Learning to Lead:

An Ethnographic Study of an Experiential Leadership Course

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that leaders learn from experience (Day, 2010; Klimoski & Amos, 2012; Kolb, 1984; McCall, 2004, 2010a). However, learning experiences that are too challenging or that lack a sense of safety, can overwhelm leaders and defeat the intended purpose (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; Noe, Tews, & McConnell Dachner, 2010).

This study attempts to address this apparent paradox, by looking at how leaders learn in situations where disruption, uncertainty and unpredictability prevail. The research site is a highly popular leadership course, running for over 30 years at an elite US University. The course is known for leaving a lasting impression on students and for having a highly charged classroom atmosphere in which significant levels of disorientation and chaos are purportedly present (Parks, 2005).

The author undertakes an ethnographic approach to studying the class, focusing on presenting detailed student accounts of their experiences (Van Maanen, 1988, 2011; Yanow, 2009). The purpose is to explore how students experience this disruptive environment and how they purportedly learn to lead in the context of this course.

During the study, the author identified Lewin (1947)/ Schein (1993, 2010a) model of change as the theoretical lens most suited to explaining and illustrating what takes place in this potentially disruptive learning environment. Using an interpretation of the model, together with the student accounts of their experiences, the author identifies how learning purportedly takes place.

The study highlights the interdependence between learners and teaching faculty, as well as amongst learners themselves, when attempting to learn about leadership. The findings show that the continual interaction between students when levels of disequilibrium are high, results in some students attempting to learn in situations they might otherwise consider unsafe for inter-personal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999).

The study highlights the learning conditions present in this leadership course, which can foster long term and provide enhanced learning opportunities for all students. The study also points to the limitations of the teaching approach, but concludes that learning institutions can do more to hone the learning experiences so leaders can learn from disruptive encounters.

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CHAPTER 1 – THE LEARNING PHENOMENON

Over the centuries, scholars have criticized educational attempts to imbue our minds with new ideas without bringing those ideas to life. The Greco-Roman philosopher and essayist Plutarch (AD 46–after AD 119)[1] remarked in his writings on the virtue of listening that: "The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting—no more— and then it motivates one towards originality and instills the desire for truth" (Waterfield & Kidd, 1992: 50). The challenges of educating leaders and developing their minds so they may bring original insight and creative solutions to modern societal and business issues is no less problematic today than it was in the first century. The late Warren Bennis (1925–2014), often recognized as one of the founding fathers of contemporary leadership studies, identified the lack of effective leaders of "our human institutions" as one of "the four most important threats facing the world today, alongside the threats of natural or manmade disasters (Bennis, 2007: 5).

Determining what Constitutes Appropriate Learning Experiences

Leadership courses are multiplying and organizations are continuing to invest heavily in training, educating, and developing leaders (DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012; Noe et al., 2010; O'Leonard, 2014). In the USA, for example, organizations invest 35% of their learning and development budgets on leadership development. Yet, despite the high level of investment and decades of research on leader development, over 60% of companies continue to cite "leadership gaps" as their top business challenge (O'Leonard, 2014: 2). There is no clear consensus or converging set of answers in the literature regarding how to effectively develop leaders (Conger, 2004; Day, 2010; Klimoski & Amos, 2012; McCall, 2010a). However, a recent surge in scholarly articles on leadership reflects the strong cross-disciplinary interest in addressing the issue of developing leaders. This includes a special edition of *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (*AMLE*) devoted to teaching leadership (DeRue, Sitkin, & Podolny, 2011) and a special issue of *The American Psychologist* devoted to leadership (Bennis, 2007).

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[1] Source Encyclopedia Britannica (2015)

Looking more specifically at the education literature on leader development, consensus is still absent. Scholars cannot clearly tell us how best to educate leaders (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), how best to teach leadership (Snook, Nohria, & Khurana, 2011; Yip & Raelin, 2012), or even if leadership can be taught (Podolny, 2009). Still, scholars seem to increasingly agree on one point, which is that learning to lead comes from experience, notwithstanding the many difficulties that entails (Day, 2010; Kolb, 1984; McCall, 2004, 2010a). The education literature reveals a wide range of options when it comes to creating effective learning opportunities for leaders. The learning options include work-based practices that provide "real world" encounters through action learning programs (Raelin, 2007; Yip & Raelin, 2012), graduate school courses tailored for personal development (Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011), combined classroom and work-based practices (Klimoski & Amos, 2012; McCall, 2010a), and many other training variations all designed to create transformative experiences. When it comes to determining which practices are most appropriate for leaders, however, there is no ready formula to guide our efforts (McCall, 2010b).

This study sets out to contribute to the discussion on developing leaders by exploring how leaders learn from their experience and more specifically in environments where high levels of uncertainty, unpredictability, or disruption are present. While there are many theories about learning from experience (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1981; Mezirow, 1981, 1997; Revans, 1982; Schön, 1983), there is a dearth of studies explaining how leaders learn when situations of uncertainty and disruption prevail. Yet, the purported benefit to leaders of adapting to and making sense of disruptive and unpredictable events, offers possibilities to break out of old regressive patterns and foster new behaviors, even when overwhelmed by options (Argyris, 1991; Weick, 1996). Here, disruptive experiences can be understood as those that break apart the routine or expected functioning of an entity, though not necessarily causing its collapse (Weick, 1993). Learning derived from disruptive encounters can potentially enhance the skills derived from the many leader learning situations where certainty, predictability, and a sense of safety are called for (Bunderson & Boumgarden, 2010; Edmondson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2007).

In the context of this study, leader development is understood as building the capacity of individuals or groups to find emergent solutions to problems that could not have been predicted (Day, 2001; Dixon, 1993) or as acquiring the competence to engage in problematic

situations where solutions are not readily available. An idealized view of leadership, in this context, can be taken as having the capacity to provide "emergent positive influences" within a group (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008: 670), although what one can consider "positive" is subject to interpretation. A definition that fits well within this study on learning to lead comes from Vaill (1996), who emphasizes the importance of self-directed learning with respect to leadership: "Leadership is not taught and leadership is not learned. Leadership is learning" (cited in Storey, 2004: 82). One can conclude that leaders are those who continue to learn, bringing originality of idea and purpose to bear in finding solutions. They do not solely rely on prior successes or the formulae of others to address societal or business problems. From these definitions, one can argue that leader development necessitates helping leaders to understand how they learn in a variety of settings, including more difficult settings where disruption and disequilibrium prevail.

A Snapshot of the Learning Phenomenon in the Class

The role that disruption plays in learning to lead has yet to be adequately addressed in conceptual or empirical studies. This study attempts to look at both by identifying an opportunity for empirical study and then using the data to add to the conceptual discussion.

The site for the empirical study is an extremely popular and highly experiential leadership course that has been running for 30 years at an elite US graduate school. The course has a reputation for being starkly different from other courses and for leaving a lasting impression on students, with many reportedly calling it the most influential course of their academic or professional careers. This long-running course at Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) consistently receives top student ratings and stands apart with claims of success in teaching leadership in a classroom environment where significant levels of uncertainty, disequilibrium and disorientation are purportedly frequently present (Heifetz, Sinder, Jones, Hodge & Rowley, 1989; Parks, 2005).

The reputation of this course extends far beyond the school and attracts many international students, including some highly experienced professionals. Students claim that the course delivers lessons that stick, yet it is not clear how students extract meaning from their in-class encounters or how this course impacts a student's subsequent capacity to lead. Some attribute the popularity of this semester-long course to the charisma of Dr. Ronald

Heifetz, the faculty member who developed the original class in 1983 and who has been teaching it ever since. Dr. Dean Williams, a faculty member known in the classroom for his quick wit and deadpan humor, has taught the course for over 12 years and has also received top ratings from the students.

The leadership framework used in the course is well-documented (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz et al., 1989; Parks, 2005; Williams, 2005). The idea of working with disequilibrium and disorientation is also well noted. In this learning context, disequilibrium is considered to be tensions that arise when continual competing views threaten the capacity of groups to make progress. Disorientation at an individual or group level is simply regarded as the loss of one's sense of direction. Yet despite its concepts and framework being well defined, the mystery of the learning phenomenon, the ongoing popularity of the class, and the extent of the validity of student claims is not fully understood. While popular consensus suggests that most students speak glowingly about the course for years afterward, a smaller set of students is said to doubt the methods used or to leave with a strong dislike of the professor. This makes a study all the more compelling in seeking a deeper understanding of how students learn to lead, particularly when disruption and disequilibrium prevail.

The lack of understanding gives rise to skepticism, with some academic colleagues dismissing the impact of the course as simply due to the exceptional skills and charisma of Dr. Heifetz. While others accept the popularity of the class, they dismiss the possibility of teaching it in different settings or environments, as they believe that the reported classroom methods are too unorthodox to fit within the usual safe and stable routines of other leadership training and graduate education programs. To help the reader understand the impact this class has on students as they go through the semester-long experience, I provide a short vignette of a student story below.

A Vignette from the Class – Franco's Outburst

This vignette briefly tells the story of Franco, a young student from South America who spoke up occasionally during the class sessions but always in a polite manner. Yet early in

the semester in a one-to-one conversation with me outside the classroom, Franco claimed that he was frustrated with the apparent pace of discussion in the class.

Franco: *"This is my least favorite class and it is painful for me to watch"* (other students learning). *"It is similar to the pain of having a nail drawn out of your finger. You know you have to go through the pain but why have to do it so slowly?"*

As the semester progressed, Franco's views on the class and his way of expressing himself in class did not seem to change much. Then, suddenly, one day Franco had an outburst in class. It was three weeks from the end of term, with just four class sessions remaining. There was growing anxiety amongst some students that there was work left undone. This anxiety appeared to generate a sense of urgency amongst those worried about writing the final paper and getting good grades.

At the start of this class session, there was talk of failure as an older male student suggested that the group of 112 students had failed to adequately analyze the most recent leadership case they were working on in class. Other students disagreed, speaking out about what they knew of analyzing that case. Forty minutes into the class session, the more vocal students were still steering the group discussion. The professor walked from the front of the class and sat down off to the side. Franco, who was sitting quietly at the back of classroom, suddenly appeared provoked.

Franco: *"What happened to the hands? Can I just talk whenever I want? I can't just listen to everyone. We had a good deal* (hand-raising). *Today I have to listen to the same voices that I hear every Tuesday, every Thursday breaking in."*

A fellow student tries to calm him: *"Franco! Franco, speak up when you want to man!"*

Franco: *"Then it continued, then it continued, then it continued. No new voices! I mean I'm fed up with it!! Sorry, that was an outburst."* (A peel of laughter rises from the class.)

The professor steps back in. He steers the group to reflect on what is going on in that moment, asking students what they think is causing the tension in the room and then elaborating on the specific exchanges that appeared to trigger reactions. After 25 minutes of

guiding the group discussion, the professor invites Franco back into the conversation, asking for his opinion.

Franco: *"This is what I'm learning from. When you tell your stories when you tell your examples, this is what I've paid for. I'm not talking about money, I'm talking about points."* (Laughter). *"I paid to listen to you. ... Sorry guys I didn't pay to listen to you, especially those ten individuals, those that speak a lot. I mean I paid to listen to this and I feel I'm in a rush. ... I'm in a rush to learn whatever I need to learn to write this paper. I'm lost in this class. There are so many things. This is part of my frustration."*

Professor: *"I'm trying to teach you how to learn in the midst of disorientation because if you keep depending on someone in authority to provide the orientation then you are playing a kind of Russian roulette. If you are really, really lucky you'll get somebody in authority who is honest. But most of the time you'll get someone in authority who under the pressure to pretend that they know what they are doing will tell you a certainty that will make you happy, because at least you feel organized and then together you go over a cliff."* (Titters of laughter).

Franco: *"But, this is three hours a week, you can't drive me off a cliff on that."*

Professor*: "Yes, but I'm asking you to see the dependency that you have. Your capacity to see that you are upset, to get on the balcony and say, 'Isn't this curious? What is it telling me?'"*

Franco: *"If I read a newspaper article in the New York Times, I read the article. I don't read the comments at the end."* (A long burst of laughter drowns out Franco's voice.)

Professor*: "I only have a few more chances to shake you out of that perspective."*

The professor then moved on to a discussion point with another student. Immediately after the class finished, I chatted with Franco one-to-one outside the classroom. He expressed surprise at how he had suddenly spoken up in class.

Franco: *"I didn't intend to speak up. It burst out of me. I have to get all this work done, there's a time crunch. I need to listen, it's good to listen, there is a purpose to listen that I don't fully understand, but I don't have time to listen. When the Professor sits down it's as*

though he's taking students out for coffee, when there is all this work to do and only 40 minutes left in the session."

<center>*   *   *   *</center>

The above vignette gives an example of how students can struggle with and react to the oft disorienting environment of the class. The objective in conducting this study is to capture the students' accounts of their class encounters and what they claim to recall. The goal of this research is to understand if and how students learn to lead from the wide array of class experiences and more specifically to understand the role that disruption and disequilibrium play in their learning.

My intent is neither to put forward this leadership course as a potentially idealized solution for developing leaders nor to argue against the benefits of alternate leadership development practices. However, I have watched this class play out, experienced its provocative routines as a student, and noted the variety of reactions from a diverse set of students as a teaching assistant (TA). This class, with its many claims of success and its reputation for being disruptive, is an ideal setting for longitudinal research, not only to address the question of how students learn to lead but also to respond to the call for a deeper understanding of learning in situations of uncertainty and disruption (Day, 2010; McCall, 2010a).

CHAPTER 2 – THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Role of Experience in Learning to Lead

There is growing consensus within various streams of leadership development literature that learning to lead comes from experience and that this is the principal route through which individuals develop into leaders (Avolio, 2007; DeRue & Wellman, 2009; McCall, 2004, 2010a; Raelin, 2007). This perspective is succinctly summed up thus: "To the extent that leadership is learned, it is learned through experience" (McCall, 2010a: 3). One important caveat or caution that comes with this increased focus on developing leaders through means of learning experiences is that leaders need help to learn and extract meaning from their experiences (Hackman & Wageman, 2007; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008).

By way of addressing this caution, some scholars have begun pointing to learning practices that they claim can help leaders learn from their experience (Klimoski & Amos, 2012; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008). In many cases, the claims are backed by empirical studies in formal educational settings where the subjects are students participating in graduate school or MBA style leadership programs. The studies suggest that in order for the learner to extract the desired lessons, the learning experience or challenge must be appropriately situated and supported through the use of tools, such as structured feedback and self-reflection (DeRue et al., 2012; Petrieglieri et al., 2011; Yip & Raelin, 2012).

The studies vary greatly in the mechanisms through which the authors claim that the experiences should be facilitated or moderated, from personalizing the learning program with counseling options (Petrieglieri et al., 2011) to structuring the learners' after-event reflection (DeRue et al., 2012) to setting the developmental challenge at the appropriate levels (DeRue & Wellman, 2009) to requiring learners to wrestle with complex, troublesome, and anxiety-producing knowledge, identified as threshold concepts (Yip & Raelin, 2012).

When it comes to helping leaders learn, however, some points of consensus can be drawn from the above studies, particularly in regard to the role of facilitated practice. The studies suggest that deliberate and facilitated practice and repeat experimenting is necessary for learners to overcome anxiety-producing situations and still extract the desired lessons (Day, 2010; DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Petrieglieri et al., 2011; Yip & Raelin, 2012). Furthermore, the studies encourage facilitation that reduces or regulates the impact of

uncertainty and anxiety associated with learning experiences, such as facing new problems or letting go of old views or previously held fixed perspectives on leadership (DeRue et al., 2012). Thus, the burgeoning consensus suggests that facilitated practices must be honed to help leaders manage their learning-related anxieties during crucial and challenging learning experiences.

The current debate on leader development is often focused on measuring and establishing models for effective development (Day & Sin, 2011; Hannah et al., 2008; Klimoski & Amos, 2012; Raelin, 2007), which is clearly a worthy goal. Significant progress has been made in creating models of predictive measures (Dinh & Lord, 2012; Hannah et al., 2008) and in determining certain aspects of experiences that promote learning (Dragoni, Oh, Vankatwyk, & Tesluk, 2011; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). However, increasing the capability to measure outcomes will not in itself fix the problem. I contend that the lack of current consensus in the literature on how best to develop leaders stems in no small part from the fact that we still do not know enough about how leaders learn and extract lessons over time from their lived experiences (Avolio, Sosik, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Day & Sin, 2011; DeRue et al., 2012; Dragoni et al., 2011).

More research is needed to understand the context in which leaders learn from their experiences, in particular from the type of disruptive experiences that would-be leaders often confront, such as facing developmental challenges that overwhelm them (DeRue & Wellman, 2009), learning from crises (Avolio, 2007), or learning from failure as opposed to success (Hackman & Wageman, 2007). Experiences of failure can purportedly create opportunities for deeper learning because "failures generate data that can be mined for insight into how one's assumptions and models of action might be improved" (Hackman & Wageman, 2007: 46). However, research in this area remains sparse, particularly when it comes to studying how the appropriateness of the experience can be honed so leaders might extract a deeper level of understanding and achieve deeper levels of leadership expertise (Klimoski & Amos, 2012).

Another concern that arises with regard to learning from disruptive experiences is that not all leaders benefit from experiences that push them far outside their normal areas of competency (DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009; Hannah et al., 2008; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008). Such experiences, scholars argue, can retard development and lead to "diminishing returns" with regard to learning and development

(DeRue & Wellman, 2009; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008; Noe et al., 2010). For example, throwing leaders in at the deep end, so to speak, to learn from new experiences does not work for all (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2008), and learners who feel overwhelmed or overloaded by their experience can be distracted from learning by safety concerns and anxiety regarding their perceived work performance at the same time (Noe et al., 2010). Noe and his colleagues described the risks of learner overload thus (2010: 291):

Learner safety appears to be compromised by highly challenging assignments. Specifically, job experiences involving high development challenge likely place individuals at a high risk for cognitive overload because these experiences are novel and inhibit learning by diverting cognitive resources away from learning and directing them to performance anxieties.

Clearly, more needs to be understood about the anxieties that arise for would-be leaders, along with the potential benefits and limitations of learning from disruptive experiences, whether engaged in on-the-job training or in other learning contexts..

The Role of Organizations, Institutions, and Teachers in Learning to Lead

Many advocates of experience-based learning insist that the locus of the learning experience be at the workplace where participants (leaders, managers, or others) are exploring, learning from, and reflecting on issues of concern to their organizations (Day, 2010; Pedler, Burgoyne, & Brook, 2005; Raelin, 2007; Rigg & Trehan, 2004).

Scholars who support this perspective often see educational institutions as playing an essential but partial role in facilitating crucial activities, such as reflection or personal development (Day, 2010), or in developing business ethics, problem solving methodologies, and tools for information analysis (McLaughlin & Thorpe, 1993). However, some caution that by shifting the learner's focus towards individual development detracts from the attention on the larger organizational needs (Pedler et al., 2005). Underscoring the centrality of the organization's role, Raelin (2007) creates the distinction between the role of workplace learning and classroom learning, extolling the idea of the learner as an apprentice who can only achieve mastery in his or her organizational life by learning from the masters in that space.

In contrast, other researchers argue that the influence of the organization can inhibit learning from experience, pointing to evidence that education and training for leaders and managers does not necessarily bring about learning (Antonacopoulou, 2001, 2006; Lawrence, Mauws, Dyck, & Kleysen, 2005). For example, longitudinal studies (Antonacopoulou, 2001, 2006) have shown that learning can be significantly inhibited where learners are preoccupied with managing internal politics, organizational expectations, and power dynamics. Other empirical studies in multinational corporations have shown that training programs can impede the effective development of leaders, suggesting that global leader development programs need to be anchored in a set of values that participants can readily relate to and recognize or the emergent leaders may not be effective in their subsequent organizational roles (Espedal, Gooderham, & Stensaker, 2013).

The research thus suggests that organizational environments play a significant role in both enabling and inhibiting how leaders learn. But organizational politics is a reality, as is the co-existence of conflicting values; if learning is to take place, leaders, managers, and other learners must be willing to engage in the appropriate political behaviors that push re-generative and reformative ideas forward (Lawrence et al., 2005).

Over the past two decades, strong criticism has been levied at learning institutions, particularly at MBA programs, when it comes to the role they play in the effective development of leaders and managers (Bennis, 2007; Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Podolny, 2009; Porter & McKibbin, 1988). The critics point to an overemphasis on analysis to the detriment of developing leadership and interpersonal skills (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) and to an over emphasis on big picture research and theoretical models to the detriment of focusing on issues of relevance, such as ethics, moral reasoning, and good decision making (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Podolny, 2009).

Other scholars maintain that the prevailing theories in leader or manager education cannot lead to progress in developing leaders as the theories are overpowered by a dominant economic ideology that leaves little room for developing the more positive side of human intentionality, creativity, and choice (Ghoshal, 2005; Gioia, 2002; Khurana & Nohria, 2008; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). Numerous leadership training and business school scholars have responded to the criticism; their studies have expounded the effectiveness of certain leadership and manager programs by laying claims that selected leadership abilities have improve significantly (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002). As

learning institutions continue to face challenges and criticisms, we can expect to see more studies highlight the purported advances being made and the ideologies being embraced in striving for the effective development of leaders.

Looking to the role of teachers in learning to lead, there is still no emerging consensus on how leadership is best taught. A recent surge of interest in the topic shows that the question has evolved. It is no longer "how we can teach leadership" but rather "how we can help leaders learn" (Hackman & Wageman, 2007; Petriglieri et al., 2011). McCall (2010a) argues that there is as yet no way to prove whether those leaders or managers who did learn or extract lessons did so because of the help they received. Other studies clearly show that learners play an active role in extracting meaning from their experiences and that instructors and facilitators can leverage program features in order to improve motivation (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Noe et al., 2010).

The call is thus for students, learners, or would-be leaders to take a more active role in and a greater sense of responsibility for their learning, with the "increased recognition that the learner is at least as important as the instructor and the learning conditions in determining whether (or not) learning occurs" (Noe et al., 2010: 281). It becomes clear that while the teaching of leadership still holds great significance in the discussion (Parks, 2005), more progress may be enabled by shifting the focus towards helping students to learn and take responsibility for extracting lessons from their experiences (Bell & Kozlowski, 2008; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Petriglieri et al., 2011). The idea of the teachers helping or directing students to take more responsibility for their own learning is not new, as this quote from Dewey reveals:

Since learning is something that the pupil has to do himself and for himself, the initiative lies with the learner. The teacher is a guide and director; he steers the boat, but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning. The more a teacher is aware of the past experiences of students, of their hopes, desires, chief interests, the better will he understand the forces at work that need to be directed and utilized for the formation of reflective habits (1933: 36).

Combining Dewey's seminal insights with the more recent call for teachers and facilitators to focus on helping leaders to learn, it is clear that teaching and facilitating leader

development becomes as much about knowing the impact the learning experience is having on the students, as it is about knowing the theory.

The Relevance of the Educational Theories

Several theories from the education literature are pertinent in discussing how leaders learn from experience. The following educational theories are of particular importance to the discussion: experiential learning (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1981), action learning (Revans, 1982), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1998), and critical reflection (Schön, 1983). Another scientific theory relevant to how leaders learn in the context of social organizations, though not often directly associated with education, is systems theory, which is more popularly referred to as "systems thinking" (Senge, 1990; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). On first review, these theories appear most relevant in helping to explain how leaders learn from experience from an educational perspective.

The experiential learning and action learning theories can help explain how the learning process is set up in the class to enable learning from a range of experiences (Day, 2001; Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1981; Marsick & O'Neil, 1999; Revans, 1982). The theorists contend that effective education is more about delivering effective learning opportunities than about teaching, and the focus is on generating the appropriate opportunities from which leaders can learn. Building on the formative work of Dewey (1938) and Lewin (1951), experiential learning scholars suggest that dissonance plays an important role in triggering learning 'cycles' for individuals and in helping to shape the learning culture (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Yang, 2003). However the various studies and theoretical discussions do not explore the impact of dissonance on learning from experience.

Kolb provides an interpretation of Dewey's learning model that helps clarify the cognitive and rational aim of the experiential learning theories: "Learning transforms the impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experience into higher-order purposeful action" (Kolb, 1984: 22). In his experiential learning model, Kolb (1981) affirms that learning comes through a cognitive process of inquiry, resolving conflicts between concrete experiences (feeling) and abstract ideas (thinking) on the one hand and active experimentation (doing) and reflective observation (watching) on the other hand. This instrumental description of a

learning process is useful in considering the structural design of an experiential class, but something more is needed to understand what happens when that process is continually disrupted.

Transformative learning theory is about learning to derive one's own interpretation from experience and thus developing the capacity for autonomous thinking. These theories can help explain how learners may experience "disorienting dilemmas" that can alter meaning for them and change their way of knowing (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 1981, 1997). This is relevant to understanding how experiences can alter a leader's way of thinking.

Critical reflection theory and practice helps explain how learners can become more critically reflective of their own actions (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Reynolds, 1998; Schön, 1983). This means shifting the learner from passive questioning of their own behaviors or "espoused theory of action" to actively challenging the beliefs, values, and assumptions that underlie their actions, more commonly referred to as "theory-in-use" (Argyris & Schön, 1974). This theory and practice is particularly relevant to how leaders learn to interpret their experiences on an ongoing basis.

Finally, systems thinking, which has its roots in general systems theory, is a way of modeling certain aspects of reality or "of seeing things which were previously overlooked or bypassed" (Von Bertalanffy, 1972: 424). It is about the need to consider the larger environment or "system" in which the experience is taking place and introduces the learner to the idea or practice of seeing all events as part of a larger integrated system or "the discipline of seeing wholes" (Senge, 1990; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Systems' thinking helps explain how students can learn from the dynamics of any experiential situation, ranging from an organizational assignment to a classroom event.

Despite their obvious relevance in discussing how leaders learn, it is not clear how these theories, either individually or collectively, can explain how leaders learn in an environment where disruption and disequilibrium prevail. At the same time, the potential to learn from disruptive encounters has long been identified (McLaughlin & Thorpe, 1993; Reynolds & Trehan, 2001; Rigg & Trehan, 2004; Vince & Martin, 1993). The research acknowledges, however, that excessive amounts of disruption or disequilibrium can have a potentially limiting impact on learning (Day, 2010; Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, &

Avolio, 2011; Reynolds & Vince, 2004; Rigg & Trehan, 2004; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Yet the research does not reveal how to mitigate this. Something is needed to address this gap and help learners offset for the negative effects associated with learning from disruption.

Introducing the Lewin/Schein Model of Change

Learning environments that foster high levels of disequilibrium are typically associated with impeding learning rather than facilitating it, because they lack a sense of psychological safety, which many scholars deem essential for learning (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Edmondson, 1999, 2003; Schein, 1993, 2010a). Studies that explore how a sense of psychological safety can impact learning are most often associated with working and learning in organizations. I argue that exploring psychological safety is equally valid in any learning context, even in the classroom. Indeed a class cohort can be viewed as a mini-organization, the influence of which continues to impact members even after they have dispersed.

In his formative work on change in human systems, Lewin (1947) refers to the need for some purposeful rousing or disequilibrium in order to "unfreeze" the existing social habits or "level of group performance" and generate the motivation for change. "The 'unfreezing' of the present level may involve quite different problems in different cases. … To break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness, it is sometimes necessary to bring about deliberately an emotional stir-up" (Lewin, 1947: 344). For "unfreezing" to occur, some facilitation is usually required. The unfreezing becomes the first stage in Lewin's proposed three-step model of change. The subsequent stages are "moving" and then "freezing," which again can require some facilitation to complete the process. Lewin (1947) also focuses on the importance of group discussion in his proposed model for social change, and though he does not tie it directly to any particular stage of the change model, I explore below the role group discussion can play, when uncertainty and disequilibrium prevail, in facilitating learning and recall when it comes to motivating change and learning to lead.

Lewin's (1947) three-stage change model has been expanded by Schein (2010a) in his research about organizational culture change. Schein's model (1993, 2010a) and related insights are derived from his expansive studies, most notably in the field of management development but also in the area of group dynamics training and professional education

(Schein, 1961; Schein & Bennis, 1965). It seems apt to consider its application in the context of this discussion on learning to lead within a classroom, though it may not be commonly applied in this way. At first glance, Schein's change model (1993, 2010a) seems like an appropriate lens for exploring culture change, but on closer scrutiny the model introduces three concepts—survival anxiety, learning anxiety and psychological safety—that I consider highly instructive in helping explain how learning to lead takes place in the classroom. These concepts are discussed in further detail below.

Schein (1993, 2010a) proposes that the First Stage of the model, "unfreezing" (arguably the most difficult stage when routines are deeply embedded) comprises three distinct and essential sub-steps or processes that together provide the motivation for change within a group or system. Schein describes these three sub-steps as follows: (1) disconfirmation or "providing enough disconfirming data to cause serious discomfort and disequilibrium", (2) creation of survival anxiety or "the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals and ideals, causing anxiety and/or guilt", and (3) providing enough psychological safety to overcome learning anxiety, "in the sense of being able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity" (Schein, 2010a: 301).

According to Schein (2010a), the change process begins by making available some form of disconfirming data that makes people feel uncomfortable. For example, announcing a major funding cut or loss of revenue in an organization is likely to create unease and disequilibrium amongst employees. Such an announcement would dispel or disconfirm the idea that the status quo continues. In a learning context, disconfirming data is something that creates unease amongst learners, dispelling their previously held ideas about how or what they are about to learn. Disconfirming data in itself is not likely to motivate change because people who hear it may think it will not directly impact them.

Building survival anxiety is the next step in generating motivation. It can be interpreted as having responsibility for taking action thrust on you despite your fears, reticence, or unwillingness to accept it. Survival anxiety typically manifests when one realizes that unless something is done, an important goal or aspiration will not be achieved or the capacity to endure will be lost (Lewin, 1947; Schein, 1993, 2010a; Weick, 1993). Take, for example, the response one might have upon waking to hear a fire alarm. There is a sense of heightened anxiety. Do you have time to get into your clothes or gather up a few essential belongings?

The responsibility is thrust upon you and you are required to do something as the fire alarm alerts you to risk or loss if you do not act immediately. An example in a learning context is a teacher repeatedly saying to students "if you don't study, you will fail your exams and you will never get a good job." Survival anxiety is generated when an instructor holds the learner responsible for achieving their desired learning goals and at the same time creates a sense of unease that the goal might not be realized.

Learning anxiety comes into play in motivating change and unlearning what was previously appropriate. This anxiety is more internally generated as it relates to a personal sense of one's skills and capacities. It can be understood as resistance to learning a new or altered behavior for fear of losing face or personal credibility in a group (Argyris, 1982; Schein, 1993, 2010a). Learning anxiety often triggers defensiveness or denial. A simple example is the inner anxiety a learner feels at the idea of singing a song in front of a large group of people. Another example in a learning context is a student speaking a foreign language in front of his or her classmates, when he or she has just started studying it. They may think, "I simply can't do it" or "I sound terrible." If it remains high, learning anxiety will inhibit change. According to Schein, learners will seek ways to reduce this anxiety, but they remain concerned about loosing credibility or identity as they strive to do this.

Learners require support in order to reduce their learning anxiety. Instructors, coaches, or facilitators provide the necessary support by creating a path forward or a routine that enables the learner to feel a sense of psychological safety when proceeding (Schein, 1993: 89). Psychological safety can be viewed as a ritual or routine intended to enable one to see possibilities for moving forward without loss of "identity or integrity" (Schein, 2010a). An example of such a ritual in an organizational setting might be holding periodic town hall meetings where employees meet executives and are encouraged to speak up and identify issues relevant to their work. A ritual with a similar purpose in a learning context is having weekly "office hours," where faculty schedules times outside of class or training sessions to meet one-on-one meeting with students and discuss the class or other related issues.

In her formative studies of team learning in organizations, Edmondson (1999, 2002) identifies various learning-related activities that can be impeded by a lack of psychological safety, such as open reflection, experimenting or acknowledging and learning from past failures. Yet each of these activities is arguably critical in the context of learning to lead. Various other scholarly studies and articles support the view that people need to feel

psychologically safe to offset the learning anxiety associated with trying to do something in a new or altered way (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Bunderson & Boumgarden, 2010; Edmondson et al., 2007; Schein & Bennis, 1965; Weick, 1996). However, the difficulty in generating a sense of psychological safety, particularly for a large group, is that the need for psychological safety is tacitly understood, but rarely discussed or openly acknowledged (Edmondson, 1999, 2002). Schein's model identifies the need to provide a sense of psychological safety and using the model to illustrate what happens in a disruptive learning context, draws attention to the need to look explicitly at the process by which this occurs.

Schein (1993) advises that in the First Stage of unfreezing, the optimal approach to generate individual learning and change is to keep survival anxiety higher than learning anxiety. Generating too much survival anxiety, however, can in itself be problematic because it may lead to increases in defensiveness (Schein, 1993) and the justification of reactive behaviors (Argyris, 1982, 1991) or the hardening of existing prejudices (Lewin, 1947), all of which can inhibit learning. According to Schein (1993, 2010a), providing routines that generate psychological safety is necessary to reduce learning anxiety and still keep survival anxiety high, thus motivating change.

In the Second Stage of the change model, which Lewin (1947) refers to as "moving," Schein (1993, 2010a) states that "learning new concepts" or "new meaning for old concepts." During this stage of change some "cognitive redefinition" or enduring shift in thinking is required. This enduring shift in thinking occurs in one of two ways: (1) through "imitation of and identification with role models" or (2) through one's own "trial-and-error learning" (Schein, 1993, 2010a). Using the first approach, instructors or teaching faculty model the new or re-interpreted concepts for learners. The faculty is often regarded as "the source" of the new concepts and learners may come to identify closely with the faculty they seek to imitate.

Using the second approach, trial-and-error learning, learners are encouraged to experiment and try their hand at doing new things or testing out unfamiliar concepts. This provides ample opportunities for learners to test out and repeat experiments even where high levels of disequilibrium are present. Schein (2010a) considers trial-and-error learning the more effective of the two methods and more likely to stick.

Group discussion also plays a key role in learning new or altered concepts. Some studies suggest that participating in group decision-making discussions can enhance learning

(Edmondson, 1999, 2002) while others show that where dissent is allowed and actively encouraged, it fosters learning since it generates more ideas than when dissent is silenced (De Dreu & West, 2001). However, in his early writings Lewin (1947) cautioned that while the act of group discussion may raise the interest of learners in a topic or issue, it does not necessarily motivate learners to act or to change the process by which they assess options or make decisions. What group discussion provides is an opportunity for learners to potentially identify what motivates the actions of others and in disruptive learning environments this enables them to confirm what ideas are more acceptable and less acceptable than others.

Some scholars argue that defensive routines frequently arise in group-learning situations and suggest that these can inhibit learning; therefore learners must be encouraged to test out the validity of their action, in order to break through the defensive routines and related denials and still enable learning to occur (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Argyris, 1982; Argyris & Schön, 1974). When high levels of dissent are present in group discussions and participants are forced to argue for their positions, learners are likely to become more aware of their own and others' defensive routines. In a disruptive learning environment, trial-and-error learning opportunities can enable learners to test out and repeat experiments, a process by which learners can confirm the acceptability of new ideas.

Schein's (1993, 2010) Third Stage of refreezing consists of "internalizing" or integrating the newly learned or newly altered concepts into one's own work and way of being. Re-freezing requires ways of reinforcing the new or altered concepts that in turn produce confirming data, showing the new concepts or ways of acting as helpful. The data must reassure the group or individuals of the benefit or value of the newly learned concepts. It is only when the new behaviors are reinforced and appear to produce better results that the behaviors are adopted and the associated new actions or routines become internalized.

To help explain how refreezing might occur in a learning environment where high levels of chaos and disequilibrium are present, I turn to Schein's (2010b) well-considered views on sharing intense or heightened emotional experiences and the resulting potential for learning. Schein states:

> Crises are especially significant in culture creation and transmission because the heightened emotional involvement during such periods increases the intensity of learning. Crises heighten anxiety, and anxiety reduction (or restoring equilibrium) is a

powerful motivator of new learning. If people share intense emotional experiences and collectively learn how to reduce anxiety, they are more likely to remember what they have learned and to ritually repeat that behavior to avoid anxiety" (2010b: 254).

High levels of disequilibrium or heightened emotion may be regarded as crises for learners who seek psychological safety in order to learn. The drive to reduce anxiety caused by the disequilibrium not only provides increased motivation to learn but also serves as an aid to remembering the ritual or learning practice that reduced the anxiety. Contemporary studies in the field of neurosciences support the view that emotional arousal and disequilibrium can enhance memory and aid in information recall and the mechanisms through which this purportedly occurs are also identified (Kensinger & Corkin, 2004).

Group discussions can also contribute to refreezing. The discussions provide not only trial-and-error learning opportunities but also a means for the group to collectively find solutions for reducing their anxieties. If the solution identified in a group discussion appears to produce better results, refreezing occurs and the change cycle is complete. If the solution does not appear to produce better results for the learners, the search for other solutions continues. Through disruptive group discussions learners have opportunities to reaffirm the ideas that appear to produce better results and when levels of emotions are high in the discussions, this potentially increases the capacity of learners to recall the associated lessons over an extend period of time.

