

AD ASTRA PER ASPERA:
A CASE STUDY OF ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER
EDUCATION

A Dissertation by

Jason M Bosch

Master of Education, University of Arkansas, 2007

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2005

Submitted to the Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership,
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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

Jean Patterson, Committee Chair

Kristin Sherwood, Committee Member

Victoria Sherif, Committee Member

Valerie Thompson, Committee Member

Peter Cohen, Committee Member

Accepted for the College of Applied Studies

Shirley Lefever, Dean

Accepted for the Graduate School

Coleen Pugh, Dean

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the risk takers and change makers who are pursuing new and bold ways to lead and who, despite the challenges and against all odds, are working tirelessly to make the world a better place. *Ad astra per aspera: to the stars through difficulties.*

You are creative and capable, and the world needs
you to be confident and courageous.

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ABSTRACT

Organizations often face complex challenges that threaten their ability to realize their missions and achieve their stated goals and outcomes. Leadership is necessary to make progress toward addressing these challenges. Many organizations operate under traditional, top-down, authoritative leadership models developed during the industrial era. However, these models are no longer sufficient for dealing with the complexities of modern organizational problems. New approaches to leadership are needed. Adaptive leadership is a contemporary model that some organizations are using to drive organizational change and address their most pressing problems, but shifting to a model like adaptive leadership is a difficult change process that requires organizational learning. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the leadership experiences of members of an institution of higher education that had adopted the adaptive leadership model. Through individual interviews with 14 faculty, staff, and administrators, this study provides insight into the challenges and successes of implementing the adaptive leadership model in an institution of higher education. Argyris's theories of action provided the theoretical framework for understanding the individual learning processes necessary for participants who had been trained in adaptive leadership to be able to translate their training into effective practice. The study's findings and conclusions illuminate the individual and organizational dynamics that influenced adaptive leadership learning and practice, and includes implications for research, policy, and practice for scholars and practitioners seeking new approaches to organizational leadership.

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CHAPTER 1

Organizations often face myriad challenges that threaten their ability to realize their missions and achieve their stated goals and outcomes. Some of the problems organizations face are routine, technical problems that can be solved relatively efficiently and smoothly (Heifetz, 1994). Some problems, however, are more complex and do not have easy or apparent solutions. Complex problems are those that are often systemic in nature and involve nuanced interpersonal and group dynamics, as well as organizational culture and politics. Addressing complex problems often requires deep individual change and wide stakeholder engagement, which makes them difficult to solve (Argyris, 1999; Heifetz et al., 2009). Examples of complex problems facing organizations at local, national, and international levels include inequality and social justice, health and safety, political division and unrest, climate change and environmental sustainability, and access to quality education (United Nations, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017, 2019; World Health Organization, 2019).

While the nature of complex problems may be unique to organizational type or context, most organizations will at some point experience complex problems (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Many institutions of higher education, for example, face complex problems such as access and affordability, enrollment and completion rates, financial stability, student mental health, and diversity and inclusion (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2020; Marken, 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Pazzanese, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Each of the complex problems organizations face is challenging in and of itself, but they also interact with one another, creating larger systems of challenges with even greater levels of complexity (Allen et al., 1999; United Nations, 2015). András Tilcsik and Chris Clearfield observed, a

“complex system is like an elaborate web with many intricately connected parts, and much of what goes on in it is invisible to the naked eye” (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 91).

Given this enormous and often elusive complexity, neither existing knowledge nor intervention from authorities alone are sufficient to address the complex, systemic problems organizations face (Head & Alford, 2015). Progress toward viable solutions requires leadership, and in particular, leadership that involves adaptive approaches to problem solving through learning, experimentation, and stakeholder engagement (Doyle, 2017; Heifetz, 2006; Northouse, 2019; Rodriguez, 2017). This approach to leadership is important “when people have tough challenges to tackle” and “when continuing to operate according to current structures, procedures, and processes no longer will suffice” (Heifetz, 2006, pp. 75-76). Two questions emerge from these realities about organizational problems: Whose responsibility is it to provide leadership for addressing these complex challenges, and what approaches to leadership are useful to effectively address them?

Research Problem

Traditional leadership models are typically leader-centric, characterizing leaders as individuals with formal authority or expertise, relegating leadership to a set of innate traits, or associating leadership with power and coercion (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2019). These models suggest leadership is available to the lucky few people who were born with the “right” characteristics, who have the “right” knowledge or expertise, or who are able to assume the highest ranks of organizational hierarchy. What is considered “right” has typically been defined by the people who hold power and authority. In the United States, this has historically been upper class white men, which “has marginalized a variety of communities” (Dugan & Komives, 2011, p. 49). This has created narrowly focused and exclusionary beliefs about who

can lead. Leaders, according to traditional models, are often presumed to have the unique ability and responsibility for solving organizational and social problems. Many of these traditional notions of leadership gained prominence in the United States during the industrial era, and are therefore also referred to as industrial models of leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Traditional, industrial-era approaches to leadership are still the dominant models operating in the United States today (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2013; Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Head & Alford, 2015; Komives et al., 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2006).

However, continuing to use traditional, top-down, authoritative leadership models of the industrial era is no longer sufficient for addressing complex contemporary problems (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2013; Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Head & Alford, 2015; Komives et al., 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Randall & Coakley, 2007). Authority figures and experts alone cannot solve complex challenges. Plans and policies handed down from the people who sit at the top of the organizational hierarchy will often not suffice. Head and Alford (2015) made a compelling case that authoritative organizations are adept at developing policy and implementing routine technical services but are inept at effectively responding to more complex problems. Institutions of higher education, like many organizations, often have hierarchical and managerial structures, are governed by authoritative figures and policies, have established institutional cultures, and face complex challenges such as those described in the introduction to this study (Kezar, 2005; Krücken & Meier, 2006). Addressing complex challenges requires leadership from people with and without formal authority (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Leadership must come from individuals at all levels within organizations, including institutions of higher education, if

progress is to be made on these difficult issues (Allen et al., 1999; Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2013; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Randall & Coakley, 2007; United Nations, 2015).

More contemporary or postindustrial leadership approaches that engage and empower diverse stakeholders, rather than relying solely on authorities and exerts, have been proposed as alternatives. Adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) is one model that some organizations are using to tackle their toughest problems (Andenoro et al., 2017; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2015; Head & Alford, 2015; Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). Heifetz et al. (2009) defined adaptive leadership as the “practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 14). The adaptive leadership model is grounded in the notion that people who are part of a problem, or who are part of a system where a problem resides, must be part of the solution. It posits that anyone can exercise leadership, with or without formal authority or expertise, and provides a framework for the leadership processes and practices conducive to making progress on tough, adaptive challenges (Northouse, 2019). Brothers and Schnurman-Crook (2015) observed, “in a world that rewards experts for generating quick solutions with finesse, Adaptive Leadership offers a counter-cultural alternative” (p. 43).

Unlike the traditional leadership models noted earlier, many of which focus on the traits or behaviors of a single person in a position of power or formal authority, adaptive leadership frames leadership as a set of processes and practices that take place within the context of complex social systems (Heifetz, 1994; Northouse, 2019). As noted previously, some organizations are trying to move away from traditional leadership approaches and use the adaptive leadership model for addressing their most pressing problems. This is evidenced by the use of adaptive leadership in leadership training and development programs across various

sectors. Since the introduction of adaptive leadership more than 25 years ago (Heifetz, 1994), the model has been used in leadership education and training programs in higher education (Andenoro et al., 2017; Georgia Institute of Technology, n.d.; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013, 2015; Heller et al., 2004; Wichita State University, 2020), businesses and corporate settings (Adaptive Leadership Australia, 2019; Cambridge Leadership Associates, n.d.; Karisfined Edge Solutions, 2019; Reams, 2017), and nonprofit and community-based organizations (+Acumen, 2020; Green & Fabris McBride, 2015; Leadership Eastside, 2017; National Association of County and City Health Officials, 2019).

While efforts to shift from traditional to contemporary leadership models are growing, practicing a new approach to leadership is challenging for two possible reasons. First, at a fundamental level, attempting to employ a more contemporary approach to leadership, such as adaptive leadership, works against deeply embedded notions of traditional leadership that have been normative in the United States for over a century (Northouse, 2019). Second, and germane to this study, movement from traditional leadership to adaptive leadership represents a change process and requires organizational learning (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974). As Nicolaidis and McCallum (2013) observed, “while adaptive leadership requires transformative learning and depends on mature developmental capacity, unfortunately, many contemporary leaders are still working on the basis of assumptions drawn from a traditional command and control notion of authority” (p. 251). Sustainable organizational change often requires difficult shifts in the underlying values or principles that govern people’s actions and behaviors, and both individuals and organizations have well-developed defense mechanisms that resist such shifts (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Heifetz et al., 2009; Rodriguez, 2017).

To date, there is little research on the efficacy of efforts to employ adaptive leadership practices to address complex organizational problems, particularly within institutions of higher education. Evidence indicates a growing number of people are participating in adaptive leadership training, yet little is known about how they apply adaptive leadership to make progress on the issues affecting the health and well-being of their organizations and communities (Nelson & Squires, 2017; Northouse, 2019). This study addressed the gap in research by exploring the potential challenges and opportunities of practicing adaptive leadership through the lens of theories of action (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Theoretical Framework

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a theoretical framework as “the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame” (p. 85) of a study. A theoretical framework comprises ideas, concepts, or theories that provide a lens through which to study a phenomenon. It frames the overall study by informing the research problem and research questions, as well as the collection and interpretation of data. For this study, theories of action (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974) provided the theoretical lens through which to understand the experiences of individuals who were striving to translate adaptive leadership training into practice in order to make progress on difficult organizational challenges. As described previously, sustainable change often requires difficult shifts in the underlying values that govern people’s actions, and people have well-developed defense mechanisms that resist such shifts, even when change is desired (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Heifetz et al., 2009). Theories of action offered a framework for understanding the defense mechanisms that may present challenges to translating training into effective practice. This framework also aided in understanding the shifts necessary in participants’ underlying values in order for changes in their leadership practices to be effective

and sustainable. The shifts described here are viewed as a learning process, and learning is a central goal of theories of action. Theories of action frames much of the learning process as an individual activity. However, as individuals within an organization learn, broader organizational learning is produced (Argyris, 1999).

Theories of action was developed in part out of the observation that “most people tend to be unaware of how their attitudes affect their behavior and also unaware of the negative impact of their behavior on others” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. xxviii). Research into the connection between people’s values, their actions, and the outcomes of their actions led Argyris and Schon (1974) to develop theories of action to understand and explain behavior, but also to aid people in creating better alignment between their values and actions in order to be more effective in achieving their desired outcomes. Theories of action aims to “enhance human activity, responsibility, self-actualization, learning, and effectiveness and make it likely that organizations will begin to decrease the movement toward entropy and increase the forces toward learning and health” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. xxxi). Three elements of theories of action that informed this study were (a) the relationship between espoused theories and theories-in-use, (b) single-loop and double-loop learning, and (c) Model I and Model II theories-in-use (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974). Each of these elements is described below, followed by a discussion on the connection between theories of action and adaptive leadership.

Espoused Theories and Theories-In-Use

Theories of action is grounded in the notion that people generally behave according to theories, also referred to as mental models, that govern their actions (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974). There are two types of theories: espoused theories and theories-in-use. Espoused theories are the mental models that people claim or believe are guiding their actions, while

theories-in-use are the mental models that actually guide their actions. Theories-in-use are so ingrained that people are often tacitly unaware of them (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974). One tenet of theories of action is that people's espoused theories are frequently incongruent with their theories-in-use. Argyris (1999) suggested:

One of the paradoxes of human behavior ... is that the [mental model] people actually use is rarely the one they think they use. Ask people ... to articulate the rules they use to govern their actions, and they will give you what I call their "espoused" theory of action. But observe these same people's behavior, and you will quickly see that this espoused theory has very little to do with how they actually behave. (p. 131)

In an ideal state, espoused theories are congruent with theories-in-use—the consequences of people's actions or behaviors align with their intentions (Argyris & Schon, 1974). When there is a mismatch between intentions and consequences, learning is required in order to find new ways of behaving that will produce desired consequences. Theories of action suggests two forms of learning that can occur: single-loop learning and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974).

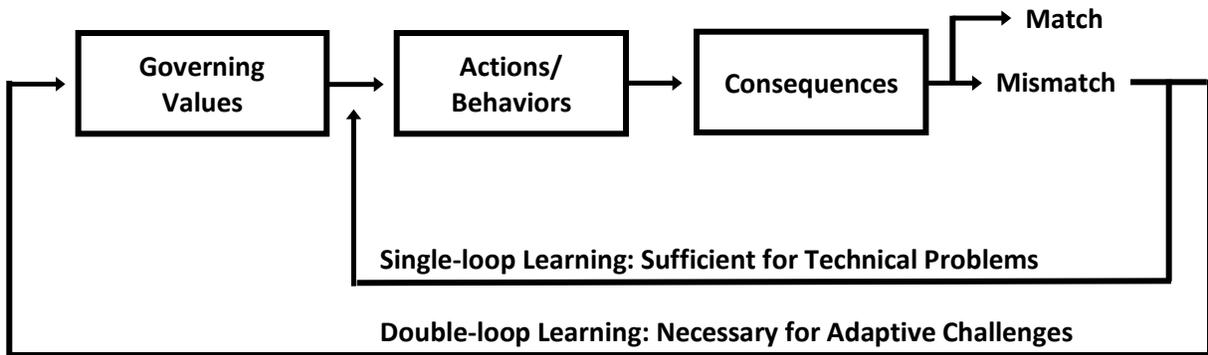
Single-Loop Learning and Double-Loop Learning

The single-loop and double-loop learning model posits that human actions and behaviors are governed by a set of underlying values or rules, which Argyris (1999) called governing values. People act according to their governing values, and their actions lead to consequences that either match or mismatch with their intentions. Single-loop learning typically occurs when one's actions or behaviors produce undesired or unintended consequences, and the individual simply tries a new approach. New actions or behaviors are employed to try to achieve the desired

consequences. (Argyris, 1999, 2002). As shown in Figure 1, merely changing one’s actions represents single-loop learning.

Figure 1

Single-Loop and Double-Loop Learning



Note. Adapted from *On Organizational Learning* (2nd ed., p. 68), by C. Argyris, 1999, Blackwell Publishers. Copyright 1999 by Chris Argyris.

The underlying set of governing values that led to a mismatch between actions and consequences is not examined. The individual does not question why their actions were ineffective to begin with, which would involve interrogating their governing values. A different strategy is simply employed.

Double-loop learning occurs when a mismatch results between one’s actions and desired consequences, and rather than simply employing a different behavior, the individual first examines and alters their governing values, and then employs a new set of behaviors (Argyris, 1999, 2002). The double-loop learning process is illustrated in Figure 1. Double-loop learning can only occur when individuals are able to adopt a new set of governing values that is more conducive to achieving congruency between their espoused theories (how they claim to behave) and their theories-in-use (how they actually behave). However, changing one’s values is difficult. Argyris (2002) noted, “many people espouse double-loop learning, are unable to

produce it, are blind to their incompetencies, and are unaware that they are blind” (p. 206). He suggested two models of theories-in-use: one that tends to produce only single-loop learning, and one that can produce double-loop learning.

Model I and Model II Theories-In-Use

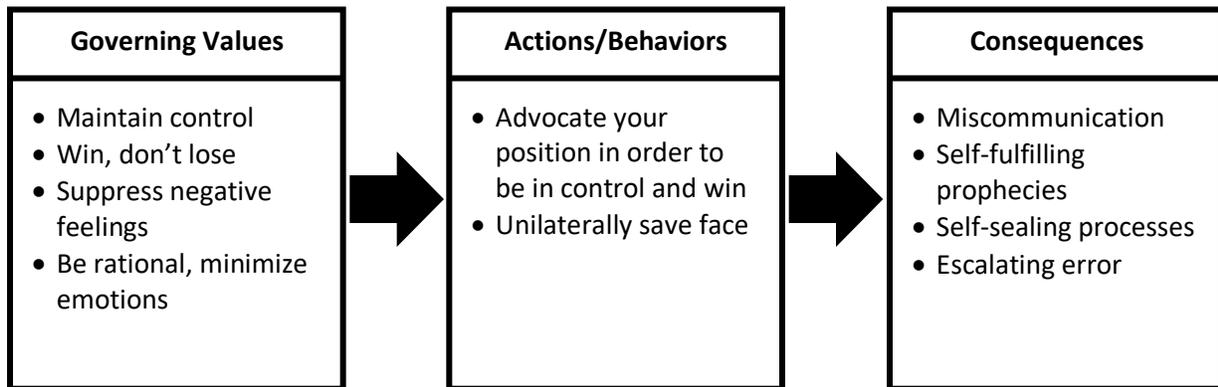
Each of the two models of theories-in-use present a distinct set of governing values, actions or behaviors that tend to follow from the governing values, and consequences that result from such actions (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974). Model I theory-in-use contains governing values that tend to produce single-loop learning, and Model II theory-in-use contains governing values that tend to produce double-loop learning. Effective change, whether at the individual or organizational level, results when individuals are able to shift from Model I theory-in-use to Model II theory-in-use (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Model I theory-in-use is illustrated in Figure 2. The governing values of Model I theory-in-use are to maintain control, always win and never lose, suppress negative feelings, and be rational and minimize emotions (Argyris, 2002). These values serve as defensive mechanisms to protect individuals from embarrassment, criticism, the perception or feeling of incompetence, or other vulnerabilities (Argyris, 1999). Model I governing values lead to actions including advocating for one’s position in order to be in control and win and to unilaterally save face in any situation. The consequences of such actions are often miscommunication, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes, and escalating errors (Argyris, 2002). Problems are not dealt with openly, conflict is avoided, and the underlying issues that are negatively impacting interpersonal and organizational effectiveness become *undiscussables* (Argyris, 1999, 2002). When attempts are made to address a problem, single-loop learning tends to result. Individuals

do not address the underlying defense mechanisms that led to ineffective problem-solving, so the problem persists.

Figure 2

Model I Theory-In-Use



Note: Adapted from “Double-loop learning, teaching, and research,” by C. Argyris, 2002,

Academy of Management Learning and Education, 1(2), p. 213

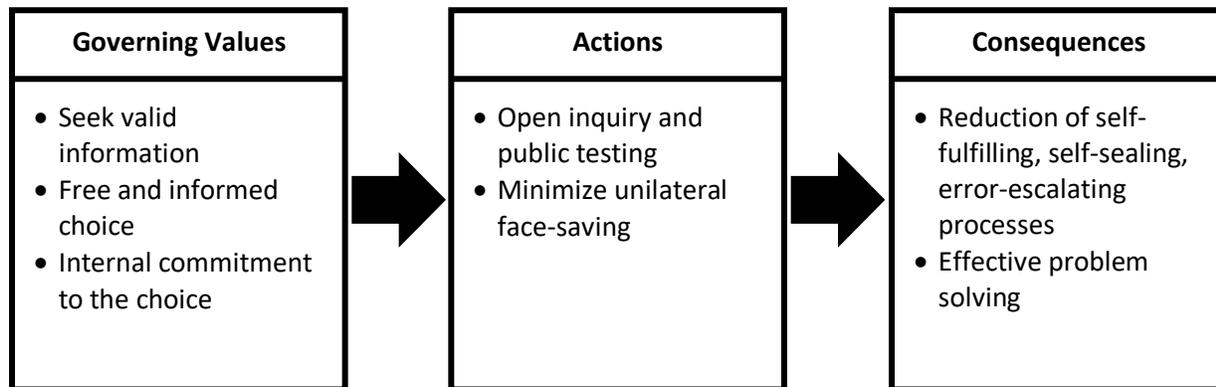
(<https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2002.8509400>). Copyright 2002 by the Academy of Management.

Argyris and Schon (1974) noted that Model I theory-in-use is not inherently ineffective. Model I theory-in-use can be useful when dealing with routine or technical problems. In such cases, when undesirable consequences result, single-loop learning may be sufficient. A recalibration of one's governing values is not likely to be necessary. When dealing with more complex interpersonal or organizational problems, a shift to Model II theory-in-use may be necessary (Argyris, 1999).

Model II theory-in-use assumes a different set of governing values. As illustrated in Figure 3, these include seeking valid information, supporting free and informed choice, and maintaining internal commitment to the choice. Model II governing values lead to actions that include open inquiry and public testing and minimizing unilateral face-saving. Such actions tend to result in a reduction of self-fulfilling, self-sealing, and error-escalating processes, and thereby induce more effective problem solving (Argyris, 2002).

Figure 3

Model II Theory-In-Use



Note: Adapted from “Double-loop learning, teaching, and research,” by C. Argyris, 2002,

Academy of Management Learning and Education, 1(2), p. 214

(<https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2002.8509400>). Copyright 2002 by the Academy of Management.

In Model II, there is commitment to effective learning and problem solving over self-protection.

Letting go of self-protection and the need to control situations in order to induce effective

learning and problem solving often involves embracing the vulnerabilities Model I governing

values seek to protect against (Argyris, 1999). Individuals are able to separate themselves from

their beliefs or assumptions and more objectively interrogate the validity or efficacy of them

without inhibition and without fear of public scrutiny. Undiscussables become discussable.

Model II theory-in-use therefore results in double-loop learning, which may be necessary when

dealing with complex challenges.

