FROM FALLBACK TO FLUIDITY: MEANING-MAKING IN THE PRACTICE OF

LEADERSHIP

by

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(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

The scholarly literature describing how adults make meaning via constructivist theories of adult development is robust. Theories in this paradigm depict a hierarchical series of stages, or logics, in which meaning-making can become increasingly complex over time (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Cook-Greuter, 2004; Torbert, 2004). A study by McCallum (2008) revealed a phenomenon in which leaders experienced fallback, or a temporary regression in meaning-making when faced with stress, uncertainty or particularly triggering situations. A follow-up study explored fallback theoretically with adult development thought leaders (Livesay, 2013), however no empirical studies were conducted to specifically examine the movement in meaning-making called fallback. This study addressed the gap in the literature on fallback, or regressive movement in meaning-making, by investigating the nature and quality of fallback among leaders and the impact on their practice of leadership.

Using qualitative data from multiple in-depth interviews with eight leaders from various organizational contexts (corporate to academia), this study explored the nature and quality of fallback among leaders at work. The findings from this study describe how the organization of meaning of leaders' thinking, feeling and behaving were ultimately fluid,

moving in and out of their most complex abilities to make meaning in response to intrapersonal and interpersonal triggers. The findings describe how this fluidity can at times render leaders unable to access their most effective leadership, and when the moments and results of fluidity are processed and reflected upon with trusted others, leaders' assumptions and meaning-making patterns become more accessible to them.

The findings from the study are significant to adult development from a theoretical perspective, offering a more robust view of the fluidity which exists in our meaning-making and subsequent leadership behavior. It is recommended that fallback be conceptualized as fluidity of meaning-making, illuminating the shifting that can occur as leaders think, feel and respond to complex and challenging situations. This study will be impactful to leadership coaches and those in the field of leadership development to bring awareness to how fluidity of meaning-making occurs, and how leaders can bring themselves into greater capacity both in meaning-making and leadership practice.

INDEX WORDS: Fallback, Constructive-developmental theory, Leadership, Adult development, Subject-Object Interview, Interview study, Qualitative, Fluidity of meaning-making, Adaptive leadership, Complexity, Practice of leadership

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DEDICATION

To Cooper, Zachary and Maggie

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More than twenty years ago, renowned scholar in the field of contemporary leadership studies, Warren Bennis, described the emergent 21st century economy as being "volatile" and "mercurial" (Bennis, 1991). He stated, "Never before has American business faced so many challenges, and never before have there been so many choices in how to face those challenges. Uncertainties and complexities abound. The only thing truly predictable is unpredictability," (p. 365). Fast forwarding to our current state of affairs, we see even more complexity and unpredictability in our economy as we are now constantly connected by social media, we can communicate internationally any time we like, and our businesses are mired in ethical dilemmas that have rocked the global economy. Conditions such as these have been characterized in the leadership and management literature as being VUCA, an acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010).

The seemingly chaotic nature of VUCA organizations means that order and predictability have been replaced by shifting boundaries and interconnected networks of stakeholders (Horney, Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010). Dealing with these conditions requires leaders to think and act differently in order to grow and change their organizations to address the chaos and complexity that abounds. Organizations that do not adapt to changing environmental landscapes potentially face stagnation and eventual extinction; organizations that embrace the messiness of change, experiment with new approaches and engage in continual learning are creating contexts for success. To do this requires a type of leader who can innovate, learn, and "...persist in the face of

setbacks, even failures" (Bennis, 1991, p. 366). Because the conditions of the workplace continue to increase in complexity, and because leaders play a role in creating conditions for change, it is important to understand the conditions under which leaders fail and succeed, and how their practice of leadership is impacted by these factors.

<p style="text-align: center">Setting the Leadership Context</p>

Leaders who can innovate, experiment, engage in continuous learning and adapt to the increasingly complex organizational environments in which they work are practicing what Ronald Heifetz (1994) has termed adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership is one perspective on the kind of leadership necessary for today's VUCA work environments and is defined as, "the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009, p. 14). One key difference in this perspective on leadership is that anyone can enact adaptive leadership; titles and authority do not give a person the ability to practice adaptive leadership. Enacting adaptive leadership runs counter to historical paradigms of leadership whereby authority figures held all of the power, knowledge, and expertise to lead an organization; it involves processes of collaboration, co-creation and generation of new ideas and new approaches to finding solutions to adaptive challenges.

Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges

Leading adaptive change within organizations requires the ability to diagnose what the actual challenges are to the organization (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009). There are two types of challenges according to Heifetz et al. which can be diagnosed: adaptive challenges and technical challenges. Adaptive challenge is a term coined by Ronald Heifetz (1994) to explain the messy, complex problems that require more than technical fixes or routine training or authoritarian decision making. Perhaps to further explain

adaptive challenges, it is helpful to contrast them against "technical problems." Technical

problems are problems for which we already know the solution; we already have the resources

and capacity to resolve a familiar problem (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Kegan and Lahey (2009)

portray technical problems as an intern or novice pilot training to become more advanced in his

or her skill, or a doctor learning how to remove an inflamed appendix. These are technical

problems because the skills necessary to perform the tasks are already known (Heifetz, 1994;

Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Adaptive challenges are more complex problems that "require experiments, new

discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community" (Heifetz

& Linsky, 2002, p. 13). They require a transformation in the way people think, the way people

act, and how systems are put into place. An example of an adaptive challenge might be

combining two distinct corporate cultures after a business merger, or a leader deciding to engage

a more distributed leadership model so as to incorporate more perspectives into company

decision-making (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Adaptive Change

In order to create adaptive change, leaders must have the ability to look at all sides of the

adaptive challenges facing them. Heifetz (1994) refers to perspective taking as getting on the

'balcony' of a dance floor. Moving between the dance floor and the balcony gives a leader

multiple perspectives on what is going on within an organization and creates opportunity for

different types of feedback at multiple levels. Taking a balcony perspective can be done at a

systemic level, or at an intrapersonal level. Leaders who can reflect on themselves as systems

that impact change can choose to grow in their self-awareness in order to evaluate how to bring

their most effective and necessary meaning-making to their practice of leadership. Being able to

reflect on one's own attitudes and behavior can render leaders more facile at leading adaptive change within the complexity of their systems and organizations (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Gaining a perspective on one's self involves understanding how you are making meaning of situations and how you choose to react to certain triggers. This type of understanding is explained by constructivist theories of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Perry, 1970, 1999; Torbert, 2004).

Adult Development

Constructivist theories of adult development explain the ways in which adults grow and develop once they have passed out of adolescence (after at least age 15). Constructive developmental theories, rooted in the field of developmental psychology, explain how adults grow- cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively- over time. Cook-Greuter (2004) conceptualizes adult development as growing both laterally (horizontally) and vertically. Lateral development occurs as a result of filling one's intellectual containers via routes such as going to school, attending trainings, being a self-directed learner, or experiencing life in general. Vertical development is a less common growth experience among adults in that it, according to Cook-Greuter (2004), refers to how we "…see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality" (p. 276). This view of adult development, vertical development, represents a qualitatively different shift in how adults know and construct meaning (Kegan, 1980, 1982).

In addition to Cook-Greuter, other scholars working in the area of adult constructivist development include William Perry (1970) and his theory of intellectual and ethical development; Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) and his constructive-developmental theory; and William Torbert (2004) and his developmental action logics. All of these theories explain how

adults move and grow into more complex epistemologies. While Perry's (1970, 1999) theory

mainly focused on college-aged adults emerging from a collegiate contextual experience,

Torbert's (2004) and Kegan's (1982, 1994) theories focus on the stages of adult development

through the highest levels of meaning-making that have been identified at this time.

Torbert's (2004) work is influenced by ego development and constructive-development

theories, with his stages of development characterized as 'developmental action logics', a theory

of both cognitive meaning-making and action/behavior enacted by leaders. Kegan's (1982,

1994) constructive-developmental theory incorporates subject-object relations theory with five

stages of development characterized as forms of mind (these are also referred to as orders of

mind or orders of consciousness).

Kegan's (1982, 1994) and Torbert's (2004) theories have been used frequently in

leadership studies, particularly to understand leaders' meaning-making and corresponding

behavior within work environments, where challenge, change and complexity place demands on

how leaders take up their practice of leadership. As Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental

theory is the basis for this research study, an overview of his theory is presented in the next

section.

Constructive Developmental Theory

Kegan (1982) refers to the type of psychological growth which occurs in adulthood as

"the unselfconscious development of successively more complex principles for organizing

experience" (p. 29). Development, thus, is a process of changing and transforming the ways in

which we make meaning over time via our processes of mental organization. Another way to

conceptualize this type of constructive development, according to Berger (2012), is that we

acquire a "bigness of perspective" (not necessarily a better perspective). The ability to arrive at this 'bigness' of perspective is predicated on subject-object relations theory.

Subject-object relations theory says that at any one time, adults hold a subjective sense of their own meaning-making systems and assumptions; at times they do not have a perspective on the complexities of their meaning-making system yet because they *are* their meaning-making system (Kegan, 1982). It isn't until adults undergo some type of transformational experience and learning from that experience which shifts their meaning-making into an object on which they can take perspective; at that point, adults then have an object on which to reflect which is their previous way of understanding the world (Kegan, 2000). These subject-object transformations are generally categorized into stages of epistemologies, moving from dualistic, dichotomous thinking, to socialized and relational ways of making meaning, to an integrated sense of self-authorship and finally to self-transforming ways of knowing (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Perry, 1970, 1999; Torbert, 2004).

As adults develop, they carry with them the meaning-making abilities from previous stages. In other words, a person is made-up of all of the previous ways of making meaning they have transcended, and can draw upon (sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally) those previous ways of making meaning when triggered or required to do so. Berger (2016, personal communication) sees Kegan's stages of development (or forms of mind) as a band of development, where the boundaries and edges between stages of development are less rigid and finite. At any one point in time, adults exist within the developmental band, displaying a center of gravity in a particular stage, with potential trailing edges in a previous stage and potential growing edges in the next highest stage.

Development is fluid, however, and adults can show up in any situation with any permutation of developmental capacity. Herdman-Barker & Wallis (2016) describe the movement of human development as the relationship between the "yin and yang"; half of the relationship representing the static hierarchy of the theory and the other half representing the dynamic fluidity in meaning-making (p. 3). Their description furthers their claim that adult development is inherently messy and mysterious (p. 2). Herdman-Barker & Wallis (2016) state:

> We understand the maturation of consciousness over the lifespan to also be characterized by fluidity, through lived experience such as the interruption of the unexpected, adventure, loss, love, success, surrender, union, worry, conversation, revelation, and more. These processes along our human journey find expression in the expansion of our consciousness as we develop from-one-action logic to the next and they leave their unique marks on us all. (p. 2)

Even in the midst of the characterizations of fluidity of meaning-making, what is common to these classifications of developmental theory is that adults have some comfort zone of meaning-making, a 'center of gravity', defined by Cook-Greuter (2004) as "the most complex meaning-making system, perspective, or mental model" a person has mastered (p. 277). This reliable stage of meaning-making is how adults respond in most situations. In some instances, however, adults do not show up as their most complex self and can be triggered into a profoundly less complex way of making-meaning. This phenomenon, an unintentional regression, or falling back, to earlier ways of making meaning (McCallum, 2008) is the focus of this study and is currently an under-researched area of adult experience, as evidenced by the limited empirical and theoretical literature which exists on the topic. The following section will explain how the phenomenon of fallback, ultimately to be referred to as meaning-making

fluidity, was identified and where gaps currently exist in the understanding of how adults, specifically leaders, experience temporary movements in their organization of making meaning.

Fallback in Adult Development

As a general observation, constructivist theories of adult development tend to focus more on the advancement of development rather than the back and forth, or regressive, nature of development. It is sometimes easy to forget that development necessarily means that adults have transcended and included all of the previous stages from which they have been able to make-meaning (Kegan, 1982, 1994). People tend to show up as their biggest, most complex selves in situations that require them to (Berger, 2012), and they also have a default to a particular form of mind that could be characterized as a safety zone, a form of mind they slip into when triggered or when they simply aren't in a position to use their most complex form of mind (Torbert, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Livesay, 2013). A phenomenon that is less understood, and which is missing from the research on adult development theory, is the experience of meaning-making fluidity, and the *fallback* (McCallum, 2008) to earlier forms of mind that is unintentional, or purposeful, and represents a less complex way of making meaning. In those moments when we are triggered and do not bring our best selves to a situation, we can experience what has been termed 'fallback.'

The concept of fallback, quite simply, is characterized as a temporary regression in behavior, thought and or feeling that is markedly different from how one normally operates (McCallum, 2008; Livesay, 2013). Situated within constructive-developmental theory of adult development, which explains how adults develop increasingly complex and encompassing "ways of making sense of themselves and their experience" (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor &

Baker, 2006, p. 634), fallback is a response to stress or to a disconfirming context (Kegan, 1994) which impacts an individual's thinking, feeling, and acting in the moment.

McCallum (2008) uncovered the experience of fallback among a group of leaders at a group relations conference in reaction to specific triggers such as interpersonal conflict, feelings of anxiety caused by uncertainty, and feelings of being overwhelmed by a multitude of perspectives. Leaders in these situations reacted in ways that they normally would not have. For example, some exerted extreme self-criticism; some shut down from situations, completely withdrawing; others became "agent[s] of rage" and exhibited hostility towards others. These behaviors and feelings impacted the study participants' abilities to show up as leaders and engage with the learning they set out to accomplish. Interestingly, McCallum's participants were able to notice their regression, reflect upon it, and in some instances learn from it. McCallum's study was the first to identify and describe the lived experience of fallback and the implications for leadership behavior.

A follow-up study conducted by Livesay (2013) attempted to ground the phenomenon of fallback as a distinct theory. In interviewing key theorists in the field of leadership and adult development, she concluded that fallback need not be incorporated into its own theory; rather it is already a part of the constructive-developmental theory and should be better delineated and described. In essence, Livesay's study validated the phenomenon of fallback, and it also began a conversation regarding the potential fallback has for leader growth and development.

The implication from these two studies suggest there are certain triggers that leaders may or may not be aware of which initiate fallback and cause an impediment in leaders' behaviors, thoughts and/or feelings. The studies also suggest fallback is responsible for potential growth in leaders, towards increasingly complex ways of knowing. Because leaders are currently faced

with situations that are potentially rife with various triggers, being aware of fallback and the outcomes associated with it could be beneficial to leaders who are trying to increase or maintain their effectiveness and lead in a way that is developmentally-oriented.

A fundamental problem, however, is that we do not know enough, qualitatively, about experiences of fallback. Only one empirical study has been conducted which uncovered fallback as a specific experience of research participants (McCallum, 2008), but no directed studies have focused specifically on the phenomenon of fallback. As echoed by several of Livesay's (2013) participants, and myself as I scoured the literature in preparation to explore this topic, we do not know enough about the qualitative experiences of fallback in other leadership contexts and whether or when it occurs. We also do not know enough about how the experiences of fallback impact how leaders enact leadership, particularly in contexts where they are being challenged on one or multiple levels to show up as an effective and adaptive leader.

Statement of the Problem

Conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) often characterize 21st century organizational environments. One way to confront these conditions is to enact an adaptive style of leadership. In the framework described by Heifetz and associates (1994, 2002, 2009), adaptive leadership is the practice of working with and among colleagues in an organization to harness the knowledge and abilities of all stakeholders in order to confront challenges and implement change. One of the tenets of adaptive leadership is the ability to take perspective on the values, attitudes, and practices which guide an organization, and which of those things can and need to change in order to respond workplace challenges. The ability to take perspective, and examine core values and commitments, requires sophisticated ways of knowing, being and doing in the world (Cook-Greuter, 2013).

Research has demonstrated leaders who possess more sophisticated ways of knowing themselves and their abilities are able to lead change more successfully within their organizations than leaders who are not as maturely developed (Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005). Constructive-developmental theory supports this idea by providing a framework for explaining how adults, and thus leaders, gain increasingly complex ways of knowing, being and doing when supported to do so (Cook-Greuter, 2013).

The constructive-developmental theory of adult development is a stage-based theory which describes the journey of how adults come to develop more complex ways of meaning-making and, presumably, ability to lead. A lesser discussed experience of meaning-making, and one that currently appears to be quite common, is that of fallback. Fallback is currently understood as a temporary regression in meaning-making, rendering leaders incapable of confronting challenges using their most mature and sophisticated order of mind (McCallum, 2008). As the context of work environments continue to present challenges to leadership, and as fallback is currently understood as an inevitable meaning-making experience in the process of leading (and perhaps development in general), more research was needed to understand how fallback was triggered, and how leaders enacted their leadership in these situations. To date, no empirical research exists prior to this study to specifically examine leaders' experiences of fallback and how, if at all, it impacted their practice of leadership. This presented a gap in the literature which this study has addressed. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders?

2. How, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?

Significance of the Study

This study was conducted with eight leaders working in organizations ranging from corporate institutions to clergy to government to academia. The multi-interview process yielded rich information about meaning-making and the practice of leadership. From a theoretical perspective, this study has increased awareness of, and highlighted explicitly, the realities of adult meaning-making via the experiences of leaders; this led to a re-conceptualization of the phenomenon of fallback to *fluidity of meaning-making* which represents a more accessible and useful way of describing how meaning is organized and expressed in real-time. This is useful to those examining adult development and adult meaning-making, particularly the role it plays in the practice of leadership and the awareness of the situations and triggers that impact meaning-making and behavior.

The lack of attention on the fluidity of meaning-making could be contributed to the overarching conceptualization of unidirectional stage theories of human development, or to the connotation of negativity associated with such a word as 'fallback,' or both (Livesay, 2013; McCauley et al., 2006). Though there may be many reasons why the fluidity of meaning-making, has been scarcely researched, McCallum (2008) and Livesay (2013, 2015) have advocated for a shift in thinking from a negative framing of what they refer to as 'fallback' to a more positive reframing of the experience. Additionally, as Livesay (2013) has made the case that fallback is considered part and parcel of human development, and by extension leadership development, this study illuminated the human experience of the fluidity of meaning-making, and the importance of reframing fallback to fluidity as a more useful and positive aspect of a dynamic theory of development.

Livesay (2013) claims human development cannot be separated from leadership development. From a practical perspective, this study addressed the importance of understanding adult meaning-making and the impact on the practice of leadership. The study addressed some of the situations that caused shifts in thinking, feeling and behaving which was inconsistent with several of the leaders' assessed capacity. Leaders demonstrated their fluid meaning-making in the face of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict, and generally in how they discussed how they react to and process challenges in the workplace. Impacts of the fluidity of meaning-making were seen in the way some leaders enacted leadership in times of complexity. This has significant implications for the practice of leadership coaches who are working with leaders to help their clients recognize when their capacity to act with their most sophisticated form of mind, or action logic, is challenged and how they can recognize their range of meaning-making capabilities to enact various practices of leadership.

Petrie's (2014) claims on the failures of traditional leadership programs to address developmental growth opens the door for discussion on the opportunities for vertical developmental programs for leaders. This study will be helpful for those who develop, design, and implement leadership development programs by providing insight into the practical triggers that leaders face within their organizations. This information may influence how programs are designed with an intentional vertical development perspective by adding supportive and challenging structures to address moments of fluidity.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The discussion of regressive-type movements in meaning-making within developmental stage theories of adult development is scarce. This is in part because the nature of developmental stage theories is such that they exist to explain how and why adults progress forward to more mature and complex ways of knowing and being in the world (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Cook-Greuter, 2004; Torbert, 2004;). While these theories acknowledge a natural back and forth movement between stages as a process of becoming settled in the next developmental order, few address how adults experience moments of unintentional regressive movements, called fallback (McCallum, 2008), whereby individuals are triggered to regress in their thinking and in their behavior (reflecting earlier habits and forms of mind).

Fallback has been shown to occur among leaders in environments of high challenge such as a group relations conference setting (McCallum, 2008), however no research currently exists in which fallback is examined and investigated within work environments that incur high challenge, complexity and ambiguity. The limited research on fallback, specifically related to its impact on the practice of leadership, presents a gap that this study has addressed. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to understand how, if at all, leaders experienced fallback within the context of complex challenges at work. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders?

2. How, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?

This chapter is a review of the foundational literature grounding the exploration of the phenomenon of fallback among leaders who are facing complexity. Two bodies of literature form the foundation for this study: the theory of adaptive leadership and its associated framework and the constructive-developmental theory of adult development. These two areas of scholarship also inform the conceptual framework on which this study is based, found in Figure 1. The following sections of this literature review will accomplish three things: (1) ground the study in a conceptual framework explaining the phenomenon of fallback, based on the two bodies of literature; (2) review the conceptual literature associated with the theory of adaptive leadership to describe how I understand the context and the role of the leader in today's 21st century context; and (3) review the conceptual and empirical literature associated with the constructive-developmental theory of adult development, with special focus on the literature surrounding the phenomenon of fallback.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model presented as Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of how I understand developmental movement and capacity, specifically the phenomenon of fallback, in relationship to leadership in action and contextual influences. The conceptual framework is directly related to the research questions guiding this study as well. I will begin by describing each part of the conceptual model, beginning with the infinity loop in the middle of the figure and how it relates to the first research question: what is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders? I will then move to the outside spaces of the model to discuss how they relate to the second research question: how, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?
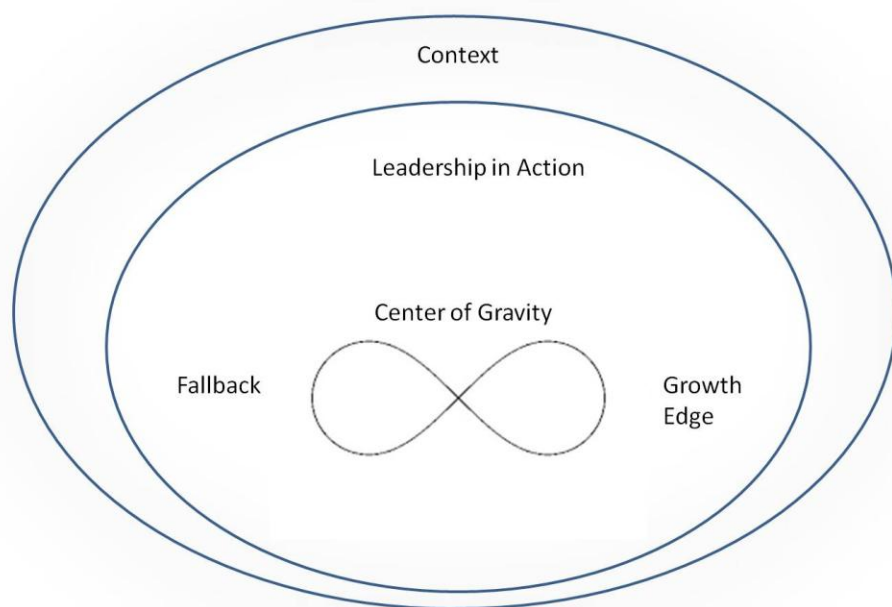
Figure 1. Conceptual model of developmental capacity within leadership context.

Developmental Movement and Capacity

The primary theoretical framework grounding this study is Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory, or a theory of how adults make-meaning cognitively, emotionally, interpersonally and intrapersonally. Constructive-developmental theories of adult development describe various stages of mental complexity through which adults can move, given the right supportive and challenging structures (Kegan, 1994). Growth into more complex forms of mind is inherently a back and forth movement between what Kegan (1982) refers to as evolutionary truces, or subject-object balances. This theory informs what I am referring to as developmental movement and developmental capacity. Developmental movement is the dynamic movement between and out of developmental stages; developmental capacity is the

dynamic relationship among a person's forms of mind (their center of gravity, growth edges and fallback positions) upon which they draw to make meaning.

The infinity loop in Figure 1 represents a visual depiction of developmental movement in adulthood. The balance, represented as the center of the infinity loop, is described as one's center of gravity, defined by Cook-Greuter (2004) as "the most complex meaning-making system, perspective, or mental model" a person has mastered (p. 277). This is considered one's reliable stage of meaning-making and how they respond in most situations.

Moving forward on the loop represents a move towards one's growing edges, or the next highest level of mental complexity. Berger (2012) describes the growth edge as being one's "…edge of the world she knows and understands and the world she cannot know or understand yet- her growing edge" (p. 61). In the earliest stages of transformation, people begin to sense that perhaps "something is missing" or "something is beginning" (Berger, 2014) in the way that they understand the world. As individuals move towards their growth edges, they become fully "transitional" in that they use both the form of mind they are leaving and the form of mind they are growing towards at the same time (Berger, 2014).

Eventually, people leave their previous form of mind behind; although aspects of that mind still exist as tethers or pulls backward on their meaning-making (Berger, 2016, personal communication). In some cases, as McCallum (2008) found, individuals become triggered in certain ways that move them back, even further, to more extreme fallback positions (more than one or two previous stages earlier). Fallback is the emic term used by McCallum (2008) from his research on developmentally diverse leaders, and is defined as a temporary regression in meaning-making ability, typically by at least one or two stages of development. In fact, adults tend to have at least one or two fallback positions to which they regularly retreat when overcome

with stress or other triggers (Torbert, 2004). In these instances, people do not show up as their most complex and adaptive selves, which impacts how they make meaning and ultimately take up their leadership. It was in the spaces where people fell back or displayed more fluidity in their meaning-making abilities that I investigated. My first research question was directly related to this part of the framework, as I asked participants to describe their experiences of fallback, the times in which they felt as though they didn't show up as the leader they typically were, or when they experienced situations such as decisional paralysis or feeling stuck when stressed or triggered in specific ways. Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the first research question and the conceptual model.

Center of Gravity

Fallback   Growth Edge

Research Question 1. What is the nature and quality of fallback,
and how do we recognize it in leaders?
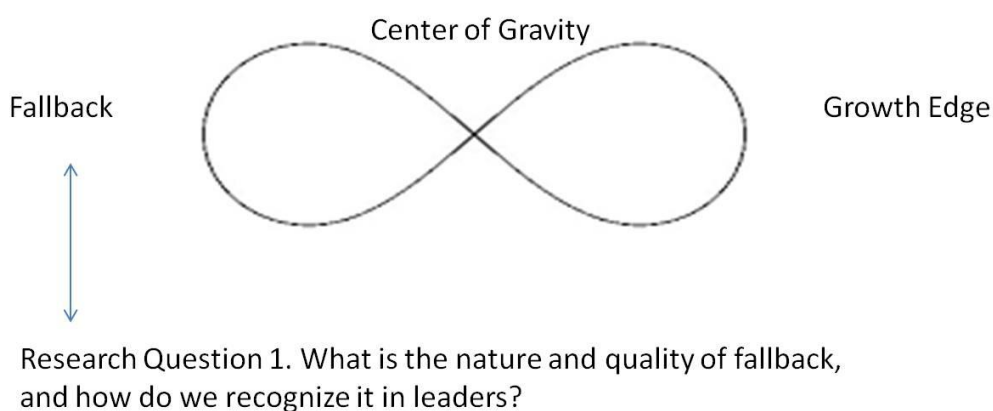
Figure 2. Relationship between conceptual model and first research question.

