How Senior Leaders Develop Resilience in Adversity: A Qualitative Study

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This study examined the ways in which adversity affects leaders with special reference to leader consciousness and leader resilience. Using a qualitative approach, interviews with senior level leaders revealed several important findings, including themes such as leader sustenance, leader adversity and coping/thriving, leadership style and change in leadership style due to adversity. Study results inform the leadership field regarding factors that encourage the development of resilience and individual and collective consciousness among leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Whilst it is well documented that adversity and struggle need to be met with reflection and mindfulness (Snyder, 2013; Barbour & Burgess & Falkman & McManus, 2012), our aim was to explore the extent to which adversity actually resulted in mindfulness, and the ways in which mindfulness contributes to leader resilience.

After an extensive literature review into the notion of adversity and business leadership, we developed a questionnaire that served as a framework for a social-constructivist approach to understanding adversity and its impact upon leadership consciousness (mindfulness) and business leadership resilience. As a result of the literature review, an abbreviated form of which we have included in this article, we began with a hypothesis as seen in Figure 1: "Our Initial Framework."
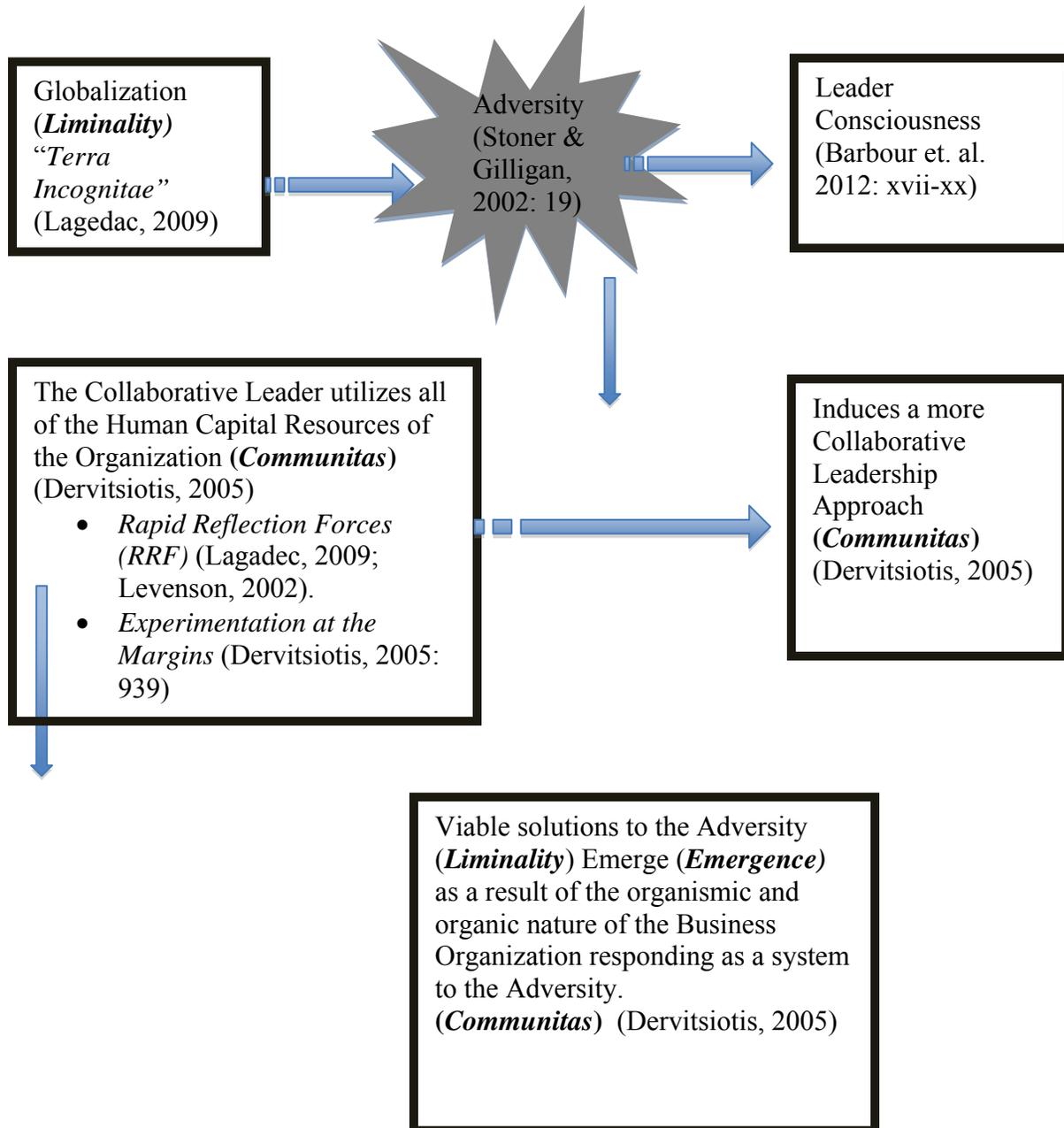
The working hypothesis, presented in Figure 1, assumes that Globalization is a major source of adversity for business leaders. However, we discovered in the process of the interviews with the 17 senior leaders that globalization is not perceived as a major source of adversity. It emerged that any number of factors are perceived as threatening by different leaders at different times. This ties in to Stoner and Gilligan's definition of adversity (Stoner & Gilligan, 2002):

- Adversities are unexpected.
- Adversities are disruptive, twisting and thwarting the expected patterns of planned action.
- Adversity has a level of uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding it. The path through it is often not immediately clear.

The literature review served as a useful framework from which we developed the interview protocol, which is found in Appendix 1, and which assumed that globalization serves as an initiator of adversity for most senior business leaders. We were in for a surprise. This article outlines our research journey, from the literature review to the findings from interviews with CEO's and senior leaders from both multi-

national corporations and smaller organizations. The article concludes with proposals for ways in which business leaders can leverage adversity for resilience in leadership.

