The Influence of Leader Legacy Beliefs on Intergenerational Decision-Making

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This grounded theory study aimed to explore the perceptions or thinking of legacy held by organizational leaders and how legacy thinking shaped their decisions and life experiences. Using the theory of planned behavior, the authors analyzed 52 semi-structured interviews with leaders to build an understanding of their perspectives on legacy. A framework emerged from the data that can help understand the process through which life experiences shaped legacy thinking and the values of legacy thinking held by participants. Our findings offer insights that can help develop leaders focused on the organization's sustainability past their tenure.

Keywords: leadership, legacy, intergenerational decision-making, grounded theory

INTRODUCTION

The popular musical Hamilton ends with the song, *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story* (Miranda, 2015). This title brings to mind the notion of a legacy in leadership. In the second to last song Miranda (2015) defines a legacy the following way: "Legacy. What is a legacy? / It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. / I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me. / America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me. / You let me make a difference." Good leaders think about the legacy they will leave behind (Birchfield, 2012; Fierke, 2015). Legacy thinking influences a leader's approach to vision, mission, and strategy formulation (Galford & Maruca, 2006; Kan, 2019). Generally, people do not set out to create a legacy, they are merely working in the present to make a difference, and to contribute to the common good. There is a project of interest or something that ignites their passion for getting involved (Castleberry, Devraj, Alvarez, Persky, & Poirier, 2023). While there is a renewed interest in this important topic in the scholarly literature, we still don't know much about how legacy thinking influences organizational leaders (Kan 2019).

A leader's legacy is important because it can have a lasting impact on individuals and organizations. Leaders play a crucial role in shaping the culture of an organization. A positive legacy can contribute to a healthy and thriving organizational culture, fostering teamwork, innovation, and employee engagement. On the other hand, a negative legacy may leave a lasting impact on morale and productivity (Colquitt, Sabey, Pfarrer, Rodell, & Hill, 2023; Fox, Tost, & Wade-Benzoni, 2010; Welch, 2024). Furthermore, a leader's decisions and strategies can have long-term effects on the success and sustainability of an organization. Leaders who make wise and ethical choices are more likely to leave a positive legacy that contributes to the organization's long-term prosperity. Finally, legacy can generate valuable learning in organizations. In summary, a leader's legacy is important because it shapes the future, influences behavior, and impacts individuals and organizations (Castleberry *et al.*, 2023). Our findings offer several insights that can help develop leaders focused on the organization's sustainability past their tenure.

According to Watton, Lichtenstein, and Aitken (2019, p. 419), "More research is needed to understand leadership legacy as an outcome; critically, the relationship between personal values and leadership legacy is worthy of further investigation." This grounded theory study aimed to explore the perceptions or thinking of legacy held by organizational leaders, and how legacy thinking shaped their decisions and life experiences. We examine the theory of reasoned action as a framework to understand how leaders' attitudes toward legacy may influence behaviors and actions. Then we review previous research on the role of legacy thinking in organizational leaders' actions, focusing on intergenerational decision-making. We then discuss legacy belief and leader development.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Legacy

What difference do we want to make? What impact do we want to have? Legacy belief is "individuals' convictions about whether they and their actions will be remembered, have an enduring influence, and leave something behind after death" (Zacher, Rosing, & Frese, 2011, p. 40). Legacy belief often takes the form of working towards ensuring that the organization is viable in the long term, and that it is stronger than one found it (Fox et al., 2010). A positive legacy is tied to the leaders' connection to their community, colleagues, and a deep sense of hope in the future for the whole rather than any good that comes to them (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013).

Theory of Planned Behavior

An extension of the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior is a decision-making framework commonly used to understand people's attitudes and behavioral intentions (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015; Tajeddini, Rasoolimanesh, Gamage, & Martin, 2021). As this paper focuses on building a legacy as an intentional process based on planned behaviors, it is appropriate to use a framework in this study. Intentions are regarded as encapsulating the motivational factors that impact a behavior in that they indicate how hard an individual is willing to try, and how much effort an individual is planning to exert to perform the behavior. The likelihood of an individual carrying out the behavior increases with the strength of their intention (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015).

