

An Examination of How Participation in a Cohort-based Leadership Development
Program for High-potential Employees Contributes to the Development of Leaders at a
Major Professional Services Firm in the United States

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Tani K. Keenlyne Bialek

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David A. Christesen, Co-Advisor

Shari L. Peterson, Co-Advisor

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Abstract

This case study examined the leadership development experience of employees who participated in a high-potential leadership development program within a major professional services firm in the Midwest United States. Leadership development is a top priority for many organizations and a critical driver of success. Effective leadership is also recognized as a source of sustainable competitive advantage and greater market value. Despite these compelling factors, the need for developing leaders has been listed among organizations' top concerns for more than a decade. These factors create challenges in developing the talent needed for organizations to remain competitive. As these challenges converge they intensify the need for well-planned, consistent, and rigorous development of high-potential talent. These needs support the call for a greater understanding of how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributes to high-potentials' development as leaders.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leadership and leadership development are top priorities for many organizations and critical drivers of success. Effective leadership is also recognized as a source of sustainable competitive advantage and greater market value. More than half a century of research supports the conclusion that effective leaders enhance organization performance (Yukl, 2012). Despite this conclusion, the need for developing leaders has been listed among organizations' top concerns for more than a decade.

This chapter outlines the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities related to leadership, derailment, leadership development, and high-potential development. In addition, the current study's statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research question, significance of the study, and key term definitions are presented.

Background

Better leaders create better results. Organizations report that leadership development is the number one talent management priority today and a critical part of

their strategy for future success. Effective leadership is commonly associated with organization success regardless of industry, geographic location, or size (Daily, McDougall, Covin, & Dalton, 2002; Yukl, 1989). It is also recognized as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Emelo, 2011; Frank & Taylor, 2004; Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2012; Hayes, 2008; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). Due to rapid globalization and changing workforce demographics, employees are often promoted into managerial and leadership roles earlier in their careers than in the past (Bunker, Kram & Ting, 2002; Cappelli & Hamori, 2005). As a result, leaders often derail in these new roles of greater responsibilities due to inexperience and a lack of skills (Watkins, 2004).

Derailment occurs when managers or leaders fail to meet expectations and involuntarily plateau early in their career, are demoted, or are fired (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Peterson, 2008) and is “largely preventable” (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989, p. 1). A 2007 study by Personnel Decisions International (PDI) reported that 27 percent of leaders rated as having high potential were also seen as having a high risk of derailment (2007). In a study conducted by McCall and

Lombardo (1983) twenty successful executives were compared to twenty derailed executives and the causes of derailment were most often attributed to the following characteristics: overly strong self-determination, inability to negotiate, insensitivity to others, coldness, arrogance, and failure to build a team.

Derailment and high-potential development are closely linked. The behaviors and characteristics that made a high-potential employee successful at the beginning of their career may become a detriment when they move into higher-level leadership positions (Kovach, 1986). As generous compensation, rapid promotions, and highly visible roles are often used to develop and retain high-potential employees, this development fast-track can be as damaging to one's career as it is helpful. In fact, giving rapid promotions and short-term job assignments has led to a focus on short-term results and the neglect of more complicated long-term projects (Thompson, 1985). As individuals become used to regular success they often do not take time to consider how their successes were achieved or how their actions impact others (PDI, 2007). By placing high-potential employees on a development and career fast track, Kovach (1986) stated that:

Organizations may have curtailed success for the most capable entering managers by overdoing the attention, praise, and rewards at the early stages of their development. Many young managers are launched on the fast track only to be derailed at the higher levels of mid-management when they fail to meet a new set of expectations. (p. 41)

In an effort to help prevent derailment, organizations should help individuals manage the role transition to aid in preventing derailment by preparing them for new roles and supporting them after their promotion (Hogan et al., 2011). According to Tang, Dai and De Meuse (2013):

At the organizational level, organizations need to help managers and executives create a culture of openness and honesty to promote self-awareness and continuous improvement. It is critical to build feedback into the organizational culture at all levels. In addition, organizations need to proactively plan and strategically identify developmental assignments and challenges for leaders.

One particular area that organizations should focus on is transition management.

(p. 339)

Given the important role that leadership plays within an organization, in addition to the negative impact of derailment, understanding how to facilitate the development of effective leaders and leadership is critical.

According to Donlon (2012) organizations with leadership development practices have greater market value than organizations that do not have formal programs for leader development. Despite these compelling factors, the need for developing leaders has been listed among organizations' top concerns for more than a decade (Charan, 2008; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Frank & Taylor, 2004; Hayes, 2008; McGill & Murphy, 2011). By the mid-1980s, most Fortune 500 companies acknowledged that management talent "could be identified relatively early in the executive career, and development could be accelerated through planned intervention" (Kesler, 2002, p. 33). The identification and development of high-potential (HiPo) talent illustrates a shift from the traditional succession planning replacement approach to a more comprehensive set of long term

assessment and development practices that support a pipeline of talent (Groves, 2007; Kesler 2002). Efforts focusing on supporting a talent pipeline have been identified as critical drivers of success yet few organizations have consistent approaches or well-developed methodologies for managing talent (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones, & Michaels, 2002; Boudreau, 2004).

While effective leadership is associated with success and organizational performance, “it is still not clear in what ways leadership development practices contribute to organizational performance” (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2011, p. 176). Organizations are facing increasingly complex challenges in their efforts to attract, motivate, develop, and retain leaders to ensure they have the right talent in place.

According to Lacey and Groves (2014):

Efforts to compete for talent in the marketplace, complemented with efforts to maintain and develop talent, have resulted in a considerable rise of HiPo development programs. These specialized programs cater to the developmental needs of the workforce elite. People selected for these

programs, or HiPos, are viewed as tomorrow's stewards of the future organization. They are catered to and nurtured by organizations with specialized, often secret programs and processes offered exclusively to them. (p.5)

In addition to high-potential development programs, "a variety of development practices have emerged in organizations such as leadership training, mentoring, 360-degree feedback, coaching, networks, job assignments, and action learning" (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2011, p. 176). Most leadership development research and theory has focused on the individual leader and has not accounted adequately for the organizational and social context (Avolio, 2007; Day, 2000; Fiedler, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

Between 2009 and 2012, U.S.-based organizations increased leadership development spending from \$12 billion (O'Leonard, 2010) to \$13.6 billion (Lamoureux, 2012). In addition to increased spending on leadership development, there is an emphasis on investing in the development of high-potential talent. The average annual amount

spent to develop each frontline leader is \$1,671, while the average amount for a high-potential is \$7,116 (Lamoureux, 2012) illustrating the disproportionate organization commitment to developing high-potential talent. High-potentials are individuals recognized as an organization's likely future leaders (Cope, 1998), and literature illustrates that “companies with advanced, formal strategies for identifying and developing high-potential talent are 12 times more likely to improve business growth and bottom-line results” (Lowe & Hill, 2012). High-potentials are critical to ensuring businesses success today and in the future, and increasingly, executives are realizing their importance with regard to organization competitiveness (Lamoureux, 2012).

While organizations implement leadership development programs targeted for high-potential staff, little information is known about the benefits of these programs or how they aid in the development of leaders. Furthermore, despite the number of normative publications describing best practices related to high-potential identification and development, empirical studies are rare (Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Groves, 2007). Additional research on high-potentials and high-potential leadership development is

needed from high-potential employees themselves. Dries and Pepermans (2008) summarized this need by stating that “remarkably few studies have built on data coming from the actual high-potential population itself” (p. 85).

An increase in high-potential development programs and a variety of development practices stress the importance of understanding how these practices contribute to development and ultimately to the promotion of people into higher-level leadership positions. Most practices have been designed in the tradition of developing competencies at the individual skills level and thus contribute to, and protect, a firm's human capital (Day, 2000; Lepak & Snell, 1999). The focus on individual skills aligns with leader development, which is primarily based on enhancing human capital, whereas a focus on relational skills aligns with leadership development and emphasizes the creation of social capital (Day, 2000). In building the leadership capacity necessary to continually reinvent organizations, they “need to attend to both individual leader and collective leadership development” (Day, 2000, p. 583). In studying both leader and leadership development practices, the current study responds to calls to better understand the value of leadership

development within organizations (Avolio, 2007; Day, 2000; Hunt, 2000) and contributes to empirical research on high-potential leadership development (Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Groves, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine and develop an understanding of how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributes to high-potentials' development as leaders. Specifically, this study aims to: explore the nature of high-potential leadership development, discover how participation in a cohort leadership development program contributes to participant skill development, ascertain how cohort leadership development programs support building human and social capital, and share reflections on learning components that cohort-based high-potential leadership development programs should incorporate.

The current study explored a cohort-based leadership development program called the Experienced Leadership Program (ELP). The ELP was designed to enhance the leadership skills of high-potential director level employees who have demonstrated an

interest in, and capability to assume, future leadership roles within a major professional services firm in the United States. The ELP is a twenty-month program consisting of several leadership development components including six two-day training sessions, networking and teambuilding activities, dialogue with organization senior leaders, 360-degree feedback, individual coaching, and peer coaching. Content was built around the firm's core competencies and examined through the lenses of competence, values, and character. Competence content covered topics such as developing others, conflict management, strategic planning, building teams and relationships, communication, and managing change. Character and values content addressed personal responsibility, authenticity, discipline, service, passion, and balance. An overview of the program can be found in Appendix D.

Research Question

This study endeavored to examine the development experience and outcomes of high-potential employees through a formalized cohort-based leadership development program. The study's research question addressed how participation in a cohort-based

leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders and was further guided by the following questions:

- (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development,
- (b) how did the program support building social and human capital,
- (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants' development as leaders?

It is important to acknowledge that the initial research questions continued to evolve during the inquiry. As Maxwell (2005) reported:

Research questions that are precisely framed too early in the study [for qualitative inquiry] may lead researchers to overlook areas of theory or prior experience that are relevant to the understanding of what is going on, or cause researchers to not pay enough attention to a wide range of data, data that can reveal important and unanticipated phenomena and relationships. (p. 67)

Significance of the Study

Most examinations of leadership development programs focus on the tradition of developing competency at the individual skills level (Day, 2000; Lepak & Snell, 1999). This study expands that examination beyond development of individual skills to the development of social capital within the organization and the ability to build both social and human capital for the organization and the individual being developed. According to Somayehsadat, Tharan, and Wang (2013) there is a moderate relationship between leadership success and social capital. This current examination of cohort-based leadership development programs is not only rare, but also explores the development of social capital within the program and across multiple cohorts.

Definition of Key Terms

Drawing from the literature, the following terms and definition are used in this study. A brief description of each term is provided below and an extended review is included within the literature review.

- 360-degree feedback—a method of gathering perceptions of an individual’s performance from a wide range of relevant viewpoints (Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998)
- Action learning—“a process of reflecting on one’s work and beliefs in the supportive/confrontational environment of one’s peers for the purpose of gaining new insights and resolving real business and community problems in real time” (Willis, 2004, p. 11)
- Cohort—a group of people who have shared a particular event together during a particular time span
- Derailment—the result of managers or leaders who have failed to meet expectations and involuntarily plateau early in their career, are demoted, or fired (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Lombardo & McCauley, 1988)
- Emotional intelligence—“the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate

thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 9)

- Executive coaching—“a series of contracted one-to-one conversations with a qualified “coach.” Coaching is tailored to individuals so that they learn and develop through a reflective conversation within an exclusive relationship that is trusting, safe, and supportive” (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013, p. 41)
- Experienced Leadership Program—the name of the high-potential leadership development program studied within this inquiry
- High-potential—“individuals within an organization who are recognized, at that point in time, as the organization's likely future leaders” (Cope, 1998, p.15)
- High-potential identification—the identification of high-potential employees through a variety of means including assessment centers, consultants, and multi-rater feedback (Pepermans, Vloeberghs, & Perkisas, 2003)
- Human capital—“individual capabilities, knowledge, skill, and experience of the company’s employees and managers as they are relevant to the task at hand, as

well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through individual learning” (Dess & Lumpkin, 2001, p. 25)

- Job assignment—a short-term assignment, such as a stretch project, occurring within a current job
- Leader development—the “expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 2)
- Leadership development—“the expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one’s leadership potential and performance” (Brungardt, 1996, p. 83)
- Leadership development program—a primarily classroom-based format in which to develop leaders including participants from all business groups
- Networking—“development activities aimed at fostering broader individual networks” (Day, 2000, p. 596)
- Peer coaching—a “confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine and build

new skills; share ideas; teach one another; or to solve problems in the workplace”

(Robbins, 1991, p. 28)

- Social capital—“social capital generally refers to the structure and quality of social relationships between individuals or organizations” (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2011, p. 180)

Summary

This chapter outlined the background, dynamics, challenges, and opportunities related to leadership, derailment, leadership development, and high-potential development. The study’s statement of the problem, purpose, corresponding research questions, significance, and key term definitions were presented.

The next chapter provides a review of leadership and leadership development literature relevant to the current study. The main topics addressed include high-potential talent, leadership development dimensions, and leadership development practices.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership development is a multifaceted area of study. It encompasses various theories explaining the phenomenon and a multitude of developmental practices. The literature on management, leadership, and high-potential leadership development was reviewed to examine factors relevant to the present research.

The literature that follows is organized and integrated in regard to those factors in three major sections: (a) high-potential talent, (b) leadership development dimensions, and (c) leadership development practices. Each section includes research and theory relevant to the present study.