Fallback was equated to being thrown off track, thrown for a loop, or some other metaphor for generally acting differently than what a person is typically capable of. I was interested in how people described and experience this pull in their meaning-making. Further, I was interested in learning how such a pull might impact one's practice of leadership.

Leadership and Environmental Context

The totality of this developmental movement could be directly impacted by the complexities of leadership in action, particularly in contexts that are characterized as being volatile, uncertain, complex, and/or ambiguous (VUCA). The infinity loop, or developmental movement, is both (1) impacted by contextual forces and leadership challenges, and (2) impacts how leaders face leadership challenges and contextual forces. Facing the challenges of adaptive leadership in the 21st century can impact one's thinking, being and doing by spurring forward growth, to one's growth edges (Berger, 2012), or triggering leaders into less complex thinking, moving to earlier stages that are more certain, safe and less complex. Another way to look at the model is to envision how developmental movement impacts how one leads, or shows up in adaptive ways to meet, head on, the challenges of VUCA environments. The second research question addressed this area of the model, when I discussed with participants how, if at all, fallback may have impacted their practice of leadership or how they showed up differently as a leader based on the fallback experiences which came up in our conversations.

Because context is important to understanding the conditions under which adults make meaning, and the contextual forces which leaders are facing today in their work environments, I will now turn to a discussion of the outer two layers of the conceptual model to situate how I understand the requirements of leaders leading change in today's 21st century context.

21st Century Leadership: Context

Leadership research has been in rapid proliferation over the last decade, likely due to the acknowledgement that leaders have a sizable influence on the outcomes of their organizations via their decision making abilities, strategic thinking and influence on others (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden & Hu, 2014). Many of the leadership models are outdated, however,

having come of age in an era where "top-down, bureaucratic paradigms" (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007, p. 298) were considered rule-of-thumb for economies built upon physical labor (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007) and predictability. There is now a shift in our 21st century world of work, and our economy is now considered a "knowledge-oriented" economy (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007) with increased global connections and very quick sharing of knowledge and overall communication. Organizations now must engage with disorder and uncertainty as the feedback loops present in every system increase in complexity (Tetenbaum & Laurence, 2011). It seems as though collaborative vision building and decision making are now key elements of working through uncertainty and complexity in the workplace.

Leaders must now act within their organizational systems to take advantage of changing landscapes and complexity and engage followers in different ways. The charge to leadership is now moving the organizations in which they work from stability and control to disequilibrium, while at the same time engaging followers in such a way that they contribute their knowledge and abilities to the process of change (Tetenbaum & Laurence, 2011). Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) have created a complexity leadership theory based on the tenets of complexity science, which frames leadership as "a complex interactive dynamic from which adaptive outcomes (e.g., learning, innovation, and adaptability) emerge" (p. 298). The type of learning, innovation and adaptability called for in today's organizations is best described by Heifetz's (1994) adaptive leadership framework, which forms one of the foundational tethers of this study.

Adaptive Leadership Framework

As mentioned earlier, leadership models based on leaders wielding unilateral power and decision making within predictable work environments are outdated. The new world of work is quite complex and requires adaptation, learning and experimentation to deal with the most

complex challenges in our society. Leadership, according to Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009), is a verb, an action, a practice; adaptive leadership, specifically, is "the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (p. 14). Adaptive leadership is a practice anyone can exercise regardless of their role within an organization. This is an important distinction as the adaptive leadership framework is based on the premise of a distributed or collective model of leadership, where the practice of leadership required to find solutions to challenges can come from multiple people and/or places within an organization. For the purposes of this study, the concept of leadership was characterized as anyone who identified as a leader within their organization, which included having a team in which they were mobilizing and leading people towards some goal and/or change in their work environment.

The fundamental practice of adaptive leadership requires leaders to grapple with and challenge notions of value, purpose and process in service to meeting the demands of changing environments, strategies and abilities (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Much like the practice of medicine, adaptive leadership involves two core processes: diagnosis first and then action (Heifetz, 1994).

One of the key features of practicing adaptive leadership is identifying technical versus adaptive problems. Technical problems are problems we already know how to address; we already have the resources and capacity to resolve the every-day problem (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Adaptive challenges are more complex problems that have no clear solutions or that require a different way of thinking about them (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Adaptive challenges require action to reach a solution, such as "experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 13). An organization may face an adaptive challenge when something happens within their organization

that they are not equipped to address; this challenge may pose a threat to the company's values, to the way they operate, and the status quo in general (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Once a problem has been identified, movement to action may require different approaches or different thinking than leaders or colleagues are used to. Addressing an adaptive challenge requires more discernment of people's and system's values, new learning and discovering what is required to fundamentally change the ways people make sense of the challenges.

Because adaptive leadership is an iterative type process, a continuous engagement between the leader and groups of people within their organizations, diagnosis can occur in one of two areas: within the system or within the leader (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009). The following sections will describe the two areas of focus as adaptive work and individual work.

Adaptive work. Leaders dealing with adaptive challenges must engage the difficult task of getting people and systems to adapt their attitudes, values and behaviors in order to thrive in their organizations (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Confronting these types of challenges in a way so as to bring about intentional change is difficult and emotionally taxing. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) warn, "adaptive work creates risk, conflict, and instability because addressing the issues underlying adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms. Thus, leadership requires disturbing people- but at a rate they can absorb" (p. 20). Disturbing people, or creating a sense of disequilibrium, often upsets people because it moves them out of their comfort zones, or the "this is the way we have always done it" dictum. Doing adaptive work requires leaders to look at problems and system in such a way that they can 'diagnose', address, and intervene on complex challenges. In order to explain how to gain these new perspectives, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) use the metaphor of moving between a dance floor and a balcony perspective by explaining:

Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray. Otherwise, you are likely to misperceive the situation and make the wrong diagnosis, leading you to misguided decisions about whether and how to intervene. (p. 53)

The process of moving back and forth between the balcony and dance floor allows a leader to see multiple perspectives of what is going on and how to address challenges as they arise. Leadership, then, becomes a process that is both active and reflective; a 'dance' between participating in and observing the work that is happening (Heifetz, 1994, p. 252).

The ability to maintain one's perspective and emotions while facing challenges, and while engaging in balcony-dance floor movement, is critical to the practice of leadership (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Leading adaptive change requires an ability to ask hard questions, challenge assumptions and accept new and disturbing ideas (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Because of this level of required cognitive and emotional work, being an adaptive leader requires individual work as well.

Individual work. Enacting the adaptive leadership framework requires leaders to think about their own experiences, how they make sense of things, and what they are capable of emotionally; it is through this kind of self-reflection that leaders can begin to see themselves as systems and can then begin to interact differently with others (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) state, "The clarity that comes from getting on the balcony to see yourself as a system can give you courage, inspiration, and focus- all vital resources when the distractions, displacement, and conflicting loyalties common in struggling organizations start to crop up" (p. 182). Doing the individual work of adaptive leadership also

means that as leaders become familiar with their own triggers and others' triggers, they will gain an awareness of what it actually is that is impeding their leadership behavior and ability to deal with adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Being triggered is a key focus of this research. As the main phenomenon under study was the experience of fallback, a temporary regression in meaning-making and behavior, along with fallback must come a discussion of the triggers which land people in fallback to begin with. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) describe being triggered within their conceptions of leadership as follows:

How often has someone "pushed your buttons" or "hit a nerve"? A brief comment by a coworker, an action from your spouse, just the right small stimulus can set you off and make you crazy, or at least momentarily out of control. Your defense mechanisms kick in, generated by fear and fueled with adrenaline. Your bright, strategic, graceful, attentive self is no longer there, temporarily eclipsed by your more primal defensive self. (p. 200)

This experience is important to pay attention to because it can lead to unpredictable behavior and "throw you into an unproductive move" (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Getting on the balcony to see these triggers, in one's self and in others, can lead to more transformational learning about contexts, environments and the type of new learning that can aid in abating the triggers and potential fallback moves.

Leaders who operate from an adaptive context, who can create spaces for collective leadership and visioning, ultimately think differently than other leaders. The capacity and ability to enact adaptive leadership, and confront adaptive challenges and adaptive change, is related to the complexity of our meaning-making. Ultimately, adaptive leaders operate from a

developmental form of mind that is more complex, mature, and able to hold multiple perspectives (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Nicolaides & McCallum, 2013). The form of mind referenced here is explained by adult development theory, which will be explored in-depth in the next section.

Adult Development

Adult development in this study refers to the cognitive and emotional processes of how adults make meaning of their lives and experiences as they move out of childhood and into adulthood (Kegan, 1982). Several theories of adult development are constructed as stage theories, and explain how adults move through sequential stages of acquiring new ways of making sense of their experiences, acquiring new perspectives, and generally forming more complex ways of knowing. Although the foundational theory informing this study is Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory, several other constructive developmental theories of intellectual, ethical, ego, identity and cognitive development contribute to the understanding of adult development and meaning-making (Cook-Greuter, 2004, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Knefelkamp, 1999; Perry, 1970; Torbert, 2004). These theories are all similar in that they draw from Jean Piaget's (1969) foundational theory of identity and meaning-construction in adolescent development and extend the theory into adulthood. All of their descriptions describe the epistemological shifts that are possible in adulthood. While the theories acknowledge a forward growth of self and meaning as each stage is approached and developed, only a handful acknowledge (explicitly) another type of movement within stages relative to meaning-making capability that is reflective of regressive-like thinking and behaving.

As this study is especially focused on backward or regressive movement of meaning-making, or the fallback experiences of adults' meaning-making, four theories will be reviewed in

which regression is addressed as an alternative to advancing through developmental stages and thus complexity of meaning-making. Table 1 (adapted from Cox, 2016) provides an overview of the theoretical foundations of Perry's (1970) and Knefelkamp's (1999) theory of intellectual and ethical development; Kegan's (1982; 1994) constructive-development theory; Torbert's (1994) developmental action logics; and Cook-Greuter's (2004) ego development theory. The table is divided into four main sections for comparison: theory description; the form or structure that is developing or changing; the process of progressive movement; and alternatives to progressive movement, or regression.

Overview of Theoretical Descriptions and Structures

In general, stage theories of adult developmental describe how adults move through a series of stages increasing their abilities to make meaning and take perspective. William Perry's (1970) theory of intellectual and ethical development is unique in that it specifically moved away from adolescent development (Piaget's theory stopped at age 15) and focused on how college-aged students matured through a series of positions of increasing mental complexity. Perry's (1970) positions represent ways of making-meaning ranging from dualistic thinking (right/wrong; good/bad) to more integrated, relativist stances.

Kegan's (1982, 2004) constructive-development theory (CDT) also moves away from adolescent development and provides a more detailed description of developmental meaning-making and movement in adulthood. The 'form that transforms' through development, according to Kegan (1982, 2000, 2004), is not what we know (content) but how we know (way of knowing); or how we construct and organize meaning and what we have the ability to hold as subject and/or object. Adults move from socialized ways of making meaning (knowing in

relation to others' standards or beliefs) to more self-authored and self-transforming ways of knowing.

Torbert (2004) and Cook-Greuter (2004) were heavily influenced by Loevinger's (1976) theory of ego development, and incorporate threads of Loevinger's and Kegan's work into their research on leaders and leadership development. Torbert's (2004) contributions to leadership development will be referenced throughout this paper as his and Kegan's (1982, 1994) work is frequently reference in relation to one another. Torbert (2004) and Cook-Greuter (2004) both use stages called developmental action-logics, or the ways in which leaders take up their action and "interpret their surroundings and react when their power or safety is challenged" (Rooke and Torbert, 2005, p. 67). Leaders can, in fact, improve the ways in which they lead by examining their own action logics (Rooke and Torbert, 2005). Torbert (2004) claims that:

> we cannot see our own action-logics, especially not at the moment of action when we most need to see them, unless and until we ourselves reach the point along the developmental path where we recognize that the different action-logics that different people hold are among the chief causes of conflict at work and at home (p. 66).

Cook-Greuter (2004) also uses action-logics (9), but groups hers further into four types of pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional and transpersonal ways of "knowing, being and doing". Figure 3 depicts a comparison of Kegan's, Torbert's and Cook-Greuter's similar, yet slightly different, various epistemological stances. In the figure, the various stages of development are shown in relation to a birth to late adulthood lifespan. Some of the stages cluster in adulthood to show where general patterns of development occur in relation to adulthood.

Lifespan	Kegan's Forms of Mind	Torbert's Action Logics	Cook-Greuter's Stages/Conventions
Late Adulthood		Ironist	Unitive
			Ego-Aware
	5- Self Transforming	Alchemist Strategist	Construct-Aware
			Autonomous
	4- Self-Authoring	Individualist Achiever	Individualistic Conscientious Self-Aware
	3- Socialized	Expert Diplomat	Conformist
		Opportunist	Self-Protective
	2- Self-Sovereign		
			Impulsive
Birth	1- Imperial		
	0		Symbiotic

Figure 3. Comparison of Kegan (1982, 1994), Torbert (2004) and Cook-Greuter's (2004)

developmental stages.

Table 1

Theoretical Perspectives on Constructive Development

	Perry (1970)/Knefelkamp (1999)	Kegan (1982,1994)	Torbert (2004)	Cook-Greuter (2004, 2013)
Theory	Intellectual and Ethical Development	Constructive-Developmental Theory	Developmental Action Inquiry/Developmental Action Logics	Ego Development Theory
Description	College students' epistemologies shift qualitatively in ways that address their role as learner and of self in general.	Adults continue to evolve in their mental complexity given appropriate supportive and challenging holding environments	Leaders move through increasingly complex stages of thinking and acting as they gain perspective through inquiry with selves, others and systems.	Adults develop vertically and horizontally, with vertical development demarcating the transformations of meaning-making and self-awareness.
Structures	Stages/Positions Nine positions/four stages of development: (1) Dualism (2) Multiplicity (3) Relativity (4) Commitment	Forms of Mind Six stages of meaning-making based on the subject-object orientation of the individual: (0) Incorporative (1) Impulsive (2) Self-Sovereign (3) Socialized (4) Self-Authored (5) Self-Transforming	Action Logics Seven action logics describe the strategies and logic leaders employ in action. (1) Opportunist (2) Diplomat (3) Expert (4) Achiever (5) Individualist (6) Strategist (7) Alchemist	Action Logics, Divided into four stages Preconventional Stages (1) Impulsive (2) Self-protective Conventional Stages (3) Conformist (4) Self-conscious (5) Conscientious Postconventional Stages (6) Individualist (7) Autonomous (8) Construct-aware (9) Unitive Transpersonal Stage
Progressive Movement	Students' meaning-making evolves as they differentiate their views of authority,	Development occurs from stage to stage via well-structured holding	Action logics increase in complexity as people engage with action inquiry; single-,	Development occurs across stages as people engage in self-reflection, action-

	truth, knowledge and identity via interactions with peers and instructors across the college experience.	environments; transformational learning; supports and challenges.	double-triple-loop learning.	inquiry, and exposure to others who are at respectively later stages than themselves.
Alternatives to Progressive Movement	Temporizing- delay in one position with hesitation in taking next step. Retreat- movement back to dualism Escape- complacency with maintaining relativistic stance Functional Regression- added by Knefelkamp; move back to previous sense-making in order to get their bearings	Inconsistencies or temporary regressions in meaning-making occur, but do constitute losing one's most complex organizing principle.	Adults have one or two fallback action logics to which they regress when they feel insecure, ill, angry or exhausted.	The preconventional tier of experience and knowing resides in our subconscious and serve as fallback positions in times of stress

Note. Adapted from Cox, A.B. (2016). *Adult learning in online educative spaces: a constructive-developmental perspective* (Doctoral dissertation).

Progressive Movement

Perry's (1970, 1999) work was based on the college experience and how learning in college impacted the evolution of students' meaning-making and identity development. As students engaged with learning that was disconfirming to their previously held beliefs, such as who held the ultimate authority on knowledge and realizing that professors were fallible, they developed more complex ways of knowing and viewing themselves in relation to the world.

Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-development theory is predicated on the subject-object relations theory which explains the growth of the mind as a transformation in "...making what was subject into object so that we can 'have it' rather than 'be had' by it" (Kegan, 1994, p. 34). People tend to grow and flourish in environments where they continuously experience the right blend of support and challenge (Kegan, 1994). Environments that provide appropriate supports and challenges (not too heavy nor too light in either direction) provide space for an individual to engage in the kind of transformational learning necessary to shift epistemological stances.

Torbert (2004) views developmental growth as emanating from a process of action inquiry. Action inquiry is a process of transformational learning that impacts thinking and action in the moment. Single-, double-, and triple-loop learning are increasingly complex ways of processing information, and subsequently taking action, in order to solve problems or engage in change in order to develop what Torbert (2004) refers to as "mutually-transforming" inquiry and power. In all, our development is generally unknown to us or not within our conscious, until we encounter a disorienting dilemma or situation (challenge to power and/or safety) which requires us to think anew and make changes in how we make meaning and how we take up our power (Torbert 2004; Livesay, 2013).

Cook-Greuter (2004) refers to the process of development as transformations of consciousness which occurs both laterally and vertically. Lateral (horizontal) development occurs via traditional routes such as classroom learning, training, etc. Vertical development is a less common growth experience in that it, according to Cook-Greuter (2004), refers to how we "…see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality" (p. 276). Vertical development is now viewed as the most effective way to grow leaders' abilities to face challenges and confront organizational complexities (Petrie, 2014). Development in Cook-Greuter's (2004) purview can only happen through "…specific long-term practices, self-reflection, action inquiry, and dialogue as well as living in the company of others further along on the developmental path…" (p. 277).

A basic theme among developmental theories which are constructivist in nature is the notion that individuals, in order to grow in complexity, experience a back-and-forth, or settling and resettling, as they construct meaning among and between stages, from one stage to the next (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Perry, 1970, 1999; Torbert, 2004). A person can be fully in one stage, transitional between stages, or mostly complete in one stage with only slight triggers to the previous stage (Berger, 2016, personal communication); this is why development can take so long to occur. The prolonged engagement with transformational learning leads to a widening gap between stages until one has been enveloped in the next most complex stage (Berger, 2016, personal communication). A caveat to this is that an individual may not need to develop in this way if their context does not call for it; if one's context is such that a person's current stage of development is sufficient, there is really no need to move forward (Berger, 2012).

While these theories acknowledge a type of back and forth movement that occurs between stages as one is growing, they do not acknowledge a regression that is so permanent, or so severe, that a person loses all sense of self and capacity to an earlier stage. They do, however, address a type of alternative fallback movement based on certain conditions or triggers. The next section will review how regressive movement is described and discussed in the developmental literature.

Alternatives to Progressive Movement (Regression)

Before beginning the discussion of how these theories address developmental regression, it is helpful to first understand the type and extent of regression to which I am referring. Jane Kroger (1996) makes a helpful distinction in discussing the concept of regression from the vantage point of psychodynamic literature and developmental literature, as presented in Figure 4.

Psychodynamic Literature	Developmental Literature
Regression… - Return to earlier developmental levels - Mastering childhood trauma - Essential and adaptive feature of normal development	Regression… - Structural characteristic of stage change - Problematic due to forward directionality of theories - Related to disequilibrium; regression is normal

Figure 4. Perspectives on psychodynamic and developmental regression.

While Kroger's (1996) work is mainly centered in adolescent development, these distinctions have applicability to adult development. In the psychodynamic category, regression is considered an "adaptive feature of normal development" which occurs in order for individuals to master some type of childhood trauma that may be impacting their development in some way. In terms of the developmental literature, which was the basis for this literature review and study, regression is most often related to the process of disequilibrium, the process of moving or being between stages of development, not fully in one and not fully in the other. Regression in this

sense is considered a structural characteristic of stage change, more aligned with some of the fallback I witnessed from study participants. More often in the study, the shifting was associated with movement which was different, in a nuanced way, than a typical stage negotiation, with nuance and characteristics more akin to gaining's one ground after being thrown off-course by some specific trigger.

Perry (1970, 1999) has, perhaps, the most robust description of "alternatives to growth" (Love & Guthrie, 1999), or what I am considering as fallback. In his scheme, he identified three types of alternatives to forward progress: temporizing, retreat and escape (Love & Guthrie, 1999). In these alternatives, thought and action were delayed by way of overwhelm, fear, or simply not being ready to confront the challenge and responsibility with increasing maturity and level of thought (Love & Guthrie, 1999). The final alternative to growth, added by Knefelkamp (1999), is functional regression. Knefelkamp (1999) describes functional regression as:

> A process where students who were undertaking new learning in a new environment "functionally" regressed to previous positions until they felt comfortable in the new environment. That is, the regression was developmentally appropriate; to progress developmentally, the students needed to move back to previous sense-making in order to get their bearings. (p. 7)

These descriptions of alternatives to forward movement, or regression, present the most in-depth discussion and observance of backward and forward movement that I could find, apart from the usual dance of undergoing stage change. Functional regression could be the closest description to the experience of fallback, apart from McCallum (2008) and Livesay's (2013) exploration into the phenomenon. The connotation of Knefelkamp's (1999) title of functional regression is such that regression is considered a helpful, normative process of development and

meaning-making, thus calling into question the nature of regression or fallback as a negative experience.

Both Torbert (2004) and Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007) acknowledge individuals can regress to earlier stages of making meaning when confronted with stress, insecurity, rapid change, anger or illness. Torbert (2004) specifically says that adults "…tend to have one particular secondary or fallback action-logic to which we retreat when we are under duress…" (p. 68). These fallback action-logics aren't necessarily in any stage-wise order, but represent a typical fallback position that seems to be consistent with how one usually reacts when triggered in specific situations.

Kegan's (1994) description of regression is mostly aligned with others, that adults can revert to a lesser complex way of making-meaning, but the structures of their most complex self (or center of gravity as referred to by Cook-Greuter) is still present, thus giving an individual the ability to have a perspective on regression, or fallback. Kegan (1994) states:

> If regression refers to an actual process of "devolution", of losing a more complex order for another simpler one, then these are not experiences of regression, because the more complex structure is still present and at work, however confined it may be at the moment. To the extent that we are unable to be fully consistent in such situations, it costs us something; we don't like it. But even in such situations of inconsistency a form of consistency continues to exist. The overall way we feel about, think about, or evaluate the situation is expressive of, and consistent with, our most complex principle of organization. (p. 372)

Thus, the inconsistency that Kegan (1994) discusses could be considered a temporary regressive fallback move in accordance with other descriptions by developmental scholars. The regressive

move is not a complete loss of self, as the self remains, but a temporary thinking and behaving less sophisticated than usual.

In a later section, fallback as described and investigated by McCallum (2008) will be discussed, however, a more in-depth discussion of Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory will be presented to situate the theory as it relates to this study and the mental complexity of leaders.

Kegan's Constructive-Developmental Theory

Constructive-development is a process of changing and transforming the ways in which we make meaning over time via our processes of mental organization. Constructive-development theory (CDT) has a rich history steeped in clinical and counseling psychology and has been popularized by the research of Robert Kegan (1982). Having integrated ego psychology, object relations theory and existential phenomenology into one comprehensive theory, Kegan's theory addresses the personal transformations of the self; the "form that transforms" across time and experience is not what we know, but how we know; how we construct and organize meaning and what we have the ability to hold subject and/or object (Kegan, 2000). The ability to transform in this way is predicated on subject-object relations theory.

Subject Object Theory

As Kegan (1982) states of the subject-object theory, "subject-object relations emerge out of a lifelong process of development: a succession of qualitative differentiations of the self from the world, with a qualitatively more extensive object with which to be in relation created each time," (p. 76). In essence, we are subject to our own ways of thinking and knowing and being in the world and are 'had' by our subjectivities (our way of structuring our meaning-making). What is object to us is that which we are making sense about (the content of our thinking). The

movement to not being 'had' by our subjectivities, but 'having' them is the transformative move to a more complex way of making meaning (Kegan, 1982). Developing adults are moving in and out of what Kegan (1982) refers to as evolutionary truces, or balances, between letting go of what was subject and making it object; between favoring a more inclusive epistemology (self) to a more independent epistemology (self). Kegan (1982) says that a tension exists in these spaces between selves; that we are vulnerable to being tipped over and to growing into a more complex form of mind, as each balance is only 'temporary' (p. 108). To evaluate where one is on their developmental journey, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) can be administered to adults to evaluate the structures with which adults use to make meaning. The SOI is scored according to the stages of development described by Kegan (1982, 1994). An aspect of development, the movement, between balances is dependent on what is referred to as one's "holding environment".

Holding Environment

Kegan (1982) draws on the work of D.W. Winnicott who used the term "holding environment" to describe the psychosocial environments in which development takes place; it is where individuals are embedded psychologically and socially. Thus, the holding environment represents a contextual view of how the world, or environment, which influences the development of a person. Holding environments, or cultures of embeddedness as Kegan (1982) also refers to them, have three functions which are: to hold on, to let go and be present for reintegration. They are literally psychosocial spaces, between you and I or within an environment, which allow development to happen, given those involved are appropriately structured to assist an individual with the process of moving and growing into a new way of making-meaning. Successful holding environments meet people where they are, psychologically-speaking, and create an evolutionary bridge (Kegan, 1994). The evolutionary

bridge enables individuals to cross over into the next stage of development where he or she can reintegrate. The following section details the different forms of mind characterized by Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory.

Forms of Mind

The forms of mind presented in this section describe the attributes of how individuals make meaning at various stages of development. Because this study is situated in the context of leadership, each description of a stage will contain a distinct explanation of the orientation of that stage to leadership roles/abilities as defined by Berger (2012). Because many of the adults in our society make meaning from at least the socialized mind, a brief description of development from birth to adolescence will be presented first, followed by more rigorous detail on developmental stages from socialized to self-transforming.