FIGURE 1
INITIAL FRAMEWORK

Globalization (***Liminality)*** *"Terra Incognitae"* (Lagedac, 2009)

Adversity (Stoner & Gilligan, 2002: 19)

Leader Consciousness (Barbour et. al. 2012: xvii-xx)

The Collaborative Leader utilizes all of the Human Capital Resources of the Organization (***Communitas***) (Dervitsiotis, 2005)
- *Rapid Reflection Forces (RRF)* (Lagadec, 2009; Levenson, 2002).
- *Experimentation at the Margins* (Dervitsiotis, 2005: 939)

Induces a more Collaborative Leadership Approach (***Communitas***) (Dervitsiotis, 2005)

Viable solutions to the Adversity (***Liminality***) Emerge (***Emergence)*** as a result of the organismic and organic nature of the Business Organization responding as a system to the Adversity.
(***Communitas***) (Dervitsiotis, 2005)

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Leader Consciousness
Approaching such a topic is a challenging task as so many have written, discussed and pleaded for leadership consciousness over numerous centuries as the following quote demonstrates:

There's no chance of their having a conscious glimpse of the truth as long as they refuse to disturb the things they take for granted and remain incapable of explaining them. For if your starting-point is unknown, and your end-point and intermediate stages are woven together out of unknown material, there may be coherence, but knowledge is completely out of the question." Plato, The Republic.

How can we, as scholars and business people, develop consciousness and resilience in our modern, distracted, lives? Scholarly literature provides some insight, with much work on the topics of moral consciousness (Branson, 2007; Hughes, Ginnette & Curphy, 1999; Kanungo and Mendoca, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981; and Sandlin, 1992.)

For example, in a study of school administrators, Branson (2007) found that structured self-reflection contributed significantly to study participants' development of moral consciousness. A cautionary note was presented by Branson, however, in that deep self-reflection can lead to negative outcomes for those undergoing such work. Participants were fore-warned of the potential for difficult emotions to arise in the self-reflection process. Thus, they were encouraged to avoid focusing on life events that could engender sadness or anxiety. Ironically, this theme recurs throughout the consciousness literature and may provide insight as to why so few choose to purposefully seek consciousness.

Parameshwar (2006) also studied leadership consciousness through the examination of 10 leaders undergoing global social change. Interviews revealed that these leaders developed a sense of higher purpose and shook themselves free of an 'entranced consciousness' – or unreflective consciousness – through 1) reframing of personal suffering, 2) embracing inspiring leadership standards of others while reflecting upon suffering, 3) reinforcing their identification with others who are suffering, and 4) reorienting their minds toward serving others who are suffering. Through this work, Parameshwar proposes that leaders can move from entranced consciousness toward true consciousness and inventing a higher purpose.

Building upon Kant's (1997) work on consciousness, where consciousness is articulated as an essential component of evolving into a higher state of being, Sanders, Hopkins, and Gregory (2003) developed a conceptual model of transcendental leadership, including consciousness as a primary dimension. While this work focused on spiritual leadership, it brings forth implications for business leadership as well.

Boucouvalas (1993) suggested that an individual's level of consciousness is directly related to the degree to which they are aware, both internally and externally and contends that consciousness exists in the brain wave frequencies, which can reveal where consciousness exists in each individual. Following this line of thinking, this work proposes that the growth of consciousness in individuals actually changes the structure of their brain and thought configuration pattern, and this restructuring can be a key mechanism in resilience because it creates a mindset or paradigm for handling future adversity. The change in brain pattern results in the ability to think in more complex patterns, leading to greater awareness and less egocentrism.

Kegan (1994) suggests that humans evolve into full cognitive and emotional maturity through orders of consciousness, and that each level of consciousness helps the individual construct new meaning and interpretation of reality. Using Kegan's, as well as Cook-Greuter (1999), Loevinger (1966); (Loevinger and Blasi, 1976) and Torbert (1987) on meaning-making, Brown (2011) empirically examined leaders in the later stages of cognitive development. Results of this study demonstrated that leaders in later stages of development think from a 'deeper foundation' (ii), drawing from transpersonal meaning, are able to use systems, complexity and integrated theories in their thinking process, and build thinking capabilities through both internal and external dialogue.

Harung, Heaton and Alexander (1995) developed a unified theory of leadership that culminates in the highest level when consciousness is achieved. Their model moves from Level 4 (leadership behaviors) and progress through Level 3 (leader characteristics), Level 2 (states of psychological development) and, lastly, Level 1 (development of consciousness). It is at this level of consciousness that leaders develop the mental framework to survive and even thrive in contexts of adversity.

Given the 'heady' nature of leadership consciousness, it is no wonder most leaders are hesitant to undertake the goal of becoming conscious. But, as demonstrated below, given today's adverse and complex business context, there is an urgent need to develop consciousness in our leaders as a mechanism for resilience in the face of ongoing adversity and complexity.

Adversity

Adversity continues to be a reality in the 21st century that affects leaders in various ways. It is only natural to ask to what extent adversity affects leadership with respect to leader consciousness and how this leader consciousness, arising from adversity, is evidenced in the leadership processes of the business enterprise?

There is a distinction between adversity and crisis, since as Stoner and Gilligan suggest (Stoner & Gilligan, 2002) adversity is distinguished from crisis based on the risk of survival. For Stoner and Gilligan, adversity within the context of business leadership comprises the following three elements – adversity is unexpected, disruptive and creates uncertainty.

The business enterprise is one of the primary agents of the business system that is affected by external and internal actors, and is also an agent that must respond to these adversities in ways that ensure the health and strength of the organization in the face of the many complex realities that challenge the well-being of the organization. These challenges emerge both externally (Lagadec, 2009) as hyper-complex risks and crises, and internally (Barlatt, Cohn, Gusikhin, 2012), and may present themselves in either the external or internal arenas. Adversity calls for extraordinary courage, resilience, and tough-mindedness. In all, business leaders and scholars alike have acknowledged that adversity is a nearly constant threat to organizational functioning. Leaders who adapt to adverse circumstances are better equipped for success and effectiveness.

