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## Social learning of strategic leadership: The role of classroom-based leadership training/education in the 'becoming' processes of senior police commanders as strategic leaders

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Social learning of strategic leadership: The role of classroom-based
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Abstract

This is an empirical study that aims to gain a deep understanding of the 'becoming' processes of senior police commanders as strategic leaders, particularly the role of classroom-based leadership training/education in those processes. The context examined in this study is the Hong Kong Police Force (the Force), which has a working strength of around 33,000 staff including 28,000 sworn officers. The 18 participants were all commissioner rank officers, most of whom joined the Force in the 1960s-1970s.

This study adopts a constructivist ontological assumption and an interpretive paradigm. Using an adapted grounded theory methodology, the research data collected through in-depth interviews were deconstructed, analysed and reconstructed to allow a sophisticated understanding of their strategic leadership development processes. The central theme, i.e., social learning is both a key feature of those processes and an important facet of classroom-based leadership training/education, is grounded in the lived experiences shared by the participants.

The findings of this study show that while the participants learned to become leaders from many different sources, classroom-based leadership training/education played a significant role in their 'becoming' processes. More specifically, compared with other sources of learning, classroom-based training/education provided them a safe learning environment that facilitated co-creation of knowledge with other course participants, activating all three levels of learning, i.e., the single-loop learning involved in acquiring new knowledge, the double-loop learning involved in broadening one's breadth of thinking, and the triple-loop learning (transformational learning) involved in acquiring a new self-identity.

This study also identifies a number of important factors that might have affected their learning outcomes including the background of co-participants, mode of delivery, venue location and personal leadership experience of the teachers. Based on these findings, the author argues that strategic leadership development is a complex social learning process involving both cognitive and affective domains, and that the common practice of focusing primarily on the former by mainstream leadership researchers reflects questionable ontological and epistemological assumptions.

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## Statement of copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

# Acknowledgements

No words can express adequately my gratitude to Mose, my beloved wife, for her unfailing support of my studies over the years.

Special thanks must go to my two research supervisors, Professor Carl Bagley and Ms Anji Rae, for their guidance, patience, encouragement and support throughout the study.   Documenting the leadership learning experience of a generation of police leaders is an ambitious task.   It is Professor Bagley who drew my attention to the potential benefits of qualitative approach to research studies of this nature.   Ms Rae enlightened me on the grounded theory methodology as a possible theoretical drive. I am also grateful to Professors Sharon Mavin of New Castle University and Ray Land of Durham University, the two examiners of this thesis, for their suggestions on ways to improve its presentation.

I salute the 18 participants who have shared with me their leadership learning experiences in great detail.   I have been pleasantly surprised by their openness, thoughtfulness and enthusiasm.   Their generosity in sharing with me their time, wisdom and experiences is beyond my expectations.   For ethical consideration, I do not name them here individually.   However, I am sure that all readers of this thesis agree with me that it is their wisdom, insights and astute observation that make this thesis so informative and inspiring.   I feel most honoured and privileged to have their participation in the study.

## Dedication

To all men and women who aspire to be a strategic leadership practitioner or researcher

**Chapter One**
**Introduction to the Research**

**1.1 Introduction**

This is an empirical study that aims to investigate and understand in what ways and to what extent classroom-based leadership training/development programmes have assisted senior police commanders of the Hong Kong Police Force (the Force) in becoming strategic leaders. In this introductory chapter, I explain my personal motivation for this study, context and significance and structure.

**1.2 Personal motivation for this study**

I am a retired member of the Force with 34 years of police service. I joined the Force in the late 1970s as a probationary inspector, rising through the ranks to become one of its four senior assistant commissioners before retiring in 2013. Like many of my contemporaries, I benefited from the enhanced training and promotion opportunities that arose from the change of sovereignty of the territory in 1997, which saw the premature departure of many experienced commanders. I had the opportunity to attend a four-week command course at the West Yorkshire Police Training School in the United Kingdom (UK) in the late 1980s. I then attended a nine-month mid-career development programme at the Graduate School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley in the mid-1990s. Soon after the new millennium began, I attended a six-week senior executive programme at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. I attended all of these overseas training/development programmes in addition to the local command courses including one intermediate and one senior command course, both of which lasted four weeks. My lived experience enables me to appreciate the very long learning journey one must take before he or she can reach and lead comfortably at the apex of a modern organisation like the

Force, which has a working strength of over 33,000 people.

Noting that my contemporaries are rapidly retiring from the Force, and that the enhanced training opportunities we have enjoyed have shrunk substantially in the past decade due to a range of factors beyond its control, I see the value of conducting this study to document the leadership learning experience of this fading generation of police commanders for the benefit of both future strategic leaders and leadership scholars who are interested in understanding our long and complex leadership learning processes.

## 1.3 Context and significance of this study

Under the concept of 'one country, two systems', the Force is the only police force responsible for maintaining law and order in Hong Kong, which has a population of over 7 million people.   Similar to many of its overseas counterparts, the Force has faced a wide range of strategic challenges in recent decades.   They include an extremely uncertain political future in the 1980s, a widening gap between its internal work culture and public expectations in the 1990s, an exodus of experienced officers before the change of sovereignty in 1997, stringent budgetary conditions imposed following the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, and the politicisation of policing, which has been exacerbated by the democratisation of the local political systems in recent years, to name but a few.

Notwithstanding all these significant challenges, the Force has apparently managed to maintain its operational efficiency at a high level while transforming itself from a paramilitary police force into a modern big-city police department.   In addition to becoming the first government department to win the 'Total Caring Award' from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service in 2006, the Force earned

international recognition as one of the most admired knowledge enterprises in Asia in 2009.   According to an international crime victims survey conducted by the United Nations in 2006, as many as 94% of local respondents were satisfied with the service provided by the Force, placing its customer satisfaction rating above all of the other major cities (over 30 in total) covered by the survey (Broadhurst et al., 2010). Another study conducted by a Netherlands victimology institute rates the city as one of the safest places in the world (ranked 2ndsecond out of 72 cities), a finding based on meta-analysis of all of the known international crime victim surveys carried out in the ten-year period between 1996 and 2005 (Dijk, 2008).

Upper echelons theory (Hambrick and Manson, 1984) attributes an organisation's success to the leadership of its top management.   Due to their powerful positions in an organisation, top managers have a disproportionate influence on organisational actions (Thomas and McDaniel, 1990; Thomas et al., 1993). Although they are not able to control the strategic environment in which their organisations operate, they are in a position to influence how the environment is interpreted and hence the framing of strategic issues and planning of organisational actions (Fairhurst, 2005).   Seen in this light, it can be argued that the remarkable achievements of the Force in recent decades reflect evident strategic leadership at its top levels, particularly when considering the numerous social and political thunderstorms it has weathered.

Developing strategic leaders is by no means an easy task.   Despite the large volume of previous leadership research, understanding the nature of leadership development and implementing leadership development practices remain significant challenges to both organisation scholars and corporations (Hernez-Broome and

Hughes, 2004; Mostovicz et al., 2009; Olivares, 2008; Popper and Mayseless, 2007). One of the main reasons for this is that previous mainstream leadership research has focused primarily on the relationship between leadership attributes and outcomes and paid limited attention to the determinants of leadership attributes (Fontana, 2001; Yukl, 2001). Without exploring the learning processes of accomplished leaders in sufficient depth, mainstream leadership research is considered to have limited relevance and application to practising leaders (Turner and Mavin, 2008). Against this background, this study seeks to narrow the knowledge gap by investigating in what significant ways, and to what extent, classroom-based leadership training/development programmes have helped top commanders of the Force become strategic leaders.

## 1.4 Structure of this study

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the major studies of strategic leadership and its development. Bearing in mind that the field of leadership is still in a state of fermentation with many continuing controversies about conceptual and methodological issues (Yukl, 2001), the literature review aims to explore the key issues underlying this research project and the gaps in the literature relevant to leadership development.

Chapter Three describes the setting of the study. Notwithstanding the regular media coverage of police activities, to many outsiders, the police remain one of the least understood institutions of modern government (Ewijk, 2012). By detailing the circumstances in which participating commanders develop and polish their leadership skills, this chapter sets the scene for readers to understand their lived experience from the proper perspective, which is reported in the ensuing chapters. Chapter Four

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provides reasons for selecting adapted grounded theory as the basis for this study. It also provides readers with their first encounter with the research data, allowing them to form an early impression of the effectiveness or otherwise of the selected approach.

Chapter Five reports the data analysis results. Following the procedures explained in the methodological chapter, this chapter explores the practical meaning of the key constructs that emerged from the interview data, which are organised into two main categories, seven subcategories and twenty-six dimensions. Finally, Chapter Six seeks to answer the research questions. It also discusses the gaps between the current literature and the findings of this study and reveals the implications of the latter.

## 1.5 Summary

This chapter explains the background of this research project, including my motivation for the study, the context and significance of this study, and structure of this thesis. Despite the importance of strategic leadership to organisational performance, it is noted that there is a gap in the leadership literature in relation to the nature of leadership development and the implementation of its practices. This study seeks to seize the unusual opportunity provided by the Force to narrow that knowledge gap for the benefit of both leadership practitioners and scholars.

**Chapter Two**

**Literature Review**

**2.1 Introduction**

This study presents two rounds of literature review. The first round, conducted before the formulation of the detailed research plan, aims at surveying the state of the field and synthesising prior research related to strategic leadership and its development so that the phenomenon to be studied can be properly conceptualised. The second round, conducted after completion of the data analysis, seeks to provide theoretical answers to the key issues raised by the participating commanders. To enable readers to follow the natural flow of this study, I summarise in this chapter the results of the first round of literature review, which cover the conventional approach to strategic leadership, strategic leadership development and the more recent theoretical developments. I defer the reporting of the results of the second round of literature review to Chapters Five and Six, which discuss the key issues raised by the participating commanders.

**2.2 Conventional approach to strategic leadership**

In broad terms, mainstream leadership researchers consider strategic leadership as the complex process of thinking, acting and influencing that aims to enhance the long-term health and well-being of an organisation (Beatty and Quinn, 2002). Hence, strategic leadership theories relate more to the leadership 'of' an organisation than that 'in' an organisation (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000). Although it is difficult to define the entire scope of strategic leadership (Guillot, 2005; Hitt and Ireland, 2002; Marques, 2010), identifying the common elements shared by different definitions is possible. Of the many varied definitions, 'long-term vision' and 'strategic changes'

have been widely thought to comprise the essence of the concept (Covin and Slevin, 2002; Hagen et al., 1998; Ireland and Hitt, 1999; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009; Mintzberg, 1994; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009).

Systematic leadership research dates as far back as the 1930s (Vera and Crossan, 2004; Yukl, 2001). However, it remained a separate line of inquiry from strategy studies until the 1980s, when organisation scholars started turning their attention to the activities of upper echelons, not only as relational activities but also as strategic and symbolic activities (e.g., Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Westley and Mintzberg, 1989). Compared with direct leadership, which emphasises specific management skills and influence styles, strategic leadership focuses more on anticipating and initiating long-term changes (Beatty and Quinn, 2003; Farjoun, 2010; Guillot, 2005). Specific managerial skills and styles receive less emphasis in strategic leadership theories, not because they are unimportant but because possessing a certain set of traits or a prescribed set of behaviour alone is not enough to ensure long-term organisational success in today's volatile and virtual operating environment (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009; Mostovicz et al., 2009). Moreover, it has been argued that a lack of specific managerial skills or significant character flaws should halt an individual's career progression before he or she can reach the strategic apex of an organisation (Lewis and Jacobs, 1992).

Based on their observations of several thousand senior managers in business settings, Stumpf and Mullen (1991) identify four elements frequently associated with effective strategic leadership: (1) developing skills in thinking and acting strategically, (2) understanding the non-linear and iterative nature of strategic management processes, (3) consistently and routinely applying a small number of key concepts and

(4) taking advantage of knowing one's personal style and its effect on others.

In a similar vein, Hitt et al. (1988) identify six critical components associated with effective strategic leadership: (1) determining strategic directions, (2) exploiting and maintaining core competences, (3) developing human capital, (4) sustaining an effective corporate culture, (5) emphasising ethical practices and (6) establishing strategic control. To investigate the relative importance of these components, Hagen et al. (1998) conducted a survey involving 1,000 chief executive officers (CEOs) selected at random from companies throughout the United States (US). Of those who responded, the majority (93%) viewed 'determining strategic direction' as the top priority. This result echoes the findings of others studies that for top leaders, the biggest challenge is to anticipate and initiate changes in what has been increasingly seen as a 'hyper-turbulent' work environment (Ayoko and Hartel, 2006; Brown and Posner, 2001; Eisenhardt, 1989; Self and Schraeder, 2009).

While some leadership scholars have focused on investigating what top leaders do, others have focused on understanding how top leaders influence organisational performance by identifying intervening variables in the process (e.g., Gupta and Govindarajan, 1984; Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991; Selznick, 1984; Thomas and Ramaswamy, 1996). One of these variables so identified is followers' internalisation of organisational objectives. As Boal and Hooijberg (2000) note, followers' internalisation of objectives is a precursor of good organisational performance and can be facilitated by the process of personal identification with the leader. Such a finding has led to a rise in popularity of charismatic/transformational leadership theories in recent decades (Arthur and Hardy, 2014; Cohen, 2010; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009). Shamir et al. (1993) observe the following:

> *[These theories] emphasize symbolic leader behaviour, visionary and inspirational messages, nonverbal communication, appeal to ideological values, intellectual stimulation of followers by the leader, display of confidence in self and followers.* (p. 577)

Advocates of these theories assert that a leader who has a charismatic relationship with his or her followers transforms their self-interested values, preferences and aspirations into those of a collective interest, making it easier for the leader to implement his or her strategic decisions (Cannella and Monroe, 1997; Shamir et al., 1993). Although this sounds logical, Fuller et al. (1996) observe that 'the ambiguity of the phenomenon and the difficulty of its measure have hindered researchers from firmly comprehending it' (p. 271).

In addition to followers' internalisation of objectives, some leadership theorists believe that timing is important (e.g., Waller, 1999). Selznick (1984) observes that different periods of an organisation's life afford top leaders different degrees of freedom to initiate change. Others believe that the leader's tenure is relevant. For example, Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) posit that in the early stages of their tenure leaders are allowed comparatively greater latitude to develop their legitimacy and attain a political foothold. However, others dispute this and observe that when a leader is new to the job, his or her discretion may be constrained by the legacies left behind by his or her predecessor (Sonnenfeld, 1988) or the path dependencies resulting from the predecessor's prior strategic decisions (David, 1985). Although the debate over this timing issue has yet to be settled, the diligence of other leadership researchers continues to produce an expanded list of intervening variables at the individual, firm and organisational levels such as culture (Avolio, 2007; Lord and Hall, 2005) and legal obligations (Davies et al., 1997).

The emergence of so many possible intervening variables has led some leadership scholars to establish strategic leadership theory paradigms that specify their targeted relationships and levels (e.g., Avolio, 2007; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). However, this attempt seems to have received little support from other researchers, due probably to the fact that the field of leadership is still in a state of fermentation (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Day and Harrison, 2007; Yukl, 2001). Even if leadership researchers were to agree on a unified strategic leadership paradigm, the wide range of intervening variables would present formidable methodological challenges to leadership researchers. As Boal and Hooijberg (2000) note, the coexistence of multiple and perhaps mutually offsetting intervening variables emphasises the questionability of the common research practice of focusing on one narrow range of variables at a time. Moreover, because leadership is a practice 'that has to blend a good deal of craft (experience) with a certain amount of art (insight)' (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 1), strictly speaking, it is hardly a science subject that can be represented by a simple or unitary model (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Day and Harrison, 2007).

Grasping the essence of strategic leadership is a challenge not only for leadership scholars. It is also a challenge for leadership practitioners. As Bottger and Barsoux (2009) observe, moving from a functional leadership role to a strategic leadership role is one of the most difficult transitions in a managerial career. This is due to the fact that the critical tasks for top leaders at the strategic apex are qualitatively different and intricately complex. As opposed to the roles of functional leaders who are organisationally and functionally oriented, strategic leaders operate at the boundary between the organisation and external environment where not only the playing field

but also rules become much less knowable (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987; Phillips and Hunt, 1992). Hence, however competent they might have been as functional leaders, their prior exposure is rarely broad enough to provide sufficient preparation experience. All of these challenges mean that 'the promotion to an executive leadership role will be the steepest jump in their career history and potentially the one with the least amount of transition support' (Conger and Fishel, 2007, p. 443). Indeed, many newly appointed strategic leaders fail at this transition. Watkins (2003) estimates that as many as 40% of senior managers hired from outside an organisation fail within their first 18 months in the new role. Watkins (2003) observes that despite its wealth the leadership literature provides little guidance for effectively transitioning into senior leadership positions.

Some leadership scholars have asserted that transitioning successfully from a functional leadership role to a strategic leadership role requires one to have an intellectual capacity that can make sense of the complex, probabilistic and volatile environment in which top leaders operate (Day, 2000; Jaques, 1986). Such an intellectual capacity, or conceptual/absorptive capacity (Covin and Slevin, 2002; Lewis and Jacobs, 1992), or simply a 'capacity to learn' as some leadership researchers prefer to call it (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000), is essential because it enables leaders to construct an understanding that matches or exceeds the complexity of the new situation (Day, 2000; Tickle et al., 2005). In other words, faced with strategic discontinuities and disequilibrium conditions at the strategic apex, a strategic leader's epistemological beliefs must be sophisticated enough to appreciate that knowledge is complex, tentative and uncertain so that they can continuously recognise new information, assimilate it and apply it towards new ends (Bottger and Barsoux, 2009; Burgelman and Grove, 1996; Farjoun, 2010; Hitt et al., 1998; Mintzberg, 1994).

Reflective of all of these arguments are the views that strategic leadership is a continuously adapting learning process and that leadership is 'learning' rather than 'learned' (Bennis, 2009; Brown and Posner, 2001; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Cooksey, 2003; Mostovicz et al., 2009; Posner, 2009).

## 2.3 Strategic leadership development

The importance of learning to strategic leadership has guided the attention of scholars and corporations to the leadership development of both individuals and organisations overall (Brown and Posner, 2001; Day, 2000; Drucker, 2004; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Leskiw and Singh, 2007; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009). In 2000 alone, US corporations spent as much as $50 billion on leadership development with significant attention directed at developing the capabilities of individual leaders (Lockwood, 2006). It therefore came as no surprise to management institutes when the Conference Boards of both the US and Canada affirmed that leadership was the number one competency organisations sought to develop in their people (Brown and Posner, 2001).

Although there is little dispute between leadership scholars and corporations as to the importance of leadership development to long-term organisational success, there is little consensus on what should be involved in the process. As Pearce (2007) argues, coherent leadership development efforts require guiding frameworks supported by comprehensive, complete and coherent leadership models. The absence of such leadership models means that top leaders must face the development paradox of 'great role complexity yet little support for learning and coaching' (Conger and Fishel, 2007, p. 443). Indeed, editors of one of the most cited management journals have also expressed their concern that 'theoretical contributions in

management and organisation studies may have not done an adequate job of anticipating the important conceptual, as well as practical, needs of […] business and social organisations' (Corley and Gioia, 2011, p. 20).

Research has thus far suggested that successful leadership development involves not only analytical and conceptual domains but also emotional and spiritual domains (Quatro et al., 2007). As Lovelace et al. (2007) note, top leaders have particularly stressful jobs due to the high levels of demand and responsibility associated with their leadership positions. Hence, a holistic approach covering all four of the domains is necessary to help upcoming top leaders 'assume roles as stewards of scarce societal resources and architects of business organisations that under-gird secure civil society' (Quatro et al., 2007, p. 428) and thereby avoid corporate scandal and the resultant loss of public confidence. However, despite huge investments made by both scholars and corporations, it appears that many leadership development programmes including those with more innovative approaches still fail to achieve what they intend to achieve, a costly failure for both individuals and organisations (Bottger and Barsoux, 2009; Hotho and Dowling, 2010; Pastor and Mayo, 2008; Souter and Ridley, 2008). Even programmes offered by internationally prestigious management institutes have also been criticised, albeit not without controversy, for being too narrowly focused, obsessed with numbers and overzealous in their attempts to make the discipline of management a science (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004).

Calls for rethinking the conventional approaches to leadership development have not ceased in the past two decades (e.g., Avolio, 2007; Davies, 1991; Flowers, 2004; Hanscombe and Norman, 1989; Hotho and Dowling, 2010; Olivares, 2008). In 1991, Sadler remarked that models must be developed 'that are not based on old-fashioned

omniscient heroes, but rather on new rationales founded on the idea of the leaders as a pathfinder who solves problems in a way that develops and draws on the competence of others' (Sadler, 1991, p. 194). Echoing this view, Day (2000) argues that leadership development should focus on building the capacity of participants to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted, as opposed to training them on the application of proven solutions to known problems. Successful leadership development, Day (2000) argues, needs to inspire scepticism and new ways of thinking, enabling individuals to criticise not just actions taken but also the framework for those actions. Seen in this light, the conventional approach that emphasises the transfer of knowledge and skills reflects a questionable epistemological assumption, i.e., leadership knowledge is absolute and can be learned from an expert (Antonacopoulou, 1999; Atwood et al., 2000; Fulmer, 1997; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Tickle et al., 2005).

The shift in emphasis from an authority-driven approach to a learner-centred approach has drawn leadership researchers' attention to the effect of individual and contextual differences on participants' interpretation and sense making of their learning experiences (Brown and Posner, 2001; Day and Harrison, 2007; Hirst et al., 2004; Mostovicz et al., 2009) in addition to barriers that may inhibit the effective transfer of learning to the workplace (Antonacopoulou, 1999; Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Belling et al., 2004; Ladyshewsky, 2007; McCracken, 2005). Leadership scholars are increasingly questioning the effectiveness of classroom-based, traditional instructional methods as means of leadership development (e.g., Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Charan, 2005; Hotho and Dowling, 2010; Mintzberg, 2004; Pastor and Mayo, 2008). In essence, those sceptics who question the effectiveness of classroom-based leadership development programmes are concerned about two main issues: the lack of

teachers' practical experience and the inherent limitations associated with classroom teaching as means of leadership learning.

As Bennis and O'Toole (2005) note, management is more a profession akin to medicine and law than an academic discipline such as chemistry or geology.  To help learners become competent leaders, education institutes require faculties who understand actual leadership practices and the important drivers of organisational performance.  However, under their model of academic excellence, Bennis and O'Toole (2005) observe that many education institutes select their faculties based solely on the rigor of their scientific research.  Although the research they produce based on abstract financial analysis, statistical regressions and laboratory psychology is excellent, it is argued, the relevancy of their experience to the day-to-day challenges facing leadership practitioners is in doubt.

Second, earlier research findings show that individuals normally assimilate the information presented to them to their current cognitive structures.  In terms of the information that cannot be assimilated, they may simply compartmentalise the resulting dissonance and thereby avoid changing their fundamental conceptual orientation (Ladyshewsky, 2007).  Given that prospective strategic leaders are more likely to be self-confident and have firm beliefs in their own ways of doing things, classroom-based development programmes, in which their role is confined to recipients of didactic input under a pre-set pedagogy would have difficulty in reaching their personal or emotional levels (Hotho and Dowling, 2010; Pastor and Mayo, 2008; Posner, 2009).  To help individuals reach that state of cognitive function where they can perform effectively at strategic levels, some leadership scholars have suggested that instead of relying on classroom-based training/development, prospective leaders

should be given successively more challenging work roles with a mentor who can help them better understand the new, more complicated world in which they must operate (e.g., Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; McGuire, 2002).

However, the mentoring approach has also been subject to criticism and does not seem to be effective at helping organisations resolve the problem of preparing top leaders at strategic levels. Notwithstanding the availability of elaborate leadership development programmes including the mentoring arrangement, many Fortune 1000 companies are still forced to look outside for individuals who can take on the challenge of leading the whole business (Ready and Conger, 2003). A survey of 276 large US companies revealed that only 20% of responding companies were satisfied with their leadership development processes (Charan, 2005). Kesler (2002) notes that one of the biggest problems with mentoring is the natural tendency for senior executives to select and develop others in their own likeness. As earlier research indicates, this has led to a temptation to return to the old way of doing things and a reluctance to take risks (Belling et al., 2004).

In short, notwithstanding burgeoning academic endeavours, understanding the nature of leadership development and implementing leadership development practices continue to present significant challenges to organisation scholars and corporations (Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004). Although decades of empirical research have produced a mass of findings related to what leaders do and how they do it, yet the fact remains that only limited insights into effective leadership development have been produced, especially at strategic levels (Mostovicz et al., 2009; Olivares, 2008; Popper and Mayseless, 2007). Many important aspects of leadership development remain understudied and unexplained. Much research work must be done before a

more coherent generalised conceptual framework for leadership development can be agreed upon (Amit et al., 2009; Hotho and Dowling, 2010).

**2.4 More recent theoretical developments**

In parallel with the preceding conventional approach to studying strategic leadership and its development, which focuses on leaders, a group of organisation scholars have noticed a need to widen the research scope to gain a more holistic understanding of the complexity of the issues involved (Boal and Schultz, 2007; Cross et al., 2008; Luthans and Slocum, 2004; Schneider and Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). As Uhl-Bien et al (2007) argue, in fast-changing and disruptive environments strategic leadership means more than 'the limited intelligence of a few brains at the top' (p. 300). It also involves flexibility, learning and improvisation throughout the organisation. Given these wider considerations, research focusing narrowly on an individual or individuals has failed to recognise that strategic leadership is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces (Cross et al., 2008; Schneider and Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

The recognition that strategic leadership is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces has led to some leadership researchers attempting to apply complex systems theory in their investigations of strategic leadership (Boal and Schultz, 2007; Schneider and Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). At its simplest, complex systems theory seeks to understand collective behaviour in complex systems by studying the relationships between component parts of the system in addition to the relationships between the system and its environments (Sterman, 1994). With many modern organisations moving away from stable bureaucracies grounded in authority and control towards more flexible joint ventures with component parts

interacting at a level of intricacy not covered by other strategic leadership theories, these leadership researchers are placing more hope in complex systems theory to clarify the complexity of strategic leadership in the current knowledge economy. An example of leadership research using this new approach is the study of distributed/shared leadership in organisations (e.g. Carson et al., 2007; Denis, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Pearce, 2004,), in which individual leaders are treated as co-contributors to organisational leadership. Another example is the study of relationships between component parts within organisations, in which leaders are seen as 'human resource brokers' (Brass and Krackhardt, 1999, p.179). Although the new approach may be intellectually stimulating, it is noted that the application of complex systems theory to strategic leadership research remains in an embryonic stage. Much research work is required before the approach can make any apparent substantive contribution to the understanding and development of strategic leadership.

Another point of note is that while the complex systems theory approach suggests a widening of the research scope, it does not negate top leaders' important role in influencing organisational performance (Luthans and Slocum, 2004). Creating and communicating a vision of the future; developing organisational structures, processes and controls; managing multiple competencies; selecting and developing the next generation of leaders; and infusing ethical value systems into an organisation's culture all require the involvement of top leaders, to name but a few (Boal and Schultz, 2007). Whatever functions they perform in the new organisation form in the economy era, top leaders are those held responsible for the organisation's current performance and for shaping the conditions that guarantee its survival (Allio, 2007; Hitt and Ireland, 2002; George and McLean, 2007).

## 2.5 Summary

This chapter seeks to synthesise the prior research related to strategic leadership and its development and to outline the theoretical developments that have emerged in the field in recent years in response to organisations' rapidly changing operating environments. Despite the high degree of importance that both scholars and corporations have attached to the topic of strategic leadership, the literature review makes it clear that insights generated from prior research lag far behind what is required to help organisations develop future strategic leaders effectively. Given the remarkable success of the Force in weathering through a turbulent period of transition in recent decades, studying the leadership learning experiences of its senior commanders may enrich our understanding of how functional leaders learn to become strategic leaders. The next chapter explains the social and organisational settings, in which the participating commanders develop and polish their strategic leadership thinking and practices.

**Chapter Three**

**The Research Setting**

**3.1 Introduction**

As Roberg et al. (2002) point out, leading a police department is by no means an easy task. Being required to pursue ends that are considered contradictory and unattainable, police officers are inclined to be cynical, alienated, disaffected and unhappy people (Delattre, 2006). Reports of police misconduct in the forms of brutality, syndicated corruption, discrimination and abuse of authority are not uncommon in either developing or developed countries (Reiner, 2000; Roberg et al., 2002; Skolnick, 2005). Facing these challenges, senior police leaders require not only direct leadership skills to maintain staff morale and discipline, but also strategic leadership skills to initiate and effect the long-term changes necessary to keep their organisations abreast of ever-changing public expectations.

Although police activities receive regular media coverage, as Ewijk (2012) notes, the police remain one of the least understood institutions of modern government. To help readers understand the significance of this study in perspective, this chapter provides information about the changing social and organisational settings in which its participants developed and polished their strategic leadership thinking and practices.