The theory of planned behavior posits that three constructs predict an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This link between intentions and subsequent behaviors has been established by several meta-analyses (e.g., Schlaegel & Koenig 2014). Attitude refers to how a behavior is evaluated positively (or negatively) (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms refer to perceived social pressure to perform (or not perform) a behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's perceived ease (or difficulty) of performing a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals' associated underlying beliefs influence all three constructs. Behavioral beliefs, which are advantages and disadvantages of performing the behavior, influence attitudes; normative beliefs, whether specific individuals approve or disapprove, underlie subjective norm; and control beliefs, which refer to barriers and facilitators, influence perceived behavioral control (McTaggart-Cowan, Bentley, Raymakers, Metcalfe, Hawley, & Peacock, 2021). Understanding

leaders' attitudes toward legacy gives greater insight into their decisions that will impact the organization in the future.

Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) Model

The VAB model suggests that values play a central role in shaping an individual's attitudes and guiding their behavior (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Tajeddini *et al*., 2021). According to this theory, values, which are seen as a combination of social cognitions, empower individuals to engage in specific behaviors in particular situations (Kahle, 1984). People consistently strive to act in a manner that aligns with the values of those important to them. Therefore, when an individual's internal values are triggered, they persuade themselves to take corresponding actions (Tajeddini *et al*., 2021). Values can be understood as an individual's enduring conviction that a specific behavior or mode of conduct is personally and morally preferable (Rokeach, 1973). Individuals will act by the importance of the values (Beatty, Kahle, Homer, & Misra, 1985). Building on values and attitudes, an individual manifests an actual behavior (Tajeddini *et al*., 2021).

Legacy Beliefs and Leadership Development

Legacy beliefs encourage leaders to take a long-term perspective, considering the enduring impact of their decisions. In leader development, this means grooming and nurturing future leaders who can carry forward the leader's (positive) legacy and values. According to Hunter and Rowles (2005, p. 328), "The process of leaving something behind, a legacy, is intimately tied up with our life story and with shaping how we are to be remembered: it is a mechanism for transmitting a resilient and enduring image of what we stood for." Those who have a high legacy belief later in life are likely to have developed their self-efficacy at younger ages (Zacher *et al*., 2011; Bandura, 1978). These beliefs are not in the sense that they only want to be recognized for their great contributions but that they believe their activities and contributions can make a difference (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Zacher *et al*., 2011). Developing a learner identity, a healthy self-image, and a leader identity and understanding of their own leaders are all contributors to the legacy beliefs (Dickman & Stanford-Blair, 2008; Kolb, 2015; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013). A leader identity is essential for developing leadership skills, self-awareness, learning from experience, and emotional intelligence (Kolb, 2015; Murphy & Johnson, 2007).

The legacy is born out of personal connections with one's emotions, their passion for developing other leaders within the organization, and creating an atmosphere of growth versus fixed or just for now. Leaders focused on a legacy rally the combined talents of the organization and prepared a succession plan (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013). Legacy is a moving target that starts in small, inconsequential ways in the shadows of history and develop in the present to shape the future that continually builds on the foundation of the many.

Intergenerational Decision Making

Intergenerational decision-making is about a "a person or group in the present making decisions that impact other individuals in the future" (Fox *et al*., 2010, p. 154). When leaders make decisions regarding the organization, they must weigh immediate advantages and disadvantages with long-term benefits and adverse consequences. For instance, a leader today may decide to hide the organization's poor financial performance by using accounting schemes, but such decisions may imperil the organization's future. According to Wade-Benzoni and colleagues, when decisions are both interpersonally and inter-temporally separate from the person making a decision, it is difficult for that person to fully envision or understand the impact of his or her decisions on others (Fox *et al*., 2010; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak & Galinski, 2010; Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez & Larrick, 2012). In such cases, decision-makers may be tempted to make decisions that are beneficial in the short term but burdensome to the organization in the future. Understanding how the past influences attitudes and actions towards the future (Hershfield, Bang, & Weber, 2014; Wade-Benzoni, 2019) is important. Therefore, two overarching questions guided this study: What aspects of legacy thinking are valued by those who consider themselves legacy leaders? In what ways do

the life experiences of those who perceive themselves to be legacy leaders inform the understanding of the process of leadership?

METHOD

In this study, we used theory of planned behavior as a theoretical framework to analyze semi-structured interviews with leaders to build an understanding of their perspectives on legacy. Fifty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted. The sample of participants comprised a diverse group with varying work experience and workplaces. Data were analyzed independently by two researchers following the thematic analysis method. Data saturation was set without new issues arising during the interviews.