Birth to Adolescence

From birth to adolescence, humans move from stage 0 to stage 1 (Kegan, 1982). This period of development focuses on forming consciousness, personality development and relationship to authority, as well as infants become aware of the sensorimotor skills and their sense of consciousness, moving into childhood and a sense of self and self-knowledge (Kegan, 1982).

Self-sovereign Mind

In stage 2, the self-sovereign mind, people are more attuned to rules and regulations; they can only see things from their own perspective and lack the ability to be empathic in their emotions and relationships (Berger, 2012). This form of mind is most common in teenagers and young adults, though it has been found 13% of adults see the world via the self-sovereign form of mind (Berger, 2012).

Self-sovereign leadership. Very few leaders will be of the self-sovereign mind within organizations; the less educated and younger employees in an organization are likely to show up at this stage, likely proving "frustrating" to others due to their self-centered focus (Berger, 2012, p. 20). Leaders operating with the self-sovereign mind are more prone to struggle with the competing demands and perspectives of stakeholders, unable to understand that there are multiple perspectives (Berger, 2012).

Socialized Mind

Stage three, or the socialized form of mind, is found in 46 percent of the adult population (Berger, 2012). This form of mind is associated with processing the perspectives of others and becoming a part of society and its rules; people at this stage "internalize the feelings and ideas of others and are guided by those people or institutions (such as a synagogue, a political party, or a particular organization) that are most important to them" (Berger, 2012, p. 21).

Socialized leadership. Leaders with this form of mind are subject to the perspectives of others and may feel conflicted where there are competing views and conflict around them. There is no self-authorship yet, therefore a leader in this position is uncomfortable with competing views of important people in their lives (Berger, 2012). This is somewhat problematic as a large percentage of adults have attained this level of complexity, and as Berger (2012) indicates, organizations are generally structured to employ leaders beyond this form of mind, therefore "many organizational structures and programs are 'over the heads' of the majority of adults" (p. 22). Socialized leaders may be tied to only one perspective as 'right'. He or she may also be uncomfortable with mistakes, attributing them to themselves or the other, unable to acknowledge the complexities of the cause and effect, or of the organizational culture (Berger, 2012).

Self-authored Mind

The fourth stage, or the self-authored form of mind, is common in 41 percent of adults and is characterized by a 'self-governing system' of rules and regulations which they use to make decisions (Berger, 2012). What is now object to these leaders are the opinions and desires of others; they are now subject to their own internal sense of goals, values and general self-authorship (Berger, 2012). In a longitudinal study of adults, conducted by Kegan and associates (1994) using the Subject-Object Interview to evaluate stage change over time, it was concluded that "at any given moment, around one-half to two-thirds of the adult population appears not to have fully reached the fourth order of consciousness" (Kegan, 1994, p. 191). This is particularly important to know, as the demands of leadership in complex environments today require a fourth-order or higher form of mind to deal with the complexity and adaptability necessary in today's organizational environments.

Self-authored leadership. Leaders in this stage empathize with others and can hold multiple perspectives, opinions and desires of others when making decisions, as they relate to their own internal sense of goals and values (Berger, 2012). They are generally internally motivated and reflective. Leaders within organizations are generally found at this level of complexity; Berger (2012) warns that socialized leaders are also common within organizations; therefore, one should not assume a leader is self-authored simply due to their status, title or authority as a formal leader. Self-authored leaders try to make sense of the intricacies between cause and effect; though this "does not necessarily dissuade them from wanting to find the best answer and working away at that answer until it appears perfect" (p. 143).

Self-transforming Mind

Finally, stage five represents the self-transforming mind which, according to Berger (2012) is a much less common form of mind (one percent of adults). People in this stage are able to tune in to the diverse and various perspectives around them, seeing things in gray as opposed to black and white ; they are able to "hold even very different perspectives simultaneously" (Berger, 2012, p. 23). This form of mind is generally found in the later stages of life.

Self-transforming leadership. As an incredibly small percentage of adults demonstrate a self-transforming mind, it could be extrapolated that an even smaller number of leaders can be found to be self-transforming. Leaders at this stage are able to hold multiple perspectives, rendering them able to "find the larger patterns of agreement, disagreement, and multiple commonalities among the different groups" (Berger, 2012, p. 144).

Thus far, a picture of adult development has been presented which demonstrates the capacity of adults to transform to more complex ways of knowing in the world. For leaders who wish to grow to their maximum capacities, to get out of being 'in over their heads' (Kegan, 1994), and lead organizations towards success, they must develop higher orders of meaning-making in order to face adaptive challenges. The next section connects the dots between developmental theory and the impacts on leadership transformation and success.

Adult Development and Leadership: Connecting the Dots

Many theoretical and empirical findings have been published establishing a link between stages of adult development and leadership behavior (Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Kegan, 1994; McCauley et al., 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 1998; Torbert et al., 2004), specifically showing a strong correlation between those at higher stages of development (post-conventional) and

effective leadership outcomes. Those at higher stages of development are seemingly more equipped to confront ambiguity, complexity and change.

Research conducted by Rooke and Torbert (2005) found leaders who identified at later stage action logics were more effective at bringing about innovation and change than those at earlier action logics. According to McGuire, Palus and Torbert (2008), only those who have reached the Strategist action logic (a post-conventional form of mind) can truly bring about the conditions for transformation to occur (p. 126). Harris and Kuhnert (2007) found empirical evidence that higher levels of leadership development do positively impact effectiveness; specifically at the self-authoring/self-transforming level leaders were more effective in bringing about more complex organizational change.

Brown (2012) conducted an empirical study looking at how leaders with highly advanced forms of mind engaged with designing sustainability initiatives. In his research, leaders with the most complex, and rare, forms of mind engaged three practices of being, reflecting and engaging. The leaders represented six Strategists, five Alchemists, and two Ironists (all post-conventional forms of mind). Leaders embraced uncertainty, spirituality and accessed high order meaning to design from a deep foundation of being. In reflecting, leaders used intuition, complexity theory and other ways of knowing to inform their design practices. Lastly, leaders engaged in adaptive design management through creating spaces for development for self and others and dialogue with the system in order to continually adapt. These findings validate the power of constructive-developmental theory in explaining successful practices of leaders at later forms of mind. In these stages, leaders were able to enact their being, reflecting and engaging akin to adaptive leadership practices.

Kegan's (1982, 1994) claim that our society demands a self-authoring or higher form of mind has been evident in several research studies. It has been well documented that leaders at later stages of development are more effective in leading than those at earlier stages of development. What are not as researched are the processes of movement to later stages of development, within a leadership context. Vincent, Ward and Denson (2015) conducted a study to evaluate whether post-conventional consciousness could be cultivated through a community leadership program. Their findings suggest that programs designed from a developmentally informed framework, such as Manner's and Durkin's (2000) framework from promoting consciousness development, do have the ability to help individuals grow in their stages of development. Vincent, Ward and Denson (2015) looked at 335 adults enrolled into a standard community leadership program, an enhanced community leadership program or a control program. The enhanced programs included psychosocially challenging components such as community-focused group projects; professional individual coaching; psychological testing with feedback; peer assessment and feedback; case-in-point learning to develop adaptive leadership; personal case study work, and/or extended wilderness-based outward-bound experiences (Vincent, Ward & Denson, 2015). Findings from the study indicate the enhanced community leadership programs (designed to be psychologically rigorous) were effective in cultivating consciousness in participants from the first post-conventional stage of consciousness (Individualist) to the next stage of post-conventional consciousness (Strategist) (Vincent, Ward & Denson, 2015). The standard program and the control program both saw growth within the conventional tier (from Expert to Achiever) but not beyond Individualist stage (Vincent, Ward & Denson, 2015).

These findings are noteworthy in that they demonstrate how forward movement is experienced among the stages of development. Given the right conditions, structured to be developmentally challenging, adults can evolve in their meaning-making, and thus their leadership practices. All of the evidence seems to support three assumptions: late-stage leaders are more effective in practicing leadership; development can be supported given the right conditions; and movement in development is generally forward to higher levels of complexity.

Research suggests, both theoretically and empirically, that people can also choose to operate from earlier stages of making meaning, assuming they have navigated enough stages in order to be cognizant of this ability. For example, Joiner and Josephs' (2007) research on leadership agility found managers to have the ability to perform something called "downshifting," which is when managers intentionally choose to operate from an earlier stage of development when the situation requires it (Joiner, 2011, p. 142). This research shows that when people are aware of their situations, they can access different ways of making meaning to gain a particular outcome. However, there are situations in which people *unintentionally* downshift, or regress in their meaning-making abilities spurred by various triggers. Research within the last eight years suggests there is an unintentional movement backward in meaning-making called fallback, which is the phenomenon under study in this dissertation.

Finding Regression/Fallback

Thus far, constructive developmental theory has been discussed as a useful theory for understanding how adults make meaning throughout their lives. Given the right conditions, adults can grow in their ability to take perspective and handle complexity. The model of development espoused in this theory is hierarchical in nature, as models depict stages going from least complex to most complex ways of making meaning. Less identified are situations or ways

in which adult's regress in their meaning-making and behaving. A search of databases yielded very little information regarding regression or fallback in adult leaders. Empirical studies conducted to explore development via constructive-developmental frameworks have only briefly addressed regression in their findings. In a study conducted by Lewis, Forsythe, Sweeney, Bartone, Bullis and Snook (2005) regarding identity development during college (via West Point Longitudinal Study) most cadets began at Kegan's stage 2 or were in transition to stage 3; by their final year, most moved to stage 3 and some to the transitional space of 3-4. Two students were recorded as regressing over the college years, but no explanation was given. It is not known if this was a true regression in developmental state, or a temporary fallback period in which the interviewers caught the cadets in a period of challenge.

In Rooke and Torbert's (1998) longitudinal study on ten organization's transformations as a function of the developmental stages of the organization's CEO and their work with consultants, it was found that seven out of ten organizations successfully transformed in their size, profitability, quality strategy reputation and systems-logic in progressive directions as they worked with developmental coaches. Two organizations did not transform and one regressed. The three organizations that remained stagnant or regressed had CEOs who profiled at earlier action-logics, prior to Strategists. This study did not provide in-depth detail regarding the experience of the regression, other than the CEO who regressed did have a challenging time working with the consultant.

Other studies using constructive-developmental theory to evaluate and measure development also found regression to have occurred in their studies (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Manners, Durkin & Nesdale, 2004), however none elaborated on the duration, cause or description of the regression.

Thus far, the impetus for my study, and the only study to date that I can find which elaborates on the type of temporary regressive fallback I am interested in, is McCallum's (2008) dissertation on the learning of developmentally diverse adults at a group relations conference.

McCallum's Study

David McCallum's (2008) dissertation research explored the learning experiences of leaders enrolled in The Group Relations Experiential Learning Conference (GRC), sponsored by the Tavistock Institute and A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems. The purpose of the conference was to engage leaders in enacting their power, authority, leadership, freedom and accountability with the goal of transforming the ways in which they, as individuals and groups, operate (McCallum, 2008, p. 98). According to McCallum, the assumption regarding the GRC setting (as it is based on tenets of psychoanalytic theory) is that it provides participants with a holding environment in which to engage in learning and development; however, the developmental diversity of the participants had not been taken into account, which can and did greatly impact the type of holding environment and structures necessary for each person's learning and development. McCallum's study, therefore, was to understand how participants at different developmental stages (developmental diversity) experienced learning within the GRC setting.

The 18 leaders participating in McCallum's (2008) research profiled at various levels along the development spectrum (expert-3; achiever-9; individualist-5; strategist/alchemist-1). As the nature of the conference was purposefully challenging, a number of triggers showed up for the participants inciting fallback; a key finding of the study, and impetus for my own research, was that all 18 participants experienced some level of fallback during the conference., stemming from interpersonal conflict, feelings of anxiety caused by uncertainty, and feelings of

being overwhelmed by a multitude of perspectives (McCallum, 2008). Leaders in these situations reacted in ways that they normally would not have, for example some exerted extreme self-criticism; some shut down from situations, completely withdrawing; others became "agent[s] of rage" and exhibited hostility towards others (McCallum, 2008). These reactions correlated to earlier forms of mind for many of the participants. These behaviors and feelings impacted the study participants' abilities to show up as leaders and engage with the learning they set out to accomplish. Participants noted feeling like they were "catching themselves in terms of noticing themselves not being genuine, acting out of character, or feeling like they had temporarily forgotten their training, tools, and theoretical resources (knowing/doing gap)" (p, 145). Interestingly, McCallum's participants were able to notice their regression after a period of time, reflect upon it, and in some cases learn from it; leaders profiling at later stages of development were able to notice their fallback faster and adjust, and paradoxically experienced more frequent fallback than those participants at earlier stages of development. In some instances, leaders resorted to what McCallum referred to as maladaptive coping behaviors when confronted with complexity, anxiety, uncertainty, etc. They resorted to behavior consistent with their "comfort zone" and engage in self-protective behaviors, directly impacting their ability to learn and lead in the moment (pp. 128-129). McCallum's study was the first to articulate the experience of fallback and the implications for leadership behavior, namely that fallback can inhibit leaders' behavior and thinking in the moment, disabling them from reacting with their full potential in the moment.

A follow-up grounded theory study, conducted by Livesay (2013), attempted to ground the phenomenon of fallback as a distinct theory in and of itself. In interviewing key theorists in the field of leadership and adult development (including Jennifer Garvey Berger, Susanne Cook-

Greuter, Robert Kegan, David McCallum, Chuck Palus and Bill Torbert), it was concluded that

fallback need not be incorporated into its own theory, rather it is already a part of the

constructive-developmental theory we are already familiar with, although the perspective on

whether or how much the fallback is conscious or unconscious is still a gray area. Based on her

interviews with key thought leaders she concluded, "…fallback does exist, and it can be

accounted for in the existing developmental theory; it has the potential to play a significant role

in development, particularly with those at the post-conventional stages; and while it may seem to

be developmental decline in the moment, fallback involves developmentally springing forward"

(p. 266). A few of the key findings from Livesay's (2013, 2015) research include: the notion

that fallback has the potential to spur developmental growth in later developmental stages;

fallback is a paradoxically positive experience calling into contrast the beliefs, which some hold,

that developmental theory is hierarchical, forward-moving and unidirectional; and fallback is

caused by five types of triggers.

　　　In order to fully situate the type of regression, or fallback, under investigation in this

study, I created Table 2 as a way to visualize three contributing lines of thought to

regression/fallback. This table includes the construct of 'functional regression' developed by

Knefelkamp (1999), fallback as a finding from McCallum (2013) and fallback more deeply

explored by Livesay (2013).

Table 2

Operationalizations of Regressive Movement in Meaning-Making

Category/Scholar	Knefelkamp (1999)	McCallum (2008)	Livesay (2013)
Operationalization of Meaning-making	Action Thought Feeling Purpose Care	Cognitive Affective Behavioral	Thoughts Feelings Behavior
Core Audience	Adults (Graduate Students)	Adults	Adults
Trigger for Regression/Fallback	• New learning in new learning environment	• Interpersonal conflict • Anxiety brought on by uncertainty • Feelings of overwhelm by complexity of multiple perspectives	• Ordinary triggers • Physiological brain responses • Contextual "gravitational pulls" • Challenges to identity • Unresolved trauma

Looking across the themes of regression/fallback, it is important to understand how meaning-making is constructed across scholars. Meaning-making consists of, generally, how we think, how we feel and how we behave. Regression, or fallback, in how previous scholars have defined it at the level of adult meaning-makers, is generally triggered or caused by a stressor in one's context, whether that is a new environment, new challenge, uncertainty, how one's brain processes danger, any myriad other threats to certainty and current ways of making meaning of experience in the world. Of the three scholars who hold positions on types of regression or fallback germane to this study, Knefelkamp (1999), McCallum (2008) and Livesay (2013) have similar operationalizations of meaning-making and the instances and triggers of movement in meaning-making abilities.

Lengthy discussion occurred in Livesay's (2013) study among theorists as to what was/was not considered a characteristic of fallback. For example, Cook-Greuter stated that fallback could only occur if there was action being taken as a demonstration of fallback in meaning-making. In other words, a thought and/or feeling on its own could not constitute fallback if there was no action taken (p. 182). Berger, elaborated on her conceptualization of fallback and stated that,

> ...fallback occurs when one's perspective narrows, and one can contain only one idea for a time; when there is a loss of something that you would otherwise have access to. It is fallback if an earlier thought, feeling, or action exists in the absence of other thoughts, feelings, or actions. Stated differently, it's fallback if the earlier meaning you make is in isolation; if you lose the capacity to make meaning from your biggest Self (Livesay, 2013, p. 182).

Kegan, in conversation with Livesay (2013) characterized fallback as the inability, on a temporary basis, to distinguish and recognize how one is bringing themselves to a situation, or "showing up", and how one would otherwise like to "show up, to frame, to judge, and to have feelings about the experience from one's most complex self in a given moment" (Livesay, 2013, p. 198). Torbert added to Livesay's (2013) discussion by acknowledging the possibility that fallback could occur in one's thoughts alone, if that person were able to recognize those thoughts and correct course, but only in those who hold advanced action logics (p. 237).

In summary, bracketing fallback for the purposes of this study entails shifts in thinking, feeling and behaving that are inconsistent with a person's most advanced capability and is brought on by some type of stressor or triggering context that renders one unable to access their most advanced meaning-making capabilities.

Triggers of Fallback

Earlier in this chapter Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky's (2009) definition of being triggered was presented; they describe being triggered as instances of having someone "push your buttons" or "hit a nerve". In these instances, people tend to retreat to more self-protective and defensive modes of knowing, being and doing. A similar sentiment is described by researchers investigating fallback.

Livesay (2013, 2015) groups the causes of fallback into five categories: ordinary triggers, physiological brain responses, contextual gravitational pulls, challenges to identity and unresolved trauma. Ordinary triggers, as described by Torbert in his interview with Livesay (2013, 2015), includes "laziness, exhaustion, depression, group norms, stress, fear, tension, crisis, rage, shame, loss, overwork, failure, hunger, and jet lag" (Livesay, 2015, p. 182). Ordinary triggers, as detailed by McCallum include "circumstances of uncertainty, ambiguity,

complexity, and illness" (Livesay, 2015, p. 182). Challenges to identity may include new life experiences (divorce, death, etc), disorienting dilemmas, or major life events to name a few; while unresolved trauma can include strong pulls back to earlier developmental levels based on how unintegrated aspects of the self show up in habitual fallback patterns (Livesay, 2015).

Contextual gravitational pulls are described as pulls backward in one's development via contextual factors such as family relationships, organizations, and societies (Livesay, 2015). In his interview with Livesay (2013), Palus indicated people tend to reside, developmentally speaking, within the "least common denominator" of development when encapsulated in these contextual environments. Finally, physiological brain triggers include actual physical reactions the brain has to certain types of experience. The field of social neuroscience provides a perspective on the biological ways in which humans relate to each other and to themselves via certain social domains of human experience (Rock, 2008). Essentially, humans process information, such as social interactions, as rewards or threats; this is done within our brains as certain brain circuitry is activated (Rock, 2008). Rock (2008) states there are five domains of human social behavior which can be triggered in negative or positive ways (reward or threat). These domains are: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. These domains, when registered and processed as threats, elicit a response from an individual that can be quite similar to fight or flight (Rock, 2008), which, when extrapolated to developmental theory, potentially renders a person more susceptible to acting with their least complex form of mind, retreating back into security and habitual comfort zones.

Triggering fallback is something that Robert Kegan and his associates are currently doing with his work on deliberately developmental organizations, or DDOs (Livesay, 2013). In these organizations, individuals are deliberately triggered into fallback- to act out of control or in a

way that is unlike their normal behavior. Supportive structures are put in place, however, to

assist individuals in learning from their experiences, thus inciting a further developmental

movement in recognizing what is a fallback limitation or a growth edge (Livesay, 2013). Kegan

has explained the process as occurring in the following way:

> They're basically putting this in front of the person, and people get triggered.
> Okay, and you can call the way they behave falling back. Because, they do the
> things people do when they're triggered. They either fight, or they flee.
> Sometimes, they literally flee. One I watched on tape where the person just broke
> into tears, and just walked out of the room and slammed the door. But, usually
> it's a more psychological flight. They get very quiet. They become depressed.
> They feel embarrassed, and shame, and so on. (Livesay, 2013, pp. 203-4).

He further explains that once a person has had time to process the fallback, he or she realizes the

experience aided in their development and provided perspective on what was truly falling

backward and what was meeting up with one's growing edge (Livesay, 2013).

To summarize the current perspective on the phenomenon of fallback, developmental

theorists generally believe that once you have completed one stage of development, or

equilibrated to that stage, you cannot completely regress to an earlier stage without having a

perspective on that regression. An individual can, however, fallback into previous ways of

making-meaning and behaving via certain triggers. Thus, fallback is an unconscious,

unintentional, and temporary regression to an earlier way of making meaning; and it is possible

to recover from fallback and use that experience to grow in one's development. Taking a deeper

dive into the phenomenon, no empirical studies have been conducted to examine how leaders

recognize fallback and make sense of it in order to further their growth and development, particularly among leaders who are facing workplaces challenges such as leading change.

Summary

This study sought to fill the gap in the adult development knowledge base by exploring meaning-making fallback among leaders who were in the midst of leading through challenge and who were triggered to fallback in their meaning-making due to unique stressors within their contexts. Constructivist theories of adult development explain the movement associated with *developing* more complex ways of making meaning, of how adults show up in their meaning-making at any one point in time, however, they are far less robust in explaining and describing two points: (1) how adults can be triggered, unintentionally, and momentarily or temporally, into a type of meaning-making that reflects a much earlier form of mind and (2) what the reciprocal effect of falling back in one's meaning-making ability is on the practice of leadership and how leaders show up in moments of great challenge and complexity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine and deeply understand the concept of fallback and how fallback influenced, if at all, leaders' abilities to lead within their organizations. The research questions guiding this qualitative study were:

3. What is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders?

4. How, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?

This chapter will describe the methodological elements of the study including methodological paradigm, research design, sample selection, methods of data generation, data analysis, rigor of the research, researcher subjectivity, and strengths and limitations of the study.

Design of the Study

This was a multi-interview qualitative study, grounded in a constructivist perspective. The research design I crafted was a three interview process, using phenomenological interviewing techniques through which to gain information on participant's experiences of and meaning-making around fallback. A developmental assessment, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), was included in the three interview approach which determined participants' forms of mind and served as an interview method, an elicitation device, and a data analysis tool.

Qualitative Research

This research study was especially suited for qualitative inquiry because it deeply explored the concept of fallback from the perspectives of eight mid- to senior-level leaders who were dealing with some type of complex challenge or change (interpersonal, intrapersonal or

organizational) in their work settings. Qualitative research methods were necessary for this study in order to obtain the depth and richness of data needed to understand leaders' constructed realities of their fallback experiences and how those experiences influenced their practice of leadership.

The aim of qualitative research, according to Merriam (2002), is to "understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective" (p. 6). To understand the participant's perspectives requires a researcher, or inquirer, to have formed a belief as to how individuals make meaning of the world, or an epistemological belief. The epistemological belief undergirding this study was that of constructivism. Constructivism is rooted in the belief that knowledge is transactional and subjectivist whereby the inquirer and the participant interact to create knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As presented in the previous chapter, the theoretical foundation of this study was based on constructive-developmental theories of adult growth and development, specifically Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory. This theory describes how adults make meaning of their life worlds emotionally, cognitively, interpersonally and intrapersonally. This stage-based theory is constructive, in that it is "concerned with the way each person creates her world by living it" (Berger, 2012, p. 15); and it is developmental in that it is "concerned with the way that construction changes over time to become more complex and multifaceted" (Berger, 2012, p. 15). Thus, adults are capable, given the right structures and supports, to qualitatively shift their ways of knowing, being and doing in the world, through and across increasingly complex stages.

I also employed an interpretivist lens so that I could understand how the participants constructed their realities and experiences. Schwandt (2000) describes interpretivism as "an intellectual process whereby a knower (inquirer) gains knowledge about an object (meaning of

human action)" (p. 193-194). Glesne (2011) states, "from an interpretivist perspective, you are not seeking to elucidate the 'truth' of a setting or situation since you believe in no underlying reality, but rather you are trying to understand the multiple perspectives available" (p. 47). The constructivist and interpretivist lenses enabled me to craft a qualitative study that truly sought to understand the multiple realities experienced by the pool of research participants.

Multi-interview Design

According to deMarrais (2004), qualitative interviews are useful for obtaining "in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences" (p. 52). Therefore, I used an in-depth, multi-interview research design to generate information from and with the leader participants in this study on their experiences of fallback, as well as how fallback influenced or did not influence, their abilities to lead. The design I crafted enabled me to explore deeply the meaning-making capacities of my participants as well as their interpretations of their experiences in falling back while leading in their organizations.

I employed a three interview process in an effort to gain breadth and depth of data to understand the phenomenon of fallback. The process began with a Subject-Object Interview (SOI), an assessment interview which used probes to deeply explore the meaning-making capacity of leaders in the study. The following two interviews were fallback-specific interviews in which I elicited (either from conversations during the SOI or based upon a new set of probes) information about specific instances when leaders felt they had experienced a type of fallback in their meaning-making and thus their leadership. The three interview process allowed me to build incredible rapport with the participants and several (seven out of eight participants) described how they felt comfortable in the process and were appreciative of the time to reflect and discuss and learn something new about themselves.

It is necessary to mention here that I did not conduct a purely phenomenological study, per se. I used phenomenological techniques to obtain information on participant's experiences, as according to Patton (2002), "one can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experiences" (p. 107). Thus, I used phenomenological tools, like asking interview questions about lived experience, without using phenomenology to justify my qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002) philosophically.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of fallback and how fallback influenced leaders' abilities to lead, particularly in the face of complexities in the workplace. In the initial phases of study development, I intended to seek leaders who were leading change within their organizations; this proved to be a bit too specific for the study in that several recruitment conversations informed me that leading change was either a) hard to ascertain as people viewed change very differently from one to the other, and b) potential recruits were hesitant to discuss the change process as it was unfolding (perhaps due to the vulnerability and/or volatility of the situation, or because of perceived potential exposure of the worksite). Because my a priori assumption all along was that *challenge* would be a catalyst for fallback, I altered my selection criteria to find leaders who were engaged in challenge, in hopes that would lead to exploration of fallback in meaning-making and behavior. I found it challenging to convey to potential participants what I was studying as fallback isn't a well-known phenomenon in leadership and organizational circles, and having never had a study about the phenomenon previously; there was really nothing to point to as an example.