High-potential Talent

The concept of high-potentials and corresponding leadership development practices was popularized in the 1980s through a series of studies conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (e. g. McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1988; Lindsey, Homes, & McCall, 1987; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). By the mid-1980s, most Fortune

500 companies acknowledged that management talent “could be identified relatively early in the executive career, and development could be accelerated through planned intervention” (Kesler 2002, p. 33). High-potential employee policies, including the identification and development of high-potential talent, illustrated a shift from the traditional succession planning replacement approach to a more comprehensive set of long term assessment and development practices that supported a pipeline of talent (Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002).

Efforts focusing on supporting a talent pipeline have been identified as critical drivers of success; therefore, knowing which qualities to look for in future leaders is undoubtedly a key competitive advantage (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001). Despite this advantage, few organizations have consistent approaches or well-developed methodologies for identifying and managing talent (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones & Michaels, 2002; Boudreau, 2004). This section describes the various definitions used to describe high potential employees, characteristics of high-potentials, and current identification practices used across industries.

High-potential Characteristics

In 1998, Cope broadly defined high-potentials as “individuals within an organization who are recognized, at that point in time, as the organization's likely future leaders” (p.15). Iles (1997) stated the concept of career resilience is required of high-potential employees and “a career-resilient worker is seen as an employee who moves quickly to keep pace with change, is dedicated to continuous learning, takes ownership of career management and is committed to the company’s success” (p. 348). Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) contended “in our definition, potential involves learning new skills (or honing current ones) in order to perform in first-time situations” (p. 322). High-potentials appear to handle relationships well, understand other’s views, are able to better cope with ambiguities of leadership demands, and possess more personal self-awareness (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). Furthermore, Walker and LaRocco (2002) describe high-potentials as being “distinguished by their mastery of new assignments quickly and effectively, learning more rapidly than their peers, initiative, and

emotional maturity in dealing with others” (p. 13). More recently, Conger, Ready and Hill (2010) provided the following description:

High potentials consistently and significantly outperform their peer groups in a variety of settings and circumstances. While achieving these superior levels of performance, they exhibit behaviors that reflect their companies’ culture and values in an exemplary manner. Moreover, they show a strong capacity to grow and succeed throughout their careers within an organization—more quickly and effectively than their peer groups do. (p. 80)

As high-potential employee policies attempt to differentiate talent and hire and develop for future potential, it is important to define the term high-potential employee. The terms high flyers and fast trackers have been used interchangeably within the literature to describe high-potentials (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). In an effort to provide a concise summary, Table 1 presents a sample of definitions and descriptions of high-potential employees found within the literature and listed in descending chronological order.

Table 1

High-Potential Employee Definitions and Descriptions

Author(s)	Year	Definition
Lacey & Groves	2014	High-potentials “are viewed as tomorrow’s stewards of the future organization. They are catered to and nurtured by organizations with specialized, often secret programs and processes offered exclusively to them” (p.5).
Conger, Ready & Hill	2010	"consistently and significantly outperform their peer groups in a variety of settings and circumstances. Moreover, they show a strong capacity to grow and succeed throughout their careers within an organization—more quickly and effectively than their peer groups do” (p. 3).
Peterson	2008	“Pools of high potentials contain the candidates most likely to be capable of filling new roles—given the proper training, experiences, and preparation” (p. 85).
Pepermans, Vloeberghs, & Perkisas	2003	A “specific category within the group of employees, with different needs, motivations, and behaviors than “regular” employees” (pp. 660-661).
Walker & LaRocco	2002	“are distinguished by their mastery of new assignments quickly and effectively, learning more rapidly than their peers, initiative, and emotional maturity” (p. 13).
Lombardo & Eichinger	2000	“In our definition, potential involves learning new skills (or honing current ones) in order to perform in first-time situations” (p. 322).
Cope	1998	“High potential candidates are those individuals within an organization who are recognized, at that point in time, as the organization's likely future leaders” (p.15).
McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow	1994	Appear to handle relationships well; understand other’s views; are able to better cope with ambiguity; and possess more personal self-awareness.

These definitions and descriptions vary, however several common themes are evident including: (a) continuous learning, (b) the ability to build and maintain relationships, (c) self-awareness, and (d) the ability to master skills quickly.

High-potential Identification

Identifying, and subsequently measuring, leadership potential enables organizations to make better predictions of future leadership behavior (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). Early on in the high-potential movement, researchers advocated that past performance was the best predictor of future performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984) and of leadership performance (Yukl, 1989). The past performance view of predicting future potential made early detection of high-potentials difficult (Briscoe & Hall, 1999; Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997). Spreitzer, McCall, and Mahoney (1997) advocated that executive potential is best predicted by an individual's ability to learn from their experiences (1997). Hall and Moss (1998) later described the ability of individuals to self-correct in response to new and unfamiliar situations "without waiting for formal training and development from the organization" (p. 31). Similarly, Lombardo

and Eichinger (2002) advocated that high-potential identification should consist of a “combination of looking at those characteristics that don’t change much and can be determined early (such as intelligence) and those that flower across time as the person learns to deal with fresh situations” (p. 321). Bennis and Thomas (2002) provided further support of the importance of learning from experience by stating “one of the most reliable indicators and predictors of true leadership is an individual’s ability to find meaning in negative events and to learn from even the most trying circumstances” (p. 39). Although it is widely agreed upon that a leader’s ability to learn from experience is critical to their success, traits and abilities associated with learning from experience remain a challenge to identify and measure.

High-potential employees are currently identified through a variety of means including assessment centers, external consultants, and multi-rater feedback, and are usually identified after one to two years of organizational tenure (Pepermans, Vloeberghs, & Perkisas, 2003). Ready, Conger, and Hill (2010) studied forty-five companies worldwide and 98% reported that they purposefully identified high-potentials.

Through the identification process, employees are often classified into various matrix-based categories of performance and potential due to the need for both high-potential and high-performance (functional expertise) within an organization. Through this classification process, an employee's contribution to an organization is maximized by "putting people in roles that match their talents" (Ashton, 2002, p. 32), in addition to identifying high-potential talent. Generally 3-5% of a total employee population is identified as high-potential (Ready, Conger, & Hill, 2013). In addition, leadership development consultancies and product development companies, such as the Hay Group and Korn Ferry, offer tools and processes to aid in the identification and assessment of high-potential employees.

Research contributions related to high-potential identification practices continue to focus on the ability to learn from experience (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2003; Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997; Zakay, Ellis, & Shevalsky, 2004) in addition to emotional intelligence (Dries & Pepermans, 2007). Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) described the

ability to learn from experience as *learning agility*. In an effort to further define learning agility, they conducted a factor analysis resulting in four different aspects:

1. People Agility—describes people who know themselves well, learn from experience, treat others constructively, and are cool and resilient under the pressures of change.
2. Results Agility—describes people who get results under tough conditions, inspire others to perform beyond normal, and exhibit the sort of presence that builds confidence in others.
3. Mental Agility—describes people who think through problems from a fresh point of view and are comfortable with complexity, ambiguity, and explaining their thinking to others.
4. Change Agility—describes people who are curious, have a passion for ideas, like to experiment with test cases, and engage in skill-building activities. (p. 324)

Similarly, Dries and Pepermans (2007) reported that emotional intelligence “profiles that emerge can provide valuable input into the high-potential identification process as well as

into individuals' personal development plans" (p. 764). In their study on high-potential identification, Dries and Pepermans (2007) found several subscales of Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory—including assertiveness, independence, optimism, flexibility and social responsibility—may contribute to the validity of high-potential identification practices.

While many organizations identify high-potential employees, transparency in identifying high-potential status to the employees themselves is inconsistent and presents several challenges. One concern is that high-potentials would become arrogant and complacent if they were informed about their status which has been referred to as “the crown prince syndrome” (Gobel-Kobialka, 1998). Conversely, organizations worry that if high-potential employees are not made aware of their status they may resign and pursue employment with another organization that will “recognize and develop their talent” (Snipes, 2005, p. 55).

Leadership Development Dimensions

Leadership development research has historically emphasized the development of individual leader skills as a means to improve performance. A human capital approach to leadership development focuses on developing individual knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), and is predominant in leadership development research (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; Day, 2000). In contrast, social capital focuses on building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organizational value (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

Several common leadership development theories approach leadership development as a means to build human capital. Theories include transformational leadership theory proposing that transformational leaders engage in behaviors related to the dimensions of charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985); situational leadership theory developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1996) addressing how leaders must vary their leadership based on the needs of the employee and situation; and character-based leadership, an extension of transformational

leadership, focusing on individual morality (Hannah & Avolio, 2010) and virtues (Sosik & Cameron, 2010). Within this section both human capital and social capital will be explored in relation to leader and leadership development.

Leader versus Leadership Development

Using human and social capital as a foundation, Day (2000) proposed a distinction between leader and leadership development, “at the core of the difference is an orientation toward developing human capital (leader development) as compared with social capital (leadership development)” (p. 605). In utilizing Day’s distinctions between leader and leadership development, human capital is supported by an individual leader development approach focusing on developing intrapersonal competence. Social capital is therefore supported by a relational leadership development approach focusing on developing interpersonal competence.

Table 2 illustrates Day’s (2000) summary of differences between leader and leadership dimensions, capital type, leadership model, competence base, and skills.

Table 2

Summary of Differences between Leader and Leadership Development

Comparison Dimension	Development Target	
	Leader	Leadership
Capital Type	Human	Social
Leadership Model	Individual Personal power Knowledge Trustworthiness	Relational Commitments Mutual respect Trust
Competence Base	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Skills	Self-awareness Emotional awareness Self confidence Accurate self-image Self-regulation Self-control Trustworthiness Personal responsibility Adaptability Self-motivation Initiative Commitment Optimism	Social awareness Empathy Service orientation Political awareness Social skills Building bonds Team orientation Change catalyst Conflict management

Note. (Day, 2000).

In his seminal work on leadership development, Day (2000) stated:

The proposed distinction [between leader and leadership development] is an essential because the respective development approaches are grounded in very different leadership models. Leader development is based on a

traditional, individualistic conceptualization of leadership. The underlying assumption is that more effective leadership occurs through the development of individual leaders. It also assumes that leadership is something that can be added to organizations to improve social and operational effectiveness. On the other hand, leadership development has its origins in a more contemporary, relational model of leadership. This model assumes that leadership is a function of the social resources that are embedded in relationships. (p. 605)

Human and Social Capital

Human capital refers to the “individual capabilities, knowledge, skill, and experience of the company’s employees and managers as they are relevant to the task at hand, as well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through individual learning” (Dess & Lumpkin, 2001, p. 25). In comparison, “social capital generally refers to the structure and quality of social relationships between individuals or organizations” (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2011, p. 180).

Historically, leadership development research and theory has focused on the human capital of individual leaders (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999), and individual leader characteristics (Avolio, 2007). Despite this, leaders generally do not lead in isolation (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, & Self, 2010), and therefore leadership effectiveness, to some extent, depends on the quality of the social network and context in which a leader leads (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006). Social capital is described as “the quality created between people, whereas human capital is a quality of individuals” (Burt, 1997, p. 339). According to Bilhuber Galli and Muller-Stewens (2012):

As a result, if a firm's leadership development practices stay exclusively human capital oriented, it might build the smartest and most competent managers but without the necessary social capital it risks that these resources and capabilities become stuck and cannot be deployed. This is particularly challenging for larger firms, where increased reorganizations and dynamic organizational changes lead to the constant re-building of social relationships across units, managers, and employees. In such a context, a conscious social capital management through

leadership development practices becomes a viable source for an organization's effectiveness. (p.178)

Skill areas identified in developing human capital include self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation, whereas skill areas in developing social capital include social awareness and social skills (Day, 2000).

Emotional Intelligence

Skills supporting the development of both human and social capital align with the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ or EI). In 1985, Reuven Bar-On coined the term emotional quotient or EQ stemming from his interest in the differences between people who are more or less emotionally and socially effective in their lives than others (Schwartz, 2000). Salovey and Mayer (1990) expanded on Bar-On's earlier work and introduced the term emotional intelligence describing it as a form of social intelligence. Then in the 1990s, Daniel Goleman published his groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence refers to the “ability to accurately identify and understand one’s own emotional reactions and those of others” (Muyia & Kacirek, 2009, p. 704), in addition to recognizing our feelings and others’ to motivate ourselves and manage emotions in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1998). Emotional intelligence has also been referred to as “the ability to use emotional information in a constructive and adaptive manner” (Lane, 2000, p. 171). Researchers describe emotional intelligence as consisting of several concepts including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Phipps & Prieto, 2011), and self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management (Goleman, 2011).

Of all the various concepts, self-awareness is consistently acknowledged as a component of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) states that “self-awareness – recognizing a feeling as it happens – is the keystone of emotional intelligence” (p. 43). Similarly, Mayer & Salovey (1997) include self-awareness as integral to the foundation of emotional intelligence. Table 3 lists additional definitions and descriptions of emotional intelligence.

Table 3

Emotional Intelligence Definitions and Descriptions

Author(s)	Year	Definition
Yukl	2010	“The extent to which a person is attuned to his or her own feelings and to the feelings of others and is able to integrate emotions and reason such that emotions are used to facilitate cognitive processes, and emotions are cognitively managed” (p. 212).
Northouse	2007	“Ability to understand emotions and apply this understanding to life’s tasks” (p. 23).
Goleman	1998	Emotional intelligence “refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (Goleman, 1998, p. 317).
Mayer & Salovey	1997	“The ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 9).