A qualitative method provides the opportunity to better understand the meaning people make of their experiences and how their interpretations influence their reactions (Byrd, 2009). Participants were asked the following interview questions:

1. How do you perceive the role of a leader of an organization in the context of history and the future of an organization?
2. What, in your thinking, is the best motivation for a leader to succeed in his/her role?
3. What is or should be the source of satisfaction for a leader at a personal level in the context of his/her performance?
4. What is the principal attraction of leadership positions that incentivizes those seeking careers in leadership?
5. What do relevance and permanence of accomplishments mean to you as a leader?

During the coding process, several procedures were adopted to code the large number of transcripts and ensure the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, three research assistants and one primary researcher coded the data independently and the results were cross-validated and compared for similarities and differences. Specifically, the 52 transcripts were randomly selected and divided into three files containing either 17 or 18 transcripts each. The three research assistants coded the data independently by following the open, axial, and selective coding procedures. At the same time, one primary researcher randomly selected seven transcripts from each of the three files (a total of 21 transcripts) with the goal to code the data that are partially overlapped with the three files and coded the data independently. The three research assistants and the primary researcher reported their initial and final selected categories. Eventually, an agreement about the framework for understanding the process in which life experiences shaped legacy thinking and the values of legacy thinking held by organizational leaders was reached among the four researchers.

At the open coding stage, the researchers first labeled concepts, then grouped these concepts into categories, and finally developed categories based on their properties and dimensions. "Properties are the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category, dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum or range" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 117). A range of 96-157 categories were identified among the four researchers. For example, under the "influence others" category, the properties and dimensions of this category included "Showing concern for others", "Supporting others", "ability to support and giving forward", "the influence you have as a leader drives the change and direction of your followers", "empower others to lead with success and influence others to reach their potential", "making a difference in a larger context", etc.
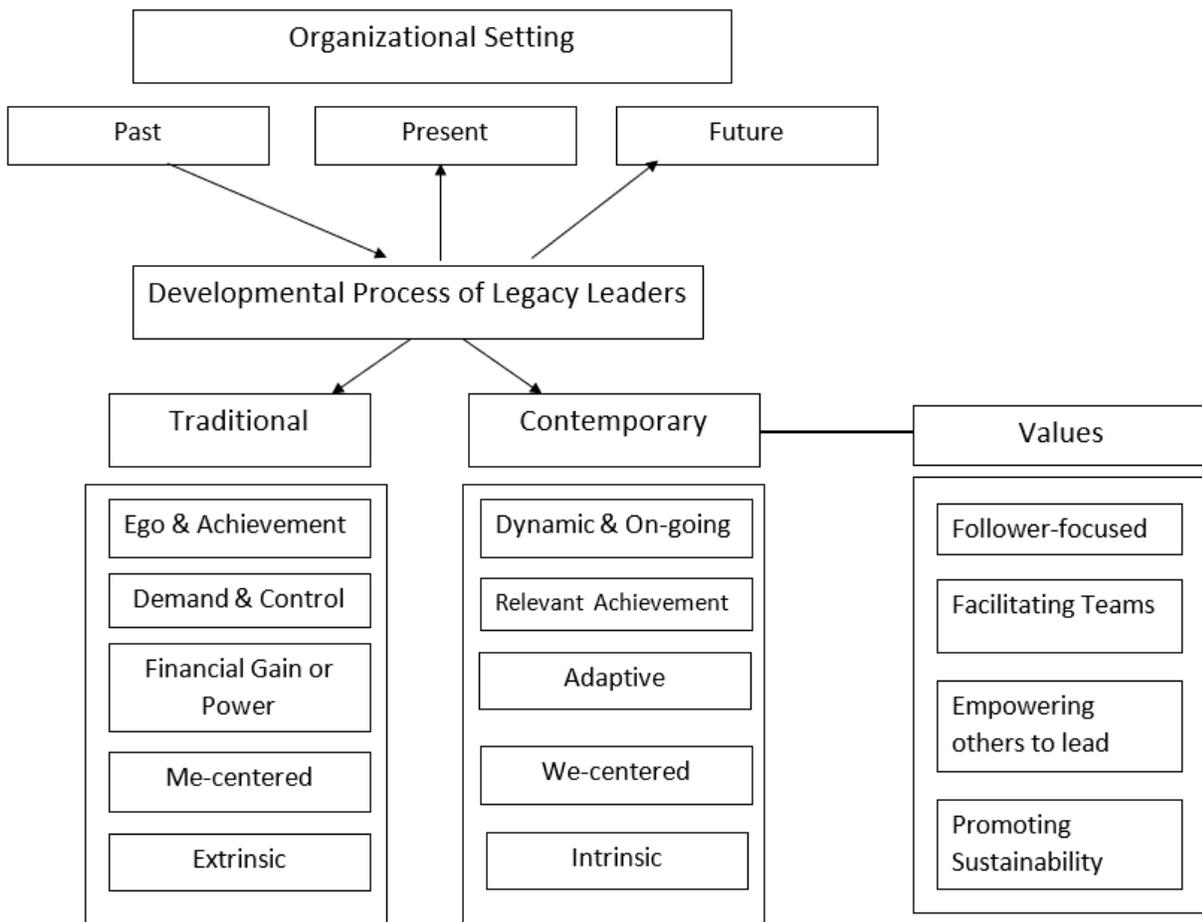
At the axial coding stage, the categories developed at the end of the open coding stage were linked and regrouped as main and sub-categories based on their properties and dimensions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the process, these categories' context and sequence were also noted. The four researchers presented and discussed their main and sub-categories. During this step, the sequence of these categories, such as the shifting process from an early stage to a later stage of a legacy leader, was documented. The process resulted in 29 main categories. At the selective coding stage, the central categories were selected based on the main categories decided at the axial coding stage, and each researcher came up with their diagram of the central categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then the four diagrams were compared to integrate and refine the theoretical framework.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the coding process (Charmaz, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) peer debriefing occurred during each coding round as the researchers discussed the similarities and differences in the results. Second, triangulation was achieved by cross-checking the results among the researchers. Saturation was achieved during the different coding stages (Creswell, 2013).