Theories of Action and Leadership on Adaptive Challenges

Model I theory-in-use is fundamentally about maximizing control over oneself and situations and maintaining a status quo of predictability and self-protecting security (Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). Similarly, traditional approaches to leadership value obtaining and

maintaining power and control (Cilente, 2009; Northouse, 2019). Power and control, often

associated with authority, may be sufficient for dealing with routine, technical problems. However, traditional leadership models are insufficient for addressing with complex, adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994). Nicolaidis and McCallum (2013) suggested Model I theory-in-use “is incapable of leading to adaptive change” and Model II theory-in-use “describes the conditions [for] adaptive leadership and change, as outlined by Heifetz (1994), and involves mature individual and collective capacity for collaboration” (p. 251). Putting adaptive leadership training into practice may necessitate double-loop learning and the ability to shift from Model I governing values to Model II governing values (Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). The adaptive leadership model suggests that inherent in dealing with adaptive challenges is the need to address the gaps that often exist between people’s espoused values and their behavior, which requires shifting one’s values, beliefs, or assumptions to deal with new and complex situations (Northouse, 2019; Rodriguez, 2017). Theories of action (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974) therefore provided a useful lens through which to understand the experiences of individuals who were attempting to practice contemporary leadership approaches in order to address complex, adaptive challenges. This framework guided the exploration of participants’ governing values, and elucidated whether they are able to shift from Model I, which is more closely aligned with traditional leadership approaches, to Model II, which is more closely aligned with contemporary leadership approaches such as adaptive leadership.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of individuals who were practicing leadership to tackle complex challenges within a single organizational context. For this study, I chose an institution of higher education. I aimed to understand the experiences of institution members who a) had varying levels of formal authority within the institution, b) had

completed an adaptive leadership training program, and c) were attempting to apply their training in order to make progress on issues impacting the institution and its stakeholders.

This study makes a unique contribution to the scholarly literature on leadership by exploring the challenges, opportunities, and successes experienced by people who were trying to make progress on difficult organizational problems using adaptive leadership practices. A better understanding of these experiences provides valuable insight that could inform the design and delivery of leadership training programs. Additionally, this study may be beneficial to organizations considering investing in leadership training for their employees, members, or stakeholders. Finally, for organizations that are providing training in contemporary leadership approaches, the study provides insight into the type of ongoing strategies and support needed beyond the initial training experience in order for organizational learning to be optimal. The following research questions guided and focused the study.

1. How do members of an institution of higher education describe their experiences practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within their organization?
2. What espoused theories and theories-in-use influence organizational members' efforts to tackle adaptive challenges?
3. How do organizational members describe the efficacy of their efforts to exercise leadership?
4. How does the experience of enacting adaptive leadership change the organizational members who are implementing it?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A review of relevant academic literature provides a foundation for the knowledge that exists on a research topic of interest and sets the stage for how the research study “advances, refines, or revises what is already known” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 91). This literature review is organized into five sections and includes academic literature and public domain information relevant to the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The first section includes a brief summary of prominent traditional and contemporary leadership models. The second section provides an overview of the adaptive leadership model and incorporates a review of the scholarly literature on theoretical applications of adaptive leadership in higher education. The third section provides a summary of the various uses of the adaptive leadership model in leadership education and training programs in higher education. This section offers an understanding of the limited contexts in which individuals in institutions of higher education have been taught adaptive leadership approaches. In the fourth section, I review literature on the application of Argyris’s organizational learning and theories of action framework in higher education contexts. The chapter concludes with a section providing a summary and critique of the literature on adaptive leadership and organizational learning in higher education.

Traditional and Contemporary Leadership Models

For the past several centuries and into the early 1900s, leadership was primarily associated with power and control (Cilente, 2009; Northouse, 2019). This early conception of leadership is referred to as the great man view because of the belief that certain people were born with natural abilities to lead. In the few decades that followed, trait theories emerged. Continuing

the great man conception, trait theories suggested leadership was based on inherent traits, and the goal of researchers of the time was to identify the key traits possessed by the prominent leaders or authority figures (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2019). Common traits associated with leadership were intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (Northouse, 2019). Based on who held power, and subsequently who was studied, trait based approaches to leadership predominantly centered on the characteristics of upper class white men (Dugan & Komives, 2011). Great man and trait approaches to leadership developed during and out of the industrial era in which the efficient control of production was the primary goal, and these traditional theories are therefore collectively referred to as industrial leadership models (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2005).

In the mid-20th century, behavioral and situational theories emerged. The behavioral theories moved away from a focus on inherent traits and instead sought to explain the task and relational behaviors associated with effective leadership, though these approaches were still reductive in that they posited a single best way to lead (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2019). The trio of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles emerged during this time. Situational theories expanded upon behavioral theories to include not only the behaviors of leaders, but also environmental and contextual factors influencing how a leader might respond in a given situation (Dugan & Komives, 2011). During this period, other leadership theories emerged in the United States that incorporated principles and skills such as influence, relationships, and the ability to direct a group's work toward a common goal (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2019). In the 1980s, trait, behavior, and power based approaches to leadership resurged as popular models (Northouse, 2019). Most of the leadership models up to this point in time are considered leader-centric because they focused on the characteristics,

actions, and styles of a single person. Kniffin and Patterson (2019) characterized these approaches to leadership in the following manner: “Leader-centric theories depict the mainstream image of a tall man standing at the front of the room providing instruction or inspiration” (p. 190). Criticisms of a leader-centric approach to leadership gave way to the emergence of more contemporary, or post-industrial, leadership theories.

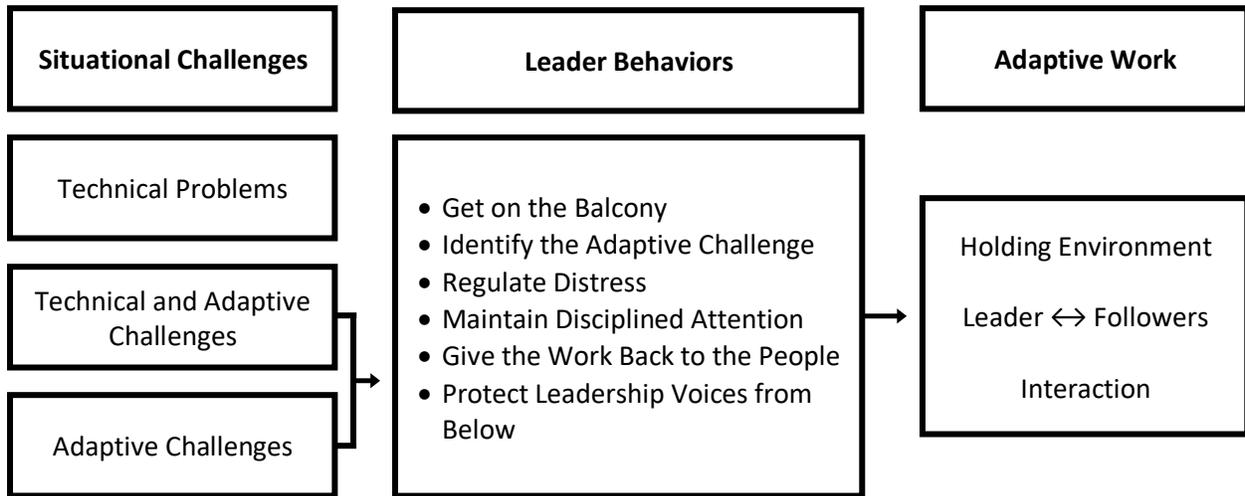
Beginning in the 1990s and continuing to the present time, scholars and practitioners have introduced theories that move away from the focus on an individual leader and frame leadership as a collaborative process that emerges from within systems (Kniffin & Patterson, 2019; Northouse, 2019). Prominent contemporary bodies of work include transformational, servant, authentic, and complexity leadership theories (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Kniffin & Patterson, 2019). Northouse (2019) captured the essence and shared assumptions of these bodies of theories by noting, “The process viewpoint suggests that leadership is a phenomenon that resides in the context of the interactions between leaders and followers and make leadership available to anyone” (p. 7). Dugan and Komives (2011) further described these theories as “focused on the mutual development of leaders and followers in collaborative processes aimed at change for the common good” (p. 40). Process oriented approaches to leadership have been gaining status and have been touted as necessary for addressing contemporary challenges, although traditional models are still deeply embedded in modern culture in the United States (Cilente, 2009; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2013; Northouse, 2019). Adaptive leadership is yet another process oriented approach to leadership that has received attention in the academic literature over the past two and a half decades. Following is an exploration of the adaptive leadership model.

The Adaptive Leadership Model

The adaptive leadership model is both a conceptual and practical approach to understanding and addressing complex issues in organizations, systems, and communities. The model posits two distinctions regarding the nature of leadership and the types of problems leadership seeks to address. First, it distinguishes leadership from authority. Leadership is framed as an activity, or a set of processes and practices, that can be employed by anyone, and may or may not be practiced by people who have formal power or authority (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Second, it distinguishes technical problems from adaptive challenges. Technical problems can be solved relatively quickly and easily with authority or existing expertise. Adaptive challenges are complex issues for which existing approaches are insufficient, and consequently require a different type of problem solving called *adaptive work* (Heifetz, 2006). Therefore, the model characterizes adaptive leadership as the activity of engaging people in the process of doing adaptive work to make progress on complex, adaptive challenges. While the literature frames adaptive leadership as a model, Heifetz's ideas about adaptive leadership were outlined across a series of books and articles published over several years. Northouse (2019) attempted to synthesize Heifetz's ideas into a simple graphical model. Figure 4 represents Northouse's model of adaptive leadership based on Heifetz's writings.

Figure 4

Model of Adaptive Leadership



Note: Adapted from *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed., p. 261), by P. Northouse, 2019, SAGE Publications. Copyright 2019 by Peter Northouse.

Following, I explore the distinction between leadership and authority, the distinction between technical problems and adaptive challenges, and the leadership behaviors and adaptive work that is necessary to make progress on adaptive challenges.

Distinction Between Leadership and Authority

The adaptive leadership model makes a clear distinction between leadership and authority. These two constructs are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive. Individuals in positions of power or with formal authority are not assumed, by default, to exercise leadership (Heifetz, 1994). Authority figures may or may not exercise leadership, and leadership can be exercised without having formal authority. Leadership is the activity of mobilizing people to do adaptive work, and it can emerge from anywhere within a system (Heifetz, 1994).

Leading from a Position of Authority

While leadership can be exercised with or without formal authority, according to the adaptive leadership model, leadership from a position of authority has unique attributes when considering the main functions of authority. The three primary functions of authority are to provide protection, direction, and order to stakeholders (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 1989). Individuals and systems expect authority figures to provide these three functions, and may even crave such functions, but performing them alone will not induce a group to do adaptive work. Exercising leadership within the context of an authority role often involves disappointing stakeholders' expectations to receive protection, direction, and order in pursuit of doing more difficult and messy adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994).

Merely relying on one's authority when dealing with adaptive challenges can produce undesirable outcomes, even in times of crisis when the desire for protection, direction, and order may be intensified. Randall and Coakley (2007) presented a case study of one university's response to financial crisis resulting from low enrollment and offered a cautionary tale about the unilateral use of authority. When the university began to face financial issues, its board of directors replaced the president. A new president came into the role with immediate and dire challenges to address. As noted by the authors, the new president approached the university's challenges in a purely hierarchical, dictatorial fashion, making decisions with input from only one other senior administrator. This approach created friction between the president and board, as well as faculty and students, and ultimately led to the firing of the president. The authors concluded:

It is necessary to challenge models of leadership that focus on the competencies, behaviors, and the situational contingencies of individual leaders. Instead, the needs and

demands of various stakeholders must be considered in order to accomplish the mission and goals of the academic organization. (Randall & Coakley, 2007, p. 334)

In this case, overreliance on authority quickly became a liability and exacerbated the situation. In the same research report, the authors presented another case study in which the central authoritative figure in the case, a department chair, did not rely solely on her authority to manage change. She used adaptive leadership approaches to navigate needed changes to a graduate program. The program needed to be restructured in order to accommodate the needs of working adults who comprised the majority of its enrollees. According to the authors, the chair used adaptive leadership practices to work with faculty to effectively modify the program structure in order to be more flexible for the target market it served (Randall & Coakley, 2007). When facing adaptive challenges, considering the role of expertise is deemed important as well.

Leading from a Position of Expertise

Providing leadership from a position of authority also involves understanding both the utility and limitations of expertise in addressing adaptive challenges. As Heifetz (2006) observed, “whereas technical problems are largely amenable to current expertise, adaptive challenges significantly are not” (p. 76). Higher education provides a useful setting for studying the role of expertise in adaptive leadership because of the tradition of valuing deep knowledge and disciplinary expertise. Two studies on community-based change efforts in higher education settings highlighted the limitations of expertise in addressing adaptive challenges with external stakeholders.

Stephenson (2011) examined the community engagement function of a public land grant university and asserted that this particular function of the university exemplified an adaptive leadership challenge for which authority and expertise alone were insufficient to drive change.

He detailed Virginia Tech's efforts to facilitate community change in an agricultural and manufacturing region in Virginia that was struggling economically. He found that in order for the university's efforts to be effective, faculty and staff involved in the project had to recognize and acknowledge they did not have all the expertise and resources necessary to solve the region's problems. The community members had to be engaged as equal partners to address their own problems, which necessitated humility on the part of the faculty and staff involved in the project (Stephenson, 2011).

Rodriguez (2017) studied how faculty members experienced the process of exercising leadership on adaptive challenges at a Chilean university. He described what he called the defensive patterns that inhibit one's ability to navigate adaptive challenges, and the recuperative mechanisms that support learning and growth. Supporting the notion that expertise has limitations with dealing with adaptive challenges, he stated:

My sense is that in a context like higher education where we are working hard to demonstrate intelligence and expertise – and to generate impact of course –, the need to assess our relationship to these defensive patterns frequently goes unnoticed, often at a detriment to all of us. Our smartness may be stripping us of the real curiosity and humility that we need to engage our roles effectively. (Rodriguez, 2017, p. 62)

He concluded that in order to navigate adaptive challenges effectively, the faculty had to let go of or detach themselves from their views and notions of control and certainty. Rather, they had to embrace the uncertainty of not having all the answers or knowing what outcome of new or untested approaches to problem solving would result. Dealing with adaptive challenges required conscious effort to mitigate inhibiting the impact of authoritative expertise (Rodriguez, 2017).

Although authority and expertise are often treated as binary—a person either has it or does not—an individual may have a scope of authority and/or a scope of relevant knowledge in any group or situation. With regard to authority in particular, one’s authority may either be formal, such as holding a title or position, or informal, such as having influence in a group or system (Heifetz et al., 2009). The adaptive leadership model posits that when exercising leadership to make progress on adaptive challenges, one must often seek ways to act beyond their formal or informal authority (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009). Individuals exercising leadership are in essence “taking responsibility for hard problems” and “taking action beyond whatever authority they have” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 205).

Distinction Between Technical Problems and Adaptive Challenges

A hallmark of the adaptive leadership model is the distinction made between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Heifetz et al. (2009) contended, “the most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems” (p. 19). The adaptive leadership model outlines three types of situational challenges: technical problems, adaptive challenges, and problems that have both technical and adaptive elements (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019). Technical problems are often easy to define, have clear solutions, and can be solved by authorities or by applying existing knowledge or expertise. Technical problems lend themselves to technical work, the aim of which is to quickly and efficiently solve the problem. Adaptive challenges cannot be solved by employing technical strategies, existing capacities, or authority alone. They require adaptive approaches, the aim of which is not to conclusively solve the problem, but to make incremental progress toward solutions. Adaptive challenges necessitate learning and experimentation to both

define the problem and to make progress toward solutions, and the onus for doing adaptive work is on the stakeholders within the system (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019).

Accurately assessing the technical and adaptive elements of a problem is critical to making progress toward a viable solution (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014; Heifetz et al., 2009). Problem definition can be difficult, however. Adaptive challenges, or what Head and Alford (2015) referred to as wicked problems, are elusive in part because, by nature, they operate at a systemic level. Adaptive challenges implicate all of the actors or stakeholders within a system, making it difficult to pin the underlying problem on a particular person, cause, or authority figure. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) stated that everyone in a system owns a “piece of the mess,” (p. 90) and people therefore resist deeper, more difficult diagnosis and response that may require them to change their own values, attitudes, and behaviors. This is one of many manifestations of what Heifetz and Linsky (2017) called *work avoidance*. The following leadership processes and practices can reduce work avoidance and help individuals and groups tackle their challenges directly.

Adaptive Leadership Processes and Practices

The adaptive leadership model describes numerous processes and practices that can induce individuals or groups to do adaptive work, and to sustain that work in order to make progress on addressing adaptive challenges. Northouse (2019) distilled the various processes and practices embedded in Heifetz’s adaptive leadership ideas (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) into six approaches: getting on the balcony, identifying the adaptive challenges, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving the work back to the people, and protecting the leadership voices from below.

Getting on the Balcony

One leadership practice described in the adaptive leadership model involves the metaphor of a dance floor and a balcony (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The dance floor is where action and interaction take place. From any one person's position on the floor, they can only see what is going on in the immediate surrounding. One can gain a broader perspective of what is taking place across the entire dance floor by moving to a balcony. From that vantage point, broader patterns of interaction, engagement, and behavior can be observed.

The adaptive leadership practitioner, through the use of probing questions and exploring a multitude of possible interpretations about what is taking place on the dance floor—or within a group or system—can help a group take a balcony perspective on the adaptive challenge they are facing. Such an approach can help the group to better understand the system dynamics and explore more appropriate solutions to the challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Identifying the Adaptive Challenges

In order to make the distinction between technical problems and adaptive challenges, the leadership practitioner diagnoses the adaptive elements of situations. Northouse (2019) indicated, “in addition to getting on the balcony and observing the dynamics of the complex situations people face, leaders must analyze and diagnose these challenges” (p. 263). One process to aid in diagnosing and addressing complex problems involves an iterative cycle of making observations about what is happening in a system, making interpretations about those observations to try to identify the adaptive challenge, and designing interventions to address the adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The types of interpretations made are important. In order to design effective interventions for an adaptive challenge, the adaptive leadership model suggests leaders make three shifts in how they interpret the problem. Leaders

are encouraged to shift from viewing the problem as technical to understanding its adaptive elements, from making benign interpretations about what is going on in the system to making conflictual interpretations, and from focusing on individual actions to identifying underlying system dynamics (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Because adaptive challenges by nature require learning in order to accurately define and effectively address the issue, this iterative process of observing, interpreting, and intervening serves to both support the learning process and enable stakeholders to experiment with a range of possible interventions to promote positive change.

Regulating Distress

Another adaptive leadership process involves regulating the level of distress or disequilibrium in the system in which the adaptive challenge exists. Productivity and progress are inhibited when a system is either operating at too comfortable a level of equilibrium, or, conversely, when a system is operating at too high a level of distress. Identifying and regulating a productive level of disequilibrium, or what is referred to as regulating distress, enables a group to do adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

In addition to managing and regulating a productive level of disequilibrium in a system, conflict must be managed. Conflict is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of engaging in adaptive work, and is often directly connected to distress and disequilibrium (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019). One manifestation of conflict comes through the surfacing of divergent factions that exist within a group or system. Factions have different, and sometimes opposing, values and loyalties. In the adaptive leadership model, the leadership practitioner should help a group name the factions that are present, understand the values and loyalties each faction holds, and then help the group find ways to work productively across factions (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Creating a holding environment is a key practice of adaptive leadership that can enable and support the regulation of distress and conflict (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009). A holding environment is a physical and/or psychological space that provides enough challenge and support for people to navigate the conflict that comes with doing adaptive work (Northouse, 2019). To foster a holding environment, leadership practitioners can help a group develop shared language, shared values and purpose, group norms or expectations, and trust in the process (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Maintaining Disciplined Attention

A common refrain is that people do not like change. Heifetz et al. (2009) contended that change itself is not what people find difficult; rather, it is dealing with the real or perceived losses they experience as a result of change. Doing adaptive work involves organizations and individuals changing the way they operate in order to adapt to new circumstances. This often requires people to alter the individual values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that may be inhibiting progress on the issues that are important to them (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). Through this work, people often have to confront competing values and commitments, such as the value of keeping what is known and comfortable and the value of making progress on an adaptive issue, which may require letting go of the known and comfortable and embracing uncertainty and discomfort. Adaptive leadership practitioners can acknowledge and confront the losses they or others may experience through the process of change (Heifetz et al., 2009). Finally, throughout the process of doing adaptive work and promoting the changes necessary to make progress on complex, adaptive challenges, the adaptive leadership practitioner should maintain focus on a sense of purpose (Heifetz, 1994).

Giving the Work Back to the People

As noted in Chapter 1, the adaptive leadership model indicates that the people who are part of a problem, or who are part of a system where a problem resides, must be part of the solution. When dealing with an adaptive challenge, the responsibility for addressing the challenge cannot solely fall on individuals with authority or expertise (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Stakeholders must be engaged in doing the adaptive work necessary to make progress. Part of giving the work back is focusing on learning and experimentation (Doyle, 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019). This tenet of adaptive leadership was illuminated in the studies by Stephenson (2011) and Preece (2016) described previously in which university actors had to engage and empower community stakeholders to solve problems collaboratively. The university actors could not solve the problems on their own, but had to give the work back to the people in the region they were charged with helping.

Protecting Leadership Voices from Below

Inherent in doing adaptive work is the need to protect the voices and ideas of people in the system who may be vulnerable. This could include individuals who have little power or authority, who are marginalized, who dissent from popular or normative perspectives, or who engage in the very behaviors encouraged by the adaptive leadership model, such as offering conflictual interpretations of situations (Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019). As noted by Ospina and Foldy (2009), “leadership and power are inextricably intertwined” (p. 877). Power dynamics exist up and down organizational hierarchies and between dominant and marginalized groups. The people in organizations who hold power can act in ways that uplift and enable others, or use it to advance their own interests and oppress those with less power (Northouse, 2019). Power differentials that often exist between different racial, gender, class, and other social

identity groups impact whose voices are heard and valued and who can dissent or offer conflictual interpretations without fear of repercussions (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Absent the protection of leadership voices from below, individuals are less likely to do the risky work of addressing conflict openly, naming the adaptive challenges, working across factions, or providing conflictual interpretations of the situation (Heifetz, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Organizational culture may instead promote and prioritize keeping undiscussables undiscussable (Argyris, 1999, 2002).

Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education

Use of the adaptive leadership model in higher education is relatively unknown. While there is some documented evidence of its use, the academic literature on adaptive leadership in higher education contexts is sparse. The little literature that does exist describes uses of the model in courses, trainings, and co-curricular programs for students. One study suggested it is not a common model in institutions of higher education, at least among co-curricular leadership offerings. Lunsford and Brown (2017) surveyed 153 directors of collegiate leadership centers offering non-credit bearing leadership programs to document the leadership theories and frameworks used in their programming. Only seven respondents reported using the adaptive leadership model. Literature on the use and impact of adaptive leadership in the context of credit-bearing courses is limited, though a few studies have highlighted such use. Two similar studies each presented the use of the adaptive leadership model in the capstone course of an undergraduate leadership studies minor, and found that the course had a positive impact on shaping students' understanding of leadership as systemic and as an interdependent process (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013, 2015).

Another study explored adaptive leadership in an undergraduate leadership certificate program. Andenoro et al. (2017) studied the impact of the program on students' adaptive leadership capacity, systems thinking capacity, and sense of urgency for addressing complex problems. The first course in the program was grounded in adaptive leadership, and subsequent courses engaged students in real world problem solving by partnering them with industry professionals, policy makers, and other external stakeholders to work together collaboratively on issues in the community. As a result of completing the certificate program, over three quarters of the students developed an increased capacity for systems thinking and other capacities that support doing adaptive work, which are promising outcomes in light of the authors' assertion that adaptive leadership "is critical to understanding the complexity that leadership learners face in real world settings" (Andenoro et al., 2017, p. 4). Finally, Heller et al. (2004) highlighted the case of a nursing leadership course that incorporated adaptive leadership into its readings and used the group consultation process, one of Heifetz's teaching methods (Daloz Parks, 2005), to help students explore adaptive leadership in the context of personal leadership challenges they had faced.

Organizational Learning in Higher Education

Scholars have proposed many theories and frameworks of organizational learning, and researchers have applied these theories to diverse organizational contexts (Basten & Haamann, 2018). Theories of action and the associated single-loop and double-loop learning model (Argyris, 1999, 2002, 2004; Argyris & Schon, 1974) are among them. While this body of literature is extensive, Miner and Mezias (1996) and Bauman (2005) argued much of the literature on organizational learning was theoretical, and adequate empirical research was lacking. Kezar (2005) observed both theoretical applications and empirical research on

organizational learning in higher education more specifically was sparse. While her conclusion was published 15 years ago, little additional peer-reviewed literature on organizational learning in higher education contexts has emerged since, and even less so on applications of Argyris's framework in particular.

Some authors have suggested theories of action is a useful framework to apply to complex challenges in higher education. Tagg (2007) noted single-loop and double-loop learning is applicable to much of what happens in higher education, and suggested the model explains why change efforts often fail. Bensimon (2005) discussed the issue of achievement gaps between majority and minority groups through the lens of single-loop and double-loop learning. She argued that institutions often engage in single-loop learning by externalizing the issue and then implementing new programs, initiatives, or best practices aimed at closing the achievement gap, only to make little impact on achieving equity for underrepresented populations. Instead, she called on institutions to strive for double-loop learning by focusing on shifting the mental models of individual institutional actors that contribute to inequitable outcomes. Such a shift would begin by disaggregating student outcome data by race and ethnicity and assuming responsibility for addressing inequities rather than attributing them to circumstances beyond the institution's control. Bensimon (2005) further indicated that double-loop learning would involve institutional members shifting from deficit thinking, which manifests as attributing inequitable outcomes to student behavior, to equity thinking, in which institutional members interrogate how their own attitudes, beliefs, and practices perpetuate the achievement gap and then work toward changing those attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Paul (2003) made similar arguments in her application of single-loop and double-loop learning to diversity issues in higher education. She called on

administrators to examine the governing values that contribute to ongoing discrimination and bias. She concluded:

Single-loop action strategies merely strive to cultivate the appearance of equal opportunity. Double-loop action strategies move beyond that appearance, both to evaluate whether there is substance beneath it and to explore the values and beliefs that drive our desire to achieve diversity and equal opportunity. (Paul, 2003, p. 45)

As evidenced by these examples of theories of action applied to complex problems in higher education, double-loop learning can be challenging.

Several scholars have suggested IHEs are, perhaps paradoxically, often ineffective at engaging in organizational learning (Bauman, 2005; Dee & Leisytė, 2016; Kezar, 2005; Tagg, 2007, 2010). With regard to the educational mission of IHEs, Tagg (2010) suggested a common incongruency between institutions' espoused theories and theories-in-use. He offered the example of the tension between academic instruction and learning. Student learning is frequently the espoused theory, while attention and institutional assessment efforts are often centered on instruction. Therefore, the theories-in-use have to do with how faculty teach, with less focus on, or evidence of, whether or how students learn (Tagg, 2010). At the broader institutional level, hierarchical relationships and power structures may be key inhibitors to organizational learning in general, and double-loop learning in particular (Kezar, 2005; Solitander et al., 2012). In hierarchical and power oriented environments, defense mechanisms will be prevalent (Argyris, 1999), and these defense mechanisms may prevent or impede valuable organizational learning in higher education (Tagg, 2007). To mitigate the structural and cultural barriers to organizational learning and change, Solitander et al. (2012) suggested "champions" at varying levels of the institution should be willing to navigate institutional politics and drive organizational change,

and these champions should be empowered and supported by institutional authorities. This is consistent with the adaptive leadership model principle that people must often work beyond whatever formal authority they have in order to make progress on complex challenges (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Summary and Critique of the Literature

One of the criticisms of the adaptive leadership model is that there is “very little empirical research to support the claims and tenets of adaptive leadership” (Northouse, 2019, pp. 290-291). When Heifetz (1994) first introduced the model, he acknowledged it as a “conceptual framework from which to launch more focused empirical research” (p. 8). He described it as “empirical in the sense that it reflects engagement with real problems. But it is not empirical in the rigorous sense of methodologically categorizing and selecting cases on which to examine and test the full range of possible hypotheses” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 7). He invited other scholars to interrogate and contribute to the developing model, and since its introduction, Heifetz has expanded upon and refined his own ideas about adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

While additional research is warranted, a number of studies have suggested the adaptive leadership model is useful for addressing complex challenges, and these studies have contributed to a collective body of research that helps to substantiate its theoretical credibility (Cojocar, 2008; Kaminsky, 2010). Appearances of adaptive leadership in the scholarly research are mostly in the context of its use as a theoretical framework for analyzing organizational change. These researchers have responded, perhaps unintentionally, to Heifetz’s call to engage in theory building around the adaptive leadership model. Though useful in substantiating adaptive leadership as a leadership theory, this subset of the literature on adaptive leadership used the

model as an analytic tool, but did not involve research on the deliberate practice of adaptive leadership.

Another small subset of the literature captured the use of adaptive leadership in leadership training, education, and development programs in higher education settings. These studies, though limited, are useful for understanding how, and in what contexts, individuals have been educated and trained on adaptive leadership. Yet this subset of the literature offers little insight regarding the impact of training on professional practice, leaving an important question unanswered in the literature: How do individuals translate adaptive leadership training into practice? Few studies to date have attempted to answer this question by exploring the deliberate practice of adaptive leadership to drive organizational change efforts. After conducting a thorough review of the peer-reviewed literature, I was unable to find research on the deliberate, purposeful use of adaptive leadership to drive change efforts in higher education specifically.

This presents a gap in the scholarly literature on adaptive leadership: understanding how individuals trained in adaptive leadership attempt to apply their training in practice, as well as exploring the challenges, successes, and/or opportunities they encounter in doing so. In a similar vein, research on organizational learning in higher education is limited, and applications of theories of action is even less present. Given the connections between adaptive leadership and Argyris's theories of action that have been explored previously, this study offers a unique contribution to the literature by exploring, through the lens of theories of action, the experiences of university members who were striving to practice leadership to address adaptive challenges within the institution.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

This study drew upon the tradition of qualitative research design. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated the “purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process ... of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 15). Qualitative research aims to understand a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective through an inductive process that is emergent and flexible and by providing rich description of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research design, the research context and participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis and interpretation procedures used. The chapter concludes by addressing research quality, researcher positionality, and ethical considerations for the study.

This research used a qualitative single case study design. A case study seeks meaning and understanding of phenomena through “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). A bounded system, or a case, is characterized by its finite nature. The phenomenon of inquiry is focused on a particular context or has parameters that limit the scope of the inquiry. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated, “The case, then, could be a single person ... a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (p. 38). For this study, the case was a single institution of higher education that was striving to create a culture of adaptive leadership to address complex challenges within the institution. This case study was bounded in the sense that participants were all members of the institution who were either directly involved in facilitating the institution’s efforts to create a culture of adaptive leadership, or who had participated in adaptive leadership training and were using adaptive

leadership practices in their professional work. Participants' experiences were explored in-depth to understand the challenges and opportunities resulting from their efforts to practice leadership to tackle difficult problems and to facilitate organizational change. I aimed to illuminate how individuals who were striving to translate leadership training into practice within an institution of higher education experienced this learning process and how they made meaning from their experiences.

Research Context

The site for the study was a four-year regional university located in the Midwestern United States, which I refer to using the pseudonym Heartland University. Heartland University provided a unique and relevant context for this study due to an explicit focus in its strategic plan on embedding adaptive leadership into the campus culture. The university's efforts to adopt adaptive leadership as an institutional practice begin approximately eight years ago through a relationship that was forged with a nonprofit leadership training and development organization I refer to as the Leadership Center. The Leadership Center was founded in 2007 to equip more people with the leadership skills necessary for tackling adaptive challenges in organizations and communities (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013, p. 15). The Leadership Center developed its own leadership framework based on Heifetz's adaptive leadership model and provides various training programs to individuals from public, private, and community based organizations.

Approximately five years ago, the Leadership Center created a grant program to expand participation in its leadership trainings, and Heartland University received a grant. The university already had a relationship with the Leadership Center and had been sending faculty and staff to Leadership Center trainings, but the grant provided more opportunities to send faculty and staff to the Leadership Center. As part of the grant requirements, Heartland University established a

core team to facilitate the university's adaptive leadership efforts. Additional historical context around Heartland University's adoption of adaptive leadership and its relationship with the Leadership Center are detailed in the findings in Chapter 4.

Participant Selection

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to identify participants for this study. Purposeful sampling involves “strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 265). Depending on a study's methodology and research questions, various approaches to purposeful sampling can be employed. Patton (2015) identified 40 specific purposeful sampling strategies. For this study, I employed operational construct sampling, which involves “selecting for study real-world examples (i.e., *operational* examples) of the constructs in which one is interested” (Patton, 2015, p. 289). Leadership was the construct of inquiry, and I sought participants who had completed an adaptive leadership training program and were ostensibly striving to practice adaptive leadership at Heartland University.

The target sample size for this study was 12-15 participants. I incorporated elements of emergent design into the study to allow for flexibility in interviewing a sample of participants who provided sufficient data to answer my research questions. Patton (2015) described emergent design as being “open to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change” (p. 46). I identified two sets of participants from within the institution: individuals involved with the six-member core team, and individuals who were not part of the core team, but were trained in and had practiced adaptive leadership. Responsible for implementing and facilitating the university's adaptive leadership goals, core team members could offer perspectives as the authorities and experts with regard to the university's efforts to build adaptive leadership

capacity. At Heartland University, the core team was called the Adaptive Leadership Advancement Team (ALAT). I initially contacted the chairperson of the ALAT to describe my study and to request permission for Heartland University to be the site for the study. The chairperson responded by agreeing to partner with me on the study, indicated that all members of the ALAT had already expressed interest in participating, and provided names and email addresses of the other five ALAT members. I sent an email to all six ALAT members, including the chairperson, providing an overview of the study and an invitation to participate in an individual interview. Five of the six members responded and participated.

During data collection, I used snowball sampling (Patton, 2015) to identify the second set of participants by asking core team members to suggest names of other faculty and staff members who had participated in adaptive leadership training and who were employing adaptive leadership practices. Approximately 20 faculty and staff members were recommended as other potential participants. Of the names recommended, I invited 14 of those faculty and staff members to participate in individual interviews. I selected these 14 individuals in an effort to generate as diverse a sample as possible with regard to race and ethnicity, gender, length of employment at the university, role classification (both faculty and staff), and position within the organizational hierarchy. Nine of the 14 individuals responded. A total of 14 faculty and staff participated in the study, which included five ALAT members and nine other faculty and staff. The email invitations for ALAT members and institutional members to participate in the study are included in Appendix A.

Data Collection

The qualitative data collected in this study helped to answer my research questions. In this section I describe the types of data I collected and the processes I used to collect it. Merriam

and Tisdell (2016) described data as “nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment” and that “whether or not a bit of information becomes data in a research study depends solely on the interest and perspective of the investigator” (p. 105). Depending on the research phenomenon of interest and the research methodology, data of interest can be collected through a number of methods. In qualitative research, Yin (2015) identified four primary methods of data collection: interviewing, observing, collecting and examining, and feeling. For this study, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with participants as identified in the previous section, and I conducted a document review by collecting and examining written documents relevant to my research study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In semi-structured interviews, questions are open-ended and may include a mix of more structured and less structured questions, which allows the researcher flexibility with the use and wording of the questions within any particular participant interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of interview structure allows for consistent gathering of specific information the researcher desires to capture from all participants, while allowing the flexibility for the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 11).

For this study, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility for capturing and understanding the nuanced experiences of participants who were practicing leadership in various contexts within the university, while also providing a level of consistency necessary for the emergence of common themes across participant experiences. An appropriate level of structured interview questions additionally aided in the interpretation of the findings through the lens of theories of action. Interview questions were grounded in and developed from both theories of

action (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974) and the adaptive leadership model (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each and were conducted virtually using the Zoom® video conferencing platform. I chose to conduct interviews virtually due to the need for extra health and safety precautions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that was taking place at the time of this research. Interviews were video and audio recorded to allow for transcription, which was useful for in-depth data analysis and interpretation. Since each set of participants—ALAT members and institutional members—had unique perspectives with regard to their role in the university’s efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity, I used two slightly different sets of interview questions. The interview protocols and questions for both the ALAT members and institutional members are included in Appendices B and C.

Document Review

An analysis of relevant written documents added further context to the study. The documents I reviewed supplemented, complimented, and helped to substantiate other data collected through individual interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I reviewed data from two sources: Heartland University and the Leadership Center. Heartland University documents reviewed included the university’s website, strategic plan, annual review publication, and alumni magazine. Leadership Center documents reviewed included its website, trade publications, training materials, and magazine. These documents provided insight into the Leadership Center’s leadership framework, as well as the relationship between Heartland University’s espoused value of adaptive leadership and the ways in which institutional members practiced leadership on adaptive challenges. I also reviewed online news articles from local news sources that provided

historical information about the formation of the partnership between Heartland University and the Leadership Center.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of data analysis is to derive meaning from, and make sense of, the data collected in a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined data analysis as a “complex procedure that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 202). This process included analyzing and interpreting data from the semi-structured interviews and the documents reviewed for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were transcribed using the Temi® transcription service to allow for analysis of the data through text (Creswell, 2015). While data analysis often initiates during the data collection process, I started a more focused and in-depth analysis following interview transcription. I began by reading each interview transcript while simultaneously listening to the associated audio recording in order to ensure accuracy in the written transcripts. During this process, I took notes on patterns I was observing across transcripts. This process of reading, reviewing, and reflecting on the interview transcripts helped to get an overall sense of the data and to allow for concepts to begin to emerge, a process called *preliminary exploratory analysis* (Creswell, 2015). I then reviewed the theoretical framework and literature review for this study to frame further analysis through the lenses of theories of action (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974) and adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz et al., 1989).

I read each transcript a second time, continuing to take notes on patterns and concepts that were emerging related to my research questions, literature review, and theoretical

framework. I then reviewed all of my notes, and generated a list of 24 initial codes for my first round of coding. Coding involves assigning descriptive words or short phrases to segments of the data that seemed relevant to the study's purpose and research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcripts were uploaded into the Dedoose® software program, which I used to manage transcript data and apply codes to segments of the data. I coded each transcript using the 24 initial codes, and then reviewed the number of occurrences of each code within and across transcripts to ensure that codes reflected patterns in the data and not single or limited instances of the concept each code represented. The coding process continued with axial coding, which involved grouping together codes that were conceptually linked or represented recurring patterns in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Throughout the coding process, I used *in vivo* codes, which are codes that emerge organically and inductively from the data itself (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). *In vivo* coding allowed me to make sense of, and seek patterns among, the unique and nuanced experiences participants had practicing adaptive leadership in their institutional contexts. Through iterative cycles of axial coding, larger sets of codes were grouped and collapsed into a smaller, broader set of themes or categories that captured the essence of the phenomena being studied and helped answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Document Review

The documents reviewed in the study helped to triangulate the findings from the interviews by providing background information and historical insight to Heartland University's efforts to embed adaptive leadership at the university, as well as provide context and clarification to participants' responses to interview questions (Bowen, 2009). I reviewed Heartland University's strategic plan and the university's webpages related to its strategic plan and

adaptive leadership efforts to understand how the university communicated its adaptive leadership goals, as well as to verify how the university codified adaptive leadership in its mission and strategic plan.

Participants provided a historical account of how Heartland University came to adopt the adaptive leadership model, so I reviewed several documents to verify the historical record and provide additional background information to supplement the information provided by participants. Documents that provided historical information included a Heartland University annual review publication, a Heartland University alumni magazine issue, the Leadership Center website, a Leadership Center magazine issue, and online news article from local news sources. Additionally, I reviewed Leadership Center trade publications and training materials to provide definitions and added context to Leadership Center terminology and concepts discussed by participants during their individual interviews. I present the findings in Chapter 4 through description of the four major themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews and documents reviewed, and interpret the findings through the lens of theories of action (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974) to understand participants' experiences with practicing leadership to make progress on adaptive challenges within the institution.

Research Quality

Research quality involves the overall trustworthiness of a study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted, "being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people's lives" (p. 237). It is important this study is trustworthy so the findings and conclusions can credibly inform the design and delivery or the provisioning of adaptive leadership training programs in various contexts. I will enhance the research quality and trustworthiness of the proposed study by employing strategies to support the

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study and its findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

The credibility of a study addresses the questions, “How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there?” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242). I aimed to support the credibility of this study through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed triangulation by comparing data across interview transcripts to ensure that findings represent patterns in the data, not single instances of participant experiences, as well as comparing interview data with data from written documents reviewed. Peer debriefing involves consultation with peers who can provide a neutral and/or expert perspective on the data and the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed peer debriefing by consulting with my dissertation chairperson at various points throughout the data analysis and interpretation. I sought regular feedback from my chairperson, who had expertise in both qualitative research and the theoretical framework that guided this study. Finally, I employed member checking to support the credibility of the study by providing each participant with a copy of the transcript from their interview. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript and provide feedback to ensure I accurately recorded their responses and captured their intended meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Six participants responded to my invitation to review their transcripts by either affirming that the transcripts accurately captured their responses or offering minor edits or points of clarity.

Transferability

Transferability deals with the applicability of a study’s findings to other similar contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This study did not result in findings that are generalizable to all

organizations or contexts, but through richly descriptive and empirical evidence, the study illuminated findings that can be used to inform efforts to incorporate contemporary leadership approaches in other institutions of higher education or other types of organizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While the challenges and opportunities identified in the study may be specific to the institution's context, the findings are transferrable to other organizations in which the problems being faced can be defined as adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Dependability

Dependability, also referred to as reliability or consistency, addresses “*whether the results are consistent with the data collected*” such that individuals reading the research would “concur that, given the data collected, the result make sense—they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251). To support the dependability of the study, I used the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) during data collection and analysis. This method, often used in grounded theory research designs, involves, as the name suggests, a continual process of comparing data to emergent findings within and across interviews and written documents and throughout data analysis as codes and themes are generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The constant process of checking findings against the data and other findings supported this study's dependability, such that anyone who may read the study would find concurrence between the data and results.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the “extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 324). One technique for supporting the confirmability of a study is to use an audit trail, or detailed documentation of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes employed

throughout the research, as record of the reasoning and decision making used during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I kept all documentation created as part of the data collection and analysis process, which included notes created during data analysis. The description provided in this chapter regarding data analysis and interpretation processes used further support the credibility of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Use of an audit trail, along with other strategies previously discussed to support credibility, transferability, and dependability, enhance the confirmability of the study's results. Finally, linking the results back to the literature and theoretical framework strengthens this study's confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

Positionality refers to a researcher's personal background, experience, identity, and perspectives, as well as the researcher's interest in the phenomenon of inquiry, and how those attributes might influence or bias a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Identifying and attending to one's positionality is an important part of the research process and supports the trustworthiness of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the present research, it is important to discuss my connection to the Leadership Center and Heartland University, as well as my perspective on the Leadership Center framework and the adaptive leadership model.

I was first introduced to the Leadership Center approximately 9 years ago when I visited the center for a 2-day program. Since then, I have completed two Leadership Center certifications, one in leadership coaching and one in the case-in-point teaching method. I have served on a teaching team for an undergraduate leadership course that teaches the Leadership Center framework. Additionally, I own a small business through which I provide leadership

coaching, training, and organizational capacity-building services. I use and embed the Leadership Center framework and adaptive leadership model into the services I provide through my business. I have found adaptive leadership approaches to be helpful in my own leadership practice, and I therefore have a high level of buy-in to the Leadership Center framework and the adaptive leadership model. I also have professional connections with staff and teaching faculty at the Leadership Center and consider myself to be an advocate and supporter of Leadership Center's mission and work.

I also have a connection to Heartland University. I worked at the institution for approximately 8.5 years in a variety of student services roles. My employment ended in 2016 when I accepted a position at my current place of employment, but I still know and have personal and professional relationships with faculty and staff at Heartland University. I personally know, or had previously met or worked with, nine of the 14 participants in this study. I believe my prior relationships with these participants enhanced trust and rapport during our interviews, but I strived to create the same level of rapport with the participants who I had not met prior to our interviews. Following the interview protocols I had established aided in taking a consistent approach to my interactions with all participants.

