment than real life.

What conditions contribute to a clearer articulation of leadership?

The conditions set forth by the particular leadership course under study were described as useful in helping millennials to make sense of leadership. Students specifically pointed to the usefulness of the competency-based framework from the Kansas Leadership Center, summarized in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in the appendix, in recognizing specific competency-based behaviors to embody when leading. Concepts including *speaking from the heart*, *raising the heat* and *speaking to loss* were discussed as observable and necessary when mobilizing others to act.

In addition to a framework, students spoke about the importance of experimenting or trying something new. Although seen as risky, the expressed safety of a classroom environment

made it more likely for students to engage differently. Often this included acting without certainty of the outcome, but rather to learn something about the people and nature of adaptive work. Allowing space for learning to happen through active trying was seen as equally important to having a grounded framework to point to as leadership. The ideas within the framework came alive through the activity within the classroom and therefore were easier to make sense of in the eyes of students. Whether this learning by doing is related to the millennial generation or broader would require further study, but the marriage of both created useful conditions to learn leadership.

Strengths of Study

The 15 students who participated in this study included a diverse group-- a close to even split of male and female students with a wide range of undergraduate academic majors and workplaces they are operating in beyond the course. All were in the millennial age range, ages 16-34 with most being between 20-24. Additionally these students participated in the courses during three different years. The split of students from each year of the course spanning 2013-2015 was even 5-5-5. No notable differences were found in results from the different years to report. While each student has varying backgrounds, experiences at the college level and beyond, clear similarities existed in the articulation of a lived leadership experience. The author also participated in the same leadership course experience years prior to these students and assisted for six years in the instruction of the course, therefore holding a deep understanding of the course structure, curriculum and environment. This understanding and relationship building assisted in the trust of students between them and the researcher. While this experience counts as a strength it could also be viewed by some as a bias. Any bias in the study was accounted for in three ways.

First, the author completed an Epoche prior to starting the interviews which detailed the thoughts and experiences held related to the course experience. Second, upon completing interviews the author wrote notes describing initial interpretations and feelings related to the data. Finally, two additional people not connected in any way to the course performed a data audit to check for consistency in determined themes.

Limitations

This study was focused on a small subset of students from a much larger pool of those who have completed a course. Students chose to be in the course and additionally they also self-selected to participate in this study. This may have altered the experiences shared to have a more positive spin. The researcher chose students based on papers submitted on the last day of a student's course experience and therefore had limited knowledge of how a student would articulate a course experience one, two or three years later. The author and researcher of this study is currently employed full-time at the Kansas Leadership Center, the founding organization of the curriculum taught during this class. The research was unaffiliated with the Kansas Leadership Center, but several of the students were aware of the researcher's employment with KLC. The author and researcher was also on the instructor team who conducted these courses and instructed these students. As stated previously none of the students were still active in the leadership course and final grades had been submitted for each so no retribution was possible, however this role perhaps influenced what the students shared with the researcher. To account for the limitation related to role of researcher, an explicit statement was made both on the written IRB form and audibly on a recording that students would be given an alias name and their identity would not be tied to results. This assurance of anonymity of the reported results was

made explicit to each student prior to completing the interview.

Considerations for Future Research

A study related to students from this course who did not articulate having an experience that contributed to a greater understanding of leadership might be useful to assess the gaps in pedagogy. What pieces of their experience did not help them to articulate and experience usefulness in the practice of leadership? It would be interesting to see whether these subsets of students had a similar experience or if there were notable differences. By uncovering inconsistencies in described experience, how pieces of competency-based leadership are taught could be tweaked to increase understanding. It also could provide valuable insight into different learning styles and reasons for a described difference in experience whether they be tied to learning, worldview or definition of leadership.

Another approach to this research would be to continue to evaluate students at greater time distance intervals from the completion of the course to determine whether the articulation of leadership changes with more lived experience beyond a leadership classroom. Answering the question does the ability to make sense of leadership increase over time with more lived learning experience would be interesting to consider. Insight into whether time matters in description of leadership could uncover themes of anticipated learning related to communication over time.

For the students who described a personal journey or the act of making intentional choices, it would be interesting to track the transformation and intentionality over time. What contributes to the articulation of personal transformation or intentionality? Are there contributing characteristics or useful descriptions that point to their utility under the broader frame of leadership?

Although the course is aimed at helping students learn something about leadership, the course is also aimed to help students tackle the challenges they face in their personal lives, systems, and communities. Another important research question would be to examine whether the course learning is contributing to greater progress on specific articulated challenges by these students over time. This could be done by asking for specific examples and evaluating the words students use to describe how they have used what was learned in the classroom to move forward more effectively. Several students alluded to the components of the Kansas Leadership Center leadership framework that were tricky to understand and practice. For example many mentioned a desire to speak to loss, but are not sure how to do this with others. A study on why some concepts are harder to understand could be useful including what might make them clearer? How could they be defined differently for students to grasp and practice? In addition to greater study on this specific leadership course, there are other universities with leadership courses that could be comparatively analyzed. How are students definitions of leadership different? Similar?