Leadership Development Practices

Numerous organization-based practices have been identified in which to develop leadership. The most common practices include training sessions, multi-module development programs, job assignments, coaching, 360-degree feedback, networking, and action learning. Approaches to development for high-potentials are often synonymous with general leadership development practices, and consistent practices

appear throughout high-potential literature. Best practices in leadership development include 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments and action learning (Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton, 2004; Day, 2001; Kur & Bunning, 2002; Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

Similarly, best practices reported for high-potential employees include “high-quality coaching, seasoned mentors, generous compensation, promotions, and highly visible roles” (Axelrod, et al., 2002, p. 86). In addition, in a study conducted on development practices of high-potential employees, the highest ranking developmental activities were job rotation, along with coaching/mentoring (Vloeberghs, Pepermans, & Thielemans, 2005). This section will describe common approaches to leadership development, their connection to high-potential development, in addition to practices specifically related to this study.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning emphasizes building upon a learner’s experience to construct knowledge and meaning, and subsequent theories stem from the works of

scholars such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Carl Jung, David Kolb, Paulo Freire, and Carl Rogers. The constructivist view of learning is the foremost understanding of experiential learning and is based on the reflection of a concrete experience and theoretical models by scholars such as Dewey, Lewin, and Kolb as they attempt to “explain ways people attend to and perceive experience, interpret and categorize it as concepts, then continue adapting or transforming their conceptual structures” (Fenwick, 2003, pp. 22-23). Experiential learning theory (ELT) defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” and “knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Kolb’s model (1984) described experiential learning as a cycle consisting of two modes of grasping and experience, concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and two modes of transforming experience, reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). The model is expressed as a four-stage cycle of learning that is initiated by a concrete experience followed by observations and reflection by the learner; observations and reflections are then translated into abstract

concepts; these abstract concepts produce new implications for action which can be tested and guide the creation of new experiences.

The focus on experiential learning is not unique to high-potentials, but is also a foundational aspect of both management and general leadership development. In a study of more than 600 managers, Wick (1989) found that job experiences accounted for 70 percent of all developmental experiences. In addition, a study by Lowy, Kelleher, & Finestone (1986) found that the majority of managerial learning occurs informally on the job. Kotter (1990) describes the critical role of experiential learning and leadership development as:

Individuals who are effective in large leadership roles often share a number of career experiences. Perhaps the most typical and most important is significant challenge early in a career. Leaders almost always have had opportunities during their twenties and thirties to actually try to lead, to take a risk, and to learn from both triumphs and failures. Such learning seems essential in developing a wide range of leadership skills

and perspectives. It also teaches people something about both the

difficulty of leadership and its potential for producing change. (p. 109)

Lombardo and Eichinger purported “learning from experience is how a person demonstrates what is termed high potential” (2000, p. 321). Bennis and Thomas (2002) concluded that “one of the most reliable indicators and predictors of true leadership is an individual’s ability to find meaning in negative events and to learn from even the most trying circumstances” (p. 39). McCall (2010) makes an even stronger case for experiential learning by stating “experience—not genetics, not training programs, not business school—is the primary source of learning to lead, and although our understanding of this kind of experience is far from complete, it is absolutely the place to start” (p. 3).

Job Experiences

The ability to learn from experience is identified as a key characteristic of high-potentials in addition to being a core developmental approach. Job experiences and challenging, or stretch, assignments are regularly cited as contributors to high-potential

development (Axelrod, Handfield-Jones & Michaels, 2002; Day, 2007; Groves, 2007; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2002; McCall, 1998; Peterson, 2008; Yost & Plunkett, 2010).

Development through job experiences pertains to how managers learn, undergo personal change, and acquire leadership capacity as a result of the roles, responsibilities, and tasks encountered in their jobs (McCauley & Brutus, 1998).

The most widely referred to study informing high-potential development is the longitudinal study of managers at AT&T where researchers found a significant relationship between early job challenge and subsequent managerial success (McCauley, 1986). Also in 1986, Lowy, Kelleher and Finestone found that the majority of managerial learning occurs informally on the job. A study by McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) reported that successful executives had a similar pattern of learning from key job assignments whereas their derailed peers, who experienced similar job assignments, had virtually no pattern of learning. In addition to learning results, studies have also reported that learning from certain on the job experiences is favorable for long-term job success (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1992).

Axelrod, Handfield-Jones and Michaels (2002) reported that high-potential employees can “accelerate their professional development through a steady stream of challenging job assignments” (p. 86). Providing high-potentials with challenging assignments keeps them engaged and helps them learn valuable lessons to boost future performance (Groves, 2007; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2002; Peterson, 2008). Studies have also found that job experiences contributed more to the executives’ development than classroom-based training programs (Davies & Easterby-Smith, 1984; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2002; McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1988).

Development Programs

Several researchers argue that leadership performance can be enhanced through formal development programs (Bolton, 1991; Earnest, 1996; Rohs, 1999). Implementing formal leadership development programs has become a popular practice among organizations as a cost-effective and efficient approach to leadership development. Leadership development programs possess several benefits including enhanced leadership skills, increased confidence, broadened perspectives, and increased

communication skills (Rohs & Langone, 1993). While leadership development programs offer several positive factors they also present challenges. The one-size-fits-all approach to a standardized program can be problematic when attempting to meet the needs of leaders with differing backgrounds, experiences, and skill levels. Solansky (2010) recommends that “leadership training programs should be realistic, practical, provide an opportunity for growth, and should provide new knowledge to participants all while facing the reality that people come into the program with diverse skills, learning styles, and experiences” (p. 675).

Cappelli (2008) suggested that structured development programs were a way to adapt to the uncertainty in talent demand by bringing “employees from all the functions together in an 18-month course that teaches general management skills, and then sends them back to their functions to specialize” (p. 4). Leadership development programs have become a means by which “high potential managers demonstrate their talents through organization-wide forums” in addition to providing opportunities to “showcase action learning projects for top management team members” (Groves, 2007, p. 244). The

inclusion of leadership development programs as a means to develop leaders illustrates a shift in development practices for high-potential employees as previous studies of successful executives have shown that classroom-based training programs contributed little to leaders' development (Davies & Easterby-Smith, 1984; McCall, Morrison, & Lombardo, 1988).

Executive Coaching

Coaching is characterized by a custom-tailored development process (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; Grant, 2006) and therefore addresses the challenge of different individual starting points and the one-size-fits-all approach to standardized programs. Dries and Pepermans (2008) discussed the use of coaches for high-potentials, and Groves (2007) reported that executives actively promote mentoring and “develop mentoring relationships with high potential employees of varying business units, work experience, and functional/product expertise, thereby creating a mentor network” (p. 244).

Executive coaching is an individual, customized development option that has become increasingly popular over the last several decades (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). Authors de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, and Jones (2013) further define executive coaching as:

a form of leadership development that takes place through a series of contracted one-to-one conversations with a qualified “coach.” Executive coaching aspires to be a form of organization and leadership development that results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable, and timely outcomes for clients. Coaching is tailored to individuals so that they learn and develop through a reflective conversation within an exclusive relationship that is trusting, safe, and supportive. Coaching is therefore substantially different from the more conventional training and development that is characterized by the imparting of actionable information, instruction, and advice (p. 41).

Historically, coaching focused on remediation for executives in jeopardy of derailing, however there has been a shift toward focusing on preparing high-potential employees for

career advancement (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; McCauley & Hezlett, 2001). According to Bono, Purvanova, Towler and Peterson (2009):

One of the reasons that coaching has grown so rapidly is because organizations have become aware of the problems and costs caused by high-potential employees with poor interpersonal skills, because the tight pool of talented employees makes employee development more attractive to organizations than replacement, because retirement among senior executives has prompted organizations to develop formal succession plans, and because managers, due to lack of skills and time, tend to outsource feedback and development of employees. (p. 389)

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching, sometimes referred to as reciprocal peer coaching, spans the interactions between two or more people with the goal of personal or professional development (D'abate, Eddy et al., 2003). Parker, Hall and Kram (2008) summarize the characteristic elements of peer coaching as (a) equal status of peers, (b) focus on personal and professional development of both peers, (c) reflection on practice, (d) emphasis on

process and content that facilitates leadership skill development, (e) and accelerating learning. Peer coaching is sometimes confused with mentoring. While many of the benefits of traditional mentors can be provided by peers (Eby, 1997; Ensher, Thomas et al., 2001; Higgins & Kram, 2001), the primary purpose of a mentor continues to be "in the service of the protege's learning" (Ragins & Kram, 2007). According to Parker, Hall and Kram (2008):

There are other examples of developmental relationships that support individual learning and facilitate career success. However the unique contribution of peer coaching is the inherent mutuality and reciprocity of the process. Both individuals are learners, in contrast to more traditional models of mentoring and other hierarchical learning relationships. The explicit and primary purpose of the relationship is to service both parties' learning. (p. 490)

Furthermore, peer coaching is based on developing a mutually beneficial partnership between two practitioners of similar experience (Waddell & Dunn, 2005).

In a study of individual leadership plans supported by reciprocal peer coaching, peer coaching was described as providing emotional, functional, and developmental value (Goldman, Wesner, & Karnchanomai, 2013). The authors further describe components of participants' experience as:

The value each individual participant received from the entire experience fell along a spectrum of emotional only to functional only, with a few experiencing both. The emotional value included confidence and positive motivation in undertaking implementation tasks (from discussions with the peer and the program director), a feeling of being in control of how their time was spent (from saying "no" to things not in their plan), and comfort of a known sounding board (their peer). The functional value included being forced to consider their plan on a regular basis (before meeting with their peer), having a framework of activities laid out (the implementation steps for each initiative), and having specific reflection prompts (the questions used in coaching and journaling). (p. 75)

As most leadership coaching is provided by external experts, coaching by internal peers is an untapped method to support leadership development (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007).

360-degree Feedback

360-degree feedback, also referred to as multi-rater or multi-source feedback, is a method of gathering perceptions of an individual's performance from a wide range of relevant viewpoints (Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, & Reilly, 1998). Raters of an individual's performance typically include bosses, peers, direct reports, and occasionally external stakeholders such as customers or vendors. An assumption of this approach to feedback is that "performance varies across contexts, and that someone behaves differently with different constituencies. An advantage of the multi-source approach is that it directly acknowledges differences across sources in the opportunity to observe various aspects of an individual's performance" (Day, 2001, p. 588-589).

Multi-rater feedback usage has largely been aimed at developing individual leaders (Church & Bracken, 1997; Tornow & London, 1998), and therefore can be a useful tool for building intrapersonal competence in the form of self-knowledge and

increased self-awareness (Day, 2001). 360-degree feedback is also used to support organization development and culture change initiatives (Burke & Jackson, 1991; Church, Waclawski & Burke, 2001); in addition, Bracken and Church (2013) advocate its use as a performance management tool:

It is our contention that 360 feedback has evolved over the past 20 years from a targeted organizational development and industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology intervention or tool focused on individual development, to a more mainstream, established and accepted human resource people process in most organizations. (p. 35)

Numerous researchers have reported that 360-degree feedback can create behavior change under the right circumstances (Goldsmith & Underhill 2001; Goldsmith & Morgan 2004; Smither, London & Reilly, 2005). While multi-source feedback is typically administered to enhance individuals' self-awareness of developmental needs, it fails to address other conditions for behavior change (McCauley & Hezlett's, 2001). Additional conditions for change can include support from bosses or peers in addition to

follow up with raters. In a study of more than 86,000 raters and more than 11,000 leaders, Goldsmith and Morgan (2004), found that responses to the degree of leader “follow-up” reported by the raters were highly predictive of perceived change in leader effectiveness. In contrast, the study also found that not following up with raters was a predictor of decreased effectiveness for many leaders.

Networking

“Leadership networks provide resources and support for leaders, and increase the scope and scale of impact leaders can have individually and collectively” (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010, p. 600). Furthermore, Day (2000) described networking as:

A way of breaking down barriers between functional areas, some organizations include development activities aimed at fostering broader individual networks. An important goal of networking initiatives is to develop leaders beyond merely knowing *what* and knowing *how*, to knowing *who* in terms of problem-solving resources. Networking is also about expanding one’s definition of what and how through exposure to others’ thinking, which can challenge basic assumptions

about what we think we know. It is also a means of encouraging organization members to form commitments with others outside of their immediate work group. In this way, networking is about investing in and developing social capital with a primary developmental emphasis on building support. (p. 596)

Literature on the developmental aspects of networking events reports that social interaction is associated with increased access to others for information, expertise, resources, and cooperation (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Hansen, 2002), and is a principal way of enhancing social capital in an organization (Day, 2000). Managers who build the kinds of networks that allow them to transcend the organization's formal structure—especially when they form non-redundant ties with people in other networks—are most likely to benefit in terms of information and entrepreneurial opportunities (Burt, 1992).

Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) developed a classification framework found in Table 4 describing four types of leadership networks. This classification provides a framework in which to better understand how to strengthen, use, and evaluate leadership networks.