Participants. Eight leaders completed the study. I piloted the process with one participant and subsequently recruited seven more participants to complete the three interview study process. Leaders in this study were mid- to senior-level leaders who had been working professionally for at least five years (though they did not have to be working in a specific workplace contiguously). I chose mid- to senior-level participants because that seemed to be, anecdotally, where much of the work of leading challenge and complexity seemed to occur. I chose participants with work histories of five years or more because I believed that to be a necessary length of time for a person to have accumulated work experience and formed a perspective on their practice of leadership. Further, the participants had to be able and willing to articulate their experiences as a leader in such a way that we could explore the concept of fallback together. I was struck by how accepting and open the participants were to participate in this study, particularly as I was asking about times when they may not have been at their peak performance. This could have been because some had experience with leadership coaches or because some were familiar with the doctoral dissertation process and understood the nature of research and/or because I was putting myself out there as someone who really wanted to listen, and learn, and contribute to what we know about how we process information and show up as leaders.

Recruitment. Participants were recruited via network sampling. Seidman (2013) advises that it is preferable to gain access to participants via their peers as opposed to "people 'above' or 'below' them in their hierarchy" (p. 49). I began by contacting my own peers via my professional network who referred colleagues who they believed to be a good fit for recruitment screening and selection. I contacted colleagues in my professional network via direct email, through direct emails within the social media outlet LinkedIn, and through direct phone calls (see

Appendix A and B for recruitment letter and phone script). I chose LinkedIn as one recruitment tool as it was a method for me to reach some of my professional network while enabling me to receive a more diverse study sample geographically and organizationally. Invitation emails were sent to contacts in my networks and were worded in such a way that snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002) could have occurred by encouraging email recipients to share the invitation with otherwise qualified professional connections. Phone calls to potential participants were also used as a means to recruit participants. None of my network contacts or study participants referred me to potential participants who were their direct supervisors or direct supervisees.

Upon contact with potential participants, I used a follow-up recruitment conversation, via telephone, determine goodness of fit between the potential participant and the eligibility criteria. This screening conversation included asking and answering questions on: work history, self-described level of employment (mid-level at minimum); and an awareness and ability to articulate experiences that could be considered fallback (ex. moments of not showing as their best self, times where they felt paralyzed by decisions, feeling incongruent with who they were as a leader). When participants were deemed a fit for the study, I followed up to schedule interviews and conduct the informed consent process. In all, I contacted roughly 45 individuals (via my direct contacts and via snowball referrals) to either request referrals to my study, or to screen for enrollment.

Data Generation Methods

Over the course of ten months, I recruited and conducted rich, personal interviews with eight leaders, each bringing their own unique selves, experiences and meaning-making capacity to our conversations. Data was generated from a 60-90 minute cognitive-developmental assessment (Subject-Object Interview); two follow-up in-depth interviews approximately 60

minutes in length; member checks with the participants when necessary; and researcher memos. Interviews were slated for two or three week intervals in between sessions, however, because I was working with leaders who were busy and experiencing life while my study was being conducted, our timelines sometimes went a bit longer (at times 4 weeks) between data collection visits to accommodate work travel and other life events that presented themselves in the lives of the research participants. The sequence of data collection events is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection Method	Timeframe
Subject Object Interview	Initial Data Collection Interview
Interview (2)	2-3 weeks post SOI
Interview (3)	2-3 weeks post Interview (2)
Member Checks	Built in/Ongoing as appropriate

Interview Series

The purpose of the three-interview structure was to ensure that I was capturing as much information about the participants' experiences and contexts as possible. Thus, using the three-interview series enabled me to establish rapport, establish the contextual nature of the phenomenon under study, and establish how the participant was making meaning of their experiences. Seidman (2013), who also employs a type of three-interview process (a bit differently from this study's process), says that the utility of the structure of multiple interviews

is that "each interview provides a foundation of detail that helps illumine the next" (Seidman, 2013, p. 23).

      Subject-Object Interview. For the purposes of this study, as aforementioned, the first interview with participants was the 60-90 minute Subject-Object Interview. The Subject-Object Interview is a rich developmental assessment based on Kegan's (1982) theory of subject-object development (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 2011). The Subject-Object Interview (SOI) is a 60-90-minute interview which has dual purposes; it is both a tool to assess where one might fall on the spectrum of meaning-making (how his/her subject-object structures are constructed), and it is also a qualitative interview tool which can give a researcher much insight into how and what the participant is feeling, thinking and doing. The SOI allows the researcher to explore deeply with the participant their meaning-making structures by providing ten prompts for participants to choose to respond to: angry, success, sad, moved/touched, change, anxious/nervous, strong stand/conviction, torn, lost something, and important to me (see Appendix D for SOI protocol). The responses and reactions to the prompts enable the interviewer to probe for the meaning-making structures, or epistemology, of the participant. I used the SOI and modified it to fit my study by asking each person to think of the prompts in the context of their position as a leader at work. This conversation was meant to elicit deep conversation about the ways each participant constructed their complexity of meaning-making with regard to their role as a leader while also eliciting information on what might be happening in their work context that was challenging, supporting, interesting or relevant.

      For example, I would ask the participant to use their context as a leader in their organization to respond to the prompt, enabling me to capture their meaning-making in their role as leader. I administered and scored (analyzed line-by-line) the transcript to evaluate where the

participant resided on the developmental spectrum based on the method of analysis in looking for meaning-making structures within the dialogue (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Feliz, 2011). I was qualified as a reliable scorer based on training I received in the subject-object interview process which emanated from a series of trainings in developmental theory, coaching and how to administer an and score a subject-object interview, and use the results as a coaching tool (for this research, the coaching tool was omitted from the process).

      Scoring the SOI. Before moving ahead, it is worthy and necessary to add a note regarding the sheer complexity and challenge of undertaking this study. First, putting one's self in a position to understand and interpret another's meaning-making schema is daunting at best. Creating the conditions by which another being allows you to probe and deeply understand him or her as a sense maker is vulnerable, it is messy and it is a gift. Meaning-making is extremely personal, complex, fluid and rigid. It is fraught with contradictions, subjectivities, and lenses. While one can never truly extrapolate another's constructions, getting close enough to try to interpret them requires patience, time and compassion. The Subject-Object interview is a type of assessment, in which Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, and Felix (2011) state, "An assessment is a snapshot capturing a moment of an ongoing process" (p. 25). The subject-object relationship and the categories used to distinguish them are both differentiated and related to each other (p. 25). The unit of analysis within Subject-Object Interviews is the structure of meaning-making found within the discourse of the participants' descriptions of and reflections on events. The fundamental unit of analysis is the meaning-making around the question of, "from where in the evolution of the subject-object relations are the person's meaning generated? (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 2011, p. 7). This is contrasted with content of conversations, such that content is found at the level of story- the details, the back-story of a

situation, or a reaction or a thought. What is "subject" is a persons' principle of organization; it cannot be reflected upon and we are subject to it and subject others to it in how we construct them (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 8). What is "object" is what people can talk about, what they can take perspective on, what they have internalized and what they can control, be responsible for and know about (p. 9). In order to assess structure, I used line-by-line simultaneous coding and analysis to analyze the conversation and meaning-making structure of participants, listening and looking for evidence of how the participant formed the thought, what was the best/worst thing about the situation, what other perspectives could have been at play in the context, how they constructed "psychological responsibility", and how they held boundaries of thought, for example, what were their own processes of meaning-making and where did they project onto others or make external attributions (p. 10).

For example, Lindsay who scored at transitional 3/4 stage discussed what was impacting her feelings of "is this the right job for me" by questioning herself and asking "…again, it gets back to were you successful? Was the team, were they able to achieve things? ... I think that sense of loss is also weighing in right now". This content of her thoughts reveals the situation and context she found herself in, and how she may have been seeking validation of external authority. When listening further, the structure of her thoughts sound different, as Lindsay revealed where her torn-ness with her subjectivities and objectivities were coming to light with regard to how she had been constructing her identity and sense of meaning:

> ... that might be why am I torn, because my identity was I led a highly-effective team, we
> were very successful in our accomplishments. We worked together to overcome the
> challenges, we were very close, well-oiled kind of a machine, which was my identity,
> because that was Lindsay's team. I had the go-to team. If something was wrong, give it to

Lindsay's team; not Lindsay, but Lindsay's team. Now, you're right, so my identity has

changed. Now I need to redefine success for my new identity.

In Joey's case, a participant with stage 4(3) form of mind, an example of content would be when

he described his feelings of importance of his position, "...when you get to the level of where I'm

at, which is in essence, CIO, Chief Information Officer, you want to have that impact on the

business. You want to have the influence on the business. That's the success criteria…" When

listening for the structure of his meaning-making, one can begin to see how he is constructing the

meaning of his self and how he is subject to his own authorship:

It's more about how am I influencing success and the furthering of our mission ... What I

value most is putting people in the right positions for their success...I've passed the stage

where my individual accomplishment is going to move me forward...It's orchestrating an

organization that runs well, that provides value back to the rest of the organization...I've

been very selective on where I go, and making sure that it's some place that it's a mission

that I believe in. So that I can actually impact the mission.

Artie, a self-authored knower with some shades of self-transforming knowing starting to emerge-

4(5)-, discussed his relationship to the concept of ownership and his thoughts on lifelong

learning, "to what degree can you learn from whatever you're going through? And, are you

owning your life to the greatest extent possible". He shows the beginnings of taking on a holistic

perspective of his self and making fine distinctions in his objectivity and subjectivity when he

began elaborating on accepting the many versions of his self and situating his life in context to

the whole of what life encompasses with life and death:

That doesn't mean control my life. Making peace and owning with where you are, the

good things you're doing, the efforts you're making, the mistakes you have made and the

fallout of those mistakes... I think ownership for me is an important concept, personally, because it's about being responsible. It's about not taking things for granted. It's about being present. Because that's what it is when you start to see your parents dying... Everybody here just about, that I'm around, parents are getting older, or they have died...I guess I'm saying is, it's about making peace with where you are.

The scoring process of the SOI is one in which the scorer must honor the various distinctions that could exist in the evolution from one stage to another; there are twenty-one distinctions that can be made in the evolution from one stage to another (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 26). To begin, stages of complete equilibrium are designated with one whole (X) number (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). The disequilibrial positions, the evolutionary points in the movement between stages (X and Y), are designated as X(Y), X/Y, Y/X, Y(X). The movement can be seen as the subject/object relationship transforming in organizing structure, having more subjective or objective dominance as meaning-making transforms. For example, 3 / 4 is a transition in new structure emerging; whereas 4 / 3 sees the structure of 4 ruling the subject-object transition. The 4(3) stage sees structure of 4 dominating, with some vestiges of the old structure 3 still hanging on a bit.

If one were to imagine the range of developmental meaning-making stages as a color wheel, ranging from the first stage (impulsive mind) to at least stage five (self-transforming mind), with various shades of color represented in between (Berger, 2014), depicting the nuances of full-stage meaning-making to stages of transition, to stages where the disequilibrium is favoring a stage behind or a stage beyond, you would see the constructions of the participants' meaning-making stages exposed as their own particular shade of color along the spectrum. Even as some of the participants scored in the same stage, or range, they expressed their meaning-

making and complexity of thought in nuanced, personalized ways, shining a light on how granular and context-specific a person's meaning-making can be.

While not entirely unexpected, the developmental diversity of the participants seemed to stay in a fairly tight range between stages 3 (socialized) and 4(5) (self-authoring/self-transforming). This is aligned with the literature which states that the majority of our population has reached at least stage 3 to stage 4 thinking, with more transformational leaders having reached stage 4 and beyond (Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Kegan, 1994; Rook & Torbert, 2005). The participants' contextual backgrounds and experiences in leading within organizations were diverse, and spanned decades of experiences. Table 4 details the participants' developmental score, as well as their gender, age and employment agency.

Table 4

Participant Profiles

Name	SOI	Gender	Age	Organization
Barbara	3	Female	48	Non-Profit
Lindsay	3/4	Female	53	IT Industry
Joey	4(3)	Male	53	IT Industry
Corey	4	Male	37	Pastoral
Gerry	4	Male		IT Industry
Samuel	4	Male	64	Non-Profit
Rudy	4(5)	Male	57	Government
Artie	4(5)	Male	43	University

Fallback interviews. The second and third interviews involved exploring with the participant the details of fallback experiences. In these interviews, I was able to probe specifically about fallback experiences at work and follow up on experiences that were illumined in the SOI. These interviews allowed me to go deeper or in a different direction to determine where the leader was experiencing instances of potential fallback. It was challenging to find the different ways in to the conversation about fallback with several of the participants. Because I asked participants to discuss situations or moments that perhaps they had not realized were fallback, I needed to get creative in my quality of question-asking. A metaphor arose with a participant, Joey, in which we discussed his backstage or behind the curtain self (much akin to the Wizard in the Wizard of Oz), the leader self that is afraid to show up or that has trouble coming out front and center, contrasted with the center stage, up-front and out there leader who is welcomed by colleagues and is operating efficiently and effectively. This seemed to be a good way in to the conversation on fallback and what that looked like in terms of leadership thinking and behaving.

Member checks were built in to these interviews as I summarized what I had heard during our previous interview and gave participants opportunities to react and correct me before we began down our next path of questioning. These interviews also probed for the impact of the fallback experiences and how those may or may not have had an effect on the participants' leadership. I was able to internally triangulate with the data obtained via the SOI interviews to evaluate whether there were inconsistencies in how participants were thinking and behaving in their fallback moments as compared to their developmental score.

Interview Coding and Analysis. After the Subject-Object Interviews (SOIs) were conducted, I followed up with participants for two additional interviews. These interviews

allowed me to probe further any fallback experienced by the leaders and their interpretations, their learning and any potential regression or growth that emanated from their experiences. The interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms replaced the participant's names and any other identifying information such as place of business. I uploaded the transcripts into ATLAS.ti 8.0 to assist with the organization of inductive and deductive coding of the data. I also utilized Excel tables to organize code groups by color as I am a visual learner and this was more helpful to me to see patterns given my level of comfort with using Excel. I then used that information to conduct thematic analysis of the data.

According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), a rigorous qualitative study can be conducted using a thematic analytical approach that is balanced in its thematic coding between "deductive coding (derived from the philosophical framework) and inductive coding (themes emerging from participant's discussions)" (p. 91). As I was working heavily within a theoretical framework, while also exploring for new and emergent thematic data, I used both approaches to encoding the data. The data encoding process was multi-layered and is described in the following sections.

Deductive coding. My approach to data coding and analysis began by looking at the first research question to determine what was fallback and how did participants experience it. Saldana (2013) suggests using generic approaches to coding and analyzing data while remaining open to amending the methods if sufficient data is not generated by the initial approaches. I followed this approach first, and began by conducting modified holistic coding through a deductive lens. Holistic coding is typically used when the researcher is already attuned to what to investigate; it is also used when there are vignettes or episodes to be explored (Saldana, 2013).

Because I had an idea of what to look for regarding the subject-object relationship, and the types of situations, triggers, and language to look for regarding fallback from the existing literature, I had an idea of what to initially look for in holistically coding the data for any themes around the nature and experience of fallback. This approach was also appropriate as fallback episodes had been shown in the literature to exist within episodic time frames, thus making the data readily available or holistic coding.

I approached this level of data coding by reading through the data and reading through my researcher memos to "chunk" the text into topic areas where I believed fallback was occurring in the subject-object relationships and why (Saldana, 2013; Bazeley, 2007), for example I coded certain parts of the transcript as "4 falling into 3" or "slipping into 3" to indicate that parts of the conversation were demonstrating a potential fallback area. This provided a road-map of sorts in order to dive into the next level which was looking at topics of the fallback such as "new job", "conflict" and "shadow self". This approach allowed me to track where fallback appeared, as triangulated with the SOI data, and the specific points of interest within the context of where, how and why fallback was occurring.

Inductive coding. With my deductive lens set aside, I did another reading of the data, keeping in mind both research questions, and employed an inductive lens, to code the data accordingly. This round of coding was more descriptive in nature and was used to explore the topical areas of fallback and how participants were describing the outcomes of fallback in their practice of leadership. I listed the codes per participant and looked at the codes together to see where overlap occurred. I also employed frequency counts to determine if there were any patterns among the codes. The number of codes for each participant ranged from 39 to 154. I then did another round of focused coding to create code categories (Saldana, 2013), which

yielded 36 categories of codes. I conducted frequency counts within and among participants to display how often each code group was appearing for each participant.

Data Analysis

Data coding and analysis for this study was multi-layered. Data were coded in three different ways. First, the Subject-Object Interviews were coded and analyzed using the formalized method for analysis associated with the subject-object relations theory by looking for structure of meaning-making and scoring the participant based on where they fell within Kegan's (1984, 1992) stages. Second, the data from the follow-up interviews were coded deductively, and analyzed theoretically to determine if fallback occurred in the participants' meaning-making according to what is known about fallback from Kegan's theory (1984, 1992), and the two research studies which preceded this one (McCallum, 2008; Livesay, 2013). Lastly, the data were coded inductively and analyzed thematically in order to find common themes within the participants' accounts of fallback which augmented the theoretical underpinnings or illuminated additional perspectives of fallback experiences. The following sections will describe how I analyzed the data within the SOI assessments and the two follow up interviews.

Thematic Analysis

The utility of thematic analysis is that it is both broad enough and can be specific enough to capture what is occurring within the data on a theoretical basis and/or emergent basis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis "...is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can be used to do different things within them" (p.81). Making my theoretical position explicit (that of constructive-developmental theory), I conducted thematic analysis on both a theoretical basis (via deductive coding) and on an emergent basis (via

inductive coding) using my research questions as a line of sight, so to speak, to guide the analysis.

After encoding the data, I analyzed the codes into groups in order to reduce the data into conceptual elements followed by categories (Roulston, 2010). I then engaged in a form of thematic analysis at what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as the latent level, which is going "beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations- and ideologies- that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84). In this way, I was able to engage my interpretive lens, engage the constructive developmental theory, and develop themes through analysis that was more than description and included a theoretical bent (Braun and Clark, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 10). Because I had no a priori disposition as to how fallback would or could have impacted the behaviors or thinking of leaders in this particular context, I developed a process of reading and re-reading the data and codes to uncover potential themes related to the practice outcomes of the fallback situations. This level of analysis involved looking at my interpretations of the data via researcher memos and summaries of the practice challenges in order to see the level of theme on the coding process to elicit information on outcomes of the fallback experiences.

Looking at the data and the themes which emerged allowed me to see the unique threads of fallback experiences, and of contextual factors, within and across participants. Using a thematic approach to data analysis allowed me to capture what fallback looked like, sounded like and how it was experienced among participants. Thematic analysis also allowed me to capture

emergent findings in the data which allowed for more nuanced information as to how fallback impacted leaders and their practice of leadership. The final themes and sub-themes are presented in chapter four with attention to the thick, rich descriptions of how participants experienced fallback and how it impacted their practice of leadership as a result. Text from the interviews and data from my interpretations set the stage for describing the themes which emerged from the data generation and analysis process.

Quality and Rigor

According to Tracy (2010), there are eight guiding principles of ensuring qualitative quality which are (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence (p. 839). Tracy (2010) suggests there are various ways a researcher can craft their path through which to achieve quality and rigor.

This study presents a worthy topic as understanding how adults make meaning and experience shifts in their meaning-making is significant to the scholarship of adult development, adult education and leadership studies. Tracy (2010) states, "research that is counterintuitive, questions taken-for-granted assumptions, or challenges well-accepted ideas is often worthwhile" (p. 840). As the stage-based constructive-developmental theory is typically taken for granted as mostly static and unidirectional in some instances, this research presented a way to trouble the waters of how meaning-making is experienced and whether falling back into earlier ways of making-meaning was an experienced phenomenon among leaders in their work contexts. In addition, examining how meaning-making shifts, particularly in the context of a potentially triggering situation such as engaging in leadership and confronting complexity and challenge, is

salient to how the theory of adult meaning-making is applied in practice settings such as executive coaching and training and development, to name a few.

This study has rich rigor as constructive-developmental theory was applied throughout the research and data collection process. The length of time (three interviews each) spent with each participant reflected an engagement that was intentional and carefully crafted to ensure enough data to address the research questions at hand thoroughly. Because this study relied on a specific type of participant and contextual background, care was taken to ensure that workplace and leadership responsibilities were reflected in the participant selection. Sincerity, what Tracy (2010) describes as "transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles…" (p. 841) is captured in my reflexivity and subjectivity statement discussed later in this section.

Credibility was obtained via member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with my participants by building in conversational member-checks, when appropriate, at the start of follow-up interviews by summarizing what I had heard in our previous sessions, and what I had written in my researcher memos, in order to give participants an opportunity to correct, revisit or confirm what I had summarized. This allowed for a real-time conversation and co-construction of the data so that the participants had a voice in how the data were being interpreted. I also sent participants a participant profile to ensure I was capturing and interpreting participants' contexts and meaning-making profiles in accurate ways from the SOI data and contextual data from their interviews; I shared the data with participants and invited feedback and dialogue about what I had interpreted and written (most, but not all, responded to the email to confirm what had been written about their context and their process of making meaning). Based upon the feedback from participants related to their profiles, they were extremely pleased by how well their thoughts, feelings, behaviors and experiences were captured at the holistic, overall developmental level.

I also engaged with another reliable SOI scorer to obtain interrater reliability in the developmental assessment scores. The reliable SOI scorer provided feedback on two SOI interviews in order to corroborate the developmental score. Data obtained from the SOI, along with the additional fallback interview transcripts, was used to triangulate the developmental assessment score. In triangulating this information, I was able to determine if there was reliability and validity between the developmental score and the actual thinking and behaving described by the participants in subsequent interviews. Thick descriptions of the participants' experiences and excerpts from the interviews in the representation of the data will describe how interpretations of fallback were discovered, uncovered and brought to light.

My aim in achieving resonance, or being able to affect an audience with meaningful data and story-telling (Tracey, 2010, p. 844) is hopefully captured in chapter four where I reveal the stories of eight leaders who shared their experiences of falling back in their way of thinking and behaving at times, which could and goes happen to most of us while we are at work. It is my belief that readers will see a part of themselves in each of the participants, and will resonate with the feelings, actions and thinking of the leaders in the study. Meaningful coherence, or "ensuring that the study hangs together well" (Tracy, 2010, p. 848), was achieved through weaving the theoretical foundation of constructive-developmental theory throughout the study, situating the findings in the appropriate reviewed literature and connecting the data to the research questions and to the implications of the study.

Lastly, the informed consent process attended to the ethical considerations of the study, and enabled research participants to become aware of the risks and benefits of participating in research, in addition to the study purpose, scope and activities associated with obtaining information (Patton, 2002). The informed consent process is the process by which participants

are asked to read and sign a consent form acknowledging that they understand all of the aspects

of the study, including protections of their privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix C for

informed consent document). Confidentiality of identity and of information, in this study, were

afforded to each research participant in several ways. I assigned participants a pseudonym which

was used in my data collection files, notes and when cleaning the transcripts. A master file with

the participant's real name and assigned pseudonym was kept in an electronic password-

protected document on a secure computer. The audio recordings were downloaded and kept in a

password-protected file on a secure computer. The audio recordings were transcribed and any

identifiable information was scrubbed and replaced with pseudonyms for the participant and their

places of work.

Role as Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher takes on a role which ultimately influences the

collection, selection and interpretation of data (Finlay, 2002, 531). The mere notion of doing

qualitative research within a constructivist, interpretive paradigm means that as a researcher I

was part of the research, co-constructing in some ways the knowledge to be discovered.

Acknowledging this and feeling this were two different experiences for me. I knew going into

the research process that the researcher is an influential part of the process and must attend to his

or her biases, subjectivities and intersubjectivities. Reflection, or thinking about something after

it has happened (Finlay, 2002, p. 532), allowed me to examine how I was bringing myself to the

research after each interview, whether my approach was thorough enough, whether I was

creating a holding space for the participants to feel comfortable and trusting towards me. This

was a painful experience at times as I began to feel pulled back into perfectionist thinking. At

times, my reflection got in the way of my progress as I stalled at the thought of going about

qualitative research incorrectly. In processing this externally, with advisors, I came to realize that this was the mark of a researcher who was attending to the trustworthiness of the research process and learning my way through rather than icing myself out. In addition to reflective activities of infrequent memo writing and, more frequently, external processing, I also engaged in reflexive practice.

Reflexivity is considered a moment-to-moment dynamic self-awareness of actively constructing interpretations of experience (Finlay, 2002; Hertz, 1997). In this vein, I became very aware of how I was reacting to my relationship with each participant in the moment. Many times, participants' stories moved me and I felt compelled to hold or nurture the conversation; at other times, I felt the moments where deep probing was necessary as I felt deeper meaning was looming under the surface of me and my participants' discussions. In my particular study, I was also tuning my ears towards how my own meaning-making structures were influencing my questioning or my reaction to the stories my participants were sharing with me. I tried to use my most complex filters to understand where I might be hearing or reading a part of the conversation in a more socialized or self-authored or self-transformative way, and how that was being reflected back to me in the moment. Several of the participants' stories were familiar to my own experience, and I found myself processing that in the moment as I was conversing with the participants. In one instance, I felt so moved by a participant's story that it felt appropriate to share my own similar experience in the moment. Afterward, participant Gerry commented on how he appreciated my story as it made him feel more comfortable and trusting towards me and the research process. This was a measured move as I did not believe it would have affected the process of obtaining data from Gerry or any other participant. My intentions in reflection and reflexivity were to be aware of my subjectivities and fallbacks constantly, and using that as a gift

with which to enhance my analysis and presentation of the data in a way that was reflective of the process.

Subjectivity Statement

Throughout the data collection and analysis process of this research, I made an intentional move to be aware of my own subjectivities. The concept of fallback is personal. As I have come to understand through my own experiences, and in the experiences of others, fallback is a normal part of the meaning-making process. I have felt and experienced my own fallback moments, which, upon further reflection, have led to my growth and development in some small form or fashion. For example, I can vividly recount a common fallback move that I am subject to, which I am working on, which falls within the socialized meaning-making form of mind when I encounter senior faculty, or authoritative figures, whom I perceive as needing to please. This thinking, and subsequent behavior, leads me into retreat- to having a 'good daughter' frame of mind whereby I feel the need to prove myself, placate others and make everyone happy.