In learning environment where disequilibrium or uncertainty prevails, strongly held ideologies and beliefs of group members can emerge or suddenly be revealed. These ideologies and beliefs, if discussed or displayed by group members can influence other individuals and increase their readiness to act, because of, as Lewin puts it, "the unwillingness of the individual to depart too far from group standards" (1947: 337). Thus, during highly interactive group discussions, the learning of individuals is influenced by the ideology and standards of other learners as well as by the instructor.

This review suggests that two learning mechanisms arise within each stage of change, in disruptive leaning environments. First, learners respond to the planned interaction of faculty (Lewin, 1947; Schein, 2010a). The response generates activities that create a learning feedback loop within each stage of change as learners interact with faculty. Second, learners

respond to the ideologies and standards of other learners that can become apparent during group discussions (Lewin, 1947), thus increasing learning interdependence between students as they interact with each other. This generates a second learning feedback loop within each stage of change.

In Figure 2.1 I provide a diagrammatic representation of the Lewin-Schein's change model, illustrating the two different learning mechanisms, or feedback loops that occur during each stage of change. The illustration shows how group-discussion plays a pivotal part within each stage of the learning change process. It also highlights the interdependence between the learner and instructors as well as amongst learners themselves, when learning to lead in an environment where disequilibrium or uncertainty prevails. Later I discuss how this interpretation of the Lewin / Schein model can be used to help interpret and understand the data gathered in this study.

Figure 2.1. The Lewin/Schein model of change as applied to learning

The original Lewin model or framework of unfreeze, change, refreeze was a potent influence in the growth and progress of the T-group (training groups) in the 1960s and 1970s (Highhouse, 2002; Schein & Bennis, 1965). The T-group was an intense, unstructured, small group learning experience (8–15 people) where learners had to deal with unexpected feelings arising from the behaviors and inter-reactions of others. The purpose of the emotionally charged learning environment was to foster awareness and sensitivity at the individual level and to increase understanding of inter-group processes at the organizational level (Campbell & Dunnette, 1968; Schein & Bennis, 1965).

The T-group spawned a mass of leadership programs that claimed to develop leaders effectively, although determining the impact of the change on leadership practices was exceptionally difficult (Campbell & Dunnette, 1968; Highhouse, 2002). By the end of the 1970s, the sensitivity training approach began to fail because of increasing inconsistency in the application of the exercises and a reputation for potentially damaging people psychologically. Despite its demise, the T-group is attributed with inspiring modern group dynamics training and with influencing theory of change processes in organizations (Highhouse, 2002).

The T-group problem that is still relevant today is the acknowledged difficulty in showing the impact of the development or training experience on subsequent leadership practices. In seeking to understand how leaders learn in disruptive and disorienting situations, it is necessary to explore the impact of the development at the level of subsequent work-related behaviors, as distinct from the level of acquired ideas or skills (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). To do this, more longitudinal studies are required.

Before I explain how the Lewin / Schein change model serves to explain the data gathered in this study, I first offer the reader a closer look at what takes place in the classroom. I then present the longitudinal data, where students recollect their experiences for up to two years after leaving the class. Following a review of the data, I return to a discussion of the Lewin / Schein change model in Chapter 7 and consider how it serves to explain the findings.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY - THE ETHNOGRAPHER IN THE CLASSROOM

In this chapter, I discuss my chosen methodological approach to conducting this research. I consider why an ethnographic approach is appropriate in studying the learning phenomenon. I summarize my own experience of the class as a student and as a teaching assistant (TA) and how that led to conducting this study. I summarize how I went about the fieldwork and subsequent data analysis. I look at the challenges of presenting the data in a manner that can help the reader relate to the stories from inside the classroom and to make sense of the student claims of learning from their experiences.

What Led Me to This Study

As a Master's student, I took this highly popular semester-long leadership course. I was immediately struck by the blunt but seemingly useful way in which we were learning from our own "flawed efforts" and "failures." I was also somewhat relieved that we were not being asked to mimic some arbitrary model of leadership success. We had to determine for ourselves what success looked like. Having completed the course, I went on to take the accompanying two-week intensive sister course one month later. There, too, I came face-to-face with some of my personal leadership habits that I had never previously been cognitively aware of. The experience seemed to wake me to a different reality. To my surprise, some of my colleagues at a different school who had not taken either course saw me as being "different" after these two courses. One classmate described the changes he saw in me as though I was an operating system or a major software release. "I can see it's now Sinead 2.0." The fleeting compliment was rather sobering. There was no going back to the person I was before taking the class, no matter how much I might have wished for the simpler way I had previously viewed my world.

I rationalized the perceived changes in myself as arising from my efforts to examine prior difficult leadership experiences that I had framed as "mistakes" or "failures." The class experience, with all its fast-paced disorienting discourse and emotionally charged student exchanges, had somehow got me to reframe my failures as a valid part of my leadership story. They were part of a much richer tapestry of realities. My in-class case stories, which included dealing with a suicide, were no longer experiences I had to bounce back from, gloss over, or cover up. That was positive. The difficulty, however, was that I now viewed

leadership in a very different way, and I had to learn to communicate that. The class did not leave me with a warm fuzzy feeling of "Ah, I get it!" but rather a more sobering thought that "Ok, I see this more complex reality. Now what do I do?" As months went by, I became even more curious to figure out how this internal shift had happened. Thus, I was attracted back the following year to become a TA in the class.

As a TA, I was responsible for guiding 16 students through the course, as well as grading weekly assignments and giving written feedback. I worked with different teaching faculty and was therefore introduced to various ways of teaching the course. I became the head TA, supporting the seven other TAs in the group. Throughout the semester, the teaching faculty and TA team met for an hour before and after each class to prepare for class, to debrief about what had taken place in class, and to discuss how students were progressing in terms of in-class participation and the weekly written assignments.

My time as a TA gave me insight regarding the different ways students reacted to certain events that took place in either the main plenary class session or in the smaller study group meetings. While many students appeared to gain insight from analyzing and reflecting on the disruptive and sometimes disorienting events in the class, what was not clear to me was the extent to which this contributed to long-term learning about their own leadership or how it influenced them beyond the classroom. Grappling with this question over time eventually led me to this study.

In order to study the impact the learning environment was having on the students and to capture the story from their point of view, I needed to immerse myself in that environment and to study the students in that setting. I needed access to study the course in a manner that enabled me to gather a diverse set of student perspectives on what was taking place in the class, how they experienced it, and what, if any, impact it had on their approach to leading over time. A longitudinal study was required, with periods for making detailed observations and for story gathering. An ethnographic approach was called for in order to represent the culture that arises within the classroom.

I first approached the two professors teaching the course for their approval to study the class. I obtained their permission to study both the spring and fall cohorts, and this enabled me to access a broad student population and to conduct a comparative analysis across two different data sets. I obtained permission from the university to conduct my study, and in my

second year I was invited to the university as a visiting research fellow, which allowed me to immerse myself more deeply in my fieldwork and data gathering. I had permission from the faculty to conduct in-class participant observations and to interview students and TAs. Thus, I was able to move in and out of the student environment, becoming in many ways a participant in their experiences.

In addition to broad physical access, I also had the freedom to determine the questioning format used in the interviews. The questions I put to students satisfied the requirements of the relevant Human Subjects Committee (as required by the university) but were neither reviewed in advance nor guided or restricted by the professors. I had the flexibility to explore whatever issues were most relevant to the students and to revise my questions in subsequent rounds of data collection based on a deeper understanding of the emergent themes in my analysis.

It is important to note that gaining access to study the class was not about determining if or how the course meets its stated aims or about comparing it to other popular experiential leadership courses but was rather about painting a picture of the often disruptive learning environment and presenting a detailed interpretive account of how learning to lead purportedly takes place (Van Maanen, 1988).

The Cult-like Following and Faculty Effect

At the time of this study, there were two established professors for this course, as discussed in Chapter 1. One professor, whose name is virtually synonymous with the course, has purportedly developed an almost cult-like following amongst students (Schein, 1961), having taught the course for three decades. Many students simply refer to the class by his name rather than using the official course identifier of MLD201 or the course name, "Exercising Leadership." The professor who has taught the course for more than 12 years, is also popular with students and his class also receives top ratings from students; however, his popularity is often eclipsed by the reputation of the professor who originated the course.

As my purpose in studying the course is to explore the students' accounts of their learning experiences, an important methodological consideration is to allow for the faculty effect. To do this, I include both the fall and spring versions of the course, as the two

professors teach in different semesters. In gathering data, I split my interviews and participant observations between the fall and spring courses. I thus take a comparative case-study approach (Yin, 1996) within the ethnographic study itself in splitting my data gathering across four different class cohorts, two in fall and two in spring. Taking a comparative case-study approach not only enhances the validity of the findings but also contributes to the richness of the data by adding observations from a different time and with a different instructor.

In presenting the data, I relate stories and student experiences from both spring and fall classes to ensure the written account contains balanced samples of the full range of the data collected. I present student stories from both classes to highlight the potential strength of impact of the experiences on students. I also present in-class stories from both professors' classes to highlight similarities in the way they explain the teaching practices and leadership tools they use. Presenting in-class stories from both semesters also shows the variety of ways in which disruption and disorientation can manifest in the classroom, even if orchestrated and managed by different members of the teaching faculty.

In the stories and student narratives I refer to the two professors using the pseudonyms Professor Edward Sterns and Professor Joe Jenkins. Where students use a professor's name in their interview accounts, I represent it in the same way as the student did, whether they mentioned the word "professor" or used only a last name or only a first name only. I change only the name. A reader with inside knowledge of the class might readily identify the professors from some of the narrative details or my account of events, but I deliberately did not identify which professor is which. For certain events, I simply refer to the faculty member as "the professor." This approach allows the reader to interpret the narrative accounts for him or herself, without the bias that may accompany knowing of the particular professor's reputation.

In choosing my methods, I also take into consideration the research setting. The leadership course selected for this study is embedded in graduate programs at a world-renowned university. The school attracts a wide diversity of students from all over the world to its full time Master's and graduate fellowships or "mid-career" programs. During the years of this study, an average of 568 students were enrolled in the university each year; 44% were

international students and 35% were "mid-career" students with an average age of 39 and a minimum of 12 years of leadership experience.[2]

The reputation of the school, the diversity of the students it attracts, and the level of experience that many of the students have provides an opportunity to explore the impact of the course in a range of settings. Students who take this class return to work and take on leadership roles, tackling a huge variety of business, political, and socioeconomic issues in public and private sector organizations worldwide. To capture the importance of the learning experience relative to the settings in which these students operate beyond the university, I used semi-structured interviews in the longitudinal part of the study and allowed open questions to capture students' stories. I also set the final interview for two years after the students completed the course. Although this extended the timeframe of the study significantly, it added a level of richness to the longitudinal data and allowed me to capture the relevance of the lessons that were recalled or purportedly used in a staggering variety of work settings. Of the 44 informants with whom I had conversational interviews, their roles ranged from senior officials who engage directly with presidents and vice presidents of their countries to "C suite" business professionals to educators at institutions large and small to employees of humanitarian relief organizations. Through the conversational interviews held over a three-year period, the research site was extended to every continent and every socioeconomic sector.

The identity of all students who shared their stories and experiences is disguised in this study. While some students offered to waive their right to anonymity if identifying their particular experiences and leadership challenges furthered the cause of the research, for consistency, I have continued to disguise the identities of all.

An Overview of the Fieldwork

The primary data for this ethnographic study was gathered over a three-year period. This included interviewing, observing, and at times socializing with students and TAs from four different class cohorts. Gathering stories from the same group of student informants over

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[2] Further details of class and school demographics are provided in Chapter 4.

time allowed me not only to extend the research site beyond the classroom and capture other aspects of the students' lives, but it also enabled me to do a comparative analysis of the data students provided, thus revealing consistencies or changes in their responses to similar questions over the study period.

During the first year of fieldwork, I worked with two different class cohorts, cohorts #1 and #2, conducting formally scheduled semi-structured interviews with 32 of 222 students, 7 of 15 TAs and the 2 teaching faculty. This included 13 hours of in-class observation.

The initial sample size and observation hours were based on sampling in open coding or the "evolving theoretical relevance of concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 179). My objective in gathering the sample was to capture a set of in-depth student accounts of their experiences, as I was exploring a learning phenomenon that is not fully understood. One of my goals for the first interview was to secure a second interview with the same students six to eight months later.

Each round of formal interviews was followed by a data analysis phase (described later) during which I sought to verify that the data, at a minimum, contained a range of opinions and perspectives on what was taking place in the class. The round of analysis further guided my decisions about my interview intervals and the nature of the questions I asked. For example, in establishing plans for follow-up interviews after the first interview, I concluded that the interval between the second and third interviews should be 18 months instead of 6 months. This was to avoid interview fatigue, while still securing the collection of data most relevant to exploring the learning phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 181). The analysis from my first round of data collection also confirmed the need for more in-class participant observations to complement the student stories related outside the classroom.

For the second year of my fieldwork, I was a full-time visiting research fellow on the campus where the leadership course takes place. This allowed me to conduct the additional in-class observations. At the same time, I was able to live with and live like the students, gathering "impressionist tales" of the classroom (Van Maanen, 1988, 2011). I conducted 38 additional hours of participant observations in two additional class cohorts, #3 and #4, during the fall and spring terms. During the academic terms, I met and socialized with students and TAs in and out of class and attended meetings with TAs and faculty. During this second year,

I also scheduled and conducted the second round of formal interviews with students from cohorts #1 and #2, six to eight months after they had completed the course.

In addition to my participant observations of class cohorts #3 and #4, I added purposeful informal student interviews (Patton, 2005). The purpose of these informal interviews was to gather information directly from students who appeared impacted by the unexpected and sometimes disruptive events that occurred during my in-class observations. I conducted 15 such informal interviews with students from cohorts #3 and #4, taking notes during and after the conversations. These informal interviews added some messiness to my more structured plan for data gathering and analysis, but they gave me greater ability to interpret and give context to the student stories I gathered and increased my ability to present the reader with student stories they could relate to (Barley, 1990). Integrating stories of learning events that students recalled, with real-time accounts of unexpected learning encounters of other students gave a richer picture of the research setting. As Barley points out: "It is in the precarious balance between the controlled and the uncontrolled, the cognitive and the affective, the designed and the unexpected that fieldwork finds its distinctive vitality and analytic power" (1990: 220).

In the third year of the study, having finished my observational fieldwork, I embarked on the third round of formal interviews with students from class cohorts #1 and #2 in the longitudinal study group. These students had now completed the class more than two years previously. During this time, I was absent from the research site, adding distance as I conducted my final phase of analysis and created my text. It was difficult for me to disconnect from doing fieldwork, given the immersive approach of the ethnographic study, the popularity of the course, and the various roles I had played over several years as part of that learning community. It was important for me to establish some distance from the fieldwork site in order to be more reflexive about my research and my role in that research (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus, 2007; Yanow, 2009). As a former insider now representing the views of other insiders, being reflexive about my role was quite challenging. Being at a distance helped me to separate the course and its reputation and my roles within that learning community from the leadership topic being explored.

Before giving details of my data-gathering activities, I will discuss how I understood others viewed my role in and outside the class. When I began my fieldwork, I returned to the school and attended the initial class at the start of the fall semester. At that time, the professor

introduced me to the students, identifying me as a former student and TA and now a doctoral researcher studying the class. During the term, I kept some distance from the students, observing primarily from the back of the class. I did not want to influence students in their decision to participate or not participate in this study.

When I conducted my first round of student interviews three months after this in-class introduction, I made little or no reference to my own background as a former student or TA unless the student asked or unless it helped me clarify matters of confidentiality. In those interviews, a number of students described class concepts or events to me as though I had no prior understanding of the class or the leadership framework used. This was beneficial in that they more often presented their stories and impressions using their own words rather than relating stories using the "common" language of the class. To them, I was primarily a researcher at the school with an interest in leadership and that was the role I upheld. During my second year when I was on site as a research fellow, I was not formally introduced to students in class or via email, although I was introduced to the TAs who knew I was a former TA now studying the class. I then introduced myself to students in class as a researcher doing a dissertation study of the course. That never seemed to require much explanation. Few students asked for more details before they were willing to share their thought about the course. Unless I was asked, I did not share that I was a former student and TA, and this allowed me to sit with students as a student again myself.

As I conducted informal interviews, usually just after class sessions, some of the students who spoke with me began to see me as another colleague or a resource, someone to simply listen to their frustrations. For example, it was not unusual to have someone say to me "Did you see what 'they' just did? They cut the professor off, just as he was about to tell us something." It seemed useful for some to just be able to vent with me. When conducting the second and third round of formal interviews, students now strongly associated me with having experience of the course. Many expressed gratitude at having an opportunity to go back over what they had learned in class via these follow-up interviews. For most of these students, I took on the role of reflective listener, which to a certain extent encouraged their ongoing participation in the study.

Data Gathering

My first step in gathering data was to recruit students to participate in formal interviews. After the professor had introduced me in-class, I sent out email invitations in which I identified the purpose of the research as "finding out what shifts or changes take place personally as a result of taking this course." The interviews were positioned as "a chance to reflect on what happened during the class." Students were assured that participation was voluntary and that it would in no way impact their grades. They were also assured of confidentiality and that their personal identity would be disguised should their stories or opinions be quoted in the research.

I used a random number generator to select student names from the numbered class list and sent invitations to 40 of the 112 students in the fall term class. Of these, 16 responded, expressing their interest and availability. All 16 were interviewed and continued to participate in interviews for this study over the following two years. I repeated this process in the spring term, sending invitations to 40 of the 110 students. Of these, 13 expressed interest. All 13 were interviewed and continued to participate in the study over the following two years. I also sought out students who had dropped the class. Three out of five students whom I contacted expressed interest in the study, and all three were interviewed.

My analysis shows that the age, gender, and student program mix represented by the 32 students in the longitudinal research group is typical of the demographics of the student population compared to the school average over five years (see Chapter 4 for details of the class demographics.) Of the sample of 32 students, however, a slightly higher percentage of the research group were international students (66%) compared to the school average (44%) or the class average (53%–58%). While the reason for this variation is unclear, I would suggest that the same factors that attracted a higher percentage of international students to the leadership course may also have attracted them to participate in this study, which is a further exploration of their leadership.

Students from the longitudinal research group were interviewed three times over a two- to a two-and-a-half-year period. Students who elected to drop the class at the start of term were interviewed once. The first interviews were held in person, on campus where possible, and the second and third interviews were held via Skype or phone, as students were scattered

across all five continents. Skype video was used wherever possible to enhance the sense of connection.

All interviews were pre-scheduled via email to last 30–40 minutes. The schedule was set to ensure minimal disruption. Where interviews ran beyond the 40 minute pre-planned time, as happened in over one third of the interviews, I verified that the student had time to complete the remaining questions. All students appeared eager to recount stories and experiences from the class, regardless of the impressions it left on them. This, along with my tenacity in following up with the students, may account for the 0% attrition rate over two years for the longitudinal study group.

In conducting the interviews, I took an open-inquiry approach to learn as much as possible about the students' experiences from their own perspective. I began each semi-structured interview by asking students what they recalled about the course. See Appendix A for a list of the questions asked in the interviews. At the start of the interviews, I stressed there were no right or wrong answers and that the participants were simply to say whatever came to mind. I allowed the students to determine which events or aspects of the course they wished to focus on when giving examples of their particular experiences.

The first set of interviews took place within two to three weeks of the end of the course and explored how students responded to the course on a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral level (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Students were asked to reflect on a critical event or incident and were then asked questions about what happened, what they thought, how they acted, how they felt, and how they make sense of the event. Questions focused on what worked well in the course, what did not work well, and what events triggered their learning insights.

The second set of interviews took place six to eight months after the students had completed the course. At this time, over two thirds of the students had left the school, while less than one third were still in school completing a second year of their Master's or dual-degree program. In these interviews, I explored what changes, if any, students claimed were taking place in their work as leaders as a result of having taken the course. Again, I began by asking what they recalled from the course. I also added questions that focused on course elements that emerged as recurring topics in the prior phase of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The second and third sets of interviews also contained questions about any lingering frustrations or other emotional reactions connected with the class experience.

The third set of interviews took place two- to two-and-a-half years after course completion, and questions focused on how the participants might connect the changes that they claimed had occurred in their work as leaders with their experience in the class. Students were asked to elaborate on which changes they would attribute to the course and why, what they still needed to work on as leaders, what, if anything, they drew on from the course when struggling, how they evaluated their ability to exercise leadership, and what they would say to someone about to take the course.

Interview times varied between 30 and 85 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed; 50% of the formal interviews were professionally transcribed and I transcribed the remaining 50%. I checked all transcriptions against the original audio files. I elected to transcribe the interviews myself once I began the second phase of analysis, as this deepened my familiarity with the data.

During the first year of this study, I also conducted formal interviews, with eight TAs and two teaching faculty, as mentioned earlier.[3] Of the eight TAs, three had been TAs for both the fall and the spring courses. This dual TA experience allowed me to capture their perspectives on the differences in how the two professors approached teaching and guiding the TAs as they supported the students. Capturing these perspectives enables a more thorough comparison between the spring and fall versions of the course.

For both the faculty and the TA interviews, initial questions focused on exploring their notion of the aim of the course and how they might determine if that aim was achieved. In my TA interviews, I included questions similar to those I put to students in their first interviews, as TAs are usually students who have just recently completed the course. The TAs were asked to reflect on a critical event or incident during the course and were then asked questions about what happened and what they thought and felt about it. Given their roles as TAs, I explored when they thought it was appropriate for them to intervene with a student or in an event. I also asked for their perspectives as TAs regarding what worked well and what did not work well. The purpose of the questions was to gain an understanding of the

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[3] In addition to my two formal faculty interviews, I held more than six informal faculty interviews, where I gave updates on my research activities and plans and asked questions about how the course was going at that time. I took notes during or after those informal interviews.

similarities or differences between the TAs in how they treated challenging situations in the course or situations of disequilibrium and disruption.

When a TA had worked in both the fall and spring courses, I added questions about what differences they experienced in how the two professors taught the course.[4] I invited the TAs to elaborate on any differences they felt were relevant to understanding how students might experience the courses.[5] Interviews lasted 25–55 minutes. As before, all formal interviews were audio recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed. See Table 3.1 for a summary of the interviews held.

During the second year of my study, I undertook a wider set of in-class participant observations to capture students' experiences in real time. As I was a research fellow at the school that year, I was able to spend more socializing with the students on campus. My extended fieldwork included 38 hours of participant observations, ensuring that my sample was broad enough to capture a range of student experiences throughout the semester and across two different semesters. I added 15 informal student interviews, as previously mentioned, eight in the fall and seven in the spring. I purposefully selected these informants (Patton, 2005) to relate a more extensive account of student experiences. These informal interviews enabled me to present the reader with a richer picture of the class population and a deeper portrayal of their learning experiences.

I conducted my in-class observations by sitting in on at least one of the two weekly class sessions and attending additional evening class sessions. Where there was more than one evening session in the semester, typically called poetry night or music night, I attended at least two out of three sessions. My routine in attending class sessions was to take a seat at the back of the class, often sitting on the window ledge if there were no free seats in the back row of the amphitheater-style classroom. I varied my seating location slightly from class to class,

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[4] It was somewhat unusual to have students who had been TAs in both the fall and spring terms, if for no other reason than the time commitment involved, typically 20–25 hours per week at least, on top of their other course work.

[5] During the longitudinal interview period, four of the 32 students became TAs after taking the course. I continued the same interview format with these four students as with the others, but I added several questions about their TA experience. I gathered data from 12 TAs, seven of whom had experiences of both classes and both professors and three of whom had been a TA in both classes.

but primarily I remained in the back row observing the students from behind. With the amphitheater-style classroom, I could directly see the faces of two thirds of the students at any time.

Table 3.1. Fieldwork – Interview Summary

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Summary of Formal and Informal Interviews conducted

Formal and Informal interviews	Year 1 Fall	Year 1 Spring	Year 2 Fall	Year 2 Spring	Year 3 Fall	Year 3 Spring
Phase 1, Formal student interview (1–4 weeks post class)	16/16	13/13	—	—	—	—
Phase 1, Formal interviews with students who chose to drop the class	—	3/3	—	—	—	—
Phase 1, Formal TA interview / (Informal TA interviews)	7	1	(3)	(1)	—	—
Phase 1, Formal faculty interview (Informal faculty interviews)	1	1	(2)	(2)	(2)	—
Phase 2, Formal student interviews (6–8 months post class)	—	—	15/16	12/13	—	—
Informal interviews (with students before or after class, during semester)	—	—	8	7	—	—
Phase 3, Formal student interviews (22–26 months post class)	—	—	—	—	16/16	13/13

I took notes on the student exchanges that occurred in the class. Many of these exchanges were fast-paced with multiple contributors. I attempted to follow exchanges between individuals or groups, but the pace and number of overlapping topics made it difficult. I supplemented my in-class note taking by writing additional notes after class sessions and by listening to the audio recordings of the class.

Class sessions were held close to lunchtime, and the classroom was on the ground floor next to the main campus cafeteria. The times and location of the class sessions facilitated having casual exchanges with students and TAs before and after class. Adjacent to both the cafeteria and the classroom was an open-plan seating area extending over four floors, with

small alcoves accommodating four to six students. I frequented this open-plan seating area not just during lunch but when having impromptu chats or planned conversations with students. Most of my informal interviews, impromptu chats, face-to-face formal interviews and other moments of observation took place in this open-plan seating area.

In addition to my interviews and observational data, I gathered class documentation, including syllabi from different semesters, class readers, in-class assignments, instructional handouts, and any other documentation distributed to the class. I viewed all movies and documentaries that were shown during the course, and gathered the questionnaires associated with each of them. I collected 78 hours of audio recordings, covering all class sessions for class cohorts #1, #3, and #4. A list of these materials appears in Appendix B.

Students are advised to take a two-week intensive, complementary leadership course that runs in January in between the fall and spring term if they want to go deeper into the leadership framework and explore it on a personal level, as distinct from an interpersonal or systems thinking level. Each year, approximately 50% of students take this course in addition to the semester-long course. I took this course as a student and choose to exclude the course from this study for three reasons. First, it is a relatively recent addition, running for 10 years, while the semester-long course has run for over 30 years. Second, it was originally designed to cover a few selected topics from the course in greater detail, topics that related to personal history and reflection. Third, this complementary course, although very popular, does not have the same learning phenomenon associated with it.

Of the 16 students interviewed in the fall, only two did not take the two-week intensive course. This suggested a self-selection bias and seemed to indicate that those who opted to participate in the study were those interested in learning more about the leadership framework or perhaps about their own leadership capacity. However, one practical consideration with the fall student sample is that those who opted to take the two-week intensive course were given a four-week extension in submitting their end-of-term paper. In practical terms, other students were more stressed in the days immediately after the course finished when I was seeking to hold formal interviews and the following week many students left campus for the Christmas holiday. I revised my interview plan to purposefully identify students who had elected to drop the course to capture a broader sample of student opinions.

Of the 13 students interviewed in the spring, four did not take the two-week intensive course. This again suggested some self-selection bias for those willing to participate but not to the same degree as in fall. I also noted in my data collection that some students in both the fall and spring terms expressed strong levels of discontent with certain aspects of the course. Thus, the self-selection bias did not preclude me from capturing stories where students expressed a range of different responses to the same class experiences. This was crucial to my study.

Data Analysis

As I reviewed the early data from this study, certain recurring variations or distinctions became apparent in terms of how the students described their learning experiences. For example, findings from the first round of interviews showed that most if not all students claimed to have experienced some level of frustration as they recalled their experiences, but the nature and the origin of the frustration varied. From the analysis of the subsequent round of interviews, the distinction between types of frustration became more apparent. Some students claimed that their frustrations were due to the faculty or the TAs, while others claimed that their frustrations were due to their own ability to speak up in the large group. Some claimed that their frustrations quickly passed, but others claimed to be still frustrated in thinking back on events and experiences they recalled from the class. Following, I describe the formal approach to my analysis that enabled me to categorize and interpret my data.

Phase one of my data analysis consisted of analyzing the data I gathered in rounds one and two of the formal student interviews. To conduct my data analysis, I used an open coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The initial step was to create a first order set of codes (Van Maanen, 1979) from the emergent themes in the student narrative. I began by analyzing small sets of interview scripts, grouping common themes, and creating in-vivo codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) or similarly descriptive phrases based on student descriptions of their responses to class events, such as "struggle", "confuse", or "anxious." The second order concepts were subsequently derived using a constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), going back and forth repeatedly between the emergent themes in the narrative, identifying their relationship to each other or to the existing literature. This iterative analysis

process yielded second order categories broadly associated with learning in the context of the class.

I used an axial coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to group the second order learning concepts into larger overarching themes (or learning categories) to create an emergent framework that would represent learning in the context of the class. In the framework, for example, first order themes of "struggle," "confuse", and "anxious" appeared frequently and were grouped under the broader second order concept of "grapple with issues" which then became encapsulated under the learning category or learning element of "developing diagnostic capacity."

I continued using the same approach to analyze my second round of formal interviews to identify gaps and reveal any potential additional relationships within my analysis framework. As part of this overall phase one analysis, I also created a "thick description" or narrative account with significant contextual detail (Geertz, 1973) representing a number of the key learning activities or second order categories in the emergent framework. In creating the thick descriptions, I used narrative accounts from both the students' first and second interviews to deepen my understanding of the students' experiences and to establish the trustworthiness of the data.

This phase of analysis began to reveal strongly recurring themes in student narratives that required additional focus in subsequent interviews and participant observations. For example, first order codes such as "struggle" and "anxious" related to students' own "grappling with issues" but also to an ongoing learning disequilibrium, which was ever-present. In my analysis, I returned to the literature and extended my review beyond the experiential, self-reflective, and transformational learning literature (Kolb, 1981; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983) to include disequilibrium in learning (Lewin, 1947; Schein, 1983, 2010a) that would help to hone and refine emerging concepts associated with "disequilibrium." My subsequent data gathering and analysis phase was informed by these analysis findings.

Phase two of my data analysis included analyzing the round of formal interviews that had taken place two years after the students completed the course. It also included the analysis of my informal interviews and participant observation data. I remind the reader that I purposefully selected informants for the informal interviews based on disruptive events that occurred during my participant observation in order to gather accounts that would help the

reader relate to the student stories and claims they made about their experiences. I analyzed this data using a narrative strategy, where the stories or "thick description (Geertz, 1973) that I bring together from inside the classroom, not only help to organize the data but also become part of the main product of the research (Langley, 1999). Using a narrative strategy to tie together in-class events with student accounts from beyond the classroom also helped to suggest causal linkages between the learning themes emerging from the analysis and the teaching practices being described. Later, I used this narrative strategy to select a subset of the stories to present to the reader.

I analyzed data, as before, using an open coding approach, followed by axial coding to confirm the overarching learning themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). More importantly, I also compared the three longitudinal interviews, for each particular student, side by side to better categorize the informants' responses and to increase the validity of the findings. Based on my findings, I paid close attention to connecting student accounts relating to the coding subcategory of "disequilibrium." I focused on "the conditions that give rise" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 97) to the distinct sets of student responses to "disequilibrium." From this, I derived three related categories of student responses, and I named the categories, Zealots, Skeptics, and Seekers. I then sorted all students in the longitudinal research group into these three categories.

In the final part of this phase of analysis, I once again created a "thick description" of each of these informant categories to present the reader with a richer understanding of the distinctions and interdependencies between groupings. For each example, I select one student who typified the grouping and provide narrative extracts from their first, second, and third interviews to show how the distinctions change significantly or remain the same over time.

My findings from the analysis of the third round of longitudinal interviews also suggested that I had achieved "theoretical saturation" in my sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 188). The analysis revealed no new data; all data can be contained within the existing defined categories, all of which relate to the student learning experiences, and all variations of the categories are accounted for. Chapter 6 contains a detailed account of the relationship between the groupings or primary learning categories emerging from this study—identified as Zealots, Skeptics, and Seekers. The adequacy of my chosen approach to sampling may be reflected in my capacity to present a rich description of the interrelationship between these categories.

In this study and subsequent data analysis, I consider the primary sample limitation to be the absence of comparative data from students who have been exposed to the same leadership framework in a shorter, more intense format, such as in a one- or two-week course where they have less time to experience and make sense of the disequilibrium that occurs. This is a potential area for future research and comparative studies.

In the following chapters, I present my results, combining findings from my participant observation data with the longitudinal data. I first present accounts from inside the classroom to give the reader an understanding of the in-class environment and the language used to describe the learning experiences. I then present an interpretation of the learning process from the faculty perspective using participant observation data and findings I derived in my phase one analysis. This is to help the reader develop an understanding of how the topic of leadership is understood and analyzed in the context of this class. Once the reader has become more familiar with what is taking place in the classroom, I then present my findings and the comparative analysis of interviews following the longitudinal data analysis.

CHAPTER 4 - THE CLASS AND HOW IT IS STRUCTURED

In this chapter, I look at how this leadership class is designed from the perspective of the teaching faculty and discuss the intended purpose of the teaching practices used. I describe the stated purpose of the course, giving a brief overview of what differentiates it from other leadership courses. I explain who is in the class and how they get in. I provide a condensed view of the class activities and the formal requirements of the course, the grading scheme, a sample of the weekly leadership topics, and a sample of the assigned readings, drawing primarily on the various course syllabi for this information. I then explain some of the key teaching practices associated with this course and the related leadership framework, creating an overview of the intended class learning process. Finally, I present an account of how the teaching faculty and the TAs who support them determine if the purpose of the class has been achieved.

The Purpose of the Course as Intended by the Teaching Faculty

According to the teaching faculty, the design pedagogy of the course includes a wide variety of experiential and traditional class practices. This is intended to allow for the different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of preparedness of the students.

Professor Sterns: "*The course is designed to meet people at their own frontier. The pedagogical assumption is that different people have different readiness. They are ready to learn different things. In a large and heterogeneous group of people I can't predict what people are ready to learn.*"

The leadership framework the teaching faculty developed for this course is intended to provide students with a wide variety of tools and concepts they can use to analyze the key characteristics of leadership situations. The framework is based on the leadership decision-making principle that facing tough problems is better than letting them fester (Heifetz et al., 1989: 543). The faculty posits that leadership goals need to be tied to increasing society's capacity to face tough problems rather than focusing on goals or strategies that increase an individual's level of power or positional authority.

The faculty establishes an important differentiation between leadership and authority, where leaders motivate and encourage people to face tough problems and authority figures foster the maintaining of order and equilibrium. The faculty contend that these are two

distinct but overlapping functions, and leaders need to differentiate between the two in order to lead effectively. Facing tough or problematic realities on behalf of an organization or societal group, however, can generate tension and disequilibrium. The intention of the faculty is to provide leadership tools and concepts that help in managing the level of disequilibrium so that would-be-leaders and others do not become overwhelmed by the tension when practicing leadership in or beyond the classroom.

The purpose of the course is derived from the same principle on which the leadership framework is based, namely that it is preferable to face tough and problematic reality than to ignore it. According to the syllabus, *"This course presents a framework for the practice of leadership within societies and organizations as they face the demanding and confusing adaptive challenges of a changing world. It clarifies the relationship among key concepts of leadership, management, authority, power, influence, followership, citizenship, responsibility, accountability and progress"* (Course syllabus, Spring 2012).

During one of our conversations, Professor Sterns summed up the purpose as follows: *"At a general level it is to increase people's ability to practice leadership, leadership in the sense of mobilizing people to achieve collective progress on tough important collective challenges."*

When Professor Jenkins described the purpose of the course during a one-on-one conversation, he reinforced the notion of leadership as an activity that can be exercised in any group or social structure. His intent is to get students to understand how to lead, even in situations where they have no formal positional power or authority to do so.

Professor Jenkins: *"The purpose of the course at its most fundamental level is to enhance people's capacity to provide leadership on difficult adaptive challenges and to contribute to progress in the world. If you un-package that a bit, the purpose is to get them to provide leadership with or without authority. Rather than just seeing leadership as an activity that is done by virtue of holding a position of significance and prominence in the world, leadership can be exercised without authority on these difficult challenges from multiple angles in institutions and in communities and in nations. To get people to understand and truly appreciate that, not simply intellectually, but in the core of their being, you know 'I've got something to say about how well this world functions,' is really what that class is about."*

One aspect of the stated purpose is to teach students how "to lead with and without authority." This specific element is intended to differentiate this course and its leadership framework from many hundreds of other experiential leadership courses. The faculty attempts to create an experiential environment where students practice leading "with or without formal authority" in the classroom setting where the professor holds the official authority role.

The syllabus echoes these ideas in repeated references to "the practice of leadership" as well as to "experiential exercises":

This course presents a framework for the practice of leadership within societies and organizations ... The course will focus on ... the personal work of leadership that must be done by any individual in order to use power wisely and responsibly, with and without authority. ... In addition to lectures, discussion, and small group work, the course draws on films and documentaries, student cases from their personal experience, experiential exercises and case-in-point teaching" (Course syllabus, Spring 2012.)