Table 4

Leadership Network Classification Framework

Type of Network	Description of Network
Peer leadership network	A system of social ties among leaders who are connected through shared interests and commitments, shared work, or shared experiences. Leaders in the network share information, provide advice and support, learn from one another, and occasionally collaborate together. Peer leadership networks provide leaders with access to resources that they can trust. Leadership development programs often seek to create and catalyze peer leadership networks to expand the trusted ties that leaders have with one another. At other times peer networks emerge when leaders with something in common find personal benefit in sharing and connecting their experiences.
Organizational leadership network	A set of social ties that are structured to increase performance. These ties are often informal and exist outside the formal organizational structure, such as when an employee seeks advice from a colleague other than her supervisor to help solve a problem more quickly. At other times, teams or communities of practice are intentionally created to bridge silos within organizations that interfere with performance, profit, or delivering on one's mission. At the inter-organizational level, networks support organizations with shared interests to produce a product or deliver a service more efficiently.
Field-policy leadership network	A network connecting leaders who share common interests and who have a commitment to influencing a field of practice or policy. These networks seek to shape the environment (e.g., the framing of an issue, underlying assumptions, and standards for what is expected). Effective field-policy leadership networks make it easier for leaders to find common ground around the issues they care about, mobilize support, and influence policy and the allocation of resources.

(continued)

Type of Network	Description of Network
Collective leadership Network	A self-organized system of social ties among people attracted to a common cause or focused on a shared goal. Network members exercise leadership locally. As the number of local groupings grows and there is increasing interaction, these groups begin to align and connect to form larger networks. These networks are often rooted in a sense of community and purpose; they may be driven by a desire to achieve a specific goal, or simply by the desire of each member to belong to something larger than oneself.

Note. (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

Research also states that the generation of complex knowledge may need stronger forms of social capital than that which results from participation in networking events (Hansen, 2002). This need illustrates how “networks/off-sites might not suffice for establishing the strong ties required for other types of cross-business collaboration. Consequently, other practices such as leadership training should be employed to develop networks further” (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2012, p. 191).

Action Learning

Action learning is an approach for developing leaders, solving complex problems, and building teams (Marquardt, 2004; Raelin, 2009). In addition, action learning offers several other benefits. Action learning can assist organizations in keeping up with the rapidly changing global work environment (Boshyk, 2002; Watkins & Marsick, 1993),

combines development efforts with tangible work product outcomes (O'Neil & Marsick, 2007; Rimanoczy & Turner, 2008), and recognizes that people are motivated to learn when they make a connection between the experience of learning and their own lives (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). Action learning is described as a learning process involving small groups working to solve real problems and learning through, and a result of, the experience (Marquardt, 2004; O'Neil and Marsick, 2007). Willis (2004) defined action learning as "a process of reflecting on one's work and beliefs in the supportive/confrontational environment of one's peers for the purpose of gaining new insights and resolving real business and community problems in real time" (p. 11).

O'Neil and Marsick (2014) describe the process an organization utilizes when implementing action learning (AL) initiatives as:

Once an organization determines that AL is an appropriate intervention for leadership and management development, a co-design process takes place during which members of the organization and an AL consultant (either internal or external) follow steps to make a number of program design decisions. These

decisions can include determining the strategic focus of the program, choosing the projects for the AL teams and executive sponsors for the projects, and determining how to address the personal development needs/learning goals of the participants. Based on the strategic focus, decisions are also made about what might need to be taught to the participants in either a more traditional classroom structure or in the project teams in a “just-in-time” format. (p.205)

Action learning is differentiated from other forms of learning-by-doing, such as experiential learning, simulations, and outdoor adventure exercises, due to its focus on a real work problem in real time (O’Neil & Marsick, 2007; Yorks, O’Neil, & Marsick, 1999).

Summary

Within this chapter literature was presented in relation to high-potential talent, leadership development dimensions, and leadership development practices. Each section included research and theory relevant to the present study.

The next chapter includes information regarding the research method and design.

Specific components presented consist of a description of the population, selection of participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and study limitations.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND DESIGN

The purpose of the current study was to examine and develop an understanding of how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders. Specifically, this study aimed to understand: (a) how participation in the program contributed to skill development, (b) how the program supported building social and human capital, and (c) how specific program components contributed to participants' development as leaders.

Within this chapter the research method and design will be described. A summary of qualitative research methodology and the case study method are provided, in addition to the specific single case study research design of this inquiry. Research design information describes the unit of analysis, information collection, population and selection of participants, information analysis procedures, and research design quality and study limitations.

Qualitative Case Study Research

This study explored the phenomenon of a high-potential leadership development program from the perspective of the participants and within a natural, corporate organization setting; therefore, from an epistemological view, qualitative inquiry was believed to be the most appropriate approach for studying this phenomenon. Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research:

Begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study; and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher; a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (p. 44)

A qualitative inquiry approach offers many research methods to select from in designing a study. Creswell (2013) described five research traditions within qualitative research: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Case study research has been described as applicable for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology approaches (Stake 1995; Yin 2014) while others view it specifically as a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Yin (2014) described three conditions guiding the selection of different research methods “(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control a researcher has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events” (p. 9). He recommended different research methods according to the three conditions. Using Yin’s (2014) conditions as a guide, (a) the research question posed for this study seeks to understand how participation in a leadership development program contributes to high-potentials’ development as leaders, (b) the researcher does not require control over behavioral events, and (c) the degree of

focus is on contemporary events. These factors combined indicate case study research will be the most relevant method for this inquiry.

Within case study research, Yin (2014) defined it first by the scope of the study, and second by the features of the study:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within the real-world context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

2. A case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result

- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (pp. 16-17)

This qualitative case study research study draws primarily upon Yin's (2014) procedures for the research design and protocol. In addition to Yin, other literature was utilized to provide further support of the research design, sampling method, and data analysis. The remainder of this chapter outlines the specific research design employed for this inquiry.

Research Design of the Study

Yin (2014) identified three specific types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Exploratory case study research primarily provides direction for future research related to a phenomenon; explanatory case study research seeks to explain a phenomenon; and the purpose of descriptive case study research is to describe a phenomenon. As the purpose of this study is to advance the current understanding of how participation in a cohort leadership development program contributes to high-potentials' development as leaders, it is classified as an explanatory case study. Yin (2014) described five key components of case study research design:

1. The case study's questions;
2. its propositions, if any;
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings (p. 29).

The overarching research question of this inquiry was how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders and was further guided by the following questions: (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development, (b) how did the program support building social and human capital, and (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants' development as leaders?

Chapter one described the research questions, the statement of the problem, and importance of the study. Descriptions of the unit of analysis and criteria for interpreting the findings are addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis, also referred to as a case, is “the main subject of study in a case study—usually a concrete entity (e.g., a person, organization, community, program, process, policy, practice, or institution, or an occurrence such as a decision)” (Yin, 2014, p. 237). Within case study research the subject of study, or the case, can be defined as a single case or multiple cases (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) compared a single case study to a single experiment in that “many of the same conditions that justify a single experiment also can justify a single-case study” (p. 51).

In particular, a single case study is an appropriate design in circumstances when (a) a critical case exists that can test a well-formulated theory, (b) the case is an extreme or unique circumstance, (c) the case is believed representative or typical, or (d) a revolutionary case, where the investigator has the opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon formerly inaccessible to inquiry, and (e) longitudinal case, examining the same specific case at two or more different points in time (Yin, 2014). As this inquiry seeks to understand participants’ perceptions of their development as leaders through

participation in a cohort-based leadership development program, the program is identified as the case. This case is a unique circumstance in comparison to other leadership development programs in that it contains competency and character-based content in addition to peer group coaching development practices. Therefore, it was concluded that a single case study research design approach would yield the best insight into the selected phenomenon.

Bounding the Case

Yin (2014) stated that once the case has been determined, further clarification, called bounding the case, will help distinguish components included, and not included, within the case. As this study defines a case as a program, understanding the context of the specific leadership development program will aid in bounding the case. The cohort-based leadership development program, called the Experienced Leadership Program (ELP), was designed to enhance the leadership skills of high-potential managerial level employees who have demonstrated an interest in, and capability to assume, future leadership roles within their line of business, region or the firm. Program literature

provided to participants specifically describes the ELP as being intended for ‘high-potential performers’.

The ELP is a customized leadership development program created in partnership with an external vendor. The program originated in 2009 and takes place within a medium-large professional services firm headquartered in the Midwest United States. It is a twenty-month program consisting of several leadership development practices including six two-day training sessions, networking and teambuilding activities, dialogue with organization senior leaders, 360-degree feedback, individual coaching, and peer coaching. An overview of the program can be found in Appendix D. Content was built around the firm’s core competencies and examined through the lenses of competence, values, and character. Competence content covered topics such as developing others, conflict management, strategic planning, building teams and relationships, communication, and change. Character content addressed personal responsibility, authenticity, discipline, service, passion, and balance.

Selection and participation in the program is by invitation only through a regional leader nomination process. The ELP is structured as a cohort-based development program consisting of a geographically dispersed group of participants spanning all three of the firm's lines of business: assurance, consulting, and tax services. Each cohort consisted of 35 to 40 participants, with a new cohort starting each year. Within each cohort, the group is further divided into peer groups consisting of five to seven members. Peer groups are pre-determined by the program management team and members were intentionally grouped in order to represent all lines of business in addition to a mix of gender and geographic locations. The heterogeneous nature of peer groups was designed to create an environment in which participants feel comfortable sharing thoughts and concerns with others not involved in their local office issues while maintaining the benefits of understanding internal firm operations. Heterogeneous groups were also established to encourage building internal networks across the firm. In addition to helping distinguish components included and excluded within the case, bounding the case informs data collection.

Information Collection

The information collection process of this inquiry followed guidelines outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although the IRB deemed this research exempt from review under federal guidelines (Appendix C), University of Minnesota IRB guidelines were followed as a best practice for conducting social science research.

Within case study research, “the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods” (Yin, 2014, p. 119). Yin lists six sources when collecting case study evidence, or data, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. This inquiry drew information from four of the six sources of evidence as listed in Table 5.

Documentation sources consist of the program overview document, session materials, and program communications. Several forms of archival records were used as sources of evidence including individual session evaluation data from 2010, 2011, and 2012 cohorts; end of program evaluation data from ELP graduates; end of program evaluation data from the graduates’ managers; and ELP graduate promotion data.

Table 5

Inquiry's Sources of Evidence

Documentation	Archival Records	Interviews	Direct Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program overview document • Session materials • Program communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual session evaluation data (from 2010, 2011, and 2012 cohorts) • End of program evaluation data from ELP graduates • End of program evaluation data from graduates' managers • ELP graduate promotion data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with ten program graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six program sessions spanning a twenty-month timeframe • Program networking events • Teambuilding ropes course • Leader dialogue

The researcher attended and directly observed each of the six program sessions spanning a twenty-month time frame. Data from observed program components data were gathered via field notes and included each of program's six sessions, a ropes course teambuilding session, and leader dialogues with organization senior leaders. Field notes were not taken during networking events. The researcher did not have access to observe groups during their peer group coaching sessions.

The primary method for collecting information was via in-depth, semi-structured 60 to 90 minute interviews with the ELP graduates. While the current study was identified as a single case due to its unique circumstance (Yin, 2014), it drew heavily on interview data from program graduates. The ELP graduate population consisted of 108 individuals who complete the program between 2010 and 2012. Within this total population (a) 39 were female and 69 were male, (b) 44 were from assurance, 21 from consulting, 43 from tax, (c) 38 graduated in 2010, 38 in 2011, 32 in 2012, and (d) 41 were promoted to partner/principal. Due to the varied demographics of the population a purposeful sampling approach was used to identify informants who reflected the overall composition of program graduates. Patton (2002) described the value of purposeful sampling as:

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230)

Patton (2002) described several different strategies for purposefully selecting cases.

Among the various strategies, Patton (2002) described maximum variation sampling as one that “aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (Patton, 2001, pp. 234-234).

Utilizing the maximum variation sampling strategy, ten graduates were invited to voluntarily participate in the study based on gender, line of business, graduation year, and promotion data with the intention of reflecting the overall composition of the program graduate population as closely as possible. Interview participants were invited to participate in the study via a request communication outlining my research (Appendix B). Interviewees ranged in age from their mid-thirties to mid-forties, and specific demographics are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Interview Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Line of Business	Graduation Year	Promotion to Partner/Principal
Jake	Male	Tax	2010	
Jason	Male	Consulting	2011	X
Jonah	Male	Tax	2012	
Kelly	Female	Tax	2011	
Lisa	Female	Consulting	2012	X
Mary	Female	Assurance	2012	
Sam	Male	Assurance	2010	X
Stan	Male	Consulting	2010	X
Tina	Female	Assurance	2010	
Tom	Male	Assurance	2012	

Information Analysis

Yin (2014) described several strategies when beginning to analyze data including working data from the ground up. This inductive strategy involves reviewing data and noticing patterns. This strategy was employed to determine initial data codes. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed, and documentation, archival records, and direct

observations were converted into a field notes format. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with the data collection process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) using a constant comparative approach involving the ongoing analysis of data as it became available (Merriam, 2009).

Interview transcripts and field notes were stored electronically and formatted to allow room for notations and coding in the margins. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) described codes as:

Labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to data “chunks” of varying size and can take the form of a straightforward, descriptive label or a more evocative and complete one. (p. 71-72)

Data were coded using a process called open coding where notations that are “interesting, potentially relevant, or important to your study” were made within the margins of interview transcripts and fields notes (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) described this process as first cycle coding. Within first cycle coding, a

descriptive approach to coding was utilized. After each interview transcript and field note was created, descriptive codes were entered into the side margins of the electronic text file.

Once descriptive codes were listed, the second cycle of coding called patterned codes was utilized. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) stated that “pattern codes usually consist of four, often interrelated, summarizers: (a) categories or themes, (b) causes/explanations, (c) relationships among people, and (d) theoretical constructs” (p. 87). Two of the four summarizers primarily informed the second coding portion of the analysis—categories or themes, and causes/explanations. Tentative themes continued to be analyzed once all interview transcripts and field notes were coded. This process entailed sorting codes and text evidence into the various emerging themes while constantly analyzing and interpreting the data.