As colleagues more senior or experienced to me question my decisions with great consternation, I begin feeling triggered, almost panicked, in my responses. I retreat in the moment to people-pleasing and fail to take up my own self-authored voice and perspective. I begin to think in dichotomies of they are 'right' and I am 'wrong,' even though I am sometimes the one in the 'right'! My fallback begins with physiological responses, indicating something is wrong. Danger. I feel hot, heart beating quickly and a type of anxiety overwhelms me. I needed to 'fix' whatever needs fixing in the moment. What I end up missing in these interactions is an opportunity to take up my own voice, to take up my own perspective in discussing how to lead a project in a better way, for example, or to address problems that needed addressing, and generally being an advocate for myself.

It is because of my own experiences of falling back to more socialized, and even dualistic, moments of making meaning that I believe I empathized with my research participants as they recounted their own fallback experiences. Because the feelings, the emotions, the thinking, are so familiar to me, I believe I listened in such a way that I was able to understand or at least have perspective on the situations in which my participants found themselves.

Strengths and Limitations

Engaging with the participants for multiple interviews (three each) was a strength in this study in that I was able to dive deep into the experiences of the leaders in order to capture various data points related to meaning-making and fallback. The nature of the study required a trust-building phase, and I believe I accomplished that in the way that I engaged participants in a safe conversation space in which they felt well held and able to dive into aspects of their meaning-making and leadership behavior that they had not explored previously. Being able to triangulate a developmental score with subsequent interviews was a strength in that I was able to provide a holistic view of how the fluidity in meaning-making (fallback) occurred in relation to the most complex capacity I was able to elicit from the participants. Additionally, I believe the criteria for selection into the study was strong as I believe readers and future researchers will be able to hear and imagine themselves in the study participants' accounts and feel that we are more alike than we are different.

There were several limitations of this study that should be considered. First, the participants in the study were likely not representative of diverse racial backgrounds. I did not explicitly ask participants to disclose their race, however observational and anecdotal data reveal that my participant pool was primarily, if not all, Caucasian. This is important because a more diverse sample may have yielded richer data as to the cultural impacts of fallback on meaning-

making from a diverse racial/ethnic perspective. Second, because the majority of participants in my study were male (n=6), this presented an imbalance in the female voice. While several female leaders were contacted and invited to participate, only two agreed and were able to move ahead with the study. Given that much research on leadership is also skewed towards the male gender, given the predominant number of males in leadership roles (de la Rey, 2005), this represents a limitation in how we understand how women and other genders experience leadership according to their meaning-making capabilities. Third, the developmental diversity of the participants in the study was also limiting in that I did not do a screening assessment of developmental stage beforehand, and thus was not able to assess whether leaders at earlier (self-sovereign) or later (fully self-transforming and beyond) stages of development, outside of the general socialized and self-authoring space, experienced fallback in similar or different ways. Finally, the original intent of the study was to catch leaders as they were experiencing fallback in the moment. This proved to be extremely difficult given the time and resources available. I had to rely on leaders to reflect back to me their experiences, thus potentially encountering recall bias.

Summary

This chapter provided a deep dive into the design, structure, and process of conducting this study. Based in the qualitative tradition, this study sought to elicit data related to the concept of fallback among leaders who were engaged with challenge and complexity within their organizations. A multi-interview design structure was employed and participants were deeply engaged with me for three interviews about their meaning-making and leadership. A developmental assessment, the Subject-Object Interview, was used as well as semi-structured interviews to elicit information from participants about their experiences. Thematic analysis, at

both the theoretical and emergent levels, yielded rich data related to the nature of fallback and

the impact fallback had on leader's practice of leadership.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how leaders experienced a phenomenon called fallback, specifically as they were engaged in leading challenges within their organizations. This chapter will detail the findings from interviews with eight leaders, working and leading in the U.S. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders?

2. How, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?

As this study was built upon two previous studies by McCallum (2008) and Livesay (2013), it empirically grounded the concept of fallback by exploring with leaders the nature and quality of fallback, and how leaders' were impacted by experiences of fallback in the workplace. To date, this was the first empirical study known to specifically examine the phenomenon of fallback and its impacts on the type of leadership and meaning-making that leaders brought to bear within their organizations, in real-world settings. Through my interaction with the data during the data analysis process, four major findings emerged related to the quality and experiences of fallback among eight leaders from across the U.S.

The leaders in the study were employed by various organizations ranging from small and large for-profit, small not-for-profit and large governmental agencies. The first finding related to the first research question was that leaders did experience a fallback in their meaning-making. The fallback experiences of leaders was characterized as a fluctuation in meaning-making structures to an earlier form of mind from where the leaders' highest meaning-making capacity

was scored (via the SOI). The fallback in meaning-making was contextual, nuanced and dynamic, further illuminating that the meaning-making process for individuals is fluid and messy and at times inconsistent. Many of the leaders in the study fell into thinking and patterns of behavior which were more socialized in structure than their fullest capacity, or SOI score, indicated. For some, falling back wasn't quite the right term as 'holding on' to a meaning-making structure, or holding on to a subjectivity with an objective lens, with open resistance to consider another perspective was a type of falling into one's shadow, or having their meaning-making structures eclipsed, instead of being able to fully make meaning at their most complex form of mind. In at least one instance, a leader experienced a shift in meaning-making as an intentional fallback based on contextual circumstances.

The second set of findings corresponding to the second research question yielded themes about the impact of fallback on leaders' leadership capabilities which were that fallback temporarily disabled leaders' ability to react adaptively to complexity; second person inquiry with trusted others enabled reflection on fallback and potential greater self-awareness in leadership capacity; and vulnerability, while seemingly costly in the moment, enabled leaders to recalibrate their meaning-making capacity and grow perspective. Table 5 displays the findings as they relate to research question, findings, and categories.

Table 5

Research questions

Research Question	Findings

1. **What is the nature and quality of fallback and how do we recognize it in leaders**	a. Fallback represents a fluidity of meaning-making that is nuanced and complex
	
	    i. Socialized fallback
	
	    ii. Holding Tight
	
	    iii. Choice of Frames

2. **How, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead?**	a. Being in relationship (second person inquiry) with trusted others enables reflection and action to overcome fallback i. Vulnerability serves as a catalyst for regaining one's capacity after experiencing fallback b. Fallback temporarily disables ability to react adaptively to complexity

Research Question 1. Nature and Quality of Fallback

Over the course of ten months, I recruited and conducted rich, personal interviews with eight individuals, each bringing their own unique selves, experiences and meaning-making capacity to our conversations. The first interview I conducted with each participant was the subject-object interview (SOI), a qualitative developmental assessment of the participants' stage of meaning-making, focused specifically in the workplace context. As I prepared the participants for the SOI, I specifically asked each person to think of the prompts in light of their context at work, as a leader. This context-specific conversation was meant to elicit deep conversation about the ways each participant constructed their complexity of meaning-making with regard to their role as a leader. In order to determine whether fallback had occurred, data from interviews was triangulated with their SOI score to assess where drifts in meaning-making occurred. Through examining the conversations with participants, and the experiences they shared regarding their leadership, it was determined that participants did experience fallback, or fluctuations, in their meaning-making structures.

Fluidity in Meaning-making

If one were to imagine the range of developmental meaning-making stages as a spectrum of colors on a color wheel, or similar to the ombre of paint swatches in a home improvement store, ranging from the first stage in childhood to at least stage five (self-transforming mind) in adulthood, with various gradients of color represented in between, depicting the nuances of full-stage meaning-making to stages of transition, to stages where the disequilibrium is favoring a stage behind or a stage beyond, you would see the constructions of the participants' meaning-

making stages exposed as their own particular gradients of color along the spectrum. Even as some of the participants scored in the same stage, or range, they expressed their meaning-making and complexity of thought in nuanced, personalized ways, shining a light on how granular and context-specific a person's meaning-making can be.

While the developmental scores of the participants in this study were situated within a relatively small range, the richness of the participants' contextual backgrounds and experiences in leading within organizations spanned a vast array of situations, nuances and decades of experiences. Table 6 reflects the developmental stages of the participants along with the contextual challenges each was facing within their role as a leader.

Table 6. Participant stage of development and leadership context

Participant	Developmental Stage	Leadership Context
Barbara	3	Long tenure with organization; Tasked with deciding how best to move the entire organization into a new location.
Lindsay	3/4	Newly hired as a thought-leader and team leader in organization. Given great amount of autonomy and few management guidelines.
Joey	4(3)	New to organization; facing complexity in dealing with human resource issue; trying to gain a seat at the leadership table with executives.
Gerry	4	Founder of company; faces complexity on a daily basis as decisions have to be made in the tech industry; human resource challenge.
Corey	4	Long tenure with organization. Deciding whether to matriculate to new organization; facing complexity of leading a fast growing congregation and the implications for leadership style.
Samuel	4	Nearing retirement; facing an uncertain funding climate with new

		federal administration; complexity in interacting with board of directors.
Rudy	4(5)	New to organization; facing complexity in re-instituting his leadership style, interactions with executive leadership team, and working within constraints of the system.
Artie	4(5)	New to leadership role within his organization; facing complexity in getting his vision and goals realized within culture of his organization; dealing with human resource challenge.

Given the nature of the study, which was to empirically examine the phenomenon called 'fallback', it was found that leaders indeed experienced fluidity in their organization of meaning, vacillating in their subject-object perspectives in various different ways under different conditions of complexity and stress, thought, feeling and action. The fallbacks were momentary for some leaders, episodic for others, and in one case it seemed that a leader was in perpetual fallback given the great complexity in his leadership context. The data from the study indicated that leaders do not always experience their full meaning-making capacity at all times. They recalled past experiences of fallback and current experiences of fallback, and it was interpreted that fallback is part of the meaning-making process.

The fallback moves of the participants were equally as personal and nuanced as their assessed meaning-making structures. For most, perhaps due to the limited range of developmental diversity of the sample, fallback entailed movements into spaces that were much more socialized, whereby leaders' meaning was subject to external approvals of others, external validations of skills and retreating to feelings of self-doubt. The second-guessing of one's own abilities and skills, and the questioning of worthiness of leadership role, were all indicators that leaders' experiences of fallback seemed to fall within the stage 3, socialized realm of meaning-making. At other times, fallback occurred not as a shift out of a particular form of mind, but a holding tight to particular ways of constructing meaning in a way that was restrictive to forward thinking and perspective taking, almost in a defiant way. Finally, fallback occurred as a choice, whereby one leader explained how he made conscious choices as to which constructions of meaning he needed to make in order to respond to a situation that required more opportunistic thinking as opposed to more complex thinking. In this sense, the leader was able to hold an

objective view of his meaning-making at many levels. The three nuances of the fluidity of fallback will be discussed in the following sections.

Socialized Fallback. Leaders in this study experienced fallback in their organization of meaning by drifting into a subject-object relationship that was more socialized in nature. Falling back into what sounded like more socialized meaning-making was common across several study participants. Socialized thinking tends toward the internalization of the feelings of others, whereby socialized knowers can make difficult decisions with opposing viewpoints as long as there is a respected other to help him or her (Berger, 2012). In this space, meaning-makers are also preoccupied and tied up in their relationships; instead of having relationships with others, they become their relationships with others, making meaning based on how they operate within the relational structure, following group norms, not wanting to make others angry or disrupt the status quo.

Uncertainty, ambiguity, and conflicting perspectives are hard to organize objectively when making meaning from a socialized form of mind. Falling back into this space represented a pull into a way of thinking and feeling and behaving that served leaders in a way that allowed them to find safety. In the socialized space, leaders could seek external validation, could try to protect their relationships, and could save face to some degree. In the relational space, leaders could find a personal parking lot, of sorts, so as to avoid making risky decisions, or taking up their voices in such a way that was vulnerable to their positions or relationships. In some cases, this was done out of a fear of failure or fear of being disliked or unworthy. Fallback into the socialized mind was discovered on two gradients: interpersonal and intrapersonal. The gradient of interpersonal was found as participants were navigation the relational spaces between themselves and co-workers

Gradient: Interpersonal. For example, interpersonal conflict was an area in which leaders found themselves falling back into more socialized ways of organizing their meaning. Joey, a leader who scored at stage 4, self-authored, with some parts of his meaning-making still occurring in stage 3 socialized, faced a particular interpersonal human resources conflict when he arrived in his new position. It was clear that there was a supervisee with whom he did not mesh well, and who was causing some problems within the organization,

> I would say a really good example was with ... I'll go back to the problem employee. There were signs two months in that he was going to be a problem employee. Probably at that point, I could have had a better case, being new, to either changing his role or moving him outside the organization. I chose not to, because he was well-liked by my boss.

> Going back to that, it's some of the fear aspects of being transparent. I probably missed my window, and I looked back and I said, "Knowing what I walked into, did I look at that as an opportunity to ... " either a crutch, because he had been here a few months more than me and was really the only guy I had to depend on at the time, and was I fearful that ... I almost feel like it was a fear of not being successful that led to my sabotaging of success, right?

> In reality, bringing somebody in that I knew, that was somebody that I had on my team, probably would have been a better option, even if a little pain was felt early on. I look back at that and say, "Wow, did I blow my opportunity, and what did I really do there, and was it because of that fear of success?"

Joey acknowledged that he had ample opportunity to confront the conflict with the employee, but "missed his window" due to his falling back into a self-protective, fear mode of not wanting to disappoint his boss or what the implications of his being successful would mean. In response to my question as to whether he was afraid of taking action because of what his boss might think or how it would impact their relationships, Joey responded, "Yeah. Possibly, yeah. Definitely. I would say definitely." In this example, Joey's meaning-making was pulled back into a more socialized space whereby he was making decisions based on whether an external agent (boss) might have negative feelings about him, which essentially tied his own hands in taking action.

Joey eventually found ways to manage the situation, and was able to reflect on his fallback in a way that he was able to re-center himself and move forward with thinking that was more open to solution-finding and wasn't dependent on the perceptions of his boss. He eventually involved the human resources department and forged ahead with a plan to "pivot" the situation with the problem employee. The re-centering to a more systems-level perspective, considering multiple perspectives was a learning for Joey as he described the path forward as, "That pivot's going to be a little challenging, but trying to find out, okay, how do we change perception, how do we change the organization structure so that we can move forward, as opposed to continuing to reel from that one potential deadly mishap."

Gerry, a self-authored leader, also experienced fallback into a more socialized mode of organizing his meaning in his experience with an employee whom needed to be terminated. The data had been present for some time that the employee was not performing well, and business was being impacted to a degree. Gerry admitted that instead of taking up his strong stand as a leader and intervening sooner, with a more objective perspective, he let the problem linger

because of his pull towards his subjectivity to being his relationships and wanting to make

people happy and successful, or his "humanist" nature, "I should have stopped being such a

humanist and started saying, 'No, I don't care. You need to show up". What I believe Gerry was

really describing in this instance was that instead of taking the strong stand he knew he needed to

make, he reverted to his "humanist" thinking and tried to maintain the relational aspect of the

leader/employee relationship in order to try to help the organization stay on path, or prove to the

management company that his decision (spending his "political capital") and his push to initially

hire the employee was seen as successful, even when it wasn't. In reflecting on this situation,

Gerry moved back in to his more self-authored stance and categorized the experience as a

learning experience, a time to learn and move on, instead of failure.

     Samuel is another self-authored leader who experienced a pull into socialized meaning-

making via his relationship with his executive board. His relationship with his board was

supremely important to him and also caused some degree of anxiety for Samuel. Samuel

described this by saying, "Anxiety provoking is easy to target. It's basically one matter, and that's

my interactions with the executive board". Because this board had the power to say whether or

not Samuel would maintain his position, his interactions had to go well in his opinion. His desire

to be well-prepared for their interactions caused some momentary stress and anxiety internally,

and externally upon his employees, because he wanted and needed the board's approval to

maintain his position. Samuel described this when he stated, "So I want everything to go really

well when I'm working with the board... I gotta make sure I'm well prepared. And you know...

that it meets their expectations". The small technical details tended to stress Samuel and the

feelings of something potentially going wrong was anxiety provoking. As Samuel profiled at the

self-authored stage, this represented a bit of a drift into thinking that was more socialized as he

was not able to see that his experience and expertise could have transcended any technical issue or unknown encountered within his and the board's interaction. The drift into structuring his meaning more from the relational, social perspective helped him to make sure he was attending to the details needed to keep his job and keep his relationships going well.

In my conversation with Rudy the concept of vulnerability emerged. For example, Rudy stated, "Whereas, what might be really vulnerable for me are those few areas which nobody ever sees. Which might relate to let's say power and authoritarianism. Not that I'm terribly good at accepting authoritarian edicts from people". Rudy's meaning-making hovered around the self-authorized/self-transforming space. His perspective on vulnerability and growth was what I might expect from someone at his form of mind whereby he has taken notice of, and has learned from, past vulnerabilities; fallbacks to him are not necessarily tangible, but vulnerabilities are. Rudy's thinking around vulnerability is that he is quite comfortable with acknowledging when he doesn't know something or inviting criticism from co-workers; this is not a vulnerability to him. He has moved past a socialized and early self-authoring form of mind whereby acknowledging not-knowing and accepting, or inviting criticism, would be dangerous to his sense of self. His vulnerabilities are fewer and far between at his stage in life, and those areas where he feels most vulnerable are easier for him to hide and keep hidden. Rudy acknowledged that where he is vulnerable, and perhaps might experience fallback, is around the contexts of power and authoritarianism. Rudy revealed that he is the "classic male who doesn't want to see his father in every boss", and who feels more comfortable with female bosses in this regard. This potential fallback area for Rudy, around males in power or those issuing authoritarian edicts, is an area where the trigger is likely more of a threat to his current meaning-making around his own power

and authoritarianism, and thus provides a glimpse into more socialized meaning-making for Rudy around males in positions of authority.

Gradient: Intrapersonal. Intrapersonal fallback, otherwise described as internal to one's self, into more socialized structuring occurred in leaders who were facing complex challenges such as entering in to new employment contexts or dealing with organizational conflict. This gradient of socialized fallback was felt more internally, almost as a representation of whether or not leaders felt worthy of their leadership roles. This was expressed as internal dialogue, with internal wishes for external approval. In leaders who otherwise scored in late-stage socialized and self-authoring forms of mind this internal pull into socialized thinking caused points of self-doubt, questioning of capabilities and a general 'am I in the right job' type of attitude. For example, Joey was in the midst of experiencing an internal crisis of confidence when we met. He was internalizing a complex set of circumstances which led to a fallback into a more socialized structure of meaning-making from the stage at which he was capable, which was self-authoring.

Joey was admittedly afraid to take risks at work for fear of the outcome. Joey experienced fallback to a more socialized way of making meaning, engaging in self-doubt and fearing failure as he reacted to my inquiry around where his fear of failure was coming from, "Good question ... I think the failure question comes with the self-reflection of do I really have what it takes to be in this role?". When feeling particularly doubtful and anxious, Joey had a conversation with a senior vice president in the organization who gave him an external sense of peace that he was, in fact, doing well or in the right position, "I had some other things come up that I was starting to question myself. Like, 'Am I really the right leader?' And the conversation with her was very reaffirming". This demonstrated the pull that the socialized organization of

meaning-making has towards being unable to objectively organize meaning (thinking, feeling and acting) from a self-authored perspective and relying on external authorities to author the perspective for him. In essence, Joey was seeking approval from a trusted other (in a position of authority) that he was doing the right thing as a leader in the right ways.

In addition to the feelings of self-doubt, Joey acknowledged dealing with feelings of inadequacy, or having to prove himself, a pull back into the socialized form of mind and having to measure one's self against external measures of success,

> And I finally went back after the age of 40, after 4 kids, and went back to get my bachelor's degree. But I don't think that feeling of inadequacy ever left. Kind of was embedded in my mind. So that's something that I've had to fight. And now, I don't have a master's degree, that's really not as relevant anymore in my mind, but I still think about it in the back of my head. So, "Should I get it, should I not get it?" And it's one of those areas that I constantly have to battle with myself against what I consider that feeling of inadequacy. And I think it goes into the fear, right? And I think they almost go hand in hand in terms of my feeling of inadequacy leads to a fear of failure, which leads to whatever."

Joey and I discussed what his "behind the curtain", or backstage, leadership persona would look like and what his front and center stage persona would look like. He described his fallback into his behind the curtain persona as starting once he obtained some footing in his new role and realizations came to light,

> Yeah. The behind-the-curtain Joey, I think he came out when I got the first indications that maybe not everyone was bought into this model of this technology solutions group here. I look at our senior leadership team and I look at them as the Supreme Court, and I

can tell who the dissenters were in terms of like when this thing was brought to the senior leadership team for a vote. I can tell you who would have written the dissenting opinion, and that I think was the first start of that stall.

I started to feel the pushback, and pushback means more difficult, means more challenge, means more work. Am I up for this? Is this still in my wheelhouse? Is this really still the job that it looked to be, kind of a perfect match for my background, that kind of stuff? That's when behind-the-curtain Joey really started to rear his ugly head and really start getting in the way of progress.

Joey's internal dialogue reflected his subjectivity as being torn as to whether he was living up to external standards of success that he had internalized as emanating from his leadership team. The reflection of his falling back into more socialized meaning-making was similarly reflected in my conversations with Lindsay.

When I first spoke to Lindsay, a transitional knower between socialized and self-authoring, she was feeling torn and uncertain in her new role at an IT company. She was hired to provide "thought leadership", in contrast to previous positions she held where she was leading a more technical effort and group of direct reports. I believe that at the time of these interviews, Lindsay was experiencing frequent fallbacks to early stage 3, socialized meaning-making more than she was maintaining her self-authored form of mind. As her new role was inviting her to become more self-authored in her leadership, she was feeling the pull back to her socialized form of mind by looking for external authority, internally questioning her worthiness of the leadership role, and seeking safety in her previous ways of leading with direct, concrete operational directives and deliverables.

For example, Lindsay stated, "It feels like this leadership role is different. I know it's different. It seems very vague when I have to drive by myself, find my own way from a leadership role. It has me wondering if this is the right type of leadership for me." This sounded very much like a socialized meaning-making statement in that she described being uncertain of how to do this on her own and discussing how she had previously had leadership that was attentive or provide more direction to her than her current situation. This sounded very different from other points in our conversations in which Lindsay presented the ability to take strong stands in taking up her leadership presence and identity and being assertive. In fact, her internal questioning of her leadership identity was another data point that Lindsay had gone to a more socialized space of making meaning.

An aspect of socialized meaning-making is that individuals fuse their identity with their relationships instead of having their relationships as an external part of their being. Lindsay was concerned that her identity had been so tied up in being a team (her identity was *the* team rather than having a sole identity herself) and having externally successful teams that were hers, and now that she was leading new teams with no immediate success, she wasn't sure how to define her identity or how she would define success on her own,

> I think that's true, I think that's a good point and that might be why am I torn, because my identity was I led a highly-effective team, we were very successful in our accomplishments. We worked together to overcome the challenges, we were very close, well-oiled kind of a machine, which was my identity, because that was Lindsay's team. I had the go-to team. If something was wrong, give it to Lindsay's team; not Lindsay, but Lindsay's team. Now, you're right, so my identity has changed.

At the end of our conversation, Lindsay was able to re-calibrate or take a more objective stance to a more self-authored way of structuring meaning and expressed what she had come to learn on her own through our conversations, which was that she had decided to deeply consider how she would redefine success, how she would re-consider how her identity was structured, and what she needed to directly communicate to her supervisors in order to move ahead with confidence. It seemed as though the interviews with Lindsay were really her way of processing how her growing meaning-making system was taking form and she began to sound less and less torn as we discussed her ways of making meaning.

Corey, a self-authored leader, was very self-directed in carrying out his leadership role, with strong values and ability to hold multiple perspectives. He and I discussed what happened to his meaning-making and perspective taking when he was confronted with conflict, or perceived conflict within the congregation. Corey, having to balance his relational relationship with his congregation and his direct leadership style, was very aware of the outward perceptions of his leadership, which led to an inner mental dialogue that was more socialized and anxious and was sometimes incongruous with his normal perception of his leadership. He demonstrated a fallback in his meaning-making when he described his struggle with his outward appearance as a leader, particularly when things might not have been going smoothly; he stated that what was at risk was the "perception of my leadership", and one of his fallbacks was that of having a "real hyper awareness of what other people are thinking about me and about my leadership." Corey struggled internally with external validations of approval and a concern for outward appearance. He said, "For me, it can be a little bit extreme that how people perceive things are going ... Somehow I equate that with how people perceive me." This was another example of how the socialized mind frames relationships and orientation to rule-following; socialized meaning-

making honors doing the 'right' thing and leading the right way for Corey was a concern in his mind when he began worrying that he was being perceived as leading the wrong way.

Rudy, a self-authored/self-transforming leader, experienced internal rumination on how he experienced not only a new work environment as a leader, but a new work environment in a new country and in a new culture. Rudy experienced a fallback in meaning-making to a more socialized form of mind as he became subject to adapting to external norms and approval as he entered into a new cultural and work context. Coming from outside the U.S., Rudy moved from an academic setting in another country into a government setting in the U.S. Rudy recounted how he felt disoriented upon his move into the U.S. and into his new role, where he felt pressed to demonstrate his subject matter expertise and be seen as the expert in order to gain external approvals of authority, even though upon reflection he could recognize that was a coping mechanism for his insecurity,

> It's when I was the fish out of water. Was when I moved here. In my old job I wasn't under that stress. I was most of the time working as the facilitative leader. When I arrived here, that's when I had no history. No reputation. No track record. My style was not the style of the system I'm in. That's when the transition point made me think when I first had these high level meetings that I just needed to get the right answer on the table. That would solve the problem. I quickly realized that that was a product of the insecurity. I should make myself more vulnerable at those meetings, and not always be right.