RESULTS

The model represented in Figure 1 indicates an emergent theoretical framework for understanding the process through which life experiences shaped legacy thinking and the values of legacy thinking held by participants in the study. The framework is characterized by three foci of themes: organizational setting, developmental process of legacy leaders, and values of legacy leaders. The framework sheds light on the thinking of legacy held by organizational leaders, and how life experiences shaped the legacy thinking. The major components of the theoretical model are described in detail in the following sections.

FIGURE 1
THE THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF LEGACY LEADERS

The central component of the theoretical model is the developmental process of legacy leaders. The organizational setting serves as the context for the legacy leaders' developmental process and eventually the development of the legacy leaders' values. The leaders need to build the bridge between the organizational setting and the employees' abilities to meet the organizational goals for the present and

future. To do so, the leaders need to first learn the organization's mission, vision, and values. As new leaders set up the goals and directions for the organization's present and future, and then develop the subordinates' abilities to match up with these goals and directions. During this interactive process, the leaders also have to make their own thinking transitions. This is presented from the developmental process of legacy leaders from a traditional to a contemporary view of a leader, one transitioning from an ego and achievement centered leader to a we-centered and adaptive leader. As the result of the transitioning process, the values of the legacy leaders are follower-focused and oriented towards facilitating teams.

When asked how they defined legacy, the participants defined it as a long-term success in which "one's contributions and accomplishments continue to enhance, even after one leaves the organization." Essentially, the success should be sustainable in the long run for an organization, not just for the past or present. Deeming achievement as relevant and not permanent is a common consensus among legacy leaders. This is consistent with the ever-changing nature of an organization's development. Organizational development serves as the context of the legacy leader's development and a legacy leader concern with the organization's future. Many participants pointed out, "As a leader, creating relevant and sustainable accomplishments is very important to me. I want to achieve notable and effective accomplishments for years to come, not just for today." Therefore, it's rather deceiving to believe the nature of success as permanent. Rather it is an ever-changing concept with the organization's long-term achievement and sustainability.

Organizational Setting

It is critical for a leader to learn and understand an organization's past. This includes its mission, vision, values, history, past practices, culture, and people. That serves as the context for the developmental process of legacy leaders. All participants pointed out that it is the leader's role to learn about the past and what the members of the organization value as a new leader coming into an organization. As one participant said:

> The role of the leader is to build upon the organization's rich history, to keep its core values intact, and the story of who and why they exist alive and well. Simultaneously, the leader is working with all stakeholders to innovate and to lead change through establishing a vision that is communicated with clarity and consistency to all members.

Equally important, leaders should spend sufficient time learning the organization's history as this learning process allows them to connect with all the stakeholders and thus learn different perceptions. This is the first step in engaging the stakeholders and creating a shared vision within an organization. One participant stated the following:

> The leader should devote adequate time to talking to members at all levels in the organization so that she can become aware of the varying perceptions of what the organization's history is. Then she should implement appropriate leadership tools to engage all employees in deciding the organization's future. To me, the most important thing a leader should do is create a shared vision with the organization's other members.