The notion of leading with or without authority ties in to the faculty belief that leadership and authority are two distinct ideas that need to be separated out in order to practice leadership effectively. Professor Sterns claims that other leadership frameworks do not adequately distinguish between leadership and authority, and this is problematic because leaders do not view all the options and possibilities open to them.

Professor Sterns: *"The practice of leadership begins to take on a whole more interesting set of meanings because you've it distinguished from authority and where authority then becomes a resource and a constraint on the practice of leadership, to be analyzed as a part of the landscape. ... That (other frameworks) haven't distinguished leadership from authority is a big analytical problem in the way they work. Some (frameworks) are using the word leadership as a practice, as an initiative taking activity, but they are also using the word leadership as if it were a positional phenomenon or managerial function and they don't have a language to distinguish that. ... There are a lot of problems for which the best thing is to have a clear hierarchy with clear command and control from the top. ... I don't think you want to throw out that capacity, ... (but) you don't need it all the time.*

In the class, the faculty encourages students to set aside traditional notions of authority or perceptions of who's in charge in the classroom of 120 people. This approach to teaching leadership is intended to disrupt students' traditional notions of leadership, but it also disrupts traditional notions associated with learning, particularly in a classroom where order and control are the expected norms. This disruption of expected group norms accounts, at least in part, for the high levels of disequilibrium and uncertainty that are so strongly associated with the course.

Who is in the class?

For almost two decades, this was a mandatory leadership course at Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). The class is no longer a required course, purportedly for two reasons. First, there are many leadership course options and students are now free to choose their leadership elective. Second, despite its popularity with students, the intensity of this class together with its heavy workload reportedly did not suit all students. Still the class remains highly oversubscribed and continues to be one of the most popular courses at the school. Getting a place in this class is difficult; there are typically 30–60 students on the waitlist for the fall and spring terms. At the time of this study, over 50% of the students who attend HKS opt to take this course, and the fall and spring semesters classes are full each year.

Each cohort of this leadership course consists of 112 full-time registered students. Adding the seven TAs and one teaching faculty member gives a total of 120 people, which is the capacity of the classroom. In order to enroll and secure one of the 112 places in this elective course, in-house students have to bid points. Those who bid the most points out of the 300 points allotted to them are given a place. On occasion, students have bid 298 of their 300 points to get into this class, leaving themselves just 1 point each to bid on two other elective courses.

Priority is given to in-house HKS students, but each semester some places are set aside for visiting fellows studying at HKS and for full-time students studying at Harvard Business School (HBS), Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), or Harvard Divinity School (HDS). An increasing number of in-house registered students are enrolled in dual degree programs, which are two-year programs combining business and policy school or education school programs. This adds to the diversity of programs represented in the class. Students can

also cross-register at HKS from other local graduate schools in the area, such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) or Tufts University. Cross-registered students have their names added to the class waitlist, which is managed and sorted by faculty and TAs during the first two to three weeks of class.[6]

While far more than 112 students show up on the first day of class, there is an element of self-selection in those who finally get into the class, as described below. Students do drop the course in the initial weeks of the semester, but dropout rates are low overall, with reportedly less than 10% of registered students opting to drop the course after they have bid. Given the active waitlist, if a registered student fails to show up for class or for the initial small group study meetings, he or she can be asked to drop the class regardless of the points they have bid. His or her place will go to someone on the waitlist. Some students claim that they drop the course because they cannot manage the schedule in conjunction with other classes, and others drop the course because the class does not fit with their hopes or expectations.

The waitlist eventually clears, if for no other reason than that students on the waitlist simply give up trying to get a spot. Those who do persist are those who find the course fits with their expectations, at least in the first two weeks, contributing more to the self-selection aspect of the class. All students registered by the third week continue taking the class and finish the course. During my interviews, I gathered information about why students hang on or decide to drop out early on. I summarize these findings later in Chapter 8.

The in-house student group comprised a mix of older "mid-career" students in their mid-30s to mid-60s—coming from the one year mid-career programs with over 12 years of experience—and younger students in their early 20s and 30s coming from two-year Master's programs at HKS. During the period of this study, the percentage of in-house students ranged from 72%–88% of the 112 enrolled students. The older students made up, on average, 40% of the class population, with roughly 60% from the two-year graduate program.

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[6] A cross-registered student is one who is registered in a full-time program in another university outside HKS. While some seats are set aside for non-HKS students, cross-registered students do not normally have advance confirmation of their place in class until the second or even third week of class.

During the same period, students' ages ranged from 21–67, with an average age of 33.5 years. Over 50% of students were international, representing 33–43 different countries in various class cohorts. On average, females comprised 45% of the class. All this added to the diversity in the class in terms of culture, ethnicity, gender, educational background, levels of work experience, and areas of specialization. See Table 4.1 for an overview of the class demographics.

Table 4.1. The class demographics

The Class Demographics	Year 1 of study Fall	Year 1 of study Spring	School average (over 5 year period)
Total number of students	112 enrolled in course	110 enrolled in course	568 enrolled in the school
Nationality — USA: International	47%: 53%	42%: 58%	56%: 44%
Number of nationalities represented	33	42	—
Gender — Male : Female	61%: 39%	49%: 51%	59%: 41%
Age range / (average age)	Max. 67 years Min. 24 years Avg. 33 years	Max. 65 years Min. 21 years Avg. 34 years	(Masters – 27 years) (Mid career– 39 years) (Overall – 31 years)
Mix of students from different in-house programs — Masters: Mid Careers	61%: 39%	58%: 42%	65%: 35%
Mix of students from different schools — HKS: Other Harvard schools: Other Universities	88%: 12%: 0%	72%: 19%: 9%	—

There are seven TAs assigned to each cohort of 112 students; each teaching assistant (TA) is typically responsible for two small groups or a total of 16 students. One of the primary responsibilities for TAs is to grade the weekly student questionnaires and give feedback to students on their written class work and their participation in class. Another responsibility held by TAs is to help manage containment in the classroom, meaning that they can at times intervene to steer or guide classroom events or discussions. These responsibilities give the TAs a certain perceived level of "formal authority" in the class. This also sets them apart from TAs in other HKS courses who are not required to grade assignments or intervene in class and thus do not have any perceived "formal authority".

TAs are typically other Master's students or PhD candidates who have previously taken the course. They frequently come from the two-year Master's program and are therefore peers of students taking the class. It is not unusual for TAs who come from the Master's program to be significantly younger than some of the students they are working with in the class. Having relatively young TAs with a level of formal authority in the class can lead to tensions with other students. As I present student stories of their experiences and accounts from inside the classroom, the data reveals the tensions and how they can play out in the class.

While the professor relies heavily on the TAs for support, he ultimately holds responsibility for and manages containment within the class. He sets the expectations and establishes the norms and rules that become associated with the class. The containment the professor seeks to establish is intended to create a sense of safety so students can take risks when testing out their leadership or experimenting in class. Describing how the faculty sets the norms and achieves that sense of containment is important in understanding the class and how it works. In the next section, I look at several examples of how faculty goes about this task.

Formal Course Requirements

This leadership class runs as a 13 week, semester-long course. The syllabus lists the various regular class activities, plus a number of additional class events students are required to attend throughout the term. These include lectures, "small group" meetings, movies, and poetry nights (also called music evenings).

The lectures comprise two 80-minute plenary class sessions per week with the entire group of 112 students. For each of these plenary sessions a leadership topic is assigned, along with a set of readings, typically 150 pages or more. The syllabus provides a list of the weekly topics and the related readings.[7] The leadership topics are based on the leadership framework,

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[7] There is some variation between syllabi from year to year and between the fall course and the spring course. While the weekly course topics remained constant during the period of this study, faculty members may make individual modifications to the reading list,

the tools required to analyze leadership situations, and the abstract concepts associated with these tools. Examples of topics include "Leadership and Authority", "Listening or Sensing the Environment" and "The Power of the Group." See Appendix C for a sample of the leadership topics and a sample set of the assigned readings.

Other weekly class activities include an 80-minute "small group meeting" or "case consultation session." During these consultation sessions, one student presents a personal leadership experience and the other students ask questions and consult to the presenter on that leadership case. All students are required to complete a written analysis of the case consultation, following the session. I describe the case consultation process in greater detail below.

In addition to the weekly activities, other required class events include between one to three poetry night sessions, each of which are three hours long and take place during the second half of the semester. Students must also attend between three and eight movie nights or see the movies or documentaries in order to complete the brief written questionnaire. Full attendance is required at all class-related events. A final written paper analyzing aspects of leadership is also required as there is no exam.

The grading scheme for the course places equal emphasis on three different activities: i) active participation of students in the large group or plenary class sessions, ii) the quality of the individual's weekly assignment, based on the small group questionnaire, and iii) the presentation of ideas in the final course paper. Each of these activities is worth one third of the final grade. The students' class participation is graded based on the quality of their contributions to the group discussions and the learning of the class. It is not based on the frequency or novelty of the comments. Each weekly written assignment is given a grade of 1, 2, or 3, with 3 being the ideal. The TAs are responsible for grading the weekly assignments and for monitoring student participation in class. Points are deducted for every class missed or late assignment, leading to a lower overall grade in the class.

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updating and refreshing the list from year to year and emphasizing different aspects of leadership.

Teaching Practices within the Course

The experiential teaching practices used in the class are intended to give students tools to face up to the tough realities when learning to lead. The approach is based on three guiding principles (Heifetz et al., 1989). The first is that students learn best from experience, a principle supported by many educational theories and studies. The second is to give students practical and conceptual tools that help them organize the experiential evidence and make use of it, or at least begin to make sense of the evidence. The third principle is that faculty aspires to practice what they preach as leaders in the classroom and let the students test out what they hear or see.

The course syllabus not only provides a list of class activities, leadership topics, and a reading list but also outlines some of the teaching practices associated with the course, including lectures, case-consultation group sessions, readings, films, and analyzing the dynamics of the class itself using "case-in-point" analysis. Following, I provide a more detailed explanation of two of those teaching practices, the "case-in-point analysis, and the case consultation, both of which are used to analyze leadership situations. I look at how the faculty sets up these class practices and explain these exercises to the students during the opening sessions of the course.

The first practice for analyzing leadership cases in this class is case-in-point analysis, one of the distinctive elements of this particular class design. According to the syllabus, this is one of the innovative teaching methods used in the course *"where students analyze the social and political dynamics common to many organizations and societies, by analyzing the evolving dynamics of the class itself"* (Course syllabus, Fall 2012). Using this method, the immediate experience of the student or group is analyzed and leadership concepts are applied in real time as events occur in the classroom. Here, the classroom becomes the laboratory, students become the case study, and any contentious student issues or problematic leadership dynamics become topics for discussion. Professor Jenkins explained this concept during his opening comments on the first day of class:

Professor Jenkins: *"We are not going to talk about Iraq or Afghanistan or the Global financial meltdown or presidential elections. We are the case study. There will be a hundred*

plus people in the room from disparate parts of the world, from different ethnicities, backgrounds, experience, ages, religions and gender dynamics. That becomes the fodder … the material for the class. You also get to explore yourself, the roles you play and you get to experiment with the degree of responsibility you can really take for the learning."

The second teaching practice used to analyze leadership cases is the small group case consultation. The case-consultation work is important in providing a context for students to discuss their personal experiences. In this setting, students are one of a group of eight students, as opposed to 112, and each has a voice. I give an account below of how faculty describes the case consultation, and outlines a number of other routine class activities that students will engage in.

During the second class of the semester, Professor Sterns takes 10 minutes to describe the class practices and routines and introduces class terminology such as "getting on the balcony" and "interpreting group dynamics", which describe concepts or activities that students will become familiar with as part of the class experience. While he is explaining the terms, he writes them down on one of the blackboards lining the classroom wall. There are no PowerPoint slides or elaborate diagrams used for illustration in this class, just phrases hand-written on the blackboard with lines connecting, encircling, and underscoring various terms for emphasis.

Professor Sterns: *"Each of you will be in a group of eight people and your group of people will meet every week for an hour and a half for the whole semester. … Every week one of you will present a case, a case of a leadership experience, probably a leadership failure that you've experienced. You'll present that case to the small group and the task of the small group is to consult to you. … The point is, every week as you learn material from the readings or learn material in the large class, you have the opportunity to apply the material to your own cases. … We will be learning a lot through experience and the primary engine of experience is your own professional experiences in your own history. We are going to use the class itself as a case. The experiences that we accumulate every day, right now we are in the middle of an experience, we can stop the action and say 'what's happening here?' … Now in your small groups that meet every week you are going to be employing two different frames of reference. The first is that you are going to have a task; a collective task of consulting to each other's cases. The group itself is also a case. The group itself is also an experience; it's an experience of consulting to a case. That turns out to be … a pretty good example of a*

case-in-point for a working group of people working on some collective task, where part of that task is an analytic task, a creative task a diagnostic task as well as a task for coming up with new options for actions. We are going to ask you to step up on the balcony and see the group process itself so you can become more skilled in analyzing what is going on in a social system as it's going on. So that you can be in the middle of a meeting and pushing your chair back a couple of inches and asking yourself 'what is going on in this meeting?' That capacity to reflect in the midst of action, so that you can ten minutes later take corrective action, is essential to the practice of leadership. You are going to have opportunities to practice that reflective skill every large class in which we use ourselves as a case and every small group, your small group is a sort of case as well."

As Professor Sterns explains the purpose of the small group case consultation, he introduces the task of completing the weekly questionnaire. This weekly written assignment involves answering a set of 8–10 predefined questions the purpose of which is to help students analyze what is going on within the small group itself.

Professor Sterns: *"To support your efforts to analyze the small group as a case, every week you are going to write up an analysis of the small group process. ... We are going to change that questionnaire three to four times during the semester, as we want to emphasize different aspects of your learning. … The first questionnaire ... will emphasize simply the skill of being able to step back and observe. The second ... we'll try to emphasize the harder task of interpretation; interpreting what is going on in the group dynamic. The last questionnaire will focus on action—how people are taking action in the small group, people's various interventions as they speak up or stay silent, which actions are effective, which actions are ineffective—in order to improve your capacity to reflect more quickly on when you are being effective and when you are being ineffective. ... These questionnaires each week will support that second task where you step back on the balcony and try to analyze the process in the midst of process. Okay. That's the basic structure."*

The faculty intends that students learn not only from the experience of presenting their own case but also from consulting fellow students on their cases. Many of the questions on the questionnaires are about what happened in the small group; therefore, students are compelled to pay attention to and comment on each other's contributions.

The TAs play a significant role in the small group case consultations, although they do not attend the meetings. It is a very heavy part of the TA workload because they correct the weekly questionnaires where students write about the actions and inputs of all the other members. The TA reads these assignments and thus potentially has more insight into the small group dynamics than anyone else. Based on this, they give weekly feedback to move the students along. This process of commenting on other student contributions and getting feedback from TAs who are effectively student peers is another aspect of the course design and learning activities that differentiate this course from other leadership courses inside and outside the school and makes it a bit of a deviant class organization.

Each week, one of the small case consultation groups is debriefed in front of all 112 students in one of the plenary class sessions. The professor picks a letter out of a hat, each letter representing a small group. The professor announces "*Group D this week.*" The presenter from Group D then gives a summary of his or her personal leadership case and explains how the small group dealt with it. Other group members contribute to explaining their analysis and then the discussion is opened up to everyone to say what else the student might have missed. These debrief sessions are not intended to generate disequilibrium or to be confrontational. The intention of faculty is to have students focus on observing and interpreting what types of issues and possible systemic problems were at play and consider what might have impacted the presenter's ability to overcome these obstacles during the events described in their case. The purpose of the exercise is to develop students' capacity to look for other options and ways of making progress when faced with apparent leadership impasses.

In summarizing the teaching practices and learning activities used in the course, there are a number of activities I am not going to discuss in depth, namely the weekly readings, movie night assignments, and the TA meetings before and after each class. Although they are a part of the course that help students gather new ideas on leadership and engage in personal reflective work, they do not illustrate the distinctive elements of the course, in terms of facilitating the learning change process.

Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the learning process as it pertains to analyzing leadership in the context of the class. The primary learning concepts are the activities that the professor seeks to emphasize at different stages of the term. These activities are: i) Step Back and Observe, ii) Interpret what is going on in the Group Dynamics, and iii) Intervene or take

action, and reflect on its effectiveness. I make use of these groupings again in Chapter 5 as I present a phased account of how the faculty guides the learning experiences at various stages during the semester. I also build on this diagram when I present an interpretation of the faculty notion of learning to lead.
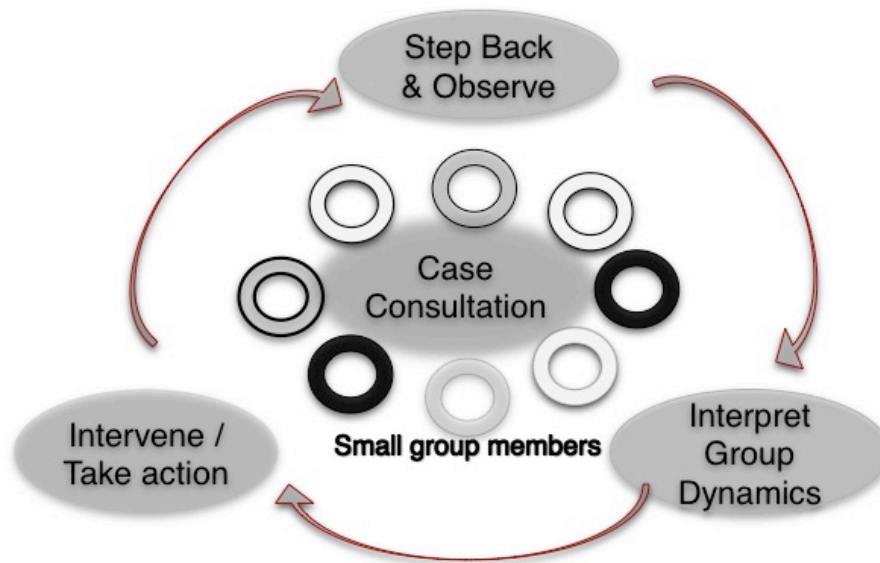
Figure 4.1. The Learning Process

Achieving the Stated Purpose of the Course

I now present an account of how the faculty and the TAs who support them determine if the purpose of the class has been achieved. During one of my conversations with Professor Jenkins, I asked how he knew that the stated purpose of the course had been achieved.

Professor Jenkins: "*There are two levels of achievements. One is the simple pedagogical purpose of that you've taught the course, people understand enough of the ideas that they can speak about it articulate it in the context of the final paper. ... A test of whether you have succeeded or not is to what degree people are successful in the presentation of the ideas. So that is the immediate feedback in the context of a semester … or a course. The*

other is in terms of application to real world problems. This is kind of a very ambiguous indicator of purpose. It's more anecdotal, but there is more a practical component as it pertains to people who go out into the real world and then send feedback our way to say this was one of the most important courses that I did and it's useful because it helps me analyze the problematic context that I am part of and shapes how I intervene into that context. ... It's not just the occasional student; you get a lot of that kind of feedback. The feedback also comes from recognition of the potency of the course in the context of awards that I receive. You can get awards because it's good teaching. ... The reason why they say you did a good job, (is) that this course is applicable to their everyday life and to the complex everyday reality that they face as they go about their leadership work. It's at those two levels of purpose, that you have a sense that you are navigating in the right direction."

In a conversation of a similar nature with Professor Sterns, he described knowing if or how the stated purpose of the course had been achieved.

Professor Sterns: *"I get a clue from the final papers. I get a clue when students come to see me, from how they are thinking about things. I don't really know though until over time I begin to hear, or from studies begin to know what people have applied and how they have applied it. ... I try to keep my mind sober and open to the possibility that you know that it's tough to apply this stuff in practice and that some people will figure it out in some context and other people won't and some people will misapply it. ... I continue to try and figure out what's working and what isn't and how to make it more effective. The (student) papers do give me my best initial clue. ... I get a clue from the final papers. I get a clue when students come to see me, from how they are thinking about things. I don't really know though until over time."*

Both these faculty accounts acknowledge some of the difficulties inherent in assessing the long-term outcomes of this experiential leadership course. As the TAs also play a pivotal role in the learning activities of the class and their function is to provide continuing feedback and support to students throughout the entire semester, I include their perspective on interpreting the purpose of the course and in determining if and how that purpose is achieved.

When asked about the purpose of the course, the responses were quite consistent. Each TA articulated the nominal purpose as learning to exercise leadership using the framework of the course. They also linked the purpose to considering where students are coming from or

how far they want to go in learning about the framework. The TAs added some variety in the way they interpreted the purpose of the course. The three examples below show some of this variety.

TA#1: *"I would say it's to learn about the exercise of leadership and that's the broadest sort of umbrella. ... I realize how much more there is to go in terms of really being able to both understand that (leadership) is an open question and be able to exercise it."*

TA#2: *"Boiled down, the purpose of the course is to teach people how to exercise leadership within this framework. I also think there is a larger purpose. ... Many of the people in the class are already leaders, or they would have considered themselves leaders before they came to HKS. That's the reason they are taking the class. ... The purpose is driven a bit by peoples' past failures and being dissatisfied, which is such a great transition into the course."*

TA#3: *"The way I see it, the main purpose is to show students the variety of ways in which they limit themselves and they limit their options. I find that is the greatest take-away."*

The TAs do not appear to differentiate between particular parts of the leadership framework when describing the purpose of the course. They claim the emphasis is on getting students to experiment with the framework and to learn from their experimenting.

When I asked TAs how they knew if the purpose of the course had been achieved, again their responses were quite consistent. They each looked for evidence that students were achieving some shift in the way they discussed or spoke about leadership issues that pertained to the course framework.

TA#2: *"I think the clues for me that the purpose had been achieved ... is usually their written work or what they are saying in the large class or in the small groups, or in your one-on-one teaching meetings. I would say that where I saw it most was in the large class."*

TA#3: *"(The purpose is achieved) when I see on the questionnaire that the student is sensitized to the fact that there is a different perspective, and realizes, moves away from their conventional way of seeing things ... There was a point in one of the questionnaires where this student realized how he was limiting himself and that he was seeing things in a certain way and he learnt so much when he didn't speak in that session. So he said 'I was listening*

differently, I was hearing new things.' ... I guess this is my measure, when I start witnessing a difference in the way they think and the way they analyze."

TA#4: *"I would say we look at each of our students and we sort of think of their learning trajectories ... and the data that we can gather from them, their conversations, their questionnaires, through their comments in class. (We) do the best we can to calibrate what their learning is, how their learning is progressing, what insights they are getting."*

The overall views expressed by the TAs match quite closely with views expressed by faculty regarding how they determine if the purpose of the course has been achieved. The best clues appear to come from reading student papers or having one-on-one conversations with them. Both faculty and TAs acknowledge the absence of any ready learning indicators. While this is a perennial challenge associated with measuring the outcomes of any experiential leadership course, it points to the ongoing gap in fully understanding the effective impact of the course. I return to this point in Chapter 8 in discussing my interpretation of how students learn to lead in the context of this class and the implications of this study.

In the next chapter, I explain how faculty organize the class throughout the semester. I focus on what is going to help explain why the course has the impact it purportedly has. I select from a wide range of class topics, focusing on activities that help explain why the course has the lasting impact that it purportedly has. I highlight the activities that I have identified as crucial in enabling students to learn from their experiences in the class.

There are many aspect of the course I am not going to discuss in the next chapter. It is important to note that while I discuss the case-consultation process in some detail in this chapter, I do not return to exploring that activity in greater detail in Chapter 5. I continue to believe in the importance of the case-consultation process because it provides a comfortable setting for students to discuss and reflect on their own leadership experiences. However, in the small group settings, students are typically one of eight and they claim they find it easier to exercise their voice. Some of steps taken to analyze leadership cases within the case-consultation process do appear to help some students in unfreezing their prior ideas of leadership. However, the data suggests that those practices alone do not enable the learning change cycle, beginning with the unfreezing of prior beliefs and ideas on leadership.

CHAPTER 5 – HOW FACULTY ORGANIZE THE CLASS

In the previous chapter, I described the faculty's ideas regarding the purpose of the class, its design, and its set up. In this chapter, I describe how faculty organizes the class. I provide a condensed description of what a typical term looks like based on my three years of fieldwork. From an extensive range of class topics and class events, I choose to focus on aspects of the course that help explain why this course purportedly has a lasting impact. I highlight crucial elements that are key to understanding how students potentially learn from the disruptive experiences in the class.

Throughout the chapter, I provide detailed stories from inside the classroom, depicting events that occur at different stages of the semester. I draw my in-class stories from four different semesters and four different class cohorts, two taught by Professor Ed Sterns and two by Professor Joe Jenkins.

To begin, I take a detailed look at the first day of class, as it stands out as significant for students when faculty begin to set expectations and discuss the norms for experimenting and practicing leadership within the class. The stories reveal that from the first class, the faculty makes it clear how this course will differ from others. Although the two professors have different styles, they both cover similar themes on the first day.

I then provide a phased view of what takes place in the remainder of the semester and how students "practice leadership" in the context of the class. I divide the class activities into four segments, each of which represent distinct learning activities the faculty seek to emphasize. These activities were mentioned in Chapter 4 when discussing how the faculty designs the course. In this chapter, the emphasis is on how students experience those learning activities. The four class segments are organized chronologically as follows:

Practicing Leadership:

Step Back and Observe: Weeks 1–3

Interpreting the group dynamics: Weeks 4–8

Poetry Night(s): Weeks 8–10

Intervening and taking action: Weeks 9–14

For each segment, I depict how faculty guides the class experiences. I then provide accounts of how students and occasionally how TAs recall their experiences in the months and years after they left the class. I follow this with a brief summary or interpretation of what is going on in each of the segments.

I select stories that are representative of typical classroom events during the semester and ones that illustrate how the faculty manages events that arise in the classroom. One of the selected stories is very dramatic, showing how confrontational and disorienting events can escalate during the course of a class session. The story may be read by some as an exaggeration of what the faculty is trying to achieve, yet because of the apparent exaggeration it serves as a useful illustration. Disorienting events happen in each semester, and the one I have chosen to depict happens to be one that is well remembered by students in that particular class.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, there are a number of aspects to the course that I am not going to discuss in greater depth, namely the small group case consultations, the teaching assistant (TA) meetings, movie nights, weekly readings, and the writing of weekly questionnaires. Although they form a part of the class that enables students to reflect on their actions and gather new leadership ideas, they do not illustrate the distinctive elements of the class that set in motion the process of unfreezing previously held ideas about leadership and learning.

Here I describe what many students regard as the most vital or memorable experiences in the course, those that occur in the large group or plenary sessions with everybody present. It is in these large group sessions that high levels of disequilibrium are frequently present and where many students claim they struggle to find voice. In these sessions, students claim to feel confused and disoriented at times, and here contentious events can take place that challenge the students' more familiar learning habits. It is essential to explore in detail student stories and in-class accounts of the plenary sessions in order to understand more clearly how students learn from their experiences and retain lessons that they use in their later work as leaders.

The First Class

It is the first class of the semester and Professor Jenkins arrives in the classroom five minutes before the class is due to start. He is carrying a brown manila folder. Dressed semi-formally in a dark blazer, blue shirt, and tie, he makes his way to the table in front of the class. He sets down the manila folder on the tabletop lectern and opens the folder to organize his loose-leaf notes. As he stands facing the class, behind him is a wall of sliding blackboards, clean and ready for use. He looks out on the amphitheater-style classroom that seats 120 people[8].

The seating comprises six tiered rows of long fixed tables with swivel chairs attached. The amphitheater-style arrangement ensures that students can readily see not only the professor at the front but also fellow students on the other side of the room. This design is intended to encourage active discussion and inclusive dialog. At the front of the room is the central pit or teaching area. Lining the wall behind is a panel of large horizontal sliding blackboards. The entry and exit doors flank the wall of blackboards. The passageway from the doors to the teaching pit at front of the room consists of wide steps that provide the only access to the long rows of classroom desks.

On this first day of class, students are still arriving right up to the official starting time of 2:40 pm. As they seek a place for themselves in the packed classroom, some wander down the aisle to the teaching pit, behind the waiting professor, and up the steps on the other side, closing in on the few remaining seats. Once all the desks are occupied, the steps themselves provide additional seating for students, as does the window ledge along the back wall of the classroom and the few chairs dragged in from outside. Once all seating spaces are taken, the remaining students stand, some propped up against the walls along the side of the room. There is loud chattering, and a sense of anticipation fills the air.

With less than a minute to the start of class, the room is now crowded with 120 students seated and over 30 additional students standing at the back of the room. The crowding suggests that the class may be over-subscribed once again, as has typically been the case for this course in recent years. Some students may already be on the class waitlist, while

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[8] See Appendix D for an image of the classroom.

other students may be attending out of curiosity on this first day just to see what happens. During the first week of a semester at Harvard Kennedy School, it is common for students to sit in on courses for which they are not registered as a way of sampling classes they have neither the time nor the "course points" to attend.[9] Despite the crowding, the room appears bright, with almost wall-length windows along the back of the room overlooking the university's green lawns.

Professor Jenkins keeps a purposeful eye on the classroom clock on the side-wall as 2:40 pm approaches. When the time arrives, he looks authoritatively around the room and the chatter quickly dies down. In a clear and deliberate voice, he says *"Hello! ... "* He looks knowingly at the students before continuing:

"So what should I say after I say hello? What should I say next? ... This is a problem all of you face in varying degrees. That is, what do you say after you say hello? We've got 150 people crammed into this room. So what should I do next?"

Some latecomers straggle in and quickly disappear into the crowd of 20–30 students standing at the back. A few scattered voices respond to the professor. One woman towards the back of the room throws out the suggestion *"Introduction?"* Jenkins turns to the panel of vertically sliding blackboards and in the top corner of the board closest to him, he writes the word "Introduction", as if beginning a list.

Jenkins: *"Introduction. Who said that? ... Why should I do an introduction? ... What do you want to hear?"*

The female student, Tara, replies: *"A brief introduction, what we are expecting?"*

For the next three minutes, Jenkins engages directly with this student, questioning her responses, challenging her ideas, and opposing her viewpoints. The exchange between them centers on expectations of him. No answer appears fully acceptable or complete to the professor. Thus, within minutes of starting the class, there is a certain degree of uneasiness or discomfort in the room. Students look around at one another as if trying to figure something out.

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[9] In popular courses such as this one, this "sampling" or "shopping" practice leads to standing room only for the first few classes of several of the courses offered each term.

Jenkins: *"The course is already explained. You've got the syllabus. What more do you want to know beyond what is already there?"*

Tara: *"Umm. What's the applicability of the course in the real world or ... ?"*

Jenkins: *"You want me to say what is already in the syllabus?"*

Tara: *"No. Maybe more insights?"*

Jenkins: *"My insights? Well I think that could be a waste of time. Because, for whatever reason, 150 people have shown up here. So they clearly have heard something about the class or read the syllabus or spoken to people who have taken the course. Perhaps the introductory work is already done in many ways. Maybe, maybe not. Expectations? You'd like me to talk about my expectations of you? And your expectations? ... No? ...Well, what are you suggesting?"*

As Jenkins prods students for answers to his questions, he continues to write their suggestions on the blackboard. Each reply earns the student a quick retort from the professor or a further challenging question. Several times he leads them to making a point that he then refutes. The level of uneasiness appears to increase, as some students who had raised their hands lower them again, as if feeling unsure about their comments. One student, Barun, attempts to counteract this uneasiness with humor in response to Jenkins' question about what he should do next.

Barun: *"Maybe you should say something about the course that might discourage people from taking the course ... "* (the class break into laughter) *"... so everybody here will have a seat and be able to ..."*

The student cuts off his reply as the professor turns to write his suggestion on the board. Barun's remarks drew laughter, perhaps reflecting a degree of frustration with the overcrowding that denies even some enrolled students a seat.[10] The dialog continues, however:

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[10] Attrition is usually sufficient to allow many students on the waitlist to get into the class within the first two weeks. See Chapter 3, "How to get into the class," for further details on how the faculty deals with a typical waitlist of 30–60 students.

Jenkins: *"So I should discourage people?"*

Barun: *"Just a few."* (A few more laughs ring out.)

Jenkins: *"Okay what else should I do now? This is a strategic choice. Here I am at the front of the room supposed to provide some leadership for the class. I've so many people in the room I'm stuck. I don't know what I should do. … What are you assessing? What are you evaluating, what are you looking for? … What would you say to me to help ensure that you do get a connection, a feeling for who I am, a feeling for the class?*

Now 20–30% of the students raise their hands, hoping to provide an acceptable answer. He nods at a female student sitting towards the front of the class with her hand up.

Cynthia: *"I want to know more about why you are here."*

Jenkins: *"You want to know more about why I'm here? (Yes.) This is my job. I get paid to do this? How's that?"*

Cynthia: *It doesn't really tell me why. Why you choose this job or within this job why you chose this class.*

At times, Jenkins speaks over the student's attempt to add clarification: *"Why is that even important to you what my internal motivations are?" How do you know, no matter what I say, that you are getting the right thing? … A lot of (what leaders' claim) is absolute nonsense."*

The blunt nature of this class conversation stands in rather stark contrast to the polite and respectful exchanges common in most graduate courses at this university. In this first class, Jenkins acts in a fashion that is blunt, belittling, dismissive, evasive, and somewhat self-deprecating. He drops some humor into the conversation, and there are numerous short bursts of laughter from the students, but Jenkins always returns to a serious and authoritative tone when discussing how the class is going to operate and his role in it.

Professor Jenkins nods to a male student, Robin, who appears eager to contribute to the conversation on expectations, which has been ongoing for more than 30 minutes, and asks:

"So what fantasy, delusion, infantile expectation do you have?" (This draws a peel of laughter from the class.)

Robin: "*I would hope that you would stand by some sort of agenda, some sort of process to illuminate the goal of where we end up in the class, so we could have some buy in.*"

Jenkins: "*So you want the goal, where we are going to end up?*" (He adds 'Goal' to his list on the blackboard.)

Robin: *"That would be useful. Yeah."*

Jenkins: *"I don't have a goal and I don't know where we are going to end up. ... (pause) ... Does that enhance my credibility?"*

Robin: *"In a way it establishes honesty?"*

Jenkins: *"Honesty?"* (He writes the word on the board.) *"But what I just said can also be pretty disturbing. I don't think a lot of people in this room can take that level of honesty."*

Robin: *"Too bad."*

Jenkins: *"Well that's a scary thought though, to come into a class and have the professor who says I don't know where we are going to end up and I haven't a goal. ... There's that distinct possibility that this is going to end up nowhere and that you are all going to waste your time."*

Robin: *"I suspect it's the process more than the goal though. Isn't it?"*

Jenkins moves on to another student who has his hand up and is eager to speak. As he draws out the students' perspective about his role in the class, he also questions their views of how learning takes place. He continues to insist that he does not have the answers and he does not control the learning outcomes of the class. Despite his insistence, a few students continue to protest otherwise, suggesting that he really does know what he's doing.

Patrick: *"You've been teaching this course for many, many years here so that credibility is already established. ... I've also heard from a lot of other people that you know what you're doing, that you are competent."*

Jenkins: *"Yeah, but have you spoken to the other half?"*

The class laughs and another student, Aaron, weighs in behind Patrick's argument, saying that the professor is already meeting his expectations because he has heard from others that the professor does not give ready answers.

Aaron: *"A lot of us have spoken with friends or TAs or people who have taken (this class) and talk about it as a place you come because you expect to learn from awkwardness and uncertainty and expectations that you thought should be met but aren't met. In a way, you are meeting those expectations for me because you are not giving us a clear introduction or a clear sense of what the goal is or how you are going to assess us."*

Minutes later, Jenkins once again denies he is in control of the learning outcomes of the class. He refers back to Patrick's initial comments to make his point:

"Patrick says 'Oh yeah I've spoken to other people and they say you are the font of wisdom' and now I've got to live up to all that nonsense. I know I'll disappoint him when he realizes that I don't know half as much as they really thought I knew, by virtue of going through the process. Perhaps they attribute to me the responsibility for some of their learning, whereas the learning was a product of their own capacity to wrestle with these issues."

This final sentence seems to summarize Jenkins' notion of learning in the context of this class. He says learning is not attributable to his wisdom in either withholding answers or revealing inspirational insights but is attributable to the students' own capacity to grapple with the tougher questions, allowing uncertainty to prevail until they figure out their own way of finding the answers. Here, the professor is apparently trying to shift responsibility for learning onto the students.

As noted, this class has a long-standing reputation as a deviant course, one that is not run like other classes. While this gives the professor considerable leeway in establishing unusual classroom practices right from the start, it also may lead students to exaggerate the

degree of deviance that is acceptable in class and also lead to students seeking out the more unorthodox practices when they first take the class.

Following is an excerpt from Professor Sterns' first class of the semester. A discussion on setting expectations has been going on for over 25 minutes. Brandon raises his hand and when called on cheerfully suggests that he would like the professor to engage in *"a psychological mugging"* at some point in the class. Sterns replies:

"You'd like me to provide a psychological mugging and if I succeed in providing a psychological mugging then I gain what with you? ... By psychological mugging you mean? ... Explain it, I don't want to even imagine."