**3.2 The Force when they joined**

Most of the participants (14 out of 18) joined the Force in the 1960-70s, when corruption was accepted as part of everyday life in the city. The continued influx of refugees and illegal immigrants from mainland China, inadequacy of public services,

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absence of an effective anti-corruption framework and poor salaries and conditions of service for public servants at the time together provided a hotbed for syndicated corruption to flourish within the Force.   Sinclair and Ng (1997), two local journalists who have monitored the development of the Force closely, provide a vivid description of the prevailing situation in the early 1970s:

> *Within the Force [corruption] was referred to as 'the bus'.   You could 'get on the bus' and quietly pocket the brown envelopes containing untraceable amounts of cash which appeared mysteriously in your locker or desk.   You could 'stand beside the bus' and watch it go by and refuse to accept corruption payments although you knew graft was common.   Or you could 'stand in front of the bus' – report corruption and try to stop it – with predictable results.   Many got on the bus.   Most stood aside and watched it.   Few stood in front of it.   Part of the indifference to corruption was that it was efficient.   (p. 51)*

The public uproar in 1974 following the absconding of a police chief superintendent back to the United Kingdom (UK) while under investigation by the Police Anti-Corruption Branch prompted the then British colonial government to establish a new body independent from the police to investigate corruption.   Known as the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), the new body soon proved its efficiency and struck a heavy blow to the morale of the Force by investigating alleged corruption activities dating back many years ago.   It was not until 1977 when the governor of the colony announced a partial amnesty for corruption offences committed previously that the Force started to recover from its low staff morale and rebuild its public image (Slevin, 1977).

Alarmed by the strong emotions expressed by police officers during the turbulent

three-year period between 1974 and 1977, the colonial government invited a team of three police advisers from the UK to take a long and hard look at the management of the Force.   Subsequently, by the end of the decade, they recommended important structural changes including devolving more authority, responsibility and accountability from police headquarters to districts; restructuring and reorganising the Force; and improving the salaries and conditions of service for all of the ranks (Henry, 1981).   One direct result of their recommendations was an expanded police force; the number of disciplined officers jumped from 17,600 in 1977 to 23,500 in 1982 (Royal Hong Kong Police Review, 1977, 1982).   Furthermore, many better-educated young men and women were attracted by the improved salaries and conditions of service offered by the Force, culminating in an increased number of university graduates joining the department as direct-entry inspectors (as opposed to force-entry inspectors, i.e., those who joined as constables and were subsequently promoted to inspectorate).

### 3.3 The turbulent period of transition

No sooner had the Force recovered from its battered staff morale and low public image than another strategic challenge loomed on the horizon: the 1997 issue.   As Ward (1999) remarks, it was not until the Sino-British Joint Agreement on the future of Hong Kong was sealed in June 1985 that 'the average Hong Konger lived, worked and played on the basis that the colony might live forever – or end on the morrow' (p. 57).   The Joint Agreement, which specified that Hong Kong would cease to be a British colony on 1 July 1997, was greeted with mixed feelings within the Force.   On the one hand, it was welcomed because it helped remove uncertainties about the political future of the territory.   On the other hand, it created anxiety because no one could say for sure how this innovative concept of 'one country, two systems' would

work in practice.   For those officers who were too young to retire by 1997, many of them were perpetually disturbed by the difficult decision of whether to stay or go before the change in sovereignty and when and where to go if they decided to do so. Expecting an exodus of a large number of experienced commanders, the Force initiated a localisation programme in the mid-1980s, the aim of which was to provide enhanced leadership development opportunities to officers of the right calibre and age group.   Officers who were so identified were sent to different internationally renowned management institutes, police colleges and public-policy schools to develop their leadership potential and/or were attached to overseas law enforcement agencies to broaden their command experience.

Amidst heated political arguments between the British and Chinese governments over the implementation details of the Joint Agreement, the first local police commissioner Mr K. H. Lee took command of the Force in 1990.   In addition to struggling hard to maintain the morale and unity of the Force, his top management team had to address a number of ruthless cross-border armed robbery gangs that took advantage of the legal loopholes between China and the colony.   The following excerpts from *Asia's Finest Marches On: Policing Hong Kong from 1841 into the 21st Century* provide a glimpse at the situation:

> *In March [1992], amid a surging tide of increasingly violent armed robberies, eight masked gangsters blasted 65 shots from Chinese-military-issued 7.62 mm automatics during a double raid on two goldsmith shops in Shamshuipo.   The busy streets were crowded during the dusk gun battle and pedestrians ran for cover.   The gang, with gold and jewellery worth $6 million [HK$7.8=US$1], fled in hijacked vehicles, holding two staff as hostages.   As the vehicles sped away, gunmen blasted wildly, hitting police vehicles.*

*Two days later, the financial and business heart of Hong Kong came to a shuddering stop as six gunmen raided a goldsmith shop. Armed with AK47s, masked hoodlums terrorised lunchtime crowds amid the citadels of banking in the world's third largest financial centre. Using a security guard hostage as a living shield, gangsters blasted shots at police and fled with $10 million in gold…*

*[A few weeks later] the most violent gunfight between police and criminals in the territory's history broke out when 20 detectives from Kowloon East Regional Crime Units raided a flat in Taikoktsui. They were looking for car thieves. Instead, they startled one of the armed robbery gangs. Inspector Chan See-kei was grabbed as a hostage and shot in the head while thugs used him as a human shield. Chinese army hand grenades were hurled, injuring four other policemen. As the furious gun battle raged, team leader Superintendent Trevor Oakes was hit in the shoulder by a bullet from an AK47. Grabbing taxis and cars at gunpoint, the gang fled, with shots fired wildly and more grenades exploding. The wild chase continued through Kowloon, the gang abandoning bulletproof vests, grenades, shotguns and ammunition...* (Sinclair and Ng, 1997, p. 125)

### 3.4 The march towards modernisation

The second local police commissioner Mr K. O. Hui took over command of the Force from Lee in 1994. Thanks to the closer working relationship between the Force and its counterparts on the mainland, the crime situation in the city was brought under control. However, as expected, a large number of senior ranking police officers left the Force before the transfer of sovereignty. In 1997 alone, 156 expatriate officers left the Force under Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service package, decreasing the number of expatriate officers serving in the Force from 944 in 1987 to 402 at the end of 1997. Many young officers, both local and expatriate, benefited from the consequent enhanced promotion prospects, with 285 officers promoted to

chief inspector or above during the transition year (Hui, 1997).

During his eight-year tenure as police commissioner, Hui and his top management team introduced many far-reaching management reforms to the Force. In 1996, after much heated internal debate, the Force formalised and promulgated a set of core values for the first time in its 152-year history.   In the ensuing year, it published its first set of strategic directions, which aimed at improving the management of the Force and describing how it would discharge its functions in the newly established Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Hong Kong Police Review, 1997).

The first decade following the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region saw the Force continue to face many challenges, notably the social and financial tension arising from the Asian financial crisis; heightened terrorism threat following the 9-11 terrorist attacks in the US; public panic during the bird flu and atypical pneumonia (SARS) epidemics; and operational challenges associated with policing major international events including conferences held by the World Bank/IMF, Global Fortune Forum and World Trade Organisation in the city. Despite all of these challenges, the Force continued its management reform unabated. In 2001, it drew up its first-ever Three-year Strategic Action Plan, in which it set out its operational and management priorities to meet the needs of the local community. It also formulated and launched an internal communications strategy to break the communication barriers normally found within a disciplined service (Hong Kong Police Review, 2001).   In 2004, the Force established the Volunteer Services Corps to encourage officers and their families to take part in a variety of services in the community.   In 2006, it upgraded its police training school to the Police College with

the ambitious objective of turning it into a centre of excellence for police training in the region (Hong Kong Police Review, 2004, 2006).

**3.5 The modern Force**

The management reforms began to pay off in the latter half of the 2000s. In addition to the Total Caring Award conferred by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Force was given the Safety Enhancement Gold Award in 2006 at the Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Awards Ceremony. Various surveys conducted by the Census and Statistics Department and local universities confirmed a very high level of public satisfaction with the performance of the Force (Hong Kong Police Review, 2006). In 2008, the Force was presented with a Merit of Highest Service Hour Award (Public Organisations) by the Social Welfare Department in tribute to its voluntary service commitment. Findings from a staff opinion survey conducted that year by Hong Kong University showed that the overwhelming majority of its staff members (i.e., 98%) believed in the Force's vision and were willing to devote extra efforts to achieve it (Hong Kong Police Review, 2008). In its Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011, the World Economic Forum ranked the service provided by the Force as one of the most reliable (fourth out of 133 places) worldwide.

As at 31 December 2012, the Force had a working strength of about 33,000 full-time staff members, 28,000 of whom were sworn officers in 14 ranks including commissioner (1), deputy commissioner (2), senior assistant commissioner (4), assistant commissioner (14), chief superintendent (45), senior superintendent (91), superintendent (266), chief inspector (533), senior inspector/inspector (1,732), station sergeant (1,297), sergeant (4,795) and senior constable/constable (19,522).

**3.6 Summary**

This chapter explains the changing organisational and social settings in which the commanders who participated in this study developed and polished their strategic leadership practices. Although the Force appears to be a stable bureaucracy characterised by a hierarchy of authority, task specialisation and the formulation of activities into routines, in reality it has undergone a series of major organisational reforms in recent decades in response to the dramatic changes in its external environments. The leadership learning experiences of its top commanders under these challenging circumstances arguably represent a pool of information-rich cases that if properly studied may help both leadership scholars and practitioners acquire a more sophisticated understanding of strategic leadership development. The next chapter explains the relevant methodological considerations that led to the decision to base this study on an adapted grounded theory methodology.

## Chapter Four

## Methodological Considerations

### 4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, although much research work has been conducted on the subject of leadership, understanding the nature of leadership development and implementing leadership development practices remain significant challenges for both leadership scholars and practitioners (Amit et al., 2009; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Hotho and Dowling, 2010).   The main reason for this is that while prior research studies have made remarkable progress in understanding leaders' impact, 'the systematic psychological mechanism and processes that can explain leaders' development, particularly leaders in everyday life, remain largely understudied and unexplained' (Popper and Mayseless, 2007, p.666). To narrow the knowledge gap, this empirical study seeks to examine the leadership learning experiences of senior police commanders who play the role of strategic leader on the Force according to their own accounts.

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations pertaining to the design of this study.   It addresses the relevant research questions, ontological and epistemological assumptions, avenues of inquiry and ethical considerations; the role I play as an insider researcher; the study's use of an adapted version of grounded theory methodology as the theoretical drive for generating theories; and additional measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings.   Because the number of research methods in the social/applied sciences has increased dramatically in recent years (McKenzie and Knipe, 2006), I draw on the 'voices' of the participants and my research diary to illustrate my points where appropriate and help readers understand

my choice of research methods.

## 4.2 Research questions

According to de Vaus (2002, p. 9), 'The function of a research design is to ensure the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible'. Hence, before any meaningful discussion of research methods can take place, there is a need to first explain the research questions (Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002).

As Morse and Niehaus (2009) note, 'the research questions emerge from the aims' (p.40). To state the aim of this research study, it is *'to understand the meanings made by senior police commanders, from their role as strategic leaders, of their learning experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes'*. To meet this research aim, there are a number of research questions that need to be addressed, including:

a) What is the role of a strategic leader in the Force? In what significant ways is this leadership role different from those at lower levels?

b) What kinds of knowledge and skills are required of senior police commanders performing the role of a strategic leader on the Force? From where did the senior police commanders who participated in this study acquire these kinds of knowledge and skills?

c) What kinds of knowledge and skills did the senior commanders acquire through classroom-based training/development programmes?

d) What factors facilitated/hindered their acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills from the classroom-based training/development programmes?

e) What meanings did they make of their learning experiences in the classroom-based leadership training/development programmes?

## 4.3 Research methods

As Annells (1996) notes, the answer to the methodological question is shaped by the answer to the epistemological question, which is in turn shaped by the answer to the ontological question.  The purists who assume that there is an objective reality apart from the beliefs of the individual naturally advocate a positivist approach to social research.  In contrast, the research approach of the interpretivists/ constructivists who hold the view that reality is socially constructed through an individual or collective definition of the situation is more likely to be guided by a phenomenological paradigm (Firestone, 1987).  Given the influence of the ontological and epistemological beliefs behind my choice of research approach, I explain my own views related to (a) the form and nature of 'the truth' I intend to establish through this study (i.e., the ontological question) and (b) which types of knowledge are important for answering the research questions satisfactorily (i.e., the epistemological question).

### 4.3.1 Form and nature of 'the truth' to be established

Because the aim of the current study is to understand the meanings senior police commanders made of their learning experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes, clearly it falls under the rubric of interpretive research (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).  To understand how people make meaning of their experience, one has to take into account not only the shifting and volatile nature of meaning (Locke, 2001), but also that 'each person experiences, gives meaning to,

and responds to events in light of his or her own biography or experiences, according to gender, time and place, cultural, political, religious, and professional background' (p.39, Corbin, 2009). Taking these views into consideration involves perceiving that meaning is subject to perpetual revision and updating in light of further experience and is not standardised from person to person. Applying this interpretive paradigm to the current study, as Meuser and Nagel (2009) argue, 'the truth' I seek to establish is hardly a fixed product independent of context, neatly packaged and waiting to be explored. There are many truths, each of which continually evolves and represents merely a preferred interpretation based on the subjective choice of the individual at a particular point. Such an interpretivist view of truth as a 'series of fragments in continuous flux' (Fontana, 2001) leads me to focus this investigation on these fragments in their own right rather than on paradigmatic wholes.

4.3.2 Types of knowledge required for answering the research questions

According to Froschauer and Lueger (2009, p. 221), 'Empirical social sciences research focuses primarily on the knowledge held by the people involved with an organisation or its environments'. This is particularly the case in the current study, which aims to understand the meanings made by individual police commanders of their personal learning experiences. As Bogner and Menz (2009) note, qualitative researchers are basically interested in three types of knowledge possessed by the participants that can help them understand the social phenomenon studied, namely,: 'technical knowledge', 'process knowledge' and 'interpretative knowledge'.

*4.3.2.1 Technical Knowledge*

Technical knowledge relates to the rules, regulations and application routines

specific to the research setting. Seidman (1998) argues that without knowing these types of background information, which together provide the context for the social phenomenon studied, there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience. One participant's positive evaluation of his experience working a busy and difficult duty post effectively illustrates this point.

> **Participant 7**: *I was picked to work in LB (Liaison Bureau), a great experience. […] That was during the time [when we had] lots of cross-border liaison, incidents, cross jurisdictional matters, extradition and all kinds of policy review [related to different] security policies that attracted a lot of outside interest. […] Of course, there were a lot of social events – very hard.* (p. 19)

The seemingly contradictory statements (i.e., the job was busy and difficult but the experience was great) make perfect sense when they are seen against the unwritten rules of mutual help among different jurisdictions, as explained by the same participant.

> **Participant 7:** *External relations cannot be built in a day – you need to have long-time understanding and cooperation. […] You don't just have other jurisdictions to help you out without first of all understanding each other. You have to understand each other. You have to have sufficient understanding, sufficient trust. Only after they know what you are up to, what you are able to do, can you forge a trusted partnership. That is all that is about. We had very good relations with many jurisdictions: America, the US, the UK, Japan, Singapore, not to mention China. […] When we talk about transnational crime, you can't solve the problem alone. You will have to work collaboratively with other jurisdictions, with other law enforcement agencies. […] I am pleased to see that we were able to achieve this kind of thing. […] Hong Kong is a big player, really, although we are only a city police force. We operate more than an ordinary city police force, and [in many ways we are] very much*

> *comparable with national police forces.   Our positioning, as far as I can*
> *see it now, has been one of the best.   I was able to compare it by talking*
> *to people and cooperating with other jurisdictions.   We have a good*
> *reputation.   Internationally, we are a partner to be reckoned with.   So I*
> *am very happy to say and I am sure to this day that we still are [a big*
> *player].*   (p. 19-20)

Without knowing the unwritten rules of mutual help among law enforcement agencies from different jurisdictions, it would be difficult for any individual not involved in international liaison duties to understand the participant's positive evaluations of his working experience in the Liaison Bureau.   Given the many rules, regulations and application routines, I must rely on the participants as 'crystallization points' and to share their relevant technical knowledge (Bogner and Menz, 2009).

### 4.3.2.2 Process knowledge

Process knowledge relates to sequences of action, interactions, routines, organisational constellations and past or current events, and is based on the practical experience acquired from one's own context of action (Bogner and Menz, 2009).   In the past three decades, as explained in Chapter Three, there were many significant organisational/social changes that may have affected the strategic thinking of senior police commanders.   Therefore, to understand the meanings they make of their learning experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes, it is necessary to first understand the significant changes they have experienced.

The following testimony explains how one participant's experience in dealing with vice activities pushed him to become a passionate fighter for ethical practices.

**Participant 2**: *[Back in the early '70s] it was so easy to get cases, absolutely very easy. But we came across a lot of nasty cases. A lot of girls in the vice business were girls who'd been gang-raped into it, girls who'd been tricked, etc. But then when we got the girls, we tried to ring up the parents. The parents didn't want to know. Everything else, a lot of it was nasty. Opium was relatively straightforward. The worst part was the prostitution, was the vice, which really upset me quite badly. I could see how corruption was a problem. [...] In those days guys spoke quite openly about corruption. It wasn't hidden. A strange thing – it wasn't a taboo subject. In general terms, people would be talking about how corruption was necessary in Hong Kong: it oils the wheel. They would never say they would take it themselves. They would say, 'I'm told by other people that…' Anyway, as an inspector you got an envelope appearing in your drawer every month. You didn't have to do anything for it. And I got very angry one night [in the officers' mess]. Maybe I was pissed, I don't know. I banged my beer on the bar and said, 'You fucking assholes! It's because we do nothing. It's why I'm dealing with bloody girls gang-raped into prostitution and things like that. Because we do nothing! By doing nothing, you are aggravating the whole situation'. Silence. The next few months were very difficult for me because nobody spoke to me. Whether it was because they were all corrupt or whether it was the case that they thought I was a mad and dangerous bloke who would get them into trouble, I don't know.* (pp. 10-11)

The preceding example shows that in terms of process knowledge, the participants acted as eyewitnesses for this study by sharing what they personally observed or experienced and how their lived experience affected their leadership development.

*4.3.2.3 Interpretative knowledge*

The importance of the participants' interpretative knowledge to this study cannot be overemphasised, as what this research seeks to achieve is to invite them to

(re)construct their learning experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes and to make meanings of such experiences from their role as strategic leaders. Unlike technical and process knowledge, which result from an objective comprehension or passive reception of the actions taken in a situation, interpretative knowledge is the result of an analytic construction that involves one's own subjective orientations, rules, viewpoints and interpretations. As Bogner and Menz (2009) note, '[A]s we construct interpretative knowledge we enter […] the sphere of ideas and ideologies, of fragmentary, inconsistent configurations of meaning and patterns of explanation' (p. 52). Although technical or process knowledge can be checked against a set of objective criteria for accuracy, interpretative knowledge involves constructed views rather than hard facts and has no objective truth (Charmaz, 2001). The contingent and fluid nature of interpretative knowledge means that a researcher's interactions with participants can affect its construction (Karniel-Miller et al., 2009), as shown in the following reflections of two participants who took part in the study.

> **Participant 2**: *This exercise together with the other presentations/ speeches I have given and have still to give have made me think very deeply and hard about my career. In many ways, it is an on-going, very reflective exercise and a big reminder as to how much readjustment I will be facing when I do leave [the Force] next month. You, in particular, through this exercise have received the deepest insight into my thoughts about my career.* (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher after proofreading the draft transcript.)

> **Participant 9**: *I must express my gratitude to you for involving me in this project. The interviews offered me an excellent opportunity to take stock of what I had done in my career. […] In the process, I was able to look back in great depth at how my leadership was developed. I found it extremely useful. This was something that I would not have done if I*

*were not involved in this research. […] I wish you every success in this very meaningful project.* (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher after proofreading the draft transcript.)

In short, the three types of knowledge discussed previously are important to the phenomenon under study. They can either throw light on the context in which individual senior commanders make meaning of their learning experiences, or can provide rich information related to the meaning itself, allowing an enriched understanding of their 'becoming' processes. What is needed is an effective method for garnering all three types of knowledge from them to address the concern that 'the systematic psychological mechanism and processes that can explain leaders' development, particularly leaders in everyday life, remain largely understudied and unexplained' (Popper and Mayseless, 2007, p. 666).

### 4.3.3 Avenue of inquiry

Identifying the types of knowledge required for this study correctly is one thing; garnering them is entirely another. As Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) observe, a researcher must be able to retrieve and receive participants' stories, experiences and wealth of knowledge of the research topic to achieve his or her research aims. While there are different data collection methods including document reviews, observation, questionnaires and interviewing, not all of these methods can ensure the attainment of knowledge in a given research setting (Charmaz, 2001). For a research study like the current one that asked participants to reconstruct experiences and explore their meaning, as Seidman (1998) argues, '[I]interviewing is a necessary, if not completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry' (p. 7). Although some qualitative researchers are critical of interviewing in favour of observation (e.g. Atkinson, 1997; Silverman,

1998), it can be argued that understanding particular experiences within a broader context of meaning involves facts that cannot be derived from the immediate observation of a particular act or expression (Tunnell, 2006). As a research method, as Seidman (1998) argues, '[I]nterviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language' (p. 7).

Interviewing can take different forms, ranging from standardised methods to semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Bearing in mind the argument that each person experiences, gives meaning to and responds to events in relation to his or her own biography or experiences, interpretive researchers criticise standardised interviewing methods on the grounds that they systematically close the door on opportunities to get at what interviewees really think and neglect the constitutive features of everyday life in which the subjective attribution of meaning takes place (e.g., Seidman, 1998; Trinczek, 2009).

In Brunner's (1991) view, inviting participants to tell stories about their lived experiences instead of asking them to provide answers to standard questions is a more effective way to understand experience and explore meaning. Such a view is based on the argument that stories are our way of organising, interpreting and creating meaning from our experiences while maintaining a sense of continuity throughout. Echoing Brunner's view, Atkinson (2001) and Seidman (1998) note that making and telling stories require reflective thinking, as every story has a beginning, a middle and an ending. To make and tell a whole story, people must reflect on their experiences. Given that the purpose of the current study is to gain a deep understanding of how individual senior commanders make meaning of their learning experiences, Brunner's (1991) suggested avenue of inquiry, i.e., life story narratives told through in-depth,

face-to-face interviews, is particularly attractive.

The following example illustrates the potential of the approach for this study. Instead of asking one participant to describe how important mentoring was to his leadership development, I invited him to reconstruct his lived experience with any mentors who had influenced his management style. The participant unexpectedly used the opportunity to deliver an impromptu speech on the subject, vividly explaining in great detail how the worst teacher in the world had taught him the best leadership lessons.

> **Researcher:** *Looking back at your career, has any supervising officer acted as your mentor? Is there any supervising officer who has had more of an influence on your management style?*
>
> **Participant X:** *I think the one who influenced me most was an SP (superintendent) when I was in a crime unit (name given), because he did the very opposite of what a good leader should do. For example, he used to ask the whole unit to do some raids at the home addresses of wanted persons during Chinese festivals, saying that it was the best time to check on them as they would want to go home to celebrate. At the time, the unit handled all of the armed robbery cases, gun cases, all of these. So [there was] no way a wanted person would go home to celebrate the festivals, no matter what. Then eventually he admitted that the reason for us to do a lot of raids on long holidays was because there were usually no other units working during holidays. So in the morning report it was always 'Nil' [under the heading of 'Search Warrants Executed']. But if we did all of the raids, then it would appear in the morning report, and the boss would know that we were very hardworking. And that was the way to impress the boss. [...] He told us that this was the way to survive in the Force, that this was the way you made progress. And he told us that's why he made SP when he was so young in his career. But to me, I say this was the wrong thing to do. And then we had 'morning prayer' and 'evening prayers'. Morning prayer was typical. Evening prayer was at around half past five. He wanted every CI (chief inspector) to go to his office for*

*evening prayer. But in a special unit like this one, not much happened in one day. If you had morning prayer already, there was nothing to report [in the evening]. But he wanted you to be there, to show his authority or whatever. Evening prayer was a waste of time. He started off by talking about personal things, and then talked about gossip and all that sort of thing. And then he wouldn't let us go until half past six. Either he had nowhere to go or he wanted to impress his boss, who was working on the same floor. There was one occasion or a few occasions when we all went home, and suddenly he paged us. We didn't have mobile phones at that time; we only had pagers. He wanted us to go back to the office immediately. So we went back. There was nothing special. He just asked us a few questions, so be it. And then [all of us] went home. So a lot of things he did were completely opposite to what a good leader, good manager, good boss or even an ordinary person would accept. So that made a very lasting impression on me. I said to myself that if I became a boss one day, I would never do things like what he did. So I think I learned all of the 'don'ts' during those two years when he was my boss. That was a very, very good model to learn – not the best way, but the worst way. Looking back, I think that SP basically affected me most. [...] So all along this was how I learned to avoid becoming as bad as this supervising officer. Unlike most people who had a model to follow, who had a mentor, to me I had the worst teacher in the world. Yet he gave me the best lessons I ever learned. Throughout my career, yes, I had some good bosses who I [respected and] said, 'This is the way I would do it. These are the things I would like'. But the person who influenced me most was him.*

Obviously, from the perspective of understanding and appreciating the amazing intricacies and yet coherence of the participant's learning experiences, a life-story narrative such as this is far superior to a direct answer akin to, 'No, I do not think mentoring has had any significant influence on my leadership development, as I have not had any mentors in my career'. The social world has no set of discreet facts to be apprehended (Fontana, 2001). Therefore, it can be argued that standardised methods with fixed choice answers fail to take into consideration the rich and elusive

nature of subjective interpretation (Trinczek, 2009) and are hardly an effective means for garnering the fragments of social truth that are continuously in flux. Exactly how the interviews were conducted is explained in greater detail in Section 4.5.2 ('Retrospective interviews').

## 4.4 My role as researcher in the investigation

As Littig (2009) observes, regardless of whether the researcher admits it, interviewing is a social relationship of which the interviewer is a part. The need to 'lure' information out of a participant means that the researcher cannot always act neutrally in an interview in a way that purists would prefer to see (Abels and Behrens, 2009). This hard reality gives rise to the concern that the researcher may become a 'contaminant' in the research process in the sense that he or she may consciously or unconsciously allow his or her own interests, values and biases to influence the participants, thereby 'misguiding' or 'misinterpreting' their views (Krieger, 1991; Tunnell, 2009). It is out of such a concern that purists frequently object to qualitative interviewing on the grounds of it being a 'dirty' method (Trinczek, 2009, p. 69).

Although qualitative researchers such as Charmaz (2009) and Abels and Behrens (2009) seek to defend the value of interviewing by arguing that there is no way in which a social scientist can avoid assuming choices of value and implying them in his or her work, the purists' concerns are valid. Unavoidable influence does not mean that anyone is free to don the cloak of the qualitative researcher by allowing his or her own opinions, prejudices and speculations to unduly influence the research process under the guise of qualitative interviewing, especially in situations where the

researcher has member-based knowledge of the phenomenon studied as in this case.

In an effort to minimise the risk of 'contaminating' the thinking process of the participants during interviews, as advocated by other experienced social researchers, I sought to apply a phenomenological technique known as 'bracketing' by suspending my interpreting beliefs and pre-existing theoretical commitments in the process (Cohen, 1987). I consciously restricted my role to listening and understanding the participants' stories, rather than looking for corroboration of my own personal views or testing hypotheses. By defining myself as the 'learner' during the interviews, I deliberately allocated the role of expert to the interviewees, allowing them to make meaning of their own experiences to themselves (Moustakas, 1994). Most of the questions posed during the interviews followed from what the interviewees were saying to me. The approach appeared to work well, as reflected in the following comments made by some of the participants towards the end of their interviews.

**Participant 5:** *I think the approach was very good, because you didn't specifically ask questions about [predetermined] issues. Throughout the discussion you focused on the issues I raised. And then equally at the receiving end, since you didn't ask, I didn't mention [certain things] because I didn't know how they would affect [your study]. I shared only factual or very general things [with you].* (p. 42)

**Participant 10:** *I think your interactive interviewing technique was very good. You let me talk, and then you picked out issues. I don't know what your [predetermined] questions were, but you obviously asked them as we went along. It's interesting as we look back on [our past].* (p. 44)

**Participant 16**: *I found your questioning, the way you put the questions and the order of your questions very skilful. It helped me think about things I hadn't considered before. It brought out 'underlying' things that*

*had been imbedded in my mind for a long, long time. You adopted a very skilful method in this research project.* (p. 20)

Notwithstanding the phenomenological technique of bracketing, the fact remains that the researcher's influence on data collection and analysis cannot be totally ruled out. Acknowledging this blurring of the division between researcher and participant, social research in recent years has increasingly been seen as the researcher-participant coproduction of knowledge (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009), a new insight that has prompted other social researchers to extol the relative merits of member status (Bogner and Menz, 2009; Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Hannabus, 2000; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Mercer, 2007).

As Stenbacka (2001) argues, with member-based knowledge, an insider researcher is in an advantageous position to bridge the knowledge gap between research participants and readers, helping the former express their views and the latter understand the views of the former. This is particularly the case in qualitative interviews in which interviewees often mention individual characters with the assumption that others know who they are, use jargon without explaining its meaning and talk about past events without contextualising them (Obelene, 2009). Consider the following example.