After completing the second cycle of coding, a conceptually clustered matrix was created to further analyze the data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) describe this process as:

A conceptually clustered matrix has its rows and columns arranged to bring together major roles, research subtopics, variables, concepts, and/or themes together for at-a-glance summative documentation and analysis. Deciding what composes a row and column heading can happen in two ways: (1) deductively, the analyst may have some a priori ideas about key concepts, themes, or theories that will be explored in a study or, (2) inductively, during early analysis, you may find that participants are giving very similar or vastly different responses to questions or that unexpected variables, concepts, and themes are emerging. (p. 173)

The matrix was helpful in providing an overall view of themes and data. Through this further analysis, the matrix illuminated areas where data coded to a particular theme represented the emergence of two or more separate themes. After further analysis, theme names were written to be “responsive to the purpose of the research” and therefore be congruent with the research questions in addition to being “mutually exclusive” where a particular piece of information fits into only one category (Merriam, 2009, p. 185).

Research Design Quality

While debate exists among researchers regarding whether qualitative case study research can, or even should, be measured by traditionally-based quantitative research standards, Yin (2014) advocated that several design tests for establishing the quality of empirical social research are also relevant to case study research. These design tests include (a) construct validity, (b) internal validity, (c) external validity, and (d) reliability. Several steps were taken within this inquiry to achieve construct validity and reliability in particular.

Construct Validity

Yin (2009) defined construct validity as “identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (p. 46). To meet the test of construct validity Yin outlined two steps (a) define the phenomena being studied in terms of specific concepts related to the study, and (b) identify operational measures that match those concepts. Yin recommended three tactics to increase construct validity in case study research including

using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the draft report.

Yin (2014) stated that “any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a similar convergence” (p. 120). Yin listed six potential sources of evidence when collecting case study data, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Within the current study, data were used from four of the six sources including interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observation. Utilizing multiple sources of evidence is also referred to as triangulating data, and is one way to support the convergence of evidence. Denzin (1989) and Patton (2002) describe four different types of triangulation protocol: (a) data sources, (b) different investigators, (c) theory, and (d) methodological. Multiple sources of evidence “provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon” and provided the multiple sources support the convergence of evidence, then “data triangulation helps to strengthen the construct validity of your case study” (Yin, 2014, p. 121).

Creating a chain of evidence describes the process of enabling the reader of a research study report to “follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions” (Yin, 2014, p. 127). In order to trace evidence from start to completion, or backward, the report should appropriately cite and denote the relevant sources of information. Yin (2014) describes the multi-step process as:

First, the report itself should have adequately cited or footnoted the relevant sources used to arrive at specific findings—for example, by referring to specific document, interviews, observations. Second, these specific sources, upon inspection, should contain the actual evidence, as you might have highlighted the key phrases or words in the documents by marking them with a yellow pen. Your methods sections also should have indicated the circumstances under which the evidence had been collected—for example, the time and place of an interview. Third, these circumstances should be consistent with the specific procedures and

questions contained in the case study protocol, to show that the data collection had followed the procedures stipulated by the protocol. (p. 128)

This inquiry follows Yin's recommendations regarding creating a chain of evidence by notating specific sources used to arrive at the various theme findings. Information supporting inquiry findings was also presented verbatim utilizing direct quotes from participant interviews, and overall program evaluation data, in addition to program documentation. Finally, the manner in which evidence was collected remained consistent with procedures specified within the case study protocol.

In establishing construct validity, Yin also recommends key informants review a draft report of the case study. In addition to being a professional courtesy (Yin, 2014), this process is a means of corroborating the findings and evidence presented (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Yin (2014) states that:

The informants and participants may cling to their own perspectives and disagree with your conclusions and interpretations, but these readers should have the opportunity to challenge a study's key findings. If disagreement emerges during

the formal review process, you may have to regard the case study report as being unfinished until the disagreement has been settled through a search for further evidence, as the informants and participants may remember new materials that they had forgotten during the initial data collection period. (p. 199)

Stake (1995) refers to Yin's recommendation that key informants review a draft report of the case study as member checking. Stake further describes the process as one in which an informant, or actor, is "requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her" (1995, p. 115). Within the inquiry, interview participants were asked to review the specific information they provided in addition to reviewing the overall study findings. Several participants provided additional information to further describe their previous statements, therefore improving the overall quality of the study. Yin further states that any "corrections made through this process will enhance the accuracy of the case study, hence increasing the construct validity of the study" (Yin, 2014, p. 199).

Reliability

Yin (2014) defined reliability as “demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results” (p. 46).

Yin describes two ways in which to support reliability: establishing a case study protocol, and creating a case study database. As outlined by Yin (2014) the case study protocol has four sections:

1. Section A: an overview of the case study (objectives and auspices, case study issues, and relevant readings about the topic being investigated).
2. Section B: data collection procedures (procedures for protecting human subjects, identification of likely sources of data, presentation of credentials to field contacts, and other logistical reminders).
3. Section C: data collection questions (the specific questions that the case study researcher must keep in mind in collecting data and the potential sources of evidence for addressing each question).

4. Section D: a guide for the case study report (outline, format for the data, use and presentation of other documentation, and bibliographic information). (p. 85-86)

The case study protocol is a means of increasing reliability in guiding the researcher in carrying out data collection from both single and multiple case studies (Yin, 2014). To support the reliability of this inquiry and increase the overall quality of the study, a case study protocol was developed (Appendix E).

The second way Yin recommends supporting case study reliability is to create a case study database. Yin (2014) states that “the database’s main function is to preserve your collected data in a retrievable form” and describes an ideal database as one that is “orderly but need not be highly polished” (p. 123). An electronic case study database was created for this study utilizing a folder structure containing Microsoft Word and Excel files in which to store study documents and data. This database included all research forms related to the overall study, in addition to data gathered via documentation, archival records, interview transcripts and audio recordings, and field notes from direct

observation. Further information regarding how the design of the study supported construct validity and reliability will be described in detail through the remainder of this chapter.

Internal and External Validity

Yin (2014) defined internal validity as “seeking to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships” and external validity as “defining the domain to which a study’s findings can be generalized” (p. 46). Yin further states that internal validity is appropriate for causal case studies only and not for descriptive or exploratory studies. As this study is descriptive in nature and does not seek to establish a causal relationship(s) internal validity was not applicable. Furthermore, as this study seeks to understand participants’ perceptions within the context of a specific leadership development program, and not intended to draw broader conclusions, external validity was also not applicable.

Study Limitations

Notable study limitations are related to the methodology, data, and researcher bias. The current study explored high-potentials' perceptions of how a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to their development as leaders. Various topics relevant to the overall effectiveness or return on investment of the leadership development program have not been explored and are considered outside the scope of this research. The study was limited to a major professional services firm headquartered in the Midwest United States. As a qualitative case study approach was utilized, themes cannot be generalized beyond the firm. The population of this study further narrows the ability to generalize findings to those who graduated from the Experienced Leadership Program.

Data were collected in an uncontrolled environment in which the phenomenon being studied occurred and had the potential to be impacted by factors outside the control of the researcher. Furthermore data were subject to varying interpretations based on the experiences and interpretations of individual program graduates. As the primary means

for collecting data was through interviews, there is some risk that the interviewees did not possess a sufficient understanding of leadership development or the ability to effectively articulate their development experience.

As the leader of the Experienced Leadership Program it is important to acknowledge my own researcher bias as a study limitation. My position within the professional services firm, and previous organization roles related to high-potential leader development, have influenced my interest and passion in this topic. It should also be recognized that I am an emerging scholar and my understanding of, and abilities related to, empirical research is limited. A more experienced researcher may have insight beyond my current capability.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to advance the current understanding of how participation in a cohort leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders. This chapter presented the current study's research method and

design including descriptions of the case, information collection techniques, analysis, and research design quality.

The next chapter includes the current study's findings and analysis. Each of the themes that emerged from this study will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the findings are presented and analyzed. The focus of this inquiry sought to understand how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders. To explore this phenomenon, the following sub questions guided the study: (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development, (b) how did the program support building social and human capital, and (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants' development as leaders?

The current study included a document review, archival data review, and interviews, which together were triangulated to develop five themes. The document review included session descriptions, learning objectives, and session course materials. Archival data, including individual session participant evaluation data in addition to end-of-program participant and manager evaluation data, also contributed to the study. The primary method for collecting information was via in-depth, semi-structured 60 to 90

minute interviews with ten ELP graduates. The following are the five themes that emerged from this study (a) enhancing self-awareness, (b) receiving feedback, (c) cultivating a network, (d) advocating personal well-being, and (e) participating in peer group coaching.

Theme 1: Enhancing Self-awareness

This central finding addressed how an increase in self-awareness contributed to participants' development as leaders. All participants interviewed revealed increased self-awareness as a result of participating in the Experienced Leadership Program.

Participants shared ways in which self-awareness helped them gain perspective and improve performance. One participant, Lisa, stated "I found out things about my style I wasn't aware of, and by changing myself I have made other people more productive.

Being able to have the time to really self-evaluate was huge for me." Another participant, Kelly, described how peer group participants helped one another increase their self-awareness:

You really get to talk about your individual strengths and weaknesses and learn from the people in your group as far as what their strengths and weaknesses are.

With the six people that were in my group, it was so interesting to me how easy it was for us to spot what they could fix where they couldn't see it in front of them and vice versa.

One participant evaluation respondent summarized the results of their leadership development experience as:

I feel that I'm simply (1) more self-aware, (2) present and (3) willing and open to understanding how I need to change and putting in steps to execute the change. I feel like I'm a better person in both my professional and personal life as a result of this program.

Managers of participants also provided evidence supporting the overall theme of awareness. One manager evaluation respondent shared the following about their employee's participation, "the program has boosted her self-awareness of the strengths she needs to continue leveraging in order to have a greater impact on the organization,

while focusing on developing skills in new areas essential to success.” Still another manager stated that their employee: Gained awareness of taking care of his career, he has a better understanding of his weak areas and how to compensate/improve them, he has gained a good working relationship with a large number of people from the class. He is more aware of his 'wake' and how his attitude and actions impact others.

The concept of *knowing your wake* was used in the program to describe the importance of understanding the impact participants have on others based on what they say and do as a leader. One evaluation respondent described how they gained better awareness of their impact and leadership presence:

The program helped me to realize the impact I have on others around me whether that be employees or clients. My attitude, how I would handle the daily challenges and so on, I learned that others would see how I handled these things and I don't think it had a positive impact on them. So one thing that I try to recognize is that I am a leader and as a leader, I need to project the kind of presence that I would like others to have.

An interview participant, Tina, described how an increase in self-awareness helped her manage her wake:

The whole discussion of knowing your wake—knowing how your decisions, and how you impact others with either saying, doing, how I do things. I needed a lot of work there. I have very high expectations of people. I work really hard. I expect everybody else to work that hard. And when they don't, I have an issue with that. So, when I came into the program, I was really pushing people very hard that worked with me and pushing back on people that maybe I shouldn't have been pushing back on. I learned that I need to deal with different people differently, and everybody has a different way of getting from point A to point B, and it's not necessarily wrong if it's not my way.

Overall, self-awareness contributed to participants' development as leaders in addition to helping prevent future leaders from derailing. A participant, Tina, shared how the leadership development program made a difference in her career:

I probably wouldn't be here anymore. There were a lot of things I learned in the program. I don't know if I would have forced myself to look at certain things that the program made me look at about myself and the way I lead and deal with people that I probably would have either gotten frustrated with people not cooperating with me or I would have just shot myself in the foot and would be gone.

Theme 2: Receiving Feedback

A key contributor to participants' development as leaders pertained to receiving feedback. Participants received feedback from their peer group coach, peer group members, and via a formal 360-degree feedback assessment completed by colleagues and bosses within their respective offices. Participants referred to how the 360-degree feedback tool and process helped them gain awareness. One participant, Tom, shared:

The 360 feedback session was a powerful experience. It opened my eyes to how people perceive me. Eyes opened in general to entire organization and how things work, and the function of being in the group with all the other participants and

perspectives—that shed a lot of light on unhealthy practices. The 360 was a phenomenal tool in terms of getting some anonymous feedback, and I learned a lot out of that, things that I might have had blinders on for. I was kind of unaware of my impact on others. So, if a high stress situation presents itself, I'd probably react negatively, bring some negative energy to it, and now, it's probably different. I bring more positive attitude.

360-degree feedback is purported to provide a more complete and accurate picture of an individual's performance. Another participant, Mary, shared how 360-degree feedback helped her gain a better understanding of how others perceive her:

Well, I think you hear things through your [boss] on feedback, but I've always taken that as that's one person that's not really how everyone feels about me. And with the 360 feedback, it was very apparent that some of those things that I've been told one way are really how I act and how I'm perceived and I think it brings it home a little bit harder hearing it from multiple people. So I think you're constantly trained to work on things but hearing those things in a more personal

manner, I think really makes you start to think, how do I look at how I'm perceived or whatnot and how do I change that and refine what I'm doing because I think I'm working on it but really maybe I'm not the way I should be.

Mary continued to explain how receiving that feedback has aided her in changing behavior and improving performance:

I'm trying to go out and connect with people. I'm on a part-time schedule so I was in my office getting my stuff done—being efficient and not spending time to get connected. Getting connected definitely helps, and I feel like I have changed perceptions of myself. People are now seeking me out and I'm not their [boss].