Throughout the research process, the strategies described previously to address the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) aided in keeping attention on my positionality and striving to reduce the influence of my positionality on data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Specifically, the peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) strategies identified previously aided in reducing my subjectivity. I also took notes throughout the data collection, data analysis, and writing processes to help me to reflect on how I was

interacting with participants and analyzing and interpreting the data. Engaging in a reflective writing process can aid in what Kleinsasser (2010) referred to as writing-to-learn. She contends, “Writing-to-learn makes thinking visible. When thinking becomes visible, it can be inspected, reviewed, held up for consideration, and viewed as a set of data” (Kleinsasser, 2010, p. 158). Capturing my thought processes through reflective writing aided me in bringing awareness to bias and assumptions that were present as I engaged in this research.

I aimed to produce a study that provides valuable insight into the experiences of individuals who were trying to make progress on difficult challenges in their university through the practice of leadership. My hope is that the results will be useful for organizations that facilitate leadership training to better support their participants’ training needs, as well as organizations considering providing leadership training for their stakeholders. In pursuing this goal, I did not ignore my own experiences or abandon my perspectives, but I strived to keep them in check. I tried to approach this research with a critical eye and with academic rigor, and engaged in this study for purpose of capturing and making sense of my participants’ experiences without interjecting my own.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of research, particularly research involving human subjects, are important to consider. Participants must be afforded respect, regard, and protection throughout the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prospective participants who met the sampling criteria were informed of the nature and purpose of the study upon being invited to participate. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study received an informed consent document via email prior to our scheduled interviews to give them a chance to review the document in advance. This Consent Form included standard informed consent information including the purpose of the study, the

voluntary nature of their participation, the potential benefits and minimal risks associated with participation, and assurance of confidentiality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the start of each interview, I reviewed the Consent Form with the participant to ensure that any questions or concerns were addressed. The Consent Form can be found in Appendix D.

With regard to confidentiality, I protect participants' identities in this study through use of pseudonyms. I also use either pseudonyms or general, nonidentifiable descriptors in place of other identifiable information such as the name of the institution, departments or units within the institution, and participant titles or roles. Audio and video files created by recording the interviews are stored electronically in a secure, password protected Internet cloud drive. Notes and other written information generated or obtained during data collection and analysis, such as signed informed consent documents, are stored in a secure location in my residence. These strategies support an ethical research process that honors and respects the individuals whose participation made this study possible.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of individuals who were practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. My aim was to understand the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by institution members who were trying to make progress on difficult organizational problems using adaptive leadership practices. To achieve this purpose, I selected Heartland University as the research site. Heartland University provided a unique case to study because of its explicit commitment to building adaptive leadership capacity within the institution.

To answer the research questions, I interviewed 14 faculty, staff, and administrators at Heartland University. Table 1 includes demographic data for the participants. In Table 1 and throughout the study, I refer to all participants, as well as key players and organizations, using pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. In the Table 1 “Role at Heartland University” column, administrators were persons at a dean level or higher, and those designated a “Faculty + Admin.” were persons whose roles included both teaching and administrative duties within their academic departments. Length of employment at the university ranged from two to 32 years. Eleven of the participants were white females, one was a Hispanic female, and two were white males. Five participants were members of the university’s Adaptive Leadership Advancement Team (ALAT), the core team charged with shepherding the institution’s adaptive leadership initiatives in connection to the institution’s Leadership Center grant. The other seven participants had all completed at least one adaptive leadership training program or workshop either on campus or at the Leadership Center.

TABLE 1
HEARTLAND UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS

Participant Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Role at Heartland University	ALAT Member	Approx. Years at HU
Sam	White	Male	Administrator	Yes	32
Jill	White	Female	Faculty, Honors College	Yes	17
Missy	White	Female	Faculty, Sociology and Criminal Justice	Yes	9
Kay	White	Female	Faculty + Admin., Ethnic and Gender Studies	Yes	13
Dorothy	White	Female	Staff	Yes	4
Elizabeth	White	Female	Administrator	No	31
Aaron	White	Male	Administrator	No	19
Heather	White	Female	Faculty, Library and Information Management	No	2
Angela	Hispanic	Female	Faculty, Sociology and Criminal Justice	No	3
Melissa	White	Female	Faculty + Admin., English, Modern Languages, and Journalism	No	25
Lisa	White	Female	Faculty + Admin., Communication	No	17
Jennifer	White	Female	Faculty + Admin., Elementary Education, Early Childhood, and Special Education	No	7
Joanna	White	Female	Faculty + Admin., English, Modern Languages, and Journalism	No	4
Julie	White	Female	Staff	No	20

I also reviewed publicly available documents that were helpful in providing important background information and context to compliment, supplement, or substantiate data collected through participant interviews.

Documents reviewed included training materials and magazine articles from the Leadership Center; strategic plan documents, annual review documents, and alumni magazine articles from Heartland University; and online news articles. Figure 5 depicts the Leadership Center’s leadership framework. This framework, which appeared in several training materials,

included five leadership principles, four broad leadership competencies, and 24 specific leadership dimensions.

Figure 5

Leadership Center Principles, Competencies, and Dimensions

Leadership Principles	
Leadership is an activity, not a position. Anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere. It starts with you and must engage others. Your purpose must be clear. It's risky.	
Leadership Competencies and Dimensions	
Diagnose Situation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore tough interpretations • Distinguish technical and adaptive work • Understand the process challenges • Test multiple interpretations and points of view • Take the temperature • Identify who needs to do the work 	Energize Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage unusual voices • Work across factions • Start where they are • Speak to loss • Inspire a collective purpose • Create a trustworthy process
Manage Self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your strengths, vulnerabilities and triggers • Know the story others tell about you • Choose among competing values • Get used to uncertainty and conflict • Experiment beyond your comfort zone • Take care of yourself 	Intervene Skillfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make conscious choices • Raise the heat • Give the work back • Hold to purpose • Speak from the heart • Act experimentally

The five principles are core assumptions the Leadership Center made about leadership and are the foundation from which the rest of the framework was built. The four competencies—Diagnose Situation, Manage Self, Energize Others, and Intervene Skillfully—represent broad areas of knowledge and ability the Leadership Center suggested are important for making progress on adaptive challenges. The Diagnose Situation competency involves the ability to assess and understand a problem rather than pursuing quick-fix solutions. Manage Self involves

self-awareness and the ability to step outside one's comfort zone when doing difficult adaptive work. Energize Others is a competency that involves the ability to engage all of the stakeholders who are involved in, or impacted by, an adaptive challenge, especially those who may have differing viewpoints. Intervene Skillfully involves the ability to effectively manage the conflict that is often present in adaptive challenges.

The competencies are not intended to be operationalized in any particular order, nor is there any differential value or importance assigned to them. Within each competency are six dimensions. The dimensions are specific leadership activities that can be employed by leadership practitioners. Depending on the situation, some dimensions may be more relevant to employ and others may be less relevant. The adaptive leadership practitioner continually assesses the situation, reflects on what they are observing or interpreting, and makes decisions about which dimensions to employ. Because adaptive challenges by nature do not have clear solutions, it may not always be apparent which leadership activities will be the most helpful. Therefore, employing these dimensions often involves experimenting with whichever ones seem useful in a given situation, and then learning from the outcome.

Most of the Leadership Center competencies and dimensions outlined in Figure 5 are derived from or directly based on Heifetz's adaptive leadership model (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Heifetz et al., 1989), which is summarized in Chapter 2. Many participants discussed adaptive leadership using the language in the Leadership Center's framework rather than language from Heifetz's work. Therefore, I included Figure 5 to provide additional context and frame of reference for participant quotes. Participants did not specifically reference all 24 leadership dimensions, so I have provided a brief overview of the

framework and competencies here, and then defined the dimensions referenced by participants as they appear throughout the findings.

I asked participants to share their personal experiences learning about and practicing adaptive leadership at Heartland University. I also asked them to share their perspectives on the university's broader efforts to embed adaptive leadership across the campus community. From analysis of participant interviews and relevant documents, four key themes emerged. In this chapter, I present the findings organized into these four themes. For the first theme, I describe the origins of Heartland University's interest in adaptive leadership and the progression, from genesis to the time of this study, of its efforts to embed adaptive leadership into the institution. This background provides important context for understanding the current experiences and perspectives of study participants. The second theme recounts participants' adaptive leadership experiences—how they became involved in learning about and practicing adaptive leadership, the diverse ways in which they have used adaptive leadership approaches, and successes they have observed or experienced when adaptive leadership practices have been used effectively to address difficult problems. The third theme provides rich description of the individual and organizational challenges of changing the way participants, and the broader institution, exercised leadership on adaptive challenges. The fourth theme illuminates participants' perspectives on what it might take to overcome these individual and organizational challenges in order to truly make adaptive leadership part of the institutional culture.

Bringing Adaptive Leadership to Heartland University

The story of adaptive leadership at Heartland University began approximately eight years ago with a shared vision between Joshua Whitford, former president of Heartland University, and Tobias Schiff, CEO of the Leadership Center. Soon after assuming the presidency of

Heartland University in 2012, President Whitford began exploring ways to make the university distinctive from the other institutions in the state and region. In a Leadership Center magazine article that told the story of its partnership with Heartland University, the author described the president's vision, saying, "His 150-year-old institution was looking for ways to reinvent itself as the university re-examines its mission for higher education, faces reaccreditation and develops a new strategic plan." At the same time, Tobias was interested in developing partnerships with educational institutions, which had not previously been a focus for the Leadership Center. The article continued: "Schiff had occasionally pitched the idea of a partnership to other school administrators, but when he was introduced to Whitford ... Whitford immediately saw promise." The two soon began envisioning what a mutually beneficial partnership between the university and the Leadership Center could look like.

Over the next three years, various initiatives were explored and eventually institutionalized at Heartland University aimed at embedding adaptive leadership in the institution. A review of magazine articles from the Leadership Center, alumni magazine articles and other documents from Heartland University, online news articles, and historical information provided by participants provided insight into these formative years of Heartland University's relationship with the Leadership Center and commitment to adaptive leadership.

The Formative Years

In 2013, President Whitford initiated the process of creating a new strategic plan for Heartland University, and advocated for embedding adaptive leadership as a key strategy to distinguish the university among its peers. In a Heartland University annual review publication, President Whitford stated, "Work on Heartland University's new strategic plan, The Adaptive University, began in July 2013 with weekly progress meetings and outreach to all constituencies

– faculty, staff, students, alumni and the Heartland community.” Over the next two years, work continued on the development of a new strategic plan with adaptive leadership at its center.

In 2014, President Whitford approached the director of the university’s general education program to explore the idea of teaching adaptive leadership through the general education curriculum. The former director, who was serving in a different role at the time of this study, said, “I was very interested, and so me and a small group of people scheduled an appointment, drove to [city], and spent some time visiting with Tobias about the possibilities of adaptive leadership being included in the gen ed curriculum.” With support from that small group of faculty to further explore possibilities, the director of general education arranged for 18 faculty members, all of whom taught general education courses, to receive in depth training at the Leadership Center. As the faculty then began experimenting with ways to teach adaptive leadership in their courses, interest in adaptive leadership grew among other members of the university. The former director of general education shared, “There was considerable interest generated in it. A lot of people saw value in the competencies, the principles and competencies of adaptive leadership.” Enough people saw value in the leadership model that it became the foundation of a major university initiative: the formation of an Honors College.

Around the same time efforts to embed adaptive leadership into general education were getting underway, the university was developing a proposal to expand its existing honors program into an Honors College. Funding would be necessary to make this vision a reality. According to a 2014 online article in a local community newspaper, “The education funding bill passed by the [state] Legislature and signed last week by [governor] includes \$1 million to move Heartland University’s honors program to an Honors College.” With funding secured, the

university would launch the college the following year. The director of general education was named founding dean of the college, and was still in the role at the time of this study.

Institutionalizing Adaptive Leadership

Three key events in 2014 and 2015 helped to institutionalize Heartland University's commitment to adaptive leadership. The first was the creation of the new Honors College. Sam indicated that "teaching and practicing adaptive leadership is one of the foundational activities of the Honors College. All Honors College students receive extensive adaptive leadership training." During this time, the university also began expanding training opportunities for faculty and staff. The second key event was the establishment of a campus-based Leadership Center faculty-in-residence program to focus primarily on faculty and staff training. In collaboration with the Leadership Center, a small group of faculty was convened to become faculty-in-residence. Sam shared how this group came to be:

President Whitford...and Tobias Schiff empowered a group of faculty on campus, of which I was sort of a leader, to be Leadership Center faculty-in-residence. And those individuals, seven or eight of us, received extra training, and then began the process of doing a lot of onsite training on campus in Heartland.

With increased access to training on campus, faculty and staff could receive training from their peers at the university rather than having to travel to the Leadership Center.

The third key event was the creation of the new strategic plan, which was a 10-year plan for 2015-2025. The plan was formally launched in spring of 2015. Enunciated in the plan was a new mission statement articulating that part of the university's mission was to prepare students for adaptive leadership. The plan itself was titled *The Adaptive University*. Two of the four strategic goals and associated objectives included additional language articulating the

university's commitment to promoting adaptive leadership among all members of the campus community. The two goals read, "Enrich the student experience with opportunities for leadership development and practice," and "Create a culture of adaptive change as the foundation for innovation and growth." By this point, President Whitford's efforts to embed adaptive leadership into the university had gained significant traction with a growing number of supporters. Then, a leadership change took place.

A Leadership Change, A Renewed Commitment to Adaptive Leadership

Shortly after the new strategic plan was launched, President Whitford resigned from Heartland University to assume the presidency of another institution. Heartland University continued to move forward with its adaptive leadership initiatives despite the fact that its key initiator and champion for adaptive leadership had left. In the several years that followed, more faculty, staff, and students were exposed to the Leadership Center's framework. During this time, the university received its first grant from the Leadership Center. The faculty-in-residence group was renamed the Adaptive Leadership Advancement Team (ALAT) and expanded its membership to include non-teaching staff. The team diversified its trainings by offering a variety of workshops and multi-day programs each year.

In 2018, the new president of Heartland University appointed a committee to review the strategic plan. According to the current version of the plan, "The committee was not asked to undertake a wholesale revision of the existing strategic plan; rather, the charge was to 'assess the continued relevance of the five goals' and 'update the objectives under each goal.'" The committee held forums with internal and external constituent groups to receive input on the plan. When hearing feedback from faculty and staff, it became apparent that not everyone was invested in the adaptive leadership model. Elizabeth, who served on the strategic plan review

committee, shared, “And when it came to adaptive leadership, there were people who were very outspoken about, like, leadership's leadership, big deal.” She suggested that these individuals thought it was unnecessary for the university to adopt a specific approach to leadership, and they openly expressed their lack of buy in to the adaptive leadership model in particular. Elizabeth continued, “So it was clear to me ... in that process that not everybody's passionate about the Leadership Center and about adaptive leadership as a leadership model, but enough people were that it stayed.” Because enough people were invested in the model, the university renewed its commitment to adaptive leadership in the strategic plan. The two goals in the original plan were combined into a new goal statement that read, “Develop the university’s capacity for adaptive leadership consistent with the Leadership Center framework.” The final version of the revised strategic plan was approved by the president in 2019.

Present Adaptive Leadership Efforts

At the time I conducted interviews in fall of 2020, the university was still moving forward with its adaptive leadership initiatives. It is important to note for added context to this study that, as of the time of this writing, the world had been experiencing a global pandemic caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus for nearly a year. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Heartland University, and the impacts related to the context of the study are discussed later in the findings. Despite these impacts, the ALAT has continued to offer trainings and workshops in a variety of formats. The university has continued to send faculty and staff to training programs at the Leadership Center as well.

I asked Sam how many people on campus have participated in some form of adaptive leadership training over the past eight years ago. He said, “Oh, my word. If we include the short abbreviated trainings, I'm going to guess upwards of 400...students, faculty, and staff with a

serious Leadership Center experience.” Sam explained that his estimate of 400 people included those who received training both on campus and at the Leadership Center. I had the opportunity to interview 14 faculty, staff, and administrators who had received adaptive leadership training, including Sam, and now turn to an exploration of participants’ experiences learning about and practicing adaptive leadership at Heartland University.

Adaptive Leadership Experiences

One aim of this study was to understand the experiences of institution members who a) have varying levels of formal authority within the institution, b) have completed a leadership training program that specifically teaches leadership approaches for addressing adaptive challenges, and c) are attempting to apply their training in order to make progress on issues impacting the institution and its stakeholders. I asked participants to discuss how they became involved with the university’s adaptive leadership efforts and to describe their adaptive leadership training background. I asked them to reflect on how their definition or conception of leadership had evolved over time, particularly since their introduction to the Leadership Center. I was interested in understanding the ways and contexts in which participants had used adaptive leadership practices, so I asked them to share examples of how they had applied their training. Participants talked about being purposeful in their leadership practice and shared successes they had observed or experienced when using adaptive leadership approaches.

Introduction to Adaptive Leadership and Training Experiences

Participants’ backgrounds with the Leadership Center and adaptive leadership training varied. Some were introduced to adaptive leadership through a Leadership Center training, while others were introduced through an on-campus program led by members of the ALAT. Six participants were part of the university’s early efforts to expose faculty and staff to adaptive

leadership, three of whom were in the original cohort of 18 general education faculty members charged with infusing adaptive leadership into general education courses. Most of the six participants involved in early efforts were interested in learning about the Leadership Center's approach to leadership, though all were to some degree recruited by the then director of general education, now dean of the Honors College. Though most of them willingly accepted the invitation to attend Leadership Center training, Kay shared her initial skepticism when asked by the director of general education to attend the training. She said, "I went because, at the time, [he] was a high up administrator that I had not had much interaction with ...and basically I kind of felt like I had to say yes because of the authority." Although she was not initially interested in the training, Kay agreed to participate, in part out of fear of potential repercussions if she declined. She went on to say:

So frankly I was not into it and was just begrudgingly going so that I could say I did my part, and someone up high asked me to go. I don't want to lose my job. So I'm going to say yes. But that's not how I felt afterwards, right?

Despite initial reluctance to attend the training, it ended up being a good experience for her. The leadership ideas presented in the training resonated with her in a way she had not anticipated.

Kay continued to describe how she felt after the training:

So it was definitely like a 180 in terms of how I saw it. I dug it so much and I saw a lot of similarities between adaptive leadership and how the Leadership Center presents it, and how I see like grassroots activism and social change, and even my work as an inter-disciplinarian in terms of like, how do we solve complex problems, right?

For Kay, the Leadership Center framework seemed to connect deeply to both her values and her academic background in ethnic and gender studies. She talked about how she believes in

activism and social change efforts, but until being exposed to adaptive leadership, she had never labeled those efforts as leadership, or as Kay described, “I never wrapped it in that wrapper, right? I never put it in that package.” Leadership, for her, was now an idea that could be applied to a broader range of situations than what she had considered prior to the training. Several other participants shared Kay’s experience of seeing value and applicability in the adaptive leadership model, which I discuss further in the next section on participants’ evolving views of leadership. Most of the six participants involved in Heartland’s early efforts have continued to remain engaged with training either as members of the ALAT or through ongoing participation in other trainings on campus and at the Leadership Center.

The other eight participants were introduced to the Leadership Center at later points, either after some momentum had already begun to build on campus or because they had only recently become employed at Heartland University. Of those eight participants, five were first trained in adaptive leadership at a Leadership Center program, and three were exposed to adaptive leadership through an on campus program led by the ALAT. Participants shared that as an incentive for faculty to participate in trainings, the university offered a stipend. Faculty were able to earn an initial stipend for attending training, and then a second stipend if they incorporated adaptive leadership into their classes. They were expected to provide evidence of how they incorporated adaptive leadership, though it was unclear what type of evidence was required.

Two study participants attended training in part because of the opportunity to earn the stipend. Jennifer was newly hired as an instructor and because the salary was low, the financial incentive to participate in the leadership training was appealing. She explained, “They were offering a bit of a stipend to participate in it. I’m like, ‘Hey, I’ve got to start kicking up that

salary.” She was interested in leadership, so she “signed on to do the six-day training where you do the three days in fall and then three days in winter.” Similar to Jennifer, Heather was attracted to the training explicitly for the compensation. Heather was frank in sharing, “So for me it was just about getting money, really. That's how I got involved.” Although the financial compensation provided the incentive to complete the training, both participants indicated genuine interest in using adaptive leadership in their classes, and ended up implementing strategies they believed positively impacted their roles in teaching and advising students.

Nearly all participants spoke favorably of their initial and ongoing training experiences. They talked about specific ideas in the Leadership Center’s framework that resonated with them, such as the difference between technical problems and adaptive challenges, or taking the time to ask powerful questions when trying to understand an adaptive challenge. Two participants spoke to the emotional experiences of engaging in personal reflection that is often part of the trainings. As Julie described, “I think the big thing was looking at myself, figuring out, what is it that I do, or more than likely don't do that I should be...that's what I've really enjoyed the most is more the introspection.” Missy referred to the introspective elements of her training experience as “emotional and profound.” Several participants talked about the convenience of having access to training at the university being provided by trusted colleagues on the ALAT.

Another benefit shared by multiple participants was that continuing to engage in trainings and workshops helped keep them accountable to honing their adaptive leadership skills. Julie captured this sentiment when she said, “I try to attend every single one that I can, because I feel like if I don't ... I am just not getting exposed again, and just having that little aha moment again that I need.” On campus training also afforded people opportunities to be exposed to different perspectives on adaptive leadership and deepen their understanding. As Elizabeth shared, “I

would dive in over and over again because you learn different things from different people. As you...have your own experiences, then the next time you're involved in a training or workshop, you learn something different.” Two participants even expressed either during or following our interviews that the interview itself re-energized them to stay engaged in learning about and practicing adaptive leadership. At the end of our interview, Aaron said, “Even having this conversation with you today is actually re-energizing.” He indicated the interview helped him realize an opportunity to refocus on using adaptive leadership to address challenges in his department. Elizabeth shared a similar sentiment in an email she sent to me following our interview. In her email, she wrote: “The time we spent talking about this topic prompted me to think more deeply about what I do not know and has motivated me to work on learning more.” Elizabeth indicated a desire to deepen her learning about adaptive leadership, but also to become more knowledgeable about the university’s efforts to educate students about adaptive leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ALAT’s ability to host in person trainings, but they were able to continue offering trainings and informal discussions in a virtual format. Several participants indicated being pleased with participation in the virtual dialogues and described them as an opportunity to discuss how to practice adaptive leadership with a real and present adaptive challenge—the pandemic itself. Dorothy remarked how the pandemic even brought new people to ALAT’s events: “We had people that I don’t think had ever had anything to do with the Leadership Center, but they were showing up and talking.” Timely topics that were relevant to the immediate pandemic-related challenges faculty and staff were facing provided opportunities to explore real-time applications of adaptive leadership.