Rudy noticed that he was struggling to regain or find his "identity" in his new setting, feeling that his authority wasn't recognized, if he in fact had any in the first place. He had demonstrated clear stage 4, peeking into stage 5, meaning-making, particularly in his previous employment situations in a more familiar country, however the disorientation of being an 'other',

or "alien", saw him slip into a more socialized, externally oriented way of trying to define what his professional identity would look like. Rudy's use of the term "struggling" signaled to me that he was in disequilibrium with his confidence and self-assuredness that he clearly presented in his SOI, during this initial transition phase into his new role. He seemed to have been grasping at some way to feel socially connected and relationally relevant to his peers, the organization and his work when he first started working there. This did not seem to me as reflective of his self-authorship, or a move into a self-transformational form of mind, whereby I would have expected someone to speak more passionately about transforming into one of a multiple set of selves in this new situation, versus how Rudy described this which seemed more of a struggle in an anxiety provoking way, almost as a concession instead of a liberating structure. Rudy was able to hold more complex meaning-making capacities to which he re-centered himself when reflecting on his experiences and the lessons he learned from them.

In these instances of socialized fallback, leaders were challenged with situational complexity from a relational frame, in their interactions with co-workers, and from an intrapersonal frame, in their inner dialogues and narratives with themselves, thus subject to their preoccupation with external loci of approval. These instances of fallback in meaning-making structures were of great learning to the leaders in the study. Reflecting on these experiences from their objective sense-making stances allowed leaders to learn something new about themselves in the moment, while in conversation with me, and as they had had time to reflect and learn from the experience prior and were verbalizing their learning to me in our intimate conversations. In all, the fallback moves into the socialized space seemed to be a parking lot whereby leaders could find temporary protection and approval until they could gather their objective selves and their learning in order to re-approach the situation from a more informed

perspective. At other times, leaders experienced a type of grip on their meaning-making that doesn't quite fall into the description of 'falling' back, but rather 'holding tight'.

Fallback as 'Holding Tight'. In addition to the various gradients of falling back into more socialized ways of organizing experience and meaning, both interpersonally and intrapersonally, leaders experienced a gradient of fallback which can be described as a holding tight to the participants' form of mind, in such a way that it was delimiting to the leaders' capacity to be open to others perspectives. This type of fallback occurred in leaders who were more self-authoring in their forms of mind. In these instances, leaders became beholden to their strong sense of purpose, mission, way of doing things in response to stress, overwhelm or time limiting factors; in essence, this was a stalling of meaning-making complexity, demonstrating that leaders in this space were not able to open up to the forward thinking that might have been necessary to move a situation forward. It then wasn't a falling back, but a holding tight in light of the contextual details; it presented as the leaders *were* their self-authorship instead of having self-authorship.

The second from of fallback found in this study indicated that leaders who were fully in the basin, or fully embedded, in a stage of meaning-making at post-conventional forms of mind have tended to have eclipses within their stage of development to their shadow sides. For the purposes of this study, a shadow side is defined as a way of meaning-making that can be held onto so tightly that it actually becomes a hindrance to their level of openness, productivity or effectiveness. For example, a self-authored mindset has many light sides to it, many advantages that render a leader effective in taking multiple perspectives, being driven by an internally self-authored set of values, and focusing on driving the mission and success of an organization. A shadow side, in contrast, can be explained as an eclipse of a leader's lighter, more capable way of

making-meaning; perhaps holding on so tightly that she is not able to see how that is in fact holding her back. A stage 4 leader who becomes eclipsed by feelings of stress, uncertainty or overwhelm, and enacting his independence in a more autocratic way than usual, which has a subsequent impact of holding back his organization or efforts with his employees who feel left behind or unable to share their voice might be an example of holding too tightly to a way of making meaning. In other words, a shadow side could be described as being *had* by one's stage of meaning-making. The first example of this is participant Corey.

As the leader of his congregation, Corey had to focus on both the business side and the relational congregational support side. Corey demonstrated very strong ties to his self-authored meaning-making. When he encountered stress, or potential danger to his independence, his meaning-making was eclipsed by his shadow side, and he purposefully chose to close-off other perspectives and maintain his particular form of independence and unilateral authority. For example, as Corey described,

> I think where I go in stress that people would note or be able to articulate is ... I tend to close off to different perspective and just want to be a little more autocratic about things. If I feel like ... I don't like to be boxed in. If I feel like something has to happen or a decision has to be made, then it puts me in an uncomfortable position on having to say ... Or feeling like I have to say ... Then I need to decide and no more input, no more conversation, no more debate. I think there have been times when the, particularly our staff team, would say we didn't feel consulted in this. I think that has to do with times when I have not felt able or free to do that.

In this situation, Corey had full awareness that others had differing perspectives, and that as a leader he could choose to consider all points of view and make the best decision he could.

However, when pushed by stress or deadlines or some other type of force competing with his autonomy, he chose to hold tightly, or remain subject, to his way of thinking, thus retreating to his shadow side in order to move ahead, or protect his self or his level of authority in decision making. The unintended consequence, or perhaps unavoidable consequence to this eclipse in his leadership behavior, is that others around him felt boxed out, left out and not heard. This in turn leaves his staff harboring hard feelings and perhaps not being as effective or communicative as they could be in enacting their own job duties. When asked what led to the "boxing in" type of feeling, or what ultimately facilitated the shadow side coming out, Corey said:

> I think time-sensitive, deadline sorts of things would be one. The other would be
> situations of conflict, where I feel like ... I guess I'm thinking about this specific situation
> ... Situations where we ... Somebody's going to be unhappy no matter what we do, so we
> need to go ahead and do something. I might end up more less likely to draw on the
> wisdom of a group and more likely to say this is the way we need to go, or this is what
> we need to do. If I feel like it doesn't matter because no matter what we do, there's going
> to be deep unhappiness.

For Corey, having his lighter side of development eclipsed by a shadowy side means having a tighter hold on authority, autonomy and independence. This can be perceived by others as not being as open or communicative or being to hard-nosed, but ultimately it is the best that Corey can do under the circumstances presented to him and his way of making meaning of the situation.

Samuel discussed an area where he gets caught in his shadow. Several of my participants discussed self-imposed "high standards" and judging themselves accordingly, including Samuel.

Samuel discussed his perfectionism and getting stuck in that cycle of perfect versus good enough based upon his own standards of excellence,

> I'm not a good writer so you're never gonna see that from me. I do publish, not as much as I'd like to. I have so many things that I would love to get out but I know they're just not gonna happen because of my writing skills. It's really finding the time. I'm kind of a perfectionist. It gets in my own way when I'm trying to get things published.

> In writing, I struggle with every sentence. It has to be grammatically correct and, oh that's not right, there's word repetition here. Instead of just writing the damn article, and then doing a secondary review, it's like as I go. I can just get bogged down on a sentence...Then I lose the paragraph, then the whole paper gets stalled.

In our conversations, it did not come across that Samuel was subject to his relationships and demands of external authorities, for example looking to an external authority for what 'right' or 'perfect' should be, but rather he was subject to what he had set as an internal set of standards to reach. When asked what the worst part about being a perfectionist in that area was, Samuel responded, "It's the old saying. It's the mortal enemy of good enough. Instead of getting some manuscript out that's good enough, I get nothing out." When pressed further to explain what "good enough" meant, Samuel said:

> It's having this incredibly high bar for myself. No one else has that bar.
> Perfection is my definition of it for my own product. Something that doesn't fulfill my standard, I don't want anyone else to see. I lead by excellence. I always tell my staff, whatever you do, just make sure it's your best and it's excellent.

I interpreted this as Samuel getting eclipsed by his shadow side due to our next exchange regarding how he applies this same sentiment to his staff, and whether good enough was good enough for his staff,

> Samuel: Yes, but I have different standards for them than myself. Yes, so the answer is yes.

> Interviewer: So, they get by with a little more grace?

> Samuel: Yeah, of course, they'll have their own internal standards, which I don't know unless I'm having trouble getting product out of them. I'll say things like, hey this doesn't have to be a work of art, but we do need a first draft. Or, something like that.

Though Samuel's shadow side did not prevent him or handicap him from reaching a change goal or a leadership goal per se, it did allow him to articulate how he leads his staff and the type of grace and expectations he has for them and their work.

Barbara is a bit of an outlier for this study. I scored Barbara as a late-stage socialized knower. She was a senior director of operations in her organization, a non-profit government organization. Barbara's role as senior director of operations was to supervise logistics, such as office space, the information technology team, human resources, annual conferences and other activities associated with operations within her organization. Having literally grown up in the organization over the last 18 years, and been witness to the growth and reach of the organization, Barbara seemed extremely comfortable in her role at work as a leader and was deeply loyal to the organization and her executive director. She had risen through the ranks of the organization when it was relatively small (around eight employees) and had found her place in the senior

leadership team, having been able to grow and shape the culture of the organization as she had lived it, seeing the organization grow to around 50 employees.

In my researcher memos I noted how she seemed to identify deeply with her organization, believing in its mission and believing, specifically, in the leadership of the executive director. I was drawn to her excitement and support of the executive director for two reasons. First, it demonstrated to me that executive leadership was important to her; that a leader who could be approachable, kind and mission-oriented was important for her own work product and sense of satisfaction at work. Secondly, it demonstrated to me that Barbara really thrived on having good leadership who could direct and support her and her efforts as a senior director in making the organization successful.

For example, Barbara's big challenge at the time was leading the organization into a decision on a physical office relocation. The relocation, while seemingly technical in nature, would have different repercussions for different employees (commute times, private vs. open offices, etc.), and reconciling that challenge was difficult for Barbara to conceive. This was significant for Barbara, as there were several ways the decision could go, potentially upsetting some colleagues and making others happy. Barbara had full trust that the Executive Director would make the right decision in the end, and was relying on the Executive Director to make the decision once all directors brought the facts and opinions to the table. Ultimately, the decision would be left to her executive director, and the process of having to disappoint some and appease others seemed to be unsavory to her, or "hard".

I believe Barbara became captured in her focus on how to make a decision that would appease external relationships, demonstrated by the frequency with she directed our conversation to her care and attention of others in her organization. As of the time of our interview, Barbara

seemed to be content with her leadership, not having very many big growth moments as of late .
For example,

> Interviewer: Sure. Absolutely. What do you think is the biggest growth moment for you professionally there, or personally there?
>
> Barbara: It hasn't been recently, because I've been in the job for a long time. This is probably what I liked about the organization and why I stayed as long as I have. When I first came on I came on as a HR coordinator. They saw the potential for me to do other things, because I just jumped in and helped with a certain area when it came to our conference and they were like, "Wow, this person can do more than just that."

As Barbara and I talked further, it became apparent that Barbara was a pillar in this organization. What I mean by that is Barbara was extremely successful in crafting her path in the organization and had done a tremendous job in serving and supporting the organization in her roles over the years. She had a long tenure and was very comfortable in her rank and tenure and in knowing how the organization should operate. Her comfort was indicative of her not seeing much growth, or, as we discussed in subsequent interviews, no specific recent times where she perhaps didn't show up as her best self, or times when she had a misstep or noticed her leadership differently. For example, in our exchange below, it was clear that Barbara was not able to see any discrepancies, mismatches, incongruities, shadows or setbacks in her leadership experiences of recent:

> Interviewer: It doesn't sound like there's a mismatch or a gap between what you value and say that you want to do versus what you actually do?
>
> Barbara: Correct.

The strong pillar of institutional knowledge that was Barbara was a steady face in the organization, addressing more technical challenges than likely adaptive, complex challenges. Barbara demonstrated a holding tight to her way of making meaning, staying settled in her socialized way of knowing, even when there was room for a different perspective. The strong socialized knowing served Barbara well as she held up this pillar of strength for an ever growing organization.

Fallback as "Choice of Frames". In contrast to those leaders who fell back in their meaning-making due to some type of stressor or challenge in their environments, or those who held tight, another leader (specifically Artie who scored in the self-authoring/self-transforming space) experienced fallback as a choice in deciding which version of his meaning-making approach he needed to use to influence the context in which he found himself. This downshifting (Joiner, 2011) of sorts reflected his ability to assess the situation and which type of structure he needed to use in order to make the best decision or have the biggest influence on a situation. In this sense, fallback was a "choice of frames", an emic code from our conversations, reflecting the finding that falling back in one's meaning-making structures can be choice within one's conscious control.

Artie's full range of meaning-making seemed to shift from opportunistic at times, to self-reflective as he navigated the leadership waters of uncertain funding from his administration, programmatic goals which were aligned/misaligned with values, and the everyday managing of people and performance which was central to the role of department chair. Artie's commitment to his team, his employees, was evident in his deep care for cultivating supportive environments within his unit, striving just as deeply for the interpersonal connections as much as the reflection of his intrapersonal development and how he authored and lived his value structures.

Artie discussed how he could objectively hold multiple versions of himself, creating space to hold compassion for others and confronting complexity like that of dealing with his upper administration. He was not one to believe in perfectionism, and believed that you could honor people by listening and seeing where they were in life, even if he didn't agree with or like it. This demonstrated his ability to hold multiple perspectives of others and his own processing of others' meaning-making. His leadership was "nimble", in his own words, as he shifted between strategies at work. He described the balance (sometimes "whiplash") of the "combative and conciliatory" moves he had to make with administration in getting his goals accomplished or ideas heard, sometimes from opportunistic to seeing how to intervene on a pattern. He was able to make an objective choice as to which stance he was going to take, combative or conciliatory, in getting his goals accomplished. He stated:

> It's constant back and forth and towing the line and which you have to do genuinely and
> he has to know that you are maintaining genuine good faith effort to be a problem solver.
> We are, that's one of the things I pride myself on, our department is trying to solve
> problems without being a sucker, right?

Artie described his choice of frames, essentially his choice to make meaning from different stages based on the situation, not as a negative intent, but as a "balance of guarding our interest and our vision of what we want to do while genuinely helping people."

Research Question 2. Impact of Fallback on Leadership

Fallback, although somewhat negative in the connotation of the word itself, showed up as both an impediment to leadership and a growth opportunity for leadership. In the instances of fallback in which impediments were felt or seen, leadership was stunted in its application. In other instances, fallback created a space between co-inquirers, and co-workers, where

vulnerability became grounds for reflection and growth, a laying down of all the cards so to speak, so that everyone could see where the potential for improved communication could be capitalized on and acted upon. This section will describe two main findings from the data analysis process related to the second research question: how, if at all, does fallback influence the leader's ability to lead? The two main findings are that second person inquiry with a trusted other was a tool for seeing fallback, reflecting on fallback and ultimately increasing perspective as a result; and fallback impeded leaders' ability to respond in adaptive ways to challenges.

Second Person Inquiry with Trusted Others

As I designed and conducted this study, I kept in mind that I was forming a relationship with my participants, building trust with them so that we could delve deeper into their experiences of falling back in their meaning-making. Insofar as participants were willing to go deeper with me, our conversations were co-constructions of making-meaning as we conversed with each other about their experiences and made meaning together as to what was or had emerged in their workplace interactions that led to a drift in their meaning-making.

An unexpected result of one of my interviews with Lindsay was a true co-construction of meaning-making in the second-person inquiry space. I use the term second-person inquiry to describe me and my participants' interactions in engaging the research together and co-generating meaning together. When I asked Lindsay a question to assess how complexly she could make meaning of her definition of success, or re-definition of success, it led to a conversation that became a true co-generation of thought. This question completely set off a chain of questions and a spark in Lindsay's mind that led her to a realization that perhaps she had been thinking too narrowly, too socialized, about success. This could have been considered a coaching question if

we were in a leadership coach/coachee relationship, which we weren't, yet the outcome seemed to be related to coaching success.

> Lindsay: Yeah, I think that's great. I wonder then if we need to as we grow or change or even have a different type of a role, if we have to redefine what success looks like?

> Interviewer: That's interesting. What would be great about redefining success?

> Lindsay: Wow, what would be great about that? Well, you would have an opportunity to change your perspective. If you could define what success looks like you could change the negative and the positive thoughts that you have. If you redefine success, you could take what you think are negatives or maybe things you focus on that aren't happening at the pace you want them to happen at or they're not measuring up, if that's the right word to use, because every day you think, okay, are you making the strides you should be making? If you redefined success, you could potentially, like you were describing, take a more positive because things aren't falling apart...

The disorientation of being given the space to think and act with a fully self-authored form of mind in her new role was causing some confusion and uncertainty for Lindsay, but when processing with me as partner and co-researcher, Lindsay was able to begin to grow a new perspective which seemed to give her a sense of peace and took some weight off of her transition. At the end of our first conversation, Lindsay harkened back to this part of our discussion and took a more objective approach to her meaning-making and how she could begin to delineate her own expectations from others' expectations. She described how she would enact her new internally-driven perspective on success that she had been reflecting on in her mind:

I've been taking notes since we started talking, and I think I could go back and I would think I would say to them, "Here's what's important to me, and here's what I want to define." I know we said redefine success, but maybe I just need to define success in this role.

This discussion between she and I would come up at each of our next sessions together. The mere question of how success could otherwise be defined was so prominent for Lindsay that she shared our conversation with her friends and partner, feeling a new sense of empowerment, that she had the power to define what success looked like in this role, and did not need to rely solely on someone else to solely author the definition for her. During a member-check communication with Lindsay months after our initial conversations, she described how important this "breakthrough" was for her and that she has now moved to a new company and new position and is feeling more "collaborative" and open and can invite more perspectives in to work with her as she is no longer feeling confined by others' definitions of success or holding herself responsible for meeting those expectations (email communication, May 31, 2018).

It is beyond the scope of this research to follow Lindsay to determine if our conversations and her moment of enlightenment had truly prompted Lindsay to transition into a fully self-authored form of mind, but it is evidence that having a period of fallback, and processing it with a trusted other, can be a means for moving forward, even if the needle moves only slightly. It would not be prudent to posit that one moment in time could propel someone forward into a fully-formed form of mind, but even if the needle moves only slightly, there is evidence that fallback can be a space, a container, for reflection and thus some steps towards a bigger perspective taking capacity.

While my experience with Lindsay was a bit more extreme than with other participants, due to her openness and strong desire to process her leadership challenges and engage in second-person co-inquiry, others in this study described how they were able to reflect with trusted others in times of fallback to reflect and process and find their way back to their most capable leadership capacities. In my interactions with Artie, it truly felt as though the two of us were in co-inquiry, sharing our meaning-making in the moment about leadership situations that were happening in Artie's work context. At one point in time, Artie jokingly referred to his thankfulness for participating in this project as it likely had saved him money on therapy. While I understand where Artie is coming from in his choice of words, I do think it is a caution to all researchers that it is incumbent upon us to remind participants that research is not therapy, though it may feel this way at times.

Artie, Corey and Joey all described times when their spouses were trusted others who could help them reflect and re-frame their fallback. Almost like a built in coach or confidante, trusted others were able to serve as mirrors and reflect back certain behavior or thinking, or worst case scenarios, so that the participants could recognize where they had drifted to in their thinking and meaning-making. For example, Corey, when faced with his own fear of failure and distrusting his own capability, would turn to his wife who would say to him, "What's the worst case scenario here? This crashes and burns and what next? What after that? We all die? It's the end of the world?" This exchange with his trusted other helped him to put into perspective that he was probably much harder on his self than situations required, which he described when he said, "I'm aware of that, that the consequences of 'failure' are not as dire as I probably make them out to be in my own mind." According to Corey, he has a deep bench of trusted others he goes to

when feeling the need to process a moment or situation when he hasn't shown up as his most leader-full self:

> I have colleagues and a couple of mentors who are helpful in letting me process and share, and who are willing to offer their perspective and advice 'cause I think sometimes we become kind of myopic about these things, and it becomes the only thing that you're willing to, the only way that you look at something rather than having a fuller perspective so you can have a page long email from someone and there's one sentence that you just can't get out of your mind because you view it as a critique whereas that may not be the intention of the overall communication, or it may not be kind of what they were going for, but it's kind of what hits you.

For Joey, he and his wife had had many conversations about his fear of success and failure, and unwillingness to take risks, which led to his realization with her that this was impacting his leadership abilities. Joey described his conversation with his wife where they concluded together that "sometimes my fear of success has caused me to have limited capacity for change." Having a trusted partner to process this with has been important in understanding patterns and growth opportunities.

Rudy described how he find mutual support in interacting with his colleagues, particularly those who he is leading. In his position, building relationships requires building them from the ground up, from the top down, and all phases in between in order to exist within a system that is quite rigid and sometimes unforgiving. Rudy described drawing upon his unit for support in the following passage,

> ... my personal support, does come from the people I lead. I do think that you start off by thinking that the leader is, it might sound reasonably elitist but I'm just using language to

try to get an idea across. I used to think perhaps that the leader was out there at the front. In a cold and isolated place. It certainly feels like that sometimes. You can't have the personal relationship that you would have with your colleagues, if you are in amongst your colleagues. Having said that, you do draw a tremendous amount of support from the bottom up. It's not the same sort of support that if you went out with your friend and had drinks for four to five hours, and you stagger home having discussed the world. It's not that sort of support. It's a sense that they're trying to do their best. They are looking to you to help them do their best. They want you to help them do their best. There's an honest mutuality in all of that.

Additionally, Rudy seeks support and council from his leadership team in order to fill in the times when he feels he is off course, or making mistakes. In one context, Rudy realized that he was taking for granted that others knew what he and his team were doing, and how they were going about it. He realized that he hadn't tended to the marketing piece, the relational aspect of marketing his unit, and thus drew upon five or six of his colleagues to help him see where he might have strayed in his more independent thinking and self-authoring leadership style, versus a more communicative and relational style of working.

Vulnerability as growth opportunity. A sub-theme of second person inquiry with trusted others as a mirror and catalyst to seeing and reflecting on fallback is that fallback can engender vulnerability, leading to a re-centering of one's full capacity of meaning-making and potential growth of perspective. For example, Lindsay and her experience with her work team. Lindsay's team had been in an unsuccessful place for some time. Lindsay's frustration got the best of her and when she did not get a technical quick fix (what she viewed as a lack of ability to solve the immediate problem) she lost her temper and showed visible frustration and harsh words

with her team. This fallback in feeling, thinking and behaving to more self-sovereign/early

socialized thinking meant that Lindsay had momentarily lost her ability to regulate her behavior

or hold the perspectives of her team members. After having a momentary fallback in anger,

Lindsay showed vulnerability and encouraged the team to explain to her what the root problem

was that was keeping them from being successful. The description from Lindsay conveys how

she was surprised by the answer from one of her employees and how she worked to move them

forward,

> The answer had nothing to do with the technology or their capability of the staff, what
>
> was making it difficult was the one person on the team basically said to me, "If I delete
>
> some of this work or if I leave the work in and we report against it, it's going to look like
>
> we're not accomplishing everything we're supposed to do, but if I delete some of this
>
> work out of the system, somebody is going to come back at a later day and time and I'm
>
> going to be in trouble for deleting this."
>
> What I said was, "All of the responsibility and all of the accountability is mine." If we
>
> make a decision today, to delete some of this work, then I'm going to take full
>
> accountability for that.

The experience in this exchange signaled to me that moments of vulnerability on both

parts, Lindsay falling back to more technical thinking, feeling and behaving and assumption-

making, and her employees assumption-making, led to both of them finding a trust in each other

that they could share their frustrations and worries and find solutions together. Lindsay further

described, " I guess what I found interesting was the hesitancy or the reluctance to move forward

because they didn't want to be blamed for it. It was causing literally work stoppage." The team,

coming from a place of fear and assumption-making, was holding up their own progress.

In order to establish relationship with others, to be in the relational space, one must understand the perspectives of others and have a capacity for understanding how social norms are formed and carried out in order to be a part of a social structure. Lindsay was able to re-center into later socialized thinking, peering into self-authoring, and was able to guide the team into uncovering their assumptions, and inviting learning to happen between Lindsay and the team. The assumptions on both parts, and the vulnerability on both parts, was an unanticipated trust-building moment which eventually led to the team making great successes. I asked Lindsay what she thought was the catalyst in all of this, according to the exchange below,

> Interviewer: What do you think it was that made that person come forward? What do you think it was about just your presence or the way that you converse with them?
>
> Lindsay: I think it was the genuine … This gets back to was it okay for me to show my frustration. By me being genuine and just saying I don't understand. Help me understand what is it? I think when we use those words help me understand so why are you feeling this way, why is it this way and just help me understand where we're at and why we got here. When you ask those questions, I think people feel like their input or their experience on what's going on with them is going to be accepted and I think that's important.

The varying meaning-making stances and emotions on behalf of Lindsay and her co-workers ended up being a recipe for success as both parties found ways to move ahead and uncover an adaptive solution to a complex challenge which was fear and worry and anxiety from previous experiences. While I cannot account for the co-workers as a whole and whether they were in fallback or had fallen back, the assumptions they were making about their work seemed to

describe a stuck way of thinking which was only loosened when Lindsay showed her vulnerable side, albeit unintentionally. Lindsay was happy to report that her team moved ahead and was successful and the rapport building was key to their growth and development as a team.

Rudy revealed that he was soon to move on to a different position in another organization. Upon hearing this news we discussed what he had learned about himself as a leader. Rudy described how he felt very isolated and vulnerable upon beginning his job in a new cultural setting within a new leadership context. Rudy explained the deep learning that took place during his time at his company, and how important soft skills were to his position and how he might enact his leadership differently upon taking on his new position. Rudy described how, at first, in his current role, he felt he needed to prove himself as a leader early on, and get everyone to come aboard his journey whether they were willing to come on it or not. He said, "I think that's because I was trying to do the classic, I have a vision and I need to sell it to the staff. We all need to move forward. In the terminology of this institution, I can then leave a legacy." Rudy described how this approach to leadership was not the most effective approach at the time, taking an objective stance on what he was subject to at the time, and revealed that he had to shift course to a position of empowering his team, to help them believe in what they were doing.

He reflected on this position and stated that a more intentional approach (and one that was much less about him as a leader and more about the team) would be his aim in his next position, and that this type of thinking could only have come from "life stage". Rudy stated, " The art of bringing people with you is one that acquires with experience, I think." He described that understanding how people were motivated to work, how they worked best, and worked together were important to enacting leadership and using persuasion and influence in making changes and working within rigid systems.

Rudy demonstrated his ability to hold complexity and systems thinking when he discussed how he learned about managing the "system outside" as well as managing the people under his direct supervision. He was able to take perspective, an objective stance of his self-authorship on his natural tendency, which was to do things independently if wanted them done, and learned that he had to step back and understand how important relationships were to managing the system, and how building those relationships was an important part of his leadership. This realization, the ability to intentionally choose to nurture relationships to benefit his team's position within the organizational system, was a moment of deep learning for Rudy.

All participants appreciated our time together as co-inquirers and enjoyed being able to process their thinking and behavior and have a sounding board of sorts to reflect back what they had described. To reiterate, it is beyond the scope of this study to measure change, however, accounts from participants have indicated that a stance of inquiry with a trusted other is helpful in framing and observing thoughts and behavior from more of a balcony perspective.