**Participant 6**: *The purpose of CIB [Criminal Intelligence Bureau] is to have intelligence and to share intelligence with others. That is the principle; that is the ideal. But the way CIB worked was, 'I don't share anything with you'. They wanted cases, they wanted credit, they wanted whatever. But they used the need to know as a front. It was a black hole – they sucked everything in without giving anything out. That was how CIB worked at the time. I said, 'You can't be right'. What also reinforced my thinking was that we had CICS I [the first generation of the*

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*Criminal Intelligence Computer System] at the time. The plan was that CICS would be extended to regions and maybe eventually to districts. But CICS was only a computer system. For other functions, the other formations did not have any. If CICS was going out to regions and districts, they would have the same computer system. But would they have the same computer skills to make full use of CICS? At the time, the officers in CIB did not think about that. They still thought about, 'We need to get cases. I don't want to tell anybody anything". So I knew things had to change. So I started making changes. Okay, things that required sensitivity to handle, then there's 'need to know'. Otherwise, we had to open up everything, encouraging an exchange of information. Second thing is that we would have to change the training of FCIS [Force Criminal Intelligence System]. At the time, the training was done by CIB. But when I looked at the content, all they did in the two days was explain the headquarters order, how to write the IRF [Information Report Form], how the information was processed, how they eventually ended up in CIB, and all of these things. So I started to change that, and said, 'If you want to change the intelligence system, you will have to change the training. Teach them how to make use of CICS instead of teaching them the headquarters order, because they can read the headquarters order'. So it was my vision. CIB wasn't right, and it had to change into something that they eventually called intelligence-led policing.* (pp. 9-10)

As Trinczek (2009) observes, an interviewer must be sufficiently compatible and on par with the interviewee before the latter is willing to 'accept and engage in a discursive, argumentative, and for the research project potentially productive, interview situation' (p. 48). Had it not been for my member-based knowledge, I would have had to interrupt the participants several times during the interviews for clarification. Otherwise, I would not have been able to understand the significance of the reforms they were trying to explain. My member status thankfully allowed me to understand and relate their stories in a style more familiar to ordinary readers, and removed the need to disrupt the thinking process of the participants.

Another advantage of insider researchers is that they know their environment well. As Hannabus (2000) notes, insider researchers know 'by instinct what can be done and how far old friendships and favours can be pressed' (p. 103). Although outsider researchers require time and effort to build up a trusted relationship with participants, the following entries in my research diary show how my member status facilitated my access to the group.

> *The first subject had over 30 years of police service. He was selected as the first subject because I had known him for over four decades. [...] Therefore, securing his agreement to take part in the research was never a problem. The mutual trust we had developed over the years allowed me to ask direct questions and obtain thoughtful answers and honest feedback from him. To any outside observer, our first meeting must have been an abject failure, as we spent the whole evening in a cafe joyfully catching up with each other on general issues pertaining to the Force rather than talking about the research project. To me, however, this exchange was very useful, as it allowed me to get a better understanding of his perception of the strategic setting within which he operates. The second meeting, which took place on a Saturday afternoon in my office, was audio recorded and proceeded smoothly for about two hours.*

> *The second subject [...] was about to retire with over 35 years of police service. I had worked with him in the same command on two separate occasions and enjoyed a close personal relationship with him. The interview was conducted in his office on a Saturday morning, by which time he had packed up his personal belongings and was psychologically prepared to hand over the office to his successor. His imminent retirement from the Force must have affected his readiness to talk. He gave a vividly detailed account of his leadership experience, development and philosophy in addition to his personal views related to the factors that led to his career success. He was so candid during the interview that I saw the need to replace the names he mentioned with letters in the transcript to avoid causing embarrassment to any individual.*

> *The third subject [...] had 31 years of service. Although I had never worked with her in the same command, we knew each other very well as we shared a very similar training background. [...] The interview took place at her office on a weekday after office hours. The two-hour interview was characterised by outbursts of laughter, a total of 17 times according to the transcript.*

Due to the member status I gained working side-by-side with the participants for over three decades, they accepted me as 'an accomplice' in the research as evidenced by their willingness to share their 'insights into real strategies and action orientations that go well beyond official aims and objectives' (Bogner and Menz, 2009, p. 67). In fact, I was deeply touched by the unreserved trust they placed in me, further examples of which I provide in Section 4.5.2 ('Retrospective interviews'). Based on the personal experience I gained through this research study, I agree with Johnson (2001) that a researcher's lived experience and member status need not be disadvantages in social research.

Although there are obvious advantages to being an insider researcher, there were certain challenges arising from my close relationships with the participants, not the least of which were ethical dilemmas and potential conflicts of interest (Gair, 2012). These challenges are discussed in Section 4.6 ('Ethical considerations).

## 4.5 Adapted grounded theory methodology as the theoretical drive of this study

To theorize how senior police commanders understand and make meanings of their learning experiences, there is a need to recruit and interview a number of them so that I could connect their experiences and checked the comments of each participant against those of the others. My attempt to connect the participants'

learning experiences based on their own accounts led me to choose an adapted grounded theory methodology as the theoretical drive of this study, as grounded theory places emphasis on generating theories based on empirical evidence (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As a set of research practices, grounded theory seeks to 'marry the richness of complexity of the qualitative studies with the scope and simplicity of the quantitative approach' (Dey, 1999, p. 44).

Although there are different versions of grounded theory, they all follow the same inductive logic by subjecting the research data to rigorous analysis with the aim to 'discover' theories that can fit the research situation and be understandable to those working in the kinds of social situation studied (Locke, 2001). The key concepts involved in the process include theoretical sampling, retrospective interviews, theoretical coding, theoretical saturation and grounded theory, which together provide an operational model for theory generation (Corbin, 2009; Dey, 1999; Locke, 2001). Borrowing these concepts, the adapted version of grounded theory employed in this study took advantage of the 'pure' version of the theory but with a more flexible methodological approach that can be characterised as 'analytical construction'. I explain how this is achieved in the following sections.

4.5.1 Theoretical sampling

Dismissing the purist's random sampling practice as no more than 'seeking information in the library by randomly selecting a book from a randomly selected shelf' (Glaser, 1992a, p. xii), grounded theorists advocate the practice of actively searching for and 'sampling' participants to provide the best possible answers to their research questions (Clarke, 2009; Locke 2001). The reason for such a sampling

approach, which grounded theorists call 'theoretical sampling', is based on the argument that what matters to a study most is the information that best supports the development of a theoretical framework (Dey, 1999; Locke, 2001). In this study, while I might invite any police commanders to participate, it is only those who have acted in the position of strategic leader could help me understand the phenomenon studied.

As mentioned previously, the Force has a working strength of about 33,000 staff members, 28,000 of whom are sworn officers holding 14 different ranks. The commissioner, assisted by two deputy commissioners, is responsible for all matters pertaining to the Force, including its operational priorities and future development. Below the commissioner are four senior assistant commissioners who oversee the programme areas of operations, crime and security, personnel and training, and management services, respectively. Together with the 14 assistant commissioners, each of whom commands a region or a policy wing, this small group of commissioner rank officers (CROs) determine the strategic directions and day-to-day operations of the Force. According to Patton (1990), given their undisputed positions as strategic leaders in the organisation, the CROs represent a pool of information-rich cases in which valuable informants can be found.

When deciding whom to invite to take part in the study, I followed the advice of Patton (1989) that 'maximum variation sampling provides the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies' (p. 45). Although CROs belong to a small and homogeneous group in terms of their professional status, they have different personal backgrounds in terms of gender, age, race and professional

attainment. To ensure the representativeness of the sample group, I deliberately invited CROs with different backgrounds to participate in the study. This resulted in a sample group consisting of both serving and retired commanders that represented all four of the commissioner ranks (one commissioner, three deputy commissioners, six senior assistant commissioners, seven assistant commissioners and one civilian of assistant commissioner equivalent rank); both genders (three females and fifteen males); different career paths (three joined as constables and fifteen joined as inspectors or equivalent in the case of the civilian); both local and overseas officers (fourteen local and four overseas); and different age groups (one joined in the 1960s, thirteen joined in the 1970s and four joined in the 1980s).

In terms of the total number of participants, I followed the advice of Froschauer and Lueger (2009) that sampling strategies should continue until the 'theoretical saturation' point is reached (p. 225). Adopting this strategy, I recruited and interviewed 18 participants before I was satisfied that the stories I had heard were becoming repetitive, and that adding additional participants would not clarify the circumstances under examination any further.

### 4.5.2 Retrospective interviews

Accepting that subjectivity is at the centre of meaning making, grounded theory researchers use retrospective interviewing to explore participants' experience and insight (Charmaz, 2001; Morse et al., 2009; Tunnell, 2006; Seidman, 1998). Although some researchers believe that such an approach places too much emphasis on individuals' experiences and is inherently incomplete (e.g., Atkinson, 1997; Silverman, 1998), grounded theory researchers defend it by arguing that 'rich data that speak to the individual's perspective and with impact or meaning [in the

phenomenological sense] must come from the interviews' (Morse et al., 2009, p. 243). Their argument is echoed by Seidman (1998), who observes that only in-depth interviews can lead to a deep understanding of people's experience from their point of view.

Grounded theory emphasises exploring and understanding the internal coherence of participants.   This requires the researcher to maintain an orientation of discovery, and derive new lines of inquiry from the information the participants provide without the imposition of priori assumptions and/or preconceived notions (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Richard and Morse, 2007).   In practice, this means that the researcher must remain open to 'what all is involved' during interviews to avoid closing off potentially gainful lines of inquiry (Schatzman, 1991).   The 'what all is involved' approach makes the initial investigation unfocused (Locke, 2001), and the personal involvement of the researcher is essential for adjusting the line of inquiry according to the situation.

To help the participants reconstruct their experiences and explore their meaning, I was guided by a list of general topics rather than a set of questions when conducting the interviews.   These topics included the following:

a) the participants' career paths, covering both their posting and promotion histories;

b) examples demonstrating the differences between their leadership roles as inspectorate and commissioner rank officers;

c) their leadership philosophies as reflected through reconstructions of the 'signature projects' they were particularly proud of;

d) the necessary knowledge and skills required of strategic leaders, determined by recalling the challenges associated with their signature projects and critical incidents;

e) their experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes, and the relevance of such experiences to their signature projects;

f) other possible sources of learning including mentoring, coaching, family education and self-learning;

g) self-perceived reason(s) for their career success in their organisations; and

h) any other issues they considered relevant to the subject under examination.

The sequence of the topics was purposely set to allow the participants to talk about more factual matters as a warm-up before being asked to provide their personal views and information about more intimate matters. Although some people may feel uncomfortable in an unstructured situation and find it difficult to tolerate a preponderance of open questions (Seidman, 1998), the participants in this study, all of whom were senior police commanders, were used to talking at length, spontaneously, articulately and coherently. I soon noticed that they enjoyed the chance to reflect on their lived experiences, as shown in the following lengthy reply to a relatively simple question.

**Researcher:** *When you studied in secondary school, were you also a high performer?*

**Participant 16**: *Very good question. […] I would describe myself as a very naughty, playful kid because I lived in a squatter area when I was young. The kids in the squatter area always go out and play football, fight, blah, blah, blah. So I had no interest in studying at all. […] When I finished Primary Six, you know, in the old days, there was still a 'Hui Kao' (public*

*examination).   I failed the 'Hui Kao'; I couldn't go to secondary school. As the eldest son in the family, […] I realised I disappointed my family and my father [in particular].   They worked so hard, and I wasn't even able to get into secondary school.   They then sent me to a private secondary school, the fees of which were very expensive.   I started thinking that I was a bad son.   I disappointed my parents.   I wasted a lot of their money. In Form One in that secondary school, my position in the class jumped from way at the bottom to the top [through hard work].   Within one single year, [my position] suddenly jumped right to the top.   But of course the quality of the other students was not high, as they were also failures anyway.   They could not get into proper government secondary schools, so the general standard was low.   I could easily excel in this relatively low-standard group of people.   This gave me confidence or a little bit of dignity.   You know, when I was in primary school, [I had] no dignity, because I always failed the exams.   I was always at the bottom in exams. [I had] no dignity at all.   But in Form One I got to the top of the whole class.   I got confidence.   I got a little bit of dignity.   So after Form One, I started running around to look for secondary school, the proper one – government secondary school.   In fact, it was also a very odd experience. The secondary school I eventually went to had a temporary school accommodation using a primary school block.   It was a temporary accommodation next to where I lived. […] I just went straight up to the school myself, and met the father of the school who was doing some admin work.   I then introduced myself, and asked if he could give me a chance by taking me to Form Two of the school.   The father was impressed: a small kid, so mature, talking to him in this manner.   He gave me a set of exam papers: Chinese, English and mathematics.   So I immediately did the tests in front of him.   It was not a proper exam. […] He immediately marked my papers [and said], 'Okay'.   He told me that he would take me to Secondary Two.   So I joined the Secondary Two of [that school].   And then from Form Two all the way up to Form Five, my overall position in the class remained within the top three most of the time.   The lowest one was down to fifth only.   So that led me to believe that although I had a poor foundation per se, I could succeed as long as I worked and studied hard.   That reinforced my value, my personality.   Up to Form Five, in fact, I got very good HKCEE (Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination) results, pretty good in the old days.   I was interviewed by a number of Form Six/Form Seven matriculated colleges or high schools.*

*But my parents talked to me several times.   They said, 'If you really want to pursue further education, we will work even harder to support you financially'. But they also said, 'You are the eldest son.   You have a younger sister; you have younger brothers.   They are still studying.   The family is so poor.   So you make your judgement'.   They said that to me so many times.   I knew it was hard for the family to support me for further education, although at the time I had been told that I had been accepted by several high schools in Hong Kong.   After a big struggle, I decided to quit.   So I quit and started working in factories, in textile factories and then in a bank as a clerk up to [the time] when I joined the Force as a constable.   (pp. 8-9)*

By allowing the participants to structure the framework of relevance/meaning by themselves as suggested by Abels and Behrens (2009), it became obvious to me that their participation in the study was an important experience for them, as they seldom had the opportunity to talk at length to someone about their leadership development experiences.   Some became so enthusiastic that they assumed more active roles as co-researchers rather than contending with their passive roles as informants.

**Researcher:** (Towards the end of the interview.) *Do you have any observations or comments about this subject that you want to raise?*

**Participant 5:** *I just wonder whether you would consider family as a factor.*

**Researcher:** *It's interesting that you raise this question.*

**Participant 5:** *Say, for example, that if my wife did not support my studies, I may not be able to devote all of my private time to studying.   If you have a family when you are in the promotion zone and have a new baby, that can affect one's performance or mind-set. […] You can't put all your time into your work and just completely ignore your family.   If you do, either you are a very irresponsible person or you have some problem with your family. I am just thinking of all of these sorts of things that can affect whether people reach CRO levels.   There may be outside but related factors.*

Another participant went even further by volunteering additional information days after the interview.

> **Participant 6:** *The interview is also of value to me because this is the first time I have gone through my leadership experience in a systematic manner and looked deeper into myself. It was a very interesting experience for me – thank you very much again. [...] I'm still reflecting on our interview from last Saturday. One of the questions you prompted me to answer was about my secondment (to a police force in the UK). You asked what I learned in those two years. I remember that I wrote a report at the end of my secondment to the chief constable and CP. I dug it out from all of my junk and reread it to see what I said I had learned then. It was very interesting, and I can see now that the seeds of changing from a paramilitary force to a police service were being sowed at that time. I attached the report to share it with you.* (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher three days after the interview.)

To allow the interviews to proceed smoothly, the process was audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees so that I could concentrate on unearthing relevant information and exploring new lines of inquiry. Particular attention was paid to the keywords, dimensions and metaphors used by the participants, as they were important sources of category names when it came to the next stage of theoretical coding (Bowers and Schatzman, 2009; Dey, 1999; Locke, 2001).

4.5.3 Theoretical coding and theoretical saturation

As LeCompte (2007) comments, '[Q]ualitative data sets are more complex and ambiguous than test scores' (p. 147). Even the two cofounders of grounded theory cannot agree on the best approach to transforming materials generated by interviews into theories (Locke, 2001; Stenbacka, 2001). Although Strauss favours a more

structured approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), Glaser (1992b) prefers to allow theories to emerge naturally from interview data.   No matter which side one supports, few qualitative researchers dispute the need to immerse oneself in the data during the theorising process (Bowers and Schatzman, 2009).   Taking note of their experience, I decided to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews by myself, a process that afforded me ample opportunity to relive the interviews as a third party with the luxury of focusing on the participants' trains of thought without the need to think about the lines of inquiry.   This decision enabled me to gain an accurate written record of the interviews along with a broad understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon under study.   Many of the participants were pleasantly surprised by the accuracy of the draft transcripts I sent them for clearance.

> **Participant 16***: Thank you for showing me the transcript, which is very well written and accurately covers all of the points I made.   I also found it very interesting to read, as your skilful questioning effectively guided me to reflect on myself and revisit many messages that had been deeply rooted in my mind.   I wholly endorse the transcript and have no amendment to propose.*   (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher after proofreading the draft transcript.)

> **Participant 18***: It must have taken you a lot of time and effort to produce such an accurate and long transcript.   Thanks for that.   Having what I said transcribed (other than in the Legislative Council and court) is quite flattering.*   (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher after proofreading the draft transcript.)

After the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, I examined them line by line as suggested by Bowen (2006), highlighting the keywords that appeared to be central to the meaning of each sentence bearing in mind the subject being discussed.   The discipline of examining the transcripts on a line-by-line basis ensured that no salient points underlying the complex statements were glossed over

(Locke, 2001). What follows is an example of how this was done in practice, with the keywords highlighted.

> **Participant 16**: *Quite **different**. It **focused** on business as opposed to policing. [...] Henley was quite an **eye-opening** experience for me: [the participants were] **senior managers or CEOs** from big companies. So it was quite a **stressful** course to me, in the sense that I was not **talking** the **same language** as them. They used the same language among themselves because they talked about business, accounting, making profit, making differences, marketing. So I **felt** quite a lot of pressure during the course. And I thought, 'Oh shit'. I even **doubted** my ability. When I attended the previous courses, I always **felt** quite **proud** when **compared** with the other police officers. We were in fact quite advanced in many areas. To some extent, I wouldn't say that I **looked down on** them, but I didn't really **admire** them. In Henley, I admired them. Wow, their **way of thinking** was **different**. In fact, their **job nature** was far more stressful than ours, because every day they had to count their figures and focus on making a profit. So that was the course – very **interactive**. I didn't have that much **input**, because I wasn't used to talking about business. But I **learned** from this course. It was the **only** course that I learned from. The interesting point is that it was not a police course – it was a business course.*

Having highlighted the keywords, I grouped them under different dimensions by asking the question suggested by Schatzman (1991): 'What is really involved here?' In this regard, a dimension is defined as 'an abstract concept with associated properties that provide quantitative or qualitative parameters as modifiers for the purpose of description' (Kools et al., 1996, p. 316). By way of illustration, based on the preceding data segment, the following dimensions were identified:.

Dimensions | Properties
--- | ---
Focus | Business/policing

| Participant | Senior managers/CEOs/police officers |
|---|---|
| Approach | Interactive |
| Language | Unfamiliar |
| Activity | Comparing/talking/thinking/discussing |
| Feeling | Stressful/doubt/admire/proud |
| Experience | Different/eye-opening |
| Evaluation | Learned |

At this stage, I deliberately ignored the leadership development theory literature to avoid forcing the data into a Procrustean bed (Kelle, 2005). I concentrated my attention on identifying all of the dimensions involved and construct substantive codes based on interview data without considering their relative importance, their relationships or the meanings of specific concepts. This process of fracturing the data segments into dimensions was to allow me to identify all of the parts involved in the phenomenon, enabling a sophisticated appreciation of its complexity (Kools et al., 1996) as well as preventing early conceptual closure (Bowers and Schatzman, 2009),

Following the identification of substantive codes or dimensions, I moved on to examine their 'implicit integrative possibilities' and come up with various provisional conceptual categories that may represent them at a higher level of abstraction (Dey, 1999; LeCompte, 2000). By way of illustration, based on the substantive codes identified, I came up with the following provisional conceptual categories or 'codes' to conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to one another (Kelle, 2005).

| Conceptual Codes | Substantive Codes |
|---|---|
| Programme design | Focus/participants/approach |

Programme delivery     Activities/language

Programme outcome     Feelings/evaluation

Intervening factor       Previous learning experience

By comparing which things go together and which are distinct from one another within and across data incidents, I refined the substantive and conceptual codes until I was satisfied that they have reached the stage of 'theoretical saturation' or a consistent level of repetition with no further expansion or refinement necessary or appropriate (Kools et al., 1996).   In parallel with this coding process, I noted down features of the data segment that appeared interesting to me.   These interesting features were subsequently collated with those from other data incidents and were developed into different provisional themes as the analysis continued.   I then categorised the provisional themes according to the research questions they related to, and continuously combined, refined or separated them by referring back to the data set to reflect their significance until I found a way that could explain the complexity of the phenomenon studied.   A table showing the key phases of this analytical construction process is at Appendix.

## 4.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Peel et al. (2006, p. 1336), 'The relationship between the researcher and the researched within the qualitative research context is a complex one'. This is especially true in the current case given my member status.   Because ethical dilemmas are context specific (Goodwin et al., 2003), this section focuses on discussing ethical issues of particular relevance to this study, including informed consent, participant anonymity, data confidentiality and potential conflicts of interest.

4.6.1 Informed consent

Unlike the vulnerable or underprivileged groups examined in other social studies, the participants in this study were intelligent and powerful elites who knew their rights well and did not suffer fools gladly. In addition to having successful police careers, many of them were high academic achievers. Of the 18 participants, 10 had attained master's degrees or higher academic qualifications. That they had known me personally for many years before the study, that we had a shared responsibility in leadership development within the Force, and that they were allowed to amend the draft transcripts before they were included as research data assured that their consent to be studied was not only informed but also meaningful (Corrigan, 2003).

Although the need to protect participants from research or researchers that may do them harm is indisputable, there is a debate over the means of this protection (Coomber, 2002). The common practice of requiring researchers to obtain informed consent in written form from participants before data collection (SRA, 2003) is more of an embarrassment than an ethical assurance measure in this particular case for the following reasons.

First, as Wiles et al. (2006) observe, in the early research stages the researcher does not know what types of information participants will provide, what the outcome of the study will be, or what recommendations will be made. Asking the participants to confirm their verbal consent by formally signing a consent form without knowing what the consequences will be serves to protect the interests of the researcher rather than the participants.

Second, a consent form provides an additional audit trail that may increase the chance of a participant's identity being exposed. When a signed consent form is

shown to a third party, the promise of anonymity is broken.    If the form is not shown to a third party, the formal procedure adds little value to the research process.

Third, the consent form requires no signature from any third party as a witness. Its evidential value in any subsequent dispute is highly questionable.    Asking legally trained experienced police commanders to sign a form to confirm the verbal consent they have already given only serves to show the 'increasing bureaucratization of research and the slippery slope to rule-based ethics in social research' (Wiles et al., 2006, p. 286).

As Corrigan (2003) notes, formalised procedures and informed consent can be two different things depending on the circumstances.    Nevertheless, to support me in this study, which is also of interest to them, the participants signed the standard consent form as required by the university's ethics committee.

4.6.2. Anonymity of participants

Given that there is only one police force in Hong Kong and the need for me to disclose my member status, many of the participants are potentially identifiable. What makes the task of protecting their identities even more challenging is that there are only 21 commissioner rank officers working on the Force at one time.    The clear division of responsibilities among this small group of senior commanders inevitably increases the chances of them being identified individually, not only by their fellow officers but also by others, even when their names are left out.    In view of this, to make any attempt to identify them difficult, I deliberately replace their ranks with the term 'CRO' when reporting their lived experiences and expand the sample group to cover retired CROs and civilian officers of equivalent rank.    This results in a

substantial increase in the number of potential participants from 21 to more than 60. Furthermore, I spread the interviews out over a 30-month period to allow a rotation of duties to take place in the interim, and refrain from disclosing the dates of the interviews and subsequent communications. Therefore, the anonymity of the participants should be maintained.

Despite these measures to protect their identities, as Wiles et al. note (2006), studies of peers place the researcher in a situation where he or she must develop an increased sensitivity to issues of confidentiality and anonymity. For example, it did not take long before I noticed that many of the participants relied on me to play the role of gatekeeper and decide what should be included in the study.

> **Participant 18**: *Going through the transcript has reminded me how I marshalled my thoughts and articulated them, sometimes more effectively and sometimes not so succinctly. Perhaps that's because I took the interview as a genuine chat with a trusted friend rather than as a formal interview.* (Excerpt from an e-mail the participant sent to the researcher after proofreading the draft transcript.)

Another participant showed his confidence in my ability to act as gatekeeper more directly towards the end of his interview.

> **Participant 7**: *So these are my few thoughts to share.*
> **Researcher**: *Okay. Thank you very much.*
> **Participant 7**: *Lucky that you are not a reporter!* (p. 53)

For a research study like this one, which revolves around a small target group that is potentially known to others, the principle of anonymity does not apply only to the participants. The personalities they referred to in the interviews are also potentially identifiable and hence require similar protection to avoid possible harm to

their reputations. This is particularly the case for those participants portrayed in a less than favourable light, as natural justice demands that identified individuals should be given an adequate chance to defend their names. With this in mind, I use pseudonyms in place of real names, and create a fictitious 'Participant X' to separate criticisms from their attributors where necessary, making any attempt to identify the subject of criticism extremely difficult if not impossible.

Despite these measures, there remain occasions where the idiosyncrasies of the individuals make them readily identifiable. In these circumstances, I have no choice but to reluctantly follow the advice of Wiles et al. (2006) and exclude the relevant data, including some of the most interesting and important data, from the individual interviews.

4.6.3 Data confidentiality

According to Wiles et al. (2006, p. 287), '[P]romises of confidentiality in research are concerned with who will have access to the data and how the data will be used'. As explained earlier, I interviewed the participants in private and on a one-to-one basis and transcribed the interviews personally to avoid unauthorised access to or misuse of the research data by any other party. All of the soft copies of the transcripts were password protected and the hard copies were stored securely in safe locations.

These stringent measures to control access continued throughout the analysis stage until the conclusion of the study, by which time I had personally either erased (soft copies) or destroyed (hard copies) all of the research data. The only exceptions to this arrangement were the participants' copies of the interview transcripts, as many

of them expressed a wish to keep the record as a reminder of the experience.

> **Participant 13**: *As a final remark, I would like to say that I have found this exercise most stimulating.   It has brought back many memories and caused me to reflect on my career in a new way, a non-judgmental way that has caused me to rethink.   I have found this most interesting, and it has given me new insight into my thinking and the rationale behind the various reasons, tactics and strategies I adopted.   For that I would like to say thank you.*   (An addendum added to the transcript by the participant after proofreading.)   (p. 31)

4.6.4 Potential conflicts of interest

   Unlike most researchers whose relationships with participants have no past or future (Platt, 1981), I had worked side-by-side with many of the participants for considerable periods at the time of the interviews.   Notwithstanding my attempt to confine my role in the interviews to that of learner, my member status remained real and conspicuous to the participants.

> **Participant 12**: *In my life, if you asked me to name four persons who were most influential on my learning to become a leader, one would be my father.   He is not well educated, but he is very hard working.   He treats people very nicely.   He is very generous, generous to the extent that he fails to look after his family sometimes. [...] Another one is a friend of mine.   He is always willing to go beyond.   He is always willing to walk an extra mile for people.   If you tell him you have got [a problem], he will always try to come back with an answer and try to help. [...] Another one is an inspector.   He is very forgiving and very truthful.   He tells you how he feels about things, and he always looks at the brighter side of things. [...] And then the next one – I just want to mention four persons – the next one is you.   You taught me how to look at younger generations' problems, how we should actually deal with them...*   (pp. 9-10)

> **Participant 13:** *I wouldn't really say I had a particular mentor in the*

*police force.   This may sound a little ridiculous, but I almost did the*
*reverse way round.   So I would look to you as one of my mentors, if you*
*get what I mean.   I rely on people who worked for me to advise me.   So I*
*hopefully had people working for me who were people who would voice*
*their opinion.   (p. 20)*

Knowing that during my 34-year police service I have come into contact with a great deal of privileged information about both the Force and the participants, I restrict myself to using only documents from open sources and information provided by the participants when presenting the findings of this study to avoid conflicts of interest.

## 4.7 Further measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings

The purpose of this research study is to understand the meanings that senior police commanders subjectively assign to their learning experiences in classroom-based leadership training/development programmes (see Section 4.2). Like any other research study investigating subjective truths, evaluating findings is not a question of what is more or less 'true' in any absolute sense, only more or less 'informed' and/or 'sophisticated' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).   In these circumstances, the usual evaluation criteria for assessing quantitative research – such as validity, reliability and generalizability – that assume the existence of an objective truth, do not apply.   Instead, as Seidman (1998) argues, the notion of trustworthiness is more relevant to the findings of studies of this nature.

In addition to suspending my own theoretical beliefs during the interviews and data analysis, in the remaining parts of this study I present all of the reportable findings, both expected and unexpected, as suggested by Hill et al. (2005), to keep my

personal biases in check. To qualify as reportable findings, any of my own observations must be supported by at least two illustrative narrative examples provided by different participants. Where abstract concepts are involved, I let the participants' own 'voices' provide the explanations as far as possible rather than offering my own (re)interpretation. By explicitly stating this set of stringent reporting rules, I invite readers to make their own evaluations of the trustworthiness of the findings, as recommended by Hill et al. (2005).

## 4.8 Summary

This chapter explains the design of the research study at length. It addresses the research questions, my own ontological and epistemological beliefs, my role as an insider researcher in the study, and the rationale behind the choice of grounded theory as the study's theoretical drive. It also provides illustrative example narratives to explain my attempt to follow the best practices in the field at every step of the research process and ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The next chapter reports the data analysis results, which represent the most challenging part of the entire study due to the inherently intricate and untidy nature of the interview data.

# Chapter 5
# Data Analysis and Interpretation

## 5.1 Introduction

Two main categories emerge from the deconstruction of the interview data according to the procedures outlined in Section 4.5.3. One relates to the construct of 'strategic leadership', which explains the success of the participants as leaders at their levels. The other main category, 'leadership learning', deals with the learning processes that led to the leadership positions they had when the interviews took place.