While most of the training experiences shared by study participants were positive, several indicated distaste for case-in-point, a teaching method that has been used in Leadership Center

trainings. According to Leadership Center training materials reviewed, as well as my own experience having completed a Leadership Center case-in-point certification program, when using case-in-point, group dynamics that unfold in the training are examined in real time to illustrate the leadership concepts being taught. Case-in-point can be a provocative approach to training, and can create discomfort for trainees because conflict and other uncomfortable group dynamics are named and addressed in real time. One of the Leadership Center training books I reviewed depicts a fictional, but representative, scenario of what case-in-point often looks like in practice. In the scenario described in the book, conflict has emerged among group members during a leadership training session:

In a heated moment among members of the group, the teacher does not shy away from the conflict, nor does she allow it to burn out of control. Instead, she tries to manage it to a productive end, jumping in to reframe the debate and question assumptions. She...asks the group, “What’s going on here?” She invites learners to do the same. “What does it say about this group that only three people are doing most of the talking?”

In this scenario, the teacher may not be able to anticipate what direction the conversation will go, but must be prepared to respond to whatever dynamics emerge. Skilled facilitation is necessary for the case-in-point teaching method to be effective. Because it is a nontraditional approach to teaching, the book indicates that “some [learners] will become confused, uncomfortable or even angry.” Joanna had a particularly negative experience at the first, and likely last, training she attended. She shared, “I actually had an awful and terrible experience with the training. ... And so, while I’m glad that I have some of their experiences, I will not engage with them anymore.” Despite a negative experience with the way the training was facilitated, Joanna still found value in some of the adaptive leadership ideas, stating, “I’m not dismissive of the whole thing. It’s only

parts.” For nearly all participants, their experiences learning about adaptive leadership changed the way they defined what leadership is and is not.

Evolving Views of Leadership

I asked participants to talk about how their concept of leadership had evolved over time, and more specifically whether their concept of leadership had changed since being introduced to the Leadership Center’s framework. The most prominent change participants described was a shift from viewing leadership as a position to viewing it as an activity available to anyone.

Angela’s recounting of her prior view of leadership captured what many participants shared with me. She said, “I was previously thinking of leadership as a position. You know, you are president of such-and-such organization, you’re vice president, treasurer, et cetera, and that it was very position-specific.” Participants consistently used the words *position* and *authority* when describing their pre-Leadership Center definitions of leadership.

After participating in adaptive leadership training, participants described having a broadened view of what leadership is and who can exercise it. Their concept of leadership was no longer tethered to holding a position of authority. That shift in mindset was helpful for Jennifer, who shared, “I think it is something that, for me, it was really powerful to have the language of anyone can really choose to be a leader.” For several participants, viewing leadership as something anyone can practice was not only helpful in empowering themselves to lead, but also empowering colleagues and students around them to lead. The notion of leadership as an activity available to anyone led some participants to consider new settings outside of the traditional organizational context where leadership could be practiced, such as a family setting. Dorothy shared, “And some of my earliest applications of like trying out some, like, Leadership

Center Diagnose Situation things, were actually in my personal life, and it was encouraged.”

Similarly, Jill and Angela talked about parenting children as a context for practicing leadership.

Every participant indicated that their adaptive leadership training experiences had influenced their views on what leadership is and is not. While nearly all participants described how their views changed in ways that aligned with the principles and practices in the Leadership Center’s framework, one participant offered a different perspective. Joanna, who had a negative experience at the training she attended, described how her experience influenced her approach to leadership:

It has actually informs me very much in the ways that I don't want to be ... It's made me more aware of considering other people's feelings and that if I ask specifically, if I ask people questions, to be prepared for whatever response they give me. ... And so by participating in and having the experience that I did with that leadership, I've learned an awful lot about what I don't want to do.

From the way Joanna described her training experience, my sense is the trainers were likely using the case-in-point teaching method in the session she attended. At one point in the session, the trainers made Joanna the focus of the group’s attention in a manner that was too uncomfortable for her. The experience reinforced Joanna’s stance against taking a provocative or confrontational approach to leadership. She shared, “I don’t believe that challenging and provoking people is necessarily the best way to do it.” Joanna’s negative training experience revealed differences between her views on leadership and some of the leadership practices in the adaptive leadership model.

All participants’ views of leadership were shaped in some way, for better or for worse, by their experiences with adaptive leadership trainings and workshops, regardless of whether the

trainings were led by ALAT members or Leadership Center trainers. In addition to finding commonalities and differences in the ways trainings influenced participants' views of leadership, I also discovered shared and unique experiences among participants regarding the ways they had put their adaptive leadership training into practice.

Ways Adaptive Leadership Has Been Practiced at Heartland University

I asked participants to share their experiences applying the adaptive leadership approaches they had learned in training sessions. I wanted to understand what approaches participants used and the various contexts and situations in which those approaches were used. Many participants, particularly staff and those with administrative responsibilities, described both general and specific examples of applying adaptive leadership practices in their day-to-day professional work. Participants who had teaching responsibilities described two distinctive applications in the classroom. They talked about teaching the adaptive leadership framework as part of their course content, but also talked about ways they applied adaptive leadership approaches to their pedagogy. For faculty, learning about adaptive leadership impacted what they taught, but also how they taught.

Day-to-Day Professional Work

When asked about their experiences practicing adaptive leadership, many participants described specific competencies and dimensions of the Leadership Center's framework they had used. In some cases, they spoke of engaging in practices in a general sense, and in other cases, participants provided detailed accounts of situations where they had practiced adaptive leadership approaches. The two leadership competencies participants discussed most frequently were Diagnose Situation and Energize Others.

Diagnose Situation. Several participants described employing practices related to the Leadership Center’s Diagnose Situation competency, such as distinguishing the technical and adaptive work, asking more questions, seeking multiple points-of-view, and offering tough or conflictual interpretations of the situation. These practices helped participants to better understand problems before intervening to address the problems. Julie shared, “I think one of the biggest things for me was...just figuring out that I would usually move way too fast and not slow down and...look for interpretations.” She felt like she was becoming more effective in her role as she practiced slowing down and taking more time to do necessary diagnostic work around the challenges she and her team faced.

Participants shared several examples of ways they incorporated Diagnose Situation practices into their daily work. Jennifer talked about her role advising students who wanted to become teachers, and how she used the Leadership Center language and tools when having difficult conversations with students about their future teaching aspirations. She recalled:

So we place hundreds of student teachers every year across the state...and you have to have hard conversations with some of them. ... There's many times when we have to have those conversations, well, you know, what's going on? How can we diagnose what's happening here? You know, are you in the right major? Are you in the right profession? Are you here at the right time?

In some cases, the conversations Jennifer had may have focused on students’ placements for student teaching, while in other cases, more difficult conversations may have centered on whether teaching was the right profession for students to pursue. Exploring those questions helped Jennifer help her students arrive at better decisions, even if the decisions were sometimes not what the students initially expected or wanted. Dorothy described her use of diagnosis

practices when bringing together multiple partners on campus to identify ways to better serve a particular population of students she felt was being underserved. She brought together a group of staff from key departments on campus who served this population, as well as the students themselves, to collaboratively diagnose and then address the issues. As the group worked together to find ways to better serve this population, she continued to use, and engage others in, adaptive leadership. She described the group's efforts in this regard:

It was an adaptive challenge. We knew our [students] weren't super happy with their experience. And instead of just saying, "Oh, well the problem is over there. It's a technical issue. Oh, here's the form. Let's make it digital," we started looking at other ways to approach that, and brought a lot more people to the table. ... But yeah, so being very purposeful, working to diagnose the situation in a different way.

For Dorothy, Jennifer, Julie, and other participants, asking better and sometimes more difficult questions, and spending more time diagnosing their adaptive challenges, were common practices.

Energize Others. Several participants talked about their uses of two dimensions of Energize Others: speak to loss and engage unusual voices. As discussed in Chapter 2, the adaptive leadership model posits that change itself is often not necessarily what people find difficult, but the real or perceived losses that come with change. An adaptive leadership practice related to this idea is being able to speak to the losses others might experience when change happens. Several participants named speaking to loss as a helpful approach they had used when dealing with adaptive challenges.

Elizabeth talked about speaking to loss, and how that leadership practice led to her being more empathetic toward colleagues. She discussed being purposeful about keeping loss in mind when working through change with her colleagues:

I feel like keeping that in my mind caused me to be more empathetic, not just with my staff, but in meetings...thinking about, so what are maybe some of the losses that people might be feeling? ... I feel like for me anyway, that keeping that in mind caused me to be less judgmental about how somebody was acting or behaving or what they were sharing, because I could see it differently. It wasn't just resistance to change.

Elizabeth seemed to suggest that being able to understand and speak to others' losses actually caused a change in her—she changed the way she interpreted others' actions, perhaps in ways that allowed her to work with them more effectively through challenging situations.

Several participants specifically discussed speaking to loss as a practice they had used as a way to help others navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had caused major disruptions to the university's normal way of operating and delivering instruction, most notably with an abrupt shift to online instruction and remote working situations. Lisa's comments were representative of what other participants described. She noted:

But the notion of like working across loss, I think is very much particularly part of this semester where we may not call it that and use that terminology, but the conversations I've had with faculty are very much about how are we trying to adapt in our class...recognizing that our students are going through a whole lot of stuff right now.

Lisa talked about how the pandemic had caused disruptions in people's personal lives, which impacted how they engaged with the university. For Lisa and others, understanding and being able to speak to the realities of the pandemic's impact on people's lives was an important adaptive leadership practice, even while trying to maintain university operations and deliver the best instruction possible.

Another Energize Others practice that several participants discussed using in their day-to-day professional work was engage unusual voices. One of the Leadership Center's publications described unusual voices as "the people and groups that you seldom engage. They have a stake in the issue but their opinions are rarely sought." Jill provided one example of this adaptive leadership activity in practice. She talked about a faculty member on the ALAT whose voice was not often sought in meetings, in part due to louder voices dominating the conversations. She recalled, "I can remember thinking about, okay, we need to engage unusual voices because when I talk to [faculty member] on my own...she has a different perspective. And I think that's really valuable." Jill tried various approaches to encourage the faculty member and create space for the faculty member to speak in meetings. Over time, Jill felt like she made some progress. There were moments when she was able to get her colleague to speak up in meetings.

Elizabeth shared a similar perspective that "there's always those people who are more likely to speak up early and have things to say, and then there's those people who hang back, but you know they've got stuff." Keeping the engage unusual voices practice in mind made her more aware "that it's okay to ask people what they might want to share or contribute." Elizabeth, Jill, and other participants' experiences suggest the adaptive leadership practice of engaging unusual voices requires being attuned to who the usual or dominant voices are in a group, and then taking purposeful steps to bring in diverse perspectives. This approach may be connected to Heifetz's practice of protecting leadership voices from below, which involves including and protecting the voices of individuals who may have little power or authority (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Adaptive Leadership in the Classroom: Content and Pedagogy

Participants who had teaching responsibilities at Heartland University talked about ways they applied their adaptive leadership training in the classroom. This included teaching adaptive leadership ideas to students and incorporating adaptive leadership approaches into their teaching pedagogy. As described earlier in this chapter, adaptive leadership was the foundation of the Honors College, and all Honors College students received extensive adaptive leadership training and application experiences through the honors curriculum. Several participants, including those in teaching and non-teaching roles, acknowledged that some disciplines lend themselves more easily than others to teaching adaptive leadership ideas as part of the course content. Kay found it easy to incorporate adaptive leadership concepts into her course content:

So we're talking about sexism, so we talk about things that are about diagnosing the situation, and then how do we manage ourselves, energize others? And then how do we intervene skillfully? And that's like the framework for the whole class.

Kay taught courses in ethnic and gender studies, which seemed to be a discipline with more apparent opportunities for teaching adaptive leadership. Missy taught sociology courses. She also referenced Diagnose Situation and Manage Self when talking about the competencies she incorporated into her classes. She described her use of a specific dimension of Manage Self: know your strengths, vulnerabilities, and triggers. Missy said:

And so just really talking about students' strengths. Where do you excel? It was a lot easier for them to talk about triggers and vulnerabilities. ... But getting strengths was really difficult. So I found a few little activities to incorporate in that really brought...that competency specifically to light.

For Missy and Kay, the connections to their disciplines came more naturally. However, even in disciplines where opportunities to teach adaptive leadership content were not as apparent, faculty found ways to apply adaptive leadership practices to their teaching style.

Independent of academic discipline, a theme that emerged from the data was how adaptive leadership informed faculty members' approach to teaching. Sam has played a significant role in training faculty at Heartland University and had a good birds-eye view of adaptive leadership practices on campus. He provided examples of the types of questions faculty members would ask themselves after being trained in adaptive leadership. Sam shared:

So they'll say to themselves, "Okay, what risks can I take that I haven't been willing to take? What interpretations of my teaching can I consider now that I was too scared to consider? What kind of diagnosis am I going to do here to really look at what I'm doing and how effective it is? And can I take the risk of trying something that will be more successful, but that might put my teaching evaluation at risk if it doesn't work?"

The data supports Sam's observation. Six of the nine participants who had teaching responsibilities described how learning adaptive leadership influenced their teaching. They talked about ways they altered their teaching methods, but also how they changed the way they viewed their role in the classroom. Melissa noted, "It's changed the way I teach in a lot of ways, in just spending more time in diagnosis space with everybody, but particularly with students." Several participants talked about taking on more of a collaborator role, relying less on the traditional role of imparting knowledge to students, and giving the work back to the students to, in Heather's words, "co-create" the learning space. For Heather, the adaptive leadership training reinforced the classroom facilitator philosophy she previously held to a degree:

So I feel like my big takeaway from the training was just to be more of a facilitator and less of someone who needed to control the classroom all the time. ... We're going to co-create what this class looks like. I don't know that it's completely changed my philosophy because I think I already had that philosophy a bit, but it validated it I guess. And it made me, it gave me tools and research that that was like, no, this is meaningful.

This approach to teaching seemed to be meaningful to Heather and her students. She indicated that her students appreciated her approach to co-creating the learning with them. Angela described taking a similar approach, saying, “Just having some really open, candid conversations. I try to view myself less as a teacher. ... I try to do less talking and let them kind of direct and shape the class.” This approach led her to go beyond talking about social issues in her classes to engaging students in discussions about how they can get involved in addressing those issues. Angela described:

Yeah, I think one thing, especially in all of my classes...it's depressing. We're talking about these horrible things in the world and I have always kind of—before this adaptive leadership—like, oh, sorry, class, like, that's just how it is today. I'm going to leave you with kids in cages or whatever the issue is, and then you go on about your day. But now, kind of having gone through the workshop and training, I'm wanting them to think more about, okay, what can we do in our own circles?

Similar to Heather, Angela took a little bit of this approach to her teaching prior to participating in the adaptive leadership training. But as she described here, the training influenced her to further engage her students in considering ways they could exercise leadership on the social issues explored in her classes.

These are just a few of several examples participants shared about how adaptive leadership influenced their pedagogy. For Melissa, the changes that occurred within faculty members regarding how they approached their roles as educators was significant. She said that “changing people and empowering people to think and behave differently has made a huge difference. I see it. I see it in people. I see it in the way they treat each other.” Melissa indicated that she has seen firsthand the positive outcomes connected to the institution’s efforts to embed adaptive leadership at Heartland University. She was not alone in this regard. I asked participants to talk about any successes they had experienced or observed when using adaptive leadership approaches. Many of them shared personal, interpersonal, and organizational successes with practicing leadership more effectively.

Successes Using Adaptive Leadership Approaches

Participants shared diverse examples of successes they had personally experienced with adaptive leadership. They also shared perspectives on broader ways in which groups within the university were making progress in addressing adaptive challenges more effectively. Three common successes described by many participants were being less authoritative and more collaborative in the roles, improved problem diagnosis, and more meaningful and authentic relationships with colleagues.

Being Less Authoritative, More Collaborative

When asked to talk about personal successes with adaptive leadership, nearly half of the participants attributed part of their success to the ways they navigated the authority they had when working with others. Elizabeth explained how her approach to working with direct reports had changed since employing more adaptive leadership practices:

I became more comfortable with really giving the work [back]...thinking that way really keeps me honest from letting the position become more authoritative of people, because I don't want to do that. ... So in working with people who report directly to me, always really trying to practice taking my position power off the table and being more of a resource or a collaborator or an advisor, but not a teller.

Elizabeth expressed a belief in letting people who work for her have ownership over their departments. She believed she had become more effective in not letting her authority get in the way of giving her direct reports the freedom she thought they should have in directing their own professional work.

Similar to Elizabeth, Jennifer talked about the success she experienced from purposefully not taking an authoritative approach with a clinical experience program she directed. She shared, “Being able to step into that [role] and using these competencies of not just walking in [saying], ‘Hey...I’m in charge. This is what you’re going to do.’ That has been a really amazing success.” Rather, she had taken a collaborative approach by “getting a good team, getting the right people on the bus on the right seats, knowing strengths and challenges from all areas, and finding other leaders that have opposite strengths than you do.” For Jennifer, taking a collaborative approach, rather than relying on her formal authority, contributed to a more effective program.

In the classroom, Heather believed she achieved more effective outcomes by tempering the use of her authority as the instructor in her courses. Heather described how her efforts to co-create the learning space with her students impacted the students’ engagement. She attributed this success to a change in the way she approached her role of authority, saying, “I don’t need to provide all the structure...I can be very loose with what I’m providing for students and allow

things to develop, and not feel like I'm in charge of the classroom all the time." She indicated this change in approach to her teaching role also resulted in less stress for her as the instructor.

Improved Problem Diagnosis

Several participants shared successes with spending time diagnosing situations, asking more questions, and gaining more perspectives on issues they faced. For them, better diagnosis of the challenges they faced helped them to address the challenges more effectively. After being trained in adaptive leadership, Julie described in a broad sense her success with spending more time in diagnosis:

I think for me diagnosing the situation has become more...natural. ... I feel like I'm asking the right questions. I'm involving the right people, using multiple interpretations, and not rushing as quickly as I've done in the past. So I feel like I have a much broader picture of what's happening, who needs to be involved, than I used to...that it just doesn't evolve around me or the few people that have the issue.

Julie was not the only participant for whom slowing down to spend more time in diagnosis was beneficial. Missy described a similar shift that she characterized as a personal success in how she engages in her work both inside and outside the classroom. She said, "I've changed myself – not jumping to conclusions as quickly. ... I've learned to step back a little bit more and think about other people's perspectives." While Julie and Missy talked about their personal successes with spending more time engaging in problem diagnosis, Lisa shared her observation of the increased use of Diagnose Situation more broadly across campus. Specifically, she noted seeing more use of the distinguishing technical and adaptive work dimension. Lisa observed:

I think that difference between adaptive and technical comes up in meetings more...there will be sometimes someone pointing out that, like, "We're just working towards the

technical solution. Maybe we need to be thinking about the kind of larger perspective. What's the adaptive solution?"

In Lisa's view, just hearing the adaptive leadership language being used more frequently in meetings was a sign of progress. Several other participants, including Elizabeth, Melissa, and Kay, also observed increasing use of the adaptive leadership language on campus. They each described this observation as an indicator of progress toward addressing adaptive challenges more effectively at Heartland University.

More Meaningful and Authentic Relationships

In some cases, when participants spoke of successes they experienced, they did not identify specific leadership competencies they had enacted more effectively, or specific challenges they had addressed more effectively. Rather, they spoke of ways in which their relationships had improved and how they engaged more authentically with colleagues. Melissa talked about "speaking from a more genuine place with people," and being "proud of the relationships that have come out of this period in my career, guided by these principles." Kay described a significant change in her identity as a leader as a result of her immersion into adaptive leadership. She shared:

I feel more comfortable [now] being my authentic self because I understand that the power that I wield comes from standing firm-footed in my authenticity. And that being able to do that means that I can see the other people around me differently, both authority figures to myself or people who are supposedly subordinates, like students. My relationship with them definitely changed.

What Kay described as her personal success with adaptive leadership goes deeper than just being able to address organizational challenges more effectively. She changed how she viewed herself

as a leader and how she engaged with those around her. Kay seemed to speak with confidence and conviction about her place within the university and her sense of agency to lead and relate to others in ways that were authentic for her.

Participants described various other successes with using adaptive leadership approaches. Many of them related to the themes described previously in this section, including examples of specific situations where adaptive leadership practices helped a group to work through problems, examples of how faculty were able to facilitate classroom learning more effectively, and examples of individual changes people made in how they engaged in their work and with their colleagues. Every participant was able to name at least one success they had either personally experienced, observed in other people or groups, or observed more broadly within the university. Yet, among the successes, participants described the many challenges that have come with trying to change the culture of an institution. In this case, participants described the challenges of trying to embed into the culture of Heartland University a unique and different approach to leadership than what the institution had experienced prior to 2012.

The Challenges of Change

Participants described the challenges of embedding adaptive leadership into the culture of the university. Heifetz (2006) and Heifetz et al. (2009) identified several characteristics of adaptive challenges that make them difficult to solve. Two of those characteristics are that adaptive challenges a) require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches to work, and b) require change in numerous places, usually across organizational boundaries. The first characteristic speaks to individual changes that must often take place for progress to be made on adaptive challenges, and the second speaks to the organizational changes that must often take place. The challenges participants identified generally fell into one of these two

categories—the challenges were either related to individual attempts to change behaviors, or the challenges involved organizational-level barriers to implementing adaptive leadership across the institution.