Impediments to Adaptation

As leaders encountered complex adaptive challenges in their worksites, and as those challenges were each fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity and volatility in their own ways, leaders' fallback positions served as temporary impediments to their ability to respond adaptively. Even as leaders in this study were mostly in the space of self-authored knowing, with degrees of freedom in each direction, some experienced a disability of their leadership thinking, being and doing in responding with adaptability and nimbleness to complexity. These impediments included losing one's temper in the absence of a technical fix; closing off of self and perspective-taking thus limiting the options for agile leadership behavior; and moments of

anxiety in which the reaction is to find a fix for the situation before realizing there may be more options for agility and nimbleness through taking a step back.

As Lindsay was working with her consulting team, she was triggered by their lack of progress and the uncertainty and ambiguity she was feeling around not understanding the problem related to their delayed success. This was compounded by a very short deadline, and the result was that Lindsay lashed out at her team in frustration, "My comment to them is, 'I just don't understand why this is so difficult for you'. I was disappointed in using those words." In a subsequent exchange, Lindsay walked back her words a bit, and stated:

> I was trying not to show the emotion but it comes out and literally I said, "I just don't understand why this so difficult." I didn't say the "for you" part because there was a lot of us in the room.

I asked Lindsay to give herself a grade on how she handled the situation with her team, to which she gave herself a 'C'.

> I give myself a C because I let my frustration show. Sometimes I think that vulnerability is okay as a leader because then I think then the people realize leaders are humans to. On the other hand, this gets back to should we show that vulnerability? Should we show our frustration or are we supposed to always be calm, cool and collected.

Lindsay really struggled with this exchange with her team, subject in the moment to her feelings regarding her relationship with the team and her internalizing their perceived failures or missteps as impacting her own feelings and perceptions. A data point that is indicative of her socialized meaning-making is in her giving herself a grade in-and of itself- as if there were a right/wrong, better/worse way to have handled the situation based on a socially constructed way of doing things, rather than as a learning experience or a part of the process of deciding how to

lead her teams. I asked her whether she knew in the moment what she had done, the feelings she might have caused with her team, or whether it took more reflection afterward to realize the impact of the exchange. She stated that she knew as the words were coming out, and immediately felt regret:

> Yes. Exactly. It's like, "Oh, why did I use those words." Sometimes I think the whole reason I give myself a lower grade last week is I didn't … Just because I'm tired or I'm frustrated is not an excuse for me not to stop and pause and think about the phrase and then say it. I didn't do it. I was pretty frustrated and I just let the words come out. I wished I had used better words.

Later in our conversation, Lindsay revealed that this was not the first time something like this happened, whereby she was triggered and let her frustration show with her words. She recognized it as a pattern of behavior and committed to have to be conscious of her leadership behavior. Because Lindsay knew immediately after the exchange happened that she had fallen back into less agile ways of thinking and leading, she was able to self-correct soon thereafter and reach resolve with her team.

Another example of fallback being experienced as a loss in adaptability is through Rudy's experience with his organization. Rudy, when new to his organization and to the culture, was not meshing as well as he had hoped with his role and his peers. He described the stutter in his leadership practice, based on him not being received in his new culture as he had before, as, "the heart of my impotence in my current leadership position." This perspective on his disruption in flow of leadership influence, and thus "impotence", was very powerful and indicated that Rudy felt powerless in the moments during meetings when he was not "appreciated or interpreted" in the ways that he was used to; because he was not contributing to meetings in ways that he was

comfortable, and was questioning a bit his abilities to influence and adapt in a work environment that was somewhat antithetical to his perspectives, he closed off, quieted down, and wasn't an active participant in leadership meetings. Rudy described it as," ... a discomfort in that I was ... I was used to being in an authoritative position and now all of a sudden I was being ... that authority was completely discounted, um, so there was that readjustment." He quickly wanted to put the "right answer" on the table, to establish credibility, and moved into the socialized space of thinking that he needed to be seen as 'right' in order to gain acceptance of his peers. In doing so, Rudy seemed to experience himself as less nimble and agile and a bit more rigid, perhaps because he was subject to his desire for external validation, yet upon reflection he realized why this was happening, as it was a movement from technical management to more adaptive leadership, "... when you first start joining this space, is it the, uh, the ... early career, mid-career type person. When you've moved out of your technical space into the management space and you start to wonder, well, how do you ... how do you orchestrate these things?" Rudy described his inability to be impactful as a result of his pulling back into a more protective and uncertain space of being able to lead in the way he was used to,

> In part, because I couldn't quite pick what was needed to make the impact, the idea itself was ... wasn't enough. So I had to find another way to intrude into a discussion, to have that discussion, uh, move more productively forward.

> Now, what that meant to me was that I then stepped back and became less confident in putting up ideas that weren't the right answer. Because in discussions, sometimes you need the wrong answer to be put on the table, to ... to help the discussion go. I came less and less inclined to put that up. I more and more just spoke when I thought I had

something really that needed to be said. And as it produced less and less of an impact, I

became less and less engaged in the discussion and therefore less and less impactful or

less and less influential.

Corey also experienced a loss of adaptability in his meaning-making as a result of his

fallback. When Corey encountered stress, or potential danger to his independence, his meaning-

making became less agile and more closed off to other perspectives. For example, Corey stated

that when he acted in this way, his staff said they "didn't feel consulted" and felt as though Corey

wasn't opening up to other possibilities. Whether or not that was the case for Corey, his co-

workers felt boxed out of the decision making process which may have impacted how they

performed their own duties or interacted with Corey as a leader. His fallback position, into the

shadow sides of self-authored meaning-making, allowed him to maintain his particular form of

independence and unilateral authority. If you will recall from the earlier narrative of Corey and

his hard-line dependence on his self-authored leadership style, he described his tendency to be

more "autocratic about things" and when he felt rushed or "boxed in" to make a decision, he took

a unilateral approach to management and opted out of consensus building.

In this situation, Corey chose to hold tightly to his way of thinking instead of opening up

to a more adaptive stance to uncover the root of the uncertainty or conflict or challenging

situation. The unintended consequence, or perhaps unavoidable consequence to this eclipse in

his leadership behavior, is that others around him felt boxed out, left out and not heard. This in

turn leaving his staff harboring hard feelings and perhaps not being as effective or

communicative as they could be in enacting their own job duties.

Gerry's experience with a loss of adaptability came as he was in a meeting with potential investors of his company and the meeting did not go well. There was a loss of control among he and his colleagues who were presenting to the investors and Gerry described having a moment of anxiety, "... I think with people like me, first there is a oh shit moment, but it's not really panic. It's anxiety." While Gerry conceded that in these moments there is actually more space to grow, he stated that the moment first starts with a feeling of "that doesn't feel right," followed by thinking more intentionally about how to "claw yourself back out of the hole" and how to regain control and influence." Gerry likened this temporary fallback to playing a chess board. His orientation to agility and adaptation changed when he began thinking differently, for example:

But then you twist your mind to figure out, how do we play this chess board? This is the way I want the chess board to look in the end. This is where the pieces are right now. It doesn't look so good. What do we do piece by piece to try to rebuild the chess board to what we want to get out? For the best of everybody involved.

In my conversations with Gerry, he was more likely to re-frame my questions about fallback or not showing up as his best self as his learning moments. He seemed to be extremely focused on leadership as learning and any perceived misstep, mistake, potential catastrophe with his employees, was framed as part of the process of learning to lead and managing people. This was similar across participants who were at later stages of meaning-making.

Joey experienced an impediment to his ability to react adaptively as a leader when he balked on terminating an employee. He had ample opportunity to follow his gut reaction and the data before him, but hesitated because the employee was favored by the boss. In Joey's words, he hesitated because the employee "was well-liked by my boss". In processing this with me, Joey acknowledged that this was a fallback into his more socialized knowing and his fear of

"being transparent" and presumably making his superiors angry; also, he was fearful of losing this employee because he felt he needed someone there to show him the ropes. Joey explained:

> Going back to that, it's some of the fear aspects of being transparent. I probably missed my window, and I looked back and I said, "Knowing what I walked into, did I look at that as an opportunity to ... " either a crutch, because he had been here a few months more than me and was really the only guy I had to depend on at the time, and was I fearful that ... I almost feel like it was a fear of not being successful that led to my sabotaging of success, right?

Fast forwarding a bit, the problem employee continued to make work challenging for Joey, and he has now had to find other ways to move forward with him on staff. Had he not been hamstrung by his fears, he could have made a more adaptive move to meet both of their needs.

<div align="center">

Summary

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The findings from this study display the fine, nuanced, messy nature of meaning-making among leaders who were leading in the midst of challenge. Because of the small range of developmental diversity of the participants, most fallbacks were located in the space of socialized meaning-making and were experienced in slightly different ways depending on the leader and their particular form of mind and leadership context. Fallback in this study was found to have been an occurrence among leaders who were leading amidst challenges in their organizations, whether they were interpersonal with co-workers, or intrapersonal in one's own thinking, or a method of holding tightly when situations called for opening up. In one instance, fallback was experienced as a choice of deciding which meaning-making structure best fit a particular work context.

With regard to how fallback impacted the practice of leadership, fallback seemed to be a paradox- it was both a form of hamstringing leaders into less agile and nimble behaviors, and also served as a moment of reflection and vulnerability through which potential moments of awareness and perspective taking took root. The bright, light side of being open to one's fallback can only be appreciated when contrasted with the darker, shadow sides of fallback into which we are all capable of and are required for our forward progress.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature and quality of fallback, and how leaders experienced fallback while leading within their organizations. This study sought to empirically validate the concept of fallback and deeply understand the experience of falling back and the subsequent implications for the practice of leadership.

Situating the context

The premise of this study emanated from prior research conducted by McCallum (2008) and Livesay (2013) in which 'fallback' was a finding in McCallum's study, and not the actual phenomenon under investigation. Fallback surfaced as an experience of his participants which was the first significant indication that there was potential for shifts in meaning-making, in contrast to one always acting from their highest stage of development. The theoretical underpinnings of the concept of fallback (within constructive developmental theory) were picked up by Livesay (2013) and explored in her study of major thought leaders and scholars in the adult development field. My research ultimately confirmed McCallum's finding of fallback (that adults do experience a shift in their meaning-making experiences) and extended the notion of the phenomenon, through empirical data, to a more encompassing view of meaning-making as fluid; fallback essentially is a representation of the fluidity of meaning-making that was described by leader participants in my study. The findings from my study are validated to a degree by Livesay's (2013) discussions of fallback with theoretical constructive developmental scholars.

In McCallum's study, leaders self-selected (registered) into a group dynamics conference in which they were purposefully supported and challenged in their thinking and being in order to understand how meaning-making was related to their stage of development and how the psychosocial factors of the holding environment impacted their meaning-making (McCallum, 2008). As a result of his data analysis, McCallum found that adults fell back, or regressed, in their developmental action logics (stages of meaning-making) based upon stressors such as anxiety and distress; these fall backs were "markedly less complex and adaptive than their potential suggests is possible" (p. 250). From this information, Livesay (2013) explored the theoretical concept of falling back with key theorists in the fields of adult development and adult learning theory, and came to several conclusions about fallback; of note were her conclusions that adults can and do fallback in their meaning-making structures which is accounted for in constructive developmental theories; they will do so under certain conditions/triggers; and the theories for constructive-developmental meaning-making are not sufficient in describing the experience and import of fallback within the human experience of making meaning.

Based upon these prior studies, I entered into my inquiry to explore fallback in a natural setting, looking at the experiences of meaning-making across situations, and within real-life work contexts of leaders. I contrasted this with McCallum's study as I wanted to situate my study in a context in which fallback may or may not have occurred organically; in McCallum's study, the situation from which fallback emerged was a partly artificially-constructed environment in which purposeful challenges were directed at the conference participants. In my study, participants were interviewed within their current work contexts whereby challenges were occurring daily, some technical and some adaptive; some under the surface and some very much in the face of the leader participants. This was very challenging to carry out and required me, as

researcher, to be in deep relationship with the data in order to understand others and their sense-making.

Generating the data

Using an in-depth interview study design, data were collected through a series of three interviews which included a Subject-Object Interview (SOI) to assess meaning-making capacity and two follow up interviews to explore fallback and its context. The findings from the study indicate fallback is an occurring phenomenon in which fallback is a drift in how meaning-makers organize their meaning experiences, whereby leaders lose their most complex meaning-making position, or hold too tightly to a particular way of making meaning, or choose to downshift their thinking in order to respond to a particular situation. The instances of fallback found in the data impacted how leaders were able to react nimbly; it engendered vulnerability leading to a re-centering of meaning-making, and it provided space for reflection between trusted others to explore why and how meaning-making was influenced. These findings lend themselves to two overall conclusions from this empirical study.

The first conclusion is that fallback is an important aspect of meaning-making and a more robust and inviting way to describe the inevitable fluctuations in our meaning-making is through the term fluidity. Meaning-making, as it pertains to constructive developmental theories, cannot be discussed in the absence of acknowledging the fluidity that is common in the back and forth spaces of organizing meaning. The full range of meaning-making includes the fluidity of the shadows and lights, the highest level balcony perspective and the in the moment dance-floor perspective (to use a metaphor from Heifetz). The second conclusion is that fallback, reframed to embrace fluidity in meaning-making, can serve as a transformative learning tool for continued growth and development. Coaches and those working with leaders in the developmental space,

can encourage deep learning by exploring fluidity and growth that could occur from examining patterns and the situations which trigger the fluctuations in meaning-making.

Conclusion 1: Fluidity, Not Fallback

The findings from this study amplify constructive-developmental theory by demonstrating that meaning-making is fluid, and the fluidity itself across gradients within forms of mind shows up in diverse ways across individuals, as well as fluidity across gradients of intrapersonal, interpersonal and organizational contexts represents the unique and varying constructions of meaning- cognitively, affectively and in our actions. This highlights the movement of integration, to falling back, to integration of subject-object moves, to moments of making meaning in another part of the spectrum of meaning-making. This is consistent with scholarly literature which states development itself is dynamic, with individuals having the capacity to make meaning and take action at earlier and later stages of development, regardless of where their center of gravity measures (Spano, 2015). Drawing from literature by Cook-Greuter, Torbert, Herdman-Barker and Wilber, Spano (2015) states, "For example, a person may have a peak spiritual experience at the earlier concrete state of consciousness, however, that peak experience does not necessarily mean that they have moved to a later stage of development" (p. 54). Similar fluidity was found within my conversations with participants, as they described how they organized meaning within different situations which was somewhat different from how they constructed meaning at their most consistent complexity within their SOI. This aligns with Sharma and Cook-Greuter's (2018) conceptualization that adults progress through periods of differentiation and integration into finer and finer distinctions into what is subject and what is object (p. 3). For example, Lindsay seemed to be integrating her subjectivities in an objective way the more we discussed and inquired together around the fluidity in her meaning-making. In

a similar vein, Rudy recounted his limitations within the system in which he was working and was integrating his fluid movement into his new meaning-making around how he had previously shown up as a leader and how he was trying to show up as a leader this time; he began questioning with finer distinction his purpose and role in meeting the demands of the system, recognizing that he might never meet those expectations. The fluidity with which in the moment and after the fact recollections of experiences and meaning-making happen are in fact differentiations and integrations in themselves.

The fluidity and inconsistencies in how participants showed up in their leadership roles, having been triggered by some environmental or intrapersonal cue, reflect the ability of the mind to bend and shift and encompass multiple ways of knowing, whether more or less complex than usual. This was aligned with the scholarly literature, particularly Kegan's (1994) statement about whether and how adults consistently construct meaning as he stated, " it would be too simple to suggest that one's most complex epistemological principle is the only way one organizes experience all the time, across all domains" (p. 373). Kegan (1994) uses the example of going home to visit your parents and finding that you begin constructing meaning from a childhood perspective after a few days, presumably falling into the son/daughter role. In this way, a person may be temporarily constructing meaning from an earlier perspective, thus falling back. However, the shift in organizing meaning is not a complete regression (in the psychological sense) or loss of capacity, but a representation of the constant fluidity that is taking form at any given moment or in any given situation. That same person still has their most complex form of mind as he/she begins to recognize that they feel poorly about how they responded to being home, or feeling inconsistent with their usual constructions of themselves (and thus may feel unhappy about this). This is fluidity in meaning-making; gliding into the socialized meaning-

making space, even temporarily, is the fluidity of organizing meaning, even though one may have the capacity for self-authorship or self-transformative thinking.

The fluidity of meaning-making represents inconsistencies in organizing meaning, but not a loss of structural meaning-making. Leaders in this study who profiled at late-stage socialized and early-stage self-transforming all had a structure from which to gauge that they were not making meaning from their most complex form of mind, with their fullest capacity for complexity. The concept of fluidity, therefore, gives great texture and nuance to the ways that adults experience shifts in their meaning-making. Fluidity gives voice to a type of movement in meaning-making. The concept of fluidity is a reality that our situations, our triggers, can temporarily render us unable to organize meaning in our most complex way; that just *is* the way that it *is*.

Fluidity *is* the fluctuations, it is the constant flow of complexity into a different way of organizing meaning and represents the meaning that we are able to make in the moment, even if it comes from a different place on the spectrum of complexity. This furthers the original position statement of this research that meaning-making is fluid, bi-directional, inconsistent at times, and complex. Giving texture and voice to the dips in meaning-making is giving voice to the journey of organizing meaning as a human being. Highlighting the ways in which leader participants in my study have experienced a fluctuation in organizing their meaning-making allows the theory of constructive-developmental meaning-making to be more accessible to those who may be overly focused on behavior, limiting the perspective that meaning-making is made from and has influence not only on behavior but emotions and ways of thinking. The fluidity found in this study also shifts the focus from a static perspective of meaning-making to acknowledging that one can flow towards periods of meaning-making that are overly perfectionist or who may

construct the theory from a top-down approach where one form of making meaning is inherently better than another. This is consistent with Palus' reflection that fallback is the "full catastrophe of life with all of its ups and downs" (Livesay, 2013, p. 153-4). The act of living life is in how we construct meaning of our experiences, from all different levels of cognitions and affectivity

Conclusion 2: Reframing Fluidity as a Tool for Learning

One of the most resounding remarks I received from study participants at the conclusion of our time together was how thankful they were to process their experiences with someone else. In our conversations, leaders were exposing times and situations in which they were vulnerable, acted in a way that was inconsistent with their normal behavior, let their feelings overwhelm their overall meaning-making and/or remained committed and stuck in their particular form of mind, unable to bend. In processing these moments and situations together, some of the leaders described how our conversations lingered with them for quite some time afterward; that they were able to reflect on our conversations and move into more open spaces of perspective taking. This information indicates the potential for reframing fluidity of meaning-making as a tool for learning about how one experiences their meaning-making structures, and the various ways in which their meaning-making shows up according to triggers and across contexts. It also indicates that individuals, when reflecting with others and being able to see themselves differently as sense-makers, can grow from one perspective to another.

For example, Lindsay shared with me how much our conversations together helped her begin down a new path of self-authorship. She began thinking and discussing with others how she was going to look at leadership differently going forward, indicating she felt more able to assert her own definitions and constructions of success rather than relying on others or external constructions of success to guide her. In a follow-up exchange, Lindsay revealed that she has

felt more open, more inviting to other perspectives and has not felt the weight of carrying others' success, but only holding herself accountable for her own success. This represents a shift in how Lindsay took our conversations about fallback and reframed them for her own learning, something that we could do more of as adult educators, leadership development experts, and bearers of the theory of constructive-developmental meaning-making.

For some in this study, discussing 'fallback' was challenging because they interpreted our conversations about showing up differently, or as their smaller self, as a discussion of what they learned from their experiences, 'lessons learned', as opposed to pinpointing episodic moments when something went awry. For some (mostly in the late self-authoring), they re-framed for me what our conversation was about, which was learning. It also represented a place where I could ask and probe differently in order to get to 'fallback' moments or points of fluidity of meaning-making. Holding tight to one's meaning-making, and overly identifying with a particular way of organizing meaning may also be an area to learn from as highlighting this 'stuckness' could lead to a loosening of frames and invite the risk of thinking differently and flowing into a more fluid space of meaning-making.

Implications for Theory

The evolution of constructive-developmental theory by Kegan (1982, 1994), based on upon years of longitudinal research, has yielded four key findings of what Kegan & Lahey (2016) describe as the "individual trajectory of mental development in adulthood" (p. 61):

1. The levels of mental complexity (socialized, self-authoring, self-transforming) are qualitatively different, distinct and represent different ways of making meaning in the world.

2. Development includes periods of stability and change; when a stage is reached, people may stay in that stage for a significant period of time.

3. The intervals between growing the next level of mental complexity get longer as time goes on.

4. The likelihood of reaching higher levels of mental complexity gets smaller as one approaches stages 4 and 5.

In the summary above, constructive-developmental theory represents a stage, or phased approach, to growing complexity of mind which means growing more complex ways of structuring meaning of and from our experiences. The process of development is unidirectional, with adults progressing through stages in increased complexity. At whichever stage of mental complexity we have reached, we automatically have access to the stages before as they are subsumed in the totality of development. What emanated from this research study, and which could be included in the above bulleted list, is a caveat that the momentary and temporal meaning-making, the organization of thought/feeling/behavior, is fluid and moves back and forth depending on the complexity of a situation, or how one is able to access their meaning-making structures in the moment.

Regression, the term used in McCallum's (2008) definition of fallback, was batted around in the discussion of fallback in Livesay's (2013) study with key theorists. Livesay noted that Palus constructed fallback as "a thing that people experience. However, he did not embrace the theoretical framing of fallback as a departure from what normally happens in one's development..." (p. 154). Cook-Greuter, according to Livesay, defined fallback in two ways as both a temporary fallback and a long-term fallback, with the former being a triggering moment or situation in which one experiences "earlier behavior, but there may also be awareness of that

earlier behavior in the moment" (p. 169). The temporary fallback is not a complete regression or loss of capacity in a significant, impairing way. Livesay's conversation with Kegan about regression revealed that Kegan did not believe fallback to be a regression in overall capacity, but rather an experience whereby "you're not your best self, and it would be better to be your best self" (p. 197). Further, Kegan and Livesay discussed fallback as "one's un-chosen use of meaning-making structures that are less complex than the most complex meaning-making structure one has developed" (p. 197) in a way that one temporarily loses their ability to notice the inconsistency in how he/she is showing up and how he/she ideally wants to show up, using their most complex form of mind.

These conceptualizations of fallback, referred to as regression in some instances, represent a somewhat negative or judgmental viewpoint of the fluidity of meaning-making. Instead, my conclusions lend themselves to a more inclusive point of view in that fallback is part of the journey, albeit a temporary loss of capacity, however there is still space to organize experience according to one's most complex way of structuring meaning. The leaders in my study had temporary fluctuations in how they organized their meaning as it related to their most complex mental capacity, but they did not lose their ultimate form of mind or structures of meaning-making. Some were temporarily unable to organize their experience at self-authored, or self-transforming stages, and perhaps displayed more socialized thinking, but they were able to have perspective on this and reflect upon it from their most complex form of mind as they took note of how it was not consistent with how they would normally react/respond. This gives purpose to the finding of fallback in that fallback is part of the theory of sense-making and serves as a point of reflection and learning. The findings from this study, particularly the experiences of Lindsay, Joey and Rudy who were new to their surroundings, seem to support the "functional

regression" described by Knefelkamp (1999) in Love and Guthrie's (1999) work on student populations:

> A process where students who were undertaking new learning in a new environment "functionally" regressed to previous positions until they felt comfortable in the new environment. That is, the regression was developmentally appropriate; to progress developmentally, the students needed to move back to previous sense-making in order to get their bearings. (p. 7)

Indeed, the fluidity of meaning-making represents a functional regression, if one chooses to continue to use the term 'regression', in order to gain psychological security, regain one's footing, and re-centering in order to move ahead. In the case of particularly stressful triggering events, being able to take a step back, or falling back to a previous way of making meaning, could be necessary in order to avoid pushing further into a situation in which one may not be ready to tackle without assuring adequate support structures psychologically.

Ultimately, my research has taken these findings on meaning-making and mental complexity and challenge and leadership and it has put a spotlight on the fluidity of our mental processes which are missing from our discussions on meaning-making. While the theory of constructive-development includes explanation as to how we organize meaning, and describes how growth includes periods of disequilibrium and equilibrium, it does not describe in any great detail what fluidity of meaning-making looks, sounds, or feels like in any specific context, especially that which is experienced by leaders; or what the circumstances are that bring about a falling backward in the construction of meaning; or how those periods or moments of falling backward can impede or engender growth to the next stage of mental complexity. My study has contributed to the literature by giving a voice to what was ultimately termed fluidity of meaning-

making, whether we continue to call it fallback or simply fluidity, by describing and displaying how leaders, in the real world, experience fluid movement in their meaning-making, oftentimes vacillating back and forth in any given moment, given the conditions and context with which the person is grappling. The conclusions from this study offer an expansion to the theory that currently exists by opening it up to a more robust and colorful perspective of meaning-making, giving life to the process and dance that is meaning-making. The beauty of being sense-makers is that we bring with us a fluidity that gives us super-powers at many levels; and recognizing this can give us more access to places in our meaning-making that are necessary for specific points in time or contexts.

Because many of the leader participants were able to have a perspective on their temporary fluidity of meaning-making, they were able to demonstrate, validate and add texture to the consistency hypothesis that Kegan (1994) refers to. The consistency hypothesis explains how meaning-makers continue to structure their meaning from their fullest stage of complexity, even as they experience temporary fluctuations in moments of organizing meaning. Kegan (1994) stated, "If we are organizing our experiencing in these examples according to less complex principles, how can I say that a form of structural consistency is also present?" (p. 372). In effect, a person has not lost a stage or ability to structure meaning from their most complex form of mind, but rather they have had a fluctuation and can take perspective that the moment was inconsistent with their usual meaning-making self. Kegan (1994) further explains this as he stated, "The very term 'losing it' is evidence that however inconsistent we may temporarily be with our more complex way of organizing, we are so identified with this way that when we deviate from it we actually construct the phenomenon as a deviation, thus ‘losing it’ is expressive of, and consistent with that more complex principle of organization" (p. 372-3).