Under the two main categories are seven subcategories, four of which relate to 'strategic leadership' and three of which relate to 'leadership learning'. The four subcategories under 'strategic leadership' are 'leadership', 'strategic thinking capability', 'position of authority' and 'motivation to lead', all of which were common strategic leadership properties possessed by the participants when the interviews took place. The three subcategories under 'leadership learning' are 'learning as a child/youth', 'learning as a leadership practitioner' and 'learning as a course participant', which summarise the leadership learning experiences shared by the participants.

Each subcategory is supported by two to six 'dimensions', each of which represents a separate but related theme under that subcategory. The following structure details the relationship of the two main categories, seven subcategories and twenty-six dimensions.

1. Strategic leadership

    a. Leadership

i. Modesty

ii. Communication

iii. Empathy

iv. Positive thinking

v. Technical knowledge

vi. Vision

b. Strategic thinking capability

i. Political sensitivity

ii. Long-term planning

iii. Creative thinking

c. Position of authority

i. Influencing external stakeholders

ii. Constructing and maintaining a sustainable system

iii. Coordinating the efforts of component units

d. Motivation to lead

i. Sense of achievement

ii. Sense of duty

iii. Sense of purpose

iv. Sense of fun

2. Leadership learning

a. Learning as a child/youth

i. Learning from family

ii. Learning from school

iii. Learning from adventure training

b. Learning as a leadership practitioner

i. Learning from senior officers

      ii. Learning from peers

      iii Learning from followers

      iv. Learning from work

      v. Self-learning

    c. Learning as a course participant

      i. Consolidation of leadership experience

      ii. Enhancement of strategic thinking capability

This chapter explains my findings and elaborates on the meaning of the categories/subcategories/dimensions used by the participants.   The following chapter provides answers to the research questions.

## 5.2 Strategic leadership

It is important to explain the leadership experiences shared by the participants. Of the 18 participants, the majority (13) joined the Force (or in the case of the civilian, the government) in the 1970s.  The remaining five joined in the 1980s, with the exception of one who joined in the 1960s.  They had altogether provided 552 years of police/public service, with each contributing 25-36 years to the impressive total by the time they were interviewed.  Most of them (15 out of 18) joined the Force as inspectors, or an equivalent rank in the case of the civilian.  The remaining three, who joined as constables, gained early promotions to inspector within three years of service.  All of the 18 participants were experienced leadership practitioners who had each earned at least 6 promotions in their leadership careers before becoming members of the elite group of CROs.

The analysis shows that their main responsibility as CROs fell within the widely

accepted definitions of strategic leadership provided in the leadership literature, i.e., anticipating and initiating long-term changes (Covin and Slevin, 2002; Hagen et al., 1998; Ireland and Hitt, 1999; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009; Mintzberg, 1994; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009). The following two examples support this observation.

> **Participant 6:** *When you become a CRO, you normally have 20 or 30 years of experience behind you. Your responsibility requires that you don't just deal with the problems at hand, because you have a duty to ensure the future development of the Force. That may become more important than solving the immediate problems. [...] I would say the higher you go, the more strategic you become because of the nature of your duty and responsibility.* (p. 4 and 13)

> **Participant 13**: *As a CRO you are not dealing with now issues at all, you know. You are developing strategies, you are trying to anticipate situations and you are dealing with politics. […] It isn't crime; it isn't criminals. The issues you have to deal with come from an entirely different source altogether.* (p. 3)

Analysis of the participants' self-perception as strategic leaders shows that their leadership and strategic thinking capability were separate properties.

> **Participant 18:** *I would just say that at this current time, I have strategic input that obviously could have strategic consequences if taken on board. I do have a role to play. So I wouldn't say I am not at a strategic level. I can have this input. But as a leader, as a strategic leader, I wouldn't call myself a strategic leader yet.* (p. 20)

As illustrated in this case, a leader with proven leadership and strategic thinking capability may consider himself or herself unqualified as a strategic leader. Further analysis shows that to be a strategic leader, one also needs a position of authority. Another participant responded to the same question of whether he considered himself a strategic leader as follows.

**Participant 10:** *Yes and no.   Yes, because the opportunities are there, pushing things in the right direction.   No, because I'm still…   You've got to form your alliances.   And you've got to get people on side. [...] I describe it as remote-controlled car racing.   You have a bunch of kids playing it.   But when you watch it, it's really boring.   When you're actually the guy who has the control, it's really fun.   (p. 29)*

Although possessing the preceding three properties (leadership, strategic thinking capability and a position of authority) should logically empower an individual to act competently as a strategic leader, the analysis shows that this causal relationship is not guaranteed, as the individual may not have the necessary motivation to lead.

**Participant 3:** *I always want to give my best.   When I'm given a job, I'm determined to do it, you know, the best way I can.   Whereas I see a lot of my peers – those in PTS (police training school) for example – a lot of them are easy-going on themselves. [...] That's their way, which perhaps may be better for them, because in a way it is less taxing on oneself.   (p. 4)*

**Participant 8:** *You said when first joined [the Force] that everybody's opportunity was equal.   That's quite correct.   But deep in their heart, what a person wants to achieve, that person's personality and style, do affect his career.   To me, I think the most important thing is that I had my heart in the Force.   I took the Force as my home, as my organisation, even when I was an inspector. [...] Now whether this is the right attitude or not, I am not so sure, because these days people talk about family, talk about friends, personal interest, etc., etc.   Whether one should be devoted totally to the Force is something to be debated.   (p. 27)*

Because 'leadership', 'strategic thinking', 'position of authority' and 'motivation to lead' are social constructs whose interpretation may vary from person to person, the following sections seek to clarify their meaning and understand their properties based

on example narratives provided by the participants.

5.2.1 Leadership

As stated previously, the interview data reveal six dimensions of leadership: modesty, communication, empathy, positive thinking, technical knowledge and vision.

*5.2.1.1 Modesty*

One participant equated 'modesty' with 'being humble' when recalling how an ex-commissioner of the New Zealand Police left a lasting impression on her when she attended an overseas command course held in Australia.

> **Participant 18:** *For the first module, the mentor was an ex-commissioner of the New Zealand Police.  He was very candid.  He did a good job. But there was also an error in judgement that led to the non-renewal of his contract.  He was very candid in sharing that, very humble.  I was very impressed by the whole approach. [...] He could be very proud of himself as an ex-commissioner of the New Zealand Police, but he didn't come across that way when talking to these junior people.  So that reminds me of humility and leadership.* (p. 13)

Another participant took the view that treating people with respect was a manifestation of modesty.

> **Participant 3:** *Understanding human beings and humanity has a major effect on me because it influences the way you think, the way you interact with people, [and] the way you learn to respect people.  I think that is very important to me, if I consider myself successful at all.  I think I have made more friends than foes in the Force, which is something I am pretty proud of.  I treat everybody with respect, unlike, if you particularly remember the older days, a lot of senior officers who thought that they were your employer, your boss.* (p. 25)

A common way for leaders to treat subordinates with respect is to treat them as equals.

> **Participant 4:** *The other way to look at my own leadership style over all these years… There would be two philosophies. The first one is the American saying 'all men are created equal'. The second philosophy is 'everyone is important'. Whether it is in a society, in an organisation, or in the unit, everyone is important.* (p. 15)

> **Participant 15:** *I believe in the 'equalness' of people: everybody is the same. […] In fact I treat all officers as my equal rank. Of course, I have to take responsibility for my rank. But when I talk to them, deep in my heart, I treat them as equal human beings. […] I think this is very important – treat people as equal.* (pp. 22-23)

One participant reported that treating people as equals allowed him to build his team effectively.

> **Participant 17:** *I very much believe that while I am in charge or the manager, all of the team members are equal, and I must recognise that each has a contribution to make. I think every officer joins the Force with the intention of contributing. If you can harness that desire and make them feel as if they are contributing, then nine times out of ten people will rise to the occasion and deliver the level of service you want, or even more than you want. That's the fundamental that stuck with me all the way throughout the organisation – believing that I could build the team.* (p. 6)

Another participant reported that being modest allowed him to learn a lot from his junior officers.

> **Participant 11:** *You can learn a lot by talking to all sorts of people, not just people who are senior to you, but people who are junior to you as well. It's something that I think people in the Force have been reluctant to do, to*

*be quite honest.   I think that there is too much, or was too much, 'I am senior to you, therefore I know more than you do'.* (p. 46)

One participant who learned to be modest after becoming a superintendent reported that it made him a more effective leader.

**Participant 12:** *I learned to become a better leader when I was [a superintendent].   Before that, I must say, everybody thought I was quite arrogant.   But I [now realise] that as a leader you don't need to be arrogant.   You can be a very personable leader.   You don't need to be holding the authority all of the time.   You can be a very personable leader. [...] There is actually a very effective leadership style, and that is to be personable.   (p. 13)*

Another participant explained why modesty was particularly important to leaders at their levels.

**Participant 14:** *As I moved up to the senior superintendent level, I realised my troops were managers themselves.   The superintendents themselves were managers, so I had to learn to manage managers.   I changed tack totally, and that was very good.   At the CSP (chief superintendent) level, at the CRO level, your guys are senior managers in their own right.   And don't forget that a lot of them are big heavy chaps – locals, expatriates.   Half of the people are well educated.   How can you expect to thump the table to tell them what to do?   (pp. 10-11)*

The following observation made by McCallum and O'Connell (2009) may explain the high degree of importance that so many of the participants attached to modesty:

*Leadership is commonly understood as the use of influence to encourage participation in achieving set goals.   The leadership process involves the leader's perception of the followers and the context within which the interaction takes place.   Central to the concept of leadership is the*

*relationship between leaders and followers. [...] Hence leadership extends beyond an individual's possession of a certain set of traits or a prescribed set of behaviours exercised in response to a defined situation. Leadership is a relational process between leaders and followers, and is moulded by the context.* (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009, p. 153)

McCallum and O'Connell's (2009) observation explains why 'modesty' is important to leadership: it helps leaders build long-term relationships with followers based on mutual respect rather than fear and coercion. Moreover, it explains why individuals with different personalities can be equally successful in their leadership careers. What matters are their relationships with their followers and not their personalities per se. The following are examples of cases that, in the view of the participants, did not fit the stereotypical image of a police commander.

**Participant 4:** *One of the instructors actually told me that I didn't have leadership. [...] Obviously in his mind I did not have leadership because I was soft. I was doing what I am doing today. But at that time he preferred to have those kinds of people: they needed to be tough, they needed to be specific, they needed to tell people what to do and correct their course of action if they had done it wrong. At that time I was soft – soft in the sense that I involved people. I sought views and spoke softly to people. So according to his definition I had no leadership. As I see it today, it's another kind of leadership – soft management. What he preferred was hard management.* (p. 17)

**Participant 16:** *Because I am not a genuinely sociable person, I haven't had dinner with my subordinates in many years. They know that if they work for me, they don't have to build up so-called connections. They only need to work hard to do their job well. They don't need to invite me out to have dinner or go for a drink. I go out and have dinner or a drink only with very, very close police colleagues.* (p. 6)

These two examples of 'alternative' leadership styles echo Drucker's (2004) observations about his six-decade consulting career: 'Some of the best

CEOs I've worked with over a 65-year consulting career were not stereotypical leaders' (p.58).

*5.2.1.2 Communication*

All of the participants believed in the importance of 'communication'. Participant 8, whom other participants identified as one of the best leaders they had ever worked with, made the following comment about communication when reviewing his own leadership style.

> **Participant 8:** *To me, the skill remained the same throughout my career. […] My theory is simple: without communication, there is no way that you can lead effectively.* (p. 6)

His comment about the importance of communication to leadership was echoed by two other participants, who attributed their leadership success to their ability to communicate with their followers.

> **Participant 1:** *I would highlight in particular the communication and interpersonal skills I've built up over previous years. […] Through better team-building and open-style discussion, we managed to get the most out of everybody, and we also managed to stabilise the workforce.* (p. 13)

> **Participant 7:** *To this day I think my strong point is that I am able to communicate with my guys. I stay with the troops most of the time. I talk to them. I let them know the dangers and pitfalls and things like that in a direct way. I am not preaching. I just talk to them; I share my experience with them. I am able to tell them because I have been through all of this.* (p. 8)

Another two participants observed that good communication required not only

language skills but also a 'heart'.

> **Participant 14:** *I think it's important that leaders recognise the importance of the troops. […] So I think whatever leaders we have, they have to […] look at the troops, not just talk to them, but talk from the heart, and care about them.* (p. 23)

> **Participant 16:** *When I was an inspector, my value was getting very close to and communicating with my officers heart-to-heart to get their trust and support. Now as a CRO, I adopt the same style with my colleagues. I maintain very, very good communication with all levels of my staff, except of course the too-junior levels [where] I don't have a chance.* (p. 5)

Participant 16's comment that communication helped him to obtain trust and support from followers is noteworthy, as it explains that communication is a purposeful activity in the context of leadership. In addition to earning trust and support, Participant 1 pointed out an important function that communication served: interpreting the environment to his team.

> **Participant 1:** *As a leader, you've got to interpret the environment to your team so that they know what the objective is and what the challenge is. And by sharing the same type of values, you get better results as a team rather than as an individual. I always believe if individuals act together as a team, the productivity will be higher than the individual performance added together.* (pp. 14-15)

McCallum and O'Connell (2009) also share the view that interpreting the environment is an important part of a leader's responsibility:

> *Central to the concept of leadership is the relationship between leaders*

*and followers. Leaders must structure or restructure situations, perceptions and expectations of group members.* (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009, p. 153)

Effective communication requires not only heart-to-heart talks but also the action to back them up.

**Participant 8:** *To me, communication is not just about talking and listening. One very important part of communication is that you must take action. Purely talking, listening or writing to each other without results will never get people to support you. So I made it very clear that whatever I said, I would produce. Whatever they requested, I would examine. And if possible, I would do. If I couldn't do, I would tell them why I couldn't do it.* (p. 10)

Communication along with appropriate follow-up actions can earn trust from followers.

**Participant 15:** *If I promise you to do something, and the next day you find that I really did it, then you will have confidence in me because I kept my promise. […] So I generate trust from my colleagues.* (p. 11)

The analysis shows that the participants emphasised the importance of communication because of its significance to both direct and strategic leadership:

**Participant 5:** *[As a CRO], your responsibility – the formations and units under your command – are getting bigger. Once your empire is getting bigger, it becomes a problem, because how can you make sure your directive, your instructions are getting down to the frontline?* (p. 3)

**Participant 17:** *Particularly in our role, communication is of paramount importance. In the intervening levels below, there will be individuals*

*with different motivations, different levels of motivation, and perhaps a different perspective on how the job should be done. So there will be a degree of interpretation of my instructions added. Therefore, what I actually want may be changed by the time it gets down to the frontline.* (p. 4)

Moreover, challenges arising from communication are not confined to the execution of specific instructions. Another participant pointed out that such challenges had wider implications.

**Participant 13:** *You have 2,000 people directly under your command, and you have another 4,000, I think it was, whose professional standards you have applied to some sort of matrix of management responsibilities and with whom you have had almost no contact. So you know you've got to think, 'How do you influence these guys? How do you lead these people? How do you impose your wishes or even make them aware of your wishes?' So this is, a real issue that you've got to think about. Just sitting behind a desk and issuing an order isn't enough. (p.3)*

Different communication strategies can be adopted in response to these communication challenges. One strategy involves making good use of intermediaries.

**Participant 8:** *There was no way I could talk to every one of them on a daily basis, not even on a monthly basis or yearly basis. But the theory behind it remains the same: communicate with people that work closely to you, and hopefully those who work closely are able to convey messages to their followers at a lower level. That is only part of it. Although I was not able to meet everybody at all levels, I created opportunities for myself at the senior level to meet some of them at the frontline level. I made regular visits to divisions, districts, operational units – day, night, midnight, major operations, sports, and recreation activities. So it's a strategy of communication. (p. 7)*

Another participant responded to these challenges by looking for opportunities to speak in public.

> **Participant 13:** *Getting back to where we were, you know, through training, by lecturing, by perhaps giving public speeches from time to time, you know, you can get your views across, your style across.   That would influence all of the people who quite often hear and read about you.   And you can influence all sorts of people without compromising your chain of command.   You will actually raise standards by doing that, I think.   (p. 16)*

Despite the availability of different strategies, the participants found that the challenges arising from communication remained real.

> **Participant 10:** *We don't know what happened.   We're bosses on top, and we don't know what happens at the bottom.   And that is the problem.* (p. 14)

> **Participant 17:** *I think one of the biggest problems we have […] is that something happened.   The truth – whatever that may be – doesn't necessarily come up at first.   Those at the very top feel very vulnerable because they are in a position where they've got to stand out to make some kind of statement, but they cannot be confident that what they are dealing with are the facts.   That said, it may not be curable.   (p. 28)*

This understandably caused occasional frustration for the participants. However, some of the participants managed to turn their frustration into something positive.

> **Participant 5:** *The most frustrating experience is that when you ask people to do something, despite giving very clear instructions, they don't*

*follow strictly without a good reason.  It is quite frustrating.  But then the good thing is that every now and then you learn. […] I am always a firm believer that communication takes two.  It is not just what you say. Make sure they understand.*   (p. 35)

In terms of communication, a high level of understanding within a team decreases the need for oral communication.

**Participant 17:** *I built a very strong team.  We had an understanding within the team that didn't need verbal communication.  So we had managed to get to that level whereby we knew what was wanted without necessarily having to speak to each other about it.*   (p. 6)

*5.2.1.3 Empathy*

One participant interpreted 'empathy' as knowing how others saw an issue.

**Participant 10:** *You've got to know how they see it.  This whole thing about 'who moved my cheese' business – change management – part of that is you've got to understand this guy likes his cheese the way it is. And you've got to explain to him either that the cheese has gone or there is better cheese.  Either way, you've got to do something about it.  But you are not going to make him say, 'I don't like my cheese; I want to change my cheese'.  He doesn't.  He likes his cheese.  A little mouse likes cheese.  You have to explain it a bit.  And you have the empathy with them to understand that, and that's not always easy.*   (p. 33)

Participant 17, who had successfully fostered an understanding within his team that made oral communication unnecessary, shared his lived experience as a newly promoted chief superintendent, demonstrating the importance of empathy in team building.

**Participant 17:** *When I first got there, my DDC (deputy district commander) had been promoted to SSP (senior superintendent) at exactly the same time as me. We got our letters on the same day. We weren't friends. We knew each other. We never worked in similar circumstances. He was much older than me, and he was senior in service by many years. He had been DDC for two or three years when I arrived. I remember thinking to myself, 'How would I feel if I was into my fifties and some young man came in? He was put in charge of me, but perhaps in some areas didn't have the same experience that I did'. So I felt it was important that from day one he recognised that I treasured his experience and partnership, and that I would do everything within my power to make sure we would work together as a team. So I told him this on the first day. [...] Because of how our relationship developed, I was then able to train two new deputies when they came in. [...] He later went on to get his promotion, and you know, he and I were a first-class team. I learned a great deal about how important it is to have that combination. You have to open up a little bit to establish that kind of relationship with the other man, you know. I think that is important, and particularly when you are in a senior position. So that was a little bit of a risk, but I believe it worked to a great advantage. So I learned something from that relationship. I actually learned something from how I dealt with him that I could use subsequently.* (p. 16)

Participant 8, whom the other participants frequently mentioned as one of the best leaders they had ever worked with, took the view that empathy was also important for making effective policy.

**Participant 8:** *If you want to make an effective policy that affects junior officers and Force members, then you must look at the policy from the view of the members and staff associations. This is my view. The higher the rank I had, the more I held that view, because policy at the strategic level actually involved wider issues. You need to take the views of all of the stakeholders, not just one party or two parties.* (pp. 35-36)

Two participants reported that empathy helped them enhance team performance.

**Participant 4:** *Because most of the [officers in the unit] were young, they really wanted to have some kind of sharing of information. But most of the time they were gagged, so they did not feel happy – because of the gagging, because of the rules, because of the restriction. If you allowed them to sit round the table and discuss, they could perform better.* (p. 8)

**Participant 11:** *Yes, when people don't work, you have to kick them. But on the other hand, you have to provide an environment in which they can operate. And if they haven't got the right equipment, they can't source that equipment themselves. Somebody has to get it for them. So it's up to you, not only to provide them with the environment, but also to provide them with the awareness that they ought to do their job. And they would do it.* (p. 52)

The analysis also shows that empathy can help a leader reach a win-win solution with other stakeholders, contributing to a long-term partnership.

**Participant 15:** *At the time, we are under great pressure from the government to cut posts. […] I have to find some 900 posts from all of the units. You know, everyone said, 'Don't cut me, don't cut me'. I had to find all of these posts and convince them to surrender their posts to me willingly. This was a big job to be completed in six months. […] Over these six months, I had to see each stakeholder. I think it was a very good opportunity to practice interpersonal skills, communication skills, and diplomacy. I would say it was a very successful exercise because I made everybody happy. […] At the end of the day, we were able to provide 600-odd posts for civilianisation.* (pp. 6-7)

The leadership literature supports the participants' emphasis on the importance of empathy to the successful performance of their leadership role. For example, Choy (2006) notes that empathy together with envisioning and empowerment are the three

core components of charismatic leadership, and Kellett et al. (2002) note that empathy and complex task performance are the two routes according to which followers perceive a leader.

In contrast, insufficient attention to empathy can cause a leader deep trouble, as revealed by one of the participants.

> **Participant 2:** *I think what comes through is from my early days. I've always stuck to my principles. That means I always tell people what I truly believe if I feel that something is not done properly. However, what I have learned over the years is that there are sensible ways to tell people and not-so-sensible ways. A lot of people would turn around and say, 'I just speak my mind'. How you speak your mind can get you into deep trouble.* (p. 23)

One participant whom the others considered particularly intelligent came up with a pragmatic way to ensure that empathy was not overlooked in his decision-making process.

> **Participant 6:** *I always say to myself, 'If I don't want to do it, I would not ask my officers to do it for me'. That means if I ask them to do something for me, I ask myself the same question, as if the order was given to me. 'Would I do it?' If the answer is 'no', I won't ask. 'If it comes down to me, would I do it?'* (p. 32)

*5.2.1.4 Positive thinking*

The analysis shows that all 18 participants were very positive in their thinking. Two examples are provided as follows.

> **Participant 3:** *I have always been that very sort of down-to-earth kind of*

*person.   I mean, you can complain and refuse to change, but at the end of the day you still have to change.   This is what I've always said to myself, to my colleagues, to my children: 'You live happily, you live.   You don't live happily, you still have to live.   You still have to face the difficulties of life, the difficulties of your work'.   So why don't you enjoy what you do?   I mean, things may not turn out smoothly.   There may be lots of difficulties, lots of frustrations.   But maybe three out of ten experiences are good ones.   Enjoy those rather than complain and complain and complain until you have no fun at all.   Why not?*   (pp. 8-9)

**Participant 9:** *Probably because of my philosophy, my style, […] I appreciate that nothing is impossible.   If there is a will, there is a way.   In fact, it's my motto throughout my life: if I am given a task, I make sure I am able to tackle it if I try hard. […] To me, I always gain something from every job, and there is always fun in the job that I can explore.   To put it briefly, at no point in my career have I had hesitations about my ability to deal with the problems I was given.*   (p. 44)

Another participant noted that positive thinking contributed to professional pride.

**Participant 10:** *I was actually convinced that I was the right person to be doing that.   It wasn't enjoyable to do it, but for me it would have been less enjoyable not to do it and to see somebody else doing it and screw it up. […] I guess it is professional pride, if you like – doing something properly, even if it is unpleasant.*   (p. 14)

There are also good reasons to believe that positive thinking on the part of a leader can enhance the performance of the team.

**Participant 12:** *I always emphasise that there must be a better way to do the task.   Let's find that better way.   I think at that level the leader becomes an inspiring leader.   So you inspire them, you empower them.   You inspire them so that they can do better.*   (p. 5)

Another participant added that positive thinking helped him to avoid falling into the trap of 'micro-management'.

> **Participant 11:** *I always found that if you allow people to do what they are paid to do and you give them responsibility, not always, but in the vast majority of cases, they will respond to that. And if you micro-manage them, you'll conversely get a reaction the other way – the people will stop working. Daniel (pseudonym) was a typical example. He stopped people from working because he […] always second-guessed them.* (p. 50)

Thinking positively did not mean that the participants ignored risks. Rather, they acknowledged the existence of risk, but were confident that they had the ability to manage it if and when necessary.

> **Participant 17:** *I had three completely different teams but still managed, in my opinion, to be very successful. I built teams by allowing officers to have a bit of freedom. I set the ground rules, but ensured they understood that they could contribute. Of course, with a style like that, you had one or two people who failed to make the grade. Or indeed, you knew they were bad eggs, and you really had to manage the situation they caused by being bad eggs. But I would rather do that.* (p. 7)

Their realistic optimism is significant. It addresses the concern of some leadership theorists that excessive positivity is an undesirable trait that leaves organisations ill-prepared to deal with unexpected events (e.g., Collinson, 2012).

Two of the participants considered positive thinking so important that they highlighted it as a major attribute of the success of their leadership careers.

> **Participant 6***: In general terms, I think there are some basic requirements. I think the first one is to be positive all the time. I would say 'be positive' is the key. If you are a negative person, I don't think you can develop much in that area. And I think the second one is to persevere. If you want to be an effective strategic leader, you need to have the credibility. And credibility cannot be built in one day. […] To be a strategic leader, you have to be influential. […] So I think that's two critical basic elements that you need to have.* (p. 54)

> **Participant 14***: A combination of ability/qualities: desire for learning from the job and taking things forward, positive thinking, leadership, the ability to lead and solve problems, and the ability to work with others […] propelled me to where I am now.* (p. 5)

*5.2.1.5 Technical knowledge*

The participants acknowledged that their jobs as strategic leaders were different from those of operational commanders.

> **Participant 11:** *Inspectors have a different job from superintendents, and superintendents have a different job from CROs. And that is true in the sense that in some police forces the people at the top are not even police officers. […] Once you get to the very top of organisations like ours you have to question whether you actually need to be a warrant-card-carrying police officer at all. A customs commissioner is certainly not a customs officer.* (pp. 47-48)

The participants also acknowledged that senior leaders did not work by themselves, but were rather supported by subordinate leaders.

> **Participant 5:** *We work in teams. So if we look at the whole regional management team plus the DCs (district commanders), they all contribute. But of course, the RC (regional commander) is the one who does the steering.* (p. 4)

**Participant 6:** *As a CRO, you have other people to assist you to deal with the immediate problems. You have to leave yourself space and time to think ahead to have some kind of vision of what may happen.* (pp. 4-5)

The participants nevertheless argued for the importance of technical knowledge to leadership at their levels. They reasoned that they from time to time they needed to understand why strategic directions were not observed.

**Participant 3***: I still micro-manage because sometimes I have to. There are times when you set your direction. You want things to be done in a certain manner. When that direction is not observed, then you have to go to the specifics to micro-manage it at times. I just did it this morning, actually. [laughs]* (p. 25)

The participants also reasoned that technical knowledge enhanced their self-confidence as leaders.

**Participant 13:** *I mean, there were two things that I missed out on that really were a problem: […] you didn't have in-depth knowledge of the process, of some of the requirements. […] You are overseeing, teaching a thing that you yourself don't know. [laughs] You get what I mean? You can't tell a war story because you haven't been to a war.* (pp. 25-26)

**Participant 14:** *You can't start networking and do all of the things you want to do without the knowledge. You need knowledge, even our senior officers. […] Once you have knowledge, you have the confidence that you know your job. Then you start looking at leadership qualities.* (p. 19)

Finally, they reasoned that technical knowledge helped them gain the respect of followers and helped them become accepted as members.

**Participant 4:** *People do not give you status because you are a CRO. Rather, they give you status if they respect you, from the bottom of their hearts, or if they agree with your performance, your talent or your ability. People disrespect you or refuse to give you the status if they don't feel that you are competent.* (p. 12)

**Participant 8:** *I think one thing I would like to highlight – perhaps I didn't say it very clearly previously – is that I had a very special style as a leader. I insist that I am a policeman, whether I am a superintendent, a chief superintendent or a CRO. I want my staff to identify me as their colleagues, as a member of the team. […] By nature, I am a policeman. I don't know whether in your report you will interpret my style of leadership. I think that to be an effective leader you must have your followers or your good members identify you as a member.* (p. 37)

One participant warned about what may happen if the importance of technical knowledge were underestimated when selecting a senior leader.

**Participant 11:** *Jack Straw said that thanks to the fast tracking of bloody promotions […], they've got people who have no respect from their officers as good police officers, and on the other hand, they don't have the management skills of the private sector. 'So what am I getting? I am not getting a good police officer; I am not getting a good manager'.* (p. 48)

*5.2.1.6 Vision*

Many of the participants highlighted the importance of vision to strategic leadership.

**Participant 17:** *You have a vision of what the future is going to be like or a vision is shared with you […], and then you put in place measures that hopefully allow your organisation to at least cope with the future efficiently. That's what strategic leadership should be.* (p. 44)

**Participant 18:** *I think it's really a sense of direction and vision about where you want to lead your organisation and the various options – the strategies – you map out to bring your organisation to that level. This is my very simple version of strategy and strategic leadership.* (pp. 20-21)

Other participants emphasised that vision was important for not only strategic leaders but also those at lower levels.