However, such history is not only an organization's core values or past successes, but also its mistakes and barriers. In terms of behavioral beliefs, some facilitators and barriers to creating a shared vision were reported. As one participant explained, "First and foremost the leader has to know the company's past, to ensure it learns from previous mistakes and/or bad decisions". They could become the barriers in stopping the organization from moving forward without knowing the past mistakes. Therefore, learning the history can also help the leaders recognize and remove the potential barriers. For example:

> The role of the leader is to facilitate change that needs to occur to meet the organization's goals and to remove the existing barriers that may be blocking that change. Barriers may include budgetary limitations, lack of training, lack of administrative support,

organizational limitations due to poorly formed teams, and personnel changes that need to occur in a few cases.

Regarding behavioral beliefs, most respondents believed in the importance of legacy and building a future for the organization that would help it remain sustainable. In the theoretical model proposed as the result of this study, the arrow points from the organizational past to the legacy leaders because the history has happened and it's the leaders' responsibility to learn it. Additionally, the arrow points from the legacy leaders and points away from the organization's present and future because the leaders take the role to build an organization's present and future. One participant used the metaphor of a "floating ship" to describe the continuously moving nature of an organization's development in the present and future. For example, one participant stated, "Organizations are ever-changing, with constant ebbs and flows", therefore,

> The leader has to be on that floating ship, taking the organization where it wants to go. In preparing for the future, the leader must get input from all stakeholders and put a strategic planning team together to set goals for the future of the organization.

Essentially, learning the history helps the leaders serve a critical role in maintaining these values and establishing new ones for the present and future, essentially "bridge the history and future of the organization and meld together the past with the present with a focus on the future of the organization" as the participants indicated. Within this context, the legacy leaders deem that success is not a destination. Rather it is a moving target. That sets up the context of legacy leaders' developmental process, which we will discuss in the next section.

Developmental Process of Legacy Leaders

If we divided the organization into three stages: past, present, and future, the development of legacy leaders could be divided into two stages: traditional and contemporary. At the early stage of a leader's career, a traditional view of a demanding boss with the extrinsic motivators such as "power", "influence", "money" was commonly referred to by the participants. At this stage, the leaders focused on demand and control, and they are rather "me-centered" because they placed themselves as the center of the organization and the subordinators acted according to their commands. For example, participants often mentioned that leaders with traditional view assume the following:

> The role of a leader is to be able to delegate work and be the 'boss' … Leaders in the past were responsible for evaluating and dictating the performance of those who were under them and historically, leaders were more dictatorial, using a command-and-control model.

This is related to the idea of the two principal attractions of leadership positions that the participants mentioned. They are extrinsic motivators (i.e., power, money, status) and intrinsic motivators (i.e., being change agents, making a difference, enhancing the lives of others by doing good). The leaders in the early stage of their career may focus on extrinsic motivators, for example:

> Unfortunately, too many people are attracted to leadership positions for self-interest reasons such as to exert control and manipulate others and the system, to become wealthy and powerful … In some cases, the individual is driven by external forces such as money, fame, and glory.

In their later career, however, the leaders realized that intrinsic motivators are more important. For instance, one participant said:

> Early in a career, I believe it satisfies the needs of ego and achievement - to become a manager, exert influence over an area, and gain recognition (and receive improved

compensation). Later in a career I believe the incentive is more internal - satisfying ones own need to leave a legacy and share knowledge and contribute to make the world better.

Such transition is largely related to the realization of the temporary nature of accomplishments at a later stage of a legacy leader's career. In the organizational setting section, the participants used a metaphor of a "floating ship" to describe the constantly changing nature of an organization's development. In the later stage of a legacy leader's own development, they found that their accomplishments are non-constant and temporary as well. For example, one participant stated this:

In my industry, the environment and business change rapidly and at an insane pace. Most accomplishments are short lived and very temporary no matter how important or relevant they were. As a result, leadership is more about sustaining a consistent level of performance in all areas, versus dwelling on the occasional win. At least, in my industry, accomplishments tend to diminish quickly, and sustained performance lasts permanently.