We've been through a little bit of turmoil within our office over the past six months and people that I have never worked with stop me to talk to me or come up to me and say, "How do I deal with this, what should I do?" So, I guess, the perception of being more of a coach and mentor. I feel like people seeking me out is probably a sign I have changed and I'm not just sitting in my office getting my

stuff done, I'm getting out there. And once that person tells somebody else that they had a good conversation with me then another person wants to come in.

Another participant, Tina, described how she would not have realized changes in her communication style needed to be made without participating in the program:

I love social settings and getting to know people and having a good time, but at the same time, when it comes to work, I have a hard time relaxing because I feel like there are a lot of things not getting done when I'm relaxing. And then some of that behavior comes off as, "She doesn't care or she's not interested in how things went for me this weekend, that's why I couldn't get something done and she doesn't even bother to ask." So that's the kind of feedback I was getting. I would say overall my communications with people has been the biggest change that I've made that I probably wouldn't have realized needed to be made without the program.

Tina continued to describe how she was able to adapt her communication and get better results:

I was able to turn things around. One change that I made was when I see people at work, I'm starting to ask them more about how they are doing personally versus focusing on what work they're doing with me at the time. That small change I made has grown into me having better relationships with the people I work with—really being interested in what's going on with them and their development. Unfortunately I'm not just—I'm a natural people person, but I'm not a natural relationship person. That's the big difference with me. So I have to put a lot effort into making sure people know that I'm interested in what they're doing, saying, and care about where they're coming from.

Information regarding communication style and how they were perceived by others was common feedback that participants received. One participant, Lisa, described the changes she has made in her approach:

I've really worked hard to let people take responsibility and be a little softer in the way I communicate. I think that a lot of times my objective is to be supportive, to mentor, and to encourage, but maybe my delivery is not communicating that to

the receiver. I'm trying to make folks feel like I have all the time in the world for them, that they are very important to me you got to shut things off and you can't do multitasking. You cannot... you have to be fully engaged and let people know you're fully engaged with them. And I've really tried to work on doing that.

Theme 3: Cultivating a Network

One of the recurring themes described the support a social network provided participants throughout, and after, their participation in the Experienced Leadership Program. The value of networking, relationships, and affirmation were cited in many of the interviews. Participants believed the networking opportunities, smaller peer group cohorts, and formal peer coaching allowed for important social components not available to them otherwise. Components of support included forming trusting relationships and cross-business collaboration.

Kelly stated “I was really excited to be able meet other people at my level from around the firm, internal networking part of it.” Another participant, Tina, described the

social network value of the program, in particular, how involvement with her peer group has benefited her:

The benefit for me was to just establish a network of people across the firm who were in the same boat I am. So that's a big piece that I took away from it is just a big kind of new family. So I mean there's the big network of the whole group and then there's also the peer group. So like for my peer group, there are six of us, and luckily, we're all six still with the firm. Three out of the six have made partner as of now. So we still have calls. We still get together and talk. So that's much more of an intimate group of people that I network with and we bounce things off of throughout the year and have emails and things like that, that we touch base with each other, see how things are going.

Tina further described the ongoing support her peer group members provide one another:

We just had our call last Monday to catch up with everybody. One of the guys in our group just made partner this last round, and another one is going through some challenges with his career. So we all just get on the line and talk through

stuff and keep in touch. That's been the most valuable thing that I have taken away from it outside of the core skills. One of the most valuable things I pulled out of it is this network of people now, that if I have an issue or a problem, I go to these guys first.

The peer group forum allowed individuals to have deeper, more meaningful conversations—accelerating both trust building and personal change. Trusting relationships and affirmation from their peer group also enhanced participants' self-confidence. One evaluation form comment, in particular, summarized this concept well:

The feedback of my peer group and coach has helped immensely. Those people got to know me at a new level. Their feedback along the way helped me to have confidence in my decisions. The last session where we shared an intimate story and where we were given the character work cards was very powerful. I finally felt like my peer group understood me...all of me. They gave me guidance and reaffirmed that I was on the right path to becoming a more effective leader.

Members of peer groups committed to one another's success, began to see a much bigger view of the firm, and shifted their fundamental mind-sets from silo success to cross-group collaboration. One participant, Tom, described the support as, "to have the group setting to talk about things out loud where you felt safe, no fear of repercussions. That support group helps you work through feedback". Another interview participant, Mary, described the unique nature of trusting relationships created through the program:

Not that I don't think my boss likes me and cares about me, but these people are people that you laid it all out there for. Whether it was children that were sick or marital problems or a serious problem with a boss at work or whatever it was, we're laying it all out there and you just create a bond that I would say as just somewhat indescribable.

In addition to forming trusting relationships where participants felt safe, the social network also supported cross-business collaboration. Cross-business collaboration spanned from creating a list of internal contacts throughout the firm, to client referrals, and cross-selling opportunities. The relationships participants developed through their

cohort program and peer group experiences have, and will hopefully continue, to build social capital within the firm. One evaluation participant stated “One of the most important parts [of ELP] is the network of people you have around the firm after being in the program. You can now contact people from all over”. Another participant, Kelly, described how she developed a network of specialists:

It was great to get to know specialists across the Firm that I would feel comfortable introducing to clients. One of the women in my group has a specialty in an area I know nothing about. So when certain questions come over that I can't answer, I now have someone to call without having to make it somebody that I don't know. It's really helped from a business perspective that if something comes across that maybe I don't have expertise at I have more people in my network now internally than I would have had had I not been a part of the program.

Kelly further describes how her peers have also utilized her skills for their clients “I've gone out to some people's clients to talk about it [a new tax law], where if they hadn't

known me from ELP they wouldn't have put me in front of their client". She summarized her experience with the statement "I feel like I've been able to service my current clients better".

Theme 4: Advocating Personal Well-being

A fourth theme described participants' on-going struggle to take care of one's self in order to be an effective leader. This included managing stress, maintaining perspective, and achieving personal and professional balance as they continue to grow as leaders. A professional services firm is part of a fast-paced industry requiring long hours and many personal sacrifices in order to attain partnership. Recognizing this, it is not surprising that this theme emerged from interview data, participant evaluation data, and also manager evaluation data. Through the character-based content of the program, participants were encouraged to be an advocate for their own personal well-being. To illustrate this, an evaluation respondent described how the program has "helped me remember that taking care of myself is a very important part of being an effective leader".

Stress management is also an important part of taking care of one's self as a leader. An evaluation respondent commented that "the energy management and personnel management concepts have been very helpful in getting a better handle on personal workload and stress levels". An interview participant, Stan, further described how the program has helped him maintain perspective and better manage stress:

I think ELP has helped me handle and minimize, I guess what I'd call, the stress of it. And I use that term carefully because we're not defusing WMDs in Iraq, right? The program helped me keep that in perspective by thinking about things like that, thinking about what's important to me in life. ELP changed the way I approach stress. I think I approach it in a way now that helps me live my life better.

Another participant, Mary, also described how the program helped her better manage stress and maintain perspective:

I would say I handle stress better, whether it's deep breathing or just getting up on the balcony, like taking a step back. The work that I do is important but it's not,

obviously, life-dependent. I have much more perspective than I did. I think I was tunnel vision and now I can see the bigger picture.

When asked what things would be like if she had not participated in the program, Mary responded:

Well, I think it probably would have slowed down my progression, and I'm not even sure if it would've made me want to leave at some point because of the stress levels. So, I don't know. I guess, it's interesting to think about it but the stress may have gotten to me and I may have decided enough is enough.

Stress management and creating a sense of balance go hand-in-hand. An interview participant, Stan, described the importance of well-being and balance as:

Taking care of yourself and making time to do that. And not only physically but making sure your personal life's in order, that you're spending time with your family and doing things because if you're not happy in that respect, you're probably not going to be happy at work.

Another participant described the actions she is taking as a result of the program:

I think I'm more aware of how I present myself. And I've always been kind of aware of it, especially in stressful situations. A lot of the little practices that we learned really do come in handy. You know things like just stopping—making sure I'm taking care of myself, not putting myself last. So that when I am here, I can think more clearly and be available. That has changed a lot.

Theme 5: Participating in Peer Group Coaching

This theme was characterized by participants' comments supporting the premise that peer coaching supported learning, created a co-counselor relationship among participants, and held participants accountable. Peer coaching is a collaborative process, one that increases confidence and supports the application of skills, generation of ideas, and creates accountability. One participant, Stan, described how his peers provided advice and supported learning:

The peer group helps you apply things you learned in the program, and gain an impartial view from someone who knows what's going on in the firm. Our group was really tight—we still have calls, bouncing off personal challenges and

challenges at work. One person was facing a decision for a transfer that would help her get to the partner level and wanted advice from group.

Another participant, Sam, also described how peer coaching supported his learning in a collaborative way:

I gained from others in my peer group who were more poised [than I] and not rushing the peer group aspect. This was a way to learn from each other because sometimes you're on an island just doing the same thing every day every week at your office, and even though there's plenty of other directors or people to talk to, you don't really sit down and talk about leadership on a day-to-day basis and ELP was the forum to do it.

Participants also described how they learned indirectly from one another and continued to increase their self-awareness by listening to peers share their experiences and perspectives. One participant, Jason, illustrated this:

What was most effective for me was the breakout sessions where we got into our teams of I think it was six or seven people. And we really talked about how we

handle different situations across the group. I guess it was intriguing to me to hear how some individuals reacted in the group. I'm like, 'Wow, I would never do that,' but in reality I probably did. So I learned through that eye-opening experience of, 'Wow, I would have taken that negatively. I hope I never did that,' but then stepping back and saying, 'I probably have done that before'.

Accountability was also a key part of the learning process. Due to the length of the program in addition to the cohort nature, participants were able to engage in learning and skill application discussions with their peers and then have an opportunity to follow-up during a future session. One participant, Mary, described how the peer group structure was instrumental in holding her accountable to her development as a leader:

My peer group kept me accountable. I think peer groups are instrumental in the process. There were constant check-ins—'Okay, what are you doing to do your part to change that behavior or refinement', and I think the accountability factor helps quite a bit because you just say, 'Well, I'm accountable to my boss', but it's

different. These people want to help you grow and there is no motive, they are just people that genuinely care about you.

Another interview participant, Kelly, summarized the power of the peer group in holding one another accountable:

I think why ELP worked so well is that I was challenged by the people in my group, and I had to report back to them two months later. There's really accountability to those other people in your group. Not in the larger group so much, I don't know why, but that small group and the accountability for the small group is just—it's really interesting the power that that has.

Summary

Within this chapter, the current study's findings and analysis of the data gathered were provided. Five themes were discussed including (a) enhancing self-awareness, (b) receiving feedback, (c) cultivating a network, (d) advocating personal well-being, and (e) participating in peer coaching.

In the next chapter a discussion and conclusions will be provided. A synthesis of the research questions, discussion of each theme, and recommendations for practice as well as recommendations for further inquiry will be made.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study endeavored to address how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders. It was further guided by the following questions: (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development, (b) how did the program support building social and human capital, and (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants' development as leaders?

This chapter includes a synthesis of the research questions, discussion of each of the thematic findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further inquiry. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter and final conclusions.

Synthesis of Research Questions

Within this section, the primary and guiding research questions are addressed, answered, and synthesized. The current study explored how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as

leaders. It was further guided by the following questions: (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development, (b) how did the program support building social and human capital, and (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants' development as leaders?

The primary research question resulted in five themes describing how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributed to high-potentials' development as leaders. Guiding questions provided further insight into the skill development, the building of human and social capital, and supporting program components. Participants' perceptions of their skill development aligned with both intrapersonal (leader development and human capital) and interpersonal (leadership development and social capital) skills. Using Day's (2000) framework, intrapersonal skills developed through this program relate mainly to self-awareness and self-regulation, while interpersonal skills pertain to social skills. Table 7 illustrates the current study's themes and alignment with types of skills and capital development.

Table 7

Themes, Skills, and Capital Development

Theme	Intrapersonal Skills Human Capital	Interpersonal Skills Social Capital
Enhancing Self-awareness	X	
Receiving Feedback	X	
Cultivating a Network		X
Advocating Personal Well-being	X	
Participating in Peer Group Coaching	X	X

Several specific program components contributed to participants' development as leaders including peer group coaching, 360-degree feedback, and networking. Peer group coaching surfaced as a main element—directly or indirectly—supporting each theme. It provided a forum for participants to receive and reflect on feedback, be held accountable, and gain on-going support.

Discussion

Within this section each theme is reviewed and discussed. Consistencies and inconsistencies found within current literature are presented in addition to updates.

Enhancing Self-awareness

The first theme, enhancing self-awareness, addressed how an increase in self-awareness contributed to participants' development as leaders. This theme was characterized by statements such as "I found out things about my style I wasn't aware of, and by changing myself I have made other people more productive" and "it was easy for us to spot what [peer group members] could fix where they couldn't see it in front of them and vice versa". The concept of *knowing your wake* was addressed in the program to help participants understand the impact they have on others based on what they say and do as a leader. This theme was characterized within interviews by statements such as "the program helped me to realize the impact I have on others around me" and "knowing how your decisions, and how you, impact others".

This theme is consistent with existing literature linking emotional intelligence to effective leadership and leadership development. Self-awareness is described as what "allows a leader to make improvements and change their behaviors to become more effective" (Solansky, 2010, p. 679), and is listed as a fundamental component of

emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Phipps & Prieto, 2011).