Complexity

Organizations are living entities (Dervitsiotis, 2005) and in this context, business leaders are agents within a living organization, which functions as a complex adaptive system (Gabriela, 2012; Solow & Szmerekovsky, 2006). The complex nature of a business enterprise means that leaders are not insulated, nor isolated, from the many internal and external forces that impact the business enterprise. Further, complex adaptive systems are diverse living elements comprised of multiple interconnected agents that have the capacity to change and learn from experience" (VanderKaay, 2010).

Reframing the science of complexity into organizational and leadership theory, and thus leader consciousness, is challenging since "much of the work on complexity and the development of complexity theories has been undertaken in the context of the natural sciences and there has been relatively little work on developing or applying such theories in the social science" (Alaa, 2009: 23). However, it has been argued that these principles can be applied to organizational life (Reason & Goodwin, 1999). That being said, an organization is more than the structures, policies and products it creates (Coveney & Highfield, 1995). This implies that in seeking to understand organizational dynamics, we need to shift our focus from individuals and departments to the interaction among all the various elements of an organization. Regine and Lewin (2000: 6) stated:

> Complex, adaptive systems are composed of a diversity of agents that interact with each other, mutually affect each other, and in so doing generate novel behavior for the system as a whole. If complexity scientists are right in arguing that complex adaptive systems of all kinds – in the natural world and in the world of business – share fundamental properties and processes, then the science offers something that most management theories do not. The argument here is that most management theories are really not theories at all, but rather techniques for managing in a certain way.

The interaction of the agents to which Regine and Lewin alluded may be of far more interest to the organizational change practitioner than the individual agents themselves. At the heart of these interactions

is the consciousness of the leader, namely: "Are they aware of who they are in the dance of organizational complexity? Are they aware of how their presence impacts others? Do they understand why they react to certain signals and not others?" Again, Kegan (1994) suggests that leaders in the highest order of mental complexity are more willing and able to embrace the paradoxes and emergent changes that surface in complex interactions. They are resilient because they have the mental framework to engage and interpret adversity.

Based deeply in leadership theoretical underpinnings of social network theory, self-leadership, transformational leadership and charisma, Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) articulated the notion of complex leadership and identified several actions leaders could initiate that help them navigate complexity. Because organizations are complex adaptive systems, complex leadership requires leaders to foster a deep network that draws from all levels of the organization and binds organizational actors together. Additionally, complex leadership requires dropping 'seeds' amongst the organization (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001: 405) while thinking systematically.

Resilience

Though adversity and complexity are taxing on leaders, they are thought to emerge as potential growth elements that, under the right conditions and factors, can create opportunities for personal growth, leadership character, and leadership development – all components of resilience (Bennis &Thomas, 2002; Frank, 1997; King and Rothstein, 2010; Moxley & Pulley, 2003; Stoner and Gilligan, 2002; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004).

Kouzes and Posner (2002) posit that leadership resilience is the required in order for people to use challenges as a catapult for success. Edson's (2012) work is useful as it demonstrates that resilience requires a system to adapt in order to maintain its purpose. Edson's research highlights the reflexivity of an organization, or leader, in the face of adversity and complexity, and the way in which leadership processes can or should adapt to ensure the resilience and health of the organization, or person, in the face of adversity. Edson also develops the role of assigned leadership in effectively communicating the adversity facing the team/organization and in drawing the team/system into one room to work together to problem solve. Edson's research shows that in the face of adversity the team functioned as a complex adaptive system and adapted its function to ensure resiliency.

Grown out of Werner's (1982) research concerning the qualities allowing starving Hawaiian children to survive, resilience has over and over again been defined as the human ability to 1) maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity, 2) view life experiences constructively, 3) rely on faith/spirituality to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life and, 4) apply an active approach to solving problems. Despite the work of Couto (2002), Luthans (2002) and others, little empirical evidence exists in the business context on the impact of this mindset to support resilience (King & Rothstein, 2010).

Current thinking about leader resilience is that in order for it to be required, life's circumstances must impact a person in a traumatic manner such their emotions are 'jarred' enough to require resilience. In other words, a bad day does require tenacity, but it does not require true resilience. Resilience requires 1) adverse events and 2) complexity), thus the model presented in this paper. We propose that today's adverse and complex work environments demand resilience, and further, that the process of becoming resilient can ultimately create a higher state of leader consciousness.

In their integrative model of resilience, King and Rothstein (2010) propose a three-pronged construct of resilience: affective, cognitive and behavioral. We propose that it is in the affective and cognitive areas where the strongest link to consciousness can be made and where business leadership resilience is fostered in the face of adversity. Thus, in an adverse and complex environment, leaders who actively develop resilience through deep reflection, examination of trigger events, and work toward recovery are more likely to go on to develop leader consciousness, given the initial impetus requiring resiliency. In other words, that which leaders learn while becoming resilient will provide them opportunities and cognitive pathways to become conscious as well and thus foster ongoing resilience in the face of ongoing adversity. The model represented in Figure 1 demonstrates anticipated findings from the study.

METHODOLOGY

In order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of adversity and its impact on leader resilience, an exploratory, qualitative study was undertaken with senior level leaders who have direct responsibility for managing high-level initiatives within their organizations. A range of leaders from various firms were asked to recount their experiences in terms of facing and coping with adversity. The current study followed the inductive approach of Isabella (1990), the predominant methodology used in similar studies.