Individual Challenges

Participants shared the struggles with trying to change one's behaviors in order to practice the adaptive leadership approaches to which they expressed a commitment. Even when there seemed to be a sincere desire to practice adaptive leadership, participants talked about being confronted with challenges that made it difficult to practice adaptive leadership to the degree they, or others, desired. They acknowledged that learning about and talking about adaptive leadership was easy, but practicing it was much harder. Kay's reflection on her struggle was representative of a similar sentiment shared by several participants. She admitted:

We like to talk about it. And myself, again, I'm totally implicated in this, that I like to talk about it, but actually doing it is so much harder. I'd rather just talk about it and have other people do it over there.

Kay and many of the other participants described the individual challenges that made it difficult to shift from espousing a commitment to adaptive leadership to enacting adaptive leadership. Some of those challenges included giving up control, changing default behaviors, leaning into vulnerabilities, and exercising adaptive leadership from a position of authority.

Giving up Control is Hard

Several participants, mostly faculty members, talked about the difficulty of letting go of the desire to control situations. Adaptive challenges by nature are messy. They require embracing uncertainty and acknowledging that authority and expertise alone are insufficient for addressing them. For some participants, loosening the reins of their control, or giving up some of

their authority in order to give the work back to others, was a struggle. Julie, somewhat in jest, said, “It’s easier to be in control, by golly!” Kay shared a similar sentiment, “I like consistency and control.” She explained how she likes to be the “sage on the stage” in the classroom, which makes it difficult for her to “be disciplined and bringing it to the classroom in terms of our actions, and giving the work back, and not being the authority when it's not needed.” Lisa shared a similar struggle with letting go of control in her classroom, saying, “Maybe it's just the way that I was trained as a teacher, but that sort of negotiation of how to kind of decision-make in the classroom and involve the students in that. That giving up of some of the control.” Her desire to have control in situations extended beyond the classroom as well. When talking about working with different factions at the university, she said, “I am a person who likes to kind of think through all the kind of possibilities and arguments beforehand.” That way, in case she faced objections to something she might say in a meeting, “I can sort of...have my answers prepared, have my evidence kind of lined up, so that if there are concerns, I kind of have my homework done.” What Lisa seemed to be suggesting is that trying to maintain control in situations might be a way to mitigate the messiness that comes with uncertainty or conflict.

The inclination to control situations so that uncertainty and conflict can be avoided appeared to be at play for Heather and Angela. They both talked about their internal negotiations between letting go of control and assuming the risks that might come with it. Heather shared:

I think anytime you kind of turn over the reins to students, you open yourself up, especially when you’re talking about difficult topics. ... And then when things are messy, it’s me. It’s my evaluations that the students are going to...they’re not going to hold the student in class who said offensive things accountable. Probably, they’re going to hold me accountable. So that can be very scary.

Heather expressed concern about the risks associated with giving up control when it came to having open and candid discussions in class. In a similar vein, Angela recounted a situation in one of her classes where there was tension around a difficult topic being discussed between two students, and she was trying to decide how to react. She recalled, “In that moment, things were tense in my class and I’m like, do I intervene at this point? Do I just kind of let them go?” Like Heather, she faced the challenge of negotiating whether to use her authority to control the situation. Related to the notion of letting go of control, another individual challenge participants discussed was the difficulty of changing the default behaviors that were barriers to practicing adaptive leadership.

Default Behaviors

Participants acknowledged that for themselves and others, changing or resetting the default behaviors they engaged in was difficult work that required purposeful attention and persistence. They talked about the challenge of shifting away from deeply ingrained ways of operating that were inconsistent with adaptive leadership. Melissa described it in this way:

We revert very quickly to the roles that we like, and that kind of personal part of it is very difficult to change. Even if we agreed in advance and said, “I’m going to play this particular role,” we’re not very good actors. We get in a situation and we just, we revert to the kind of self-soothing patterns that are common.

She went on to say the “behaviors that we are accustomed to become so difficult to undo...it goes back to how we were raised, the experiences that we had.” Melissa was suggesting that sometimes people’s default behaviors were socially conditioned. Dorothy shared a similar perspective: “I think that’s something when applying [adaptive leadership], you can’t be looking at it as a quick fix. It goes against everything we’ve been conditioned for. ... And so it really is

undoing a lot and changing.” This notion of seeking quick fixes to problems is a default pattern that conflicts with the adaptive leadership approach of taking time to better diagnose problems before prescribing answers. For Elizabeth, avoiding the temptation to provide quick solutions was a challenge. She shared:

Sometimes it's easier to default to telling somebody, “Well, maybe you should do this and this and this,” instead of sticking with, “Well, let's figure out...let's diagnose this situation. What do you think is going on? What are some of the stories that people are telling about all of this?” Like really engaging in those, it takes longer.

Elizabeth was talking about the difficulty of working against some of her tendencies. In a similar vein, Julie talked about how she continued to attend adaptive leadership trainings and workshops because of her tendency to stick with her typical ways of operating. She recognized how easy it was “staying within what I already know.” When it came to using adaptive leadership approaches, she further indicated, “I don't want to get stuck in Julie's way ... I want it to really permeate what I'm doing every single day.” I asked Julie to describe the allure of reverting to her default behaviors. She responded, “Well the allure is probably it's faster, quicker, move on, versus, to me, anytime you're implementing Leadership Center principles, it's not faster, quicker, move on. It's slow down, reflect, ask questions.” What Julie might have been speaking to, and Elizabeth previously, is the expediency that comes with acting on defaults.

When trying to manage multiple priorities, responsibilities, and expectations, as many participants described having to do in their jobs, there was a degree of efficiency that came with relying on default approaches to addressing problems. Adaptive leadership approaches, which could be more effective when dealing with complex problems, took time and energy. Participants acknowledged that efficiency was often pursued at the expense of effectiveness. For Aaron,

maintaining a commitment to adaptive leadership approaches, rather than relying on his default patterns, was difficult: “When I'm tired, or when I'm exhausted, when I'm in firefighting mode, when I'm super overwhelmed, and ironically, when it would make the most difference, that's when I struggle. I really struggle with it.” Aaron’s struggle was shared by several participants. It was easier for participants to stick with the patterns they had developed, rather than expending the mental and emotional energy required to develop new ways of being. For some participants, the emotional cost of practicing adaptive leadership also included leaning into the vulnerabilities that can come with the messiness of doing adaptive work.

Vulnerabilities

Another one of the Leadership Center’s principles is that leadership is risky. Tackling adaptive challenges is “messy” work, as several participants described it. Participants talked about the vulnerabilities that came with leaning into the messy and risky work of adaptive leadership. The vulnerabilities participants described included fear of failure, fear of losing one’s job, the discomfort of engaging on an emotional level in the work environment, the discomfort of challenging authority figures, and in general, the uncertainty of not knowing what consequences might result if they took risks. When asked what was difficult about practicing adaptive leadership, Aaron said, “As someone that works in a very technical field, we like very technical answers...and the emotions and people are messy.” Similar to Aaron, Kay said that people are “just not inclined to be emotionally vulnerable.” As she was describing the “vulnerability that comes with adaptive leadership,” she said:

You have to protect yourself. You have like that hard candy shell and you can't ever have that inner nougat be exposed. And in some ways, I think good adaptive leadership work is letting your inner nougat be exposed, and that's a huge risk. And so I think people

maybe...and I, too, feel this way at times...it seems too risky...to have that type of vulnerability and emotional truth.

Kay captured a theme that seemed to underpin the vulnerabilities she and other participants discussed, which was the inclination for self-protection. For some participants, doing adaptive work involved a negotiation of how much risk to take in order to make progress on adaptive challenges, but at the same time, protect themselves against the vulnerabilities that came with taking risks.

Sometimes, the vulnerabilities participants felt was related to the power dynamics within the university. The hierarchical nature of the university was a factor when trying to decide how much risk Angela would take. She said, “This power structure is very much present. ... But, they're telling me that we can do adaptive leadership, but in terms of practice, am I going to get in trouble and so forth for some of these things?” Along with Angela, several participants spoke to this fear of how practicing adaptive might impact their employment. Elizabeth shared a concern “that people who are higher in the organizational structure, if they don't respect my work or see me as possibly a troublemaker, then [they] can make it more difficult for me.” Her fear was that exercising adaptive leadership in an authoritative environment could negatively impact her job satisfaction. She also noted that when learning how to practice adaptive leadership, “you're going to have a lot of failure.” From her perspective, if people were not “confident that those failures aren't going to somehow come back to bite you, then why would you take the risk?” The fear of failure was real and present for some participants.

Dorothy shared several examples of failures she experienced when practicing adaptive leadership. In one example, she talked about how she felt when she tried to practice adaptive leadership during a meeting, but felt like her attempts were “fruitless,” and she felt “defeated”

when the authority figure made decisions without considering input from the other meeting attendees. The messiness Dorothy and other participants described often seemed to be connected to the vulnerabilities they experienced when trying to practice adaptive leadership. For some of the participants who had formal authority, figuring out how to lead from their position of authority also contributed to the messiness of doing adaptive work.

Leading from a Position of Authority

Heifetz (1994) posited that the primary function of authority is to provide protection, direction, and order. This function may be sufficient for technical problems, but insufficient when dealing with adaptive challenges. Several participants talked about the challenges of trying to exercise adaptive leadership from the positions of authority they held. Lisa shared, “It’s a little bit of a struggle because at one level, I am in a leadership position. And so there’s a certain level of responsibility.” Lisa discussed the balance she tried to find between when to use some of her authority and when to “back off” and not direct her colleagues down a particular path. Aaron said he was committed to practicing adaptive leadership within the position of authority he held. He indicated, however, that sometimes “I know where we need to go and we just need to do it, and this is the direction I want to go. I’m responsible for it, so I’m going to exercise my authority.” Sometimes, using one’s authority may be necessary. According to Elizabeth, “there are times that, based on the level of position you have in an organization, you do have to exercise those things and you have to recognize when people need them.” In her role, she acknowledged there were times when she felt like she needed to provide protection, direction, or order to her staff.

Sometimes, as Elizabeth indicated, people want protection, direction, and order. Dorothy shared her perspective on this, saying, “It’s so easy to default, not just for the authority figure,

but for the people who report to them, to say, ‘Well, authority figures, fix it.’” She was suggesting that at times people will look to authorities to provide solutions to problems. This can create an expectation that authorities will always have the right answers and execute the solutions flawlessly. Aaron shared a perceived expectation from his staff, saying, “I feel like sometimes there's an expectation that ... they're always going to get it 100% right. They're never going to forget to do a single one of these.” Despite this pressure, Aaron indicated remaining committed to employing adaptive leadership practices within his unit.

Connected to the notion that people look to authorities to solve their problems, Heifetz and Linsky (2017) said that with adaptive challenges, everyone in the system is in some way implicated in the problem, and therefore must be part of the solution. Part of doing adaptive work is to help people understand their role in the adaptive challenge, and people often resist owning what Heifetz and Linsky (2017) call their “piece of the mess” (p. 90). Sam, a high-ranking administrator, experienced this resistance several years ago in a situation involving sexual harassment allegations against a faculty member. Sam said, “So a couple of my colleagues and I put together a workshop where we were going to talk about how to apply adaptive leadership to addressing the issue of sexual harassment on campus.” They presented the workshop to a room packed full of participants. He continued:

We started talking about, “All right, what's all our role in this? What can we do as individuals to help change the system here, to change our culture, so it doesn't tolerate this?” And there was great resistance from some of the students, and great anger directed towards us for that. They didn't want to hear...that they had a role in this. They needed authority to protect them. ... It's authority's job to fix this problem.

While this situation presented a personal challenge for him, Sam's example also revealed an adaptive leadership dynamic greater than his individual struggle. There was also a broader organizational challenge of getting people across campus to engage in difficult, adaptive work. In Sam's story, and in many of the experiences and perspectives shared by participants, there were organizational challenges to embedding adaptive leadership at Heartland University that extended beyond their own personal struggles.

Organizational Challenges

Participants described their perspectives on the broader organizational challenges to creating a culture of adaptive leadership at the institution. They talked about aspects of the institutional culture that created barriers to implementing adaptive leadership. Other organizational challenges discussed included senior authority figures' roles in modeling adaptive leadership, competing commitments with adaptive leadership, creating a shared language around adaptive leadership, and using adaptive leadership in disingenuous ways that some participants perceived to be unhelpful. Participants also talked about the challenge of helping people see the real life applicability of adaptive leadership. Finally, participants discussed whether there was a critical mass of buy in to say with confidence that adaptive leadership had become part of the culture. Each of these challenges is explored in greater detail below.

Institutional Culture

Participants indicated the hierarchical nature of the university was a challenge to implementing adaptive leadership. The bureaucratic and authoritative culture of the institution made it difficult to practice a leadership model that is based on the notion that authority and expertise are insufficient for solving complex challenges. Melissa said, "We're an institution, so we like committees and we like chains of command." Several participants shared this sentiment,

including Sam, who said, “It’s still so easy in a hierarchical organization to just simply revert back to the leadership is authority model. That sort of is how the place is structured.” Angela described adaptive leadership as a “radical” model that creates tension with the bureaucratic, “fall in line and don’t speak out” nature of institutional culture. Power dynamics within the university culture required some political savvy to navigate adaptive challenges effectively. Jennifer described her perspective on the potential barriers to implementing new approaches to problem-solving:

You could have an amazing idea that could springboard something, but if you don’t have the funding for it, or you don’t have the backing, or you don’t have the administrative support...sometimes I think that there’s more roadblocks.

Jennifer was describing the roadblocks of working up the chain of command. Other participants noted that working laterally across organizational silos or factions was also a challenge, particularly when people acted in ways to serve their factions’ interests, perhaps at the expense of taking more collaborative approaches to addressing problems.

Several participants talked about the university as operating under a business model, which further contributed to the challenge of implementing adaptive leadership. From their perspective, money, measurable outputs, and a desire for efficiency were key motivating factors for decision making within the university. Angela poignantly said, “We’re supposed to just kind of fall all in line, and the dollars do the talking. If it doesn’t make sense from a dollar perspective, then shut up about it. ... It’s not so much on teaching and learning.” Some participants discussed a perceived overreliance on what Dorothy referred to as “technical outputs” such as enrollment numbers, graduation rates, and financial efficiencies. While these outputs may be a reality for any organization, it “really undercuts the application of adaptive

leadership,” according to Dorothy. As participants have indicated frequently, making progress on adaptive challenges is not a linear, efficient process. Progress can be slow, messy, and elusive. Yet, as Aaron said, “What we’re graded on and what we’re measured on is what gets done.” The cultural challenges described by participants here were systemic barriers to adaptive leadership that superseded any one actor with the university. However, participants also talked about perceived role that individual high-ranking university officials played in contributing to the challenge of embedding adaptive leadership at Heartland University.

Role of Authorities

From the perspective of several participants, senior administrators had insufficient buy in to adaptive leadership. Participants indicated they did not see these senior level authority figures modeling or practicing it. Elizabeth and Kay both described senior administrators as giving “lip service” to adaptive leadership, and, from Elizabeth’s perspective, “while they may refer to leadership, they’re often behaving in an authoritative way.” For her, if the campus was going to create a culture of adaptive leadership, it was important that a “higher level of commitment needs to be seen as not just paying lip service to adaptive leadership, but rather trying to practice it.” Sam provided his explanation of the importance of authorities modeling adaptive leadership, and why it may be challenging for them to do so:

Authority can't be threatened when people suggest alternatives, when people turn up the heat, when they provide conflictual interpretations for things that are happening. They can't get all defensive. ... And that's hard for some people to do. That's not what they've been taught. They've been taught the leader is the lone figure who leads us forward, and come follow me, that sort of thing.

Sam may have been suggesting that when authorities feel threatened or get defensive, they can thwart other people's efforts to use adaptive leadership to tackle tough problems. Dorothy articulated what Sam may have been implying. She said that "you could have a whole bunch of people really excited about it," but get "squashed right out of the gate" when authorities become defensive and shut down attempts to use adaptive leadership. This could have the effect of deterring people from using adaptive leadership approaches that might be useful for the situation at hand.

Even if senior authorities were attempting to practice adaptive leadership, it was not apparent to some participants. Jill described having a close professional relationship with the president and other senior administrators. From her perspective, they were attempting to use adaptive leadership practices. She said that "all of them do that...there is a focus there," referring to their use of adaptive leadership. However, those practices are not necessarily seen by people who are not close to senior officials. Julie noted that "there's usually not that much heavy discussion to see kind of how our upper administration is doing with the Leadership Center [practices]. So I'm not really sure on that level." Lisa indicated that she sees attempts by senior administrators to practice adaptive leadership, but described it as a "ritual we go through" to be collaborative in decision making, but "in the end, someone else is just going to make the decisions." For Lisa, the few attempts she observed felt inauthentic and perfunctory.

Competing Commitments

Another challenge to embedding adaptive leadership in the university culture was competing commitments. Participants described multiple scenarios where job responsibilities, urgent problems, or other institutional priorities competed with the time and energy necessary for engaging in adaptive leadership. Trying to manage their "day-to-day" work, as participants

described it, consumed most of their attention. Adaptive leadership, to some people, felt like an added expectation on top of an already overwhelming workload. Aaron suggested the institution was not adept at prioritizing its initiatives and expectations. “Everything is priority one around here, right? Which means nothing’s priority one,” he said. When faced with choosing between these competing commitments and multiple priorities, efforts to use adaptive leadership could easily be pushed to the side. Lisa captured what several participants expressed about the realities of trying to juggle many commitments. She said, “Sometimes, we’re like so bogged down in the semester, and so burned out or tired, that the adaptive part...no one has the drive to engage the adaptive.” Participants used phrases like *frenetic*, *overloaded*, *whirlwind*, *hurried*, and *firefighter mode* to describe the fast-paced, multi-faceted, and stressful work environment that made it difficult to find the time and energy to practice adaptive leadership.

Shared Language

Having a shared language of adaptive leadership throughout the university was an important element of creating an adaptive leadership culture. If some people know and understand the adaptive leadership language, and others do not, it can be a challenge to engage in collective adaptive leadership. Some participants indicated there was sufficient shared language among their colleagues. However, other participants indicated a lack of a commonly shared language, which created barriers to collective adaptive leadership practice. Julie had several staff members on her team who had not been exposed to the Leadership Center framework, which made it “challenging just because they’re not where I am.” She talked about her struggle to use adaptive leadership approaches, and that she would “try not to use the lingo” since her staff might not understand the terminology.

Like Julie, Aaron described how the Leadership Center terminology created barriers in the large unit he oversees. He said a challenge was “not everybody being on the same terminology wavelength. ... When everybody’s not on the same wavelength of what the philosophies and principles are, they’re using terms differently and they’re using principles differently.” Missy also found the terminology to be a barrier when try to use adaptive leadership with people who did not have the shared language, so she “started incorporating, not necessarily the terminology, but the ideas behind it, because sometimes lingo gets in the way.” Missy and others described how they had to be creative in finding ways to use and communicate the adaptive leadership ideas when there was not a shared language, which was not always easy.

Co-opting Adaptive Leadership

Related to the issue of shared language, participants also discussed challenges with how some people on campus used adaptive leadership language and practices in ways that lacked fidelity to its intended meaning and use. Several participants provided examples of ways their colleagues had co-opted language or practices to bolster themselves or advocate their positions. Sometimes, as Elizabeth shared, people used the word adaptive in ways that were not really aligned with the leadership model. She shared her perspective on this issue:

I think one of the challenges that I face is when people who are in positions of authority or power or higher in the organizational level than me, what I perceive is misuse the phrase adaptive leadership and not encompass the competencies at all.

She shared a specific example of a person she works with “who loves to say to me or others, ‘Well, we need to be adaptive.’... And that focus becomes on the actual act of adapting, which is not what adaptive leadership is.” She was suggesting the word *adaptive* was being used in ways that were synonymous with notions of being nimble or responsive to changing circumstances,

which is not the same as enacting the leadership practices outlined in the Leadership Center framework.

A few participants shared their belief that sometimes, adaptive leadership was perhaps being used for personal gain rather than for the purpose of trying to make progress on an adaptive challenge. Dorothy shared, “It’s people coming into a meeting and throwing all the interpretations possible at people in a way that is...not being purposeful, and then sitting back and saying, ‘Well, ha-ha, I did that Leadership Center thing.’” She implied that some people may use adaptive leadership practices to bolster themselves and superficially appear to be supporting the university’s initiatives. Lisa provided another example of possible misuse of adaptive leadership for personal gain. She indicated her belief some people were “using that strategically” when “trying to make a case for something, and you know people respond to that [language].” Aaron likewise shared his perception that “we’re still somewhat selective, individually, when we want to or don’t want to apply those principles.” Participants were essentially questioning some individuals’ purposes for using adaptive leadership language or practices, and suggesting their purposes were inappropriate or misguided.

Real Life Application

Several participants indicated the challenge of helping faculty and staff see how to apply adaptive leadership to real life situations. Implicitly or explicitly, some participants suggested that people must be able to move beyond viewing adaptive leadership as philosophy or concept. They must see it applied to, and be able to apply it to, real situations. Helping people see the real life applicability was yet another barrier to building an adaptive leadership culture. As Melissa said, “I think people would see more use in adaptive leadership if they knew what they were applying it to.” In a similar vein, Jennifer noted that when people are using adaptive leadership

practices, they need to be “a little bit more explicit with what’s going on.” She suggested that naming the practices they were using could help people see useful examples of how their training could be applied to problems. For Kay, doing so could address the disconnect she and others saw between people’s intellectual understanding of the Leadership Center framework and its applicability to their own work. Kay described it this way:

To be able to point out that...this change happened because people worked their asses off using adaptive leadership and struggled and risked a lot, and we got here...I think that could help people see the value of it and get more buy in from that ground level, if people can really see what a change it can make.”

Kay suggested helping people see the impact that using adaptive leadership had on addressing adaptive challenges could help create more buy in. The issue of buy in to the adaptive leadership model is another organizational challenge to which Kay and several participants spoke.