**Participant 4:** *Taking a broad definition, I suppose leadership is involves influencing people to go or do or take action in the direction you would like. So in that sense, to me, there is no difference between leading a small team or a big force because you have one goal that you think is achievable by going in that direction.* (p. 2)

**Participant 6:** *Even when you are the leader of a small unit, you still require that vision. Although […] your skill is not that mature, you still need that, because otherwise you won't make a difference. You will just plod along day after day after day, and it won't distinguish you as a good leader. You are the leader by post or the leader by command, but you are not an actual leader by yourself.* (p. 6)

The leadership literature has also recognised the importance of vision to leadership, particularly at strategic levels. For example, Bass (1990) argues that without a vision, a leader is unlikely to inspire his or her followers to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. To illustrate its importance, one participant explained how vision of the local socio-political landscape in five years' time guided him to formulate a set of strategic directions.

**Participant 17:** *One thing I am convinced of for the future: the next five years in Hong Kong are going to be completely politically charged. We will be questioned at every turn, in all government departments, but particularly the police. Therefore, you need to have evidence-based decision making. If you do not conduct competent research, you won't have the evidence on which to base your decisions. One of the things I have been working to sell to the people in the college is that we need to be able to train our officers to be able to do research. They need to come up with the evidence. At the same time, we need to partner with academia and let them conduct the research along with us.* (p. 32)

At the personal level, another participant explained how his vision of his own future position in the organisation led him to prepare himself in good time for the anticipated challenges.

**Participant 15:** *In the last few years, because I know that I may have a chance to become a very senior officer, I have focused on communication – crisis communication – how to deal with the media. I have at least 10 books on how to deal with the media, how to formulate policy.* (pp. 9-10)

The analysis also shows that those with vision can obtain greater job satisfaction.

**Participant 9:** *I was very pleased with this project because we started from nothing. I wasn't asked by my boss to do it. I could have taken an easy way out by following in the footsteps of my predecessors and making no changes. [Looking back] I am still very proud of this project. The project came to fruition simply because of my conviction in striving for improvements and efforts in coordinating the various parties. I probably regard it as the most satisfactory project in my career because unlike other supportive work I could witness the various stages of its development.* (p. 29)

The participants who were leadership practitioners preferred to interpret vision as a guide for action rather than merely a mental picture.

**Participant 6:** *After I became a CRO and gradually moved on, there was more and more reflection. And then I realised that vision is basically about a direction, if you look at the future. So that's why […] I say vision is a big word. If I wanted to change it, I would say vision is equal to direction. As a leader, you have to give a direction.* (p. 37)

*5.2.1.7 Reflection on leadership dimensions*

Upon reflection, the six leadership dimensions identified in this study can be roughly divided into two groups. The first group, which consists of modesty, communication, and empathy, can be considered as attributes of people-oriented behaviour. The second group, which consists of positive thinking, technical knowledge, and vision, can be considered as attributes of task-oriented behaviour. This taxonomy, if adopted, coincides with the behavioural approach to studying leadership, which was popular among leadership researchers in the 1950s-1970s (Yukl, 2001).

The emergence of modesty, communication, and empathy as attributes important to leadership in this study may also be interpreted as supportive evidence of charismatic and transformational leadership theories, i.e., two of the most widely quoted leadership theories in recent decades (Arthur and Hardy, 2014; Cohen, 2010; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009). Common to these two leadership theories is their emphasis on the importance of 'consideration' behaviour on the part of the leader to secure not merely compliance but also trust and commitment from followers (Bass, 1990; Cohen, 2010; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009).

When seen as a package, the six leadership dimensions identified in this study are compatible with the views of prominent leadership theorists. For example, Bennis and Nanus (1997) describe the four keys of effective leadership as attention through vision, meaning through communication, trust through positioning, and deployment of self through positive self-consideration. Kouzes and Posner (1995) similarly put forward five key practices of leaders, including challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart.

The leadership dimensions identified in this study may offer supportive evidence of other less prominent leadership theories such as servant leadership theory, which emphasises humility and empathy on the part of the leader (Russell and Stone, 2002). However, because the purpose of this study is not to prove or disprove any leadership theory but rather to gain a better understanding of the strategic leader development process, it suffices to say that the 18 individuals who participated in this study commonly possessed the 6 leadership dimensions identified. The antecedents of these dimensions require attention when plotting the participants' leadership development.

### 5.2.2 Strategic thinking capability

The participants considered the term 'strategic thinking' to involve wider, deeper, and higher levels of thought than 'operational thinking'.

> **Participant 4:** *When we say we are strategic, what we actually mean is that when we are thinking about an idea or policy, we have to look wider, deeper, and higher to see the effects of that policy.* (p.13)

**Participant 18:** *Being able to think strategically and laterally and being able to appreciate and think about what the real issue may be is the start of [strategic] leadership.   If I don't even have that appreciation [...], then I can only be working at a very operational level in terms of solving problems in a pragmatic way.   If I think, I would be looking much wider, hopefully much higher, and much more into the future.   (p. 19)*

Further analysis identifies three dimensions that according to the participants helped them think on wider, deeper and higher levels: political sensitivity, long-range planning and creative thinking.

*5.2.2.1 Political sensitivity*

The participants considered political sensitivity important to their thinking because at their levels they had to frequently deal with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders who have different political agendas.   They included government policy bureaux, Legislative Council, watchdogs, community leaders and staff associations.   The following examples illustrate the political dimension of the participants' leadership responsibility.

**Participant 7:** *Staff associations see themselves more as staff unions than as communication bodies.   They want to negotiate; they want to have negotiation power.   I can't say it is wrong for them to fight for their interests, but when you see yourself as a union, it's a different ball game.* (p. 11)

**Participant 11:** *You were talking about keeping politics separate.   You can't, because the way they operate up the hill is dictated by politics.   We knew they would never going to take it and run with it because it was a political hot potato.   (p. 13)*

**Participant 17:** *There were far too many politics involved, and we never*

*were actually achieving anything. Decisions had been made before we actually started. [...] It was quite clear to all but the chairman of the meeting that the three other bureaux had colluded in terms of what was going to be said at the meeting and what decisions were going to be made. Our work was in no way relevant to the decisions they had made. No matter how hard we tried or whatever we put forward, we weren't going to achieve anything, in my opinion.* (pp. 5-6)

Given this reality, political reality must be taken into account when formulating strategies and policies.

**Participant 5:** *CIPs normally focus on a particular area of the job, and you expect their scopes to be rather focused. In our case, as we know quite well, [...] you have to digest a lot of things, including political ramifications, balance of power, resources, you name it.* (pp. 3-4)

**Participant 8:** *I am not saying that civil servants should play politics. Civil servants should step away from politics. But civil servants, particularly senior civil servants, must have the political sense to know what is happening in the political arena so that they know when to do the right thing and when to do nothing.* (pp. 19-20)

One participant who considered the effect of the prevailing socio-economical situation on other stakeholders when seeking policy changes provided a good example of the usefulness of political sensitivity in the effective performance of a strategic leader.

**Participant 9:** *The economy of Hong Kong was down at that time. The forecast was that the government would be facing a few years of deficit budget. [...] If the stringent economy continued, the money available to them would be inevitably decreased. Against this background, they were willing to talk, willing to look for a way to survive in the long term and prepared to accept what was placed in front of them.* (pp. 32-33)

One participant who considered public opinion when introducing policy changes demonstrated the usefulness of political sensitivity.

> **Participant 8:** *Remember we had that very nasty case in Tinshuiwai in which the husband killed his wife and his two kids before committing suicide? Everybody pointed the finger at the police and Social Welfare Department and said they were responsible for the issues. Within the Force, there were different views. The majority thought we were scapegoats. It shouldn't have been our responsibility. It should have been the social workers' responsibility. But then I held a different view, because, looking at the broader picture, the community actually wanted the police to get involved in a positive way. Why didn't we take the opportunity to better ourselves and solve the problem to build our reputation instead of just saying 'no' and closing the door? I decided to take the matter positively. We eventually set policy. We trained our officers. We had new procedures. I was quite happy to see the news reporting that domestic violence had gradually gone down. (p. 7)*

Another participant observed that political sensitivity even helped correctly position the organisation.

> **Participant 13:** *In my mind, he achieved a hell of a lot in positioning the police force correctly. The police force was having a good relationship with PSB (Public Security Bureau of mainland China) without giving anything away, without making it a subordinate organisation. In my mine, I think he did a brilliant job. I much admire him for his strategic thinking. (p. 20)*

Despite the obvious importance of political sensitivity to strategic leaders, it attracted only limited attention from organisational scientists until recently (Ferris et al., 2007). Applied behavioural theorist Jaques (1986) observes that when an

individual is required to oversee and change institutions from the outside, competence in networking with key individuals in other fields is an essential quality of capability. From this perspective, it can be argued that political sensitivity in the context of leadership serves an important function similar to that of empathy: the former helps the leader understand the concerns of external stakeholders, and the latter helps the leader understand the feelings of the followers. Both are parts of one's social intelligence (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000) and are instrumental in building up and maintaining constructive working relationships with important stakeholders who can affect the organisational outcome.

### 5.2.2.2 Long-range planning

Although political sensitivity helped the participants think at a wider level, long-range planning guided them to think farther into the future. The future is open-ended (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004), and the term 'long-range planning' may cause confusion due to its different interpretations. The analysis shows that it was not uncommon for the participants to look five to ten years into the future.

> **Participant 11**: *I don't know whether you call it strategic thinking, because I am not sure where strategic thinking comes into this Force. But certainly your timeframe is different, your focus is different. […] I mean, there is work that is being done now that may not necessarily produce anything for the next five to ten years.* (pp. 2-3)

> **Participant 12**: *I think we need a longer time to get things and people moved into the right positions. And again, we are talking about at least five to ten years. When it comes to cultural change, getting people to change in terms of the way they behave and empowering them to develop the confidence to do what they need to do is not direct influence. It is actually indirect influence.* (p. 7)

The participants considered long-range planning important because it helped them cope better with radical, non-linear changes.

> **Participant 17:** *For someone who [...] is only responding to stimuli from the immediate environment, well, you know, they may be a good situational leader. But if the situation changes radically and is not linear – this world is not linear – then they will have a bit of difficulty coping with a radical shift. I think that strategic leaders have to scan the environment and see the next challenge or what have you in our organisation.* (p. 44)

The analysis shows that long-range planning was not confined to those 'young' participants who still had several years of service remaining. There is ample evidence to show that the participants who were close to retirement also applied long-range planning when approaching their work. For example, Participant 2, who handed over his office to his successor upon retiring in the week following his interview, made the following comments when looking back at his career on the Force.

> **Participant 2**: *I suppose at the end of the day the other thing that may not be recognised at the moment but may be recognised in a year or two is some of the stuff that I've been looking at and have been dealing with on policy audits [...] and trenching the position of the Force to be able to respond quicker to the changing demands of society. This is an on-going thing here.* (p. 31)

Participant 10, who had fewer than four months to serve before his retirement at the time of his interview, similarly made the following comments when looking back at his final posting.

**Participant 10**: *I would have come here earlier. I always knew I was coming here, and the things that I have been doing for a year and a half now would have been started two years ago and now coming to completion. These things will be done, but I won't see them. That's the only sad thing about it. […] This old guy planting a tree: I'll never see that tree grow unless you live forever. It's most unlikely you will live forever, but that doesn't mean you don't plant the tree.* (p. 41)

To ensure that the change processes they initiated would continue in their absence after their retirement, the participants focused on aligning their followers' thinking with theirs. The following two different participants were scheduled to retire from the Force less than a year after being interviewed.

**Participant 3**: *If you can change people's mind-set and make them think like you, or not necessarily like you but make them think about what's the best for the organisation, […] then you have achieved what should be achieved.* (p. 27)

**Participant 17**: *In fact, all of these things are unlikely to be finished before I'm gone. […] I have been boring my people to death by continually telling them about my vision, my sharing. It's coming back to me. […] So I think the point is that when I leave I don't think my ideas will necessarily leave with me. There will be so many people who have listened to these ideas. They will take them on.* (p. 36)

The leadership literature has also acknowledged the importance of long-range planning to strategic thinking (e.g., Allio, 2006). Some organisational theorists have simply combined the two and referred to the resulting aggregate as strategic planning (e.g., Mintzberg, 1994; Powell, 1992). Heracleous (1998) argues that strategic planning should not be confused with strategic thinking; whereas the former refers to

a programmatic, analytical thought process, the latter refers to a creative, divergent thought process.

In terms of long-range planning, Jaques (1986) argues that an individual's ability to engage in long-term goal-directed behaviour in solving problems is affected by his or her intellectual capability.   In his view, shaping complex social institutions usually requires five to ten years.   Hence, the individual must have an intellectual capability that enables him or her to work by extrapolation in addition to previous experience in transforming systems at lower levels to be successful (Jaques, 1986).

*5.2.2.3 Creative thinking*

Creative thinking was important to the participants because they had to work with information that did not exist or was not accessible to them.

> **Participant 18**: *In the real world, things are getting more complex the farther you go up.   You have to work with information that does not exist or is not accessible to you.   (p. 13)*

The participants were at liberty to use creative thinking to fill the information gap because their colleagues also lacked the required information.

> **Participant 3**: *The way our organisation operates is that you do have a large degree of autonomy and discretion until something hits the fan – I mean the shit hits the fan.   [laughs]   You do, to a large extent, chart out how you want your organisation to move forward, of course, within the bounds of the law.   (p. 3)*

> **Participant 6**: *Once you reach chief superintendent level, nobody will actually come to you and say, 'This is right'.   Instead, you are the one*

*who decides whether it is right or wrong. This is the turning point from a more tactical scenario to a more strategic scenario, because at that level nobody can say that you are completely wrong. Nobody can say that this is exactly the thing to do, especially when you are looking into the future. You are the one who has to take that responsibility. You are the one who decides what to do, decides the direction, decides how to do it.* (p. 36)

The participants were often compelled to think creatively because they were expected to make decisions.

**Participant 7**: *At its most basic level, leadership is about how you can influence people. You can influence how things are to be carried out, how tasks are to be performed. It is not about managing. […] If you don't make decisions, you are no leader. Your guys come up for advice. You have to rightly or wrongly take on the responsibility. You must be responsible.* (pp. 23-24)

The participants were aware of the risk of misjudgement associated with thinking creatively.

**Participant 15:** *You have to take risks. Of course, taking risks is one of my responsibilities now, because nobody knows for sure whether a policy will definitely work. Of course we may consult, do consultations; we may do pilots, or we check with the current policy […] But you still can't be 100% sure. So risk taking is also part of it.* (p. 4)

In addition to conducting pilots and consultations, the participants reviewed their strategies and policies regularly to manage the associated risks.

**Participant 12:** *The quarterly meeting allows us to review our management and operation priorities. We ask ourselves the question:*

> *'Were those things that happened expected in accordance with the strategies we applied?'  The quarterly meeting has become not just an operational meeting but also a strategy review meeting.*   (p. 6)

By thinking creatively the participants managed to find innovative solutions to complex leadership problems.   Two examples are provided as follows.

> **Participant 10:** *I had the first armed women in EU (emergency units). […] By sticking the [armed] women in EU, when they go back to the patrol subunits afterwards, the patrol subunits can't complain – because they work in EU, they work in the patrol subunits.   If you started at the bottom, every time you went up incrementally, you would face the same resistance.   If you started almost at the top, or at least in the top half, then it undercut half the resistance.*   (p. 9)

> **Participant 13:** *He did a lot, and some of it was very, very subtle, almost amusing.   One of his tactics to get rid of the [rank of] staff sergeant was to promote them.   So instead of being staff sergeant class I with the big red sash and huge prestige, you suddenly became a PI (probationary inspector) with no standing or status, and you were required to do jobs for which you had no particular ability.   An awful lot of them went for early retirement or resigned because of the indignity of being promoted. [laughs]*   (p. 6)

The leadership literature has acknowledged the importance of creative thinking. Noting the rapid, non-linear changes to operating environments in recent decades, leadership researchers have underscored the need for leaders to find creative solutions to novel and ill-defined problems (e.g., Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004; Self and Schraeder, 2009).   In such an operating environment, the leader's ability to define new problems and find and implement new solutions is considered most important to organisational success (e.g., Basadur, 2004).

*5.2.2.4 Reflection on the dimensions of strategic thinking capability*

As Heracleous (1998) notes, the leadership literature has not agreed on a definition of the construct of strategic thinking.   He suggests that it can be considered as a type of double-loop learning that permits the alteration of governing variables for action when a mismatch occurs.   This contrasts with operational thinking or single-loop learning, which does not require any alteration of the basic beliefs (Argyris, 1976).   Seen in this light, the three dimensions (i.e., political sensitivity, long-term planning and creative thinking) are important to strategic thinking because they are instrumental to the development of lateral and flexible thinking.   They enable the identification of best solutions based on changing circumstances rather than previous solutions based on past experience.

Furthermore, the participants continually emphasised action, i.e., long-term planning.   As leadership practitioners, they considered strategic thinking unaccompanied by action to have little value.   This emphasis on action arguably enabled the participants to not merely anticipate but also influence the future. Leadership scholars have also coincidentally emphasised shaping the future (e.g., Cohen, 2010).

5.2.3 Position of authority

Contemporary leadership theories such as charismatic and transformational leadership theories emphasise empathy, vision and communication.   However, the analysis shows that position power remained an important leadership attribute for the participants.   There is ample evidence that the fulfilment of the participants' leadership responsibilities involved reengineering processes, reforming the organisational structure and shaping the operating environment, all of which required

a position of authority as backup to be effective. Based on the empirical evidence gathered in this study, these leadership responsibilities at higher levels can be divided into three dimensions: influencing external stakeholders, constructing and maintaining a sustainable system and coordinating the efforts of component units.

### 5.2.3.1 Influencing external stakeholders

The participants' ability to influence external stakeholders was linked to their formal positions in the organisation, i.e., the more senior one was in the hierarchy, the more authority he or she had to deal with external stakeholders.

> **Participant 3:** *In my capacity as CSP of the C&IIB (Complaint and Internal Investigation Bureau), I was obviously dealing with the IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Council) a lot in that job, and you are very much left to decide a lot of important issues. Of course, for the really important policy matters, you still have to defer upwards.* (p. 15)

The participants were keen to influence the external stakeholders who were in control of the supply of the resources required by the organisation.

> **Participant 8:** *I pointed out [to the administration] the difficulties we encountered: we faced the problem of training, the problem of succession, etc. My responsibility was to reflect the views of my staff plus my comments to the government. […] I won on occasion. For example, I got 350 recruits a year during a recruitment freeze.* (p. 17)

The participants also sought to influence external stakeholders who could modify the operating environment to the organisation's advantage. One example involved those in the legislative process.

> **Participant 12:** *The problem we are up against in PHQ, in the policy*

*wings, is politicians and politics, not this job. […] The biggest hurdle we face is trying to persuade the government to face up to the realities of life. There are plenty of laws that need to be changed.*   (p. 15)

The participants also sought to influence external stakeholders who might have obstructed the organisation in pursuing its organisational objectives if not properly engaged, such as the media.

**Participant 13:** *You had to play the media carefully.   It seemed to me there were various issues where we had to position ourselves correctly so that we were not perceived as getting it wrong.*   (p. 13)

*5.2.3.2 Constructing and maintaining a sustainable operating system*

Despite the high degree of success enjoyed by the Force, the participants nevertheless had to exercise their position power to modify the operating system. Additional control mechanisms were introduced to enhance service quality.

**Participant 3:** *It is not a single project per se, but more so is influencing people's way of thinking, and of course putting in place a lot of mechanisms that weren't in place before. […] I am trying to make them see that if we don't change now, it will be extremely painful if we are caught.*   (p. 8)

Furthermore, efforts were made to modernise the organisational culture.

**Participant 4:** *I brought a totally different culture to that working environment.   It's not so much about individual projects or tasks at that time.   Rather, it is something that we did on a daily basis.   It was basically the culture. […] I changed the whole culture and the way it operated.*   (pp. 4-5).

Efforts were also made to modify the organisational structure.

>   **Participant 13:** *We introduced the unit that dealt with child abuse, and the special interviewing there. Some people were deeply offended that I had done that, because they felt that child abuse was not a problem in the local community. […] In fact, some police objected to it, to us doing it. But it certainly took us from being perceived as old fashioned, reactionary and stubborn to forward thinking.* (p. 7)

### 5.2.3.3 Coordinating the efforts of component units

Given the participants' responsibility to oversee such a large and complex institution, ensuring that all of the component units were moving towards a common goal was itself a significant challenge. To this end, the participants had to exercise their position power to ensure that all of the units shared the same set of priorities.

>   **Participant 7:** *We have so many problems that require extra resources to handle, yet we don't have that kind of luxury. […] You have to decide which area is not your top priority. You have to prioritise.* (p. 17)

>   **Participant 13:** *Crime, the first priority, for both UB (uniform branch) and CID, is the prevention and detection of crime. Our objective is to make the community as safe as possible for residents, both on the street and in their homes. I consider priority offences to be street robberies, residential burglaries and serious sexual offences.* (p. 17)

Setting priorities aside, the participants also needed to exercise their position power to assign different roles to different units.

>   **Participant 12:** *I actually made sure each and everybody's effort would contribute to certain priorities, whether they were management or operational priorities, and they knew they were contributing to the priorities so that there would be a common understanding between one*

*another.  They all knew which role they were playing; they all knew what they were doing and contributing to.  (p. 4)*

Moreover, the participants needed to exercise their position power to resolve internal conflicts if and when necessary.

**Participant 14:** *There is a multidisciplinary task force involved in any big project, and we had a lot of in-house fights among different professionals.  We had telecommunication engineers, we had the IT people, we had the policemen and then we had the finance people.  We had to pull all of it together. [...] It all boils down to the CRO holding the fort.  (p. 14)*

Of course, the participants also had to exercise their position power to set and enforce standards.

**Participant 13:** *How would you decide that the teams have been successful? [...] What is a meaningful measure of success? [...] [We] work out what those achievable objectives are, and give people tasks where the chances are that with enthusiasm and intelligence and energy, they can be successful.  (p. 16)*

Finally, the participants had to exercise their position power to intervene when things were not moving in accordance with the set direction as expected.

**Participant 17:** *I was quite confident that the management learning was in need of reform. [...] So I brought him in.  I told him that I wanted to have an element of pre-course learning – collaborative pre-course learning.  I wanted the course, and I also wanted action learning afterwards.  I wanted a project that they would work on and that would cement the learning.  I don't think you can come for two weeks and be changed.  (p. 30)*

*5.2.3.4 Reflections on position of authority*

Given that leadership responsibility involves bigger issues than simply dealing directly with followers, both scholars and practitioners have criticised leadership theories for being too narrowly focused and failing to consider many important aspects of the leadership role. Such criticism applies to the two most-cited leadership theories in recent years, i.e., charismatic and transformational leadership theories. For example, Yukl (1999) criticises the two theories for focusing too much on the dyadic process to the extent of omitting relevant leadership behaviour such as work organisation, intergroup activity coordination, objective and priority alignment and resource procurement. Indeed, as shown in this study, no matter how adorable the leader, discharging leadership responsibilities to higher levels requires not only charisma but also a formal position of authority for support.

5.2.4 Motivation to lead

A strategic leader has a demanding role and is constantly under the close scrutiny of not only external stakeholders but also his or her own followers (Bottger and Barsoux, 2009).

> **Participant 8:** *Having my position does not mean my staff must give me support. I have seen a lot of department heads and CEOs in big firms who in spite of their positions were not supported by their staffs. So it doesn't come naturally. Probably the majority of the staff would not openly disagree with you. But I am sure that some of them – definitely in some other departments, people at the lower levels – did not give support to their director.* (p. 18)

To be effective as strategic leaders, the participants had to make personal sacrifices by putting their own personal interests behind that of the organisation.

**Participant 10:** *In the private sector, if you don't like it, here you go: 'I am out of here. I quit!' We don't really have the option of quitting – not because we're held by the pension or something, but because when we quit it destroys the people underneath us. And it's a bad situation. Quitting is only going to make it worse, and not for us. It's only going to [...] destroy the system. That's where the duty business comes in, and I believe in that strongly.* (p. 42)

The participants also had to accept the behavioural constraints attached to their leadership positions.

**Participant 2:** *Another thing that I think is very important is recognising that you are different. You are not one of the boys. So that pushed you to recognise the level you were at. You get a bit lonely – there are less and less people to share with.* (p. 25)

The participants' motivations to lead can be grouped into four dimensions: sense of achievement, duty, purpose and fun.

*5.2.4.1 Sense of achievement*

The participants who were motivated by their sense of achievement considered their leadership responsibilities as challenges to their personal ability. Therefore, their motivation to lead came from their attempt to overcome the challenge.

**Participant 12:** *I like to organise things. I like challenges. When I face a challenge, I want to find out how I can actually work better, more systematically, in a more structured way in a challenging environment. I always try to define some logic and see how we can work on it. [Through] trial and error, I'll find a way that I think is probably the right way to do it. Perhaps this is just me.* (p. 20)

**Participant 17:** *Determination and perhaps concentrating on my career more than others [has led to my success]. Others may have different things they considered important. Of course, there is some aspect of ability and worldliness, but it's also determination, a desire to succeed and a desire to get that rank. There were officers in that cohort who were equally able, but perhaps had different life balances or weren't as determined to be successful in their careers.* (p. 10)

*5.2.4.2 Sense of duty*

The participants who were motivated by their sense of duty saw their leadership responsibilities as their duty. Therefore, their motivation to lead came from their attempts to fulfil their duty.

**Participant 6:** *My attitude all along was that I worked because I thought it was my responsibility. I worked because of work, not because I wanted promotion. Therefore, I didn't need to impress the others. I didn't need to make sure that I stood out from the others. I didn't have to do things to make sure my boss was happy.* (p. 29)

**Participant 7:** *The way I saw myself was that I was very much my own man. When I saw the right thing, I thought we must do it. If there was something that I didn't agree with, I would [speak up].* (p .7)

*5.2.4.3 Sense of purpose*

The participants who were motivated by their sense of purpose saw their leadership responsibilities as means to reach a purposeful target. Therefore, their motivation to lead came from their attempts to reach that purposeful target.

**Participant 9:** *I could have followed what my predecessors had been doing and made no changes. We all know the saying in the civil service: the more you do, the more mistakes you commit. The less you do, the fewer mistakes you make. The best is to do nothing. But my conviction is that I have to make my life meaningful, to make the job that I am doing*

*interesting.   I want to achieve something that can benefit the community.*
(p. 35)

**Participant 18:** *I want to do something for the Force.   I want to do
something for the community.   That's quite clear to me.   (p. 3)*

*5.2.4.4 Sense of fun*

The participants who were motivated by their sense of fun saw their leadership
responsibilities as enjoyment.   Therefore, their motivation to lead came from their
attempt to maximise their enjoyment.

**Participant 2:** *Now I'll say this, and you may not believe it: I was not
motivated by promotion.   I was motivated by the job.   I loved the job,
getting the job done.   The promotion aspect is something that came
along with it.   (p. 19)*

**Participant 13:** *Like a lot of people, I suppose it was the stupidity of
youth or the stupidity of people who enjoyed their work on the police
force.   I just allowed myself to be totally absorbed by my work.   (p. 22)*

According to the analysis, the four dimensions are not mutually exclusive.   The
following example shows that one participant was motivated by a mix of senses of fun
and purpose.

**Participant 10:** *I really like [the nature of the job].   It's fun, and it's the
sort of thing we have on the Force: you work with your own groups.
And you are doing it for a purpose, not just to make money or to get the
bonus and things like that.   And I consider that part of the job very
important.   (p. 17)*

However, the analysis also shows that any single dimension can work on its own

as an adequate motivator.   The following example demonstrates that this participant motivated primarily by a sense of fun, as a job in the Correctional Services Department (CSD) arguably can provide the same set of motivators except a sense of fun.

**Participant 8:** *I loved the Force.   I liked the job.   I enjoyed the job.   I didn't care about promotion.   Promotion has never crossed my mind. In fact, throughout my career, I have never asked for a promotion. Promotion came my way naturally. […] I don't like the job of CSD.   So if I unfortunately joined CSD, I might not be as successful as I was in the Force.   But whether it was coincidental or not, I liked the job.   I enjoyed it.   I joined the Force. (pp. 27-28)*

*5.2.4.5 Reflections on motivation to lead*

According to O'Reilly and Caldwell (1980), intrinsic motivation is important for job satisfaction and attitudinal commitment: '[D]ecisions predicated on intrinsic job features and made for internal reasons are likely to be associated with increased feelings of satisfaction and attitudinal commitment' (p. 563).

It can be argued that all four of the dimensions of motivation identified in this study (sense of achievement, duty, purpose and fun) fall under the rubric of intrinsic motivation.   The analysis makes it clear that the participant who said that his motivation to lead was caused by 'a desire to succeed, desire to get that rank' (Participant 17, see p. 107) was actually driven by an intrinsic motivation, i.e., a sense of achievement.   He remained focused and enthusiastic even after he had reached his targeted rank and kept the same positive working attitude up to his retirement.

Knowles et al. (2011) argue that although adults are responsive to external

motivators such as promotions and higher salaries, the most potent motivators are internal pressures, including the desire for increased job satisfaction and self-esteem. This argument was strongly supported by all of the participants, who without exception expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their leadership careers.