Because of the social nature of leadership, qualitative study, with its accompanying interpretive approach, is appropriate when examining human experiences (Charmaz, 2006). The current study sought to generate a theoretical leadership development model through times of adversity, leading to an enhanced sense of leader capacity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Sample

To capture the breadth of the leader consciousness phenomenon, interviews were conducted with a diverse group of senior-level organizational leaders with varying levels of experience and knowledge. Typical titles associated with study respondents included Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Senior Vice President and Director. The resultant non-probability, judgment sample met the 12-20 participants recommended by Kuzel (1992) for "maximum variation" sampling. Characteristics of the final sample are presented in Appendix B. The 17 respondents that participated in the study represented a cross-section of industries including internet, retail, finance, research, non-profit, global manufacturing and distribution, military and defense, agri-business, and energy. Leaders were bounded in a system characterized as those charged with the responsibility to lead others through adverse situations.

Interview Protocol

The desire for depth of insight and a few *a-priori* themes, or questions, suggested that in-depth interviews would be the most appropriate data collection technique (McCracken, 1988). In this regard, data collection in the initial interviews followed the interpretive paradigm (Stewart, 1992). Interviews focused on adverse events, leader resilience, coping with adversity, and how adverse events shaped leadership consciousness. Leaders were asked to discuss times when they had faced extreme adverse events and then, how they endured. Thus, initial interviews were largely unstructured in an attempt to uncover themes and concepts central to the research objective (Miller and Crabtree, 1992). However, following the methodology described by Schouten (1991), subsequent interviews were guided by previous ones and became more structured in order to more fully probe themes previously identified.

Interview duration ranged from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted by Skype and audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Member checks were used to validate the data collected during the interviews. Extensive interview notes were taken. Interviews were conducted between March and June, 2014.

Once participants indicated an interest in the study, they were sent an email describing the study in detail and an initial interview was scheduled. Informed consent letters were sent to the potential participants in advance discussed in detail at the beginning of the interview, with emphasis on confidentiality. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Participants verbally confirmed their understanding of the informed consent letter. Participants were given the opportunity to review quotes and any other information about her/him prior to publication.

Analysis

Analysis followed the qualitative approach of Creswell (2014), which requires that generated data and theory be contrasted and compared in an iterative manner such that there is fluid movement between theory and data, using open, axial and selective coding. Once transcriptions were returned to the researchers, they were analyzed for codes within the text or in field notes. Next, codes were developed into specific themes or patterns. As themes emerged, verbatim sections from the transcripts were coded

under general themes or categories, and subsequently reviewed to capture the nuances under the general themes. Each case was described and classified using categorical aggregation. Direct interpretations were also made, which should help the reader develop naturalistic generalizations about the data.

FINDINGS

As stated at the outset of this article, we expected globalization to be a major factor in the adversity facing business leaders. In fact, most business leaders reported globalization as a positive factor in their current business experience. What emerged from the interviews was a series of themes that related to leader consciousness, authenticity and thriving, often tied to an instance of adversity in the near or distant past. In this section of the article we focus on eight of these emergent themes and show how these interrelate in the leadership experience and consciousness of the 17 leaders we interviewed.

In Table 1, these themes are listed in order of density (from highest density of occurrence to lowest density) and we highlight the fact that these are not all of the themes that emerged, just the top eight themes that relate to Adversity, Leader Consciousness and Leadership Style. We list each of the eight key themes and then highlight the contributions of our interviewees to these themes.

TABLE 1
KEY THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM OUR INTERVIEWS

Theme	Density of Occurrence
How I Sustained Myself as a Leader	105
How I Handle Adversity as a Leader	94
Example of Adversity	71
Leadership Style	59
How My Leadership Style Has Changed	57
How I Reflect	47
What is Leader Consciousness?	40
Adversity Leading to Consciousness	31

Theme One: Sustaining

When it comes to adversity, a natural corollary is sustenance and thriving. All of the leaders that we interviewed had developed mechanisms to sustain themselves in times of adversity. This emerges as a critical theme in our research into adversity and leader resilience because it highlights mechanisms that leaders can learn and employ to sustain themselves in times of adversity. As one of the interviewees, a CEO of a large multi-national, so well stated: "Resilience is the combination of optimism and realism."

Drawing upon this thought and in the category of optimism, data are placed in intangibles such as personal faith, meditation or reflection, and passion. We might also suggest that amongst these intangibles that create optimism is the support of family, friends and colleagues, also reported by study participants. Many of those we interviewed declared their faith in something "outside of themselves", something greater. We purposely did not ask any of the leaders about their faith conviction, primarily because it did not predispose itself in the literature review and we were aware that since this was a global sampling there would be a multiplicity of faith perspectives. However, many of the leaders declared that it was a personal faith, coupled with spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation, that enabled them to calmly endure and even thrive in times of intense and sometimes terrifying adversity. One leader, who faced a time of intense adversity and felt that he emerged stronger stated:

Then, on the spiritual and emotional side, I tried to keep perspective by looking at how
I'm going to feel at the end of my life looking back on what's going on right now. I try to

look at it from the big picture, which is how God sees things, and realize that I need to maintain character. I need to do things and say things I'm going to be proud of thirty, forty years into the future; and that helped me stay a little bit grounded and not get too taken by the moment. Also to help me with this, which I can't do on my own, I-I had a kind of a regular prayer time, but it wasn't just at a set time every day. (Male, finance industry.)

Not all of these leaders articulated a faith in God, but all articulated a sense of optimism arising from a belief in something greater than them. One respondent, a CEO who has been through very difficult business and personal adversity, suggested that what helped her prevail through these times of incredible difficulty is a process in which:

I started to surround myself with people who understand what being….is the word spiritual—I don't know if the word spiritual—but being in touch with what is very, very important in life which is, you know, the fact that there's, that we're all interconnected human beings. I find myself more and more gravitating to be what I consider like-minded people, people who want to change the world, who want do good in the world. That's what makes me happy, to be with people like that. (Female, retail industry.)