Critical Mass of Buy In

I asked participants to share their perspectives on how effective the university had been in making progress toward its adaptive leadership goals. I asked what was working and what was getting in the way of realizing those goals. Participants’ responses to those questions seemed to address an implicit underlying question: Was there a critical mass of buy in for adaptive leadership to say that it was part of the campus culture? There did not seem to be consensus among participants that enough people were on board with adaptive leadership, nor had they seen a significant enough level of change in leadership practices, to stake their claim that it had been embedded into the campus culture. Aaron said, “I think it’s still very much a common theme on campus, but it feels pocketed.” Participants generally agreed there had been

meaningful progress in generating buy in and commitment within pockets of the campus, but most acknowledged there were still areas on campus where buy in was lacking. Elizabeth shared:

So wherever your little pocket is, if the people who have the ability to influence how you spend your time and how you spend your money want to see the capacity in that pocket grow, then it can and will. But I think it happens in a little bit more of an island.

Most of the other participants concurred with Elizabeth and Aaron's assessment of the university's progress toward a campus-wide culture of adaptive leadership. Dorothy expressed a sense of optimism that many other participants shared as well: "We're getting closer, I think, all the time, to getting that critical mass of people." Despite this optimism, participants acknowledged the significant challenge of generating widespread buy in.

Participants attributed a lack of campus-wide buy in to several factors, including staff turnover, lack of knowledge or exposure to adaptive leadership, indifference toward the adaptive leadership model, and in some cases, disagreement with the model's assumptions about leadership. In Aaron's case, staffing changes created an ongoing challenge. He said, "In six years, like 33% of my department has turned over." This rate of turnover meant Aaron had to constantly be exposing new people to adaptive leadership. Sam indicated that "there are people who are just, you know, 'I'm tired of hearing about this' and 'just leave me alone.'" Sam was not discouraged by this. He maintained his vision for a culture of adaptive leadership, saying:

I feel like when I can say, in most or all of our meetings, we are considering multiple interpretations, we are engaging unusual voices, and we are dealing effectively with who loses if this change is made, that we will be well on our way to having a culture that really practices adaptive leadership. We'll get there. It'll take a while.

I asked Sam and the 13 other participants what it would take to “get there.” I was interested in understanding, from their perspectives, what would help the university more effectively build adaptive leadership capacity throughout the campus community.

Building Adaptive Leadership Capacity

Participants offered numerous ideas about what the university could do to make more progress toward its strategic plan goal of developing “the university’s capacity for adaptive leadership consistent with the Leadership Center framework.” Several participants indicated that providing more training opportunities and access to adaptive leadership resources was important, as this would encourage ongoing exposure to adaptive leadership for those who had already received training. In addition to providing further opportunities for those already trained, Lisa indicated the need for “a concerted effort for those who maybe have not had the training yet,” particularly considering the challenges related to buy in identified previously in this chapter.

Beyond providing more trainings, participants also talked about the desire for structured ways to bring together faculty and staff together to provide counsel and support to each other in their adaptive leadership practice. Kay indicated the ALAT did not “have a lot of follow-up” after trainings, and having other mechanisms to “check in with people and see how they’re doing” following their training experiences would be helpful. Angela suggested monthly forums to “talk more about those issues” that are affecting the university and how adaptive leadership could be applied to them. Several participants suggested offering formalized mentoring or coaching programs to faculty and staff as a peer support strategy.

In addition to suggesting programmatic ideas such as additional training and mentoring, participants also indicated the need to be intentional in helping faculty and staff see adaptive leadership in action—to see it being applied to adaptive challenges at the university—to

demonstrate its value and utility. From Dorothy's perspective, there was a need "to increase the consciousness" and "to give people almost like that marker, that point of context" to see how adaptive leadership had been used to make meaningful progress on institutional challenges. This need was related to the organizational challenge identified previously regarding the disconnect between theoretical and practical applications of adaptive leadership that some participants' perceived among faculty and staff. Finally, some participants indicated that people need to have the time and space to practice adaptive leadership. Angela noted the need for "carving out space to do that" because "this all comes back to time." As identified previously in this chapter, participants described the competing commitments that made it difficult to channel the energy needed to take the longer, slower adaptive leadership approaches to addressing problems.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

This purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of individuals who were practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. The study was guided by four research questions aimed at exploring a) how members of an institution of higher education described their experiences practicing adaptive leadership, b) what espoused theories and theories-in-use influenced their efforts to tackle adaptive challenges, c) how they described the efficacy of their efforts to exercise leadership, and d) how the experience of enacting adaptive leadership changed them. In Chapter 4, I described the findings from in depth interviews with 14 faculty, staff, and administrators at Heartland University regarding the challenges, opportunities, and successes they experienced when employing adaptive leadership. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of their experiences and perspectives through the lens of theories of action (Argyris, 1999, 2002, 2004; Argyris & Schon, 1974), as well as implications for future research and practice.

Adaptive Leadership and Theories of Action

Theories of action (Argyris, 1999, 2002, 2004; Argyris & Schon, 1974) was the theoretical framework for this study. This framework informed the research questions, participant interview questions, and data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this section, I explore the challenges of practicing adaptive leadership through the lens of theories of action to make sense of the findings and answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the past eight years, Heartland University has been engaged in a significant effort to embed adaptive leadership into the culture of the institution. Argyris (1999) posited that changing organizational culture requires organizational learning, which is an ongoing process that involves identifying

and correcting ways of behaving that are counterproductive to the stated goals of the organization.

According to Argyris (1999), organizational learning is a byproduct of individual learning. As individuals within an organization go through their own learning processes of identifying and correcting counterproductive behaviors, broader organizational learning results. Argyris and Schon (1974) developed theories of action as a theoretical construct for describing the mechanisms involved in individual learning. Therefore, my analysis primarily focuses on individual learning, while also accounting for the organizational structures, pressures, and dynamics that influenced individual learning. I analyze the findings using three elements of the theories of action framework: espoused theories and theories-in-use, Model I and Model II theories-in-use, and single-loop and double-loop learning.

Espoused Theories and Theories-In-Use

Argyris (1999) defined espoused theories as the mental models people claim guide their actions. He suggested that if a person was asked to speculate how they might act in a given situation, the person's response would represent their espoused theory. The way the person would actually behave if faced with the situation would be based on another mental model: their theory-in-use. Espoused theories are the mental models people believe are guiding their actions, while theories-in-use are the mental models that actually guide their actions. Argyris (1999) suggested people are often unaware of the theories-in-use that guide their behavior. Theories of action assumes people's intentions are often incongruent with the ways they act, primarily due to the difficulty of changing the mental models that influence their behavior. In the case of Heartland University, there was an espoused theory of adaptive leadership among nearly all individual participants and at the institutional level.

Participants and the Institution Espoused Adaptive Leadership

At the institutional level, Heartland University espoused adaptive leadership. The most significant stated commitment to adaptive leadership was found in the university's strategic plan, but was also reinforced through various official publications including annual review documents and institutional magazines. The institution first formally committed to the adaptive leadership model in its 2015 strategic plan, which was due in part to the former president championing the adoption of the model. When the plan was reviewed in 2018 under the direction of the new president, the institution recommitted itself to adaptive leadership by affirming the strategic plan goal associated with adaptive leadership and making its adherence to the Leadership Center framework more explicit.

At the individual level, thirteen of the fourteen participants espoused a belief in the Leadership Center framework and a commitment to applying its principles, competences, and dimensions in their professional practice. For most participants, their learning process involved adopting a new espoused theory. Prior to their exposure to the Leadership Center framework, most participants bought into traditional or industrial models of leadership. They had accepted the dominant narrative that leadership and authority were synonymous—leadership was associated with title and position. Changing one's behavior to align with their espoused theories is already a complex challenge, which is why Argyris (1999) suggested people's intentions and actions often remain incongruent. For the participants in this study, the challenge of practicing adaptive leadership added another layer of complexity. As a prerequisite to their efforts to employ adaptive leadership, participants had to go through the process of discarding an entrenched, socially scripted belief about what leadership was and who it was available to, and replace it with a new espoused theory of leadership. Once they had adopted a new espoused

theory, participants bought into the adaptive leadership model and maintained a commitment to continued learning and growth in their individual practice. However, despite espousing a strong commitment to adaptive leadership, individual and institutional practices often did not align with their intentions.

Individual and Institutional Practices Were Often Incongruent with Espoused Values

Despite some success with using adaptive leadership practices effectively, participants described various struggles with translating adaptive leadership training into practice at the individual and institutional level. These struggles created incongruences between the espoused value of adaptive leadership and individual and collective behaviors. Participants described numerous examples of ways their own behaviors and others' behaviors conflicted with the institution's stated adaptive leadership goals and their own commitment to practicing adaptive leadership. Such examples included overreliance on authority, seeking quick fixes to complex problems, and avoiding the messiness of doing adaptive work. Argyris and Schon (1974) posited that people often unconsciously engage in these incongruent behaviors.

However, in this study, participants generally seemed to have at least some awareness of the behaviors that were incongruent with the espoused theory of adaptive leadership. They talked about the default behaviors that conflicted with adaptive leadership, and how hard it was to change those behaviors. Prominent behaviors included trying to control situations and using their authority when collaborative approaches may have been more useful. These default behaviors are explored further in the next section. For the participants in this study, the challenge seemed to be less about the unconscious actions undermining their aspirations for adaptive leadership, and more about changing the counterproductive behaviors of which they were aware. The challenge for these participants was to reset the default behaviors they knew were getting in the way of

their desire to practice adaptive leadership. Beyond the individual challenges of achieving congruency between intention and behavior, participants were trying to employ adaptive leadership in an organizational environment that still operated under traditional notions of leadership.

Institutional practices—practices that represented broader patterns of behavior across the institution—were also sometimes incongruent with the university’s goal of imbedding adaptive leadership into the institutional culture. According to the study participants, the university seemed to be beholden to operating in authoritative ways based on its hierarchical structure and the traditional top-down approach to organizational governance. Participants described the organization as operating under a business model that prized efficiency and measurable outputs over the slower, messier, and more collaborative, but perhaps more effective, approaches to problem-solving that are central to adaptive leadership. While the institution maintained its stated commitment to adaptive leadership, participants perceived the institution was structured in a way, and often acted in ways, that undermined adaptive leadership and reinforced industrial leadership models. Most of the efforts to apply adaptive leadership came from people within small pockets of the university who made the individual choice to practice it. Participants perceived the lack of broader institutional efforts, supported from the top down, to embed adaptive leadership across the university.

These institutional practices created additional challenges and pressures that made it difficult for individuals to practice the adaptive leadership they espoused. Both the individual and organizational dynamics described by participants made it hard to create congruence between their espoused theory and their practice. As described previously, the mental models that guide people’s actual behavior are their theories-in-use. Argyris and Schon (1974) presented

two models of theories-in-use. Individuals operate according to one of these two mental models, and depending on the mental model employed, there can be a greater or lesser chance of achieving congruence between espoused theories and practice.

Model I and Model II Theories-In-Use

People's actions are rooted in a set of governing values they hold. These values, whether people are conscious of them, influence the way they behave. Argyris and Schon (1974) concluded that people tend to operate according to one of two mental models, and each model has a distinctly different set of governing values. Each set of governing values in turn produces a different set of behaviors, which lead to a different set of consequences. Argyris and Schon (1974) referred to the two models as Model I theory-in-use and Model II theory-in-use.

Heartland University Participants Operated According to Model I Theory-In-Use

Model I theory-in-use includes the governing values of maintaining control, striving to always win and never lose, suppressing negative feelings, and being rational and not showing emotions. These values serve as a defense mechanism and lead to self-protective behaviors (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974). People tend to want to avoid being wrong, embarrassed, or criticized; being seen as incompetent; or having their vulnerabilities exposed. The self-protective behaviors people engage in to avoid these vulnerabilities often result in perpetuating organizational problems by not dealing with them openly and avoiding conflict. These behaviors are not conducive to adaptive leadership and make doing adaptive work extremely challenging (Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013).

Many of the participants in this study spoke directly to Model I governing values. They talked about their desires to maintain control of situations, and how hard it was to give up control and authority when trying to practice adaptive leadership. They described their fears of losing.

Engaging in adaptive work created fears of losing their jobs and fears of losing favor with people higher on the organization chart. There were fears around losing the sense of certainty about what consequences might follow if participants relied less on their authority and took more collaborative approaches to decision-making and problem-solving. Participants discussed the risk involved with raising tough issues, posing difficult questions, providing conflictual interpretations, and showing emotion in the workplace, all of which connect to the governing values of suppressing negative feelings and being rational.

The Model I governing values seemed to be present among participants, but counter to Argyris's supposition, they were aware, at least to some degree, of their counterproductive mental models and behaviors. However, being self-aware did not make changing their mental models any less challenging. Participants were still susceptible to the default behaviors that were not aligned with adaptive leadership, suggesting a persistent presence of Model I governing values. The persistence of Model I values might have been related to both internal and external factors. Internally, participants might have continued to adhere to beliefs rooted in industrial models of leadership. Some participants noted how they and others had been socially conditioned to associate leadership with position and authority. Although they described how their views of leadership had shifted away from traditional authoritative models as a result of their adaptive leadership training, they may still have held on to some of those beliefs.

Externally, participants were still operating in an institution that reinforced industrial leadership models, which might have also contributed to the persistence of Model I governing values. Regardless of whether they still held onto any industrial leadership views, participants were working in an environment where pressures to conform to traditional leadership approaches were present. While participants seemed to have an unwanted allegiance to Model I governing

values, they were aware of it and were working purposefully to detach themselves from old ways of being and adopt new mindsets and behaviors that were more conducive to making progress on adaptive challenges. It seemed as though they were consciously trying to shift to Model II theory-in-use.

Participants Were Consciously Attempting to Shift to Model II Theory-In-Use

Model II theory-in-use includes the governing values of seeking valid information, supporting free and informed choice, and maintaining internal commitment to the choice (Argyris, 1999, 2002; Argyris & Schon, 1974). In Model II, learning and effective problem-solving are prioritized over self-protection. Rather than defending one's position in order to maintain control and win, one openly tests their assumptions and considers alternate possibilities. One then shares power and responsibility with others for making informed choices about how to address problems, and generates shared ownership for making progress toward solutions. Conflict is dealt with openly, and problem-solving is engaged in collaboratively. Individuals operating according to Model II theory-in-use embrace the vulnerabilities that come with giving up control and authority and are willing to take risks that could result in failure. Model II governing values are more conducive to adaptive leadership and may produce the behaviors necessary for doing adaptive work (Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013).

For the participants in this study, practicing behaviors in the Diagnose Situation leadership competency suggest they were in the process of shifting to Model II theory-in-use. Diagnose Situation involves exploring tough interpretations of situations, considering multiple points of view, distinguishing technical and adaptive work, and identifying who needs to do the work to make progress on the adaptive challenge. Participants indicated they practiced Diagnose Situation behaviors more purposefully and more frequently than other behaviors in the

Leadership Center framework. They also described improved problem diagnosis as one of the most significant successes they had experienced when applying their adaptive leadership training. Diagnose Situation behaviors seem to be aligned with the Model II governing value of seeking valid information, which involves seeking accurate and relevant information about a problem in order to develop the most effective course of action.

Related to the Model II governing value of supporting free and informed choice, another adaptive leadership success participants described was becoming more comfortable with relying less on their authority, and instead taking more collaborative approaches to teaching, learning, and problem-solving. Since free and informed choice involves sharing power and responsibility and engaging others in finding solutions to their own problems, participants' experience with giving up some of their authority also suggests they were in the process of shifting from to Model II theory-in-use. Additionally, participants seemed to be committed to deepening their understanding of adaptive leadership and becoming more effective in their practice of adaptive leadership. They were not satisfied with the progress they had made, and wanted to continue to improve their practice.

In this study, making the shift from Model I to Model II theory-in-use did not seem to be a linear process. Participants experienced both challenges and successes with practicing adaptive leadership. Sometimes they employed adaptive leadership effectively, and other times they gave into the default behaviors that were incongruous with adaptive leadership. Becoming aware of their counterproductive mental models and default behaviors was useful toward beginning to shift their mental models, but participants were also aware that sometimes they would revert to their old ways of thinking and behaving. This change process can be described using the metaphor of taking two steps forward, then one step back. Despite the difficulty of adopting new

ways of thinking and behaving, it was apparent participants were engaged in individual learning, and learning is a key component of creating congruency between espoused theories and theories-in-use. Argyris (1999) described two forms of learning that can occur: single-loop and double-loop learning.

Single-Loop Learning and Double-Loop Learning

As noted previously, people's behavior follows from their governing values. When people act or behave in ways that produce undesirable or unintended consequences, they typically respond in one of two ways. One response is to simply try new actions or behaviors to see if the new actions produce the desired consequences. This response is what Argyris (1999) called single-loop learning. With single-loop learning, the governing values that produced the behavior are not examined. The new behaviors therefore tend to produce the same undesired consequences, and the status quo is maintained. The other response type is to first examine and change the governing values that produced the counterproductive behaviors, and then try new actions or behaviors based on a new set of governing values. This response is what Argyris (1999) called double-loop learning. Double-loop learning leads to more effective actions with more productive consequences.

Single-loop learning is often a sufficient response to dealing with the types of issues Heifetz referred to as technical problems (Heifetz et al., 2009; Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). Solving technical problems typically does not require a shift in one's mental model. However, for the adaptive challenges participants in this study described, double-loop learning may be necessary for meaningful progress to be made. Heifetz (1994) suggested that making progress on adaptive challenges requires changes in people's attitudes, values, and beliefs, or what Argyris (1999) called their mental models. Single-loop learning does not result in new mental models;

only double-looping learning can produce a shift. However, double-loop learning is difficult, even rarely achieved according to Argyris (1999), because examining and changing one's governing values involves engaging in the uncomfortable and vulnerable work people have developed defense mechanisms to avoid doing.

Single-Loop and Double-Loop Learning Were Simultaneously Being Enacted

The data and findings suggest both single-loop and double-loop learning were taking place at Heartland University, or at least among the participants in my sample. Participants who were members of the ALAT or who had several years of exposure to, and practice with, adaptive leadership seemed more likely to be engaging in the type of learning Argyris (1999) would call double-loop learning. Members of the ALAT were heavily engaged in teaching, learning, and practicing adaptive leadership. They seemed to be deeply reflective and self-aware of their leadership mental models and behaviors, likely due in part to the constant exposure they had to the Leadership Center framework and their sustained engagement with the framework through their roles on the ALAT. Likewise, participants who were not on the ALAT, but who had accumulated many years of training and purposeful practice around adaptive leadership, seemed better positioned to engage in double-loop learning. As indicated in the previous section, there was evidence that some participants seemed to be in the process of shifting from Model I to Model II governing values, which is indicative of double-loop learning.

Participants who had received less training or exposure to the Leadership Center framework, or who had relatively shorter tenure at the university, seemed more likely to still be engaging in single-loop learning around their practice of adaptive leadership. These participants indicated buy-in to adaptive leadership, but may have had a lower commitment level than participants with more years of engagement with adaptive leadership. Additionally, they have

had less time, relative to their more seasoned colleagues, to experiment with the adaptive leadership ideas and hone their practice. The findings therefore suggest purposeful and persistent reflection and practice are conducive to double-loop learning, and may be an important element in embedding adaptive leadership at Heartland University. Simply exposing more people to adaptive leadership through trainings may be insufficient. To produce and scale double-loop learning to a level that would truly create a culture of adaptive leadership at the university, it seems critical to have post-training mechanisms in place to facilitate ongoing reflection and purposeful practice that can support the difficult individual changes people must make to their own values and actions in order for broader institutional change to take place. This need for ongoing support was identified by participants. When asked what it would take to more effectively build adaptive leadership capacity at Heartland University, they talked about the need for activities extending beyond training such as peer support, mentoring, and coaching, all of which could provide structured and purposeful mechanisms for deeper engagement, reflection, and feedback regarding their practice of adaptive leadership. What I find particularly interesting and paradoxical about this study is that adopting adaptive leadership, whether at the individual or institutional level, is itself an adaptive challenge.

Practicing Adaptive Leadership is an Adaptive Challenge

Adaptive challenges by nature are so complex that they often cannot be conclusively solved (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). There is unlikely to be a point at which an adaptive challenge is fully resolved. Effectively tackling adaptive challenges is therefore a continual work in progress. In the case of Heartland University's efforts to become *The Adaptive University*, it is likely there always will be individual and systemic pressures to uphold elements of traditional or industrial leadership models. There will likely be ongoing

pressures to operate in ways that actively work against the university's aspiration to embed adaptive leadership into its culture, and against individual members' aspirations to embed adaptive leadership into their professional practice. Changing individual and organizational beliefs and ways behaving requires incredibly difficult and persistent adaptive work. Even if all current institutional members were bought into adaptive leadership and were able to make the necessary shifts to produce double-loop learning, faculty and staff turnover would necessitate continually exposing new people to adaptive leadership and influencing them to buy into the model. Heartland University aspires to achieve its strategic plan goal to "develop the university's capacity for adaptive leadership consistent with the Leadership Center framework" by 2025. However, if the institution is truly committed to realizing this espoused goal, the work may never be done. Making progress on the adaptive challenge of embedding adaptive leadership into the culture of the university may require the lifelong learning that is central to the mission of institutions of higher education like Heartland University.

Implications for Practice

This case study tells the story of Heartland University's quest to take a unique approach to addressing its challenges by embracing adaptive leadership as an aspiration and a practice. This research was conducted within a single institution of higher education, but the adaptive challenges described in this study are not unique to Heartland University or higher education (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). While the findings and conclusions from this study cannot be generalized to all organizational types and organizational problems, the findings and conclusions produce insights that are transferable to other organizations that are trying to create change or make progress on difficult organizational problems (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Heifetz (1994) concluded that most organizations face adaptive challenges, and Argyris (1999) concluded that organizational learning—particularly double-loop learning—is necessary for addressing complex problems and creating change regardless of organizational type. Many organizations in the United States continue to operate, to some degree, on traditional or industrial leadership models (Cilente, 2009; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Head & Alford, 2015; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2013; Northouse, 2019). These entrenched models, which are rooted in hierarchical power, authoritative structures, and pursuing the most efficient means of production, are not conducive to the type of learning and leadership necessary for making demonstrable progress on an organization’s adaptive challenges.