Following the discussion of the temporary nature of accomplishments, the participants mentioned accomplishments as relevant rather than permanent several times during the interviews. To this end, relevant accomplishments are more important than permanent ones. Therefore, success is not a destination. Rather it is a continuous movement, dynamic and on-going. In one participant's own words:

Accomplishment is a fleeting definition. Relevance is measured against the current environment and circumstances at one point in time, which is constantly changing …The world is dynamic, and leadership is ongoing … I think permanence of accomplishments is temporary because of our every-changing world and circumstances that we face, whereas relevance of accomplishments is a result of fluid responses to changing situations.

In the contemporary view of a leader, the terms such as "we-centered", "peace with oneself", and "intrinsic" are often used by the participants in the interviews. This view helped the leaders set up their purpose for leadership and which in turn brought in more satisfaction for them.

The best motivation for a leader to succeed in his role is purpose. I have worked in the field for 17 years, and realized that money, glory, and power did not bring me the joy I anticipated as a young professional. Purpose placed everything in order by bringing satisfaction to serving others and by allowing myself to be vulnerable. A leader's satisfaction source should be the assurance that their decisions and actions are 'we-centered' and not 'me-centered'.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not every leader in the interviews thought the intrinsic motivations are the most important factors for leaders. Rather, financial gain, fame, and power are still the most important attractions to them or some other leaders they know. They were outlying situations, but few participants brought them up. A couple of participants mentioned the following:

The principal attraction of leadership positions is financial, developing others, and having influence. Leaders typically make more money and let's be honest, we all work to support our families and have some level of enjoyment in life.

and

Sadly, I have known some leaders drawn to leadership for reasons I think are not admirable, such as the desire for power over others, or the need to be admired by others, or well-known.

Values of Legacy Leaders

According to the leaders in this study, the definition of a legacy leader is a leader who uses knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to make contributions to one's organization that are highly relevant and have a lasting impact so when they move on, the relevance of their leadership continues to evolve resulting in a permanent change of the organization and the individuals within it. The values embraced by the legacy leaders are follower-focused, facilitating teams, empowering others to lead, and promoting sustainability. The common terms these participants referred to are "inspiring and supporting their followers", "motivating and helping their team to reach their personal and professional goals", "every team member is empowered", "creating a rich and meaningful experience that will make a positive impact on them for years to come", "continuously grow, change, and develop into something better and beyond", "grow and achieve beyond the tenure of the leader", and "sustain a healthy organization culture".

Transitioning from the traditional view of a leader at the early stage of their career when leaders are focused on ego and achievement to the contemporary view of a leader at the later stage of their career with a "we-centered" and intrinsically motivated focus, legacy leaders embrace the value of their roles being follower-focused leaders. During this transition, the leaders changed from a "slash and burn" management style to a "lifting followers" one because the leaders' accomplishments are only presented through the accomplishments of their followers and the success of an organization is "for the sake of the followers within". As evident in one participant's words"

> The role of a leader has shifted. Leaders are only as powerful as their followers. A leader has to be able to move and inspire others while continuing to adhere to the mission, vision, and values of an organization … My accomplishments are only relevant to me if my leadership qualities are positively encouraging others to take risks. The true accomplishments of a leader are those accomplishments of our followers that we celebrate.

Legacy leaders need to utilize their knowledge and skills to facilitate teams to reach their full potential. In. terms of normative beliefs, participants indicated that opinions held by followers and others in the organization influenced their decisions. The legacy leaders value their followers, their followers' opinions, and work with them to build their skills in order to better serve their organizations. Setting up the goals and directions for the organization's present and future and working on achieving these goals are a collaborative effort. In other words, success is not a leader's personal recognition, rather it is the success of the collective group. The best possible outcomes are the team outcomes, and it is the leader's goal to establish the collaborative culture in an organization as one participant pointed out:

> In today's world, leaders work aside their teams and share the reins to ensure the best possible outcomes. This shift is creating a collaborative scenario which utilizes the leadership abilities of all members regardless of whether that is their official title.

During the process, the participants discussed the importance of open and authentic communication and learning community. Being present, listening to their followers, and involving them in the process of changing the organizations and communities are the ways to engage and motivate followers. One participant stated the following:

> Take the time to listen to your followers and involve them in the process of change. Give them the opportunity to shine. Motivate everyone to think critically about everything they do and create meaning, purpose … This doesn't mean that there is always agreement, but that the leader has created an environment of open and honest communication.

The value of "Empower others to lead" is clear in the leaders' reflections. The best motivation for a leader to be successful in their role is the motivation to inspire others to reach their highest potential. In this way a legacy leader of an organization recognizes the importance of distributive leadership when it comes

to addressing complex challenges. Furthermore, a legacy leader holds a system's view and creates coherency in which each person is aware of their role, vision for the future, and responsibility toward that vision. As one participant stated:

> If the leader has done a good job, the culture of the organization has evolved to the point that the rest of the team can lead without the leader...that the organization becomes self-sustaining because the initiative and programs instituted under the leadership of the leader have become permanent features of the organization.