A loud spontaneous burst of laughter erupts in the classroom, suggesting that other students have some idea of what Brandon is talking about. Brandon hesitates briefly and then elaborates on what he means: *"Tearing apart some of my beliefs and reordering them."*

Sterns answers by saying: *"We've already started having fun doing that."*

Some students expect that, in this class, the teaching faculty will challenge them openly in front of others, and in ways that may sometimes appear harsh. In many classes, especially in an elite school, such as Harvard Kennedy School (HKS), it is not the norm for the faculty to harshly challenge students about their views and beliefs in front of other classmates. However, in this class, the professors do just that and are, in effect, meeting some student expectations; but for other students, this behavior may still come as a surprise.

In his first class, Professor Jenkins warns of the volatility and vulnerability that characterizes this unusual leadership class. Sterns, in his first class, similarly warns that some students may come to distrust or even hate him for "pushing at the boundaries of what is tolerable for them." In either case, the warning is clear: "be prepared for disruption and volatility in the class experiences ahead."

This is how Professor Jenkins warns the students:

"In a way, your expectations are like hoops that I have to jump through. To the degree that I jump through the hoops you authorize me. ... I'm going to disappoint a lot of people in the room because of my inability to read and respond successfully to your expectations. Sometimes the work of leadership that's going to make a difference is outside

the hoop. Maybe to the degree that I can frustrate your expectations will be to the degree that you actually learn, which actually puts us in a very volatile environment. So if I can say anything about this class, (it) is that volatility, that vulnerability, that sense of teetering on the edge, walking the tightrope is what this class will be about for the next 12 weeks. Some of you may not be up for that kind of experience because the expectation may be on me to do the teaching. Whereas I'm throwing the work back to you and that burden of responsibility is going to be on your shoulders to front up and tackle this work. Some of you may not be ready for that kind of work."

In Professor Sterns' first class, he echoes similar cautions:

"*Now in this course I will be frustrating your expectations, as I have already frustrated some of your expectations. We can see that it's inevitable. You have different expectations. This is a very diverse group of people and each of you brings a different criteria. ... So it's inevitable that I am in the business of frustrating your expectations at a rate that you can stand. If I frustrate all of your expectations all at once I end up with an empty classroom. ... So if you think I know where we're going and how to get there or if you think I'm going to be routinely inspiring, you are going to be disappointed sooner or later. This course is about you. It's about your performance not mine.*"

Towards the end of his first class, Sterns begins to use the phrase "to shake-up," which in the context of this course mean to confront and disrupt students' prior understandings, views and beliefs. Both faculty and students commonly use the phrase "shake-up" throughout the semester. When he introduces it, Sterns places a deliberate accent on the phrase and then pauses, giving it emphasis. He also uses evocative words such as "hate" and "distrust," forewarning students of the discomfort and anxiety they might come to experience during their time in the class.

"*You come to this course with a lot of expectations about authority systems, problem solving, trust, role dynamics, who you are, what success looks like, how to operate. A lot of that knowledge is good and some of it needs to be reexamined and shaken up. ... Personally I wish that weren't the case. Personally I'd much prefer, it would be really easy to teach all of you and have you like me at the same time. It's not fun to have you hate and distrust me, which will happen sometimes this term, for some of you, because I will step on some boundary or sensitivity that emerges. Some of it will be because of the content that we*

explore; some of it will be just because of who I happen to be, or at least the various role identities that I inhabit."

He then ends the class with an indirect acknowledgment that many of the students in this overcrowded first session will not be taking the course and that those who are taking it still have the option of dropping it.

Some common themes emerge from the instructors' occlusions in the opening sessions, and all serve to illustrate the faculty's beliefs of how students will learn to lead, using the dynamics of the class. During his first class, Professor Jenkins summed up these themes or ideas in the following way:

"You get to explore yourself the roles you play. And you get to experiment with the degree of responsibility you can really take for the learning. You get to experiment with informal authority. How do you intervene into a system, to get work done that actually adds value into that system rather than be excessively dependent on the authority figure to do that work."

These common themes can be separated out as follows: a) take responsibility for your own learning, b) explore the roles that you take on and play in the class, and c) experiment with (your own) informal authority in the class. The stories to come in this chapter will serve to illustrate how these learning themes are woven, explicitly and implicitly, through the in-class experiences during the semester.

The faculty reveal their ideas about how they intend to teach leadership, as they seek to withhold rather than give answers. Their focus is on guiding students to learn in situations where disequilibrium, frustrations and uncertainty prevail, the kind of situations that leaders might expect to encounter when they return to work outside the class. Professor Sterns expressed this view with regard to his own role as de-facto leader of the class by saying his role is: *"to frustrate expectations at a rate that you can handle."*

During one of my follow-up conversations with Professor Jenkins, he reflected on the challenges for both students and faculty of teaching a class where students do not fully understand, initially at least, the reason for creating disruptive experiences. In Jenkins' view, it is vital that students persist in the face of the "orchestrated" classroom disequilibrium and disruption in order to gain learning insights.

"You are teaching a course where students don't really understand what the methodology or pedagogy is about. They don't understand why you are teaching it that way, they don't understand or appreciate why they have to put in so much effort to generate some kind of insight or a return for their investment in time and resources. But over time, over the duration of the three-month period, the insights begin to develop for the students. It's more than just an insight; for most students there is some kind of a breakthrough where they can see with greater clarity what the purpose of the experience is and therefore they can embrace and even own the experience. It's not easy to put people through that kind of intense experience without a guarantee at the end, but I've done it enough times now that I know if the students persist, and I know to hold the students through that kind of disequilibrium and uncertainty and to a degree disruption to their life, that it will work out in the end."

According to the faculty, "to hold" the class means to support or sustain an individual or a group. A "holding environment" is another common phrase used in the class and means to create a virtual space or a "container" in which the group members can feel relatively safe to go about experimenting, as they grapple with their work. The faculty readily acknowledges that this is not an easy course either for students to take or for the teaching team to support. However, they express their belief that this approach can make a difference in developing leaders. Professor Jenkins expressed his belief in the class, in the following way:

"I know, we know, that we are onto something that is critical, that can make a difference when compared with other leadership models and leadership development processes. I know we've got something that is very difficult to do, that can be done and is valuable, ... as it can help people go about their leadership work and make a difference in the larger world. If I didn't believe that, I'd do something different, like be a fisherman."

Practicing Leadership

In the stories that follow, I present a phased view of student experiences throughout the semester. I look at how faculty directs the in-class experiences of students beyond the opening session. Following the in-class stories, I provide a selection of short accounts of how students recall the experiences at various times after the class. Again, I draw on stories from four different semesters and four different class cohorts, two of which were taught by Professor Sterns and two by Professor Jenkins.

I have separated the semester into four sections, three of which are aligned with the key learning themes discussed in Chapter 4. The fourth section is Poetry Night or music evening, an event focused on learning by listening that is often remembered in great detail by students. I present the four sections in the following order: i) "Step Back and Observe" (weeks 1–3), ii) "Interpreting the Group Dynamics" (weeks 4–8), iii) Poetry Night (weeks 8–10) and iv) "Taking Action and Intervening" (weeks 9–13).

Step Back and Observe: (Weeks 1–3)

It was the third week of the semester, and one of the study groups of eight students were standing in front the larger class during one of the two weekly plenary sessions. The group of eight were sharing with the class their various accounts of what had happened during their first small group meeting. This "case debrief", as the activity is formally called, is a planned weekly class event, but the heated debate that emerged on this occasion was unplanned.

During a typical case debrief, one student recounts the personal leadership case that he or she presented in their small group meeting that week. However, for the first small group meeting, members are just getting to know each other and plan for the meetings ahead, therefore no personal leadership case is discussed, instead the activities of the entire group becomes the case.

When, as part of the case debrief, the eight students were recounting what had happened in their meeting, it emerged that one of the members came late and this resulted in their cutting the meeting time short by five minutes. One student's account of how they arrived at the decision to cut short the time was starkly at odds with the other accounts. The professor then provocatively accused group members of "lying" to cover up what had happened. Other students listening to the case-debrief interpreted this as a misunderstanding rather than a lie, but the professor persisted in calling it a lie.

An African American student (from the armed forces) named Sam was sitting attentively in the front row of the class. Having listened to the exchanges between the professor and the group of eight, Sam erupted in the final 10 minutes of the class. He claimed

to have had a visceral reaction to hearing the professor use the word "lying." The professor then replied to Sam, provocatively using the word "slavery".

What followed was a somewhat heated debate between the professor, Sam, and other students that spanned the topics of authority, reaction, and deception. The debate was intense and taken up again in the next class session. I pick up the story where Sam challenges the professor for his suggesting that group members had lied.

Sam: *"I would never say that in front of all these people I would never call them liars like you did in that way. ... I know that this is a classroom, but when you go into the real world that is not something that would happen in this type of setting. Even if it was something where ... it was miscommunication. It was not right to say 'you are lying.' I had a visceral reaction to it and I chose to ignore it personally because that's not what I'm going to take in my kit bag when I leave this class."*

Sterns: *"Right. But you didn't choose to ignore it personally. You just did ignore it personally. In retrospect you call it a choice. But it's just a habit. It's just slavery ... to the norms and traditions and software and programming that you have learned. I'd like you to have made a choice, but I don't believe it was a choice at all.*

Sam jumps back in with a strong defiant reply: *"I respect your opinion"* (a spontaneous outburst of laughter from the class drowns out some of his words) *"about what I thought or I didn't think, but you know ..."*

Sterns: *"But you didn't hear my opinion because you are too busy reacting.* (There was a pause with some nervous laughs from a few class members, building quickly into more laughs.) *"I know, I know I'm plucking a string"* (a class metaphor used to depict hitting on a personal nerve). *"I even used words in plucking a string."*

Some students mutter comments such as *"Yes"* and *"He did"* in an apparent sense of relief that the professor is acknowledging his provocation.

Sam jumps back in: *"We can't just cede all authority here. Everything is predicated on this idea that you are the central figure here. You've taught us so far to not just yield to that type of norm, to that type of pattern. For me to just sit here and accept that okay he's already got everything figured out, Professor Sterns already knew exactly what I was*

thinking. I just take that as such, everything is just gospel … I've got to question that. That's who I am."

Sterns: *"But you haven't begun to question it because you haven't even begun to entertain the possibility that what I'm saying might be useful. You are just reacting. … At some point in the 40 minutes you could have said, 'Wow that was a really interesting thing Sterns did. He accused them of lying. That clearly set up a whole set of chain reactions. Now let's step back and look at was that a useful thing to say? I'd never say that. Are there any situations that'd be useful to say?' Did you happen to watch Colin Powell testify in front of the United Nations, before the Iraq war started?*

Sam: *I did.*

Sterns: *Right and remember when he said there are weapons of mass destruction and he showed various photographs? He believed that stuff. He had sufficiently conned himself by accepting intelligence that was faulty; it was a whole system of people deceiving themselves. And I think he still lives with the tragedy that he let himself be conned. When are you going to stop lying to yourself so you can have the freedom to entertain the possibility, in this particular case, that I have something to teach you about authority right now?"*

Sam: *"I respect that you have something to teach me…"*

Sterns: *"There is so much reactivity right now that I think it's pretty difficult to step back, reflect on the issues that are on the table that I have raised for you to explore … the issues of deception, the issues of a group dynamic that coalesces in reaction to a perceived threat, as if I was threatening them instead of trying to help them, or the issues of authority itself, which are really important for us to explore.*

An older male student raises his hand, and the professor nods to him to speak: *"I think that the language you used was correct but a bit brutal."*

Sterns: *"A bit brutal, and you know something about brutality."*

Male student: *"You made it very strong just to raise an alarm that we hear it clearly."*

Sterns: *"Yes."*

Male student: *"I would have said 'you are not telling the truth' but you said 'you are lying'. It is very, very, very strong so that everybody could hear it loud."*

Sterns then calls a halt to the discussion, as the class is about to go into overtime*: "Alright, we are going to have to stop. Thank you all."*

It was during the final 20 minutes of the next class that Sam was called upon by a fellow student from the Middle East to comment on what he'd experienced during the previous class. Before Sam began to speak, another African American male student expresses his thoughts about the events of the previous class.

Duncan speaks, first addressing the professor:

"This class is so unusual and you are so unusual. ... I just value every moment to learn. I used to think the readings were my learning and this (class) was just a waste of time and now the readings are just a waste of time ... well not a waste of time ... but this is my learning. When Sam got caught up, normally I would be like 'Sam is my boy' and 'I'm in with Sam'. Then I was like 'Oh Sam, don't fall for this, bro!' (Applause from the class.) *For us, normally that line is one that gets to the black people wherever we are. I just felt like for me it was good to watch Sam react and say okay I'm not going to react if it happens to me."*

Sam adds his thoughts to this. *"For me ... I was just visualizing myself walking over and beating the shit out of you"* nodding to Professor Sterns. Loud laughter and applause erupts in the classroom.

Sam continues: *"The message you were trying to convey, it's salient; I understand that. It's just that, there was so much haze, as far as just the way that it was delivered that I really just saw myself just going over and just kicking your ass. I was telling myself 'I can't give this person power over me.' That was kind of where I was. For me to do that would be to yield or whatever to you."*

As the class draws to a close, Sterns addresses the entire group:

"If Sam is going to rise above his immediate reaction ... to understand what are all the forces compelling me to act in this way versus that way, that is limiting my options. When he said the one thought in his head was to get up and hit me, it generated fairly widespread laughter in here. The odds are that that thought would play to a particular

constituency ... that Sam represents a faction in here and his response would have championed ... that faction. Where is the freedom if you are, before you know it, acting on behalf of some amorphous subset of a larger group? Just look at the group dynamic, the distrust, the anger ..."

*   *   *   *

During the first few weeks, the faculty repeatedly emphasizes certain concepts or phrases in the classroom. To "Step Back and Observe" is the phrase used to encourage students to take a moment before reacting and to thus consider "what is really going on" or whether someone is "pulling on your harp strings" or hitting a nerve. Throughout the course, particularly in these early stages, students attempt to justify their reactions rather than thinking of or considering other ways to respond.

In their post course interviews, many students recall moments in class when they "reacted" rather than "responded" and they claim to be more aware of moments where they need to "Step Back and Observe", even when they admit that a similar issue might trigger them again. What follows is an account of how one student reflected on and attempted to make sense of this aspect of the course over a two-year period. The example illustrates once again that in learning to Step Back and Observe one's own reactive habits, students often begin by strongly justifying their own reaction to the point the professor is making, and the purported insights emerge over time.

This student account is from Bruno, an older mid-career student, and includes extracts from three interviews. The first interview was held immediately after the end of the course, the second six to eight months after the end of the course, and the third two years after the end of the course.

In the first interview, Bruno recalled how the professor openly challenged the older, more experienced students, accusing them of arrogance and unwillingness to learn from other class members. Bruno said believed that he must have misunderstood the professor. He failed to see why the professor might call them arrogant.

"There was an event for me, where I felt a little bit frustrated. ... (The professor) came to class and said 'Well there are many people in this class who are too proud to learn from other people. You know who they are currently.' ... To me, I wondered, maybe he misspoke?

He could have said 'Well, I wish more people would share their experience.' For example, somebody like me, I have very rich experience in leadership. It wasn't that. To me, I was learning all these concepts and I said to myself 'No, no, there's no need to react. He probably did this for some reason. I'm not going to get angry. I'm learning.' My TA is telling me I have a perfect "three" on all my assignments so it's not that. Why did he say that? Why did he say that we are a bunch of proud, narrow-minded mid-careers? Is it because we do not intervene in this course? ... I would not have cast a problem in this manner. He could have cast it differently. ... I got on the balcony. I said "Okay, so he believes that I'm not learning?" ... Maybe I'm not thinking calmly, but I've been working for 20 years and I'm coming back to the course here to build skills for leadership ... Here the professor is doing something, which is quite interesting and I am observing it. ... After that lecture I had to interact with the TA who kept telling me, 'I wished you knew what was happening in the small group session because there is a really interesting dynamic happening there.' Again, I didn't feel angry. I thought the best response is to try to give the impression that we are his best students. ... I think we are here not for the diploma or the degree. ... We are here to get something that will open our eyes once we are out in the real world."

In his second interview, Bruno brought up this topic once again. However, on this occasion he claimed to be able to Step Back and Observe what was going on. He maintained that he had come to understand the difference between reacting and responding as a result of thinking about the challenge from the class.

"Remember when we had the first interview I was telling you that Professor Sterns threw some 'work' as they say (in class); 'You Mason Fellows, you are arrogant', or something like that. Now when I think about it, at the time I was frustrated. I'd say well you know we've taken this course with these youngsters, maybe ... the equivalent age of our children. Then the professor is kind of telling us to do this kind of 'work' and it was frustrating. But in hindsight what I came to realize is that it was clearly a way of touching our strings, as he likes to put it. Then it was to see how you react versus respond. I feel myself in that situation all the time. Only now I am beginning to see, well, if somebody tried to provoke me I'd call it provocation. You get that all the time, I'd say 'No! Step back, you can't react, you've got to respond.' So the difference between reacting and responding has been something I am aware of. The sense of awareness of that, of why did Professor Sterns did that, was just to see this. ... I went to Harvard with a lot of "reculé" as we say in French. I

had a lot of experience. I led people. I'd been a minister. I'd been a professor. To me I came rather to watch what it is that I can take and I can carry forward to develop my skill further on. I am building this skill as I confront reality. There is no way you could build this skill there at Harvard. The time was too short. Right? But as long as you had the concepts in your mind, you can carry them on and finally become a better leader, better personality, and that I think is at stake here. Many of Sterns' concepts at the time we thought were too experimental; it's just not true in the real world. But my own view of leadership has changed. The important thing to get out of this course is a sense of awareness, to be aware of who you are, that leadership begins with yourself and how you shape your own individual behavior yourself before you can make any change on others."

In his third interview, two years after the class, Bruno still recalled the incident:

"One of the things I found about that course was (it) put more into student hands. ... The relatively younger generation were able express themselves in a very free minded (way). ... The process was sit down and shout whatever comes to their minds. For most people coming from outside the US it could be really challenging. We are not used to that way of learning. ... It was ... much stronger in that course because they put a younger generation with an older generation like us. Sometimes you want to do deep thinking for people like us who have richer experience, so you would be more inclined to be in the listening mode than just talking and animating ... Most people in our culture would not come from that perspective of learning of basically talking while the professor is saying little. ... It's a good learning experience; I wouldn't mind sending my son there. But ... people in their 50s like us going back to learn things were really habitual, it was not clear cut. We had to sit and listen to these young debaters. But we learned, obviously, we learned much more."

Bruno, like many other students attempting to learn to Step Back and Observe, initially justified his defensive reaction, in his case highlighting his impressive professional experience as a leader. Over time, however, he placed his defensive reactions alongside the claim that he has learned to Step Back and Observe the reason for his reactions. He claimed to have "learned more" in this way.

One noteworthy point is that many students refer to the teaching faculty as Professor years after they have left class. The practice exists to some extent throughout HKS and is not

simply associated with the students' cultural background. For example, some American students also refer to the faculty members as professor. Other students readily use the last name or even just the first name of the faculty member. What is noteworthy is not the use of the title but that the class experience appears to sustain or even strengthen the deferential attitude of some students but not others. I return to this point later, when discussing the different ways in which students derive the necessary sense of security or comfort when learning within in the class.

This second example of Step Back and Observe shows that the faculty does not always clearly articulate the lesson they intend and thus often allow students to grapple with learning the lesson over time. Jenkins' response to students coming late to class illustrates this point. Tardiness is an all too familiar problem in any classroom, and faculty can choose to impose rules to deal with it, as Professor Jenkins choses to do on his first day of class. However, it is the stark way in which he handled latecomers that some students recall vividly.

On the first day of class, Professor Jenkins challenges the first latecomer, a male student who arrives 20 minutes after the start of class, by saying: *"The class began at 11:40. Anybody who comes after that time will not be allowed in the room from now on."*

The student made no reply and simply shuffled into the class to find a standing spot at the back of the room. Jenkins continued with the earlier discussion. Then, 50 minutes after the start of class, Jenkins challenges the next latecomer as he walks in the door.

"The class is nearly over. Are you here to attend this class?" (The student nods and says yes.) *"It began an hour ago."*

The student excused himself, saying: *"I had courses to release from the registrar."*

Jenkins: *"Yeah, but the class has begun, so I'm not taking anybody else."*

The student politely says *"Okay."* He then turns and leaves the classroom.

Jenkins asks the class, *"Is that leadership?"* One student quickly but quietly responds: *"It's authority."*

Jenkins continues on with the class, nodding to a student with her hand raised and after listening briefly to her query, he challenges the students: *"Describe leadership."*

Some time later, 55 minutes after class had begun, another male student walks into the room.

Jenkins: *"Excuse me, the class has already begun."*

Latecomer: *"Sorry. Do you mind if I listen?"*

Jenkins: *"We are not taking any more people; the room is already full. You can stay until four o'clock"* (when class finishes). He turns back to the student who was talking and says *"Sorry, I was distracted."*

Jenkins has made his point. He is serious about establishing the "be-on-time" rule. Ten minutes after admitting this latecomer to the class, a student questions the professor's allowing the third latecomer to stay. This provokes muttering from two or three male students, who attempt to express their views on what they think is going on.

Trond: *"How do you tell one person that they need to leave and tell another that they can stay in the class? Maybe that hurt so much making him leave? Or maybe his response wasn't the right one?"*

Another male student, Martin, throws in a more cynical suggestion. *"Maybe he didn't look the right way?"*

Jenkins: *"Or maybe he didn't ask could I stay."*

Martin hesitatingly affirms the professor's point. *"Yeah! No, that was the secret test, perhaps? …"*

Jenkins re-affirms the point: *"That was the secret test!"*

Martin continues enthusing over Jenkins' action *"… to see if he was hungry enough … that was the secret hunger test. This gentleman passed it because he asked to stay."*

Jenkins: *"He could have even said oh no. I'm going to stick around. Try throwing me out. See what you guys can do."* (This draws more guarded laughs.)

Martin: *"Maybe that means he had more to learn."*

Jenkins: *"I'm surprised at how easy it was. I'm amazed by my power sometimes."*

Divya, a female student sitting towards the back of the room, quietly but confidently brings up one of the class readings for that day about the Milgram experiment, a well-known series of American social-psychology experiments about excessive obedience to authority figures.

Divya: *"The piece about ethics and trust brings to mind the Milgram experiment and the abuse of authority and trust. ... So having too much trust means the leader must not abuse that power."*

Jenkins gives a nod. *"Good point."* He then calls on another student, moving onto a different topic and leaving students to grapple with the tensions raised over his own possible excessive use of power and authority.

In a one-on-one conversation outside the class, Jenkins says that his on-time rule is intended to affirm that he wants students to take the class and the experimenting in it seriously. This is particularly the case in the beginning when the class appears confusing and students do not fully understand what they are observing, what is going on, and why they are not getting ready answers. He goes on to note his intention that students will realize, over time, they are not just observing what happens in the class but need to be there for things to occur and to change.

In the first round of interviews, a number of students claimed to have felt irritated by the professor's insistence on being on time, and most of these students appeared to arrive at their own interpretation of why he was doing this. Many students had a list of potentially valid excuses, if not a list of defensive objections to the on-time rule, while some surmised that its purpose might have something to do with demonstrating commitment to the class. One cross-registered international student, Tanya, had to travel some distance from a neighboring university on each occasion to get to class. For her, being on time was a practical challenge. This account, taken from her first interview, shows how she claimed reconciled this particular rule.

"In MIT you can walk into a class five or ten minutes late, nobody says anything. ... I don't know if all (Harvard) classes are like this (one), yet he made it a point. ... If you are a few minutes late, he would even embarrass you in front of the whole class. ... I was on the

receiving end once or twice. "Do you want to be in the class or?" A lot of people actually complained about it. We are not kids here. We are not from school you know. I noticed that he actually looked like the staff headmaster in school who was trying to discipline his students, but I think part of the reason was to avoid the slack; he wanted to give the message very early ... that we are very serious about this. ... He wanted to make it very clear at the beginning through these indirect signals that we are quite serious about it and we require you to commit yourself. 'It doesn't matter if your train is on time or whether you missed your bus; we don't care. You have to be here.' So you kind of work backwards and organize everything else according to that. ... There are people who would just come in a few seconds after he would come in and he would not accept that. I thought that was pretty harsh initially, but looking back I think had he allowed that slack in the beginning, especially when people are skeptical, it might have worked against the whole group. I noticed later that he was a bit more forgiving later on, in the last few sessions. Once he knew that the group got it and the commitment was seen then he kind of relaxed those barriers a bit, but initially ... he was very particular. ... One of the new things in this particular ... course is that he intentionally does not give you any ready answers. So he could have given a clean definition of what leadership is and all the principles on a printout. He gave it at the end. ... He sort of makes you struggle with something and then, like you throw peanuts to a monkey, he gives you a small peanut to chew on and then he makes you work a bit more and then he throws another peanut at you ... So this becomes apparent after a period of time, and there is this pushback and he then asks you to sort of observe what is going on in the large group. ... There is a process of realization inside, where you think of it deeply and you also have to motivate yourself to experiment. I think unless you do something and the realization comes, you really won't appreciate it, I think that is the point."

Once Tanya had reconciled why the rule was in place, she claimed that she was willing to "organize everything else" around this on-time rule. When students present claims that they have taken on board the intended lesson, they typically mention their initial defensive reaction and then the new lesson that they claim to have learned. Tanya also claimed that the regular practice of Step Back and Observe was one that took time for her to appreciate and develop and this point is echoed in many other student interviews. The faculty claims that these lessons take time and that different students are at different stages and levels of readiness when it comes to being able to absorb the lessons, but they say that the range of learning activities in the class—the readings, reflection papers, movie nights, and small group

meetings—are designed to accommodate a wide range of student learning stages and a diversity of learning preferences and capabilities.

Interpreting the Group Dynamics: (Weeks 4–9)

This section explores how the faculty attempts to guide students to learn from the dynamics that arise in the class. The stories of in-class events that follow contain many illustrative examples of the types of events that arise when students in the large class group are "practicing leadership". The next account provides an example of the surprising confrontation norms that can, at times, unfold in class as the semester progresses. While it may seem surprising to many readers, the basic nature of the confrontational episodes in class become expected and familiar to students who take the class. These are also episodes that possibly become etched in the memories of some students.

The Carlos Incident

It is week six of the semester, the session topic is "Leadership and Authority", and the class is being urged to look at how leadership relates to authority. From the first day of class, faculty have explained how they view leadership and authority as two distinct roles. This is a key point that differentiates their leadership framework from other popular leadership frameworks. In this particular class session, the students are being urged to look more deeply at how they might differentiate between these two roles or activities.

Forty minutes into the session, one of the TAs asks the class the question: "*What can the group learn about its relation to authority?*"

Professor Sterns responds by saying: "*This is how one person who gained a great deal of formal authority and a very great deal of informal or charismatic authority put it. 'That is the mightiest mission of our movement, namely to give the searching and bewildered masses a new firm belief, a belief that will not abandon them in these days of chaos, which they will swear and abide by, so that at least somewhere they will again find a place where their hearts can be at rest'.*"

One student mutters *"Martin Luther King?"* Four or five other students chime in with *"Hitler! Hitler!"* Sterns goes on to remind the class of the many ways in which he and the

TAs (the authority figures in his view) have already upended and disconfirmed many of the students' prior beliefs about leadership:

"*We've challenged you hard. We've told you that you don't have much freedom that you are mainly a ping pong ball on a ping pong table, that your default settings are more powerful than you think, that you're a cog in a system, that you confuse leadership with authority, that your basic units for analysis for understanding the world are faulty and that creates a dynamic.*"

In the above quote, Sterns accuses students of being confused about the dynamics of leadership. He then pauses and sits down. This is a familiar cue to students to take up the discussion. What follows immediately is an exchange between three or four students arguing first for the need to structure the discussion. It begins with Elba, an engineering student, calling for more structure "for fear of being thrown off topic." Then Ibrahim immediately resists that call "for fear of being limited by structure." As the debate on structure continues, one student tries to steer the discussion away from that recurring topic and to look at how the professor's initial accusation might be generating a sense of unrest or restlessness in the group.

Maya: "*(The professor) told us that we are all like the rats in a laboratory. … During this whole session that we are having, we are just learning how we don't know how to interpret the group, how we don't really know how to do this, we don't know how to intervene, behave, and etcetera. So basically now our hearts are at unrest. Let's start from there.*"

Instantly, Carlos jumps into the discussion about the need for structure, a topic he has previously championed in earlier class sessions. He suggests having a facilitator to guide the student discussions; otherwise he says he'll learn nothing:

"*Sorry! I'm interrupting, as I think we are having a collective problem right now, which is that a lot of us are learning in different ways. … We are kind of bouncing around, that is what we did the first couple of times. But not everybody learns really well that way. Some of us learn really well with some kind of facilitation. So, before we get down this road, or begin having the situation where some people think 'Yeah I'm really excited by this ping pong back and forth,' some of us are thinking 'Oh my God, for the third time we're going to learn absolutely nothing.' I'd like to propose that this time we're going to try it a little*

differently so that we can define this collective problem and have some kind of structure for doing that."

The professor then stands up and walks over to Carlos, who is sitting in the front row of the class. He stands directly in front of him and speaking in a calm but firm and authoritative voice says

"Carlos, nobody is going to facilitate it for you in the real world. You're going to be there, the group is going to be in panic, things are going to be chaotic, and there is going to be no facilitator."

Then placing his hands firmly on Carlos' shoulders, Sterns holds him resolutely and shakes him gently as he continues talking:

"There's going to be nobody to hold you by the shoulders even. There's going to be nobody helping you out. You're going to have to figure out how to invent from …"

Carlos interrupts, looking straight back at Sterns*: "That's what I'm doing"*

Sterns: *"No, you're not."*

Carlos, *Yes, I am.*

Sterns is intervening on this occasion in a rather direct and forceful way by holding his shoulders and thus invading his personal space. The tension in the room rises quickly, as others observe this invasion and Carlos and the professor begin speaking over each other.

Sterns: *No, you're not. You're hungry again for structure.*

Carlos: *"Yes."*

Sterns: *"Yeah."*

Carlos *"And that's exactly what I'm saying."*

Sterns: *"Right."*

Carlos *"And there is nothing wrong with wanting it, to have some kind of structure so that some of us …"*

Sterns interrupts: *"You're going to have to be able to operate without it."*

Carlos attempts to cut back in) *"Umm …"*

Sterns continues: *"and to keep your eye focused on the work to be done."*

Carlos: *"But my eye is focused on the work to be done."*

Sterns says slowly and deliberately: *"Without, … No! Without requiring as a prior the institution of a structure."*

Carlos continues to assert his point: *"We don't have (structure) currently. I'm proposing it."*

Sterns: *"Actually, you do have lots of structure. You have more structure than you even know how to make use of right now."*

Carlos: *"I'm proposing to have a facilitator."*

Sterns: *"You don't even hear me."*

Carlos says: *"Okay"* in a tone of resignation with half a laugh. Some other students echo the cautious laugh. The professor turns to walk back to his chair, nearby the front of the room, as Carlos speaks to the class.

Carlos: *"So I want to interject just real quickly, if it's okay … "*

A strong peel of laughter rises from the class, drowning out Carlos' words. It suggests that instantaneously Carlos' request is being rejected. Many voices burst forth, all speaking at once.

Carlos raises his voice, trying to finish his point: *"Wait a minute, wait a minute, okay, hold on."*

A student looking on mutters: *"What the hell has just happened?"*

Carlos turns his attention back to Sterns and speaks defiantly to him: *"First of all, if I'm not hearing you and you are this close to me (*putting his hands up to show how close Sterns was*), maybe there is a problem with the way you are communicating it? 'Cus you*

know, I didn't understand what you were saying. I don't think it's that far out of left field to say that some people do well and some like facilitation. And I'd like to ask if others feel similar ..."

Sterns interrupts Carlos and speaks directly to him: *"Okay, okay, so here's an innovation. Instead of asking for political support, which is what most of you tend to do, you lobby for support for your point of view. It's what you are doing right now."*

Carlos: *"Yeah."*

Sterns speaks in a soft, slow voice: *"Instead, why don't you ask? Why don't you go back to a childhood virtue called curiosity? Why don't you ask people, since you had trouble hearing me, can anybody help you? That would require relating to me as an authority, as a resource, rather than defensively."*

Carlos: *"Well you were literally an inch away from me. I don't know what world in which someone grabs you and tries ..."*

Sterns breaks in, speaking over him: *"Sometimes ... sometimes people will be shooting bullets at you. I'm asking you to respond with curiosity. ... "*

A student sitting further back in the class jumps in, echoing Sterns' call for curiosity. He almost pleads with Carlos to follow Sterns' guidance: *"Try! Try! Try! Ask a question."*

Sterns continues: *"Sometimes there will be people in the street ..."*

Another student, Terry, jumps in to support Carlos, and counter challenges the professor by arguing that the call for curiosity is somewhat naïve under the circumstances:

"With all due respect to Carlos, I just want to intercede here. I think you are asking him to engage in what I would regard to be a suicidal approach to interacting with you here. The normal approach to protecting yourself is that if someone gets in your face and grabs your shoulder that person is violating some basic societal norms and as an extension of that, move away from that person, you know, not ask them with childlike curiosity, are you going to stick a knife in me?" I think it's a normal and natural response that Carlos had. I appreciate the desire to be provocative and obviously it got all of our attention. I don't think

there was anything wrong with how Carlos responded, even if there is substance to your point."

The professor stands back and remains silent, allowing both the supporting and dissenting voices to have a say. For the next seven or eight minutes, the exchanges continue as students representing different points of view or factions jump into the exchange with arguments and counter arguments. For example, Hareesh counters Terry's criticism of the professor using concepts from the class to support his point:

"But this is the actual purpose of this class … that this is not a technical challenge. In a technical challenge situation like your describing, yes, someone violating the norm I can back away from them and continue on with my job or my purpose. But, in adaptive (leadership) situations, there are no rules like that. People do get in your face. Some people will be shooting at you, metaphorically or literally. Okay? You have to be able to adjust to it. Also, showing your vulnerability should not be seen as a failure."

Terry continues the point: *"I'm not saying the intervention that the professor engaged in wasn't effective and obviously hasn't got us thinking and got us on a new point, I'm just speaking to what just specifically happened on an interpersonal level, which is that it's quite reasonable for Carlos to …"*

Five or six students then jump in and start speaking at the same time, drowning out Terry's voice and almost shouting each other down. Hareesh persists in making his point, raising his voice as a way of quieting the others: *"This is not about the personal level, no offence. … This is not about what is in our hearts. This is about, we face a collective problem, regardless of what we are feeling inside, we have to work towards a common solution."*

Carlos jumps back in, trying to reconcile the point he made with the arguments being put forward. He insists on being heard on an issue he feels is connected to his leadership of the group:

"Okay, let me put the question out there along the lines of what Professor Sterns said that I just did. … What I don't understand and what I'd like someone to clarify for me is what is wrong with saying the adaptive problem is that people learn differently, so, therefore, we

should move the class differently. Why does that reflect a failure to understand what this class is about or a failure to appropriately interpret the lessons here?"

One student immediately counters Carlos' point by saying: *"I'm not sure that's our collective problem. How can people learn ..."*

A pro-structure supporter shouts to Carlos in a bid to reinforce some norms: *"Why don't you call on someone Carlos?"*

Carlos answers: *"Okay. Anyone raise their hands?"*

This call for raising hands in the midst of a heated discussion seems both helpful and provocative at the same time. As yet, Sterns does not attempt to influence or guide the discussion. One of the TAs now attempts to intervene. He raises his hand. Carlos sees him but pointedly ignores him, prompting a laugh from the class. This rouses the TA to become more assertive, and he speaks up without waiting to be called on. The resulting exchanges build towards a rather chaotic crescendo.

TA: *"Carlos? ... Carlos you are not taking help and I don't play by the same rules that you play by because I'm a TA here. TAs here play by different rules and that's part of the structure.*

Carlos: *"I forgot you were a TA."*

TA: *"Okay, now you remember. So listen to me; I'm trying to help you."*

There are a few muted laughs and an older Asian student voices his reaction to the TA's approach: *"That's not the way to intervene."*

TA: *"Sorry?"*

Student: *"That's not the way to intervene even if you are a TA."* Some heavy sighs and groans of discontent go up around the room.

TA: *"We don't play by the same rules."*

Amongst a flurry of arguing voices, a younger American male shouts out: *"Why should we listen to you?"*

A woman jumps into the fray, shouting even louder in support of the TA: *"You guys, they get paid to help us. They get paid to help us."*

The younger male continues, raising his voice further: *"I don't care if they get paid. ... Why do I care if they get paid?"*

The woman shouts back at him "*Just listen for a minute."*

The older Asian student chimes back in, addressing the TA: "*Honestly, I didn't know that you are a TA. I know my TA."*

The TA answers back in a very firm voice: *"Well now you know that. I'm telling you that we play by different rules than the rest of the class."*

At this point, one student claps slowly while another softly repeats: *"Please be quiet."*

Carlos and the TA begin shouting over each other. Carlos says: *"You are not my TA and I don't care if you go by different rules ... There is a degree of respect that is ..."*

The TA shouts even louder: *"There is a purpose for us to be here, which is to help you."*

Carlos says: "*That's fine"* and the TA responds: "*Can you understand that? Do you understand that?"*

Carlos: "*That's fine. Do you understand that your approach is failing?"*

There is laughter and slow applause from some students in response to Carlos' point.