It seems that leaders who sustain themselves in the face of adversity have an innate capacity to look beyond the current reality to an optimistic future because they have faith in something greater, or that there is something greater, than the present difficulty. The other major factor that these leaders referenced was some form of personal support network, as another leader articulated:

. . . while I was at the office it was very therapeutic to be able to talk to my direct reports, to have the team together so I wasn't just thinking about this alone. So, that helped and we did spend most of those two days meeting. So, we were together; and I certainly felt better being with them and because we were in it together. That's where I wanted to be and I felt better by being with them. (Male, agri-business leader.)

In the category of realism, the leaders we interviewed suggested that tangible and calculable disciplines as well as self-development tools are useful in developing resilience and in sustaining a person through times of adversity. Tools reported in our data included things such as a commitment to lifelong learning -- whether through formal degrees or informal reading -- journaling, a commitment to personal health and balance through exercise, rest and good diet, and a commitment to accountability and discourse through a robust network of professional peers.

Thus, this theme combines elements of optimism and realism, each providing the leader with the capacity to attend to the psychological, social, and physical aspects of life. Through this purposeful energy toward 'dealing with it', leaders were able to sustain themselves when adverse events occurred in their lives. Learning to sustain oneself was not a given, however. Most leaders grew in this area over time and from one difficult experience to another. The following theme elaborates.

Theme Two: Handling Adversity – Now and in the Future
" . . . the adverse moments are the ultimate learning opportunities." Many of the 17 leaders we interviewed referred to a definitive crisis moment or period of adversity that became, in some sense, a paradigmatic shift in the way in which they planned to handle all future occurrences of adversity. Two leaders referenced being "caught in a war zone" as their crucible moment. A number of the leaders referenced catastrophic business loss as a moment of intense adversity. Two other leaders referred to the tragic and difficult loss of a spouse as the crucible moment that changed everything and ultimately led them to believe that if they could persevere through that dark period, they could certainly navigate other

adversities that might come their way. The one key ingredient that most of these leaders suggested as critical is that of maintaining perspective. One leader stated:

> I would say a lot of talks with my wife. A lot of talks with friends, very trusted friends, who could help me get perspective and who could just kind of make me feel, you know, a little more accepted, and loved, and like loved no matter what. No matter what happens, my wife would say, "I'm here," you know, "Our children are here. We're going to make it and we're going to be fine." So, that key relationship got me through a lot of this. I'm not a big talker as my wife will tell you, but during those times I talked a lot more than usual and that was somewhat therapeutic for me. I did a lot of reading. I still do. I have as long as I've been in business. That was a practice that really helped me because it opened my eyes to even more serious failures and how other people dealt with their mistakes. It gave the benefit of hindsight on those and it helped me envision hindsight in my current situation. It also gave me principles and lessons as a result that I could apply in the moment to mine. (Male, Finance industry.)

This leader referenced the event above a number of times throughout the interview as a "turning point", a crucible moment that definitively shaped him and his response to subsequent adversity. In the midst of adversity, his support network gave him perspective, and that perspective is something he carries with him when dealing with all subsequent adversity. We found this same perspective making in the midst of adversity in another leader who stated:

> Well, my faith absolutely. Perspective, actually losing my husband. Sometimes I realize it is just a job and, you know, when I look at my kids—you know when I focus in on what's really important—I get that it's important to pay my bills and things like that, but, you know, sometimes I would rather go to school and spend time with my family and friends and I could find a job and it would be alright; and just getting a perspective on the bigger picture of life. You know, going to church and spending time with my loved ones and realizing that I'm a smart, intelligent person and I'll land on my feet, makes me realize it's going to be okay. (Female, defense industry.)

What was striking and surprising to us is that our literature review had predisposed us to the notion that leaders face ongoing adversity and that they respond to it *in situ* and somewhat *ad hoc* - as each adversity presents itself. However, this seems not to be the case as all of the leaders we spoke to looked back to a crucible moment, or moments, of adversity that definitively shaped their ongoing responses to adversity, which in turn shaped both their leadership paradigm and their approach to leading people. The experience of adversity was paradigmatic at some point in the past, and so it continued to define and shape current responses to adversity. This paradigmatic shift led to a very strong sense of interdependence, or a much more participative and collaborative style of leadership because of the new perspective that previous instances of adversity rendered to these leaders. As one leader who survived wartime as his crucible adversity experience incisively stated:

> You need to lead the way. You need to set the vision. What words to use, what coloring to give it—you need to do that as a collective group. So, two-three weeks ago we worked as—with our top hundred leaders on our company purpose, but with our executive team we had already done something two months ago when I did the purpose and company purpose with my executive team. When we presented that to the one hundred people, it was rejected; and why? Because they had not been part of the journey. So, on the spot, I kind of tore it up. I shredded the papers and said, "Let's start over again. Let's do this as a group," and we completely derailed the agenda. The whole agenda we had developed with [Inaudible] we kind of put it in the dust bin and started all over. Now, one of the

things I've learned for this to be successful is that you need leaders who have their ego under control. So—and the other day I was interviewed by the New York Times and I made some statements about this that it's not about being low ego because to be a successful CEO or executive you need a certain amount of healthy ego in terms of drive, energy, ambition. You know, it's as simple as that. At least, that's my personal conviction. The trick though, is to have that ego under control because if you don't have the egos—your own ego for that matter or the egos of your senior leaders then suddenly politics get in the equations, and suddenly there is a lack of trust, and suddenly everything starts breaks down. So, what I've been trying to do is form and executive team—and it's almost a paradox—that is very strong willed, very ambitious, very driven, very high energy, who are experts in their field but at the same time have their egos under control, are comfortable in their own skill to show full ability and really build trust throughout the organization; and it's a rare combination. It's a rare combination and it's really hard to find people who fit in that mould."(Male, Retail industry.)

Whereas our literature review led us to believe that globalization was a major force for adversity in global leaders, in fact, our respondents reflected that it was a positive force. Alternatively, some crucible moments of adversity they had experienced in the near or distant past had (re) shaped their leadership paradigm and praxis to be more collaborative and participative, not the existence of globalization, per se. We elaborate on this in our next theme below."