> **Participant 2:** *I have absolutely no regrets. [Upon my retirement] I'll walk away. I'll walk away and I will not come back. I don't see myself as hanging on and coming back. […] I have a fantastic career, and I regret nothing.* (p. 33)

> **Participant 5:** *I am very satisfied, especially in the past few years working this post. Despite the many challenges, I have no regrets. […] What can you complain about?* (p. 16)

Also relevant to the notion of motivation is Higgins' (1998) regulatory focused theory, according to which people have two basic self-regulation systems: one that regulates the achievement of rewards and influences individuals to focus on promotion goals, and another that regulates the avoidance of punishment and guides individuals' attention to prevention goals. Under this theory, people who are motivated by duties and responsibilities are said to be prevention focused and tend to preserve the status quo. In contrast, people who are motivated by achievements and purposes are said to be promotion focused and tend to be more creative and innovative in terms of their behaviour. Based on the analysis of the participants' lived experiences, the applicability of Higgins' (1998) theory to strategic leadership may require further tests. There is evidence to show that even those participants who were motivated by their sense of duty were also keen to change the status quo, probably because they accepted initiating changes as part of their duty (i.e., a hybrid of both prevention and promotion goals as defined by regulatory focused theory).

### 5.2.5 General comments about strategic leadership

Grandy (2013) observes the following about strategic leadership:

*The strategic leadership perspective is not well developed and there is a lack of agreement regarding the nature of strategic leadership.  Some refer to it as a broad area of study that has to do with one's position in the organisation, that is, leadership of rather than in organisations performed by those who are members of the top management team. [...] Others conceptualise strategic leadership as a set of activities (and behaviours) that leaders, again those in top management positions, must perform to ensure positive organisational performance. [...] Some conceptualise strategic leadership as a style that individuals at any level of the organisation may possess.*    (p. 622)

By deconstructing and regrouping the interview data into different subcategories and examining instances that may help explain the practical meaning of the dimensions in each subcategory, it becomes clear that the strategic leadership literature features different perspectives and terminologies mainly because different researchers choose to emphasise different dimensions and subcategories.   The comprehensive understanding of the 'strategic leadership' construct resulting from the data analysis arguably provides a strong foundation for investigating which dimensions are developable through formal training and which are likely to be stable, i.e., the focus of this research study.

## 5.3 Leadership learning

As stated previously, the data analysis led to the identification of three subcategories under the category of 'leadership learning': 'learning as a child/youth', 'learning as a leadership practitioner' and 'learning as a course participant'.

<u>5.3.1 Learning as a child/youth</u>

The highly competitive recruitment process the participants had to go through before they could become members of the Force meant that they possessed certain leadership qualities before joining the organisation. This also applied to the three participants who joined as constables. One of the participants who joined as an inspector offered the following reflection.

> **Participant 18:** *I did start with some qualities though. I started with the conviction and self-confidence that I could do certain things, that I could work through problems and that I could work with others. I have a good sense of self-worth – not pride, but self-worth. As I said, I was a student leader before. My communication and verbal skills were quite good. […] Academically and intellectually, I can absorb things. I just didn't have that exposure and didn't have that life experience to know what to lead and to think things through, the priorities.* (p. 7)

Another participant who joined the Force as a constable offered a similar reflection.

> **Participant 16:** *[Upon reflection], before I joined the Force, I had already sowed the seeds, i.e., my values, integrity, sense of responsibility and commitment. All of these, from my point of view, are the basics that make me successful on the Force. Without these basics, I could never be [a CRO]. There is no such thing as luck, no way. So the Force identified me, recruited me. These good qualities made me a so-called good candidate for the Force.* (p. 19)

The participants acquired these leadership qualities mainly from three sources as a child/youth: learning from family, school and adventure training.

*5.3.1.1 Learning from family*

Many of the participants considered their parents as role models from whom they learned important virtues that formed the basis of their interpersonal skills.

**Participant 10:** *[My father] is not the brightest guy, but very honest, very straightforward without being strict. […] Intellectually, he was a great reader. But he was a working-class guy, so in many respects a role model for character.* (pp. 32-33)

**Participant 12:** *[My father] is not well educated, but he is very hard working. He treats people very nicely. He is very generous, to the extent that he fails to look after his family sometimes. What I learned from him is that he has a big chest, and is hard working.* (p. 9)

Some of the participants also learned about how to lead from parents who were leadership practitioners.

**Participant 2:** *That's something my dad always told me: 'You must look after the troops. That doesn't mean that you look after them to the point of ignoring bad behaviour. But you've got to look after your troops'.* (p. 17)

**Participant 8:** *I would say that my father had a very strong influence on the children, particularly on the subject of leadership. For example, he always said, 'As a leader, you never eat before your men'. And that applies to me all the time. I always allow my staff to take their meals, take their leave, enjoy their time with their family before I consider myself. So that's the leadership skill that my father taught me.* (p. 30)

Parents are not the only source of learning in families. The participants' responsibility in their families also helped them develop leadership skills.

**Participant 16:** *I was the eldest son in my family. Below me, I have one*

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*younger sister and two younger brothers. So it developed my value of responsibility. Since I was very young, I have had to take care of my younger brothers and my younger sister.* (p. 6)

**Participant 18:** *I helped my parents to look after the little brothers because they were busy earning a living or whatever. [...] In terms of becoming a leader, I think it is just my character, the inborn thing, but also because of the opportunity I had to lead three little brothers.* (p. 9)

Other participants learned from family activities.

**Participant 4:** *My father always took my brothers and me to various places. That inspired me to develop a kind of public sense and common sense. For instance, [...] during the riot days, he took me to watch the riot on the police side. So that kind of education.* (p. 21)

*5.3.1.2 Learning from school*

In addition to family, the analysis shows that school was an important place for the participants to acquire early leadership experience.

**Participant 1:** *I have been a class monitor since I was in primary 1. From primary 1 to primary 6 I was the monitor of my class, and then in secondary school I was the chairman of my class committee. Because I was a little bit older than my classmates, a little bit more mature than them, I was always in the leading position. So for me, being a leader seemed to have started at a very tender age.* (p. 22)

**Participant 2:** *I do remember as a kid, even in primary school, I wanted to be a prefect, not to rule or bully people. I went to a rough school, and I wanted to have a bit of authority to be able to catch the bad buggers, the bullies and the guys. So even as a primary school student I remember wanting to be a prefect, and I was made a prefect.* (p. 45)

The participants learned how to manage teams based on their leadership positions in school.

> **Participant 1:** *While I was in university I was already a team sportsman in swimming, and I spent quite some time as the team captain of our college swimming team.   Through that type of activity I particularly enjoyed a kind of disciplined life and I liked teamwork very much, or team building.   That's also the reason why I chose to join the police force.   Its discipline offered me a good opportunity to develop people.* (p. 14)

> **Participant 8:** *I was a leader before I joined the Force.   I was the leader of the college basketball team, and I was also the captain of the university basketball team.   That was a very good experience as a leader because a basketball team requires teamwork, motivation, good communication, and of course leadership.* (p. 5)

For many participants, their self-identity as leaders had been firmly established well before they joined the Force.

> **Participant 7:** *In school, I mingled very well with people.   I was a DEA leader.   I was a house captain.   I was good at sports.   These things were all related to people.   The junior guys in school looked up to me as their elder brother, their house captain, sports captain.   I always had guys following me.   It was natural, that's it.* (p. 43)

> **Participant 9:** *My nickname in college was 'the captain'.   I was the captain of the school football team.   I was a house captain.   Leading other colleagues gives me great satisfaction.* (p. 36)

### 5.3.1.3 Learning from adventure training

In addition to learning from family and school, some of the participants recalled

that their self-confidence as leaders was further strengthened by taking part in youth adventure training.

**Participant 9:** *I was appointed captain of one of the watches.  My role was to take care of about 15 team members.  I needed to lead them through various activities including canoeing, rock climbing, hiking, everything.  It was very good experience to me because the watch members came from different backgrounds. […] At the end, when I came back, I thought it was an extremely useful experience. […] So as far as leadership training is concerned, I think Outward Bound training helped me build up a good foundation.*   (pp. 4-6)

**Participant 18:** *One of the openers, the first opener, was Operation Raleigh. […] That was working with others in a non-discipline environment.  You actually worked with other youngsters who would not listen to you.  You just worked alongside with others.  But that gave me a chance, the first chance, to work with people of other nationalities, other cultural backgrounds, under trying circumstances.  It involved dealing with people, being adventurous, a little bit of risk taking and being confident about myself.  I think my self-confidence was very much boosted coming back from that.*   (p. 7)

*5.3.1.4 Reflection on learning as a child/youth*

The participants' early leadership experience as children/youths had a profound effect on their subsequent leadership development.  Participant 8 recalled how his previous experience as a university basketball team captain helped him quickly establish himself as a competent commander during his formative years on the Force.

**Participant 8:** *When I left the training school and worked in the Western sub-division as an inspector, I actually mingled very well with my rank-and-file or junior officers. […] But I knew there was a need for me to make it clear to my team members that I was the leader and I would be responsible for them, either for their duties or their conduct, etc.  So I*

> *find this style very workable.   My relationship with my team members improved very quickly because I could understand their background, their skills, their weaknesses and their strengths, and based on that I deployed them very effectively.   That's it.   I started as a junior inspector with a skill I acquired from a basketball team when I was in the university.   (p. 6)*

The participant who attended Outward Bound training as a youth made the following comments when reflecting on his leadership career during the interview, which was conducted shortly before his retirement.

> **Participant 9:** *Because of my philosophy, my style, and probably the things I appreciated from my Outward Bound days through programmes like rock-climbing, I appreciate that nothing is impossible.   If there is a will, there is a way.   In fact, that is my motto for life.   If I were given a task, I am sure I would be able to tackle it if I tried hard. […] To put it short, at no point in my career have I hesitated about my ability to deal with any problem I was given.   (p. 44)*

Authentic leadership theories offer an approach to investigating leadership that is relevant to the participants' early leadership experience (e.g., Avolio et al., 2004; Klenke, 2007).   Avolio et al. (2004) define authentic leaders as individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave accordingly.   Klenke (2007) considers the defining characteristics of authentic leaders as their strong sense of true self.   As such, the participants' early leadership experience as children/youths might have been important in helping them understand their subsequent leadership development, as it reflected their natural tendency to adopt a leading role among their peers, a role that they truly enjoyed.   However, as Bommer et al. (2004) note, further research related to the antecedents of effective leadership behaviour is necessary before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

5.3.2 Learning as a leadership practitioner

The analysis shows that when the participants acted in their capacity as leadership practitioners, their leadership skills were improved by their interactions with senior officers, peers and followers; job assignments; and self-learning.

*5.3.2.1 Learning from senior officers*

The participants improved their leadership skills by learning from their senior officers, mainly through observation.

> **Participant 5:** *We always look at the seniors to see how they act. The minefield is there, and you have seen people stepping on minefields. You learn from some people's bitter experience. So I believe the setting of the Force presents some advantages in observing and learning from other's mistakes. Sometimes I thought that if I were in his position, I would do things differently. You keep on checking and asking yourself whether you like it. Would you adopt the same approach? Is the end result what they really intended to achieve? I mean, we would learn.* (p. 32)

> **Participant 10:** *I wasn't instrumental in doing it wrong, but I was instrumental in watching it go wrong, and it was like a train wreck. It's like what the Duke of Wellington said when he was on his expedition in Holland as a colonel: 'It was a complete disaster'. And he said, 'I learned so much of me. The general screwed up, not the colonels. And so when I become a general, I won't make those mistakes'. It's the same thing, you know.* (p. 17)

There is evidence to suggest that the participants seldom approached their senior officers for advice on leadership-related issues.

**Participant 13:** *I won't really say I had a particular mentor in the police force. This might sound a little ridiculous, but I almost did that the reverse way round. So I would look to you as one of my mentors, if you get what I mean. I rely on people who worked for me to advise me so that I hopefully had people working for me who were people who would voice their opinion.* (p. 20)

**Participant 14:** *I would not go to them with a problem, if you like, so they were not my mentors per se. But I watched them. I would watch them at every step and learn from them.* (p. 13)

Participant 17 provided a reason for this circumstance, which might have also applied to some of the other participants.

**Participant 17:** *We would never tell our boss that there were gaps in our knowledge, because we feared that it might halt our advancement. I suppose in some respects we often felt that even if there was a gap, we would pick it up somewhere along the line. But for God's sake, don't tell the boss otherwise. It will be used against you when it comes to report time.* (p. 40)

The analysis also shows that the participants did not model themselves on a single senior officer. Instead, they cherry-picked their good practices from different senior officers.

**Participant 1:** *Different bosses gave me different insights into their management styles, and I believe I have my own management style as well. So I try to adopt those better parts of their management style and build up my own strength in my management style.* (p. 10)

**Participant 3:** *You pick up a lot of these skills from your senior officers. Of course, there are many kinds of skills. There are officers who present themselves in a nice way, and there are others who are really nasty.*

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> *There are officers who abuse, and there are those who teach. There are many models. It is really up to your to pick out or cherry-pick whatever you think is suitable for yourself.* (p. 13)

It is only natural that the more successful the supervising officer, the greater the benefit the followers may receive by observing his or her leadership behaviour. With this in mind, it is no wonder that the two participants who acted as personal assistants to the commissioner (PA to CP) spoke highly of the experience.

> **Participant 4:** *If you were a PA to the CP, you would naturally hear people talking to the CP on some less-sensitive issues, or in what seemed to be normal or routine business. Then you could see how people thought, and how people presented their ideas to the CP, and how the CP reacted. That actually indicated how he thought about the whole process, or what kind of action needed to be taken or the way to deal with that kind of issue at that time.* (p. 19)

> **Participant 7:** *I spent two years as a PA to the CP. I thought it was the turning point of my career because I was accompanying the commissioner. I went to China with the commissioner. I went on visits with the commissioner. I went through difficult times with the commissioner. So I was able to see how he solved problems and faced crises.* (p. 9)

The participant who acted as a bodyguard to the governor learned something even more strategic by observing the governor's leadership behaviour.

> **Participant 4:** *As long as the governor was there, I had a chance to see him talking to people, see how people reacted, and see how people tried to associate themselves with him. I could see the kind of politics, the kind of struggling for power, the kind of competing for power at work. Leadership is a kind of act to distribute power in an optimal way.* (p. 18)

The participants were occasionally 'taught' by their senior officers directly, but not often in a nice way.

> **Participant 2:** *I would say Keith (pseudonym) taught me a lot.   Not that he thought he was teaching me a lot.   I learned a lot from him. […] He was giving me a 'bollocking' most of the time while he was doing it. [laughs]   (pp. 37-38)*

> **Participant 10:** *There was a major operation going down, and we had been working on these plans, blah, blah, blah.   He came down and […] basically told us what a bunch of wankers we were. […] So you learned how 'not to' do things, the precarious thing.   Even if he wasn't happy with us, telling people at the final briefing is not the way to do it, you know.   (p. 46)*

To be fair, some senior officers were willing to teach in a nice way.

> **Participant 4:** *He would talk about his thoughts on that issue, about how that issue should be dealt with, about how the proposition should be taken forward.   So he was talking about his ideas.   And sometimes he asked me.   For instance, when Patten changed the whole constitutional arrangement, he asked for my views.   (pp. 19-20)*

> **Participant 9:** *At the time, the director was Herbert (pseudonym), who was a very good boss.   He was very accommodating.   He was very willing to teach us how to deal with complicated issues.   I also went out with Willie and David (pseudonyms), who served as deputy director at different times.   I learned a lot from them in terms of leadership.   (p. 16)*

In general, how much the participants learned from their senior officers also depended on their ability to persuade the latter to wear the hat of a teacher.

**Participant 2:** *He was an old chief inspector who everybody used to laugh at.   He drank a lot.   He was very funny.   He ate curry every day. […] I quite liked him.   He seemed to like me, and he gave me quite a lot of advice.   (p. 4)*

**Participant 17:** *He knew exactly what he was doing, but he lost his enthusiasm because his career had hit a brick wall.   He saw me as enthusiastic.   In his heart, he must have still wanted to be professional. So instead of doing it himself, which would have been contrary to the image he was trying to portray, he taught me.   (p. 12)*

Leadership research has shown that mentoring is an important means of developing leadership (e.g., Brockbank and McGill, 2006; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Parker et al., 2008).   However, this did not seem to apply in the case of the participants, none of whom had formal mentor-mentee relationships with their senior officers.   Instead, their lived experience supports the observation of Higgins and Kram (2001) that in reality people rely on not just one but multiple individuals for developmental support in their careers.

**Participant 7:** *I can't think of any person who I consider as a true mentor as such.   But there are guys I hold in high respect who have retired.   I see them as my role models. […] I learned from them.   I saw them doing things, why they made certain decisions and the way they treated people.   (p. 38)*

**Participant 8:** *I won't call them mentors because mentorship has a different meaning, in that you actually work closely under a mentor and take and seek advice regularly.   I learned from not just senior officers but in fact a lot of colleagues at the lower levels as well. […] So I have not identified one particular person as my mentor.   What I have done is pick up good practices.   (p. 26)*

*5.3.2.2. Learning from peers*

When the participants encountered leadership problems, they were more likely to consult their peers than approach their senior officers.

**Participant 2:** *He and I were very close.  We would talk a lot.  We were very, very good friends.  Although we were different types, we were able to bounce ideas off each other.  We were very good friends, I mean, the right kind of what you would call real friends: people you share a deeper doctrine with.  And I would ask him for advice, and quite often he would ask me for advice on this and that.  It seemed to work.  We didn't seem to give each other bad advice.  (p. 40)*

**Participant 3:** *I've looked to [friends from within the Force] for support and advice, like yourself, honestly.  You have given me very good advice in the past.  I have been frustrated many a time, and then I came to you, and you listened to my frustration and gave me support.  So if you are talking about our work, friends within the Force are probably more important than other friends because of the lack of understanding.  (p. 23)*

One participant highlighted that peer support was a recent development within the organisation and had become part of the organisational culture.

**Participant 5:** *These days I would say the system is more transparent. We can learn from others, share things with others.  We can pick up the phone and call a fellow CRO and say, 'Hey, big brother, what is your experience?'  This actually helps us build up our competency in handling issues.  So I believe that throughout the years we have been lucky.  We live in an era of transition, from an old and very authoritative era to a quite open, transparent and sort of partnership style of culture, and that helps.  (p. 11)*

The participants even consulted their peers overseas to address certain strategic issues.

> **Participant 9:** *When I went to Bangkok for a meeting, I took the opportunity to call on the International Labour Office there to consult with their officer in charge, who was an American lady. […] She threw out the idea of partnering with the private sector and quoted a successful case. […] The idea was to enhance social responsibility through collaboration between NGOs and the business sector. It was a win-win situation. […] I thought it was an excellent idea.* (p. 28)

> **Participant 17:** *I was a bit confused about the direction and relative merit of certain things until I went to Argentina last year to do police training with the Interpol group of experts. There I had my first opportunity to meet a group of people who were in a similar situation as myself, exchange with them, learn about where we are, and also understand things that I was unclear on because I was not from the stream. […] There were several members in this Interpol group of experts who led the field in police research and who were also very bright. […] By listening to them, I understood that I hadn't got the signal wrong and that research was important.* (p. 33)

Leadership schools have increasingly recognised the importance of learning from peers (e.g., Kram and Isabella, 1985), which has had a profound effect on the approach to leadership development. As Ladyshewsky (2007) and Berings et al. (2008) note, professionals should be allowed to use other professionals to support their learning instead of continuing to ground leadership development on rationality and objectivity, which cause people to interrogate knowledge. Attention must also be paid to the intuition, feelings and experiences of leadership learners to facilitate collective reflections and transformations.

*5.3.2.3. Learning from followers*

The participants also learned from their interactions with followers, mainly in terms of how to fine-tune their influence tactics.

**Participant 5:** *The higher you get, the more people you get, and direct influence becomes more difficult. […] I tried different influence tactics while working through the ranks, and some worked and some didn't. So I think the happiest [time], going back to your question, is when you have a team of your own, working side by side, and you actually have an influence and they do exactly what you want.* (p. 10)

The participants also learned about critical thinking and forgiving behaviour from their followers.

**Participant 10:** *You can actually use his negativity. He is the guy that [when] we all say, 'This is great', but he would say 'No, it isn't'. Or [when] the others say, 'Oh, this is fine' – you know, we're all happy in our nice little well, that sort of thing – he will say, 'Why are we doing this? Why are we doing that?' Moan, moan, moan, but it's always constructive moaning. […] I don't have a problem with that. He's probably right in some cases.* (p. 44)

**Participant 12:** *[He] is actually my student, an inspector. He's very forgiving and very truthful. He tells you how he feels about things, and he always looks at the brighter side of things. I have seen people letting him down, but he doesn't give any weight to it. […] At his retirement dinner, I actually told everyone that I learned more from him than he learned from me.* (p. 10)

As Brown and Posner (2001) note, leadership development is a learning process that requires practice. Continuous feedback from their followers enabled the participants to fine-tune their leadership skills through practice.

**Participant 7:** *People are acquiring skills because of the first-hand experience that they practise. People like great sportsmen and even good pilots have to undergo the 10,000 hours. [To gain] this kind of experience, you really have to practise. If you practise leadership for 10,000 hours and survive, you must be a good leader.* (p. 39)

*5.3.2.4 Learning from job assignments*

All of the participants agreed that they learned a lot from job assignments.

**Participant 2:** *I honestly believe that it doesn't matter what job you are given in this organisation. If you approach it in the right way, you'll learn from it. I think that I have carried this out and that's why I always say to people, 'You may think you don't like it when you get there. But if you have worked, say, two years in a job and you tell me that you have learned nothing out of that job, I'll be very disappointed'. I'll be very disappointed in that officer as a person. I'll think that person has got a problem, because I think there's always something to be learned.* (p. 28)

**Participant 4:** *I enjoy every post, because funnily enough I took every post as a course: a learning course or a degree course, whatever way you name it. So after one posting, it's like graduation from a course. I learn a lot, I improve a lot and I have something to share with people.* (p. 10)

According to the participants, the more different types of jobs they performed, the more they learned.

**Participant 5:** *With hindsight, even if you don't like the post, try your best. You will gain some insights and you can learn from the job. […] Some people may say, 'This is not my cup of tea. I won't be able to do well'. So they try every effort to get out, and then in a way their scope is very limited. Yes, they are doing an excellent job because of their experience. But then they can never jump out of the box because they are only focusing on one stream.* (p. 14)

**Participant 9:** *I was fortunate to be able to expose myself to different job environments. I consider myself to have more of a perspective than some of my colleagues. I was given a chance to work overseas, to be given different tasks to deal with.* (p. 47)

Insofar as developing their strategic thinking was concerned, the participants found it helpful to 'act up' in the absence of their senior officers.

**Participant 5:** *I mentioned earlier the handling of strategic and policy issues. […] Every now and then, you have a chance to act up, during which time you are asked to look at things that are beyond your scope. So every now and then, you have this sort of exposure. If you are bright enough, you will be able to pick it up.* (p. 11)

**Participant 7:** *Of course, the district commander […] would be away on leave. And because he was an expatriate, I would have one and a half months, or six weeks, to act up [annually]. I was given the opportunity to take full command of the district during his absence.* (p. 18)

A chance to work in another government department or a non-government organisation also helped the participants see things from different perspectives.

**Participant 3:** *You asked me about the effect of two outside postings on my career, [one of which required me] to look at Hong Kong-Guangdong coordination and cooperation matters. Obviously [in that job] you have to think beyond one's scope of Hong Kong's territory. […] In that sense, that job had a more significant effect in terms of training.* (p. 17)

**Participant 12:** *When I got posted out to the private sector to work, that three years helped me open up my mind to become more accommodative and flexible. They probably changed my mind-set a bit. My leadership role was no longer just to control but also to facilitate and help people.*

> *It involved not only working together with people, but also helping people help one another.* (p. 3)

The participants considered an opportunity to work in an overseas law enforcement agency to be even better in terms of understanding problems not seen or experienced in Hong Kong.

> **Participant 15:** *Thanks to the exposure offered by my Interpol secondment. In a way, it is a big global environment for you to pick up all of the good things from other colleagues from other countries. […] When we chatted, they would tell me about the problems they had in their countries. Then I learned from them.* (pp. 21-22)

> **Participant 6:** *That [attachment] was a traumatic experience. It was basically a test; either you swam or sank, and nobody was able to help you. You were on your own, and you carried the entire Force on your shoulders. They looked at you as an officer from the RHKP (Royal Hong Kong Police), and I wasn't the first log. So it was a huge mental pressure. […] Basically, it was a very, very testing job, and I learned through everything. So that was a very, very good experience. Nothing can compare.* (p. 47)

Looking back at their leadership careers, the participants found that unfamiliar jobs forced them to learn more.

> **Participant 8:** *Once you're posted to the personnel wing as a chief inspector, it's all paper work. It's all administration. It's all policy or strategy issues, and helping to implement policy or strategy issues. So I spent quite a lot of time trying to understand what was going on. I needed to go back to the old files to see why the policy was set, the circumstances, the rationale, the reasons, etc.* (p. 25)

The participants also found that they could learn more from job situations that

required them to stretch their limits.

> **Participant 2:** *The whole place blew up, exploded. […] Within a couple of days I went from number three in the unit to number one, and I was left there for six months. […] In many ways it was the toughest period in my career. It was very hard to keep it together. […] When I left there three and a half years later […] I understood an awful lot more about crisis management and handling people in crisis. And I think that was a big change, probably the biggest change, in that I thought a lot more from that day on about ways to manage people. (p. 21)*

> **Participant 16:** *All the way [throughout the operation] it was extremely busy. Basically, I represented the Force at the government level, dealing with different departments, bureaux, etc. […] So it was a very busy and in fact very stressful period. But of course, looking back, I have a great sense of satisfaction, as we achieved a lot. I also learned a lot, achieved a lot. It was a great experience. So looking back, I would only say that it was my privilege to have the chance to be involved in such a big operation. (p. 4)*

The participants also unfortunately learned from tragic incidents encountered in their work.

> **Participant 7:** *Soon after I left Action Squad, there was a tragedy – a detective sergeant committed suicide. That detective sergeant, as far as I am concerned, was a very good and honest officer. He came from CAPO (Complaints Against the Police Office). He had obviously been groomed for further promotions. He was a relatively young sergeant from CAPO, but he did not fit in completely because people were suspicious of him. There was a CAPO complaint against our guys for assaulting somebody when making an arrest. The complainant sustained serious injuries. We were under investigation. Unfortunately, he could not stand up to the pressure and committed suicide. I felt very sorry for that. That's part of the reason why I always knew about the danger of forcing your unit to achieve results*

*when I later did my job as chief inspector in the operational units and SP in the EU (emergency unit). People will do crazy and naughty things to cut corners. That I hate to see. […] It is very wrong for us to only be interested in the result, which is very superficial. In this day and age we talk about detection rates, and they don't tell you that much. You can't compare the detection rate of the year with that of the year before and say you have been doing a good job. It must be more than that. It's one of those indicators that people should be interested in, but you should not be singing and dancing if you have improved the detection rate until you are satisfied that your guys have done a very good job in trying to prevent and detect crimes.* (pp. 42-43)

Of course, the participants also learned how to lead from their work in a less painful way.

**Participant 9:** *I was secretary at all of these meetings. In the process, I was able to appreciate how important decisions were made, and how to set milestones and goals for monitoring and control purposes. All of these experiences were very valuable to me in terms of leadership development.* (p. 17)

Based on the participants' lived experiences, it is not surprising to note that many leadership scholars also see the workplace as an important venue for leadership learning, and that challenging job assignments are an important means for developing leadership (e.g., Berings et al., 2008; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004).

### 5.3.2.5 Self-learning

Many of the participants habitually engaged in self-learning activities, not for the qualifications but to challenge their own views by knowing what was going on around them.

**Participant 2:** *I believe in continuous learning.   I just don't see that continuous learning must equate to doing degree courses.   I think a lot of officers do see it that way.   I think lifelong learning – being willing and open to learning, having your views challenged and maybe changing your views – is very important. […] I think that has helped me quite a lot.* (pp. 27-28)

**Participant 7:** *I am inquisitive.   I love to read.   I read all sorts of books, believe it or not.   Although I could not get into university, I thought I was quite bright. [laughs] I was well read, I believe.   I always say my son doesn't read as much as I do, because I was always hungry for reading.   The books I read are amazing: literature, history, science.* (p. 37)

**Participant 11:** *Because I am nosy, the Internet has been a bonus for me in the sense that you can get a huge amount of useless information from it. You can read newspapers from anywhere on earth. […] So in that sense, I always want to know what is going on around me.   Without being modest, my knowledge of the Force and who can do what is based as much on me being nosy as it is on my practical experience.* (p. 49)

**Participant 14:** *I read the Economist, and I watched BBC and CNN.   So in that regard, and because I watched the news programmes, I think I had a lot of advantages.   I think something else became quite prominent later in life when I started looking at our colleagues.   Some of them just don't bother to update themselves.* (pp. 17-18)

**Participant 16:** *I mean, I am the type of person who cannot let myself slow down without that much work.   I was always busy over the years. I started taking private studies again when I worked as a course instructor in the police training school.   It was basically nine to five [so] I had spare time.* (p. 17)

Many of the participants' positive attitudes towards self-learning could be traced back to their childhoods.

**Participant 10:** *Ever since I was a kid, I've been reading history books about leaders. […] I like stories; I like narratives. This Force has a narrative. My career has a narrative. I like narratives, and that's how I learn. Fitting things within a narrative actually makes them interesting.* (pp. 19-20)

**Participant 15:** *In fact, I started that in primary school. I remember that as a birthday gift my grandfather gave me a set of storybooks. I have loved reading ever since. […] I read books as a leisure activity. I read for pleasure. I would not make an effort to remember everything and then find time to apply it. I just read it for pleasure. Of course, it may subconsciously influence my behaviour and thinking. But I do not consciously make an effort as if I am taking an exam.* (p. 12)

*5.3.2.6 Reflection on learning as a leadership practitioner*

Knowles et al. (2011) observe that adults are particularly motivated to learn when they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in their life situations. Such an observation was certainly true in the case of the participants.