There is an emotional component to leadership, and leaders need to acknowledge that emotional component in order to be successful (Dasborough, 2006; George, 2000).

Several authors further argue that emotional intelligence is a key component of effective leadership (Goleman, 1995; Solansky, 2010). Emotional intelligence has also been linked to high-potential leader identification and development practices. Dries and Pepermans (2007) proposed that using emotional intelligence factors in identifying high-potential may contribute to the validity of high-potential identification processes.

Receiving Feedback

The second theme, receiving feedback, pertained to the feedback participants received from their peer group coach, peer group members, and via a formal 360-degree feedback assessment completed by colleagues and bosses. Participants referred to how feedback in general, and 360-degree feedback in particular, helped them better understand how people perceived them. This theme was characterized by interview

statements such as “it really makes you start to think [about] how I’m perceived” and “it [360-degree feedback] opened my eyes to how people perceive me”.

This theme is also consistent with literature regarding the importance of feedback in leadership development. Feedback from 360-degree assessments can challenge leaders’ self-perceptions and help them identify areas for development (Conger & Toegel, 2003). As a leader’s behavior and performance can vary across contexts, Hooijberg and Choi (2000) recommend using 360-degree feedback as a starting place for managers and leaders to understand the different expectations of various constituency groups. As 360-degree feedback, or multi-rater feedback, is largely aimed at developing individual leaders (Church & Bracken, 1997; Tornow & London, 1998) it is a useful tool for building intrapersonal leadership skills and human capital in the form of self-knowledge and increased self-awareness (Day, 2001). The use of groups in relation to 360-degree feedback is also supported in the literature. Brenner (2010) supports the utilization of groups to support development from feedback in that putting “360-degree

feedback to practical use within a ‘live’ interpersonal setting adds a beneficial component not available within the framework of one-on-one coaching” (p. 22).

Cultivating a Network

The third theme, cultivating a network, describes the support a network provided participants throughout, and after, their participation in the program. Participants shared how the networking opportunities, smaller peer group cohorts, and formal peer coaching allowed for important social connections not available to them otherwise. This theme was characterized by interview statements including “the benefit for me was to just establish a network of people across the firm who were in the same boat I am” and “my peer group understood me...all of me.” The creation of social networks also supported cross-business collaboration through client referrals, and cross-selling opportunities illustrated by the following statements “it was great to get to know specialists across the firm that I would feel comfortable introducing to clients” and “I’ve gone out to some people’s clients to talk about it [a new tax law], where if they hadn’t known me from ELP they wouldn’t have put me in front of their client”.

This theme is also consistent with existing literature as an approach to leadership development. Networks “provide resources and support for leaders, and increase the scope and scale of impact leaders can have individually and collectively” (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010, p. 600). Networks developed through the program resulted in a sense of camaraderie among participants sharing the same experience—particularly among those within the same peer coaching group. These results echo findings from a study of the development of entrepreneurs found that peer coaching provided emotional support and valuable networking opportunities (Kutzhanova, Lyons, & Lichtenstein, 2009). Inquiry findings related to networks also align with literature in regard to providing leaders with access to resources that they can trust (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). Literature on the developmental aspects of networking reports that social interaction is associated with increased access to others for information, expertise, resources, and cooperation (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Hansen, 2002), and is a principal way of enhancing social capital within an organization (Day, 2000). While literature related to leadership and leadership

development supports the importance of cultivating a network, few studies exist specifically linking networks and high-potential leadership development.

Advocating Personal Well-being

The fourth theme, advocating personal well-being, addresses participants' ongoing struggle to take care of their selves in order to be an effective leader. This includes managing stress, maintaining perspective, and achieving personal and professional balance as they continue to grow as leaders. Through the character-based content of the program, participants were encouraged to be an advocate for their own personal well-being. Statements illustrating this include “[ELP] helped me remember that taking care of myself is a very important part of being an effective leader” and “ELP changed the way I approach stress. I think I approach it in a way now that helps me live my life better”. This theme supported intrapersonal skill development and the building of human capital.

Literature addressing leadership and well-being primarily focuses on the role a leader plays in creating an environment where employees can experience well-being (Nielsen, Yarker, Brenner, Randall, & Borg, 2008). Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, and Guzman

(2010) reported that “leaders’ high levels of stress and poor affective well-being are associated with high stress levels and poor well-being among subordinates” (p. 117).

Transformational leadership is also linked to employee health (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; McKee, Driscoll, Kelloway, & Kelley, 2011).

As current literature focuses on the well-being of the employee, and not the leader, this theme contributes insight into leadership development practices. While participants provided many examples of how advocating personal well-being contributed to their development, this theme may be influenced by the high-stress, professional services industry setting in which this study was conducted.

Participating in Peer Group Coaching

The fifth theme, participating in peer group coaching, pertained to how peer coaching supported collaborative learning, created a co-counselor relationship among participants, and held participants accountable. Peer coaching is a collaborative learning process that increases confidence and supports the application of skills, generation of ideas, and creates accountability. This theme was characterized by statements such “the

peer group helps you apply things you learned in the program, and gain an impartial view” and “I gained from others in my peer group who were more poised [than I] and not rushing the peer group aspect” Accountability was also a key part of the peer group learning process. Statements such as “my peer group kept me accountable” and “I was challenged by the people in my group, and I had to report back to them” further illustrate this component.

This theme is also consistent with existing literature as an approach to leadership development. Several studies have reported similar results of peer coaching in regard to its ability to support learning via skill-building, emotional support, and accountability (Goldman, Wesner, & Karnchanomai, 2013; Swafford, 1998). Brenner (2010) listed collaborative learning as a benefit of group-based leadership development and further described it as:

The most conspicuous advantage of a group-based leadership development process is the fertile potential it has for creating real-life, real-time learning and development moments. The value of colleagues challenging one another with

penetrating questions to generate innovative thinking, creative yet practical solutions and actionable learning is incalculable (p. 22).

While this theme is supported by literature, it is important to note the primary context for existing literature stems from the healthcare industry (Goldman, Wesner, & Karnchanomai, 2013; Moskowitz, Thom, Hessler, Ghorob, & Bodenheimer, 2013) and education industry (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Syh-Jong, 2010). This theme therefore offers additional insight into the role of peer group coaching as a leadership development practice.

Recommendations for Practice

This inquiry provides greater understanding of high-potential leadership development practices. Study findings support the implementation of cohort-based leadership development programs in addition to several program components as a complement to other individual-based approaches to leader and leadership development.

Within this section each recommendation for practice is presented.

Recommendations include: (a) incorporate research-based high-potential identification

practices, (b) deliver cohort-based programs to support networking, (c) facilitate peer coaching, (d) develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, (e) incorporate action learning, and (f) implement 360-degree feedback.

Incorporate Research-based High-Potential Identification Practices

Incorporate research-based identification practices to identify high-potentials and inform leadership program selection criteria. Identifying leadership potential enables organizations to make better predictions of future leadership behavior (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007) and research-based practices help validate identification processes. Research on learning agility (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2003) and emotional intelligence (Dries & Pepermans, 2007) combined with organizational factors may contribute to the validity of high-potential identification practices. Lominger and Eichinger (2000) recommend a multi-faceted approach when identifying high-potentials including performance data, subjective judgment of potential, and results from their Choices Architect questionnaire profile.

Deliver Cohort-based Programs to Support Networking

Deliver leadership development programs utilizing a cohort-based format.

Leaders generally do not lead in isolation (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, & Self, 2010). Furthermore, organizations lacking necessary social capital risk resources and capabilities from being deployed, and therefore “social capital management through leadership development practices becomes a viable source for an organization's effectiveness” (Bilhuber Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2012, p.178).

A cohort-based format provides a means in which to develop leaders together and support network development. Networks contribute to interpersonal skill and competency development and support building social capital. Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) describe how leadership networks:

Provide resources and support for leaders, and increase the scope and scale of impact leaders can have individually and collectively. Nurturing and catalyzing leadership networks is increasingly a focus of leadership development efforts,

especially those that seek to develop leadership with a capacity to influence policy and bring about social and systems change. (p. 600)

Facilitate Peer Coaching

Facilitate peer coaching to support collaborative learning via small groups of five to seven people. Peer group coaching supports learning, aids in the development of a deeper social network, and helps participants hold one another accountable. The “unique contribution of peer coaching is the inherent mutuality and reciprocity of the [learning] process” (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008, p. 490). Furthermore, coaching by internal peers is an untapped method to support leadership development (Hunt & Weintraub, 2007).

Leadership development programs should be designed in a manner that supports the maintenance of peer group coaching after the end of the formal development program.

Establishing and maintaining social capital implies a continued investment in and of resources. Therefore, build program extensions into original budgets so they are not viewed as an incremental spend after participants graduate.

Develop Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

Design high-potential leadership programs to develop both intrapersonal skills/competencies (human capital) and interpersonal skills/competencies (social capital). Implement approaches to develop leaders, and human capital, such as 360-degree feedback, coaching, and job experiences. In addition to incorporating these more traditional methods of development, complement them with leadership development practices such as action learning and networking that aid in building social capital.

Incorporate Action Learning

While job experiences are widely recognized as the most common way to develop leaders, cohort development programs generally do not allow for many job experience development options. Action learning, in the form of cross-functional, enterprise-wide strategic projects, could complement the overall learning experience and benefit both participants and organizations alike. Action learning is an approach for developing leaders, solving complex problems, and building teams (Marquardt, 2004; Raelin, 2009). The utilization of action learning can assist organizations in keeping up with the rapidly

changing global work environment (Boshyk, 2002; Watkins & Marsick, 1993), combines development efforts with tangible work product outcomes (O'Neil & Marsick, 2007; Rimanoczy & Turner, 2008), and recognizes that people are motivated to learn when they make a connection between the experience of learning and their own lives (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

Willis (2004) defined action learning as “a process of reflecting on one’s work and beliefs in the supportive/confrontational environment of one’s peers for the purpose of gaining new insights and resolving real business and community problems in real time” (p. 11). Therefore, action learning provides an environment for participants to learn and develop leadership skills while working on high-impact initiatives and solving problems important to the organization. Action learning projects utilizing sponsors and the opportunity to present project results and recommendations to senior leaders also provide high-potentials greater visibility and access to senior-level leaders. The organization can further benefit by utilizing the intellectual horsepower and talents of high-potentials to complete initiatives related to organization strategy.

Implement 360-feedback

Select a validated and reliable 360-degree feedback assessment tool to incorporate as part of an overall leadership development program. Implement 360-degree feedback to gain input regarding participants' performance and skills from bosses, peers, direct reports, and clients or customers. Feedback from a wide range of stakeholders allows participants to gain a broader perspective of how they are viewed within the organization in comparison to self-reported, self-perceptions alone. Feedback results should be interpreted and delivered to participants individually by a qualified assessment interpreter. Follow up support in the form of executive and/or peer coaching should also be offered. According to Seifert and Yukl (2010) the administration of two feedback interventions has the ability to improve leader effectiveness more than a single administration therefore where possible, administer a follow-up 360-degree feedback process six months to one year after the end of the development program for further development and as a benchmarking tool.

Recommendations for Further Inquiry

In addition to recommendations for practice, this inquiry provides guidance on areas where further inquiry will advance the field of leader and leadership development.

While a great amount of research exists on the topic of leadership development, study findings support that further research is needed in several areas related to high-potential leadership development.

Within this section each recommendation for further inquiry is presented.

Recommendations include: (a) peer coaching research, (b) networking research, and (c) research related to high-potentials.

Peer Coaching Research

Despite the benefits of cohorts and peer coaching illustrated in this study, the use of peer coaching resides primarily within the education (K-12), higher education, and health care industries. Furthermore, peer coaching has not been recognized as a top way to develop leaders. Further inquiry on the impact of peer coaching in corporate leadership development settings would advance efforts in this area. In addition, research comparing

the effectiveness of executive coaching and peer coaching would also prove beneficial.

As peer coaching is not a common approach to leadership development further research is needed to assess its contribution to leader and leadership development.

Networking Research

Leadership development programs provide a unique opportunity to gather participants together in a location for the purpose of further development. The structure of a multiple-session leadership development program and networking events, such as receptions or dinners, provide opportunities for participants to connect. Further research regarding which types of activities, frequency, and duration, yield the greatest development results would benefit practitioners and researchers alike. Along with networking research, exploring how leadership development programs help build social capital, particularly within the context of cohort-based programs would be beneficial.

Research on High-Potentials

Despite the number of publications on the topic of high-potential leadership development, empirical publications are rare. Further inquiry related to high-potential

employee identification and development approaches could be greatly advanced through additional empirical research. Furthermore, as high-potential development initiatives are considered a driver of organizational success, conducting evaluative and return on investment studies to measure the effectiveness and results of development programs would be beneficial.

Additional research gathering data from the high-potential employee population themselves would also advance knowledge in this area. While valuable, gaining data from high-potentials will be fraught with challenges. Although many organizations are interested in research on high-potential employees, organizations are often unwilling to allow researchers access to their high-potentials. Hesitancy to release high-potential employee names stems from concerns about competitors seeking to entice employees to leave their current organizations in addition to reservations about communicating high-potential status to the employees themselves.