Supporting others is the true satisfaction of a legacy leader. If the employees are happy and satisfied with their work, that offers the leaders a sense of personal satisfaction. The source of satisfaction for a leader is the positive long-lasting difference that the leader has on stakeholders. Such difference must be systemwide and embraced by all levels of the organization to become a true part of the fabric of the organization. In one participant's own words:

> Satisfaction comes when the leader leaves the workplace with ideas for tomorrow, confident in her team's capacity for success in the known and unknown. I believe that a healthy organizational culture where each member of the team is empowered, growing, and thriving are sources of personal satisfaction for a leader. If I succeed, I have helped create the leaders of our future generations. I am determined to succeed because I believe in my leadership and the impact it has on others.

A value is an enduring belief that enables an individual to engage in a specific action or attain a preferred end-state (Rokeach, 1973). These values guide evaluating events and choosing behaviors, organizing them based on perceived levels of importance (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Scholars have identified values as abstract constructs that form the foundation for attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Chryssohoidis & Krystallis, 2005). Values are the underlying factors that can help explain individuals' attitudes and behaviors. While general attitudes toward policies, people, institutions, and events correlate well with general behavioral patterns, they don't correlate well with specific behavior (Ajzen, Fishbein, Lohmann, and Albarracín, 2018). Ajzen *et al*. (2018) state that "predicting specific actions requires a measure of attitude toward the behavior itself, as in the reasoned action approach, which takes specific behavior as its starting point and identifies intentions, attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control as important determinants." According to leaders participating in this study, promoting sustainability is another important value legacy leaders hold. Sustainability is built upon the relevance of accomplishments. When relevance is measured against the current environment and circumstances at one point in time which are constantly changing, the legacy leaders need to build the capacity of one's organization to succeed in a constantly shifting environment. Therefore, the end goal of promoting sustainability is that the leaders could leave their current positions without fearing the hindrance of progress because the followers are empowered to lead in their absence.

> For me this comes down to facilitating change at a systemic level. This can only occur when the professional and leadership capacity of your team has been fully achieved. Team members (with all stakeholders included) must own the vision, mission, and accomplishments of a team in order for growth and achievement to last beyond the tenure of the leader. … it's best to cultivate a growing community of leaders and followers to produce the priorities of the organization.

A few participants discussed the leadership style differences. However, the conclusion was that these differences in leadership styles do not interact with the values of legacy leaders. For instance:

The transformational leader is motivated by an opportunity for change and growth, while a servant leader is motivated by the needs she sees in those around her, and an adaptive leader thrives in finding a balance between integrity and possibility in an environment of change. It does seem, however, that in each of these situations, the effective leaders use the global lens to identify human and situational potential, putting the right resources and people in the right places and combinations to innovate and evolve.

DISCUSSION

Guided by the theory of planned behavior and a strong sample size, this study gained an understanding of the motivations of some leaders making decisions to preserve their legacy and create a sustainable future for their organization. Overall, study participants generally reported favorable attitudes toward legacy thinking. The organizational leaders in the study were affected differently by their behavioral, normative, and control beliefs regarding their role in the context and future of the organization, and motivation to succeed. The importance of the constructs in predicting behavior appeared to be impacted by the stage of their career, whether they were fairly new in this role or were experienced leaders.

Participants' answers indicate that those who felt important to leave a positive legacy and empower followers devoted time to developing followers in the organization. This attitude also influenced leaders' attitude toward personal growth and learning (theirs as well as the organization's learning). Several participants emphasized the importance of learning from the organization's past to create a shared vision and the importance of learning communities for the organization to learn from its mistakes. Such leaders' attitude could contribute to creating a learning organization. A learning organization is an organization where it is the norm for employees to consistently engage in collaborative learning, striving for continuous improvement in their work together (Sinclair, 2017). Working collaboratively in teams is a key aspect of the learning organization (Senge, 1990). According to Yoon and Park (2023), employees are more likely to share knowledge when employees with high learning goal orientation form a positive attitude toward knowledge sharing in a learning supportive culture and structure. Yoon and Park found a that there is a strong positive connection between the learning organization culture and employees' knowledge sharing. It should be noted that team learning is only one of five principles of a learning organization, the others being personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking (Senge, 1990). So, while a leader's positive attitude toward learning is crucial, it is not enough in and of itself to develop a learning organization. Organizations that embrace a learning culture are better positioned to align their decision-making processes with legacy thinking. They can adapt to changing circumstances, refine their strategies, and make decisions that support their long-term legacy goals.