Theme Three: The Crucible Event as a Learning Experience
This theme is illuminating because of its paradigmatic nature in the experiences of the leaders that we interviewed. That is to say, each of the 17 leaders anchored a dimension of their leadership capacity in some clear crucible event that irrevocably shaped how they each thought about themselves and about their notion of leadership. As one interviewee incisively put it:

> ... who I am today and my ability to succeed today is very much shaped by adversity that I had in the past. … But yet…but that experience of having gone through that back then has very, very strongly shaped who I am today and how I approach…kind of…how I approach doing my work and interaction with my colleagues because I know this is very important to be really clear about what you are trying to accomplish, who the ultimate customer or who the ultimate client is who you are serving; and making sure that you're…you're speaking up for yourself because no one else will." (Male, research.)

Each of the leaders we interviewed had a reference point to a crucible moment of adversity that dramatically shaped their self-perception and worldview. This adversity then seemed to become paradigmatic or served as a filter that they regulated and integrated into future adverse events. Adversity, although difficult, was reshaped as a useful tool for personal and leadership growth. The paradigmatic or crucible adversity was often initially viewed as a pariah, unwanted and useless. However, upon reflection and integration, these leaders began to see this adversity as a useful learning tool that shaped them into better people and, in their perception, better (more collaborative, sensitive, intuitive,) leaders.

The types of adversity that were paradigmatic varied widely for each participant and occurred at different points in each leader's life experience. It was striking that the nodal point of the paradigmatic experience seemed clear in each participants' mind, that is to say, whether in the recent past, or in the distant past, each participant referenced a crucible moment when intense adversity shaped personal experience and reshaped personal worldview, as if there was a conscious point in the leaders' mind in which adversity transitioned from foe to ally.

Examples of crucible, or paradigmatic, adversity ranged from extreme instances -- such as the loss of a spouse through death or divorce (three interviewees), war zone survival (three interviewees), recovery from virtual bankruptcy (two interviewees), betrayal in business either by a dysfunctional board or by

other leaders (three interviewees), restrictive and hostile business environment caused at some point in the past either by a superior (at the time) or unrealistic expectations (four interviewees) to a sense of failure in business (two interviewees).

So far our themes have illustrated that our study participants needed to find ways to sustain themselves during adverse times (theme one), how to learn to handle adversity more effectively with each experience (theme two), and how to shape their worldview based upon adverse experiences (theme three). Our next theme probes the notion that this shift in mindset, arising from adversity, affects the leadership style of the leader, and that this changed leadership style leads to greater resilience through heightened interdependence on the part of the leader and the followers.

Theme Four: How I Changed My Leadership Style Through Adversity
During the interview, we asked leaders to identify their self-perceived current leadership style. We then tried to probe their sense of how they perceived that their leadership style might have changed over time due to the interpolation of adversity into their personal and leadership experience. Many of the leaders reflected definitive change and "maturing" in their approach to leadership, as one respondent stated:

> Ya. I think, maybe, the difference is a little bit humility. If you don't have these adverse experiences, you might be a little too full of yourself and maybe a bit overconfident in your capabilities. Adversity kind of grounds you. It puts you with your feet on the ground and you learn a lot. In certain ways, you gain in confidence, but yea, it feels more humble and realistic. (Male, retail.)

The crucible moment seemed to change the leaders' perspectives in terms of what it means to lead others. Many of the leaders we spoke to expressed growth in their own confidence in their ability to lead, creating a kind of confidence/humility paradox as it were. As stated earlier, subsequent adversities served as additional learning experiences rather than being perceived of as hindrances. Adversity took on a new meaning – a tool embraced for deepening and maturing the leader. As another respondent put it:

> I'm telling you, where there's that moment where that decision is right in front of you and you can choose to live your life in bitterness and anger or you can choose to live your life in love, and positivity, and caring, and being a better human being and that's the choice that I made. I made that choice. I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember where I was. I remember what I was doing; and I've decided to approach everything I do with love, no matter how bad it is and no matter how difficult it is. Trust me when I tell you, it's an amazing thing to live like that. (Female, retail.)

The fifth theme that emerged was the way in which adversity leads to reflection and leader consciousness. This growth took place through a process of experiencing the event, actively reflecting on how to cope, becoming self-conscious and self aware within this experience, and then choosing the best way to simultaneously sustain and learn. We elaborate in theme 5 below.

Theme Five: Adversity, Reflection, and Leader Consciousness
We group the last three key themes, adversity, reflection and consciousness together because they intersect one another in a continuum -- namely -- our respondents reported that adversity led to reflection, which led to greater leader consciousness, which ultimately leads to leadership growth. But, without the presence of active reflection leading to leader consciousness, we believe that these leaders would not have learned as much through adversity as they did. Rather, they would continue to feel victimized, might become cynical, and could react negatively toward those whom they are charged to lead.

It is helpful to note that many leaders reported utilizing external mechanisms in the process of reflection. The pattern of reflection is often the same across this broad range of leaders, but the external

mechanisms and processes are highly distinctive and individualistic. The pattern that emerged through the data is as follows: 1) adversity strikes; 2) The leader then takes time to reflect on the adversity, either by taking time to exercise, to journal, to diagram on paper or on a whiteboard, to talk with others about the adversity, to pray, or to meditate, or simply to put aside time to think; 3) the transformative element arises through sense making. This sense making occurs when the current adversity is framed within the context of the crucible moment and filtered through that paradigm. These leaders remind themselves through the process of reflection of their core values and a personal commitment to lead differently. They look for solutions to the current problem and they collaborate with others to find those solutions. Previous periods of adversity, reflection and consciousness has taught them patience, wisdom, and most of all, that a collaborative stance is infinitely stronger than a singular voice. As one leader who has faced incredible adversity at different points in her life, and currently faces adversity in her leadership role stated:

> So, I'm in that business group, so… it again has caused a lot of chaos. People are worried about their jobs. We don't know who we're reporting to. The chain of command is gone. It's just caused a lot of worry, a lot of people out of jobs, people don't know who they are reporting to; and, again, I have to regroup people, refocus them. It's definitely made me reflect on my own—I'm thankful that I still have a job. I still have to meet client, customer deliverables. We still have contract obligations we have to follow through on. I still need to get people focused and keep morale up. I have to be resilient. I have to be hopeful that the people that are in control now know what they're doing. So, there's been a lot of adversity lately within the organization; and I try to stay hopeful and positive. (Female, defense).