An older male voice shouts *"Guys! GUYS!!"*

An African American male exclaims excitedly: *"So I think we just reached the collective problem. ... "* There is laughter and even more applause. The student offers a suggestion. *"We are trapped in our own norms."* He then poses a question. *"How do we, as both individuals and a group break from those norms?"*

However, breaking from the norms proves to be illusive , as one female student immediately casts doubt on his idea: *"Do you think that's the work though? Do you think that's our work?"*

In his reply, the African American student sounds just a little less sure. *"I'm wondering if that is? ..."*

A deep-voiced European senior decides to invite the TA back into the conversation to finish his point:

"Guys, how does that answer Carlos question? And I'm right now curious about what he (the TA) had to say. Whether a TA or not, he was trying to reach out, to voice an answer ... Let's at least give him a chance ... and then decide whether we'll agree with him or not."

One woman objects to acknowledging the TA: *"He just hijacked the group, he wanted to take control over it ..."* (Amidst shouting from a few other students, she continues.) *"This is our collective challenge. ... We're here and we don't know how to react. We're like 'Am I a rat in the slot? How should I react?' ... Was that (his) purpose?"*

Her objection reflects a belief held by some that either TAs have little to add or that their interventions are contrived in collusion with the professor to simply provoke student reactions and disconfirm their positions in the discussions. This perhaps explains in part the hostile reaction he received. The deep-voiced European persists, along with some other calmer voices: *"Let him answer."*

The TA, being invited back into the conversation, addresses Carlos directly; *"What I was trying to say was ... Carlos don't feel like (it's about) Carlos, because you are just a voice that represents a faction of a lot of people that feel the same way that you do. You are not alone in this."*

Carlos answers: *"Do you think I thought I was alone?"*

TA: *"No, no, I'm not saying that you thought you were alone. This is not about you and me. Try not to be defensive. I'm trying to help the whole faction you represent, not just you. ... Maybe you are absolutely right and you gave a lot of context to what you said, there are many people that learn in a different way, but ... what this faction has to learn in order to interact in the system is to try to see what you should modify ... to learn in a different way. Because the system is moving in a way that if you try to change that whole system you are going to hit against the wall. So maybe not by modifying 100% of what you are, but just*

modifying 0.5% of that, you can move in a way that you can interact with the system and not hit against the wall. That's all that I wanted to say."

With that, a degree of calm returns to the conversation, though the arguments and counter arguments that have persisted for the past eight minutes continue for another five before Sterns steps in.

Thirty minutes have passed since Sterns has said that students had a confused understanding of the dynamics of leadership. In those 30 minutes, there were tense verbal exchanges around the importance of structure. During this time, Sterns sat silently observing the exchanges. Now, with just 10 minutes of class time remaining, he steps back in with a characteristic call, "*Let's stop the action and get on the balcony for a moment and just look at what's happening here.*" This is frequently the way in which he prompts the students to pause, reflect, and begin offering an interpretation of the enacted group dynamics.

With virtually no interruptions from students except for an occasional laugh, Sterns spends 10 minutes giving his interpretation of the disorienting class events, along with his view of their relevance to leadership and even dictatorship. He critiques student behaviors and even his own, ultimately tying it all back to authority, dictatorship, and human vulnerability:

"Groups that are disoriented, as you are, are hungry for orientation. There are a lot of different ways to provide the group with orientation. ... You could orient people by simply instituting structure ... by playing to some value ... by creating a common enemy.

As he begins summing up his interpretation of what has just taken place in the class, the professor starts sketching a simple diagram on the board, one that he has used before in class. He then clarifies his interpretation of the connection between disorientation and the dangers of dictatorship, pointing out, as he sees it, the importance of leaders being able to manage the sense of disorientation so that "the real work of leadership" continues.

"There are a lot of different ways in which people hungry for orientation become vulnerable to demagogues who will propose a mechanism of orientation. Dictators tend to emerge in times of disorientation ... (or) crises. ... Now you can either provide people with a mechanism for orientation that simply restores equilibrium by avoiding the work at hand, or

you can provide some mechanism of orientation that will reduce the level of disequilibrium from its peak, but will keep people somehow in a productive range of disequilibrium."

Sterns then interprets two different ways in which he believes the class tried to orient itself and explains why each of those efforts failed.

"The hunger for orientation in your conversations anchored around a couple of different major needs. Right from the beginning Elba saying 'Engineers,' 'Structure,' and then Ibrahim saying 'Well maybe not structure, maybe some of the structuring norms' and then Carlos saying 'No, we need structure,' then my intervening and Terry organizing around the anti-structure structure or the anti-me structure. One way for people to organize and orient themselves in time of chaos is to start fighting about structure, which you've seen all semester in the tendency to become preoccupied with how to maintain order."

Sterns interprets the second set of efforts as being more laudable, coming from students who attempted to name the work of the group or the collective challenge "in real time."

"Another means of creating orientation is to interpret the work for people, to orient people by saying look here's a way of framing the collective problem that we are all, in one way or another, confused by or are organizing around unconsciously. We saw some efforts to do that …"

He names two students who attempted this but says that ultimately they could not complete the task. Even though he sits by quietly and appears to let the students have a free-for-all, Sterns is nevertheless alert to all that transpires, and before the class ends he puts forward his interpretation of the unfolding group dynamics. In interpreting the events that had just occurred, he says rather unapologetically of his own behavior that his actions are merely those of a "puppet on a string"—a theme that re-emerges in a subsequent class session on "inspirational leaders".

"(You think) my behavior is autonomous. You think I'm in control of myself. That's the fantasy of a lot of people who look to authority, thinking authorities actually have power rather than being a puppet on a string. The string is being held by you, because I'm in the system too. If you want to understand my behavior today, you have to understand your hungers and the various factional divisions and how they are generating a group dynamic that causes me to step into play forcefully."

He then cautions students and even reprimands them for getting distracted by what he calls the various power plays in the room: *"As you begin this interpretive challenge ... (it is) not reaching for an engineering solution, not getting distracted by the power dynamics between authority and individuals, not rejoicing in the rebellion against a teaching assistant in your own primitive way ... but working hard to come up with some way to frame the collective task that makes people say 'Ah God, alright I see what we are trying to do here' ... "*

In closing, he says:

"The mission of this course is to learn leadership ... Today we have a topic called authority ... an extremely difficult topic. Because as much as you hunger you are vulnerable to people like Hitler, who really do get it right. They know what you want and then they give it to you and for that you give away your mind. If you were really desperate and not just you know, a little bit confused in a course at Harvard on a safe day. ... Good luck."

Some students clap, but most begin packing up as class finishes.

* * * *

Interpreting and reflecting on what happened in this class is far from over, despite the professor's eloquent summing up. Students raised the topic repeatedly during class time in the weeks that followed and the issue was mentioned in the interviews I conducted over the subsequent two years.

The dramatic and disorienting event became known as "the Carlos incident" and for a number of the class sessions that followed, some students continued to voice their interpretations and reactions to it. In the subsequent class discussions, some students claimed that they felt uncomfortable and questioned the professor's behavior. Others also claimed to have felt uncomfortable but questioned their own reactions rather than Sterns'. Other students claimed that they did not feel uncomfortable at all and saw this as reflective of the challenges of real life. The examples below illustrate these reactions.

Adam: *"What you did to Carlos last week in invading his personal space was what hit my level (limit) of tolerance and ... I was wondering why we as a group actually allowed this to happen and nobody stopped it while it was taking place. ... I was wondering If we as a group can decide on a new norm, that in our discussion we all respect each other's physical*

and personal space ... I think there are some people in this group who didn't feel comfortable in that situation and that their safety of operating was violated."

Bill: *"In real life you find people with different values, with different beliefs, and different preferences and you have to go about experimenting, so I wouldn't agree that we have the rule. For example, I didn't feel uncomfortable at all ... and I guess there are (other) people who don't feel uncomfortable. So you need to guess and try and assess what the reaction of the other is going to be and according to that you act and you measure the impact and then you change your conduct in one way or another."*

Clark: "*Some of us were bothered because we were so bewildered to use the term that Professor Sterns was just using. Why did he do that? ... I can only speak for myself ... as much as any physical invasion, I felt extremely uncomfortable because I didn't know what we were doing. I wonder if we reframe it that way, are we not being challenged to stay bewildered, just to stay confused. ... I want to be really careful about creating norms that save us from the trouble of feeling uncomfortable and confused. Some really good things can happen if we just hang in there and stay confused."*

With 112 students in the class, it is inevitable that there will be a wide range of differing reactions, as illustrated in the examples above. However, what was noteworthy in exploring the range of student responses was that they fell into broad categories or groupings. I will discuss theses groupings in detail in Chapter 6.

As for Carlos's reaction, five days later he submitted a routine class questionnaire in which he included some comments about the incident.[11] His comments came in reply to the following question: "Describe 1–2 examples of how authority has been used well and/or abused in the life of MLD 201 (large class, consultation group, and/or teaching staff) so far."

Carlos' written reply: *"Am I really being asked this question? Ed Sterns committed assault against me (legally speaking) in front of 115 students and 8 TAs. This may be par-for-the-course for his classes, but doesn't make it a non-abuse. Indeed, I believe he should be fired for his history of using humiliation and shame against students ... but to switch to*

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[11] Carlos elected to share his questionnaires with me as part of my data gathering fieldwork following the class.

systemic considerations: His use of humiliation reflected the permissive environment that existed within the class. Sterns never could have gotten away with what he did without students who lust for an authority figure to tell them what to think. ... Although he invoked Hitler during that class to describe what happens when people long for authority amid chaos, what he failed to mention — and what I think very, very few students understood — was that in this case, he was the Hitler analogue. The students and TAs, meanwhile, were the permissive German people who (with a few exceptions like the estimable Terry) jumped on his side in order to teach me, to help me, to make me see why they and Sterns understood something I didn't. All the while, they (and I, until later) were overlooking what their systemic role really was: that of enabler to abuse, all for the purpose of reinforcing the class's authority structure. That's one heck of an irony, one made more intense by the fact that students thought Sterns was seeking to maintain "creative disequilibrium."

In many regards, Carlos has done a thorough job of analyzing and interpreting the group dynamics, albeit in his own way. He took on board the seriousness of the situation, with student reactions at one point tending toward a form of mob rule. One question that needs to be further explored is what or how Carlos learns from these stark experiences, in contrast to those who may have learned from observing and interpreting what happened to Carlos.

This response also reveals a sense of ambivalence and unease that often surrounds the faculty's role and use of authority in the class, particularly during the early weeks of the course. In this case, Carlos was invited to discuss his views with his group TA and also with the teaching faculty. Having discussions with TAs and faculty is intended to help create a sense of safety but it does not always fully resolve the issue, as in Carlos' case.

For the remainder of the course, Carlos became known as the structure guy, a mantle he continually tried to discard but with little success. The professor played no small part in reinforcing this characterization of Carlos when discussing and interpreting the group dynamics. During the next class, Professor Sterns sparked another reaction from Carlos on the topic. Carlos was sitting at the back of the class with no name card in front of him, in contrast to his sitting in the front row, name tag visible, during the previous class.

Professor Sterns: *"It is very common when people are confused about what they are trying to do that they retreat to structural solutions of the sort Carlos thinks is necessary."*

(Carlos shakes his head in response.) *"I may think it's important too. ... I'm giving a lot of structure in this course, but there are a lot of people in authority pushed to create structure that is empty of any real purposeful meaning, that ends up simply serving as a way to calm people down. Now Carlos wags his head because he can't even imagine that he is just a cog in this system.*

Carlos replies: *"How do you know that? Why do you ... No. The reason that I shake my head is that I do think that I'm a cog in the system and you can't fathom that I think that."*

A male student retorts: *"We fell back into the trap again"* referring to the supposed trap that the professor lays, as he prods students to respond.

It is not until the final class of the semester, in fact in the final 12 minutes of that class that Carlos voices his interpretation:

"I noticed something about 20 minutes ago ... I found myself reverting to a place of frustration that I'd been many times in this class ... What happened was Art said 'I'm sorry Carlos. ... You're the structure guy and I'm sorry that I said I'd disrupt any kind of structure thing' and I'm thinking in my head at that point ... structure is barely any part of who I am, why did I emerge as the structure guy in this class? ... But what that frustration ignores is my own and each of our own roles in permitting the role that is assigned to us. When we get assigned these roles, it affects our capacity to intervene, it affects our own capacity to say things that other people take seriously or how they'll interpret everything, but it's not purely a passive thing. In fact, a lot of it is active. One of the things that this class has illuminated for me is the need to get on the balcony and look at my own role in the system, my own ability to guide the role the others assign to me in that system, so that I can keep my mind focused on the adaptive work that needs to be done."

Although the professor played a formidable part in ensuring Carlos became known as the structure guy, Carlos now claims to see how he permitted this to happen.

The Carlos Incident: Afterward

Many students, though not all, say their sense of unease or frustration with the authority role of the professor is resolved at some point during the 14-week long semester. For Carlos, however, his anger was still palpable eight months after course finished.

"When this (class) stuff comes into my head, I sometimes use it but at the same time I tense up and resist it to some degree and that's because (Sterns) is … a megalomaniacal asshole who lacks integrity. That has to factor in."

Two years after the course, Carlos was somewhat more moderate:

"I'll concede that experiencing a level of frustration is part of what propels you to learn about yourselves or your interaction with others … I'd actually say that in fairness, if you remember something that seems humiliating you are going to try to avoid that thing in the future. You might not if you never got humiliated by it. That class in general was humiliating for me so as a result I try to avoid adopting the role that I allowed to be assigned to me in that class."

After the course had finished, one international student, Peter, recalled the Carlos incident as the highlight of the class for him. Peter claimed that he felt the harsh lesson could have been tougher, viewing it like an experiment on the verge of breakthrough:

"The event that I thought was best was Carlos and Professor Sterns. I thought that was amazing, I thought that was brilliant. But that is me thinking because I believe when you push people hard that is where the breakthrough comes from. I actually certainly feel that Professor Sterns didn't push him hard enough. Otherwise we would have seen something finally give. So, from my point of view, I thought it could be much more … provocative."

Another student, Paula, appreciated the harsh lessons and claimed she had changed as a result of what Sterns had shown her. Two years after the class, Paula recalled the Carlos incident with notable clarity, going on to relate it to her own embarrassing experience in class:

"I remember moments with other people … Professor Sterns, he's kind of good at doing 'the shake' and sometimes that feels okay and sometimes it's like 'dude back off.' … I saw him do it. I remember him actually physically … (gesturing.) Our class was so focused on the

Carlos incident; that was the thing. When Sterns actually physically went up and ... someone was talking about 'Oh we should get a moderator' and ... all of a sudden Sterns was there and he was physically going 'No one's going to come for you. No one's going to be there. You'll be all alone and you're going to have to make the decisions' or something like that. ... And I've seen him do that (shake.) ... Maybe he could have had a little more kindness. I don't think he tries to be unkind. I think he does that out of being so passionate about shaking people out of where they are stuck or what they can't see or sort of cutting in. He's definitely a challenger and not afraid of really challenging people in development, and I appreciate that. ... And him coming in harshly helped me see that I was showing up in a weak way a lot of the time or being judgmental or unhelpful and so that has changed. It helped me see more of that and what I can do differently."

Some months later, the TA for Carlos' small group recalled the Carlos incident in the following way.

"I was right there when Ed (Sterns) *did it. ... At the end of the day he was very confrontational. ... It generated a lot of learning for a lot of other people, but for Carlos, in some ways he got sacrificed somewhat for the learning of others. I don't know if he learned as much as he would have had that not occurred or had he ... been challenged in a different way. ... It was productive on many levels, just when I'm thinking for Carlos, and in the effectiveness it had with him and his ... faction, that's where it's more questionable, the degree to which it was (effective). ... As a general observation ... (on) some of the interventions Ed might make with students, you know he's unbelievably skilled at being able to push and prod, and at times it feels a bit reckless, or at least I know that he can take that luxury, because then we (TAs) will clean up the bit of a mess later or work at it more in-depth. ... With a number of my students where he intervened fairly strongly, ... perfectly legitimate and I think potentially productive, ... but, it wasn't necessarily a productive intervention for that student, and I had to do a lot of work with the student to then see if we could make it productive. ... Because it wasn't sort of pointing at the right thing for what that student needed."*

This TA account reveals the range of roles that TAs are called upon to play in the class in trying to support and guide individual learning and in helping to repair any damage that may arise from the actions of the professor in the plenary class sessions.

Professor Sterns himself recalled the incident in a conversation with me some weeks after the event. He recounted how he had pushed against the boundaries for decades and "shaken students", figuratively speaking. However, he acknowledged that he rarely got so physically close to a student as on that occasion.

'I'm not sure if it served the intended purpose. ... Time will tell. ... But I think I may have pushed too far on this occasion with this student.'

"Pushing at the boundaries" is part of the long-established pedagogy of this course. The long story recounted above points to many of the challenges associated with this experiential learning method, ranging from the risks the faculty may take to the dangers of improvising and pushing students when making a point and the role that TAs play in helping students to derive the appropriate and meaningful lessons from the course.

The Carlos story is presented in great detail because it illustrates many of what I think are key learning points about the way this class is run. In the plenary class sessions, many students struggle to find voice when disorienting, confusing, and often-contentious events occur. The faculty and TAs argue that this challenges the students' more familiar learning habits. And there is a rather ritualized way in which this occurs.

First, the faculty begins by creating a sense of restlessness, typically by confronting the existing views or beliefs of students with regard to learning about leadership. Many students enter this class having held senior leadership positions in their political and business worlds, while others have considerable academic success. Therefore, it is not difficult to provoke a reaction by openly confronting these student views.

Second, the students may respond with quiet disbelief or open defiance, but they often react in defensive ways. This may include, as seen in prior examples, challenging the professor, reacting to TAs in a hostile manner, building heated arguments that draws others into the fray, and creates an almost mob-like atmosphere in the classroom. In the highly visible dynamics of the group, students may be active or passive but, spurred on by the prompting of faculty, roles become assigned to some students in ways they may or may not

like. When this occurs, faculty challenge students to interpret the assigned roles as part of "practicing leadership" in the classroom.

Third, individual students are singled out and used as examples, and some see this as being "sacrificed" to make a learning point. I return to this issue in Chapter 7 when discussing how students learn from each other in the class.

Fourth, after disruptive incidents arise, faculty encourage students to pause, reflect, and interpret the incident in a calm and rational fashion to see if there are lessons to learn about leadership. Even when episodes of this sort explode during class sessions, students typically exit the room quietly and politely, perhaps thoughtfully following faculty's instructions.

Poetry Night: (Weeks 8–10)

In this section I take a look close at Poetry Night or music evening, as it is sometimes called. I explore how the faculty tries to guide students in "listening to each other and to the environment." Poetry Night is a three-hour long evening class event. It stands apart as a notable class event and is frequently mentioned by students as memorable during their follow-up interviews. While many students recall it vividly, their descriptions reveal contrasting views as to how they experienced and interpreted the event.

Poetry Night typically takes place eight weeks into the semester.[12] The event runs in addition to the normal weekly classes and meetings. All students are required to attend. Few details about the event are shared in advance, other than the logistics. Students are simply invited to bring a poem or piece of prose of their own choosing; "something that is meaningful to them." The choice of material can be in their native language, they can translate it, or it can be a poem or piece of prose they have written themselves.

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[12] One faculty member held three Poetry Night sessions during weeks 8–10 of the semester, giving more students an opportunity to share their poem or piece of prose in front of the class. Yet there were still more students wanting to present in front of the room than there was time to accommodate them. The faculty members frequently use a numbers lottery to select the presenters.

The event goes deeper than merely reciting a poem in front of a large group. Students may be asked to repeat their poem over and over again as they attempt, with active guidance from the professor, to hold the attention of the entire classroom with no more than a single word or sound. Given that some students may be working with the professor for up to 20 minutes in front of the class in the course of the three-hour session, only a few students present to the large class. The rest of the class are, the faculty hopes, watching and listening attentively. Thus, this is as much an exercise in listening as it is in speaking or reciting poetry.

In the accounts that follow, I describe how faculty introduces Poetry Night, preparing the students for the experience. I then give an example of how one professor guides a student who comes to the front of the room to present her poem. These accounts serve to illustrate the sense of anticipation and anxiety that exists in the room on that night. I then give several accounts of what the experience "felt like" from the perspective of three students who shared their poems. Finally, I provide some contrasting accounts of how students recalled and interpreted the event afterward.

*   *   *   *

It is 6 pm and the familiar classroom is full but somewhat quieter than usual as students file in and settle down quickly. There is a sense of anticipation for what lies ahead in this three-hour session. Some students are still finishing their take out food or dinner substitutes as the professor organizes his notes at the front of the classroom. He stands and faces the group and as stillness descends he begins to speak, providing an explanation as to why poetry and music are part of the teaching pedagogy in this leadership course.

Professor Jenkins introduces students to Poetry Night using the theme of inspiration. He uses the story of Odin, the mythological god of inspiration, to illustrate what he considers to be the power, the possibilities, and the danger associated with a leader's use of inspiration. He has previously used ancient mythology when presenting his views on where the more traditional notions of heroic and idealized leadership come from. Therefore, students in his class are familiar with his use of mythological metaphors.

Professor Jenkins: *"Tonight is an inquiry. It's an inquiry into a domain of leadership that we are calling inspiration. If you read the reading for this week by Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, about the ancient Odin myth, you get some insight about what we are here to*

inquire into. According to the myth, one of the gods had this incredible power. The dwarfs, who lived on the earth, who were somewhat mischievous, wanted to harness that power. So they invited the god to their house and they killed him and they took his blood and they mixed it with honey. It became a very sacred and powerful potion. Whoever had that power had the capacity to inspire, to move a group. Now Odin sought to regain that power for the gods so he was able to, through his own trickery get that potion from the dwarfs, by turning himself into a bird, an eagle. As he got the sacred mead and flew away, some of that mead spilt down on the earth and it's all over the place today. Some people are able to find it and access it and use it. In mythological terms, it's how they describe this gift of poetic inspiration, this capacity to move the group. Now…it's a dangerous conversation, but we get to explore the danger and the possibility of what this is really all about."

As he continues, Professor Jenkins tells students that the evening's experiences may become uncomfortable. In doing so, he puts students on alert and creates a sense of anticipation about the task ahead. Despite the relatively late hour, there is a high degree of attentiveness in the room.

In his guidance, Jenkins harkens back to points raised in the first class about "pushing boundaries." By now, eight weeks into the semester, the students have a better sense of what the professor means when he says he will push at their boundaries and they will push back on him or on whoever is in front of the class. Students have come to associate a certain level of discomfort or anxiety with pushing boundaries, but faculty heightens that sense of anxiety by reinforcing the idea that they do not know who is influencing whom in this classroom. During this evening event students are invited up to the front of the room to test it out for themselves.

"Tonight is about the 'being' of leadership, who are you 'being' when you exercise leadership, … how are you 'being' when under this enormous pressure. … (It's) a series of exercises that are designed to help you experience as well as reflect on certain aspects of leadership practice that are pretty important; some of them are pretty dangerous because they are powerful and can be misused. But they are difficult to teach and talk about in a traditional way. That is why we are using music and poetry to try to get at some of these lessons. We will be asking for volunteers and we will also be drawing your name out of a bag. You get to choose how far you want to go in this exercise tonight. In other words, it's your choice; if you wish to sit down, you can sit down at any time should you come up to the

front. But we'll be pushing boundaries. I'll be pushing boundaries and in your listening, you'll have the capacity to push boundaries because it's not just about who is up in the front of the room. As you see, this leadership activity is interactive. You are in a dance with the group, so the group has a very powerful influence on you as you are in the front of the room. We don't know really who is pulling the strings, who is the puppeteer. Is it you in front of the group or is it the group that's doing it to you? So what you bring to this as those who listen is equally important as the person who is at the front of the room."

* * * *

On another Poetry Night in a different semester, the professor takes over 30 minutes setting the context for the evening event. He then asks: *"Who would like to volunteer?"* There's a knowing kind of laugh from the class, as though some anticipate this may be more difficult than it first appears. A young Asian student, Kavitha, is one of the first to raise her hand and the professor quickly selects her. As she stands up and moves to the front of the room, she gets approving applause from many other students. The professor then takes a few moments to organize the front of the room, moving the teaching podium off the table and helping Kavitha with a microphone when she accepts the option to use it.

As Kavitha stands in the teaching pit in front of the class, the professor notices some agitation amongst the audience before the recital even begins, so he starts off with some instructions for the audience: *"I want you to experience two different kinds of silence."* He gets the class to keep silent for 10–12 seconds and encourages students to let their minds wander anywhere it might take them. After that, he gets the class to hold silent for another 10–12 seconds but this time he encourages them to be fully present and attentive. After the second silence, he says: *"Can you hear the difference? That's what we're looking for."*

There is a noticeable calm in the room now, despite the stuffiness that comes with lack of air conditioning and needing to keep the windows closed because of the noise outside. Having instructed the audience in keeping silent, the professor then turns his attention back to Kavitha, who is looking nervous and unsure. He gives her three instructions, which he says he will repeat over and over in the weeks to come: *"The first instruction is to 'stay with your audience.' You have to stand here and look around. You can't look around terrified. We already know they are nervous. You have to hold them. The moment you act nervous you are asking them to hold you. You have to hold them."*

He then writes another instruction on the board:

"This is the second (instruction). I want you to 'make each word count.' Each word is like an ancient song. ... Human beings have been uttering that sound for hundreds and thousands of years ... each word, each sound you make, you have to give it time, make it count."

As he writes on the board, he continues to speak: *"Here's the third. I want you to 'allow for silence.' ... It's like the frame of a painting. You want your poem or later your song to be framed with silence. Wait until I sit down. Allow there to be a little silence then somewhere in between phrases or words allow for silence. At the very end of your poem make sure you stay with your audience."*

The professor sits down in his chair , off to the side of the teaching area. Kavitha hesitates and then turns towards the professor, softly and hesitatingly asks a clarifying question. The class laughs.

The professor stands up as he replies: *"All that laughter is just their nervousness."* He then sits down again in his chair and smiles at Kavitha, thus inviting her to begin reciting her poem.

Kavitha looks resolute and determined as she recites her poem in her native Hindi. She begins in a somewhat loud and powerful voice, which seems to surprise some audience members. She gives a strong emphasis to each word or phrase in the poem. At the end of the poem, which is four to five sentences long, the professor stands up and walks over to her smiling:

Professor: *"Good first try. This is going to take a while. Yeah? I'd like you to do it again. I just want you to follow the instructions. Don't look down when you are reading. You didn't talk to anybody. So why talk if you're not talking to someone. We do this every day."*

Kavitha attempts to explain: *"I tried, but it's not complete, it's not sufficient at all."*

The professor responds: *"So now look to people. Don't say a word without having somebody in your eyes."*

During Kavitha's second attempt, she doesn't get beyond three words. The professor interrupts her: *"No, slower. Don't look down so fast."*

Then he goes through an exercise to illustrate how difficult it is to listen to instructions. He sees how confused and anxious Kavitha appears as he tries to work the exercise with her. He then turns to Todd, an American student who is sitting half way back in the class. He asks Todd if he has some "talk" going on in his head as he listens to him giving instructions at the front of the room.

Todd admits that he has a lot of chatter in his head. The professor asks in a lighthearted tone: *"What are you saying inside, just so we can get a clue?"*

Todd: *"I'm saying Kavitha is having a hard time. There is a language disparity. The professor is giving her the hot seat here. She's nervous. There are a lot of people looking at her. But I'm also thinking 'I'm supporting you. I'm funneling energy at you and I'm hoping you connect with me.'"*

The professor then turns to Kavitha and explains in a somewhat animated way that he, as the instructor, also has to pause:

"I have to pause and allow for silence so that Todd can complete his half of the conversation in his head. Then he can start listening to me again. ... Todd can't keep up with me. He's lost track of what I'm saying. I have to make one point at a time and then allow for silence so he can catch up with me. ... So you have to give them time. Most people in this room don't speak Hindi. So you have to give them time to feel what the language might be meaning."

Kavitha makes a third attempt, looking more purposefully at students in the room as she speaks. She then pauses for four or five seconds at the end before looking questioningly at the professor. There's applause from the class as she finishes. The professor rewards her with the comment: *"Good improvement. We're going to continue."* He then suggests to the class not to clap. If they still want to show appreciation, he says they could perhaps wave their hands silently. He explains further: *"The reason for that is clapping completely stops the process of integrating the experience with the process of listening. I want you to be able to stay with it."*

He turns back to Kavitha, saying:

"I want you to take your time even more. I want you to make sure that you are really with people. I want you to allow for silence, more silence. Give them time. You know, it's very powerful the way you are speaking. It's generating a lot of different emotional reactions in people. So you have to give them time to sit with it. Allow for more pause, silence in between the words or the phrases. Stay with people longer."

She expresses a little hesitation and embarrassment at being the center of attention for so long: *"I feel that everyone here stays with me too much?* The professor reassures her: *"Give them more time."* The audience is looking on attentively, though I spot one student reading email on a handheld device in the back row even though she is seated beside a TA. Some students have a look of being bored or distracted. But these are the minority, as most look fully engaged.

With her fourth attempt, Kavitha does not get beyond the first sentence before the professor interrupts again:

"No, no, no. You start to speak as soon as you pick your eyes up. You have to give people time to settle in. ... Look up and hold the silence. You have to hold their attention because you shock them, particularly because the beginning of your poem you say with a lot of power. It's like you're driving your car with people in the back seat. All of a sudden you step on the gas without making sure they have their seat belts on. ... Take your time. Give them time."

She tries again, but gets no further than a few words.

The professor asks: *"Who are you looking at? Are you looking at anyone?"*

She replies vaguely: *"Some of them.*" The students laugh. The professor stands close beside her and looks at the audience and then looks back at her, saying: *"A lot of people who speak, do that. . . . I want you to look at somebody. Anybody. Look at them anyplace in the room . . see the people. Blooming creatures."*

The professor then helps Kavitha pick out someone "good" to look at, and then he makes a joke of what he intends by saying "Good." Kavitha replies nervously: *"I'll just focus on Jin Min.*"

Professor: "*Okay and then the next time you speak, you could find someone else. But don't speak until you've found somebody.*"

For this sixth attempt, Kavitha recites all the lines of the poem. She appears more relaxed with the audience. Her voice is still resolute and powerful but more quietly so. It is as though she is telling us a personal story and is recalling it with some emotion. There are 30 seconds of silence at the end. A few students wave their hands in appreciation. Most simply look intently at Kavitha.

Professor: "*Much better. The ending is great. You really stayed with people. Okay, keep going, take more time, much more time, more time giving the words to people, more silence in between. Each phrase really means something. … Let people just sit with it forever before you move on. Okay?*"

During her seventh attempt, she sounds slightly more hurried and louder again as if she is perhaps getting impatient or becoming overly anxious about getting it "right". During the 45 seconds of silence at the end of the poem, she looks more deliberately at a few students, as though she might be speaking silently to them.

Professor: "*Slower, much slower. You have to give each phrase to somebody and stay there for a long time … until the tears are real. Take your time.*"

By her eighth attempt, Kavitha has been working with the professor in front of the class for over 20 minutes. This time, her voice is softer and her tone seems more convincing as though she is speaking from deep personal experience. During the pause at the end, she holds steadily looking only at one or two students. There is a palpable stillness in the room, with little or no shuffling, coughing, or looking around. Most of the audience appears focused intently on the front of the room.

Professor: "*Now in English, but really slowly, don't look down except when you have to see, then look up and give the words to people.*"

Kavitha prepares herself, looking at the page with the English version and then looking at the class again. She straightens her stance and speaks in a distinct and deliberate voice, unrushed and unwavering throughout:

"*Oh my younger brother, I weep for you. You must not die.*

You are the last-born child and so you are most cherished by family.

Did your parents ask you to hold a sword and to kill another person?

Did your parents bring you up until 24 years old in order to murder and die?"

She remains silent for 40 seconds as the audience takes in the English translation. She stands resolutely but still appears somewhat nervous.

The professor mutters softly *"You have to hold the group, the whole group."* The silence lasts for another minute, during which time there appears to be an air of calmness and unity in the room. This calmness is rare given the sense of disorientation and confusion that often emerges in the plenary sessions of the class.

Professor: *"Okay, nice work. Are you ready to sing? That was just a warm-up exercise."* Some of the students laugh loudly as Kavitha seems to think the professor is joking. However, she gradually realizes he is serious.

There is some shuffling around in seats as some students prepare for the exercise to continue. The professor stands beside Kavitha, looking at her and giving her time to compose herself again.

Professor: *"I'm going to ask you to make up a song, no words, just open sounds."* The professor sings: *"AHHHHHHHH",* holding on one note for several seconds and then repeating the same sound on a second note, four tones higher. Kavitha mimics him on the second note.

Professor: *"I want you to make up a song just with that sound."*

Kavitha clarifies: *"Only AHHHH?"*

Professor: *"Only AHHHH. Of course you can go up and down so it's a song without words. Now I want you to stay with your audience. I want you to make each note count. Don't move to the next note, until you've listened to the note that you are on. So the song may need to be slow so that you can keep up with where you are. You're going to improvise. You are going to make this song up from scratch. Okay? Do you understand?"*

Kavitha: *"Yes. It's about the poem or …?"*

Professor: *We'll have to decide that. I want you to allow for silence so there could be pauses in the middle of the song if you want. Now as you improvise you will find that there will be many exits off the road, off the highway. Don't take the first exit. The song will have many natural places where it could end. Let it go on a little bit before you (end) and you'll discover that there's a natural ending. You don't have to force the ending."*

Kavitha replies, nodding to confirm: *"Natural ending?"*

Professor: *"Natural ending, yes. This is a song in part about the process of mourning. (He spells out the word.) We'll make it a little easier; we'll give you a particular person to sing to. We'll give you somebody to focus on. Let's see. You see Mae there? You have to hold everybody in the class in your awareness, but focus on Mae, and just sing to Mae a song of mourning, a song of loss and just with AHH. Let her draw it from you. Don't try to think about it, just start with AHH and see where it goes. See where Mae and you go. Take your time. You can't plan it. It's not analytical. It's creative. ... You have to hold everybody. You can't hold everybody if you've got your hands behind your back. So take your time, allow for silence, and just be with Mae. Stay with her."*

After a 40-second pause, Kavitha sings *"AHHHHH"* on two different notes. She holds each note for four to six seconds and then repeats the sequence, singing slightly louder, holding the note slightly longer and taking a slightly longer pause each time. She repeats the two-note sequence six times and then holds silent for just under a minute. She adds a single one-note *"AHHHHHH"* to finish and then holds silent again for just under a minute.

Professor: *"Do you want to keep going?"*

Laugher arises briefly, but the silence resumes for yet another minute and a half, during which time a few students exit to the bathroom.

The Professor whispers: "*Nice job.*" A few students start clapping, but catch themselves and stop. They wave their hands in appreciation instead. A few quiet murmurings begin between students.

Professor: "*Let's take a 15-minute break and then we'll come back and debrief that experience.*"

By the end of the experience, Kavitha has spent 35 minutes in front of the class. She looks relieved to sit down.

* * * *

The in-class account reveals that this is not a simple poetry recital or music exercise. To reveal what the experience is like from the perspective of the presenter, I provide three different accounts from students who, on different occasions, presented their poems or piece of prose. In reading these accounts, recall that in my interviews and informal chats, I never specifically asked about Poetry Night. Yet many students recalled it in detail even two years after they have left class.

The first account comes from Lin.

"I was the first person to go up and I read a poem from memory. ... I said it in Japanese. ... I memorized this poem when I was like six years old and I remember it. Every now and then I say it to myself before going to bed. It's a poem particularly meaningful to me right now and has been at different stages of my life. It about this sailor, about his journey and what he is searching for and so forth, highly characterized. So, I first said it in Japanese and then I translated it, kind of instantaneously, to what I thought it would mean in English. ... I mean it was a very powerful experience ... to be steady enough for people to hear it in two languages ... and one that most people didn't understand. ... Singing is one of my biggest fears. I don't sing happy birthday at a birthday party. So I had to sing in front of 120 people ... and people knew, I articulated that I am tone deaf ... there is no way that I can do this. But I wanted to do it. Recognizing that I had to be there to hold people through it and the kind of bonds that needed to occur ... for me to be able to go through that experience, it was really powerful. Because, for me literally every one other than the person I was looking at became blurry, like visually, physically, completely blurry in a way that I have never experienced before and I only saw that person. ... I could be sitting in a computer lab and someone from the class who would be sitting next to me would tell me about their life ambitions and fears and in a way that would have never happened had I not shared that. ... I think they saw me facing a fear that I had publicly, so I think that probably broke down some of those walls and created a level of connection. I think it alleviated some of the burden off of me, ironically. ... When you are facing things more privately I think it's easier to keep more of the burden internally. ... That is a lesson I have been learning ... that sometimes it makes it

easier when the weight's been shared. ... They were blurry when I was doing the singing, because I think in order for me to do it, that was just like a strategic mechanism, that was like a, how do you get through something difficult? For me I guess it was a very singular focus. ... There are a couple of people from the course that I've seen on campus that I never really talked to in the class. I'm in another class with them now. (Both) came up to me ... one of them recalled the poem I read in class; the other recalled some other conversations. This happened over two years ago and I haven't seen these people since and I didn't even know them, but there was instantly a connection."