**Participant 14:** *In our days, we were kicked into the deep end. If you survived it, you survived it. If you didn't, you left the Force. And all of the survivors managed, and I managed. As a CRO, you have to learn yourself along the way. You have to find your own way. Don't expect somebody to hold your hand.* (p. 11)

The demanding nature of the participants' leadership roles provided them with both motivation and opportunities to learn and polish many of the skills required.

**Participant 13:** *I can remember the first time I ever had to give a speech in public. I was terrified. […] I had to give a speech to a lunch, the*

*annual lunch of chartered accountants or something at the Hong Kong Club. And I can remember I rushed off and bought Dale Carnegie's book on public speaking. And I read this book two or three times. 'What should I do? What should I do?' I was terrified. And I read this book on public speaking, and you know, there was some guidance in there. I can remember everybody had their lunch and was having their coffee and were all chatting with each other when I was introduced, and everybody was so uninterested in me. They almost didn't stop talking. And I stood up and said, 'Gentlemen, I stand before you, a senior member of one of the most corrupt police forces in the world, a member of the Narcotics Bureau from the Marseille of the Far East'. And I stopped. You know, quite a few senior government people down there thought, 'Oh, holy shit! What is this guy going to say next? Oh, I wish I wasn't here. Oh, take him away!' [laughs] 'But do you believe the sensational stories you see in the tabloid press? Is this the real situation?' You know, I got the ball. I got the attention. [laughs] [There was] a collective sigh. 'What is the real situation? What is really happening in Hong Kong on this front?' [laughs] S-i-g-h. Since that moment, I have developed a love of public speaking.* (pp. 18-19)

### 5.3.3 Learning as a leadership course participant

Despite the availability of many other learning opportunities and channels, formal training/education was an important source of leadership learning in the participants' leadership development process, in part because their past experiences were not applicable to novel situations.

**Participant 10:** *The problem with experience is you can be misled by experience. And we often are. The classic one there was the captain of the Titanic. He was the most experienced captain in the White Star Line – he had 40 years at sea, so a lot of experience. But all of that experience had been with smaller and slower ships. If he had been in a smaller ship, he would have been able to turn to avoid the iceberg. If he had been in a slower ship, he would have had more time to turn. So his experience was misleading him, leading him astray, really. 'I can hammer across the Atlantic at this speed'. Yes, you can, but not on a*

*ship like this.* (p. 24)

Furthermore, formal leadership training/education provided the participants with learning experiences that were not available in other learning settings.

> **Participant 7:** *Doing a proper course with structured course content is very different. You have the lecturer-student interaction type of environment. You discuss issues, you share thoughts, you have written assignments.* (p. 35)

By interacting with teachers and other course participants, the participants benefited from formal training/education programmes in two important ways: they consolidated their leadership experience and enhanced their strategic thinking capability.

### 5.3.3.1 Consolidation of leadership experience

The analysis shows that the theories introduced in formal training/education programmes helped the participants conceptualise their leadership experience and think more methodically.

> **Participant 6:** *After so many years as a policeman, getting the job done, sorting things out, solving problems, all of these things, […] I didn't actually go back and conceptualise what I had done, put it into whatever model, and say, 'This is the change model, that is the whatever model'. I have never done that. I just got on with day-to-day work. But when you went on a course, you said, 'Ah, this is the thing'. […] So to me it is a new exposure, a new way of thinking.* (pp. 40-41)

> **Participant 9:** *Although I acquired information about managing and learned about how to manage from some great leaders, in terms of strategic thinking and particularly decision making, using different*

*decision-making models [classroom learning] was a very good opportunity for me to conceptualise the things that I had learned before.* (p. 40)

In addition to conceptualising their previous experience, formal leadership training/education helped the participants validate their leadership practices.

**Participant 1:** *In the programme I attend as an SP, they talked about motivational factors. They talked about counselling and about different leadership styles. That kind of thing is really good for young managers. […] And through that kind of training you will be reinforced, knowing that you are moving in the right direction. Although there are many different management styles, your style seems to be quite acceptable and within the norm.* (p. 17)

**Participant 12:** *I think the most important thing about the course was that it validated my knowledge and whether certain practices I applied were working. Am I the only one applying its teachings? The course had a lot of participants. They all came from different settings, but they had similarities. They all came with very good leadership and business management experience.* (p. 16)

The analysis also shows that formal leadership training/education programmes helped the participants reinforce their core values.

**Participant 10:** *I am incurably romantic. The good guys are going to win, blah, blah, blah. What they were talking about was ethical leadership, inspiring leadership. […] I am a sucker for that kind of stuff.* (p. 27)

**Participant 18:** *I think for these programmes, especially those at that level, the point was not to learn new tricks. It was just to push something that might have been embedded with a lot of other competing*

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*values and qualities within you and made it more transparent. And for myself, the point was the clarity of thought about this human approach to leadership. I have always known that. But do I pay particular attention to it? Do I remind myself of it? I would say that the courses confirm it and make it clearer. It is not brand new.* (p. 14)

More significantly, formal training/education enabled the participants to enhance their self-confidence by benchmarking themselves against other participants.

**Participant 6:** *I can't remember how or which things were taught on the course, but I recollect that when I compared the superintendents with me at the time, I felt that I wasn't in any way inferior to them in terms of ability, in terms of the way we were doing things. So I could see that we were almost equal, if not better. That again boosted my confidence – at least I am not that worse off. Again, that had a more lasting impression than what I actually learned from the course. I am sure I learned something. It was years ago.* (p. 34)

The participants' benchmarking involved comparing themselves with not only fellow police leaders, but also other participants from different backgrounds.

**Participant 14:** *Once you compare yourself with your counterparts [in the course] – your equal counterparts in the rest of civil service – you'll know right away that you are way above them in terms of theory and practice. Apart from networking, I gained a lot of confidence in myself. We were natural leaders. Don't forget we are natural leaders. We are good speakers.* (p. 17)

Furthermore, benchmarking themselves against other course participants paradoxically helped the participants become more humble.

**Participant 3:** *You learned not just from the courses but more*

*importantly from the people, because you learned to recognise differences and to realise that there was so much wisdom out there. […] When you are humble, you look to yourself as being inadequate. You look at the inadequacies of your organisation. That is the driving force for you to do better. If you are proud and think 'I am the best', what's there to improve?* (p. 46)

**Participant 12:** *I think I have learned to understand that there are lots of things we need to learn. […] Secondly, it helped me to understand that there are a lot of theories out there. They will work if they fit into the proper environment. They are not one-size-fits-all solutions. It all depends on the type of people you are dealing with and the timing of the circumstances you are in.* (p. 18)

Benchmarking themselves against other course participants allowed the participants to become more confident at working in collaboration with other stakeholders as equal partners.

**Participant 10:** *It was this thing about going to deal with LegCo (legislative council) and things like that. They don't frighten me because I have seen a bunch of people. […] I have seen these people in [training programmes], these businessmen and things like that. I know I might be a police officer. But I am just as bright as you are, if not brighter.* (p. 23)

In summary, considering that the participants' participation in formal training/education programmes allowed them to conceptualise their past experiences, validate their current practices, reinforce their core values and enhance both their self-confidence and self-image, their leadership experience was very much consolidated as a result.

*5.3.3.2 Enhancement of strategic thinking capability*

The analysis shows that the participants broadened their minds by exposing themselves to the different perspectives and new ideas shared in formal training/education courses.

> **Participant 5:** *I think it is a mind-broadening exercise. The chances of getting together with other government officials in those days were rare, especially when you were staying with them for so long. […] I think it was good exposure. It wasn't just what you learned from the course. It was the things that you saw.* (pp. 12-13)

> **Participant 18:** *Learning is not just learning from the course instructor. One also learns by observing what is happening to other people in the class, reflecting on what they think, what they see, what their points of view are, why they think the way they do, why I think the way I do. […] If I learned only from my own work experiences, then my mind would be focused only on work.* (pp. 18-19)

In addition to broadening their minds, formal education/training programmes helped the participants enhance their political sensitivity.

> **Participant 1:** *It was very good in terms of developing me as a person with critical analytical power to deal with uncertainty, ambiguity, that type of thing. At that time, they were really preparing us for the transition from British rule to mainland rule, so that helped me build up my confidence in the future of the Force under the new regime.* (p. 18)

> **Participant 4:** *It talked about power distribution and struggles if not competition, so in that sense we learned about the balance of power in a world setting. In an organisational setting, the concept is the same. […] As long as we know how to balance the power and interests, then theoretically and practically we can maintain a harmonious setting within the organisation.* (pp. 32-33)

Moreover, the analysis shows that the participants picked up useful ideas from both course instructors and other participants, which helped to mentally prepare them for possible challenges.

> **Participant 8:** *All of these courses have a hidden benefit. To start, you rub shoulders with your counterparts elsewhere, be they police officers or private sector CEOs or senior civil servants. So you learn from them. You learn from their bitter experience. If you are smart enough, you will know that what happened in their countries is coming to this place called Hong Kong.* (pp. 21-22)

> **Participant 15:** *I still remember one of [the cases we studied] was about what you should do when you become a CEO. Their advice was to identify a theme or a single goal – not too ambitious – so that you could get yourself settled down as soon as possible and let your subordinates identify with the goal. [...] When he arrived as a CEO, this gentleman identified safety. [...] To identify safety as a goal, he got the full support of the whole company.* (p. 15)

Those participants who attended business programmes also benefited from their exposure to business thinking and became more willing to change as a result.

> **Participant 5:** *I noticed that in the business world people are really quick in their thinking because their environment changes so quickly. Their minds really work quicker, and they look at things from a different angle. We are now working more as senior managers than as police commanders. [...] Change is natural. Regardless of whether you like it, this is what people from the outside expect. There is no point talking about 'the good old days'.* (p .24 and 37)

> **Participant 6:** *Before I always thought like a policeman. I didn't think as broadly as business people. So my lasting impression of [this business course] was that first you have to change, because that is the*

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*number one thing, you know, adapting to the change. If you do not change with the circumstances, others will quickly overtake you in the business world. Either you are acquired by other people, or you cannot progress and you reach a stalemate. So adapting to change and watching out for what needs to be changed – these were the lessons learned. My lasting impression is that you cannot stand still. You cannot sit still.* (p. 38)

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, evidence shows that the participants picked up generic analytical tools such as PESTEL (i.e., political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal) and SWOT (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses, the McKinsey 7S (i.e., structure, systems, style, staff, skills, strategy and shared values) framework, scenario planning and critical path analysis from their formal training/education programmes. They found these tools useful when it came to discharging their strategic leadership responsibilities.

**Participant 9:** *Given the experience, I could sit down and think about the world scenario; the things we had; and the weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Having done the analysis, I mapped out a plan to achieve what we were given. In a way, the course was useful because […] it gave me a rather concrete tool that I could work with when making strategic decisions.* (p. 40)

**Participant 10:** *Now experience has told me, 'If you think you got doubts, you say those who numb your feet, that's SWOT analysis'. It's never going to let you down. It may not give you the answer, but it's a new situation reverting to the default thing. […] So you have the basis of the system, which is what they teach us. You build on that with your experience.* (p. 24)

In a nutshell, it can be argued that the participants' strategic thinking capability was enhanced by their broadened minds, enhanced political sensitivity, new

perspectives, greater willingness to change and additional analytical tools acquired through their participation in formal training/education programmes.

*5.3.3.3 Reflection on learning as a course participant*

As Westley and Mintzberg (1989) note, '[O]ne of the most difficult transitions in a managerial career is the accent from functional or project roles to general management responsibilities' (p. 25).   The apex level of an organisation represents a very distinct stratum that addresses issues of a very different nature compared with those at the lower levels.   Working competently at the apex level as a leader requires not only a different set of skills, but also a new type of self-perception/recognition as a strategic leader.   This means that in addition to undergoing successful double-loop learning (Argyris, 1982) to enlarge their previous behavioural repertoire and interpretative system, leaders must successfully undergo triple-loop/transformational learning to acquire a new self-identity (Brown and Posner, 2001; Clark, 1993; Ladyshewsky, 2007; Mezirow, 1994).   Although this may sound too difficult to achieve, the analysis shows that some of the participants did so through their participation in formal leadership training/education programmes.

> **Participant 17:** *The most important thing I learned [from this course] is that I had a position in this organisation because I deserved to be here, not because I'd played a good game or shone somebody's shoes, or by fluke or luck.   I say this because I've gone to [this] course, which is not just law enforcement.   It is an international course that attracts people at the CEO level.   I was with a group of my peers from other organisations.   I found that I was at least on the same level as them.   That gave me confidence.   'Hey, I deserve to be at this level because these people are my peers'.   We share similar experiences.   We can speak at the same level.   We can collaborate to get the job done.   I don't feel like I am an inferior partner.   I believe I am a contributor.   I*

*thought about it long and hard when I came back.*   (p. 40)

With this newly acquired self-perception, the same participant found himself more confident in making difficult leadership decisions.

**Participant 17:** *Going on that course, I came back with renewed confidence that I was actually where I should be in the organisation.   If I have to make a decision on my own – which may be an unpalatable decision to those who work for me – […] I should at least have confidence in my ability to make that decision.   That is an important confidence, and that's what [the course] gave to me.   Basically, I shouldn't be concerned that I am over-promoted or ill equipped for the position in the organisation.   I have been in a group of my peers from diverse backgrounds, and been able to equally collaborate with them as an equal partner.*   (p. 50)

Hence, based on the lived experiences shared by the participants, their participation in formal training/education programmes contributed to their leadership development in three important ways: the single-loop learning involved in picking up useful ideas, the double-loop learning involved in broadening their minds, and perhaps most importantly the triple-loop/transformational learning involved in acquiring a new self-perception as strategic leaders.   Although single- and double-loop learning may be achieved through other means such as self-learning and on-the-job learning, it is evident from the participants' lived experiences that triple-loop/transformational learning, which requires critical self-reflection to attain, can be facilitated by the group setting provided by classroom-based training/education programmes.   These programmes allowed the participants to benchmark themselves against top peer leaders from different sectors.

Another finding of note is that the learning processes triggered in formal leadership training/education programmes do not cease when the learner leaves the classroom.

**Participant 16:** *If you ask me whether I learned something from the overseas programmes, my answer would be 'yes'. But if you ask me whether I learned a lot, I would say, 'I don't think so'. […] I would say that it only enlightened me. With this enlightenment, I still need to come back, hands on, based on what I have encountered overseas, and develop my own leadership style or ability in different areas.* (pp. 13-14)

Evidence shows that this learning process may continue for a long time before the learner eventually realises the true effect of a formal training/education programme.

**Participant 6:** *[In the course] we spent a week or two talking about vision. I wasn't too sure what all of that meant at the time. So I asked the course instructor, 'How can a leader acquire vision? Where does he learn it from?' Unfortunately, […] he gave me an answer that was about 15 to 20 minutes long, went round and round in circles, and did not answer my questions. […] I said [to myself] that there was nothing new in this course, nothing learned from this course. I didn't realise that this course basically sowed a lot of seeds in my mind. And after I got promoted, a lot of things came back to me. Eventually I found out what vision is about: it is more on the strategic management side than on the operational side. At the time I didn't realise it.* (p. 35)

### 5.3.4 Other significant issues relevant to leadership learning

Analysis of the participants' leadership learning experiences reveals two issues. The first relates to the on-going debate over whether leaders are born or trained. The second relates to which learning method is most effective.

*5.3.4.1 Are leaders born or trained?*

As discussed previously, leaders' leadership development can be traced back to their childhood, an observation supported by other leadership researchers such as Amit et al. (2009) and Popper and Mayseless (2007). One important and fundamental question that must be addressed is whether leaders are born as such. Some of the participants believed upon reflection that they were born with the necessary leadership quality.

> **Participant 7:** *I think I was born with it. In many ways I was active. I was a kind of extrovert – not completely extrovert. Parents' influence? I don't know. My farther served in the army and fought in the war.* (p. 43)

> **Participant 9:** *There are two different schools of thought about leadership. I am inclined to subscribe to the thought that some of the leaders are born, innate. I have seen a great number of leaders. They had different styles. For some of the leaders, their mere presence gave you confidence. So I am not too sure. It was probably born with me. I like leading, and I like to see the whole team achieve something.* (p. 36)

The participants had certain personality traits that tended to be stable over the years, notably a positive attitude.

> **Participant 6:** *I really can't tell. It may be personality. I am a positive person rather than a negative person. Maybe my basic personality is that. This is my character, my outlook on life, reinforced by my experience, by the things that I did. But I cannot pinpoint and say when I picked up this positive attitude. Even back in my school days, I didn't give up things so easily. […] I can't recall anything happening*

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*that was so drastic it changed my personality completely.* (pp. 26-27)

**Participant 18:** *My character hasn't changed much fundamentally. I am an outgoing person with a positive way of thinking. I value various people. I haven't changed much, or so my old school friends of 30 years tell me. So I am still like that.* (p. 16)

Bartone et al. (2009) note that a normal personality consists of five dimensions: neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Analysis of their lived experience shows that not all of the five dimensions were innate in the participants. For instance, evidence shows that the participants found both 'agreeableness' and 'conscientiousness' learnable.

**Participant 18:** *What have I changed? I think I am now more considerate. I think of others' perspectives more than before. As a young inspector, aged 20-something, I was more self-centred. I considered things from my perspective first, and probably would not have considered other perspectives, other people's feelings that much. Now I am more into that.* (pp. 16-17)

**Participant 5:** *I think one of the things I learned […] is that what you learn affects what you do. In school, who cares? You won't be able to apply the mathematics in your life. But then as a [police officer], it was obvious to me that if you are not good at your subject, you are stuck. So this is the fundamental change. I still reckon, going back to my school time, that if I had adopted the same attitude it would have been a different story.* (p. 21)

The analysis shows that although the participants' 'extroversion' tended to be stable, it was disguisable.

**Participant 4:** *After working in this organisation for 32 years, my*

> *thinking has changed in the sense that sometimes I can make use of the opportunity to market, either for myself, for the unit or for the Force. That's natural and that should be done. Being too humble, too modest and too reserved would not do the unit, the Force or me any good, especially when we have to lead people and they look at us to blow the trumpet for them. They need those kinds of marketing. Although deep in my heart I am an introvert, at work I am an extrovert. And now I have a double personality. [laughs]* (p. 25)

> **Participant 16:** *I worked very hard. I made sure that I had no gaps at all so that they could not attack my performance. Although I don't like socialising, I would join functions like curry lunches if it was part of my duty commitment. For private dinners, I didn't bother.* (p. 8)

By the same logic, there appears to be no reason why 'openness' cannot be disguised, although this possibility was not discussed in any of the interviews. The only personality dimension that is likely to be innate is 'neuroticism', which psychologists define as a predisposition to experiencing negative affect (Gunthert et al., 1999). Although it is difficult to draw a firm conclusion as to whether this personality trait is innate or acquired based on the limited evidence gathered in this study, all of the participants displayed consistency in this dimension at different life stages according to their recollections. For instance, Participant 1 had consistently displayed faith in people throughout his different development stages, which could be traced back to his time as a child.

> **Participant 1:** *Experience and maturity increase throughout your career. But your basic values don't change much, so the reasons why I joined the Force are still valid. One thing I particularly enjoy doing is meeting and working with people and having faith in people. And that hasn't changed.* (p. 10)

An opposing example was provided by Daniel (pseudonym), a colleague who several participants mentioned during their interviews in reference to his predisposition to negative affect.

> **Participant 11:** *I think you can have people with certain personalities. No matter how much you try to change the way they think, you're always going to struggle because that's the way they are. I mean, Daniel's problem was that he didn't trust people.* (p. 55)

This may explain why the participants took the view that personality was a key factor blocking an individual's leadership learning. Seen in this light, there is reason to believe that when the following two participants talked about personality, they might have been referring only to certain dimensions of personality and probably neuroticism.

> **Participant 11:** *A lot of it is personality. […] There are certain people who can be taught to lead. There are certain people who naturally have the basic skills necessary to be able to lead. And there are other people you can teach until you're blue in the face and they will never be able to lead. […] Some people find it very easy. They don't find being in a command situation difficult. Others do.* (p. 44)

> **Participant 17:** *The long-term vision and strategic leadership are more reliant on things inside you, not tricks, you know. So those things are difficult to teach. I don't think necessarily you can teach. I am not sure.* (p. 47)

Nevertheless, all of the participants agreed that even those individuals with the 'right' personality required development before they could become competent leaders.

**Participant 6:** *I think whether you are a strategic leader or a tactical leader or whatever, you have to be developed. Maybe some are better because of their personality. Because of their experience, they find it easier to adapt or develop more quickly. But no matter what, you still have to learn from experience. […] It still takes time for experience to develop, to accumulate. As I said, the transition of a tactical leader into strategic leader varies from person to person based on your job opportunities, your life experience, all of these things. You can say training; you can say development. But I think, yes, there may be one or two persons who are born leaders. They came out as a young boy and made it all the way through. But they are exceptions. Talking about the general population, no matter what, you still need development and that takes time.* (p. 50)

Drucker (2004) echoes this observation:

*All [effective executives] have in common is that they get the right things done. Some are born effective. But the demand is much too great to be satisfied by extraordinary talent. Effectiveness is a discipline. And, like every discipline, effectiveness can be learned and must be learned.* (p. 63)

*5.4.3.2 Which learning method is most effective?*

In addition to the debate over the question of whether leaders are born, one debate of particular relevance to leadership development involves which learning method is most effective. For example, Charan (2005) suggests that 'true development happens on the job, not in a classroom' (p. 75). This suggestion is echoed by Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004), who remark that 'development today means providing people opportunities to learn from their work rather than taking them away from their work to learn' (p. 27).

Although the empirical evidence gathered in this study strongly disputes such

assertions, the participants underscored the importance of work-based experience, the lack of which, in their view, would have made formal training/education meaningless.

> **Participant 6:** *We send SSPs or CSPs [to strategic command courses] because these two ranks will actually go farther up, and those would be the appropriate ranks. But if you ask, 'How about sending an inspector?' Probably not, because the experience, the skill, the exposure required would be way beyond his ability at the time.* (pp. 13-14)

Judging from the participants' lived experience, it is clear that leadership development is a complex learning process that involves the notion of social learning. The very many different sources of learning can each have a noticeable effect, both singly and jointly, on the learning outcome. Figure 1 is a synoptic diagram that illustrates how the contributing elements of this process are integrated together. Hence, it is fair to say that the debate over which learning method is most effective is unnecessary. Indeed, as Brown and Posner (2001) note, '[P]eople who use a variety of learning tactics will be best able to learn from their experiences and will consequently be more effective in the workplace' (p. 275). Kouzes and Posner (1995) reinforce their comment and observe that formal education/training, trial and error, and observation are the three most important sources of learning to leaders.

Figure 1 - An integrated model of social learning of strategic leadership
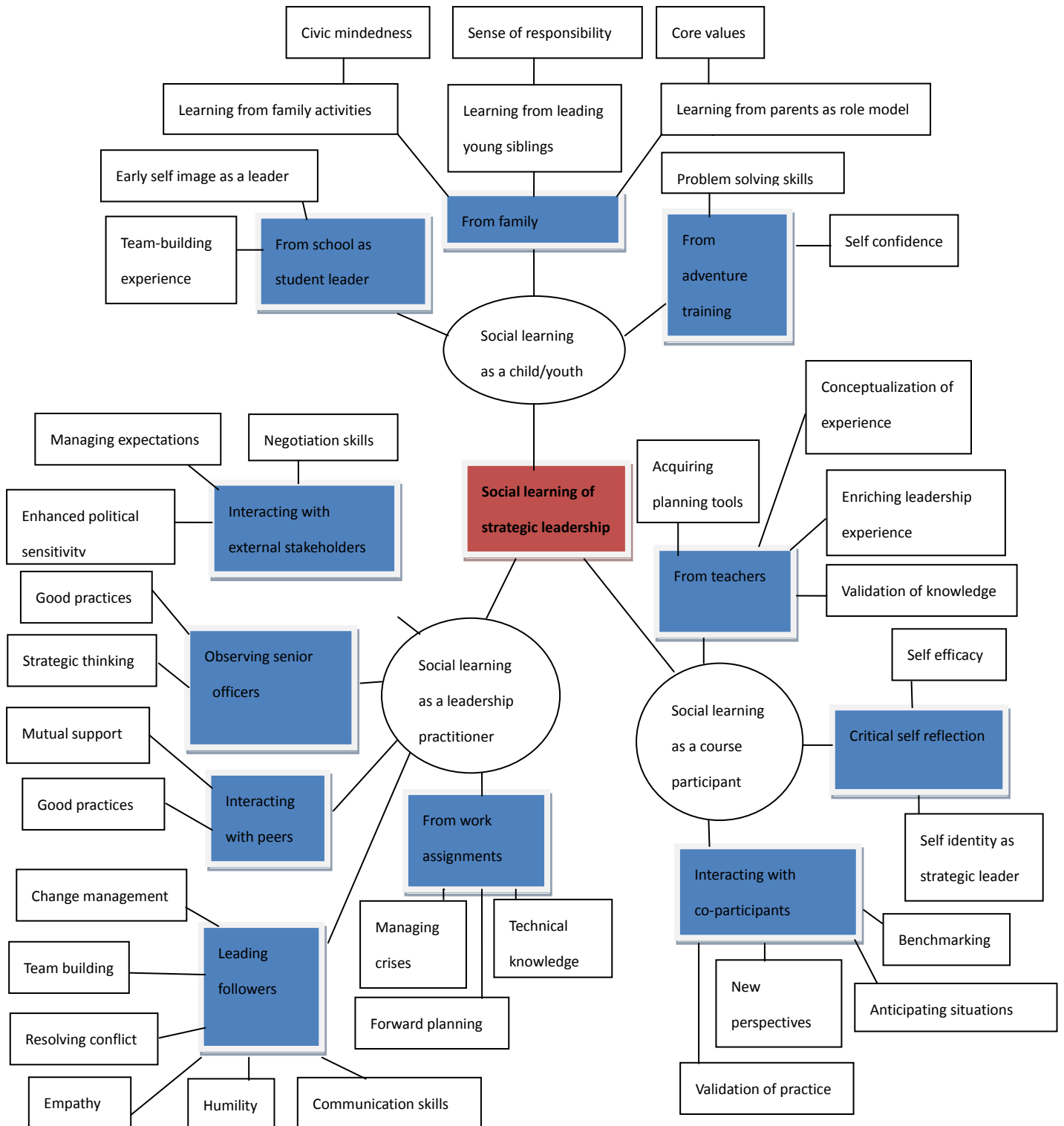
**5.4 Summary**

This chapter details the data analysis results. Analysing the participants' leadership experience produces a deeper understanding of the notion of strategic leadership, including its major properties and their practical meaning. Furthermore, analysing the participants' leadership development processes clarifies the many sources of leadership learning and their interactive relationships. Armed with this deeper understanding of the notion of strategic leadership and a clearer idea of its development, I seek to answer the research questions in the next chapter.

# Chapter 6
# Findings and Discussion

## 6.1  Introduction

This chapter reports the study's findings, i.e., the answers to the research questions set out in Section 4.2, and discusses their practical and theoretical implications.   Bearing in mind that the research questions were not put directly to the participants, the answers provided in this chapter can only be considered as 'analytic constructions' jointly produced by the participants and me through a process of abstraction and systematisation (Bogner and Menz, 2009, p. 53).   The participants selected details of their learning experiences from their streams of consciousness to clarify their leadership development processes (Seidman, 1998).   I selected details of their shared learning experiences from the interview transcripts, which consisted of 253,687 words, to clarify those processes to readers.   As Charmaz (2009) argues, the findings presented in this chapter should more appropriately be considered as views rather than hard facts.

The research questions are recapped as follows.

- What is the role of a strategic leader on the Force?   In what significant ways is this leadership role different from those at lower levels?

- What kind of knowledge and skills are required of senior police officers?   From where did the senior police commanders acquire these knowledge and skills?

- What kinds of knowledge/skills have the senior commanders acquired through classroom-based training/development programmes?

- What meanings have they ascribed to their learning experiences in the

classroom-based leadership training/development programmes?

● What factors have facilitated/hindered their acquisition of the necessary knowledge/skills from the classroom-based training/development programmes?

**6.2 Findings**

6.2.1 What is the role of a strategic leader on the Force?

This study shows that, as strategic leaders, the participants had two primary roles: leader and strategist. In their role as leader, their task was to lead other members of the Force to achieve organisational goals. In this connection, they were required to be technically knowledgeable and visionary and able to influence their followers through communication (see Sections 5.2.1.2, 5.2.1.5 and 5.2.1.6). The following example explains the challenges associated with this leadership role. In this example, the Force had to prepare itself for the imminent enactment of a piece of new legislation that would have far-reaching ramifications on its operational effectiveness.