Indeed, several leaders in this study may have 'lost it' but were able to discuss this from a form of mind that was aware that there was an incongruence happening in their usual way of knowing, being and/or doing. Fluidity of meaning-making also has potential implications for transformative learning theory. Mezirow's (1991, 1994, 2000) transformative learning theory posits individuals can transform their perspective taking, and thus meaning-making; it is "based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our own way, and that how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences" (Cranton and Taylor, 2012, p. 5). Thus, the process of transformative learning is through "examining, questioning, and revising those perceptions" (p. 5). Leaders can engage with transformative learning by engaging in a process of critical reflection, dialogue, and action in relation to a disorienting dilemma. Embracing the fluid movement that one is susceptible to could be a type of disorienting dilemma that leads him/her to engage in critical reflection leading to perspective transformation. Critically reflecting and taking action on fluctuations in meaning-making that have become problematic or limiting has the potential to engender transformative learning when processed with care and attention, thus growing perspective and maturity of thought to greater levels of complexity. Thus, integrating fluid movement into the framing of transformative learning as a potential point of disorientation and critical reflection may lead to a more robust way to describe the process by which construction of meaning takes place in the moment and the implications for evaluating triggers for movement in the future.

From a leadership theory perspective, this study affords a unique perspective on adaptive leadership. As referenced in the review of the scholarly literature, being triggered as a leader is not a new phenomenon. According to Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), in their work on

adaptive leadership and adaptive challenges, triggers to leaders can come in a variety of formats and can render leaders debilitated by fear and self-protection:

> How often has someone "pushed your buttons" or "hit a nerve"? A brief comment by a coworker, an action from your spouse, just the right small stimulus can set you off and make you crazy, or at least momentarily out of control. Your defense mechanisms kick in, generated by fear and fueled with adrenaline. Your bright, strategic, graceful, attentive self is no longer there, temporarily eclipsed by your more primal defensive self. (p. 200)

This experience is real, as evidenced by this empirical study, and has in fact put leaders into unproductive spaces (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). If the work of leaders in today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) milieus is that of practicing adaptive leadership- that which challenges the status quo and disrupts systems by questioning assumptions and tackling hard questions- then recognizing one's triggers and fallback as counter to that process is necessary. One might call this self-awareness, or being conscious of one's meaning-making. The metaphor Heifetz, et al. uses of getting on the 'balcony' is key to leaders being able to reflect on their fallback moves, their areas of trigger and how they are being rendered unproductive or impotent in their leadership. Holding space in leadership development programming for training one's mind to move between dance floor and balcony, to acquire those perspectives of self and other, in order to be more effective in catching ourselves in our meaning-making shifts, or becoming more intentional in our meaning-making shifts, in order to hold steady in the adaptive leadership framework is a significant contribution of this study to the leadership literature. Fluidity in meaning-making is ultimately a signal, or a tool, that we are reducing our capability of being adaptive, and thus potentially less impactful than we could be.

Implications for Practice

The leaders in this study were asked to share instances when they did not quite show up in their usual fashion as a leader. In these conversations, it was found that fluidity of meaning making did occur on occasion and the movement consisted of making meaning more from a socialized form of mind rather than the form of mind in which the leader had the most capacity for complexity of thought. For some, the leaders did not show up using their most complex form of mind in interpersonal situations for fear of retribution or damaging relationships in the workplace. For others, fluidity of meaning-making occurred in the intrapersonal thinking and acting around worthiness of being a leader and whether being a leader in the particular organization was the right position for him/her. The impact of the fluctuations in making meaning led to the "impotence" of leadership for some, paralyzed by not being able to act or have influence in ways that he or she had formerly experienced; at other times, it impacted leaders in that they held too tightly to ways of constructing meaning which impacted their ability to be flexible, to open up and invite other perspectives when the situation was calling for a more open and robust consideration of viewpoints. The implications of this study, and fluidity of meaning-making generally, on the practice realm lie within the impact on the field of leadership development, executive/leadership coaching, and developing adaptability as a leader.

Leadership Development Programming

In Petrie's (2014) call to action with regard to transforming leadership development programming from traditional horizontal leader development (that of learning new skills to deploy) to a combined effort of developing leaders both horizontally and vertically (that of changing how leaders know, or shifting their complexity of mind), he stated:"

Traditionally, leadership programs have focused mainly on horizontal development. What is it that leaders need to learn, and how do we give them that? At first this sounds sensible. But if your leaders already know what great leaders do and still can't do it, what value is there in telling them again? What if the problem isn't what the leader knows, but who the leader is? (p. 8)

This thought-provoking series of questions have significant implications for reframing fluidity of meaning-making as a learning tool for leadership development programming. If it is indeed "who the leader is" that is a point of contention in one's practice of leadership, then understanding and examining how they are making meaning of situations will be of ultimate import; understanding where fluid movement that may have hindered leaders in some way, and reframing it to a learning tool for getting past being stuck, or incapable of leading change or leading through uncertainty, could be extremely useful in developing leaders' sense of self, learning how they organize meaning and how they can expand both horizontally and vertically to reach their full potential.

Executive Coaching

Coaching philosophies and practice approaches which use psychodynamic theories, specifically constructive-developmental theory, to approach the philosophy of coaching would benefit greatly from learning the conceptualization of fluidity of meaning-making which emanated from this study. Understanding the concept of fluidity, née 'fallback', from the vantage point of this study may increase the compassion by which coaches and leaders approach their leadership development. Understanding how and where fluctuations in meaning-making may occur, and reflecting that back to leaders, could increase the critical reflective practices the leader employees to examine their thinking and being around leadership.

Leadership coaching platforms, such as Growth Edge Coaching developed by Jennifer Garvey Berger, already employ a CDT approach; information from this study could add to the richness of the discussion as to how adults' meaning-making can span across stages, eliminating a false assumption that leading with one's fullest self is the goal/outcome of coaching, or that it is even possible. Imagine the liberation of knowing that one doesn't have to show up as their fullest self all of the time; that understanding and recognizing triggers, and when meaning-making has been stunted, is a learning tool and aid in development instead of a setback or a failure. As stated in the previous section, it is unwise to believe that everyone uses their fullest mental complexity all of the time in all situations; Lindsay, a leader participant in this study, repeatedly used the mantra "failing forward" to indicate the learning and growth which come from examining fluid movements in meaning-making. Having a nuanced, textured description of fluidity of meaning-making would allow for the liberating structure of falling back to be helpful in examining one's leadership practices from a perspective of learning and growth.

Leadership Agility

Bourton, Lavoie, & Vogel (2018) lay out steps that leaders can take to enhance their "inner agility," or the complexity of thought and action, in reaction to leading within the ever-increasing complexity organizations are facing. If leaders can react to the "fog of uncertainty" that exists in organizations with more complex and agile ways of knowing and doing, they can become more transformative in their practice of leadership. This line of thought would benefit from the information laid out in this study related to fluidity of meaning-making, or 'fallback,' in that by naming, examining, and reflecting on fluidity, leaders can more deeply understand what their triggers are and how they stand in relation to making-meaning about certain situations. This aligns with Bourton, Lavoie & Vogel's (2018) warning that without an acknowledgment of

how leaders internalize stress, their "judgment and decision-making skills seem insufficient" (p. 1); eventually, they say, leaders "fall back on old habits, which, unfortunately, are almost always out of sync with what their current context demands" (p.1). Acknowledging the fluid movement in meaning-making can give shape to how leaders essentially get in their own ways and how they can overcome that with reflection, action, and persistence.

Recommendations

This study served as an empirical account of the nature and quality and implications of 'fallback' on leaders' meaning-making and practice of leadership in the workforce. The findings and conclusions from the study indicate meaning-making to be a bi-directional, fluid process that takes place in varying temporal degrees. Fallback, texturized as the *fluidity of meaning-making* between and among more and less complex ways of organizing meaning, was elicited through conversations with the leader participants about their experiences and reactions to those experiences. Further involvement of co-workers and others serving alongside leaders in their organizations could offer more nuanced and contextual information as to how the leader was experienced by his or her co-workers and the extent to which the leaders' context influenced the fluidity of their meaning-making. Given sufficient time and resources, it would be useful to employ an ethnographic approach to a study on fluidity of meaning-making whereby investigators can observe and record potentially fluid movements in real-time, moment by moment, in order to process with the leader afterward. This would require deep buy-in from study participants and would require participants to submit to a level of vulnerability whilst their meetings or performances or work situations are observed and reflected back to the participant by the investigator.

Given that the majority of leader participants in this study were male, further exploration of fluidity of meaning-making should be conducted with women leaders. While several women leaders were contacted as potential participants to balance the gender bias, ultimately only two agreed to participate. This is not uncommon, as a study by Spano (2015) on the relationship among leadership, wisdom, and constructive-developmental theory also skewed towards more male participants, even though efforts were made to balance the gender representation in the study. Spano (2015) attributed part of the imbalance to the statistic that women only occupy 40% of the executive population (p. 62), and presumably are harder to gain as a representative population. In her study, women executives were more keen to be "straightforward" in recalling their experiences of leadership and wisdom, thus indicating women may be more apt to integrate ways of knowing (cognitive, reflective and affective) in their holding of wisdom (p. 66). These findings would be critical to review and incorporate into future studies of the fluidity of meaning-making with women leaders as fluidity could be found among all domains of knowing.

A final recommendation is directed towards the interview questions used to elicit data from leaders about the instances in which they did not show up as their fullest, most complex selves. It was challenging to explain to leaders what type of information was being sought in the absence of a model or metaphor. The development of innovative and creative tools to help persons access their awareness of, and attention to, fluidity of meaning-making would serve the research community in uncovering and getting to the crux of the fluid nature of meaning-making.

Final Thoughts

"We are more alike, my friends, than we are unalike."- Maya Angelou

This quote, taken from a well-known Maya Angelou (1990) poem, exemplifies the overarching learning I am personally taking away from this research experience. My quest into

doctoral research was a personal one- having experienced the frustrations, and eventual

liberating structures, of not showing up as my fullest self in various work situations. I wanted to

dive deeper into the nature and experience of falling back in the process of meaning-making to

understand more deeply how the phenomenon was experienced in other meaning makers,

especially leaders. Having risen into leadership positions myself, I was becoming more aware of

the ways in which I was finding myself stuck, and thinking and acting "inconsistent with my

values" (to paraphrase an emic code from participant Artie).

These inconsistencies, and fluctuations between less and more complex thinking and

doing on my part, were interesting, frustrating and stymieing to me. Dipping into self-doubt,

seeking external favor from those whose opinions were more important to me at the time than

my own, and facing paralyses of different levels, in making decisions or taking action, were my

own personal fluid movements in meaning-making. In reflecting on these experiences, I learned

a great deal about myself and how fluidity of meaning-making served in some instances to

protect myself, protect my ego, to not appear unknowing and incompetent. When processing

them with others, I began to have a perspective on these moves which allowed me to increase my

attention to when I was experiencing fluid movement in my meaning-making in the moment.

Primarily, meaning-making is fluid and complex, and paying attention to meaning-making is a

habit that one must train one's self to see. In effect, in observing my 'fallback' at the time, now

fluidity of meaning-making, I gained new eyes with which to see myself and my triggers, and my

reflective patterns in the moment and after the fact.

I then became curious as to whether those were also experiences of other adults, other

leaders whose leadership was lurking around the edges of complexity within their organizations,

or whose responsibilities as a leader included leading high stakes projects. What I came to know

through my study is that we are all more alike than we are different. Even at varying ages, and stages of career, leaders experience very similar fluctuations in their meaning-making. We are all alike in that, as human beings, we are meaning makers. Theory tells us that making meaning is an active process, socially constructed and influenced by the holding environments in which we find ourselves. Fluidity of meaning-making, when examined from a balcony perspective, is a part of the meaning-making process and in some ways puts us all on level playing fields, from the novice academic to the seasoned CEO. Fluidity could be considered the great equalizer, in that we all find ourselves moving in and out of our highest form of complexity from time to time, and if only we were more inclined to acknowledge and speak about these fluid movements (which only those with a greater capacity for meaning-making can see), without fear of judgment (a movement in itself), we might find ourselves in good company. Good company to reflect, to listen, and find ways to view our fluidity of meaning-making as learning about ourselves, our patterns and our assumption-making.

My greatest learning has been that we are all more alike than we are different, and while the Angelou quote reflects fluidity more generally, fluidity of meaning-making is also extremely personal and nuanced and shows up in varying ways across individuals. This study has also revealed to me that people, more than most other things, want to be heard. Hearing someone else, really listening to their stories, is a genuine act of compassion. The leaders participating in this study were extremely gracious and giving of their time and expressed how helpful and insightful this process was for them. Some even had major learnings and insights which have perhaps grown their perspective taking abilities. Fluidity of meaning-making, when approached with openness and kindness, as a common experience with rich potential for learning, can be a great tool to understand the meaning-making process and by extension the leadership process of

adults who are generally just doing the best that they can. Fluidity of meaning-making, when approached as a tool for reflection and learning can reveal inconsistencies in our organizing of meaning, and reveal hidden assumptions and patterns that simply needed illumination in order to become un-stuck in leadership patterns of behavior. Fluidity of meaning-making, holistically, is a gift. A gift that reminds us that we are constantly learning and reflecting and taking note of our biggest, or fullest, selves and when we are cognizant of that, we are moving towards growth even if only pushing the needle just a bit.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT CONTACT LETTER

Greetings,   [name]_____,

My name is Ashley Wells and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia in the department of Adult Learning, Leadership and Organization Development.   I am contacting you because << I believe you may be interested in participating in my dissertation research>> or << you have expressed an interest in participating in my dissertation research>> for my doctoral degree (PhD).

I am interested in interviewing leaders for my dissertation. Specifically, I am looking for leaders who are facing challenges within their organizations such as leading or engaging with change or complex situations. Changes/challenges that would meet my proposed criteria include but are not limited to: cultural shifts, mergers, traversing unchartered waters, implementing new systems, developing new teams, etc.

The purpose of my research is to explore how leaders lead in the midst of change, challenge and/or uncertainty. Specifically, I am most interested in understanding how leaders experience themselves and their leadership practices during these times, and how they may or may not bring their best 'leaderful' selves to a situation.

Leaders oftentimes face challenges in leading change or other initiatives at work. Of particular interest are those situations in which leaders experience a phenomenon called 'fallback'. This is sometimes described as feeling like you are falling backwards, being off-balance, triggered, unprepared or not showing up as your best self. I am interested in learning about those fallback instances when an individual does not make the best decisions that he or she is normally capable of making, due to moments of fallback. These instances are important to understand as they will help advance theories of how adults make meaning and how leadership is enacted.

The benefit of participating in this study is two-fold. First, you will have an opportunity to reflect with someone on your experiences in leading change and the challenges of being a leader in those critical times. Secondly, the insights generated from this study may help to explain and better understand what holds leaders back from bringing their best selves to the practice of leadership.

Participation in the study would require a series of three interviews, each about 60 to 90 minutes in duration. If you are interested in participating, I would be happy to speak with you regarding the eligibility criteria. Please contact me at the email and/or phone number below so that we can discuss your potential eligibility for the study, and the study requirements if you are eligible and willing to participate.   Many thanks for your consideration,
Ashley Wells

acwells@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE ELIGIBILITY SCREENING SCRIPT

Thank you for calling to find out more about our research study. My name is Ashley Wells, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia's Department of Adult Learning, Leadership and Organization Development.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how adults think about challenging situations at work like leading or engaging with change. Leaders oftentimes face challenges and complexity at work, and this research will investigate how adults respond to those challenging situations with their thinking and behavior. Of particular interest are those situations in which leaders experience a phenomenon called 'fallback' or an instance when an individual does not make the best decisions that he or she is normally capable of making, due to stress or conflict or challenge. This is sometimes described as being off-balance, triggered, unprepared or not showing up as your best self. We hope that the main study will help advance theories of adult development and leadership.

To participant, individuals will be asked to participate in three interviews (either in person or by phone/Zoom). They will last about 60-90 minutes. Do you think you might be interested in participating in that study?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time. End call.

{If Yes}: Great. Before enrolling people in this study, I need to ask you some questions to determine if you are eligible for the study. *At the end of this interview, I will tell you if you qualify or not to participate in the study. If you don't qualify, all the information you gave me will be immediately destroyed by shredding.*

And so what I would now like to do is to ask you a series of questions about your experience as a leader, the length of time you have been employed with your current employer, and how many people you supervise. This should only take about 10 minutes of

{if no}: Okay, thank you for

your time.

{If Ineglibile}: Thank you for

your time.	your participation in this screening. Unfortunately, you are not eligible at this time. Thank you again for your time. End call.
Do I have your permission to ask you some questions?	
Q1. Would you describe your position at work as that of a 'leader'?	
Q2. [if yes] How many people do you currently supervise?	{If Ineglibile}: Thank you for your participation in this screening. Unfortunately, you are not eligible at this time. Thank you again for your time. End call.
Q3. How long have you been employed at your current place of employment?	
Q4. Oftentimes, as leaders, we encounter situations that are challenging and complex. Sometimes we don't know how to react or solve the problem, and sometimes we do. I am interested in learning about those situations in which the challenges are so great that you make decisions or behave in ways you normally wouldn't; perhaps you felt like you were falling backwards in your abilities to address challenges. For example someone touched on a nerve or triggered something in you that led you to react in a way that you normally wouldn't. Can you think of any time that this has happened or is this currently happening at your place of work?	{if no}: Okay, thank you for your time.
Q5. [if yes] Would you be willing to take part in this research whereby I interview you about those experiences, observe in your workplace setting and ask you to keep some brief notes on your experiences?	{if no}: Okay, thank you for your time.
{If Eligible}: Thank you. You are eligible for this study. Would you like to proceed with participation?	
{if yes} Proceed with scheduling.	
Thank you.	

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Developmental Fallback and The Practice of Leadership

Researcher's Statement
We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator:	Aliki Nicolaides, Ed.D. Department of Adult Learning, Leadership and Organization Development alikin@uga.edu, 706-583-8098
Co-Investigators:	Ashley C. Wells Department of Adult Learning, Leadership and Organization Development acwells@uga.edu, ██████████ Alexandra B. Cox Department of Adult Learning, Leadership and Organization Development alliecox@uga.edu, 706-542-5760

Purpose of the Study
This study is being conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation research. My research focus combines the areas of leadership theory and adult development. The purpose of this study is to understand how adults make meaning of challenging work issues, make decisions and behave, particularly as a leader in a workplace setting. Leaders oftentimes face challenges in leading change or other initiatives at work, and this research will investigate how adult's respond to those challenging situations with their thinking and behavior. Of particular interest are those situations in which leaders experience a phenomenon called 'fallback' or an instance when an individual feels triggered, off-balance, unprepared or now showing up as their best self, and consequently does not make the best decisions that he or she is normally capable of making. You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet the eligibility criteria as a leader leading or engaging change or facing other challenges within your workplace, and you agree to talk about personal experiences of 'fallback'.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in …
- **Individual Interviews**: Participate in up to five 60-90 minute interviews with the researcher over the course of 3-4 months. Each interview will be audio recorded and will be conducted in a private setting of your choosing, or via telephone. Audio recordings will be kept private and held in a secure location. The interview questions will ask you about your experiences at work, how you think about situations that have happened, how you have acted or made decisions at work (particularly any instances of 'fallback'), and how you use any resources available to you to help you in difficult or challenging situations.
- **Assessment Interview**: Participate in an assessment interview with a qualified researcher who will ask you questions regarding how you make meaning of experiences in your life. The results will provide the researchers with information related to how you take perspective on experiences, view authority, and generally think about life experiences. The assessment interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Risks and discomforts
While the risks and discomforts of this research project are expected to be minimal, you may experience some feelings of stress or anxiety or other emotions in discussing your personal interactions with people at work, discussing your decision making process, and/or any realizations about how you think about things and perform as a leader. The researcher will provide to you a reference sheet which lists the appropriate counseling services available in your area should you experience any of these feelings of discomfort.

Benefits
Benefits of participating in this research include the opportunity to contribute to scientific knowledge about the process of adult development and its relationship to the practice of leadership. The results of this research will help the fields of developmental psychology, adult education, and human resources in understanding how adults make meaning and deal with challenging situations, particularly experiences of 'fallback', as leaders in the workplace setting. You may also learn something about yourself and your leadership that you did not know before, which may benefit you in your growth and development as a leader.

Incentives for participation
A gift card in the amount of $50 will be provided to you as an incentive for the considerable amount of time participating in the interviews.

Audio Recording
I will use a digital audio recording device during your interviews. The purpose of using the recording device is to ensure that I obtain information about your experiences as accurately as possible and have a record of that information to review as part of my data analysis. Immediately after your interviews, the audio recordings will be transcribed for research analysis. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept in password protected electronic files on a secure computer. Files will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in audio recordings is necessary for this study. Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You will not be able to participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality
The data collected from your interviews and interactions with the researchers will be kept confidential. We will use pseudonyms in place of your real name and place of work so that you cannot be identified in any presentation of the data. Your contact information, audio recordings, and any other identifiable information will be kept private in a password protected document on the researcher's computer, only accessible by the researchers specified in this document, or by any departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory oversight of human subjects' research. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is **Ashley C. Wells**, a doctoral graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Ashley C. Wells at acwells@uga.edu or at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

SOI PROTOCOL

APPENDIX D

ADMINISTERING THE SUBJECT-OBJECT INTERVIEW

MATERIALS:	Ten (10) subject cards (3" x 7") pencil; tape recorder and ninety (90) minute tape
PREPPING THE SUBJECT:	Subject needs to know he/she: (a) is participating in a 90minute interview (b) the goal of which is to learn "how you think about things," "how you make sense of your own experience," etc. (c) doesn't have to talk about anything he/she doesn't want to.

PART I: Generating Content: The Inventory

The subject is handed the ten (10) index cards.

Each card has a title printed on it, to wit:

1. ANGRY

2. ANXIOUS, NERVOUS

3. SUCCESS

4. STRONG STAND, CONVICTION

5. SAD

6. TORN

7. MOVED, TOUCHED

8. LOST SOMETHING

9. CHANGE

10. IMPORTANT TO ME

The subject is told that the cards are for his/her use only, that you won't see them, and that he/she can take them with him/her or throw them away after the interview. The cards are just to help the subject jot down things we might want to talk about in the interview.

The subject is told, "We will spend the first 15-20 minutes with the cards and then talk together for an hour or so about those things you jotted down on the cards which you choose to talk about. We do not have to talk about anything you don't want to talk about."

(1) "Now let's take the first card" (ANGRY)
"If you were to think back over the last several weeks, even the last couple months, and you had to think about times you felt really angry about something, or times you got really mad or felt a sense of outrage or violation-are there 2 or 3 things that come to mind? Take a minute to think about it, if you like, and just jot down on the card whatever you need to remind you of what they were." (If nothing comes to mind for a particular card, skip it and go on to the next card)

(2) (ANXIOUS, NERVOUS)
" ... if you were to think of some times when you found yourself being really scared about something, nervous, anxious about something... "

(3) (SUCCESS)
" ... if you were to think of some times when you felt kind of triumphant, or that you had achieved something that was difficult for you, or especially satisfying that you were afraid might come out another way, or a sense that you had overcome something... "

(4) (STRONG STAND, CONVICTION)
" ... if you were to think of some times when you had to take a strong stand, or felt very keenly 'this is what I think should or should not be done about this,' times when you became aware of a particular conviction you held..."

(5) (SAD)
" ... felt real sad about something, perhaps something that even made you cry, or left you feeling on the verge of tears... "

(6) (TORN)

"…felt really in conflict about something, where someone or some part of you felt one way or was urging you on in one direction, and someone else or some other part was feeling another way; times when you really felt kind of torn about something… "

(7) (MOVED, TOUCHED)

" … felt quite touched by something you saw, or thought or heard, perhaps something that even caused your eyes to tear up, something that moved you… "

(8) (LOST SOMETHING)

" …times you had to leave something behind, or were worried that you might lose something or someone; 'goodbye' experiences, the ends of something important or valuable; losses… "

(9) (CHANGE)

"As you look back at your past, if you had to think of some ways in which you think you've changed over the last few years--or, even months--if that seems right--are there some ways that come to mind?"

(10) (IMPORTANT)

"If I were just to ask you, 'What is it that is most important to you?', or 'What do you care deepest about?' or "What matters most?'--are there 1 or 2 things that come to mind?"

PART II

"Now we have an hour or so to talk about some of these things you've recalled or jotted down. You can decide where we start. Is there one card you felt more strongly about than the others? (or a few cards, etc.) … "

(Now the probing-for-structure part of the interview begins…) (Subject keeps selecting the cards)

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I appreciate your time and your willingness to speak with me. My goal during this conversation is for you to be able to speak openly and honestly about your experiences at work as a leader. As a reminder, I am studying the ways people experience fallback and make sense of their experiences of fallback, or those times when you might not show up as your best self when confronted with challenges.

If at any time you are uncomfortable with the questions or the interview, feel free to stop the interview. The interview will last between sixty and ninety minutes and will be audio recorded. Before we begin, please read the consent form and sign both copies that you agree to participate in this interview and have it audio recorded (or, confirm that the informed consent form has been signed and emailed before interview). As a reminder, your identity will remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we begin? I will now begin recording.

Subject-Object Interview (Interview 1)

Follow Subject-Object Interview protocol.

Follow-Up Fallback Interview (Interview 2)

Following up on previous interview about the leaders' experiences or beginning with a new inquiry into fallback:

1. Tell me about a time during this/that challenge/change that made you feel like you were off-balance in your response, or like you were holding back, triggered, unnerved or not showing up like you would have liked to. Potential probes:
    a. What were you thinking in the moment?
    b. How were you feeling?
    c. What would you have normally done or would have liked to have done in that situation?
    d. Why do you think you responded like that?
    e. What do you think instigated that response from you?
    f. When did you realize you had a moment of falling back?

Follow Up Interviews (Interview 3)

Following up on previous conversations about the leaders' experiences. Potential probes:

1. If you could think of yourself as having a front and center-stage leader persona and a back-stage behind the curtain leader, what would those two personas sound like while they were leading?
2. When are those personas most welcome/unwelcome in your work?
3. When did you realize you had a moment of falling back?
4. Tell me what the response was from your colleagues.
5. Describe your interactions with them.
6. How did this impact your leadership, if at all?

Closing (for all interviews)

Those are all the questions I have. Thank you for sharing with me about your leadership/work experiences. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to tell me about? Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I appreciate your time and your responses.