What is striking in Lin's account is the bonds that were allegedly formed with other students. The sense of "sharing" the burden is part of what she said enabled her to get through the event and enabled a number of students to feel more connected to her afterwards.

The second student account comes from Rick. Similar to Lin, he said he had to overcome his anxieties in front of others.

"Having more courage in showing vulnerability ... and being acknowledged for having that courage is what seems to have arisen for participants. ... I was the first one to go on stage but then I think it sort of opened up something in me in terms of ... my ah hah! ... This happened for many people, I believe. Many people started discussing about the poetry of leadership because many people felt some sort of openness, something that had opened in us. ... It was difficult. I was sweating and then Professor Jenkins noticed that ... so it was a lot more difficult and I was kind of mirroring the poem that I was talking about. ... It was a poem by Rumi about ... how happiness and order and disorder co-exist or about how difficult situations contribute to your learning. So I felt so exposed and vulnerable in that situation sitting in front of so many people. There are various thoughts coming to me ... about how I am wasting other people's time ... and then how I should continue, how I should force myself to continue etcetera. ... The most interesting experience was I felt so connected with the people. How I could feel related to so many people? ... I started exposing my own vulnerabilities more ... I think there is more courage in terms of opening up to other persons. I don't know if that makes sense."

In the third account, Juanita recalls Poetry Night as a turning point for her, and she attempts to explain what lies behind the deep emotions she claims to have experienced.

"My change came when we had the Poetry Night ... and for the first time I think perhaps I was able to connect ... because you can imagine poetry and the emotions ... and you can really feel the person's feelings, how they are thinking about what is happening in the system. You could actually see how each individual who went up there in front and recited their poems was being affected by the kind of issues that they were talking about and something just snapped inside me and I couldn't even control myself. Straight after the class was finished, I went up to the professor while he was clearing the board and I just broke down crying because something just happened. ... I don't understand what it was but I was such an emotional wreck and I think that it's maybe to do with things ... that we're learning and how I was looking at my own life and my leadership failures, the things I could have done and I didn't do. Also just the frustration that even if I was to take these concepts outside to my environment it's not going to happen. ... It's not as easy as it sounds. ... I was getting all these things jumbled up and I just couldn't deal with it. The professor recommended that I come and talk to him. ... (There) he suggested because every single time when I went into the class I would sit right at the back, so I was always sitting in like, at the balcony; I was never on the dance floor, dancing with others and really experimenting or whatever. I was just an observer, listening to people. ... I was not involved, so he said why don't you sit in front for a change and see what happens. ... He encouraged me to find a voice, to talk about it in class. So the next day we were in class and people started talking about all sorts of different things and then I just thought I'm not going to intervene, I'm not going to say anything, I got back into my comfortable zone where I didn't want to have anything to do with this, and someone actually called me out, one of my classmates, she says, 'Well, I want to hear from Juanita.' I wasn't ready. ... I didn't really have anything to say right now but maybe perhaps let me just recite my poem. So I did and so all the emotions just came out in class. After I finished it was like there was five minutes of silence in the whole class, just people taking it in. In my own way I felt a big load had been taken off my shoulders and I was able to really go inside and be part of the system and actually even analyze my own actions. ... If someone asked me something that I really didn't like I'd go, 'Oh my God this is a personal attack?' But then I began to realize it's not like that ... I learned more in those last three weeks than in the whole semester put together. Perhaps the concepts that we had all been learning from the beginning actually helped me to get to the stage where I was right at the end. But at the beginning, if you were to ask me, I would have said don't take this class. But now I have become a disciple."

Not all students experience Poetry Night in the same moving way. Some viewed Poetry Night as evoking a sense of power, as wonderful, inspiring and impressive, while others viewed it as troubling, disturbing, or even downright scary. To appreciate the range of responses, I present four accounts of how students recalled the event.

Student one: *"One of the highlights for this class was the first musical evening. ... This girl came up and she read a poem about death and it was basically her own eulogy. Then Professor Sterns asked her to recite it again and she did it, and he asked her to do it a third time and during the space of like 10 minutes the way she delivered her poem . . . was totally different, because she started in a very confident, a very public kind of way and by the third time, she was crying. For me (the highlight) was not the third time, it was the very first time that she read the poem. ... It was about loss and death ... and everyone has lost somebody dear. ... I was thinking, okay now this is something very, very powerful in terms of leadership, which means that if you strike the right type of chord with people you can make them do anything."*

Student two: *"Poetry Night was wonderful in the sense that everybody showed vulnerability and everybody showed that they are sensitive. I mean, every single guy, even me. It was really very, very interesting to see the reaction of the audience. ... It was 95% emotion and 5% brain. Probably I have never experienced such a thing in my life. So it was emotions, emotions, and emotions. Lots of persons would never have participated in this one, at least in the way it was done. It was pure emotions. This is why I loved it. It was an experience."*

Student three: *"Poetry Night was so scary. The professor was able to get students to go through an act on stage and hold everybody's attention. This will overpower whatever rational the group has. It's not about keeping emotion out, but I do not think it has a place when it comes to making progress on policy issues ... When dealing with one's emotions you need to deal with them rationally, in my own case at least. It's about rationally guiding the emotion, instead of emotions guiding the rational analysis."*

Student four: *"In one of the classes, Sterns told us about the power of music. One of our classmates started singing kind of a mourning song. She said; 'I would love that this song should be played after my death'. She was simply making kind of a rhyme. It was not that*

many words. It was simply like "Ahhhhhh." I can still remember that 70–80% of our class started crying, including me. I feel that I learned a lot from that kind of experience."

For many students, the event appeared to create unifying bonds with others in the class after a period of disorientation and discomfort. For others, watching students face their fears and anxieties appeared to generate a sense of "we are all in this together." There is no clear trend as to how many students typically hold one view versus another; it varies from semester to semester. Much has to do with the students' willingness to experiment, with how they react to the individual presenting in front of the room or with their own comfort in expressing emotions or in allowing emotions to be expressed in the context of a classroom. Regardless of the views expressed, Poetry Night emerges as a highly memorable event in a wide range of class learning experiences.

However, as faculty explain, the purpose of the Poetry Night exercise is not necessarily to learn how to hold the attention of others through the use of emotion, and nor is it to develop a sense of unity in connecting with others. The intent of faculty, as they describe it, is twofold. The first is *"to develop your capacity to hold a group,"* or in class parlance, "to create a holding environment". Developing the capacity to hold a group includes needing to slow down and allow for silence so others can absorb their message and attempt to keep up. Here is how one professor describes it:

"Pace the work. Don't overwhelm people with too much, too much reality, too much intimacy, too much inspiration. A group can only take so much and it's got to consider it, digest it and it's a very difficult thing to do. Many of you in the room when you intervene, collapse so many points and you get that moment and you want to put it all out there, but the group, by the time you get to the third, fourth or fifth (point), they forgot what you said in the first. So pace the work to allow for silence."

The second intent of Poetry Night is *"to develop your capacity to listen not just analytically, but 'musically.'"* In class parlance this is referred to as *"listening to the song beneath the words."* As one professor clarifies: *"When you listen musically, some of your usual judgments dissipate because many of our judgments are based on the way we listen analytically."*

The faculty acknowledges the sense of unity that students comment on after Poetry Night, but faculty attributes this to the use of silence that they say has the effect of lowering

the previous state of disequilibrium. Paradoxically, faculty does not interpret this sense of unity as suggesting that progress has been made. One professor explained this apparent paradox in the following way during a subsequent class discussion:

"One achieves an experience of equanimity or order, what you experienced in silence. … It could simply mean that we succeeded in scapegoating some faction and now we are in that immediate post fake-remedy euphoria and we are all feeling good again. And the urgency is gone away but the problem hasn't. So the experience of that silence doesn't necessarily indicate progress; it does indicate that you restored equilibrium. It might indicate progress."

Following Poetry Night, with three or four weeks still to go in the course, the faculty reminds students that their work is not yet complete. They prod students to continue questioning and learning. They do so by continuing to cast doubt on or disconfirm the idea that progress has been made.

The question of whether or not progress has been made remains, to me, an open one. On one hand, the faculty increases student anxiety by heightening the sense of emotion. For example, listening musically means allowing for or even heightening emotion for some students. On the other hand, the faculty actively partners with and support students at the front of the room in a bid, they say, to help them overcome their anxieties and learn ostensibly to "hold the group". In some respects, the faculty is simply trading one type of anxiety off against another. In Chapter 7, I take a deeper look at what trading off anxieties might suggest about how leadership is taught in this class.

Intervening and Taking Action: (Weeks 9–14)

In the final few weeks of class, the faculty continues to remind students that they need to keep asking difficult and probing questions as they think about what options they may have for taking action so they can open up a wider range of possibilities than they've had previously. The stories of in-class events that follow provide examples of how faculty try to spur students to take action, or to use the class term, to "intervene" in the class in ways that facilitate deeper discussions on topics that are politely being sidestepped. In the example, I

select what emerged as a rather confrontational debate on beliefs in religion, and on the values of national ideologies, such as capitalism and socialism.

It is the second to last week of the course. There is a growing sense of urgency among some students to get answers and figure out what this class has been about. The end is looming. The topic of the class is "Staying Alive", class parlance for "staying in and sticking with the game of leadership." Early in the class session, a student calls on the professor to give more guidance to the class, but this call is met by a stern reprimand from the professor.

Professor Jenkins begins the class discussion with his characteristic call, *"What's on your minds?* After a few reflective comments and exchanges from other students, a younger European male student, Ralph, speaks up, saying that he struggles with how it is left to students to determine what is discussed in class:

"I'm struggling with what legitimacy we have to define what the work is. . . We saw last week, which we also saw before, that there was a dispute in the class about what we should discuss, what the case was about ... I believe we all have a different vision of what the agenda should be. I'm struggling with what legitimacy each of us has to define what the work is or what we should be talking about in the class."

The professor replies in a calm but sarcastic tone: "*You're asking me?*" It's like waiting for the punch line of a joke that will never come and most students realize that the professor is not likely to give a direct answer. Ralph replies with a guarded smile, perhaps holding out hope that his question is not going to be rebuffed: "*If you can provide me an answer about that, it would be great."*

Professor Jenkins: "*I can make one up. Let me see."*

There's an awkward silence. In an effort to forestall a potentially harsh retort from the professor, a young woman meekly suggests that maybe another student attempt to answer. The professor cuts back in and chides the class once again for looking to him for answers. He goes on to describe why it is necessary for them to continue grappling with questions. He then rebukes the students for not intervening and experimenting more in the relative safety of the classroom: He speaks with a tone of urgency:

"But think about that question. At this stage, and where we're at, you're asking in this quest for the Holy Grail here – where is it? It's not like I've got it figured out, like I'm going to tell you what the work is in that case. … You often don't know what that work is. The group's not going to know. ... The work is an abstraction that we use, not a technical term to define specifically what's got to happen. ... From a leadership point of view, you have got to be asking yourself all the time, ... 'what really is the work?' ... In a way you are like a dentist poking at the nerves and then you discover, boy there's a raw nerve and you prod it even more because it reveals that's where the decay is in the system. ... This raises this question of purpose. Many of you ... find it difficult to really be present in the game ... even when you don't know what the work is ... to be there with your cynicism or skepticism or your doubt. ... Some of you have not put yourselves out there in this course; you don't know what failure really means in the context of this course. Or you think failure is getting a (grade)"two" instead of a "three", and then you get angry. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the failure of intervening and experimenting with provoking, evoking, experimenting with your diagnosis, experimenting and raising these tough issues. All you've got here is your ego to get bruised. Out there it's a tougher world."

One young woman, Amal, responds to the professor's challenge by introducing to the class the sensitive issue of religion. The class had skirted around this topic on a number of different occasions, particularly since the Poetry Night a few weeks ago when Amal recited a piece of prose that opened up the issue. Her piece of prose had begun with the taunting question, "Don't you love Jesus? Don't you love Jesus?" Others had touched on the topic of religion since, but there had been no sustained discussion.

Amal began her intervention, with no interruptions:

"I think that one issue we've also avoided is religion that I brought up a couple of weeks ago. We avoided it ... you guys have put (the work) on me in a way, whether you mean to or not. Because I've got a lot of emails, text messages or jokes in the hall and I think that I made people uncomfortable. So when you come by and say 'Amal, don't you love Jesus?' I'm making you uncomfortable. There's something going on here and you just want to bring it to me. But the work needs to be with all of us having a discussion. ... There is, I'm guessing, two big groups in this, those who see Jesus and God or a supreme being as holding a certain level of values that are higher. And there's another group ... that questions whether all the

answers lie within. To me, these are people we've never met. So… we can keep avoiding it and keep on making jokes to me in the hall and I keep taking it in."

There was a hint of sadness in Amal's voice as she said how difficult it was to deal with the remarks. By suggesting that some students in class were treating her harshly for her non-religious views, she placed the issue squarely on the table for class discussion.

"That wasn't hard standing up there (Poetry Night). The part that's been hard has been afterwards and all the comments. That's where I've really learned what it's like to hold steady. And I've also learned to not take it personally because I know what you are saying to me isn't about me, it's about whatever I brought up with you and how that is sitting with you."

During Poetry Night, Amal received a warm response to her repeated renditions. The piece of prose she chose to present was stirring in its content, yet down to earth in its delivery and tone. Following her renditions, Amal had identified the prose as an extract from *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's book about the struggles of homeless American farm laborers during the Great Depression. Her recitation in its entirety reads:

"Don't you love Jesus? Don't you love Jesus? Well I thought and I thought and finally I says, I don't know nobody named Jesus. I know a bunch of stories but I only love people. I love people so much that I'm fit to bust. And then I figure why do we have to hang it all on God and on Jesus. Maybe I figure it's all men and women. Maybe it's the holy spirit, the human spirit, the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul and everybody is part of it."

During the class sessions that followed, religion emerged as a theme and happened to be the topic in the student case-debrief that week as well. But the debrief and subsequent conversations had remained very respectful and reverential to the point that the professor described them as "*excessively polite indeed.*"

Now, the class has returned again to the topic of religion, but with more students claiming that they find the topic difficult. A second woman, Priyanka, speaks up immediately after Amal's intervention and claims to have had her own difficulties as a result of politely expressing her religious views in the class:

"So I'd like to partner with you, Amal, on that because I actually got a lot of the heat too for just representing the other perspective after Poetry Night, and I didn't do a very good job of holding steady actually, and I apologize to the people that I lost it on. I actually do think that you and I represent something in this system in terms of potentially two opposing views on religion. Maybe there's a little morality in there also. I wonder if it became so thrown about the two of us because it was easier to do that than to actually have the conversation about what do we think about what we brought up and what I represented?"

The next few comments come mostly from women. They contribute to "raising the heat," identifying themselves by their religious or non-religious beliefs and starting to articulate a message, 'Let's not pretend we agree.'

An American woman added her voice to the discussion, saying:

"I think it's even harder for atheists to constantly come under attack for where their values come from because I'm an atheist and I think that I have values too … I think we need to raise the temperature and have this discussion."

A TA pushes for more comments to bring in a greater mix of views: *"What about the non-Christian, non-atheists in the room? Has there been space to hear from that group?"*

The clearly articulated exchanges continue for another five minutes, at which point the professor intervenes, calling suddenly on Ralph, the student who earlier claimed he was struggling with how it was left to students to determine what was discussed in class. As the professor calls on him, it appears as though Ralph might not have been listening to the other students.

Professor Jenkins: *"So Ralph as you look at this and you are doing the diagnostic work, what do you think the work is right now?"*

Ralph hesitates and answers in an unsure manner. He tries to engage with the professor rather than with the others in the room and seems more interested in what the professor is saying than in the students. He replies: *"I think you're seeing it as a learning perspective but I see more…"*

The professor responds: *"No, you don't know what I'm thinking. I asked you what do you think is the work right now? … It's a very practical question."*

Ralph: *"I think we don't agree on the work in the class."*

Professor: *"I'm asking you what do you think is the work right now?"*

Ralph concedes quietly *"I don't know."*

A male student who rarely spoke in the class jumps in and redirects the conversation: *"I think we need to hear from the different factions on what their views are and what assumptions they bring to the table and then we can start having the conversations and arguments about. At the moment, we are talking around the issue."*

The conversation starts to include more voices, and a young American man expresses his skepticism: *"I don't see the opportunity for me as a Muslim to speak up . . . the discussion is mostly about Jesus."*

A woman from the Middle East politely opposes this view: *"I am Muslim and I love Jesus, but I see Jesus as a prophet not a God. This is the issue we really need to grapple with, who is what and why do we interpret him or her the way we do."*

Just seven minutes after being cold called by the professor, Ralph comes back into the conversation with a comment that shows not only that he is listening attentively to the student dialog but that he has an opinion on "what the work is" at that moment. Thus, he answers the question the professor had put directly to him.

Ralph replies directly to the Muslim woman from the Middle East, cautiously opposing her perspective on what she believes is the work:

"On the contrary, I believe that starting to interpret Jesus might be work avoidance in this room. ... An interesting new road that we could take in the class is just to think about Amal's struggle as a person who tried to implement leadership on Poetry Night. She has constantly been marginalized by other people who were attacking her because of the role that she was playing and because of what resonated in everyone. Maybe focusing on that... on her role as a leader in saying that poem. I think that's something interesting; how she said 'I prepared the poem, I put it out there, but then what happened later on I could not strategize about it. Actually I had to wiggle through, hold steady and be flexible, just for me to not lose it.' That to me is related to some of the work today of staying alive. How do you partially prepare in order to exercise leadership? How do you train yourself to be flexible when the

work comes through because you know it's impossible to prepare for everything that's going to come?"

The professor acknowledges or, in the class parlance, "partners" with Ralph by building on his contribution and in this way shows a willingness to give guidance once a student makes an effort to intervene. He also moves the discussion on, pointing out the need to step beyond the discursive work and be willing to attempt different forms of action.

"Don't mistake the conversation for doing the work. It may be a piece of the work. … I think six-year-olds can have the conversation exactly the way it's being expressed right now. It's such a safe conversation. We haven't even touched any of those raw nerves really. It's like we are going to go out in the world … and have that conversation, but what are you learning about that here? … There's a zone of safety. In this zone of safety is the zone of predictability where we all kind of operate. Words like respect and order, prominence, status position, technical work, it's all there. We all become masterful and we've all got a little role and a little outfit we put on to play the game in there. But leadership means moving out there into this zone of uncertainty. Now how far you go is your choice, but usually adaptive work is going to be taking place out here. So until you kind of get out here and start touching those raw nerves you are not going to have much of an appreciation for what the work is. While you are back here in the confines of your safe secure nest, with authority structures all around to protect you, not much adaptive work is going to get done. Every system, even America has a ton of adaptive work that's got to be done around religion. So we simply mirror that larger environment here."

In calling on students to move beyond safe conversations, he sums up his ideas on what it means to practice leadership. In his view, learning to lead is about becoming involved, "playing the game", or "intervening" in the tougher, potentially dangerous and highly sensitive domains and allowing for having no ready answers. Leadership, as understood in this course, is not safe; it is not something predictable. "Progress" will be slow, and one needs to be willing to stay in the game, doing "adaptive work" or taking on "adaptive leadership."

*   *   *   *

Many students, when recalling the course, do not specifically use the word or term "intervene" when referring back to the class or to their current work as leaders. However,

they use phrases that are analogous, as in the two student accounts that follow. In many ways, the course and the views of leadership associated with it are all about "intervening" and "becoming involved". In formal interviews, many students claim to consider that leadership work is about becoming involved in tougher and often intractable business or societal issues, where no ready answers are to be found. One student even suggested in an interview that the course might be renamed or reframed this way:

"I have some problems with the title of the class. It is something more like 'Leading within Seriously Difficult Situations,' like crisis management or something. Or 'Learning How to Intervene.' It could be reframed but definitely is a very interesting class."

This idea—that leadership is about becoming involved in seriously difficult and intractable societal problems—is one that is echoed across virtually all student interviews in one way or another. As students discuss what they claim to be the tougher leadership challenges they face, they tend to raise points about how they are trying to cope with these struggles and they frequently relate these points back to some aspect of the course framework. This is one of the most consistent findings across the data. In Chapters 6 and 7, I discuss in more detail my reading of the interview data. However, before moving on, I provide two more examples of how students recall the lessons that are put forward in the final segment of the course.

This first account is taken from my interview with Gabriela. It took place two years after the class. In her account, Gabriela describes the struggles she purportedly faced in her work as a leader:

"One of my biggest personal challenges ... historically for me in leadership has been the proper kind of patience and pacing for the work. I'm always well in advance of other people on the issues. I press and pressure the system a lot for rapid change. I think prior to the course I was unable to express that that was a problem, but I sort of sensed it. ... I knew that my leadership failures, many of them were attributed to that sort of thing, but I just couldn't put a name to it. I think during that course it was really recognizable in my own case for me and also in the small group work. Then I think, after the class I was extremely sensitive to the fact that this is still a part of my human nature. ... So I would say that's the biggest change is my self-awareness and trying to use the tools whenever appropriate to pace the work properly, to recognize the issues from someone else's point of view, and not to put

such a pressure on the overall system. ... So I work for a government agency in Spain right now. It is ... poorly run. The employee morale is at its lowest in our agency. The average tenure of employee is highest, so we have oldest workforce, many actually eligible to retire right now. People still use, frankly, typewriters to do their work. I'm not being sarcastic and I'm not trying to be glib about it, but the work environment for me is incredibly difficult. Layer that on top of what we do ... we deal with poverty issues, things that I'm just deeply passionate about. The gap between those issues, why I'm involved in public service and where this agency is in being effective and efficient, is really difficult for me. There is no framework to just deal with that. ... I appreciate that much of this agency was created to deal with intractable poverty. These people, probably at the time when they came in, were civil servants with a longer-term view of contributing to their people. But now I see them 40 and 50 years on and candidly I don't think there's a role for them in an effective agency right now. I can't reconcile that because my values appreciate that everyone can contribute to society but when you can't type a memo or deal with a 21st century environment, I can't reconcile the two because the issues are too important. I guess that's to say, God bless Sterns, I just don't think that there is a framework that will tackle that. ... We see the enormity of the challenge ... and this environment doesn't allow me to do the necessary work because ... you have to deal with all those other structural issues. I'm not interested in engaging in other structural issues. ... So I have to figure out, in my own personal leadership, how to not give up and how to be effective still in that environment. ... So my nature is still to throw up my hands and say it's not worth it. I can still be an advocate for these issues but elsewhere. My leadership dilemma is giving up, just going elsewhere. ... I suppose, the first thing that I do is think about some of my other classmates in that course and the challenges that they faced and that they shared in class, from personal stories about ... their civil wars and leaving family members ... I think that my challenges are so insignificant compared to that. So I rely a lot on the fact that these people have committed themselves to adaptive leadership and have found a way through that and I should be able to do it as well."

Gabriela referred to learning to "pace the work." The faculty repeatedly uses the term "pacing" during Poetry Night in the context of taking it slowly and allowing others to keep up. The catch phrase used in the class is "pacing the work at a rate that others can handle." While Gabriela presents this as a key personal challenge, many other students recall pacing as a key concept they take away from the class.

My second account is drawn from my interview with Bradley, again two years after the class ended. Similar to Gabriela, he also describes the struggles he faced and explains what purportedly keeps him going.

"The class has given me tools and concepts. That really helps in being more aware of what is happening. The concepts have given me a language for something I already knew to a large degree, that's why I connected with it. ... As soon as you become aware you can also go three levels deeper, which you wouldn't have been able to do if you didn't have the language. ... One (concept) that I should have mentioned ... is the rate of change a person or a society or a group can absorb. Actually, I would put that number one. By now that is so internalized that I don't even think about that any more. ... Yeah ... suddenly you can hear these terms you know, sort of popping back or these little sentences pop back into your head and then you're reminded of it and that helps. ... I think that in a way it's much easier to just be a manager and close your eyes to the reality. I think if you open your eyes to the reality it just becomes a hell of a lot tougher. So I wouldn't evaluate my capacity very highly. But I would evaluate my capacity to see that as quite high. ... It's very much all this building a democratic political system ... there are so many fragmenting forces at play. ... I have found in the systems thinking and complexity theory and a lot of Sterns' stuff, I'm using these as my weapons to fight my fight. I'm fighting my fight, not because I'm interested in that (systems thinking) you know. It's the other way around. ... I'm very ready to give up because it's just too difficult. But so far I do keep pushing that. In a way it's a little bit better now because I'm not alone any more. I have a few others that feel the same way and that is such a relief. I think what I find the hardest is that if you stay in the game there are only so many opportunities you have to actually have the conversations or find that entry point or put a little kernel in somewhere or sew a few seeds here and there. There's not that many times that you can do that. If you constantly are repeating the same stuff all over again, you completely become ineffective. Say that 10–20% of your time you are able to sew a little seed or water your plants a little bit. What I find hardest is that 80% of the time you are in the game and you are actually having to replicate the same system to play along with the system with the rules."

The two stories show how some students struggle to stay in "the game of leadership", and "not give up" despite the purported interest in or passion they hold for the work they do. While they use different concepts from the course to describe the problems they face, both

students acknowledge that "intervening" or becoming involved in the tougher work issues. Making progress takes a long time and it needs to be managed or paced "at a rate others can handle." I return to this point in Chapter 7, when discussing what lessons from the course all students claim to recall.

Summary

The stories I have presented in the chapter are intended to illustrate, both implicitly and explicitly, how the faculty attempts to weave the various learning themes into the student learning experiences. In summarizing 14 weeks of class activities into only a few in-class encounters, I have chosen stories to illustrate some of the most critical learning points in the course. I also chose stories based on their richness and descriptive detail. Arguably, each student's perspective is unique, and members of each class raise this point repeatedly. Yet some students express particular points of view that are shared by a number of other students and I sought to represent some of the shared perspectives in the selected stories.

To tie together these different stories and accounts from inside the classroom, with how faculty intends that students learn to lead, I return to a summary of how the course is designed. Previously, in Chapter 4 I presented three learning concepts or activities around which the course is designed: i) Step Back and Observe, ii) Interpret what is going on in the Group Dynamics, and iii) Intervene or take action. I represented these activities together as the "small group learning process" and mentioned that these activities also mirror the learning processes the professors seek to emulate in the larger class (see Figure 4.1). In the beginning of this chapter, I set forth the three the learning themes or overarching learning ideas that faculty use when guiding students to "practice leadership" throughout the semester; (a) experiment with their own informal authority in the classroom, (b) explore the roles that they take on and play in the class, and (c) take responsibility for their own learning.

In Figure 5.1 I combine the above three learning themes, with the three core design elements of the course, to create a more detailed picture of how faculty intends that students learn to lead in the context of the class.
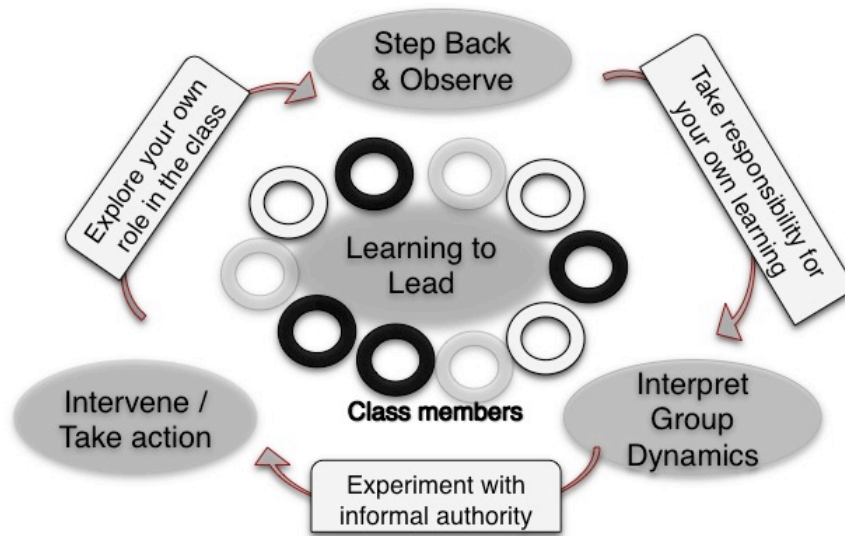
Figure 5.1. How faculty intends that students learn to lead

In Chapter 6, I provide more detail on how certain sub-groups emerge as a result of the disequilibrium that is frequently present in the learning environment and the ensuing interaction amongst students and between students and the teaching team. I discuss the impact these subgroups have on the collective learning experience in the class. Later, in Chapter 7, I explore the different types of anxieties that students can experience in class as a result of the disequilibrium and I look at how faculty may be trading off these anxieties as they teach about leadership in this class.

CHAPTER 6 – THE TRIBES (IN THE CLASSROOM)

In the previous chapter, I provided a description of how the faculty organizes the class and the way students learn to lead from their experience in the class. I presented stories from inside the classroom, along with examples of how students recalled their in-class experiences. I mentioned the variation amongst student responses and illustrated the point with examples from a number of different student accounts.

In this chapter, I present the results of analyzing my formal interview data. In the first section, I recap on how I interpreted my interview data and grouped students according to their responses. I then introduce the three groupings, which I call the tribes: Zealots, Skeptics, and Seekers. I use the term tribes in relation to a group of students who share a habit, interest, or origin and amongst whom leadership is informal. I provide examples of each tribe, drawing from student accounts given over a two-year period. Following the descriptions of the tribes, I then summarize the characteristics that differentiate each of the tribes.

Interpreting the Interview Data

In Chapter 3, I provided details of how I analyzed the data from my study and I described how my early findings suggested that all students claimed to have experienced some level of frustration as they recalled their experiences in the class. However, the way in which they recalled the frustration or nature and origin of the frustration varied significantly. I created categories or tribes based on how students recalled their frustrations and claimed to have subsequently dealt with them.

I first provide a brief preview of each tribe. Zealots are the cheerleaders for most of the class activities, actively attempting to reinforce what they believe the professor is advocating. Skeptics strongly oppose certain learning practices in class, and their opposition does not appear to waiver. Seekers look on the class primarily as a laboratory in which they must take risks and experiment in order to learn. Their claim of lingering frustrations, if any after two years, is with themselves for not experimenting more. While the Seekers are the largest of the tribes, the Zealots and Skeptics, as I explain later in this chapter, frequently exert a strong influence on the collective and individual learning experiences in the class.

Before I present detailed descriptions of the groupings, let me first dispel some possible misconceptions. At first glance, the naming might suggest the categories refer to students'

willingness to learn or their capacity to understand what is really going on in the class. That is not the case. Students in all groups claim to recall and put into use a range of concepts from the class leadership framework. Also, students in all groups claim to have gained significant insights from their learning experiences in the class.

It is also important to remind the reader that this is consistently one of the most highly rated courses at the school, as voted by the students and discussed in Chapter 4. It has a long-standing reputation as a leadership course that "everybody should take." What I found, however, is that student responses to the course differed and these differences fall roughly into these three categories, as described below. Based on interview samples, Zealots make up 20–30% of the group, Skeptics 10–20%, and Seekers 50–60%. There did not appear to be any clear demographic differences within any of these groups. Women were as likely to be Skeptics as Zealots. Older students were as likely to be represented in all groups as were international students.

Introducing the tribes

Students do not fall into a particular category on their first day in class. These categories are emergent or nascent responses to individual learning experiences in the class. Membership in the groupings is a co-creation of the class structure and the resulting student responses over time.

The categories, however, are not comprised of students who share perspectives on certain topics. Such groupings—often referred to in class parlance as "factions"—are those of students who have common perspectives on topics such as the class structure, punctuality rules, religion, or war. Within the categories, students do not necessarily share common perspectives, but they do share a common way of coping with the challenges of the in-class learning practices.

For each tribe, I select one student who typifies the grouping, and I provide extracts from their first, second, and third interviews to show how their expressed views change, or not, over time. After I present these examples, I discuss how students from one grouping may influence the learning of others.

The groupings are not fixed but represent how the students typically expressed themselves in each of their formal interviews. These groups may become apparent in class but because many students express a more limited set of views in front of the entire class, membership in the groups is not always readily apparent, although it may become apparent in indirect ways, such as the level of attention that students give to certain activities.

Zealots - Jonathan

Jonathan is a student from outside the USA, taking the Masters in Public Policy degree program at HKS. He claimed to have changed his attitude quite decidedly about a number of learning practices he experienced in the class. During the first of his three interviews, I asked Jonathan if he had experienced any "ah-ha moments" where something that he had disliked or had caused him frustration suddenly began to make sense. In response, Jonathan claimed to have had a number of these moments. One story that he recounted related to the professor wearing his grandfather's world war medals to class. The other related to a student revealing, what Jonathan considered as rather personal information when she presented her leadership case to the large group:

"There were moments in class, like when (the) professor came with the medals of his grandfather from the Anzac Day. He put on this Australian song about the Gallipoli massacre. That touched me for many, many reasons. ... That was ... an ah-ha moment for me. I was one of the guys that did not like the music. I did not like the tribal music and did not like the classical music but in this moment my entire attitude changed and I said, look in the end it is not what you hear it is how much you resonate with what you hear. It was not the music. If it was just the tribal music it does not resonate with me but when I have something that resonates with me, I really love it. So I saw the change of attitude, my change of attitude. What else? When the girl ... presented her case in the large class. ... That was very, very brave. ... Look, I mean, I would have never done this. But, it is interesting, it's really important but I would have never done this. Privacy has some limits and I would never, never, never have done this. ... A couple of (students) ... really felt bad about it ... and they asked for the entire session to stop. ... That was a changing moment for me. ... The entire case was doomed. ... So I started speaking on behalf of the girl. I said 'look if she does not have any problem in presenting this, we have to respect it and if you are really very sensitive

please stay here and listen and if you are really so sensitive that you cannot handle it, you can go out. But she has to go on.' ... I don't know if I've handled it in the best way, but at least she received the presentation."

In both situations, Jonathan's remarks suggest that he had altered or changed his attitude towards the particular class activity and it had become more acceptable to him. His narrative suggests that he suddenly shifted to where he accepted and even endorsed the norms that were emerging in the class. His actions could be interpreted as even co-creating some of the emergent norms in the classroom.

In his second interview, 6–8 months after the class, Jonathan referred back to the same incident that he claimed had initially embarrassed him and he then recalled other moments where he claimed to have felt uncomfortable and did not readily accept what was going on. In these cases, he claimed to defer to the professor's superior wisdom in knowing what was best. Later in the same interview I asked Jonathan if there was a time in the class where he had felt "confused or uncertain." He quickly provided an example, but throughout the interview he laughed heartily as he recounted his claims of feeling frustrated, as though they were all in the past:

"Do you remember that in class ... we had some conversations about some very, very personal issues from certain classmates? In the beginning that was kind of embarrassing to have to cope with. Now I think that I'm ready in a situation like this to state my opinion and try somehow to help or even learn from others in order to face my own problems. In that sense ... I think that in a difficult situation, conversation, discussion, question I'm more open, more ready. ... There were some (other) moments that made me feel uncomfortable despite the fact that I did not participate. I was not so much embarrassed but still I think ... the class could still go on without some embarrassing moments. But probably for some others this was a moment of revelation, as there were other moments for me. ... If I try to isolate a couple of moments and say 'this' could be like 'that,' I don't think it would be very productive. ... I think that the professor has the experience to know much better than myself."

When I asked Jonathan if there was a time in the class where he felt confused or uncertain, he replied:

"Oh yes, it was only the first month, I mean it, the entire month. I was not sure what I was doing there. I felt that nothing was of any importance whatsoever. I felt that I had been

shot a couple of times in class without any apparent reason. Yes, I was bored, I was frustrated. The first month was a nightmare. ... It was a significant period of time. Yeah. I wanted to participate from the very beginning. I was not, you know, not part of 'the silent faction.' I wanted to participate. I tried to participate because, you know, it's a matter of personality. I like these things. But in the beginning it was really, really frustrating for quite a long time. ... I was always (thinking) ... everyone is speaking about the class, it can't be that bad. Give this guy a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance. Suddenly, I cannot even think of a certain point that my attitude changed, but I think it was not only in the (large) class, it was 'the small group' that really helped me change my attitude, towards the class and in general."