Implications

For leadership training

While wide variance exists in leadership trainings, a few key components seem to contribute to a greater understanding and active practice of leadership including; (1) the utility of a framework of leadership behaviors--specifically the competency-based one set forth by the Kansas Leadership Center, (2) an environment that encouraged experimentation and the broadening of perspectives, (3) the active acceptance and celebration of vulnerability, (4) the creation of the sense of a learning community and (5) the understanding that leadership is a continued process of practice. In relation to the framework several behaviors were explicitly

mentioned including raising the heat, multiple interpretations, manage self, strengths, vulnerabilities and triggers, distinguishing between technical and adaptive challenges, act experimentally, engage unusual voices, get used to uncertainty and conflict, experiment beyond your comfort zone, speaking to loss and speaking from the heart. These concepts students found to be relevant in their understanding of leadership today largely attributed to applying them both in the classroom and beyond to their workplaces now. What might be even more interesting to consider are the concepts from the Kansas Leadership Center framework that were not mentioned. These included: understand the process challenges, take the temperature, identify who needs to do the work, know the story others tell about you, choose among competing values, take care of yourself, work across factions, start where they are, inspire a collective purpose, create a trustworthy process, give the work back and hold to purpose. Whether this is a product of generational relevance or tied to how the concepts were taught, further research would need to determine. Considering what was missing as students made sense of leadership may tie to what is missing as they practice the exercise of leadership beyond a leadership classroom. This could have broader systemic implications beyond individuals leading.

The ideas within the leadership framework helped students make sense of leadership, however students also found the setup of a classroom environment and course experience significantly useful in increasing understanding. Experimentation, or the expectation that one could try multiple ways of engagement for the purpose of learning and not for the purpose of reaching a 'correct' outcome, was a novel and useful concept as described by students. This practice arena within the classroom contributed to broad acceptance of trying experiments beyond the safety and confines of a controlled classroom. The decrease in pressure to have the

right answer allowed for a stretching of student comfort zones and articulated increased learning related to leadership. Students discussed that the ambiguity inherent within leadership led to their belief that learning and practicing leadership will be a lifelong process. This did not discourage students in their efforts, but it increased their curiosity and opened a space for even greater possibilities, ones millennial students described as freeing as this allowed them to think outside the box versus following a prescribed unrealistic process within their unique contexts. Finally, each of these components experienced in the presence of other students within what they described as intense environment contributed to a described importance in a learning community.

Students were passionate about their unique contributions under the umbrella of leadership and had a profound appreciation for a community that encouraged them to show-up uniquely as themselves, wholeheartedly and vulnerably. This was modeled and taught under the frame of speaking from the heart, but it had an impact beyond a curriculum bullet point. Students wanted more people who exercise leadership to be present and vulnerable in how they relate to others. Leadership courses should make a point to support and encourage students to experience expressing vulnerability related to their purpose and passions and as a way of engaging wholeheartedly in leadership. By combining these components within a leadership development experience, there might be a greater chance the complexities of leadership will be understood and applied in contexts beyond a classroom. This could increase the chances of more movement being made on daunting challenges participants face their workplaces and communities.

For leadership broadly

Setting the table for others to formulate their own described leadership experience is an important backdrop to encouraging more movement on the grander challenges calling for more

leadership. Defining leadership occurs over time and after repeated practice. Some students noticed a shift in their worldview and how they showed up to their work, while others expressed a delayed response and understanding that increased over time. Drew described this process saying it is “going to take a few months or a year before you get in your rhythm and find a pattern that you can really start to thrive one. I think it’s something that if you want to continue developing you’re going to have to continue to keep up on the learnings and keep experimenting.” Continued practice and application in a variety of contexts beyond a college classroom increased understanding about the practical realities and challenges inherent in leadership.

Creating a foundational springboard of learning and confidence to continue this engagement beyond a leadership development experience would prove useful in seeing more positive outcomes, the result of more acts of leadership. This push and support to do something in workplaces and communities is important to consider when calls for more leadership are expressed. Leadership, while more of it might be required, this study found to be a necessary action to cultivate in others, both to inspire them to mobilize others and to lend confidence to their abilities and efforts to lead. Increasing confidence in one’s ability to do something for ‘greater good’ can only produce more positive systemic change related to greater acts of leadership.

For competency-based learning

Within a classroom setting, both one teaching leadership and one teaching communication, the foundation of a specific competency-based learning increases understanding. Competency-based learning is seen as helpful in creating repetition which leads to a shared

language helpful in solidifying learning (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Gray & Yerby, 1993). Students expressed a sense a competency-based approach to instruction grounded them in specific behaviors to practice rather than nebulous theories. This study found that specific concepts from a competency-based framework were remembered years later. Along with being recalled, students were also able to give practical examples of how they applied the ideas within their interactions in their workplaces and community. This language created a sense of community both with classmates from the year they took the course and other students who had a similar course experience. Competency-based instruction should be considered as a useful mechanism to increase understanding and sensemaking of concepts both in the field of leadership and also communication.