We have outlined key thematic findings revealed through our data. We now elaborate on the practical and theoretical meaning of these findings.
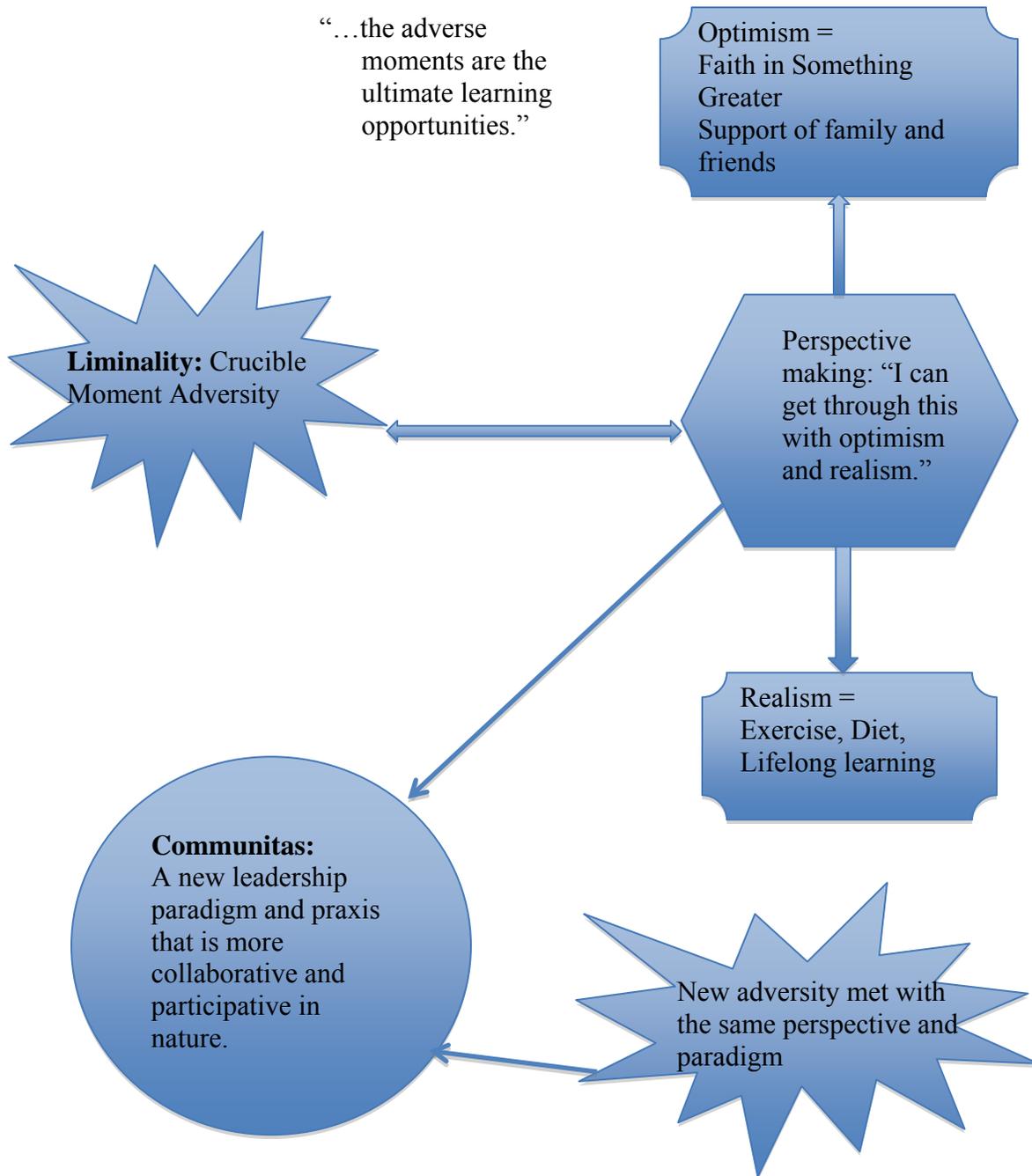
DISCUSSION

What Does This Tell Us About Leadership?

This study confirms many ideas about leadership, most importantly, that developing leadership skills takes time, effort, reflection, and experience. Unfortunately, many of the experiences leaders face are unpleasant, or adverse. Yet, it is the difficult experiences that wise leaders use to build their leadership repertoire.

Prior to conducting our interviews, the literature led us to believe that globalization would create adversity in leaders' lives, forcing them through the crucible moment (Stoner and Gilligan, 2002), and drive them toward a greater sense of consciousness, as depicted in Figure 1. Once leaders' developed a stronger sense of consciousness, we believed they would become more collaborative and ultimately use the collective minds of their teams to create new solutions to dealing with subsequent adverse events.

After our interviews and analysis, however, a new model developed, as depicted in Figure 2. Our study participant's did not view globalization as an adversity in and of itself. Rather, adversity existed everywhere and could emanate from any source. Some of our participants viewed globalization as a positive factor that provided economic viability. What is surprising about our findings is the fact that the crucible moments are viewed by leaders as the 'ultimate learning opportunity'. Leaders who incorporate both optimism and realism are able to adopt a new perspective, which provides them with the resilience (I can get through this!), over and over again. Their new resilience perspective does encourage leaders to foster a new leadership paradigm – one that encourages stronger community and collective ties. Each time a leader faces a new adversity, it is viewed as a new opportunity to learn, all while sustaining themselves through sound resilience strategies and perspective making and ultimate consciousness. Adversity creates a learning loop, and wise leaders use the energy garnered in this loop to grow.