Spend More Time Diagnosing Problems

Organizations seeking to implement bold changes or address complex problems, whether internal to the organization or external to the constituencies they serve, may benefit from spending more time in problem diagnosis. Organizations should become skilled in distinguishing between the technical and adaptive elements of the changes they seek to make or the problems they aspire to solve. As Heifetz et al. (2009) contended, “the most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems” (p. 19). Taking the time to explore and understand problems from multiple points of view, and to investigate and challenge the assumptions people make about organizational problems, may lead to more effective solutions (Argyris, 1999; Heifetz, 1994).

Organizations pursuing efficient, quick fixes to adaptive challenges and minimal disruptions to the status quo are likely to create ineffective solutions and generate undesired outcomes (Argyris, 1999; Heifetz, 1994). Spending more time diagnosing problems may necessitate negotiating tradeoffs between effectiveness and efficiency—increasing effective

problem-solving is likely to decrease organizational efficiency. Once problems are better understood, better responses can be designed. Technical problems can be addressed with existing knowledge and capacity. Adaptive challenges necessitate building the organization's capacity for doing adaptive work through collaboration and experimentation. Adaptive work will require learning.

Encourage and Support the Learning Process

To make progress on adaptive challenges, organizations will likely need to build new capacities through organizational learning (Argyris, 1999; Heifetz et al., 2009; Nicolaidis & McCallum, 2013). Organizational members at all levels, from the top down, should encourage and support the individual learning that will be required for broader organizational change to take place. As indicated in this study, learning and leadership are slow, messy, and risky processes. Organizations must be prepared to provide the time, space, resources, encouragement, and support necessary for people to be able to navigate the difficult changes to their beliefs and behaviors that are incongruent with the organization's goals and aspirations.

Since individuals have well-developed defense mechanisms to protect themselves against vulnerabilities (Argyris, 1999), organizations must create environments where it is safe for people to experiment and fail without fear of negative repercussions (Heifetz, 1994, 2006; Heifetz et al., 2009). Building trust is critical. If organizational members do not have trust in the system or trust in organizational authorities that risk taking and failing will be supported, they may be less likely to experiment with new ways of thinking and behaving. Rather, they are likely to behave in self-protective ways that are counterproductive to learning (Argyris, 1999; Argyris & Schon, 1974). Organizations must acknowledge and be empathetic to the difficulties of creating individual learning and change, and organizational authorities should be willing to

model the difficult personal change work they may be asking others within their organizations to do.

Temper Authority and Share Power

Authority figures should recognize and acknowledge the limitations of their authority and expertise when tackling complex challenges, and be willing to engage diverse stakeholders in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving processes. Individuals who have power within organizations must be willing to share power, particularly with people and groups within the organization who have been marginalized. Power can either be used for altruistic purposes through uplifting and empowering other people and creating equity within organizations, or it can be used for destructive purposes through engaging in oppressive and self-serving practices (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Organizational authorities and power brokers should reflect on their use of power, understand how power dynamics affect organizational members, and aim to use their power to benefit people who have less power or authority (Heifetz, 1994).

One way that authority and power were present in this study was in the context of the university classroom. Instructors have inherent authority over their students and the power to impact students' learning and performance (Bovill, 2020; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2015). Teaching itself can be a context for exercising adaptive leadership (Daloz Parks, 2005). As some faculty members in this study described, adaptive leadership can inform pedagogy. Institutions could use the adaptive leadership model for faculty training and development, which could, as identified in this study, lead to more adaptive and collaborative approaches to teaching. This could result in co-created learning environments where students take more ownership for their

own and each others' learning (Bovill, 2020; Bright et al., 2012; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2015).

Authority figures, whether in a classroom or a board room, are encouraged to let go of the desire to control situations and outcomes, and embrace the uncertainty that comes with empowering stakeholders to take ownership for the organization's outcomes. Simply issuing edicts from the top of the organizational hierarchy or implementing new policies to address complex problems will likely not produce the desired results and will either maintain the status quo or perpetuate the problems organizations seek to address. Organizations may be more effective in creating change and solving tough problems if they take active and purposeful measures to dismantle the traditional, industrial approaches to leadership that continue to persist in many organizations (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Head & Alford, 2015; Komives et al., 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2006).

Adopt New Approaches to Leadership

The implications described here necessitate taking new approaches to leadership. Industrial era notions of leadership are insufficient for dealing with contemporary organizational problems and are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the realities of 21st century organizations (Cilente, 2009; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Head & Alford, 2015). The industrial era has long since passed, yet the leadership models developed during that era persist. Organizations need to adopt new models of what leadership is and to whom it is available. Leadership should be reframed as an activity available to anyone within an organization, rather than a title bestowed upon the individuals at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Organizations are encouraged to learn new ways of practicing leadership that are more collaborative, more inclusive, and more conducive to effectively tackling their most difficult and

complex challenges. These implications for practice suggest implications for policy and opportunities for further research into the intersection of adaptive leadership and organizational learning.

Implications for Policy

This study focused on the adaptive leadership experiences of individual faculty, staff, and administrators and explored their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of embedding adaptive leadership into the institutional culture. While the study focused on a single institution of higher education, Heifetz (1994) developed adaptive leadership as an approach to addressing complex challenges regardless of organizational type. The Leadership Center has partnered with many organizational types—public, private, nonprofit, for profit, governmental, etc.—to develop adaptive leadership capacity and create organizational cultures of adaptive leadership across many sectors.

An aspect of organizational culture this study did not explore, but is an important consideration, is the role of organizational policy (Schwoerer et al., 1995). An organization may espouse a particular leadership model such as adaptive leadership, but in order for such a model to be implemented to the fullest extent, the organization's policies and procedures must align with adaptive leadership approaches. People, such as senior level administrators, serve as one source of power and authority, but authority and power are also vested and codified in an organization's written rules (Culver et al., 2020). If an organization like Heartland University truly desires to embed adaptive leadership into the culture, organizational policies and procedures—written and unwritten—should allow for and support individuals at all levels of the organizational hierarchy engaging in the leadership activities suggested by the leadership model the organization has espoused. Written rules could include policy manuals, operating procedures,

performance evaluation tools, disciplinary procedures, and other written documents that guide how the organization operates, makes decisions, and manages personnel. If an organization espouses adaptive leadership, but its policies are not aligned with adaptive leadership approaches, organizational members receive mixed messages. Such an incongruency makes the organization's true intentions unclear and could make practicing adaptive leadership an even riskier venture for people with little power or authority.

Implications for Research

As indicated in Chapter 2, research on the adaptive leadership model is limited. Few studies to date have empirically explored the practice of adaptive leadership in an organizational context. Most of the existing academic literature is based on theoretical applications of adaptive leadership. While this study attempted to address that gap, additional empirical research on efforts to employ adaptive leadership could produce further insight into the challenges and opportunities of this approach to leadership, and the efficacy of adaptive leadership practices in addressing complex organizational problems. Two strands of research in this regard could be illuminating. Given the unique challenges of exercising leadership relative to one's level of power or authority, research exploring the practice of adaptive leadership from positions of authority and in contexts where one has little authority could produce valuable insight in the nuances of employing adaptive leadership up and down the organizational hierarchy. In addition to the practice of adaptive leadership, more research into adaptive leadership teaching, training, and development is warranted. A better understanding of what approaches to teaching adaptive leadership skills and capacities are effective could aid in creating training and development programs that will lead to better practice.

Research on Argyris's organizational learning theory is extensive (Argyris, 1999, 2002, 2004; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Basten & Haamann, 2018). However, similar to adaptive leadership, much of the literature is theoretical. Miner and Mezias (1996) and Bauman (2005) argued for more empirical research on organizational learning. This study took a theoretical approach to organizational learning, and therefore did not address the gap in empirical research, but it was unique in that it explored the intersection of adaptive leadership and organizational learning. Additional research on the relationship between organizational learning and adaptive leadership could produce new knowledge and generate further understanding of each theoretical approach to organizational change and problem-solving, and perhaps lead to a new, integrated model of organizational learning and leadership.

Implications for Leadership and Organizational Learning Theory

A major premise of this study is that industrial era leadership models, which centered on the behaviors and traits of upper class white men, are no longer appropriate for contemporary problems. Furthermore, the models themselves are problematic because they are not grounded in the experiences or perspectives of diverse and marginalized populations. However, even contemporary models such as adaptive leadership can reinforce dominant perspectives and perpetuate the very inequities in leadership models they seek to address (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Nelson & Squires, 2017). The major contributors to the adaptive leadership model are presumably white males of at least middle, if not upper, class status. This same observation extends to the authors of theories of action, who are also ostensibly white men. In the United States, middle and upper class white men hold considerable power and privilege, which likely influences how the scholars among them frame their leadership and organizational learning theories.

Absent the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences in these or similar theoretical constructs, they may continue to uphold whiteness as the limiting and marginalizing lens through which leadership and learning are framed (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Further explorations of existing theory, efforts to revise existing theory, or scholar work to develop new theories should be pursued from a critical point of view with regard to social identities, and address the diversity of thought, experiences, and perspectives undoubtedly present among the theory's intended audiences and users.

EPILOGUE

I developed this study out of my interest in leadership. Based on my own experiences and history with the Leadership Center, I came into this study with a bias toward the adaptive leadership model in particular. Through the process of this scholarly endeavor, I embarked on a more critical examination of adaptive leadership than I ever had prior to developing this study. I gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges of implementing adaptive leadership approaches in authoritative and hierarchical environments. I have a greater awareness of the intersection of power, social identity, and adaptive leadership, and how my own identity influences how I view adaptive leadership. In most of the spaces where I work and live, it is likely to be less risky for me to engage in adaptive leadership practices than people who may have less privilege than me. While I still consider myself to be a proponent of this leadership model, I am developing a more critical stance toward the limitations of this model with regard to the racial and gender dynamics involved in implementing its leadership practices.

In this study, most of the participants were white females. While this sample was fairly representative of the demographics of Heartland University's employees, their perspectives are framed by their own social identities and their experiences connected to those identities. The identities of the participants likely influenced how they described their experiences, particularly as it related to the authority and power dynamics. For example, the white participants discussed how they engaged in risky leadership practices such as providing conflictual interpretations of situations. This raises a question regarding how much risk employees from marginalized racial identities might have felt empowered to take. Female participants discussed their fears around losing favor or employment if the adaptive leadership practices they engaged in were not received well by authority figures, which raises the question of whether males, in general, would

experience those same fears. Looking beyond social identity, most of the faculty participants were from disciplines in social sciences, humanities, and education. This raises the question of how faculty in other disciplines, such as business or the physical sciences, experience adaptive leadership.

The findings and conclusions in this study are grounded in the data. While I attempted to tell the participants' stories and elevate their experiences, I must acknowledge that the insights produced in the study should be viewed in the context of the participants' identities. A review of the participant demographics reveals whose voices and what perspectives are reflected in study, but also whose voices and perspectives are not. I relied on snowball sampling from the first set of participants to identify the second set of participants. It is likely that an inherent bias among the first set of participants led to a fairly homogenous group of participants in terms of race, gender, and even academic discipline. If I were to conduct this study again, I would be more purposeful in soliciting a more diverse set of participants, certainly with regard to social identities such as gender and race, and also with regard to diverse professional identities such as faculty from a broader set of academic disciplines. The inclusion of diverse ideas, identities, experiences, and perspectives is critical to future scholarship and practice on contemporary approaches to leadership.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Email Invitation to ALAT Members

Dear _____,

My name is Jason Bosch and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Wichita State University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study I am conducting on the experiences of individuals who are practicing leadership to tackle complex, adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. I aim to understand the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by individuals who have been trained in an adaptive leadership model and are striving to apply their training in order to make progress on difficult issues facing their institution.

I am inviting you to be a participant because of your role as a member of the Adaptive Leadership Advancement Team at your university. Your perspective and insight are valuable and will make a significant contribution to my research study.

If you are willing to be part of my study by participating in an individual interview with me, please respond with a few dates and times when you are available for an interview session. Interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom, and I will strive to schedule a date and time that is convenient for you. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio and video recorded for accurate transcription.

If you agree to participate, please be thinking about other university members beyond the advancement team who you might recommend as additional study participants. My goal is to interview 6-10 members of the university community who are not part of the advancement team but have participated in Leadership Center training and are striving to practice adaptive leadership at the university. I will ask for your recommendations during our interview.

Thank you for your consideration, and please let me know if you have any questions about the purpose or nature of my study.

Regards,
Jason Bosch
Doctoral Student

Email Invitation to Institutional Members

Dear _____,

My name is Jason Bosch and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Wichita State University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study I am conducting on the experiences of individuals who are practicing leadership to tackle complex, adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. I aim to understand the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by individuals who have been trained in an adaptive leadership model and are striving to apply their training in order to make progress on difficult issues facing their institution.

I am inviting you to be a participant because another study participant recommended you as someone who has participated in Leadership Center training and is striving to practice adaptive leadership approaches to make progress on adaptive challenges your university. Your perspective and insight are valuable and will make a significant contribution to my research study.

If you are willing to be part of my study by participating in an individual interview with me, please respond with a few dates and times when you are available for an interview session. Interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom, and I will strive to schedule a date and time that is convenient for you. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio and video recorded for accurate transcription.

Thank you for your consideration, and please let me know if you have any questions about the purpose or nature of my study.

Regards,
Jason Bosch
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B

ADVANCEMENT TEAM MEMBER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello. My name Jason Bosch, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Wichita State University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The title of my study is *Ad Astra Per Aspera: A Case Study of Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education*. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of individuals who are practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. I aim to understand the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by individuals who have been trained in an adaptive leadership model and are striving to apply their training in order to make progress on difficult issues facing their institution.

You have been selected to participate in the study because you are part of the Adaptive Leadership Advancement Team at the university. Your experiences and perspectives will provide valuable insight to my research study.

Before we begin, I would like to review a few procedures for our interview. I will ask two sets of questions. The first set of questions will primarily focus on your personal experiences with learning about and practicing adaptive leadership. The second set of questions will focus on your perceptions of the university's efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity within the institution. While we will use our given names during this interview, no identifying information will be used when reporting the results of my research, including the names or titles of participants. In place of your name, I will use a pseudonym of your choosing. With your permission, I would like to begin recording our session now so that our conversation can be transcribed for the analysis phase of my research. The recording will be stored in a secure cloud drive during and after the study, and you will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy before any analysis is conducted. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Please share your name and then select a pseudonym you would like for me to use in place of your name in both the interview transcript and the research report.

1. Can you share your title, how long you have been working at the university, and a little bit about your role at the university?
2. Why did the university choose to adopt the adaptive leadership model?
 - a. Who made that decision?
 - b. What issues or problems was the leadership model intended to address?
 - c. What is the university's commitment to adaptive leadership?
3. How did you become involved with the advancement team?
4. Before your introduction to the Leadership Center and the adaptive leadership framework, how did you define leadership?
 - a. How do you define it now?

- b. How has your experience with the Leadership Center influenced your thinking about what it means to practice leadership?
5. Tell me about your experiences applying your Leadership Center learning within the institution.
6. What challenges, if any, have you faced when trying to practice adaptive leadership approaches?
 - a. What about this approach to leadership is difficult?
7. What successes, if any, have you experienced in practicing adaptive leadership approaches?
8. What have you learned as you have practiced adaptive leadership? How are you incorporating that learning into your practice?
9. Can you think of a specific example of when you attempted to practice adaptive leadership or apply your Leadership Center learning within the institution?
 - a. Describe the situation.
 - b. What did you do, and what outcome were you hoping for?
 - c. What was the outcome or impact? Was it effective? How did it match, or not match, with your expectations?
 - d. What do you think contributed to the effectiveness/ineffectiveness?
10. If you were to practice leadership more often, what could be possible for you?
 - a. What could be possible for the institution?
11. What adaptive challenges is the university currently facing?
 - a. What do you see as your role in addressing them?
12. One of the university's strategic plan goals is to "develop the university's capacity for adaptive leadership consistent with the Leadership Center framework." How would you describe the university's efforts to do this?
 - a. What is working?
 - b. What challenges are getting in the way of realizing this goal?
 - c. What do you think is contributing to those challenges?
13. What is the adaptive leadership advancement team's role in the university's adaptive leadership initiatives?
 - a. What is your role on the team?
14. How are you measuring progress toward the adaptive leadership goals articulated either in the strategic plan or as part of your Leadership Center grant?
15. Describe the university's relationship with the Leadership Center.
 - a. How do they engage with the university with regard to the grant?

- b. What has the Leadership Center done that has been helpful to the university's efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity?
 - c. In what other ways could the Leadership Center support the university's efforts?
16. What would help the university more effectively build adaptive leadership capacity throughout the campus community?
17. Is there anything else about practicing leadership that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello. My name Jason Bosch, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Wichita State University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The title of my study is *Ad Astra Per Aspera: A Case Study of Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education*. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of individuals who are practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. I aim to understand the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by individuals who have been trained in an adaptive leadership model and are striving to apply their training in order to make progress on difficult issues facing their institution.

You have been selected to participate in the study because you have participated in a Leadership Center leadership training program and have been identified as someone who is striving to practice leadership to make progress on adaptive challenges at the university. Your experiences and perspectives will provide valuable insight to my research study.

Before we begin, I would like to review a few procedures for our interview. I will ask two sets of questions. The first set of questions will focus on your personal experiences with learning about and practicing adaptive leadership. The second set of questions will focus on your perceptions of the university's efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity within the institution. While we will use our given names during this interview, no identifying information will be used when reporting the results of my research, including the names or titles of participants. In place of your name, I will use a pseudonym of your choosing. With your permission, I would like to begin recording our session now so that our conversation can be transcribed for the analysis phase of my research. The recording will be stored in a secure cloud drive during and after the study, and you will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy before any analysis is conducted. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Please share your name and then select a pseudonym you would like for me to use in place of your name in both the interview transcript and the research report.

1. Can you share your title, how long you have been working at the university, and a little bit about your role at the university?
2. How did you become involved with the university's efforts to provide adaptive leadership training to members of the campus community?
3. Before your introduction to the Leadership Center and the adaptive leadership framework, how did you define leadership?
 - a. How do you define it now?
 - b. How has your experience with the Leadership Center influenced your thinking about what it means to practice leadership?

4. Tell me about your experiences applying your Leadership Center learning within the institution.
5. What challenges, if any, have you faced when trying to practice adaptive leadership approaches?
 - a. What about this approach to leadership is difficult?
6. What successes, if any, have you experienced in practicing adaptive leadership approaches?
7. What have you learned as you have practiced adaptive leadership? How are you incorporating that learning into your practice?
8. Can you think of a specific example of when you attempted to practice adaptive leadership or apply your Leadership Center learning within the institution?
 - a. Describe the situation.
 - b. What did you do, and what outcome were you hoping for?
 - c. What was the outcome or impact? Was it effective? How did it match, or not match, with your expectations?
 - d. What do you think contributed to the effectiveness/ineffectiveness?
9. If you were to practice leadership more often, what could be possible for you?
 - a. What could be possible for the institution?
10. What adaptive challenges is the university currently facing?
 - a. What do you see as your role in addressing them?
11. One of the university's strategic plan goals is to "develop the university's capacity for adaptive leadership consistent with the Leadership Center framework." How would you describe the university's efforts to do this?
 - a. What is working?
 - b. What challenges are getting in the way of realizing this goal?
 - c. What do you think is contributing to those challenges?
12. What is different about the way people engage with adaptive challenges now compared to before the Leadership Center trainings started to saturate the campus community?
13. What would help the university more effectively build adaptive leadership capacity throughout the campus community?
14. Is there anything else about practicing leadership that you would like to share?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM



Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study of the experiences of individuals who are practicing leadership to tackle adaptive challenges within an institution of higher education. I hope to learn about the potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes experienced by individuals who have been trained in adaptive leadership approaches and are striving to apply their training to make progress on difficult organizational problems.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study either because you are a member of the university's adaptive leadership advancement team, or because you have completed an adaptive leadership training program and were recommended by an advancement team member or another participant as someone who may be attempting to apply your training in order to make progress on issues impacting the institution and its stakeholders. Approximately 12-15 participants will be invited to join the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to schedule an individual interview with Jason Bosch, the doctoral student researcher conducting this study. Interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio and video recorded to allow for transcription. I will provide you with a copy of your interview transcript to review for accuracy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in the interest of the health and safety of participants, interviews will be conducted via the Zoom® video conferencing platform. Examples of interview questions include:

What challenges, if any, have you faced when trying to practice adaptive leadership approaches?
What successes, if any, have you experienced in practicing adaptive leadership approaches?
If you were to practice leadership more often, what could be possible for you?

Discomfort/Risks: Minimal discomfort and risks are anticipated in the study. You will be asked questions related to your efforts to practice leadership within the institution, as well as your perceptions of the institution's efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it. If at any point you feel too distressed to continue the study, please inform the researcher and you may discontinue your participation without penalty. If the distress continues after you discontinue or finish participation, you may wish to contact the Wichita State University Counseling and Prevention Services. They are located in the Student Wellness Center, phone number 316-978-4SWC, email Annette.Santiago@wichita.edu.

Benefits: As an institution that has articulated a desire to develop adaptive leadership capacity in both its mission statement and strategic plan goals, this study may provide helpful insight into

current efforts to practice adaptive leadership and opportunities to strengthen the institution's efforts to build adaptive leadership capacity. Additionally, as a Leadership Center grant recipient organization, this study may provide useful insight into the type of ongoing support needed from the Leadership Center for the goals of the grant to be realized.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the researcher permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study – Emporia State University.

The researcher may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

The recordings of the Zoom® interviews will be kept in a secure, password protected online cloud drive for five years.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or the institution at which you are employed. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact:

Jean Patterson, Principal Investigator
jean.patterson@wichita.edu
316-978-6392

Jason Bosch, Doctoral Student
jason.bosch@wichita.edu
316-207-4419

If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Printed Name of Witness

Witness Signature

Date