Conclusion

It would be unrealistic to assume that all millennial students will make sense of leadership consistently; however, elements of a leadership development experience are helpful in understanding how students reached their described learning. More important to consider is the impact students expressed as a result of making greater sense of leadership. Considering leadership as defined by millennials may help answer the question of how are more experiences created similar to the one Bill describes?

After the course, I felt broken down. I felt like I had been through boot camp and my way of thinking was completely distorted. I felt very vulnerable. But at the same time, I felt like I could take over the world. I felt like I was ready to reach some type of initiative where everyone would think underneath the heart. It was quite the experience. I have not felt two different highs at once like that in my life and of that magnitude by just talking to

other people that I had never met in my life. It was very influential. It had a huge impact on me in the way I thought and the way I would continue to think. I knew that if I wanted to continue increase my capacity to lead, I would need to give myself the chance, to go back and dabble with this practice. Every session I learned something new. And that's what it is, it's just learning and if you want to get better at learning you just reinforce it from time to time. That's how I've ended up where I am now.

Kellerman and others may still hold skepticism on whether leadership development is merely a stage leading to few tangible outcomes and what the correct approach for teaching leadership may be practically, but this study found within a subset of students utility existed for them in the learning of leadership. An outcome of leadership emblazoned in the eyes and hearts of a passionate generation was articulated as an arena full of possibilities and opportunities, one where they feel better equipped to lead. Leading within a practice of bringing their whole selves to the work that is challenging, but good. Work they truly believe will make a difference in the lives of those they reach with their words and more importantly their actions. They left this course markedly changed, not just as an experience to hold onto themselves, but as a process to give away to others, helping them hold steady in the face of uncertainty. Regardless of being awakened to the challenges inherent in leadership, students were still willing to join together to ask what will the world miss if I do not exercise leadership?

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APPENDIX

Table 5.1 | Kansas Leadership Center Principles

1.1	Leadership is an activity, not a position
1.2	Anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere
1.3	It starts with you and must engage others
1.4	Your purpose must be clear
1.5	It's risky

Table 5.2 | Kansas Leadership Center Competencies

	DIAGNOSE SITUATION		ENERGIZE OTHERS
2.1	Explore tough interpretations	4.1	Engage unusual voices
2.2	Distinguish technical and adaptive work	4.2	Work across factions
2.3	Understand the process challenges	4.3	Start where they are
2.4	Test multiple interpretations and points of view	4.4	Speak to loss
2.5	Take the temperature	4.5	Inspire a collective purpose
2.6	Identify who needs to do the work	4.6	Create a trustworthy process
	MANAGE SELF		INTERVENE SKILLFULLY
3.1	Know your strengths, vulnerabilities and weaknesses	5.1	Make conscious choices
3.2	Know the story others tell about you	5.2	Raise the heat
3.3	Choose among competing values	5.3	Give the work back
3.4	Get used to uncertainty and conflict	5.4	Hold to purpose
3.5	Experiment beyond your comfort zone	5.5	Speak from the heart
3.6	Take care of yourself	5.6	Act experimentally

**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT**

PROJECT TITLE: Redefining Leadership: Acts of Leadership Beyond a College Classroom

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: February 15, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: April 20, 2016

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Timothy Steffensmeier,

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Amy Nichols

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PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

This research explores how students communicate leadership specifically how leadership is talked about and applied beyond a college classroom. The specific words and phrases used will point to how leadership resonates with millennial students over time.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Qualitative interviews via phone

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: Review of individual transcript will be made available after the interview completion for review and to check for accuracy of transcription.

LENGTH OF STUDY: 30 minute phone interview per participant

RISKS ANTICIPATED: No known risks are anticipated as the result of these phone interviews.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: As part of the study participants might gain some greater clarity around leadership by articulating the answers to the questions asked of them.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Participant's names will be changed in the write-up of the findings and results section of this thesis. Information of who is participating in the study and answers tied to specific names will not be shared beyond the primary investigator, Amy Nichols.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date of Birth? If not within millennial age range (born between the years of 1982-2000), participant will be excluded.

Major:

Graduated or no?

If no, year in school:

If yes, what are you doing now?:

When you think about your leadership course experience what leadership ideas do you remember?

What is it about that idea that stuck with you?

How have you applied this idea beyond the leadership course?

What leadership ideas are still unclear or challenging?

What would you share with a peer who hasn't gone through this leadership development experience?

From where you sit today, how do you define leadership?

Have you shared all that you think is significant related to your leadership course experience?