In his third interview two years after the class, I asked Jonathan once again about any lingering frustrations with the class. He claimed that he had none, although he vividly recalled the discomfort he claimed to have felt at the time. Jonathan claims to reconcile his frustrations by seeing the potential learning benefit of these norms and accepting that even if the implementation is slightly less than perfect, the professor must be doing the right thing. Jonathan's narrative suggests that he sees the professor as his primary role model in class:

"I really love (the professor). He's a great guy. I think he over did it in a couple of situations in the poetry night, but that's all. Personally I have no frustration at all. I felt very uncomfortable in a couple of situations but definitely not personally. ... I think the embarrassment was in the end beneficial ... I think that these guys learned a lot from the certain situation they got themselves in. This is a problem with an experiential class. Sometimes it can be too embarrassing. ... I think that in the end, that was beneficial for them. I would remember it. I'm sure they remember it. But I think that in the end, it helps them see things in another way. ... Being embarrassed, or thinking something in a negative way that makes you feel very uncomfortable does not mean it has no educational value. Vice versa. I think it had great educational value. In the end I don't blame the professor. Probably if I were in (the professor's) shoes, I would have stopped some things a little bit earlier, you know, whatever!"

In summary, Jonathan continually looks for reasons to enthuse about, uphold, and even endorse the learning practices. The example shows that Zealots such as Jonathan learn by coming to accept the learning practices and the associated norms they believe the professor introduces and reinforces in the class.

Other examples of Zealots

Zealots see the professor as the primary role model for leadership in the class, and their preference is to learn from him. For example, in interviews they frequently quote what the professor said in class or what he said to them in meetings outside class. They treat his comments as facts or guidelines that needs to be followed even if they are at first confused by them. Some claim that this guidance has transformed them and the way they work as leaders.

In Chapter 5, Bruno is an example of a Zealot. In his second interview, he claimed that despite his frustrations he eventually came to realize what the professor was trying to achieve. His narrative suggests that he began to re-interpret what he believed the professor was really trying to do. With his purported new insight his claims of frustration seem to have lessened:

"Remember when we had the first interview I was telling you that Professor Sterns threw some 'work' as they say (in class); 'You Mason Fellows, you are arrogant,' or something like that. Now when I think about it, at the time I was frustrated. ... But in hindsight what I came to realize is that it was clearly a way of touching our string, as he likes to put it. ... So the difference between reacting and responding has been something I am aware of. The sense of awareness of that, of why did Professor Sterns did that, was just to see this."

In class, the Zealots emerge as most consistently enthusiastic about the class learning practices and the professor's own actions within the class. They may appear to suddenly change their minds as they become more open to the influence of the professor. For example, if the professor publically embarrasses someone who comes late to class, Zealots may initially question the professor but will stop short of intensifying the criticism. If pushed, they look for reasons to support the professor's actions.

During the Carlos incident described in the previous chapter, we saw several Zealots supporting the professor. Following the incident, for example, Terry appeared to criticize the professor for how he engaged with Carlos, but Hareesh jumped in, emerging as a Zealot in countering Terry's criticisms and appearing to steadfastly support the professor's action. Hareesh repeats words and phrases used earlier by the professor, in order to endorse the

professor's own actions. His actions seem to further intensify the disequilibrium, as he pushes back on Terry's criticism of the professor and support of Carlos:

"In a technical challenge situation like you're describing, yes, someone violating the norm I can back away from them and continue on with my job or my purpose. In adaptive situations, there are no rules like that. People do get in your face. Some people will be shooting at you, metaphorically or literally. Okay? You have to be able to adjust to it."

When disequilibrium emerges in the classroom and the professor is seen to make an example of a student, Zealots align with the professor, often intensifying the disequilibrium. Zealots appear to thrust the responsibility for resolving the problem onto the other student, rather than take it on board personally. However, if they believe the professor supports a student's actions, the Zealot may take on responsibility of supporting that student also. Jonathan appeared to do this as he purportedly supported the woman who was presenting a very difficult case in class. In either situation, the actions of the Zealot often serve to heighten the emotion and intensify the disequilibrium in the class. With their strong desire to support the professor, Zealots derive their sense of comfort or encouragement from the professor's words or actions.

Skeptics - Olga

Olga is a European first year student in the Master's program in Public Policy. During each of her three formal interviews, she consistently expressed claims that the use of emotion in class was something she experienced as negative. In her first interview, she claimed that she felt "marginalized" because of her questioning this. She attributed this emotional focus to the presence in class of older students or "mid-careers".[13]

"I think the class almost had two sets of people, you have people that it becomes a sort of personal transformation, and then you have people that see the class more from the framework perspective, which is very useful ... I would consider myself as being in that

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[13] "Mid-careers", as described in more detail in Chapter 4, are students who have anywhere from 12–30 or more years of work experience and come from the school's one-year Master's programs.

second group. I had a negative experience in the sense that if you don't buy into every aspect of the class ... you feel somehow marginalized. I think that was for me a negative highlight, where going against the emotion was almost considered something negative. ... The class is a very powerful class, so I think that when that happens, whenever people question what the class does to people ... the methods used or how people react then you are almost boxed as a non-believer. It's almost as if it was a kind of a cult and you just don't understand it. I guess for me that was just a little strange. ... The Poetry Night really didn't work for me ... when emotion gets so highlighted, I think it is difficult to be analytic and to actually be able to stay rational ... I understand what the purpose was, in the context of understanding your environment and knowing whether or not you are connecting with your system ... and really deliver what you are trying to say. But there was such a strong emphasis on emotion. I mean some people cried ... for me that had nothing to do with the class ... for me it was just people's own kind of psychology. ... I would say that is definitely one thing that didn't work for me. ... When emotion really became a focal point and when people were confusing what was the class, with what was their own personal boundary. For me, I felt that I could no longer participate in class. It was almost dangerous. ... I don't learn very well with the people from the mid-career program. Apparently again, it's based on my experience in the class. I felt that ... sometimes the people that embodied that gimmicky sense were from that program and it's interesting because I actually did not know they were from the program until during the class."

For Olga, excessive use of emotion appeared "gimmicky." According to the claims she made in her second interview, her frustration with the emotional aspect of the class did not appear to have altered. She appears resolute in her dislike of the use of emotion in the classroom. From her narrative, she appears to have acted out her opposition by "disconnecting" or "not participating in the conversation." Her narrative also suggests that she resisted attempts by other members of the class, even her small group, to alter her views or to get her to "engage."

"I was very uncomfortable with the Poetry Night. ... It seemed that for some people the class was almost like a therapy session, where it gave them the opportunity to tap into things they had not tapped before and to connect with people in an emotional way ... I feel there's a setting and a time for those type of things and I don't feel comfortable with that being the classroom. In the Poetry Night people cried. I was very uncomfortable. ... There were a few

(other) times in class I also felt uncomfortable. There was one time where a girl screamed. I just I think that it adds to the lack of seriousness, where there is no right or wrong. Since you are talking about emotion ... you can't engage in a conversation or in an argument with someone when they are being emotional ... I wish that the professors would find a way of surfacing those tensions, without it becoming therapy ... Often times honestly it was the mid-career students who I think were re-finding themselves. ... I think when that would happen in the class, I would disconnect a little and that was it. In the reflections, I tried figuring out why that made me uncomfortable. ... More than anything it was really disappointing I think ... so my mechanism for coping was just to disconnect and try to understand why I felt the way I did. ... What was most helpful was the small group actually, because it was something that we talked about a couple of times. But still, my reactions didn't change. ... Even though what was often encouraged was to try to engage and I was an engaged observer, but I didn't want to participate in the conversation when people were screaming and crying."

Olga's remarks suggest that her reaction to the use of emotion did not change during the semester. Her way of dealing with it was to disconnect from those particular aspects or activities in the class. Other students may express similar frustrations to the use of emotions in class, but a Skeptic, as I have defined it in this study, will strongly uphold his or her opposing view, even when challenged by colleagues, the TAs, or the professor.

In her third interview, Olga's frustrations remained the same and if anything, her alleged dislikes were even more strongly worded than in prior interviews.

"I think ... how dramatic everything was, with people crying etcetera. That is still frustrating ... I think that back then what I did was try to disconnect, to remove myself from that, so that it wouldn't bother me. I also tried to understand why it was something that bothered me. That was really rooted in how I viewed a course. I view a class more from the tangible tactics that you are able to derive and the knowledge. ... Some of the people had real issues. Some were sobbing in the class. There were people that yelled. ... If you are questioning your multiracial background and trying to figure out how that informs your thinking, I think that is really interesting and yes, let's have a dialog about that. But if ... you start crying because your father didn't pay attention to you, that, to me, is just inappropriate. ... If I could just capture in a sentence, it would be that the issue with bringing in emotions that are very personal is that it removes all objectivity from

conversations ... (The class) is meant to replicate what real life would be, where you would not have people sobbing ... that's my experience. I mean I haven't had people sobbing and asking me what to do with their relationship with their Dad after talking to them for like twenty minutes. That was really uncomfortable. I didn't like that at all."

Despite Olga's opposition to some of the learning practices, her remarks suggest that she had great respect for the professor and she claimed to have learned a lot from the class:

"(The) professor really did an amazing job of carrying the class. I think that all in all, I feel that I left the class having learned a lot and having had a very particular experience."

The example shows that Skeptics, such as Olga, purportedly learn by setting aside or disconnecting from the specific issues they oppose, at least for a time, and focusing on other learning practices. Moreover, their opposition does not appear to waiver or mellow over time. If challenged by faculty, TAs, or other students, they are likely to act out their opposition rather than change their views. This raises questions about whether students' lingering frustrations leave them open to learning from such situations beyond the classroom. I return to this question later in the chapter.

Other examples of Skeptics

In interviews, Skeptics reveal their opposition quite readily when asked about their lingering frustrations. Skeptics most often express opposition to one of the following: (1) the use of emotion, (2) the playing out of an "elite authority" role within the class by the professor, the TAs, or others, and/or (3) the absence of familiar class structure that often appears to them to result in chaos. While other students may express reservations about these practices and may even claim to be frustrated by them at times, Skeptics go further by "acting out" their opposition, meaning disconnecting or ignoring what is happening in class.

While Skeptics and Zealots may both express frustrations with certain learning practices, at the end of the class the Zealots claim to have come to accept those practices while Skeptics will not have changed their minds. For example, Skeptics may say they oppose the role that the TAs play in the classroom or when grading their weekly assignments and, if so, they will discount or disregard any or all feedback they get from TAs.

The account that follows is how one Skeptic expressed his frustration with the TAs two years after the class:

"One (lingering) frustration … is with the TA[14] process. Hopefully I'm not unique there. I still don't understand what their role was in the small group … Am I overplaying that they were supposed to have a role? … It just felt extremely frustrating that they were present and commenting on us in a way that felt very intrusive. I had a thing with, frankly, the TA… Maybe it is individualized. I still don't get the TA model. If the point of Professor Jenkins is to be completely ambiguous about what they do, he did a good job. It doesn't make any sense to me why they were even around."

In class, Skeptics may be silent or vocal about their opposition, but if challenged they are likely to express and hold their opposition rather than change or reconsider their views. Their actions or inactions are consistent with their opposition. By their opposition, they can provoke actions, reactions, or even anxiety from other class members in turn.

In Chapter 5, "the Carlos incident" is an example of a Skeptic who openly acts out his opposition to what he considers to be the absence of formal structure in the classroom. When the professor gently shook Carlos suggesting that he needed to get used to operating without structure in the "chaos" of the real world, Carlos openly resisted the professor's comment:

"First of all if I'm not hearing you and you are this close to me (putting his hands up to show how close Sterns was)*, maybe there is a problem with the way you are communicating it? 'Cus, you know, I didn't understand what you were saying. I don't think it's that far out of left field to say that some people do well and some like facilitation. And I'd like to ask if others feel similar …"*

By openly confronting the professor, Carlos appeared to provoke others to react to him in turn, and the resulting heated exchanges included many others in the room. Through their staunch action or inaction, sometimes accompanied by defensive reasoning, Skeptics give other students an opportunity to look at their reasoning and explore the logic and grounding of such views.

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[14] Teaching assistant (TA)

A similar but less dramatic example of a Skeptic is in Chapter 1, "the Franco outburst". Franco is an example of a Skeptic who claims that he wants to listen to and learn from the professor but not from others in the class because that's what he has "paid for". Franco's comments provoked others in turn, generating a rather lengthy discussion. It gave other students an opportunity to potentially learn what ideologies or principals France was trying to represent in his outburst. Ironically, it may be others who derive the lessons from the Skeptics' strongly held views. Skeptics often derive different lessons, as they learn how to manage the reactions their stance can provoke.

Despite the disequilibrium that their skepticism may generate, Skeptics appear to derive a sense of comfort from their continuing belief in the particular learning approach they seek to uphold or promote. In Olga's case, she seeks to promote learning from logic, not emotion. Carlos seeks to promote the use of structure or facilitation to guide learning, and Franco seeks to promote learning directly from the professor.

Skeptics claim to have gained some valuable learning insights from the class, setting aside or perhaps despite their stated frustrations. They all claim that they would recommend the course to others but typically with some cautionary caveats included.

Seekers - Sheridan

Sheridan is an American mid-career student who, in all three of his formal interviews, continually promotes the idea of trying things out and experimenting in class in order to learn. In his first interview, I asked him "What didn't work well for you?" In response, Sheridan recalled a time when he said he lacked patience with others.

"I need to have a lot of patience with people who I thought were de-railing the discussions and wasting time on things that I thought were not useful for me. But then I thought 'that's the way of learning, it takes time.' So it's a sense of solidarity. When I want the discussion to go to the next level and people were talking (about) technical things, I was thinking we are wasting everybody's time. Now, to me it's part of everyone's learning. ... The professor might be able to move the discussion to the next level at certain points in time, (but) that has a cost. I understand that cost. ... I talked directly with people. I went to Carlos and talked to him. ... So we had conversations. ... He told me 'I'm going to slap you in the face in

front of everybody to see how you react' and I said 'okay, why don't you try it,' (shoulder shrug). We had very insightful conversations, because we were talking about authority and rules. I said 'there are no rules here.' He wanted to have rules, so he said 'I am going to slap you in the face the next time you speak in class to see if you like no rules at all.' I said 'why don't you try it see what we learn from it.' That led to a series of conversations in and outside of class that were very productive… and that's the way I did it. I said something in class and he was uncomfortable. I went to talk to him, so we dealt with the issue … outside of class. … I would keep on trying to maintain a balance between not talking too much, because you need to try better. You cannot become the one who talks all the time. … That class for me was like affirmative concentration. I would take notes and relate peoples' comments or Sterns' comments to my previous experience. I was learning all the time. … It's not only the concepts but the process, because in the process of understanding the framework, using the framework, progressing and learning about leadership, you need to practice … learn to fail, learn to take risks. Just going through the process itself was very helpful because I need to be aware all the time, of not overreacting to someone's comment, trying to understand where they are coming from. All that."

Sheridan appeared willing to trust the class environment and claimed that understanding the learning process was as important as understanding the leadership framework. At the time of his second interview, Sheridan has just started a new job that he said was very challenging. He had responsibility for establishing policies that could potentially impact a large sector of his community. He expressed concerns about the complexity of the leadership task that lay ahead but claimed to be able to view things differently as a result of taking the class.

"I think in my previous responsibilities … I didn't acknowledge the legitimacy of interest groups that represented perspectives that were opposite to mine. I would try to move things along without them, listening to them but without them. Right? What I do now is that we are all part of the system and just another piece of the system, if you will. Those interest groups and their perspectives need to be included in the process. … That's a really big change in the way I am doing my work now. … I understand those courses as the beginning of a process. I think it's impossible that in one or two courses that you get all of it. I think the (class) experience was very intense because we live the course as a laboratory in itself. Then actually outside of the course, outside of the class, we're living and talking about these

concepts most of the time. ... I wouldn't say I have any frustrations, other than being able to spend another year there. ... There is a gap between having the technical knowledge, or knowing about public policy or whatever and being able to move 'the system,' to execute things, to get things done. (The class) opens up your mind and your soul, to new possibilities of making transformation possible. I'm now facing two very difficult challenges here in a system that is corrupt, that is inefficient. Some parts of it work well but it's pretty tiny parts. It's a system in which there is a lot of economic and public interest and a lot at stake. I have been analyzing this situation now for two weeks without a clear answer yet on how to tackle the issues. But I know that with the perspective that I have, I am doing much better than I would have done without the course. So even with the other tools and the awareness it's very difficult. I cannot imagine how I would be approaching this without taking these classes."

Sheridan's narrative suggests that he views his leadership challenges as opportunities to use his awareness and test out the skills he recalls from class. During the third interview, Sheridan brought up an issue from class that he had not mentioned in prior interviews. It apparently came to mind when I asked if he had any lingering frustrations.

"Well I haven't thought of (lingering frustrations), but now that you ask the question, in our study group there was one person that was difficult to deal with. We let him talk and do many things that were not well taken by the group because we didn't want to confront him. We thought it was not worth going back. I'm going through a similar situation right now. The reflection that I shared with you as the meaning of my silence--avoiding confrontation,-- it has been very painful here. Looking back, had we, or had I confronted that person's perspective in the study group it would have trained me better for this situation. Probably I would have avoided lots of frustrations here. ... It didn't frustrate me at the time. ... Some of us in 'the small group' decided to handle that situation that way, but looking back, we could have learned much more had we confronted the situation. ... I would encourage (students) to experiment, without any fear. It's an exceptional opportunity because it's a lab and it is risk free. When you are in class you don't perceive it's risk free, but it really is. I think if you take (the class) seriously, it's difficult, not because you are going to pass or fail, but it's difficult because you're going to engage in this process. It's an ongoing process that will not end after you take the class and yes it is challenging. It is difficult, but it's the task at hand."

Seekers, such as Sheridan, often express a wish that they had experimented more in the class. Their narrative suggests that they see leadership as an ongoing process of conducting

experiments, as they look for ways to connect with others. Their claims of lingering frustrations with the class, if any, are with themselves for not experimenting even more in an environment they regard as being considerably lower risk than their work environments.

Other examples of Seekers

The Seekers are students who view the class primarily as a laboratory. Even if they claim that they sometimes feel uncomfortable about experimenting their narrative contain many expressions of testing, doing things, or attempting to "intervene" as part of the process of learning. Some mention that while in class they were cognizant that they had to motivate themselves to experiment. This is because they can become overwhelmed by the many different options, to act or intervene or simply step back and reflect.

Seekers claim that the reason for experimenting is to gather the views and opinions of others, as opposed to viewing it as a personal measure of performance. Their narrative suggests that they are motivated to overcome the fears and risks associated with experimenting, by the desire to connect with others. In Chapter 5, Lin, who described how she purportedly overcame her personal fear of singing on Poetry Night, is another example of a Seeker. In her account of the experience, she refers to the importance of holding others and forming bonds with others:

"Recognizing that I had to be there to hold people through it. And the kind of bonds that needed to occur ... for me to be able to go through that experience, it was really powerful."

In class, they appear to trust the class environment as a place to take on some difficult challenges and face difficult discussions. In Chapter 5, Amal, who prompted the discussion about religion in class, is another example of a Seeker. They appear willing to initiate tough, potentially disturbing discussions in class and accept the disequilibrium that follows, if they believe that the disruption benefits the learning of the group. Amal persisted in holding a difficult discussion on religion, despite the taunting she had purportedly received following her recitation on Poetry Night, which posed the provocative question, "Do you love Jesus?"

"The work needs to be with all of us having a discussion. ... We can keep avoiding it and keep on making jokes to me in the hall, and I keep taking it in. ... I've also learned to not take it personally because I know what you are saying to me isn't about me. It's about whatever I brought up with you and how that is sitting with you."

Many Seekers voice their supposed concern about how difficult and complex the work of adaptive leadership can be, particularly in interviews held two years after the class. However, as in the case of Bradley and Gabriela at the end of Chapter 5, what keeps them going in their leadership struggles is the belief that they are not alone in the struggle.

Bradley: *"I'm very ready to give up because it's just too difficult. But so far I do keep pushing ... because I'm not alone any more. I have a few others that feel the same way and that is such a relief."*

Gabriela: *"My leadership dilemma is giving up, just going elsewhere. ... I ... think about some of my other classmates ... and the challenges that they faced ... their civil wars and leaving family members ... my challenges are so insignificant compared to that. ... these people have committed themselves to adaptive leadership and have found a way through that and I should be able to do it as well."*

With their strong desire to experiment, Seekers can readily become overwhelmed or overly concerned, from reflecting on all the possible options, challenges and scenarios, as both Gabriela's and Brandon's stories reveal. Seekers can benefit from the actions of Zealots, who maintain high levels of enthusiasm for the learning practices and can motivate them to push beyond their sense of being overwhelmed. Seekers can also benefit from interacting with Skeptics. When Skeptics appear to disconnect, this can motivate Seekers to experiment in order to re-connect with them.

Summary

Zealots are most consistently enthusiastic about the class learning practices and the professor's actions in the class. They see the professor as the primary role model for leadership, they are more open to his influence, and their preference is to learn from him. Zealots express frustrations with certain events in class, but they are open to changing their

minds. Their frustrations are often resolved by figuring out what they believe the professor was attempting to do, even if they consider it "imperfectly done". They derive their sense of comfort from his words or actions. If disequilibrium arises and is initiated by the professor, Zealots serve to intensify it by supporting him.

Skeptics uphold a strong opposition to some particular learning practices or class activities, and their opposition does not appear to waiver or mellow over time. Their narrative is characterized by a fixed frustration towards that learning practice or activity. In class, they act in ways that are consistent with their opposition, and their action or inaction can provoke reactions from other class members. When challenged by faculty or others, Skeptics are not likely to change their views. They derive a sense of comfort from steadfastly believing in a particular learning approach or value, such as learning from logic, not emotion. Paradoxically, through their staunch opposition they bring unconscious habits and perspectives into view for others to discuss and explore.

Seekers view the class primarily as a laboratory in which they must experiment in order to learn. They too have frustrations, but these are typically with their own internal conflicts in motivating themselves to experiment. Seekers appear willing to initiate tough, potentially disturbing discussions, and they accept the resulting disruption once they believe that it benefits the collective learning of the group. If pushed, they will look to create connections with others in order to overcome their anxiety about learning or experimenting. Seekers, as they learn to lead, can become overwhelmed or overly concerned from reflecting on possible options and scenarios. They appear to derive their sense of comfort from creating connections with or gathering the perspectives of others.

CHAPTER 7 –THE ROLE OF DISRUPTION AND DISEQUILIBRIUM

In this chapter, I explain how the tribes learn in different ways within the class and how each contributes to creating additional or enhanced learning opportunities for others. I first discuss the theory, which helps to explain how learning takes place in the emotionally charged classroom environment, and I explain the benefits of using the Lewin (1947) / Schein (1993, 2010a) change model—hereafter called Schein's model—as a lens through which to view the class. The model provides a way to read the concepts on which the class is based and to help explain why so much learning appears to take place. I then look at how the theory supports my claims that the emergence of tribes in this emotionally charged environment provides enhanced learning opportunities for all. In the final section of the chapter, I look at what sticks and why, the common lessons that students claim to have retained two years after completing the class.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how Schein's model (2010a) illustrates how learning to lead takes place in environments where uncertainty and disruption prevail. I now look at how the model can be applied to this class to explain why so much learning appears to take place.

Applying Schein's Change Model to the Class

Stage One: Using Schein's model as a lens to view the class, Stage One can be seen to begin on day one of class when faculty attempts to "disconfirm" or dispel the students understanding of how learning about leadership is going to take place. The process of attempting to unfreeze old ideas begins immediately. During the opening classes, the faculty begins to dismiss students' existing ideas of leadership and disconfirm their notion of how the class is going to run. For example, faculty tell students that they will be "throwing the work back" at them rather than doing the teaching, and they warn that although students may not like having the burden hoisted upon them, it might be their only way to learn. The faculty attempts to raise survival anxiety by thrusting on students the responsibly to learn from each other despite the preference of many students to learn directly from the professors. The anxiety manifests for many students as they begin to realize that unless they are willing to learn from each other, the important goal of learning about leadership, their purpose in enrolling in the class might not be achieved.

Throughout the semester, the faculty frequently reminds students about what they consider to be problematic habits, opinions, or beliefs that may prevent students from learning important tools for leadership. These problematic habits, faculty say, include students being "triggered" to react when others contradict their views in the class. By continually reminding students of their problematic habits, the faculty is thrusting the responsibility onto students to resolve these problems and, in effect, maintaining high levels of survival anxiety, yet at the same time they are using class constructs that are intended to reduce learning anxiety.

When viewed using Schein's change model, the learning construct of Step Back and Observe can be considered a "safety producing behavioral ritual" (Schein, 1993: 89) that helps to overcome the learning anxiety students experience as they attempt to learn something new. Through the use of this learning construct, faculty potentially build greater tolerance for the unfreezing stage of Schein's change model (1993, 2010a). What they are unfreezing, particularly in the early weeks of the class, are the students' prior attitudes and beliefs about leadership.

Poetry Night is a particular class event where Stage One, unfreezing, appears to occur in a rather condensed timeframe. Students who recounted their experiences of presenting or singing in front of the class on Poetry Night described the fear or anxiety they had to overcome. When viewed through Schein's model, the fear students claimed to have had to overcome is learning anxiety as they sought to maintain a sense of integrity or perhaps professionalism in front of 120 people. The faculty who are standing by and supporting the students in their presentations can be viewed as generating a sense of psychological safety. Requesting students to repeat the exercise over and over can be viewed as generating survival anxiety where the responsibility is thrust onto the students to achieve a certain learning goal. The students' accounts show that they were motivated to push through their fears because they wanted to do it.

When it comes to leading in the context of this class, the faculty continually points out that one needs to move beyond one's safe zones. The faculty attempts to replicate a sense of moving beyond their safe zones by generating a type of controlled disequilibrium and pushing students to overcome their fears and their established sense of comfort. Paradoxically, when it comes to learning, scholars point to the need for a sense of safety or comfort in order to encourage the generation of new ideas and the testing of new options

(Edmondson, 1999, 2002; Schein, 1993, 2010a). In learning to lead, the faculty is trading off between creating the sense of psychological safety needed to learn and generating the disequilibrium that accompanies situations in which students are asked to lead. This is what many students experience as chaos. The theory suggests that the discomfort that students experience in the class provides an essential element in the often extremely difficult initial stage of unfreezing and motivating students to change.

Stage Two: Many aspects of the class can be considered to enact Stage Two of Schein's model, learning new concepts, through the modeling or imitation of desired behavior or through trial-and-error learning. The modeling or imitation of new behaviors is done in various ways throughout the semester; however, on Poetry Night it is very distinctly enacted. Throughout Poetry Night, faculty actively supports the students who present in front of the class, guiding them to "pace their work" and "allow for silence". This construct is intended to help students create a connection between the work of leadership and the need for silence or slowing down the pace, so that others can take in their message more completely and potentially become inspired. In many regards, this is the behavior that faculty themselves are modeling in front of the students as they support the presenter. They present a modified version of this learning construct in other class sessions as well, referring to it as "pacing the work at a rate others can handle". The construct is most distinctly modeled and imitated on Poetry Night.

Students who present their poem or piece of prose in front of the class imitate the suggested leadership behavior as they learn the new concept of pacing their work to allow for silence. The students, who are observing the presenters, are instructed to "listen to the song beneath the words." Each presenter repeats their performance numerous times in front of the class and the experience is repeated with different students, thus allowing for trial-and-error learning.

Another example of enacting Stage Two is seen in the student-led discussions during the plenary class sessions. These group discussions foster trial-and-error learning as students are left to steer the classroom discussion that often results in high levels of chaos, uncertainty, confusion, and intense emotional exchanges. From session to session or moment to moment, the intensity of these exchanges can vary and the leadership topics being debated can also vary greatly. However, one aspect that all group discussions have in common is that students

are required to listen to the perspectives of other students. This invariably means listening at times to students who derail, upend, or even hijack the conversation.

When students become frustrated with the derailing of the discussion, one of the learning constructs that faculty puts forward, to help students interpret what is going on, is to listen to the song beneath the words or listen to the perspectives of others. These constructs are intended to help students pay attention to what others are saying. The manner in which faculty encourage students to guide and lead the class discussion can be seen as modeling a new leader behavior and promoting the learning construct of "listening closely to the perspectives of others".

In guiding the group discussion, students are encouraged to "experiment with their informal authority."[15] In class, students experience periods of "informal authority" when they have gained credibility, trust, and the respect of others, perhaps by providing an insight into the discussion or managing to steer the group discussion in a direction that appears to serve the group well. These periods can be fleeting, however. If the student fails to follow through in guiding the discussion or if the disequilibrium returns, the student may have lost his or her informal authority. Viewed through the lens of Schein's model, the class construct "experiment with your informal authority" promotes trial-and-error learning for students.

In Stage Two, the tribes of the class show distinct preferences for how they favor learning. Zealots have a preference for learning new concepts by modeling or imitating new behaviors. Seekers have a preference for learning through trial-and-error experimenting. Skeptics have a preference for neither but nonetheless must continue to participate in the class and thus vacillate between one approach and the other.

Stage Three consists of refreezing. This involves internalizing or integrating the newly learned or altered concepts and behavior into one's own approach to leadership or work routines. Internalizing means reinforcing the newly learned concepts in ways that produce confirming data that reassures the individual of the value of the new concept. One particular aspect of the class that can be considered an effective aid to refreezing is enacted in the

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[15] Authority, as interpreted in the class, means being conferred with power and control in exchange for providing a service to others. It is considered a resource or skill that leaders use but in itself is not considered to be leadership.

student-led group discussions. When students are left to manage the discussion on their own, they must decide what topic to focus on and how to steer the group conversation. When the decision making does not work well and disequilibrium arises or the environment becomes emotionally charged, students are compelled to look to each other to find ways to reduce anxiety. The act of collectively reducing anxiety is a way of testing out solutions and determining which ones produce results that work and that are more acceptable to the group.

Ironically, many students lament or complain when they are left to manage the class, as the apparent lack of guidance or structure seems to result in *"discussions that go nowhere."* Yet it is the act of testing out or trying to find solutions that yields the potential for long-term learning. Finding the solutions collectively in the midst of heightened emotions intensifies the motivation to learn and thus provides a hook for remembering what they learned. It is only when the new solutions or concepts appear to produce better results that they are adopted and the associated routines become internalized.

Two of the class constructs that are particularly relevant to refreezing and internalizing the new learning concepts are "Step Back and Observe" and "Explore your own role", or the role you take on in the class. Using these two constructs, faculty encourages students to pause in the midst of disequilibrium, consider the roles they are playing, and think about how others in the class might see them. "Exploring your own role" means testing out and becoming aware of how you are leading or engaging with others. All students claim to have a greater degree of self-awareness with regard to their capacity to lead or to engage with others as a result of taking the class and further claim that this greater awareness has become internalized.

Stage Three of Schein's change model appears to be enacted through students grappling with the disequilibrium in the class and then engaging with others in order to reduce anxiety and understand their own roles more deeply. See Table 7.1 for a summary of the stages of Schein's change model, how it relates to what happens in class and to the corresponding learning construct that faculty uses in class. Figure 7.1 shows how Schein's model can be overlaid onto the key learning concepts in the class, that were previously illustrated in figure 5.1.

Table 7.1. Schein's change model with corresponding learning construct

| Schein's Change Model (1993, 2010)	What happens in class	Learning construct used by faculty
Stage 1 Unfreezing: Disconfirming	Faulty dismisses student ideas on "learning to lead."	During plenary sessions: Step Back and Observe
Stage 1 Unfreezing: Create survival anxiety	Faulty thrusts responsibility for learning onto students.	During all class sessions: Step Back and Observe/ Take responsibility for your own learning
Stage 1 Unfreezing: Generate enough psychological safety to overcome learning anxiety	Faculty oscillates between allowing disequilibrium or chaos and guiding the class.	During plenary sessions: Step Back and Observe/ Interpret Group Dynamics
Stage 2 Learning new concepts: Modeling and imitating new behavior	Faculty guides Poetry Night presentations. Students attempt to guide the classroom discussions.	During Poetry Night and plenary sessions: Allow for Silence, and Pace the Work at a rate others can handle / Listen to the Perspectives of Others.
Stage 2 Learning new concepts: Trial-and-error learning	Students attempt to guide the classroom discussions.	During all class sessions: Listen to the perspectives of others / Experiment with informal authority / Intervene and take action.
Stage 3 Re-freeze: Internalize new concepts into one's work and identity	Students become more aware of their own leadership habits.	During all class sessions: Step Back and Observe/ Explore your own role in the class
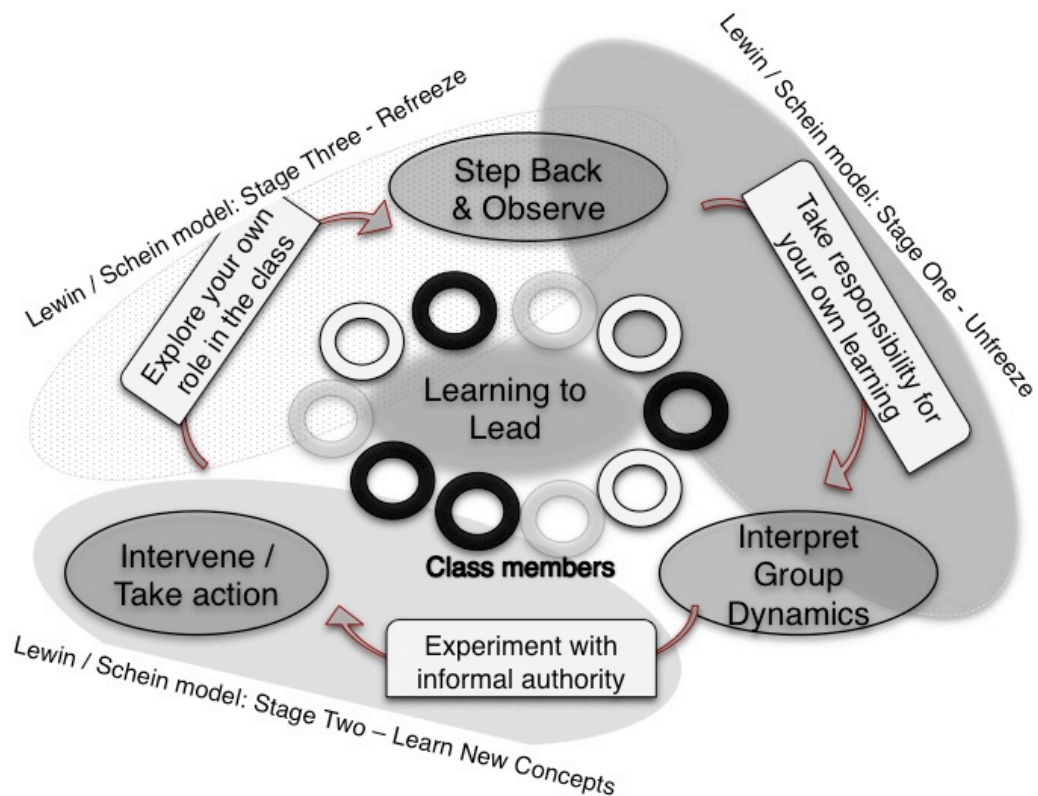
Figure 7.1. Schein's model combined with the faculty notion of learning to lead

How the Tribes Contribute to Long-term Learning

I now consider how Schein's model helps to explain how and why the tribes emerge in response to the in-class structure and how they contribute to the learning experience. Previous accounts show that all tribes grappled with some level of discomfort or unease in class and sought to remove this discomfort, as one student put it, in order to *"move to the next level"* of learning. What differed noticeably among the tribes, however, was the way they sought to ease their discomfort and deal with the ambiguity or disequilibrium they purportedly experienced.

For example, the Zealots claimed that in moments where they felt uncomfortable, they might have preferred if the professor had managed things a bit differently, but in the end they felt that he knew best. Thus, they came to trust the professor's guidance as a way of dealing with the discomfort that arose. Seekers, like Zealots, also claimed that at times when they felt uncomfortable they might initially have preferred if the professor had managed things a bit differently. However, unlike Zealots, they sought to connect with others in order to address their anxiety. Skeptics claimed to disconnect when they had to deal with learning activities that made them uncomfortable. While they claimed to recognize what made them uncomfortable, their responses to that particular aspect of the class did not change over time.

Schein suggests that "It is easier to tolerate anxieties in the presence of sympathetic others than alone" (1993: 89–90). My view is that the tribes emerge as a coping mechanism in response to continually dealing with and watching others deal with disequilibrium, uncertainty, and ambiguity in class.

Deriving a sense of comfort can equate to deriving a sense of psychological safety. Data suggests that the tribes derive their sense of psychological safety from different aspects of the class. Edmondson (1999) provides a point of clarification, noting that psychological safety does not imply unity or cohesiveness that might give rise to unquestioning conformity and inhibit the creation of new learning options or ideas. Data from this study not only supports Edmondson but also goes a step further in highlighting that within the class, the mechanisms for deriving a sense of psychological safety differ and these differences result in the emergence of distinct sub-units or sub-cultures. The mechanisms by which the tribes derive their sense of psychological safety are not part of the class structure or design, but the

data suggests that they develop by way of reaction to the uncertainty and ambiguity in the class.

In addition to differing in how they seek to ease their discomfort, the data also show that tribes differ in how they generate survival anxiety and deal with their own learning anxiety. I summarized the differences between the tribes in Chapter 6, and here I highlight how these differences specifically relate to their dealing with survival and learning anxieties.