Research on intergenerational decision making has shown that certain values positively influence intergenerational beneficence. Individuals attempt to create a legacy by associating themselves with other individuals and followers, organizations, or value system that will remain after they are gone (Fox *et al*., 2011; Plunkett Tost & Wade-Benzoni, 2011). So legacy thinking is tied to one's desire to "extend the self into the future through impacts on future others" (Fox *et al*., 2011, p. 160). The themes from this study and proposed model align with the perspective of Kan (2019) that leadership legacy and followership are intertwined. Consistent with current research, participants in this study mentioned the importance of certain values such as follower empowerment and promoting sustainability when making choices that will impact the organization after their departure. Reed (2009) noted that the legacy of leaders defines and impacts their organization, its people, and their wider community of practice. One implication of this finding is the importance for human resource to promote policies that emphasize responsible organizational citizenship and perhaps encourage the organization's involvement in social responsibility initiatives. Human resource leaders should also strive to promote the kind of organizational culture where, when faced with ethical dilemmas with implications for others' future, organizational leaders will make the choice most likely to benefit the organization.

As leaders develop a leader identity, self-attention and self-reflection can help them become legacy-oriented leaders. Steele and Day (2018) suggest that the focus of bolstering development should be on

encouraging positive methods of self-attention. The results of this study are consistent with Harvard Business School's definition of leadership: "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence." The leaders had to make their own thinking transitions as well.

The theoretical model places emphasis on the developmental process of legacy leaders, suggesting that effective leadership involves continuous growth and evolution. This implies that organizations should invest in programs and initiatives aimed at nurturing and developing their current and future leaders. The organizational setting is highlighted as the context within which the developmental process of legacy leaders occurs. This suggests that leadership development efforts should be tailored to suit the specific context and challenges faced by the organization. Leaders need to understand the unique dynamics, culture, and values of their organization in order to effectively lead and inspire others. The study's themes and resulting framework suggest that the development of legacy leaders' values is a central aspect of leadership development. This implies that organizations should not only focus on skill-building and knowledge acquisition but also on instilling and reinforcing core values that align with the organization's mission and vision. Values serve as guiding principles that shape leaders' decisions, behaviors, and actions. This study underscores the interconnectedness between leadership development, organizational context, values, and goal alignment. It emphasizes the importance of continuous learning, adaptability, and a strong ethical foundation in effective organizational leadership.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Legacy thinking, decision-making, and the concept of a learning organization are interrelated in that they all contribute to an organization's ability to create a meaningful and lasting impact. Legacy thinking informs decision-making by emphasizing long-term goals and values. At the same time, a learning organization facilitates informed, adaptive, and value-aligned decision-making through a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Integrating these concepts can lead to more purposeful and sustainable organizational practices. In this paper, we asked participants their thoughts on legacy thinking, and how thinking about legacy impacted the decisions they made. The grounded theory study shows that the developmental process of a legacy leader from early stage of being an ego and achievement-centered leader to later stage of being a we-centered and adaptive leader. Therefore, it will be interesting for future studies to further track the transitional stages and the factors triggering such transitions during the trajectory of the developmental process. For example, are the stages based on the years of taking a leadership position? Are the stages based on the leadership experiences? Or are there a set of events that triggered such changes?

Additionally, there is some value in exploring the relationship between knowledge sharing and the learning organization. Knowledge sharing has been recognized as essential to organizations and sustainable competitive advantage (Wilhelm & Durst, 2012). A better understanding of how and what leaders think of legacy would provide an opportunity to learn how legacy beliefs impact organizations. In a learning organization, individuals and teams have opportunities to analyze the consequences of past decisions and their impact on the organization. Legacy beliefs can inspire employees to contribute ideas and insights to shape the organization's future legacy, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment. There is a lack of empirical research examining the transmission of knowledge to those who succeed as leaders (Biron & Hanuka, 2015; Kan, 2019).

Finally, as pointed out by Colquitt *et al*. (2023), much of the research on legacy focuses on formal and informal leaders, as well as those who live their legacy, which they term the "legator." Research on legacy could also benefit from focusing on the beneficiaries of the legacy.

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