FIGURE 2
THE ADVERSITY LEADERSHIP PRAXIS TRAJECTORY

"…the adverse moments are the ultimate learning opportunities."

Optimism = Faith in Something Greater Support of family and friends

Liminality: Crucible Moment Adversity

Perspective making: "I can get through this with optimism and realism."

Realism = Exercise, Diet, Lifelong learning

Communitas: A new leadership paradigm and praxis that is more collaborative and participative in nature.

New adversity met with the same perspective and paradigm

Implications for Leadership

Given that adversity is actually a learning tool, as evidenced through our interviews, it leaves the field of leadership development with somewhat of a quandary – how do we help leaders develop resilience in times of adversity? Do we purposefully place them in adverse situations so they have opportunities to learn? Do we throw them to the wolves?

Fortunately, it is probably not necessary to insert leaders into adverse situations. Life takes care of this for us. But, when leaders are in the center of the storm, helping them to develop the critical balance between optimism and realism, helping them take a higher-order perspective, and coaching them toward a collective, collaborative approach would be beneficial. Unfortunately, most organizations do not provide a leadership coach in times of extreme adversity. Leaders are expected to solve the problems on their own.

Thus, it is would benefit everyone to make explicit resilience strategies that sustain us in adverse times. Behaviors, attitudes and actions that our participants shared include confiding in a trusted partner or friend, exercise, prayer, support groups, time with nature, and journaling/reflection to name a few. Equipping leaders with coping strategies and leading them toward 'in the moment' learning could facilitate the leaders' learning process. These coping moments create opportunities for leaders to become conscious, awake and mindful. Rather than reacting to adversity with panic, leaders could proactively take care of themselves while facing the adversity that has come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the lives of 17 senior-level leaders and their perspectives on globalization, adversity, resilience and collaborative leadership. Through this work, we learned that adversity is actually a tool that can cause leaders to learn and grow, if they have a reflective mindset. Though adverse events create intense times for leaders, those who are wise enough to balance optimism with realism in order gain a resilient perspective are able to develop a learning community equipped to tackle the next adverse event when it arises. They are also able to look back on the adverse event and think "this is what I learned from that", all while sustaining themselves through healthy resilience-leading activities.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Is your business organization positioned within a <u>global arena</u>, and if so, how does this positioning impact the way your company does business?
2. How has <u>globalization</u> affected your business organization either positively or negatively?
   a. If positively – how?
3.
   a. If negatively – how?
4. Tell me about a time when your, or your organization, faced adversity?
   a. If there is more than one instance of crisis/adversity can you give a brief overview of some of these, starting with the instance of crisis/adversity that occurred furthest back and working forward to the most recent?
   b. Can you describe each of these crises or instances of adversity?
5. Can you describe the differing factors that gave rise to these crises or instances of adversity?
6. As a leader, how did you respond to this crisis, threat or adversity?
   a. How different was your response to each instance of adversity?
7.
   a. Have you noticed a change in the way you personally respond to crisis/adversity in your business organization?
   b. Have you noticed a change in the way your business organization responds to crisis/adversity?

8. How is your organization positioning itself both internally and externally to thrive within a context of <u>globalization</u>?
9. How would you describe your leadership style?
10. Has your leadership style changed over the time that you have been a leader within your organization?
    a. If your leadership style has changed can you describe how it is different?
    b. If your leadership style has changed can you unpack whether you feel this change in leadership style/approach is better or worse:
        i. For you personally?
        ii. For your organization?
11. Is your business organization more like a living organism, like a tree? Or is it more mechanical, like a machine? Tell me more about that? Why do you feel this way?
12. How as adversity shaped you for better leadership within your business organization?
13. How do you personally deal with adversity? (trauma)
    a. What types of things do you do to sustain yourself?
    b. Tell me about your social and support network?
    c. What does your network do for you?
    d. Tell me how you take care of yourself physically? Spiritually?
    e. Have you ever felt 'derailed' at work?
        i. If so, how did you cope?
    f. Tell me about a time when you felt you failed?
        i. How did you cope?
        ii. How did you feel?
        iii. What did you think?
        iv. What did you do?
        v. How did you grow? Adapt?
        vi. What was the real turning point that helped you to ultimately recover from the adversity/trauma you faced
14. Tell me about a time when you have been reflective?
    a. What did you learn?
    b. Why did you take time to reflect?
15. What does leadership consciousness mean to you?
    a. How could we develop leadership consciousness?
    b. How could it be beneficial to you or your organization?
    c. What might be the opposite of consciousness?
    d. What does it mean to live in the 'present' moment? How might that impact your leadership?
16. Please reflect on each of these terms:
    Personal humility
    Personal courage
    Human empathy
    Personal autonomy
    Leader integrity
    Mental and Emotional perseverance
    Intellectual fair-mindedness
17. Please can you share with me some details about who you are?
    a. Your company name and your position within the company?
    b. Your professional trajectory – your career history to this point and how you became a leader within this organization?
    c. Your cultural heritage, where you were born and where you grew up?

APPENDIX B
SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMANTS

Industry	Gender	Position
Financial Services	Male	Senior Vice President
Retail	Female	CEO
	Male	CLO
	Male	CEO
	Male	CLO
	Male	Senior Manager
Military & Defense	Female	Senior Manager
	Male	Director
Non-Profit	Male	President and CEO
	Female	CEO
Energy	Male	Senior Manager
Internet	Male	Owner/CEO
Research/Education	Male	Senior Manager
	Male	Program Director
Manufacturing	Male	Senior Manager
Agri-business	Male	Owner/CEO
Government	Male	Senior Manager

N=17 personal interviews

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