Summary

This study examined and described the development experience and outcomes of high-potential employees through a formalized cohort-based leadership development program, and sought to advance the understanding of how leadership development programs support high-potential leader and leadership development. This research contributes to the fields of leadership, leadership development, and high-potential development by concentrating on areas that have not been sufficiently explored. These areas include (a) exploring the nature of high-potential leadership development; (b) discovering how participation in a cohort leadership development program contributes to participant skill development; (c) ascertaining how cohort leadership development programs support building human and social capital, and (d) sharing reflections on learning components that cohort-based high-potential leadership development programs should incorporate. Furthermore, the primary sources of information and data come from high-potential participants themselves.

This study illustrated the importance of, and methods to support, greater self-awareness within leadership development. Findings continue to support the importance of receiving feedback in general, and 360-degree feedback administration and follow up support in particular. The study also illustrated learning through peer coaching and gaining support via a social network, finally the study revealed how the leadership development program advocated participant well-being. Through these findings, it is my hope that this study serves as a stepping stone for additional inquiry related to high-potential leader and leadership development practices.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. When you found out you were nominated to participate in the Experienced Leadership Program (ELP), what did you originally hope to get out of the program?
2. Suppose a new ELP participant asked you about the program. How would you explain it to them?
3. As you think about the program, which part contributed most to your development as a leader?
Probe question as needed:
How did that part of the program contribute to your development?
4. What can you now do, or do better, as a result of participating in the Experienced Leadership Program?
Probe questions as needed:
What program concept(s) have you been able to apply?
What result(s) have you achieved?
5. Some people would say it's a waste of time for leaders to invest in developing their character. What would you say in response?
6. What do you think things would be like for you today if you had never participated in the Experienced Leadership Program?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Subject: Leadership Development Research Study

You are invited to be in a research study that investigates your perceptions of leadership development. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in the (organization specific) leadership development program. We ask that you read the information provided below and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.

This study is being conducted by: Tani K. Bialek

Dear Experienced Leadership Program graduate,

You have been invited to be part of a research study investigating cohort-based leadership development programs. You were identified as a possible participant by your completion of the ELP program.

Individuals interested in being part of this study will participate in a one-hour, recorded interview with the researcher (Tani Bialek) at a time that fits the participant's schedule. Each participant will receive a \$30 Amazon.com gift card as a thank you for their participation in the study. Interview questions focus on participants' perceptions of the ELP program and how it has contributed to their development as a leader. No identifying or confidential information will be gathered or reported and all responses will remain anonymous.

Procedures:

This study is being conducted by: Tani K. Bialek, University of Minnesota

If you agree to be in this study, please contact Tani directly at biale003@umn.edu or [651-245-3676](tel:651-245-3676) to arrange an interview. Each participant will receive a \$30 Amazon.com gift card for their participation. We ask that you read the information provided below and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Interviews will be recorded and then erased at the conclusion of the study. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or your place of employment. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Tani Bialek. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [\(651\) 245-3676](tel:651-245-3676) or biale003@umn.edu. You may also contact Dr. Shari Peterson at [\(612\) 624-4980](tel:612-624-4980) or peter007@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis,

Minnesota 55455; [\(612\) 625-1650](tel:6126251650).

Please print this information to keep for your records.

Best regards,

Tani K. Bialek

University of Minnesota

Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development

biale003@umn.edu

Appendix C**University of Minnesota IRB Approval**

Date: 04/01/2010

To: Tani, Bialek (biale003@umn.edu)

From: irb@umn.edu

Subject: #STUDYNBR# - PI #PILASTNAME# - IRB - Exempt Study Notification

Message: TO : peter007@umn.edu, biale003@umn.edu,

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1003E79352

Principal Investigator: Tani Bialek

Title(s): High-potential Managers' Perceptions of Their Leadership Development

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota RSPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at <http://eresearch.umn.edu/> to view further details on your study. The IRB wishes you success with this research.

Appendix D

Experienced Leadership Program Overview

The Experienced Leadership Program is designed to enhance the leadership skills of high potential performers who have demonstrated an interest and a capability to assume future leadership roles in their line of business, region or firm. ELP is built around our seven core competencies: Know Your Impact; Develop Talent; Communicate Effectively; Drive Results; Champion the Client; Shape the Future and Cultivate Teams and Relationships. Each competency will be examined through the lens of competence and character.

Program Objectives

This program is designed to develop future leaders by accelerating improvement in individual performance and influence. The program will focus on topics that include leadership presence, gaining leverage, driving results and partnering with peers. The key objectives include:

- Demonstrate increased self-confidence and self-awareness in leadership approach
- Build more effective client service teams and internal partnerships
- Expand internal network and peer coaching resources to support learning and development during and after the program

Session	Core Competency
Session I	Know Your Impact
Session II	Develop Talent
Session III	Communicate Effectively
Session IV	Drive Results
Session V	Champion the Client
Session VI	Shape the Future & Teams

Note: Relationships is a theme through all sessions

Program Format

ELP consists of six sessions held over a twenty-month period. Each session will provide an interactive environment that leverages large and small group discussion, role-plays, peer groups and one-on-one coaching.

Learning Commitment and Program Expectations

- Attend and completely participate in all sessions of the Experienced Leadership Program
- Complete all pre and post course work by assigned due date
- Actively participate in periodic coaching calls

Session	Description
Session I Know Your Impact	<p>Setting the Stage - Strategy of the program; Personal payback; Organizational payback; Expectations; Role of character; Rituals and habits (peer group work & self-assessment)</p> <p>Getting on the Balcony - Your leadership impact; Looking from the outside in; Systems thinking; The Performance Equation; Leadership as adaptive work</p> <p>Leadership Presence - “Emotionally contagious”; Fully engaged energy; Management; Health/stress</p>
Session II Develop Talent	<p>Working through & Developing Others – Leverage personal responsibility; Boundaries; Control; Accountability for self and others</p> <p>Integral People Management - People management beliefs; “Integral map”; Best practices in core people management processes; Building a culture that supports performance</p>

(continued)

<p>Session III Communicate Effectively</p>	<p>The Power of Real Conversation - Authenticity; Honesty with self & others; Removing biases; Being open; Intelligent questions</p> <p>Conflict & Dialogue - Conditions which promote conflict; I.D. yours and others' conflict management styles; Effective communication skills; Disarming the climate</p>
<p>Session IV Drive Results</p>	<p>Execution - Competencies of execution; Threats to execution; Building execution capabilities for a team; Tools for alignment; Sustaining an execution mindset</p> <p>Discipline - Establishing goals; Creating real accountability</p>
<p>Session V Champion the Client</p>	<p>Personal Passion - From problem solving to creativity; See-feel-change; Raising the bar on commitments; Extending service, action based on desire and delight not obligation and alienation</p> <p>The Experience Economy - Building better relationships; Building better experiences; From commodity to experience</p>
<p>Session VI Shape the Future & Teams</p>	<p>Experience Change - A team-based competitive simulation; Understand need; Enlist team; Develop strategy; Motivate with urgency; Communicate; Act; Consolidate Gains</p> <p>Bringing it Together: Your Leadership Journey - Going below the line; Leadership Panel</p>

Appendix E

Case Study Protocol

This case study protocol is a standardized agenda that outlines my line of inquiry to study this phenomenon. An examination of how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program for high-potential employees contributes to the development of leaders at a major professional services firm in the United States.

Introduction

While effective leadership is associated with success and organizational performance, “it is still not clear in what ways leadership development practices contribute to organizational performance” (Bilhuber Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2012, p. 176). Organizations are facing increasingly complex challenges in their efforts to attract, motivate, develop, and retain leaders to ensure they have the right talent in place to keep their organizations operating competitively. According to Lacey and Groves (2014) efforts to attract, retain, and develop talent has “resulted in a considerable rise of HiPo development programs” where high-potential employees are “nurtured by organizations with specialized, often secret programs and processes offered exclusively to them” (p.5). In addition, to high-potential development programs, “a variety of development practices have emerged in organizations such as leadership training, mentoring, 360-degree feedback, coaching, networks, job assignments, and action learning” (Galli & Muller-Stewens, 2011, p. 176). To date, most leadership development research and theory has focused on the individual leader and has not accounted adequately for the organizational and social context (Avolio, 2007; Day, 2000; Fiedler, 1998).

Calls for further empirical research on the topic of leadership development are common and span theories of leadership development, development practices, and the impact of leadership on organizational performance. As high-potential development initiatives are considered a driver of organizational success, it is important to explore the

effectiveness of those practices via “empirical studies that model program theory and assess knowledge, behavior, and results outcomes” (Groves 2007, p. 256).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine and develop an understanding of how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributes to high-potentials’ development as leaders. Specifically, this study aims to explore the nature of high-potential leadership development, discover how participation in a cohort leadership development program contributes to participant skill development, ascertain how cohort leadership development programs support building human and social capital, and share reflections on learning components that cohort-based high-potential leadership development programs should incorporate.

Research Questions

This study endeavors to examine the development experience and outcomes of high-potential employees through a formalized cohort-based leadership development program. The study’s research question addresses how participation in a cohort-based leadership development program contributes to high-potentials’ development as leaders and is further guided by the following questions:

- (a) how did participation in the program contribute to skill development,
- (b) how did the program support building social and human capital,
- (c) how did specific program components contribute to participants’ development as leaders?

Research Method and Design

This study explores the aforementioned phenomenon in terms of the meaning subjects give them and within their natural setting of a corporate organization; therefore, from an epistemological view, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for studying this phenomenon. In particular, a single case study is a suitable design in circumstances when (a) a critical case exists that can test a well-formulated theory, (b)

the case is an extreme or unique circumstance, (c) the case is believed representative or typical, or (d) a revolutionary case, where the investigator has the opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon formerly inaccessible to inquiry, and (e) longitudinal case, examining the same specific case at two or more different points in time (Yin, 2014).

As this inquiry seeks to understand participants' perceptions of their development as leaders through participation in a cohort-based leadership development program, the program is identified as the case. This case is a unique circumstance in comparison to other leadership development programs that it contains both character-based content and peer group coaching development practices. Therefore, it was concluded that a single case study research design approach would yield the best insight into the selected phenomenon.

Information Collection Procedures

The data collection process of this inquiry followed guidelines outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although the IRB deemed this research exempt from review under federal guidelines, University of Minnesota IRB guidelines were followed as a best practice for conducting social science research. Yin (2014) lists six sources when collecting case study evidence, or data. This inquiry drew data from four of the six sources of evidence including documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observation.

- Documentation sources consist of the program overview document, session materials, and program communications.
- Several forms of archival records were used as sources of evidence including individual session evaluation data from multiple cohorts; end of program evaluation data from ELP graduates; end of program evaluation data from the graduates' managers; and ELP graduate promotion data.
- Observation spanned each of the six program sessions spanning a twenty-month time frame, a ropes course teambuilding session, and leader dialogues with organization senior leaders.

- In-depth, semi-structured 60 to 90 minute interviews were conducted with ten of the 108 individuals who have graduated from the ELP between 2010 and 2012. Participants were selected based on a variety of demographic factors including gender, line of business, geographic location, and graduation year in order to achieve a broad base of information-rich cases reflecting the overall composition of program graduates.

Case Study Question

The semi-structured interviews will use the following questions as a guide. Additional questions may be asked for clarification, more detail, or to further inquire on the topic.

1. When you found out you were nominated to participate in the Experienced Leadership Program (ELP), what did you originally hope to get out of the program?
2. Suppose a new ELP participant asked you about the program. How would you explain it to them?
3. As you think about the program, which part contributed most to your development as a leader?

Probe question as needed:

How did that part of the program contribute to your development?

4. What can you now do, or do better, as a result of participating in the Experienced Leadership Program?

Probe questions as needed:

What program concept(s) have you been able to apply?

What result(s) have you achieved?

5. Some people would say it's a waste of time for leaders to invest in developing their character. What would you say in response?
6. What do you think things would be like for you today if you had never participated in the Experienced Leadership Program?

Outline of the Case Study Report

The final outline of this inquiry will be a five-chapter dissertation containing an (a) introduction, (b) review of the literature, (c) research method and design, (c) findings and analysis, and (d) discussion and conclusions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Background
- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Question
- Significance of the Study
- Definition of Key Terms
- Summary

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

- High-potential Talent
 - High-potential Characteristics
 - High-potential Identification
- Leadership Development Dimensions
 - Leader versus Leadership Development
 - Human and Social Capital
 - Emotional Intelligence
- Leadership Development Practices
 - Experiential Learning Theory
 - Job Experiences
 - Development Programs
 - Executive Coaching
 - Peer Coaching
 - 360-degree Feedback
 - Networking

Action Learning

Summary

CHAPTER 3: METHOD AND DESIGN

Qualitative Case Study Research

Research Design of the Study

Unit of Analysis

Bounding the Case

Information Collection

Information Analysis

Research Design Quality

Construct Validity

Reliability

Internal and External Validity

Study Limitations

Summary

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Theme 1: Enhancing Self-awareness

Theme 2: Receiving Feedback

Theme 3: Cultivating a Network

Theme 4: Advocating Personal Well-being

Theme 5: Participating in Peer Group Coaching

Summary

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Synthesis of Research Questions

Discussion

Theme 1: Enhancing Self-awareness

Theme 2: Receiving Feedback

Theme 3: Cultivating a Network

Theme 4: Advocating Personal Well-being

Theme 5: Participating in Peer Group Coaching

Recommendations for Practice

Incorporate Research-based High-Potential Identification Practices

Deliver Cohort-based Programs to Support Networking

Facilitate Peer Group Coaching

Develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills

Incorporate Action Learning

Implement 360-degree Feedback

Recommendations for Further Inquiry

Peer Coaching Research

Networking Research

Research related to High-Potentials

Summary