Zealots, with their support for most of the learning practices, reinforce the activities, beliefs, rules, and norms that they believe the professor is advocating. When disequilibrium emerges in the classroom, they help to heighten survival anxiety, pushing responsibility onto whomever they believe the professor may be targeting. In their stories, their learning anxiety is often related to fear of failure. This is reduced, although sometimes very gradually, by watching what happens when others expose their failures in class. The enthusiasm of the Zealots often motivates other students who may be overwhelmed or disconnected as a result of the chaos or heightened emotions in the class.

Skeptics strongly oppose certain learning elements in the class and claim to resist any pressure to engage in those particular learning routines, even when it means temporarily disconnecting from what is happening around them. Other students may attempt to re-engage the Skeptics, who are perhaps provoked by others' actions or inactions. This often serves to intensify the disequilibrium and heighten survival anxiety. At the same time, Skeptics provide valuable learning opportunities for others students, as they staunchly uphold values they consider important. Skeptics help to bring unconscious habits and perspectives into view for the class to discuss. When Skeptics maintain their defense routines, their learning anxiety remains high, and they are the least likely to experiment, to test out new options, or to learn from that particular event. Ironically, Skeptics may serve to lower the learning anxiety for others. Ultimately, however, Skeptics appear to derive different lessons from the intense reactions of other students to their own strongly held views.

Seekers look on the class primarily as a laboratory in which they must take risks and experiment in order to learn. They appear willing to initiate tough, potentially disturbing discussions and accept disruptive events as part of the learning processes. Thus, they are willing to heighten survival anxiety once they have gathered sufficient confirming data to convince themselves that such discussions benefit the learning of the group. To overcome

their learning anxiety, Seekers look to create connections with others. They sometimes refer to this as overcoming their internal conflicts or reluctance to experiment. Once a connection with others is established, a sense of psychological safety is created. This enhances their opportunity to learn.

Viewed through Schein's lens, the data suggests that the emergence of the tribes serves as a re-enforcing mechanism, increasing tolerance for anxiety in the class. The tribes also contribute to unfreezing the previous attitudes about leadership. At the same time, the students, faculty, and even the structure of the class itself, all serve to place an upper limit on the amount of disequilibrium tolerated. However, the data show that interaction between the tribes results in constantly increasing and reducing anxieties. Schein's studies suggest that students are more likely to remember what they learn if they associate it with a struggle to reduce anxiety.

Refreezing - What Sticks and Why?

The tribes clearly contribute to the in-class learning process and to the retention of lessons learned. However, when it comes to analyzing what lessons students claim to retain and apply in their work as leaders, there is little consistency amongst members of the tribes. The identity of the tribes relates to their response to in-class processes and not to what lessons they claim to recall.

In analyzing what lessons stick, I consider the longitudinal data gathered after students had completed the class. The data suggest that all students claim to have learned several lessons from the class, lessons they say they found useful in their work as leaders. One student summed up why she recalls the lessons she learned in the course as follows:

"This class is totally different to any other leadership class I've taken. … I come from a very strong curriculum of taking a lot of leadership classes and a lot of management classes. I mean even just six months ago I took a couple of classes at MIT … on management. This class is so different. It stuck. It stuck because of the pedagogy of the class. You know, walking into a classroom where the professor is putting you in scenarios and situations where there's chaos and disequilibrium in the classroom. The students themselves have to figure out how they want to run the class, how they orchestrate a conflict. (This) is doing the adaptive work,

in action, in the classroom. So every concept, every tool, every framework that we learned, it wasn't something that just went in our short-term memory bank. It was something that we had experiential learning in the classroom while we were doing this. When I was skimming through these four books, every chapter, every concept I read I remembered an experience that I went through in the classroom. I can visually remember (it). I read the concept of reaction versus response and I remember the first day of class walking in. I was sitting next to my best friend Tom, who was a troublemaker in class, and he was the first guy that raised his hand and Professor Sterns came and used him as sort of the center of attention to go through a whole concept. ... Tom raised his hand. He had a knee-jerk reaction to something that Professor Sterns said. Professor Sterns came and he put the hammer on his knee and he said 'You are a very reactive person. I can tell already.' And very true! That was Tom's personal challenge, and he worked through that for the whole year."

More than two thirds of the students interviewed claimed that they connected periodically with former students or TAs from the class, and close to half of these spoke about using the class concepts at times during their conversations with colleagues. The remaining students claimed to have sporadic connections with others since finishing the course, if they had any contact at all. A minority of students referred spontaneously in their interviews to using memory aids, the most commonly mentioned ones being re-reading summaries of their class notes or referring to the textbooks written by the teaching faculty. Occasionally, students referred to re-reading particular articles from the course syllabus that they liked, but for each student who claimed to go back over readings, there was a student who claimed they had rarely if ever completed the readings. Regardless of connecting with other students or referring back to class materials, all students at some point in the interviews nine months and two years after taking the class spontaneously referred back to certain concepts from the course.

In each of the student interviews, the first question I asked was: "What do you recall from the course?" Students typically responded by describing a range of lessons or class concepts they recalled. While some students readily using the exact class lingo, over half the students would begin the interviews using a language of their own to describe class concepts and then later in the interview begin to recall the exact terms used in the class. The range of lessons that students claimed to have retained two years after they have left the class is very broad. From analyzing the data, however, there are three claims put forward by all students

and I've noted these as "common claims", meaning that they are common to all students who participated in the formal interviews. These lessons were not necessarily stated as the most important or most valuable ones students recalled, but, expressed in various ways, the lessons were mentioned in all interviews. The common claims are (1) "I'm more aware," (2) "I listen more to the perspectives of others" and (3) "I pace things at a rate that I think others can handle".

The first of the common claims was expressed in a number of different ways, such as: *"the biggest change is my self-awareness," "I see myself more," "I didn't realize before",* or *"I have to catch myself all the time."* One student described his new awareness two years after leaving class in the following way:

"I didn't realize this before … very often we emphasize the team element in exercising leadership, but I think that exercising leadership can be applied to yourself. You can be your own critic and feedback mechanism, if you will, if you apply the tools in an impartial manner, if you step on the balcony and examine your actions. I think that's probably one of the most valuable things that I have gained in the past couple of years."

The second of the common claims that students made was conveyed as follows: *"I listen more … to voices I might previously have ignored"* or *"I include many more perspectives because mine is only one view"* or *"the class showed me just how many different perspectives can exist."* This claim was made in response to a range of different questions as I did not ask specific questions about "listening" in any of my interviews.

There is a caveat here. While all students claim to "listen more" and to have become more aware of who they may be willing to listen to or learn from, some students still hold onto particular default habits or preferred ways of engaging with others, despite their purported willingness to listening more.

The third common claim, *"I need to pace things at a rate that others can handle"*, also takes different forms. Gabriela, for example, put it thus: *"trying to use the tools whenever appropriate, to pace the work properly, to recognize the issues from someone else's point of view and not to put such a pressure on the overall system."* Another student said *"When you really engage with others, it takes much longer to get things done. It's so slow … but that's the only way progress is made."*

Many students refer to "*pacing*" indirectly, using various other terms or phrases, but all claimed to have discovered that *"pacing the work,"* meant taking things much more slowly, even if that created other problems associated with delays. Slowing things down in certain cases was essential to actually making progress.

In Chapter 5, when presenting the accounts from Bradley and Gabriela, I mentioned that many students talked about their leadership work in terms of "getting involved" and making progress on tough issues, as distinct from leadership being a position one holds. With this view of leadership, "pacing the work" was considered by most students to be essential in enabling progress. While students appeared willing to accept that leadership often requires pacing things more slowly, many students lamented over how difficult it was to deal with that reality in their day-to-day work. This issue echoed across more than two thirds of the final interviews, where students commented on how difficult it was to make progress on the goals they claimed to consider very important, both personally and professionally. Ironically, the more students claimed to have learned about leadership from the class, the more complex and challenging they saw their work becoming,.

As students discussed their current leadership struggles, they referred to a range of different leadership tools that they recalled, supposedly used, or wanted to become more proficient in using. What kept them going, they claimed, was the belief that they were not alone in their struggle. Other students claimed to actively look for "partners"—meaning strategic allies in class parlance—in order to better pace the work. Even students who said they experienced failure where jobs or projects did not work out as planned still claimed to consider "pacing the work" as they contemplated trying things out again.

Another challenge that students claimed to have found difficult, if not impossible, was to teach the concepts to others who had not attended the class. No student claimed to have been successful in relating the lessons to others unless the person had also attended some training program related to this course. One student who interacted with former students from the nearby Harvard Business School (HBS) explained how difficult he found it to even explain the terms that he used:

"I tried educating some of my peers from HBS and every meeting I would have to remind them what each term meant. Just yesterday I said 'Oh we have a real 'adaptive'

leadership problem in the group' ... and she said 'What does that mean?' I said 'I've been telling you for two years now.' So it's tough. It's tough."

A notable challenge for this course—one that the professors say they are well aware of—is that one or two students in a class may continue to recall their class experiences as humiliating. Given the sample of students interviewed in this study, the findings are consistent with those reported by Parks (2005), who estimated that 3–4% of the students remain upset by the course to some degree, based on class survey results. Findings from this study show that even where a student claims to have retained a clear memory of the humiliation, he or she also appears to have retained the lessons they learned. Consider how Carlos assesses the course two years later:

"I recall a lot from the course. The experiential model helps sear things into your memory that otherwise wouldn't be (there) if it were a lecture. That is true. ... Just because I've learned some things through a seared experience doesn't mean that I couldn't have learned even better if it were tweaked. ... If you remember something that seems humiliating you are going to try to avoid that thing in the future. You might not, if it never humiliated you. That class in general was humiliating for me so as a result I try to avoid adopting the role that I allowed to be assigned to me in that class. ... I still have negative feelings about Ed Sterns, and it taught me some things that are frustrating about human nature and about how quickly people rush in to fill the void behind a formal authority figure. That is all frustrating. ... It's okay that I will always remember that as a frustrating time. In terms of dealing with the leadership challenges that those frustrations identify, yeah, I try to look at myself from the balcony, I try to pause when I am in the middle of potentially reactive situations. I try to look at people and see where they are at and what they can handle hearing right now. I think about those things all the time when I'm dealing with people."

In the final three sentences above, Carlos succinctly sums up the three common claims made in various ways by all students who participated in the formal interviews. The data strongly suggest that students retain the lessons they learn regardless of whether or not they enjoy the experiences. The findings beg the question as to how these experiences, which are potentially both illuminating and disturbing at the same time, can be managed so that students can work through any issues of humiliation that arise. Being aware of the emergence of the tribes may help in identifying mechanisms to deal with these humiliations. In Chapter 8 I look at potential options for future research which may help address this point.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I look at how this research contributes to the scholarly discussion on causal linkages between experiential learning opportunities and subsequent leader development. I begin by summarizing some of the more surprising findings the study reveals about how students learn to lead from their oft-disruptive experiences in the context of this class. I discuss how these findings fit within the current set of scholarly opinions on how leaders learn from their experiences. I look at future measures that may help students assess their own learning progress. I consider the implications for the broader use of this teaching approach and the options for future research. I discuss using the findings to help bolster a leader's capacity to seek and find the support they need in their ongoing work as leaders.

New Insights on Learning to Lead

This study set out to explore how students learn to lead in situations where high levels of disruption, uncertainty, and unpredictability prevail. In reviewing the literature to find the appropriate theoretical explanation, I was surprised to find that the best explanation lay outside the education and experiential learning literature. I found that Schein's organizational change model (1993, 2010a) provided the best theoretical framework to analyze and illustrate how students and other learner practitioners learn to lead under conditions of uncertainty and from disruptive experiences. In illustrating how students and other practitioners experience learning in such environments, I drew heavily on three concepts used in Schein's change model—Survival Anxiety, Learning Anxiety and Psychological Safety. I used the concepts to highlight the importance of recognizing, understanding, and managing the different types of anxieties that can arise in disruptive learning environments. I showed how working to reduce anxiety caused by disruption can increase the motivation to learn. The findings also suggest that learners need to be held responsible for finding ways to resolve the anxiety-producing situations themselves, as the act of overcoming the anxiety is what they learn from and are more likely to recall.

In presenting an interpretation of how the Lewin/Schein model of change applies to the process of learning to lead, I highlighted the importance of group discussions and the associated disequilibrium in enabling the three stages of "unfreeze, change, and refreeze" to

occur. My empirical findings showed that students go through all three stages of Schein's model in learning leadership lessons throughout the course. The results suggest that by relating each of the stages of Schein's model to particular aspects of a leader development course or activity where students learn from disruption, we can better understand how students experience and draw lessons from their learning encounters. I concluded that Schein's theory is relevant not only in the context of examining organizational change but is also applicable in educational settings and particularly in examining how learning to lead takes place.

The high level of disequilibrium and emotion that students describe as occurring in the class calls to mind the T-group phenomenon. One similarity between the class and the previously discussed T-group (Highhouse, 2002) is the significance of the unstructured group discussion. The intent of the group discussion in this class, however, is not to sensitize the learner to see how their customary way of acting can impact others, but to encourage trial-and-error learning so students can test out their ideas and gather confirming data when actions yield better results.

The study supports the burgeoning consensus that learners need help to extract meaning from the facilitated learning practices (Day, 2010; Hackman & Wageman, 2007; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). This results also uphold the view that learners need opportunities to conduct deliberate and repeated experiments, in order to figure out how to manage and not be overwhelmed by their learning related anxieties (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Yip & Raelin, 2012).

A second surprising finding is the discovery of the formation of tribes as learners interact with other learners and strive to find ways to cope with the anxiety that arises amidst the continual disruption and disequilibrium in the class. The findings revealed how the presence of the three tribes enables students to tolerate longer periods of disequilibrium, which enhances their learning opportunities. The findings suggested, however, that all three tribes needed to be actively engaged in order to bring about the enhanced learning opportunities.

The study disclosed the mechanisms by which disequilibrium supports learning but highlighted the importance of allowing diverse or even contentious views to be expressed as an ongoing part of group interactions. For example, Zealots continually support the professor's view, while Skeptics react by disengaging from certain activities that they find

frustrating. Seekers attempt to draw others into tough discussions that may benefit the group, but they can become overwhelmed. Zealots, with their cheerleading support for the professor and the class, help to keep Skeptics and Seekers motivated when they become overwhelmed or dispirited. It is thus the interaction between the tribes that helps to unfreeze the status quo or the existing ideas or habits surrounding leadership and learning.

These findings support the view of experiential learning scholars, that dissonance plays an important role in triggering learning cycles for individuals and in helping to shape the learning culture (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Yang, 2003). It supports the perspective that coping with difficult situations and even crises can contribute to developing leaders (Avolio, 2007; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). The study, however, points to the critical need for a learning environment that supports learners who struggle to get beyond the cycle of dissonance.

Results show that when students are forced to respond under pressure in the midst of disruptive group discussions, new ideas for leadership can emerge. Weick refers to "the effect of stress on overlearned behaviors" and suggests that under pressure people regress to what they know best (1996: 306). However, the findings of this study suggest that over time learners can replace some of these regressive behaviors with different ones that they have tested out in some repeated fashion, within and perhaps beyond the classroom.

A third surprising finding from this research is that generating a sense of psychological safety is not simply a matter of course design or implementation, but it is also related to sub-group formation. The findings suggest that when a group shares a high anxiety or stress-producing experience, sub-groups or meso-groups form (Hannah et al., 2008). The tribes, as depicted in this study, are examples of such sub-groups. The data show how tribes derive a sense of psychological safety in distinctly different ways and these differences impact the manner in which the tribes are willing to learn. The study revealed how the continual and arguably forced interaction between tribes resulted in members of some tribes attempting to learn in situations that they might otherwise consider intolerable or unsafe for inter-personal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999; Espedal, 2008).

Much of the previous research is lacking in pointing out the various mechanisms by which learners can potentially derive a sense of psychological safety, particularly in situations of high disequilibrium. This study highlights the dynamic and learning mechanisms

through which this occurs in the disequilibrium of the classroom. The findings suggest that psychological safety is an emergent social system characteristic rather than a personality characteristic.

Educators need to make more of learning opportunities that tend to generate a sense of overwhelm and anxiety in students. Rather than seeking to eliminate or mitigate situations, educators need to pay closer attention to how students respond individually and collectively to the learning events. By paying attention to and making explicit the various mechanisms through which students derive a sense of psychological safety, educators can help students extract more meaning from their lived experiences.

Another implication from this study is that organizations or learning institutions that wish to generate changes in leaders' practices need to take a closer look at the role they play in honing the learning experiences. The study shows the importance of having all three tribes actively engaged in the discussions in order to bring about the unfreezing of old leadership norms and open up the potential for learning new ways. Organizations need to consider how they bring together learners with diverse views and opposing perspectives and enable learners to act out their opposition as they test out new ideas. Such learning experiences not only hold potential for long-term learning but also demonstrate the benefits to leaders of actively seeking out perspectives they might not normally wish to consider as they strive to make progress in their respective fields.

This study, however, is specific to the Harvard Kennedy (HKS) setting. The course itself, whether taught by either Professor Sterns or Professor Jenkins, has a long-standing reputation for being different and leaving a lasting impression on students. The data show that students come to the class with a sense of anticipation and the idea that the class is starkly different and disruptive is well socialized in the school. Many students claim they are willing to tolerate certain elevated levels of disruption in the class because of this reputation. Data gathered from students who chose to drop the course also supports the view that students anticipate higher levels of disruption when coming to the class, though what that means in practice is typically unclear to the students before they start.

Further comparative studies are required to determine to what extent this tolerance for disequilibrium has become a school-related learning phenomenon, given the caliber of students attracted to the school and the specific renown of this particular leadership course.

Comparing student willingness to tolerate disruption or uncertainty in other experiential courses at HKS or other Harvard schools would help to answer this question.

My own experience in teaching a leadership course using some of the aforementioned disruptive teaching practices, in the USA at MIT and in Norway at the Norwegian School of Economics / Norges Handelshøyskole (NHH), is that the reputation of a course does have an impact on the students. It impacts not only their willingness to tolerate a certain level of anxiety or disruption, but, more fundamentally, their willingness to tolerate an increase in workload or effort, when compared to participating in other local class. More up-front work is needed to help students understand the reasons for and the potential benefits of immersing themselves in this type of learning experience, particularly if these teaching pedagogies are not well known or appreciated in the school or learning establishment. Only when students are willing to engage fully in the experience, can the potential for additional learning be realized in different teaching settings. Setting expectations with students, about the additional demands of any experiential course, is something that needs to be done at a departmental or program level in the school or training institution. I have also found that in the absence of a long-standing course reputation, using Schein's theory to explain to students what they may be going through in the early stages of teaching is useful in bolstering their motivation and willingness to engage.

Measuring Student Progress and Course Outcomes

In Chapter 4, I discussed how the faculty determines if they have achieved the purpose of the course and revealed that they also acknowledge there are few ready mechanisms by which to measures effectiveness of this leadership course, although the continuing popularity of the course and the feedback ongoing received from students stand as useful indicators. Establishing quantitative or qualitative measures for leadership course outcomes is, of course, important for many leadership scholars and for teaching faculty. During my fieldwork at HKS, I became aware of the pressure on the faculty who teach this course to establish quantitative measures of the leadership outcomes. However, my priority in conducting this ethnographic study was to explore what was mysterious and not yet fully understood about how students were learning to lead in the class. The findings point the way to possible future measures that can be used to help students assess their own progress throughout the semester,

and provide evaluation criteria for the leadership course itself. The findings reveal how the course increases learners' abilities to practice certain aspects of leadership. All respondents claim to have increased their capacity for "listening more to the perspectives of others", for "pacing the leadership work at a rate others can handle", and for being more aware of their own leadership habits as a result of taking the course. Each of these can be viewed as increasing the learner's ability to practice leadership. What is not clear from this study, however, is how well the student achieves each of these outcomes or how successful the student is in employing that particular leadership practice.

One possibility is to include questions on the existing weekly questionnaires that would help students self-assess their own progress throughout a semester in regard to achieving these outcomes.[16] For example, a self-assessment question could be an open question that asks students to reflect on how positively or negatively they responded having listened to someone express a perspective they might not normally wish to consider. The student response to this question could be assessed at the start of the course, re-assessed at periodic intervals during the semester, and re-assessed again after they have completed the course. The TAs would also get to read and comment on these reflections and help students make sense of their perceived progress. Students could also have a voluntary option to share these reflections with other students in their group or in their class. Such qualitative measures may be used over time to establish evaluation criteria for this and perhaps other experiential leadership courses, depending on the stated purpose of the course. Questions with a rating scale could also be established in addition to the reflective questions so that students or their TAs could rate their progress over the 13-week semester.

A second option is to insert questions in the weekly questionnaire that help students to identify how they cope in class when they experience high levels of anxiety or frustration. The purpose of these questions is not to draw undue attention to survival or learning anxieties but to help students identify how they potentially go about creating a sense of psychological safety to deal with these issues. For example, an open question could be included that asks

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[16] The current weekly questionnaires contain numerous reflective questions where students are asked to consider their actions or inactions and to explain why they chose their response. The purpose of the current set of questions is to help students identify the dynamics that arise between individuals, sub-groups, or "factions" within the class. The proposed additional questions would expand the scope of the weekly self-reflective questionnaires.

students how they coped in the aftermath of feeling frustrated with their perceived progress or their ability to speak up in the class. Reflective questions of this nature may help students to identify what their default mechanism is in coping with frustrations or in dealing with anxieties and to understand what resources they rely on to generate a sense of psychological safety, namely the tribe they belong to.

If shared with the TAs, the responses to these questions could help the teaching team to identify the emergence and composition of the tribes in the class, which may help in creating the appropriate containment for the group discussions. The responses could also be used to establish anxiety level markers so TAs can identify if student frustrations remain questionably high over an extended period of time.[17] The questions could also be designed to help students identify their own patters of reaction if or when they have experienced a degree of humiliation in the class, thus making it a more explicit part of the learning process. If one accepts the premise that leaders are those who continue to learn (Vaill, 1996), a potential evaluation criterion for the course may be to assess the increase in students' capacities to self-identify and cope with their own learning-related and survival anxieties.

Gathering measures over time, as outlined above, would improve our understanding of the causal linkages between student experience and leadership outcomes. Putting these measures in place would also support students in their ongoing desire to learn. One notable point in this study is the 0% attrition rate for students who elected to participate in the formal interviews that extended over a two-year period. I attribute this to, among other things, students still being eager to learn about their own leadership by answering and reflecting on the questions asked in the interviews.

Another related finding in the data is the intensity with which students talked about their ongoing struggles in their work as leaders. Of those who spoke about being tempted to give up their particular job or work role, each claimed that what keeps them going is the belief that they are not alone in their struggle. More work is needed determine how to provide support for alumni of the class who embrace the leadership framework and ideals taught in

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[17] Teaching faculty who are well versed in the teaching practices may not need the responses to the above questions to assess students' level of frustration in a class, but the measurements may be useful to teaching faculty who are new to this experiential approach and who are not as adept in using the teaching pedagogy.

this course and who subsequently undertake tough leadership roles in an attempt to resolve some truly intractable societal or business issue. Such ongoing support may take the form of having refresher courses or setting up networks of student alumni who wish to remain actively connected. The measures suggested above do not provide a means of ongoing support, but they may increase the capacity of students to self-assess their own needs and to seek out the resources they require in their ongoing work as leaders.

Challenges in Teaching the Course

While this study provides some novel insights about how to help students extract lessons from their disruptive learning experiences, I recognize that the approach used in teaching this leadership course is difficult to implement. This course is not an easy one to operationalize. It requires great skill on the part of faculty and commitment on the part of students and the educational institutions. The faculty require not just academic skills but also the capacity to model the leadership lessons they wish students to test out, to negotiate tough discussions, to stay calm under fire, and to draw leadership lessons from potentially divisive situations. Faculty must be willing to take risks and work to recover the situation if the experiment results in someone feeling wounded or humiliated or if a student remains upset by a course experience.

Students are required to take responsibility for the lessons they extract from the experience, to put in effort above and beyond the standard graduate-course workload of 6–10 hours per week, to put forward their particular ideas or perspectives and risk having them torn apart, and to trust that faculty are guiding the class experience in the best interest of each individual and not just of the overall group. Students must be willing to trust that when difficult moments arise, they can and will be unpacked and effectively resolved, yielding long-term valuable lessons in leadership for all involved.

Learning institutions must be willing to support faculty who undertake this approach to teaching leadership, as it may appear to outsiders as incomprehensible or even enigmatic. While the course holds great potential benefits for students, the learning institution must accept that it is also heavy on resources; there are seven TAs for this course, with each working upward of 20 hours per week to support a class of 112 students. As this research and

future studies continue to improve our understanding of the course outcomes, I believe that more courses resembling this one will find their place in graduate education, executive programs, and organization-based leadership training programs.

Many former TAs express an interest in teaching this class or in working with this framework beyond the class. Despite the level of expressed interest, which I noted during my time as a researcher and TA, few go on to teach this course in any form. One problem is that there are no established training courses, but being a teaching assistant (TA) throughout an entire semester course seems a likely first step. In my experience, individuals who wish to become instructors or teachers using this type of pedagogy must hold have certain interests or curiosities. Instructors must be curious about or desire to understand the different types of anxiety that arise for students throughout the course. Instructors must also have an interest in interactions between students and not simply an interest in the progress of individual students vis-à-vis the course curriculum. Most important, instructors must be willing to take responsibility for managing that overall anxiety of the group, as it manifests in the class. Managing the collective anxiety, as distinct from moving to reduce or dispel it, needs to be an integral part of the regular teaching sessions and not a separate task relegated to team coaches, mentors, or TAs.

The biggest barrier to teaching a course such as this is in the willingness of teachers to change established notions of their role in front of the class. I suggest that co-teaching the course or certain aspects of the course is the next step in training a teacher to manage the course and the related student anxieties. Co-teaching could be done in conjunction with an intense teacher-training course, focused on the theoretical concepts underpinning the leadership framework and teaching pedagogy.

Limitations and Future research

The findings in this study relate to one particular leadership course, but they may be generalizable to other experiential or project-based leadership programs where the following conditions exist: where the learning periods extend over months rather than weeks, where learners and facilitators are dealing with unknowns and uncertainties, and where responsibility for defining the objectives or project goals lies with the learners and not their

instructors, facilitators, or bosses. Building on this study, more needs to be understood about if or how other leadership courses provide similar or comparable learning opportunities.

One of the limitations of the sample used in this study is the absence of a comparative sample from another course or leadership development offering. As I began this study, I made several efforts to identify other leadership courses to which I could compare the course in this study. However, this course appears to be an outlier in terms of its disruptive approach to teaching leadership not just at HKS but also amongst other local business schools where leadership is also taught. In place of using another leadership course as a comparative sample, I chose to take a deeper dive, using an immersive ethnographic approach and gathering data from four cohorts of this particular leadership course over a longitudinal period.

Having completed my study and identified a model to explain how learning to lead takes place in this context, I can now with the benefit of hindsight reflect on what comparative samples might have been useful. There are two different approaches I would now take in comparing this leadership course with others. The first approach would seek to compare longitudinal data gathered from this course with data gathered in a similar longitudinal manner from another course at HKS, where students are exposed to a similar disruptive learning pedagogy but over a shorter period of time. The courses that would be suitable for comparison purposes, are the two-week intensive companion course *Leadership On The Line* that runs during early January each year and the eight-day intensive executive education Master's course *Art and Practice of Leadership Development* that runs at HKS during May each year.

The second approach would be to compare the teaching approach used in this course to the teaching approached used in other leadership courses either in or outside HKS. I would seek to determine if or how disruptive learning practices are generated or managed by teaching faculty, instructors, or facilitators. I would use my interpretation of the Lewin / Schein change model to assess how the change phases of "Unfreeze, Change and Refreeze" appear to take place for students as they purportedly learn to lead. I would look at what learning mechanisms are in place that might account for each of three stages of change. One course at HKS that may be suitable for such a study would be the leadership course *Organizing, People, Power and Change* taught by Professor Marshall Ganz, which is also a practice-based leadership course. Other local leadership courses, for example, at HBS or

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management may also be suitable for such a comparative study.

Another interesting finding is that I noted no difference between Professors Jenkins and Sterns when it comes to the emergence of the tribes within the classroom or the student claims of lessons retained after they left the class. What differed between the two classes was the size of the three tribes, as represented in the interview sample. While both professors had an equal number of Skeptics in the interview sample, the professor with the long-standing reputation for teaching the class had a slightly higher number of Zealots. The fall cohort had 7 out of 16 Zealots, 2 Skeptics and 7 Seekers in the student sample. This compared to the spring cohort with 5 out of 13 Zealots, 2 Skeptics, and 6 Seekers in the student sample. Of the three students interviewed who dropped the class for various reasons, one was an emerging Skeptic, still expressing frustration more than six months later regarding her two-week experience of the course. Here, the sample size of the informant group is limited. More studies would be required (or more self-assessment questions, as mentioned earlier) to determine if the composition of tribes varied significantly from cohort to cohort or when different faculty members teach the course.

Conducting these comparative studies would help address the gaps in this study by determining if the results are primarily attributable to the teaching pedagogy, the leadership framework, the interaction between students or tribes, the intended and unintended interactions between the tribes and teaching faculty, the time that students spend immersed in the experience, or a combination of all of these aspects of leadership development, as this study suggests.

Another option for future research, in addition to conducting comparative studies, is to explore how many other schools teach a leadership program similar to the one described in this study. While it is clear that the course stands apart at HKS in terms of its teaching pedagogy, it is not clear if other elite schools or leadership development facilities offer comparable courses. One suggestion for future research is to conduct a survey to identify what other leadership courses come close in terms of teaching pedagogies or claims of leadership lessons learned. The research would take into consideration the differences between teaching approaches, the profiles of students who attend the class or program, and the types of learning claims made by students. Such research would probably begin with a web search of leadership course offerings at recognized leadership institutions, elite schools,

or other recognized leadership development organizations to identify 10 such programs, perhaps. Follow-up interviews with teaching faculty/instructors would then be required.

Another possibility for future research is to use the data already gathered for this study to explore leadership development in terms of individual identity development (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Petriglieri et al., 2011). Data from this study could potentially be re-characterized or re-classified to look at how students develop their identity as leaders during the course and in the two years after the course. This re-characterization would replace the current focus on the lessons students claim to retain and subsequently apply in their work as leaders. By re-characterizing the data in this way, it opens up the possibility for comparison with other studies that take the identity process into consideration when designing leadership development experiences (Day & Harrison, 2007; Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Petriglieri et al., 2011).

A final and potentially more complex area for future research is exploring how disruptive experiential events potentially enhance memory and recall. This research could be linked with relevant studies in the field of cognitive science/neuroscience (Cahill & McGaugh, 1998; Kensinger & Corkin, 2004). Of particular relevance in this case is a study by Kensinger and Corkin (2004) that describes how emotional arousal can enhance memory and aid in information recall. The authors assess emotion-bearing information along two dimensions; the first dimension is "arousing" (exciting versus calming/non-arousing) and the second is "valence" (positive versus negative). Their study shows that information with either "arousing/exciting" content or "negative non-arousing" content is more likely to be remembered than information consisting of neutral content, at least in certain conditions. Exploring student anxieties along the two dimensions described, may enhance our understanding of the cognitive process involved in the retention of leadership lessons associated with disruptive learning experience.

This study is simply another step in exploring the modern frontier of leadership development. More work needs to be done in honing how students learn in situations of uncertainty and disruption so that they become aware of what resources they need to draw on as they attempt to make progress in the enormously inspiring work they do as leaders. My desire is to help leaders find their inner stillness and inner inspiration as they learn to lead in day-to-day situations where uncertainty and unpredictability prevail. My hope is that this study inspires further fieldwork and studies to support the pioneering leaders of our day.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Student Interview #1 – within three weeks of completing the course

I'm interested in learning about your experience in the course.

1. What were the highlights of the course for you?
2. What worked well for you in the course?
3. What didn't work well for you in the course?

I'd like you to think about an event that took place during the course in which you were involved, one that you might consider a critical incident or event.

4. Can you name one such event?
5. What happened?
6. How did you act? (How did you react?)
7. What did you do? (How did you behave as a result?)
8. How did you feel at that moment?
9. What did you think?
10. How did you make sense of it?
11. What other options did you have?
12. Was there any kind of ah-ha moment where you understood your own behavior better?

I'd like to ask a couple of questions about how you relate this to your own work outside the class.

13. Did the (course) leadership framework help you to understand your own work challenges in a new way? If so, how?
14. Is the anything else you'd like to mention?

Student Interview #2 – Follow-up, six to eight month after the class

1. What do you recall from the course?
2. What tools, if any, do you still use from the class?
3. What has changed, if anything, in the way you look at a system?
4. What has changed, if anything, in the way you perform interventions?
5. What has changed in the way you hold collective discourse/difficult conversations?
6. Looking back, was there any time during the course experience when you felt confused, uncertain, unsafe, or even in danger?
    a. If yes, how did you manage those times? What did you do?
7. Looking back, do you have any lingering frustration with your experience of the program?
    a. If yes, did these frustrations lessen over time?
    b. If yes, did these frustrations impact you in other ways?
8. Do you notice any changes in how you view your work as a leader?
9. Is there anything you would like to add?

Student Interview #3 – Follow-up, two years after the class

1. What do recall from taking the course?
2. How has your approach to leadership changed, if at all, over the past two years?
3. Which of these changes would you attribute to MLD201 (in part or fully)? Why?
4. What would you say you still need to work on (in terms of your own leadership)?
5. Is there anything that you draw on from the class (when you are struggling)?
6. What was the most valuable take-away from this class for you?
7. How do you evaluate your ability to exercise leadership (today)?
8. Do you have any lingering frustration when you think back on the course?
9. Do you still connect with other colleagues from the class?
10. What would you say to someone about to take the class?
11. What tools, if any, do you still use (in your work outside the class) from the class?
12. Is there anything you would like to add or ask?

Faculty and Teaching Assistant Interviews

I'm interested in learning about your intentions for the course.

1. What is the main purpose of the course as you see it?
    a. …from a teaching perspective.
    b. …from a student outcomes perspective.
2. What were the highlights of the course for you?
3. Faculty only: What worked well for you in delivering this course?
4. Faculty only: What didn't work well for you in delivering this course?
5. How do you determine if you have achieved your teaching purpose?
6. How do you determine if the students have achieved their purpose?
7. How do you deal with power dynamics?
    a. How do you help students deal with or cope with power dynamics?
8. How do you determine if a student is experimenting or behaving in a way that is safe for himself/herself and for other students?
9. When might you intervene in a student experience?
    a. ….in the large class environment?
    b. ….in a small group environment?
10. Is there anything you wish to add?

List of course-related materials gathered during this dissertation study

Fall and spring course syllabi for years 1, 2, and 3 of this study

Fall and spring class readers for year 1 of this study

Instructional handouts for in-class and small group meeting assignments

- Guide for (personal) case study presenters
- Diagnostic questions for case presenters and final paper
- Briefing for designated authority
- Small group session questionnaires, Forms I, II, and III
- Small group session questionnaires, saying hello and saying goodbye
- Etymology instructions and examples
- Final paper questions

Movie-related questionnaires and fact sheets

- Study questionnaires for five movies and three documentaries
- Gate of Heavenly Peace - documentary time line and summary

Other documentation distributed to the class

- MLD201a – Glossary of adaptive leadership terms
- MLD201b - Teaching assistant guidelines and rules of class conduct
- MLD201b – Class rules for students
- MLD201b - List of orienting concepts for exercising leadership (Williams)
- MLD201b – Ideas on leadership (Williams)

Audio recordings, Cohorts 1, 3, and 4 (78 hours)

Sample lists of leadership topics and assigned readings

(Drawn from various course syllabi gathered during this study)

Sample 1: Assigned leadership topic - "Leadership and authority"

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Ludwig, A. 2002. *King of the mountain: The nature of political leadership.* The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington KY. Why Rulers Rule, pp. 1–21.

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Milgram, S. 1974. *Obedience to authority: An experimental view.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers. The Dilemma of Obedience, pp. 1–12.

Weber, M., Gerth, H. H., Mills, C. W. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology.* New York: Oxford University Press. The Sociology of Charismatic Authority, pp. 245–250, 253–255.

Sample 2: Assigned Leadership topic – "Adaptive work and social learning"

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. 1978. *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. pp. 1–6, 8–29.

Coles, R. 2000. *Lives of moral leadership,* New York: Random House. ch. 1.

Pascale, R., Sternin J., & Sternin, M. 2010. *The power of positive deviance, deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems.* Boston: Harvard Business Press, ch. 2.

Plato, ., & Cornford, F. M., 1945. *The Republic of Plato.* London: Oxford University Press. pp. 221–235.

Sample 3: Assigned leadership topic "Listening (sensing the environment)"

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Photo of the classroom

This website photo shows the classroom being used by a group of international delegates attending a weekend workshop at HKS. Source: APCSS Editor, 2012. ***South Asian countries look at ways to better prepare for regional disaster response.*** http://www.apcss.org/south-asian-countries-look-at-ways-to-better-prepare-for-regional-disaster-response/ , accessed April 20 2015