> **Participant 1:** *In many ways it was challenging. First, there was the timing of the project. We were working on a really tight schedule. The effect of the legislation on the operational effectiveness of the Force was far-reaching. It involved the protection of human rights issues, which were really dynamic and quite new to the Hong Kong Police at the time when we were doing the exercise. [Second], there was the volume of research work. We had to commit ourselves because there was a lot of overseas experience and literature you had to go into. [Third], there was the complexity of the procedure that we had to work out and the political difficulties. It affected not only the police force, but also a few other discipline services [that] had their own operational modes, objectives and ambitions they wanted to achieve through different means. And then you got this Security Bureau involvement, the DOJ (Department of Justice) involvement. In the legislation it was proposed that we*

*should set up an oversight body, a judicial oversight body – that meant you got to involve the judiciary as well. You would need to brief officers on the interim measure and also on the final outcome, because once the legislation came into effect, the whole [new] regime needed to be in place, all the procedures had to be there, and all of the people had to change to the new regime overnight. A lot of briefing packages and briefing sessions [were required] to ensure it would be complied with.* (pp. 5-6)

The participants' lived experience informed them that being modest, empathic and positive in their thinking contributed positively to their effective performance in this leadership role (see Sections 5.2.1.1, 5.2.1.3 and 5.2.1.4). These findings are in line with many current leadership theories including transformational/charismatic leadership, authentic leadership and servant theories that emphasise the interactive relationship between leaders and followers (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Gardner et al., 2005; Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009).

In their second role as strategist, the participants determined the direction of the Force in terms of its strategic issues. In this connection, they needed to be politically sensitive, think creatively and plan over the long term to help the organisation grow from strength to strength (see Sections 5.2.2.1, 5.2.2.2 and 5.2.2.3). Participant 8 explained how directions were set in practice using the Force's relationship with the Public Security Bureau (PSB) in mainland China as an example.

**Participant 8:** *I have one very simple example: the Force's relationship with the PSB on the mainland. What is the direction? We are now one country, although we operate under two systems. The direction is clear. For the Force, it is to keep Hong Kong safe. Of course, the mainland PSB is responsible for law and order on the mainland. So it's very clear that the two organisations must work together. Nobody would dispute*

*that. Our relationship with the mainland PSB involves working together to ensure the stability and safety of society and the people. When it comes to strategies, there can be many strategies. One of the strategies I worked out was to improve our training with the mainland in terms of making them learn from us and vice versa. So the strategy was to exchange in training with the mainland PSB. That was our strategy. And the tactics [were to] organise various courses, train the mainland trainers, and eventually encourage the mainland PSB people to train their own counterparts. According to our relationship with the mainland, we must work together for the goodness of the country. One of the strategies to achieve that direction was exchange in training. The tactic was to arrange courses. Tactics can be changed from time to time. Strategies must be reviewed from time to time. Directions should be set clearly. Unless there is a major change in circumstances, the direction should be consistent.* (pp. 14-15)

In general, the participants' combined role as strategic leader (i.e., leader and strategist) is in line with the strategic leadership literature, which emphasises leading an organisation rather than leading within the organisation (Beatty and Quinn, 2002; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000). Their lived experience is compatible with the findings of other research studies of strategic leadership that emphasise that determining a strategic direction is an important part of the role of strategic leader (Hagen et al., 1998; Hitt et al., 1998) and that 'long-term vision' and 'strategic changes' comprise the essence of the concept of strategic leadership (Covin and Slevin, 2002; Hagen et al., 1998; Ireland and Hitt, 1999; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009; Mintzberg, 1994; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009).

6.2.2 In what significant ways is this leadership role different from those at lower levels?

Participant 6 observed the following about the difference between the participants' leadership role and those at the lower levels. It summarises the views

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of the other participants.

> **Participant 6:** *I think the higher you go, the more issues you should get involved. Your decision may gradually become more strategic in a way. […] As a young inspector, your duty is obviously more on the frontline dealing with operational matters. Then, as a CRO, you are farther away from that. You deal with more personnel issues, you deal with more resource issues, and all of this. So it is a kind of migration from more technical and tactical aspects to more strategic aspects. […] It's just because of your responsibility, because of your rank, because of the issues. You have to lean more on the strategic side than tactical side. […] But you still have your tactical issues to deal with on a day-to-day basis. You know there are immediate problems that you have to resolve.*
> (pp. 12-13)

Compared with operational commanders at lower levels, the participants' strategic leadership role provided them with more opportunities to deal directly with external stakeholders who might have had different political agendas (see Section 5.2.2.1), longer time frames to plan and implement their strategies (see Section 5.2.2.2) and greater discretionary powers due to the less-knowable playing field boundaries (see Section 5.2.2.3). These findings are compatible with those of other strategic leadership researchers. Compared with functional leadership, strategic leadership focuses more on anticipating and initiating long-term changes (Beatty and Quinn, 2002; Farjoun, 2010; Guillot, 2005), and strategic leaders must face a more volatile and virtual operating environment (Ayoko and Hartel, 2006; Boal and Hooiberg, 2000; Brown and Posner, 2001; Eisenhardt, 1989; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009; Mostovicz et al., 2009; Self and Schraeder, 2009).

6.2.3 What kinds of knowledge and skills are required of senior police commanders

performing the role of strategic leader in the Force?

In terms of their first role as leader, the participants saw no major differences between the skillset required for leading at their levels and those required for lower levels.

> **Participant 8:** *Let me make it very clear: the leadership principle has remained the same for a thousand years. Changes in circumstances, environment and lifestyle do not change the leadership principle. A leader must be seen to be leading. That's why he or she is called a leader. No one can lead from the back. This is the principle. If you want to be a good leader, not only your followers but also other people must accept you as the leader. That is the principle. Whatever management terms you give to this principle, it remains the same.* (pp. 13-14)

The participants' lived experience echoes the observation of earlier strategic leadership researchers, i.e., that individuals who lack the necessary leadership skills are unlikely to reach the strategic apex of their organisation (e.g., Lewis and Jacobs, 1992). In the current case, each participant needed to earn no fewer than six promotions in highly competitive exercises by demonstrating their leadership skills before they could become members of the CRO cadre.

As to the second role of strategist, the participants' lived experience informed them that political sensitivity (Section 5.2.2.1), long-term planning skills (Section 5.2.2.2) and creative thinking capability (Section 5.2.2.3) were required for effective leadership performance. These findings and those of other studies contribute to an understanding that helps identify the learning needs of a leader transitioning from an operational leadership role to a strategic one.

6.2.4 From where did the senior police commanders acquire these knowledge and skills?

As to the participants' role as leader, this study shows that the participants learned the necessary knowledge and skills from a wide range of different sources including school and family (see Section 5.3.1), colleagues (senior officers, peers and subordinates), job assignments, self-studies (see Section 5.3.2) and formal training/education programmes (see Section 5.3.3). Half of the participants traced their leadership learning processes back to their childhoods. These findings are compatible with those of Kouzes and Posner (1995), who in their analysis of thousands of case studies conclude that people learn how to lead from three main sources: trial and error, observation of others and education.

In terms of the skills required for their second role as strategist, a main source of learning for the participants was observing their senior officers at work (see Section 5.3.2.1). According to the participants' lived experience, staff posts, acting-up appointments and secondment to outside agencies that afforded them opportunities to expose themselves to wider issues assisted their learning remarkably (see Section 5.3.2.4). These findings are in line with studies by Charan (2005) and Hernez-Broome and Huges (2004), who emphasise the importance of learning from the job. Moreover, the participants' strategic thinking capability benefited immensely from their participation in formal classroom-based training/education programmes (see Section 5.3.3).

Looking back at the process he undertook to become a leader, one of the participants coined the term 'precarious learning' to summarise his learning experience (Participant 10, p. 19).

> **Participant 10:** *The thing you mentioned about learning… The thing I do believe is the precarious stuff. […] You don't have to be aware of the learning experience to have that [moment where you say], 'Oh! That was good. How did he do it?'* (p. 41)

'Precarious learning' may also be used to describe the learning experiences of others participants.

> **Participant 8:** *My interpretation of training is not just formal training programmes, training courses or being sent overseas or elsewhere. Training comes with a person as a lifelong commitment. Training is associated with learning. You can learn even when you sit in your own room without going out.* (p. 33)

### 6.2.5 What kinds of knowledge/skills have the senior commanders acquired through classroom-based training/development programmes?

The analysis shows that formal training/development programmes helped the participants at all three levels of learning: the single-loop learning involved in acquiring new knowledge (Argyris, 1982), the double-loop learning involved in broadening one's breadth of thinking (Argyris, 1982) and the triple-loop/transformational learning involved in acquiring a new self-identity (Brown and Posner, 2001; Ladyshewsky, 2007), resulting in a consolidation of leadership experience and the enhancement of one's strategic thinking capability (see Sections 5.3.3.1 and 5.3.3.2). More specifically, the participants acquired environment- (e.g., political landscape, concerns of other stakeholders), self- (e.g., self-reflection, self-perception), task- (e.g., needs for change, how to balance power) and tool-related (e.g., SWOT analysis, scenario planning) knowledge from the formal training/development programmes. The participant who coined the term 'precarious

learning' likened the knowledge he had acquired from the formal training/education programmes to a car.

> **Participant 10:** *The way I would describe it is that the [formal leadership training/development programmes] gave me a nice car, a good car with a great engine, good control and things like that. [Work experience] is the sort of fuel you put in the car.* (p. 26)

The types of knowledge the participants acquired from the training/education programmes depended not only on the design of the programmes but also on the participants' learning needs at different stages of their leadership development processes. There is reason to believe that the Force has successfully married the two, as reflected in the following comments from different participants, which clearly demonstrate a logical sequence.

Upon their promotion to the rank of chief inspector, the participants attended an intermediate command course (ICC) that aimed to equip them with more sophisticated people-management concepts.

> **Participant 14:** *ICC was when management theory was first introduced to me. […] Because I was not exposed to management training, it was at that time that I started looking at these issues and started reading up on management issues. So it was an opportunity, you know, for the concept to be introduced to someone who had no idea whatsoever about management.* (p. 16)

> **Participant 16:** *I had a lot of difficulties understanding these concepts: something like […] X type, Y type, something like motivation, definition of motivation, definition of so-called leadership, management, what is a leader, what is a manager, etc. Before attending the ICC, I had no*

*concept, no idea at all about any of these terms, the so-called management terms. I found them totally confusing. So I didn't quite understand, honestly. After the ICC, I still didn't quite understand.* (p. 14)

Subsequent to their promotion to the rank of superintendent, the participants were arranged to attend development courses that aimed to further broaden their minds.

**Participant 3:** *A lot of things they taught were different. I mean, they were new. A lot of the readings that they introduced were things that you had never come across. Were they totally irrelevant? I wouldn't say so. But I guess going to this sort of course is more for personal development than for getting a concept or a principle to apply to your job.* (p. 18)

**Participant 6:** *In the SCC (senior command course) they talked about resource management and vision. […] My expectation at the time was still the typical blackboard teaching. This is the definition. This is what you are supposed to do: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. But this course asked you to think, asked you to reflect, asked you to look at the issues without giving you an answer. […] Only afterwards did I realise that this course affected me a lot, because it taught me how to reflect, how to think by myself.* (p. 36)

When the participants' potential to lead at strategic levels was confirmed, they were arranged to attend courses that aimed at helping them cope with the uncertain future.

**Participant 4:** *It was a world politics course. It was held in a strategic location. It talked about power distribution and struggles if not competition, so in that sense we learned about the balance of power in a world setting. In an organisational setting, the concept is the same. […]*

> *What they try to get is power. Legislative Council, District Council – what they try to get is more power.* (pp. 32-33)

> **Participant 12:** *I picked up a few things: scenario planning, which I realised was very important; strategy formulation and implementation; and how to measure your results. A balanced scorecard was one of the methods proposed. It has been talked about for a long, long time. […] In that course, they helped us focus on how to make use of/apply the balanced scorecard.* (p. 15)

Even by following this logical sequence, successful learning outcomes are not guaranteed, as successful leadership learning largely depends on the attitude and ability of the learner.

> **Participant 4:** *A lot of people who went to business school commented that those things were useless for police officers. Likewise, they would say public policy had nothing to do with us. I would say I don't know about their thinking. I can't really speak for them. But I imagine that they are trying to get some quick fix or some formula that they can use immediately in their work setting, i.e., policing. They want to know how to prevent crime, how to ensure the community is safe. So they want something that is concrete – good practice elsewhere. But learning involves analysing the subject, an issue or a phenomenon. You take the best bit of it – the concept, the theory, the rationale, the reasons behind it. You extract the essence, come up with a formula or theory, and use it in your own setting. So I would say people don't like these courses because they want a quick fix. It is not learning; rather, it is training.* (pp. 34-35)

## 6.2.6 What meanings have they made of their learning experiences in the classroom-based training/development programmes?

As Corbin (2009) rightly points out, each person 'gives meaning to and responds to events in light of his or her own biography or experiences' (p. 39). Although in

general all of the participants commented positively on their overall learning experience in the formal training/education programmes, they had their own views when it came to ascribing meanings. For example, Participant 1, who once oversaw the policy area of personnel and training, ascribed a meaning to his classroom-based learning experience that closely resembled the official training objectives.

**Participant 1:** *For those training courses I attended, I considered them very useful in consolidating me as an effective manager. There were quite a number of skills they taught you, and a number of ways to deal with people in a more effective manner. They also gave you a better insight into how to move forward.* (p. 18)

Participant 5, who had never been involved in personnel planning, looked at the experience from the opposite side and ascribed it a totally different meaning. He saw it as a signal from management about his long-term potential.

**Participant 5:** *The most important thing is that I did not apply for all of these courses. What they thought and what they wanted to shape me into are things that even I myself didn't know. […] When I worked through the ranks, I realised that those really prestigious courses […] were the only ones worth investing in. When you know you don't have a chance of going there, it is a sort of signal, whether you like it or not.* (p. 19)

Participant 6, whom the other participants considered particularly intelligent, believed formal training/education to be meaningful because it covered all three levels of learning, i.e., the single-loop learning involved in acquiring knowledge, the double-loop learning involved in broadening thinking and the triple-loop learning involved in enhancing one's self-image. The participant expressed these meanings in his own language.

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**Participant 6:** *Training courses gave me time to learn new things, think and look at things from other angles; exposed me to other people; gave me benchmarks and all of these things.* (p. 49)

Participant 7, who was proud of his inquisitive mind, saw the formal training/education programmes as opportunities for him to put together different pieces of information he had collected from difference sources to form a clearer picture.

**Participant 7:** *We are inundated with information, and you don't know whether you can trust a particular piece of information or not. You have to confirm it from different sources: the observers, the foreign correspondents, the stories you read in the Economist, in Times, whatever the media – BBC, CNN, you know. Here you have an [...] expert in economy who knows the politics and their upbringing. By listening to him, you can understand why they do things and think that way. It's useful in that respect, because you come to understand that there are many misunderstandings. [...] People still have lots of misconceptions.* (pp. 32-33)

Participant 10, who pointed out the limitations of experience in resolving novel problems, saw the formal training/education programmes as opportunities to allow him to establish benchmark against the rest of the world.

**Participant 10:** *[It] was a good way to benchmark against the rest of the world. [For the overseas command courses], you were benchmarking against police officers. [For the overseas management courses], you were benchmarking against future CEOs.* (p. 21)

Participant 17, who was good at teambuilding, saw the formal training/education

programmes as opportunities to hone his skills in a particular direction.

> **Participant 17:** *I think they provide you with the opportunity to hone your skills in a particular direction. […] If you're trying to use the raw skill on its own, you may not be successful.   Even though a skill may be required, because it is raw, it is not shaped or crafted.   You need to be provided with opportunities and experiences as you go through your career so that you can shape your intervention.   You need to shape your intervention and know how best to shape it so that it will work. […] I think that is what you learn from going to courses and through training and sharing experiences.   (p. 43)*

Participant 18, who articulated herself very well when discussing conceptual issues, took the view that the formal leadership training/education programmes were meaningful because they helped her think.

> **Participant 18:** *Being exposed to the different courses, even though they might not have been directly police related, helped me think.   The good point about attending these various courses was not that they provided great vocational knowledge.   Rather, it was the opportunity for me to think, and for me to see how other people thought.   (p. 18)*

Although the participants assigned positive meanings to their overall learning experiences in the formal training/education programmes, their views were diverse when it came to assigning meanings to specific courses.   For example, the following two participants found certain courses to be superficial and to have little effect on them.

> **Participant 10:** *A lot of lectures and stuff were very interesting and fascinating and good opportunities to drink and stuff like that.   But I don't think they had that much of an effect.   (p. 21)*

**Participant 16:** *All you can learn is something quite superficial. It can only enlighten you. Actually, there's not that much you can learn. Of course, it depends on the way they run the course.* (p. 13)

Other participants found that they learned something from the courses but not from the formal curricula.

**Participant 17:** *They brought together police officers from 39 different countries. […] It was my first real experience of Muslims, some of whom were devoted Muslims, and others not so. They were just like Christians. So the commonalities are there. It was a good experience for me. It was a very valuable experience, but not necessarily for the learning.* (p. 38)

Of course, the participants learned a great deal from some of the classroom-based leadership training/education programmes, such as one attended by Participant 8.

**Participant 8:** *It had nothing to do with the police. It was a course on public administration. […] That actually helped me to broaden my view, understand more about politics, government and public administration. It was also a great opportunity to see organisations outside Hong Kong. We actually went to Europe to see how the European community worked, went out to UK departments to see how they operated. That probably was the best training programme to me.* (p. 24)

Many of the participants found that the meaning of formal training/education was not confined to things they learned in the classroom.

**Participant 16:** *[It was] excellent in the sense of activities, friendship,*

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*etc.   After work we had a lot of activities.   We went swimming.   There was a big indoor swimming pool.   We went swimming, and we had dinner together.   After dinner, we got back to the room and did a bit of homework.   And we had a corner, a drinking corner.   Everybody brought a bottle of wine and drank together – good chats, good time.   (p. 15)*

**Participant 18:** *I remember that one was also a good course in the sense that it got other course members who were also newly promoted chief inspectors together.   We had quite a lot of interactions, sort of talking to each other, seeing how they were doing in terms of their work and their lives, and it was a good networking opportunity.   (p. 16)*

Hence, the participants ascribed different meanings to their learning experiences in the classroom-based formal training/development programmes depending on their own personal circumstances and perspectives. Generalising the meanings they ascribed without losing the critical contextual information is difficult if not impossible.   This echoes Carbin's (2009) argument that people ascribe different meanings and respond differently to the same event based on their own personal circumstances.

6.2.7 What factors have facilitated/hindered their acquisition of the necessary knowledge/skills from the classroom-based leadership training/education programmes?

The participants' lived experience revealed a number of key factors affecting the outcome of the formal leadership training/education programmes, including the diversity of the course members' backgrounds, mode of delivery, venue location and personal experience of the teachers.

*6.2.7.1 Diversity of the course members' backgrounds*

All 18 of the participants highly appreciated the input of other course members who brought different life experiences to the course.   Two examples are provided as follows.

> **Participant 9:** *As I mentioned, they came from different countries and sectors.   Some of them were from the private sector, some from the public sector.   The way they tackled the problems and delivered their ideas was also very useful to me.   Apart from that, in my syndicate there were different people.   We needed to reach consensus on different issues.   In the process, I could appreciate how we sorted out different opinions and reached consensus, such as by working out our end of a course project and determining how to present it and who was going to be responsible for each part of the presentation.   It was a good experience for me.   (p. 39)*

> **Participant 11:** *Listening to other people's ideas and what they thought was probably as important as listening to what the lecturers were saying sometimes.   Spontaneous discussions where you threw the whole lesson plan out of the window and just allowed it flow freely were probably just as informative in many ways as sitting there and listening to the lecturers drone on, telling you about this, that and the other.   (p. 41)*

As Knowles et al. (2011) observe, the learner's experience is the highest valued resource in adult education.   This was echoed by the participants' high appreciation of the input of other course members.   The participants did not find the command courses, in which attendance was confined to police officers, to be as stimulating as those run by business and/or public policy schools.

> **Informant 6:** *What I am saying is that [this business course] gave me a new exposure to a different kind of environment that I had never seen before.   All along, [...] it was all a police environment.   Going to [this course] was a completely brand new experience – different concepts,*

*different thinking, different ways of doing things. I might not have been able to adopt [all of the new concepts], but they were all based on the same principles: 'survival', 'change with society', 'change with the environment', 'things do not stand still', [...] 'you must always look farther ahead into the future'. That may affect the way I deal with things as a CRO.* (pp. 39-40)

**Participant 18:** *If those people you come across were all within the same organisation, and if your discussion was all about police work issues, then your thinking would only be in that arena. [...] If I had just learned from the thinking of fellow police officers, it would have been very difficult to see things from different perspectives.* (pp. 17-18)

*6.2.7.2 Mode of delivery*

In terms of the mode of delivery, all 18 of the participants commented favourably on the case method approach, which required their active participation.

**Participant 1:** *By going through case studies, you learn a lot from the real problems of others. Case studies are based on real case scenarios and you develop very different problem-solving skills. They're good for problem solving.* (p. 18)

**Participant 2:** *I liked [their] case study approach, working through the case studies of doing things. It was the first time I came across the use of case studies, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.* (p. 43)

Participant 17 provided an example to explain how the case method approach left a lasting impression even 16 years later.

**Participant 17:** *There was one lecture that sticks out in my mind. This was a lecture delivered by an American professor, a female professor, on ethics in policing. I can't remember the exact details, but the way in which she described it was that you are a patrol officer new to an area.*

*You just transferred in. [...] You notice [that your colleagues] haven't paid for breakfast [in a friendly restaurant]. What would you do? This was a collective of 39 countries. We got one guy there from Australia who was dealing with corruption. You got the line-to-take coming out: immediately report them to the boss, etc. The lady noticed me obviously having a little bit of consternation at the back there, thinking about what I would really do. What would I do if that happened in the Hong Kong context? She pounced on me and I said, 'To be honest, I don't think there is a clear cut answer. I realise that something needs to be done. It can't just be left alone. But I am not so sure about what I would do immediately. I think I have to think about this'. This started a discussion, you know. [I remember this] because of the dilemma it made me face. It was the kind of dilemma you couldn't find a solution for in a textbook. (pp. 38-40)*

Development theorists argue that to be effective, leadership training/education must reach learners at personal and emotional levels, help trigger critical self-reflection and provide support for meaning making, including the creation of leadership mind-sets (Brown and Posner, 2001). The participants shared these expectations.

**Participant 2:** *My view on any course, lecture, seminar or anything like that is that if it doesn't make you think, review and reconsider some of your ideas, it's a waste of time. It tells you nothing. This course certainly made me re-examine a number of thoughts that I had, the views that I had. (pp. 41-42)*

According to the participants' lived experience, the case study method was not the only teaching method to reach their emotional level. Other forms of teaching that required their active participation, such as learning journey and writing exercises, had a similar effect.

> **Participant 12:** *It also adopted the learning journey approach, in the sense of reflecting on an individual's leadership learning style. […] They actually took us out for a walk, which they called 'a retreat'.   Before the walk they talked about how leaders identified their own leadership styles. And then they asked you to reflect on your leadership style, when you started becoming a leader.   They would ask you, 'Who were the most influential persons that shaped your leadership style?'   That's why I could name them right away when you asked me that question.   I was asking myself that question while I was there.*   (pp. 17-18)

> **Participant 18:** *There was a very good exercise that asked us to write down our own leadership philosophies.   We had to write our own statements about our leadership philosophies. […] In a way, that was good because there were many leadership qualities a person could write about.   But to say this was my personal statement about leadership, I would really have to think through it and have to be able to explain why I chose it. […] This was something I needed to deliberate within myself. So that was a good learning process.   It helped me focus on what I really thought about my personal leadership.   I am quite happy with those sentences I wrote down because they reflect my belief and conviction. They are not something I wrote down for homework.*   (pp. 13-14)

Hence, the participants' lived experience lent support to an observation made by Field as early as 1940:

> *[For adult learning], not only the content of the courses, but the method of teaching also must be changed.   Lectures must be replaced by class exercises in which there is a large share of student participation.   'Let the class do the work' should be adopted as a motto.*   (Quoted in Knowles et. al., 2011, p. 42)

The participants' lived experience also lent support to an observation made by Sadler (1991), who argued some 20 years ago that teaching models grounded on old-fashioned omniscient heroes should be replaced by developing models based 'on

new rationales founded on the idea of the leader as a pathfinder who solves problems in a way that develops and draws on the competence of others' (p. 194). Under this revised approached, as Amit et al. (2009) argue, one should consider maximising the use of an adult student's rich lived experience as a mentor to facilitate the creation of meaningful new knowledge.

*6.2.7.3 Venue location*

The participants' frequent references to overseas training/development programmes but not local ones prompted the researcher to inquire whether the location of the teaching venue was a significant factor that might have affected their learning. Some of their views are presented as follows.

> **Participant 6:** *If this was done in your own environment, you got somebody coming here to tell you something. Rather than you going to a foreign environment trying to learn something from them, this might have affected the mind-set – this is my home turf. You come here and tell me something I may be able to learn from rather than me going to a foreign environment to learn from you. So I think there could be some difference. I am not sure. But at least the environment is completely different. (p. 42)*

> **Participant 7:** *When you were exposed to a foreign environment, you read things in greater detail. […] You didn't know what it was like until you were there, unless you were there. […] So this gave you a first-hand experience in understanding different cultures, albeit only for a short period. […] It was like sending your kid to Oxford. If Oxford had a local school here, it would be different nevertheless. Obviously it would still be run by Oxford professors, but you wouldn't have the same kind of culture at the offsite location. (pp. 33-34)*

The leadership development literature has made little reference to these

circumstances other than by emphasising the importance of providing a supportive learning environment (e.g., Garvin et al., 2008). Future researchers may consider investigating these circumstances, as they may affect not only the decisions of HR executives as to where they should send their employees for leadership learning, but also the teaching institutes' decisions about the need to form partnerships with overseas counterparts to share faculties and students. In fact, the Force has already attempted to capitalise on this potential benefit by forming a partnership with an overseas counterpart.

> **Participant 17:** *We signed the memorandum of understanding recently – this international executive development programme. I see the international executive development programme as a win-win for both sides. Ten superintendents from Hong Kong will join ten superintendents from Canada. They will do the online learning phase for four weeks. They will then go 10 days in Canada for a residential course. They will then do a change project, an online learning project and an action-learning project for six months. Then they will come to Hong Kong for 10 days. [...] I am convinced that the international dimension will add a great deal to the learning of our 10 superintendents.* (p. 31)

### 6.2.7.4 Personal experience of the teacher

This study shows that teachers who are experienced leadership practitioners are in a better position to persuade learners to accept their views than those who are not.

> **Participant 10:** *They got one of the chief constables of those forces to come. He was saying, 'First of all, you have been promoted because you have been a good police officer'. [...] What he is getting at is don't go back and micro-manage. It's Peter's principle: stop doing their job because you feel comfortable doing it. He also said, 'Now, here are the skills you need: the leadership, the command and the PR, blah, blah, blah'. And he said 'numeracy'. Everybody looked at him and half of the [class]*

*didn't know what 'numeracy' meant. He said, 'You are now moving to the league where money and figures [matter]. You may hate it as a police officer, but that's your bread and butter'. And it is very true. (p. 22)*

**Participant 11:** *There was a professor. [...] He told us a story about how he was brought into a shipping company, you know, ships, not logistics. Because the chairman had been away sick, the board had employed this guy without the chairman's knowledge. So he was brought in to look at the company. And when the chairman came back to work, the first thing he did was sack him. So I said, 'After he sacked you – the board thought that they needed your help. He came back and sacked you. What happened to the company?' He said, 'Oh, it went wonderfully, very big company'. And I said, 'You were brought in to help it'. He said, 'Yes, but the thing was that the chairman had been in the shipping business. The family had been in the shipping business since sailing ships. There was nothing that I could teach him about their business'. [He was suggesting that] obtaining an MBA would not allow you to stack up against somebody who really knows that business. (pp. 42-43)*

These two participants' reflections echo Quinn's remarks as quoted in a study by Anding (2005): '[G]reat teaching is not primarily about thinking, behaviour or techniques. It is not about style. It is about something more basic. It is about our being state' (p. 488). Trying to teach experienced leaders new ideas without the personal experience sufficient to locate them in real-life situations may result in outright rejection, as shown in the following narrative.

**Participant 11:** *We had a standard 'U' [seating arrangement]. I was here, and the lecturer was there, and Michael (pseudonym) was looking straight at him. And in the end, Michael said to him, 'What did you do before you become a management lecturer?' And the guy said, 'I used to work for MT'. So every time he came up with a new idea, Michael used to look at him and say, 'Did you do that when you were a manager with MT?' The guy got really, really pissed off with it because we were not*

*going to sit there and just accept that this was the way you did things. Fine, if you think this is the way, you prove to me that it is better than the way I do it. […] You've got to justify it.* (p. 40)

As Brown and Posner (2001) argue, instead of confining the participants' role to that of recipient of didactic input and a pre-set pedagogy, consideration should be given to using experience as both the starting point and content for reflection in training programmes for leaders. Their argument seems to be particularly persuasive when considering that engaging life experience in a critically reflective manner is a necessary condition for transformational learning (Brown and Posner, 2001; Ladyshewsky, 2007; Mezirow, 1994).

## 6.3 Significance and implications of this study

However trustworthy the findings of this study are, they are highly sensitive to context (Trinczek, 2009). Any attempt to extend their application to other settings such as the business sector must be made with caution. Even the assumption that the participants will not change the meanings of their own learning experiences is problematic, as there is no solid, unmovable platform upon which to base our understanding of past experiences (Seidman, 1998). Such an interpretivist/constructivist view of the findings naturally invites questions about the value of the entire exercise.

The significance and implications of this study can be considered from two different perspectives: practical and theoretical.

### 6.3.1 Practical implications

The practical implications can be considered at two different levels: the

individual level (i.e., the perspectives of leadership practitioners and researchers) and the organisational level (i.e., the perspectives of leadership development programme seekers and providers).

### 6.3.1.1 The individual level

At the individual level, the findings of this study are relevant to leadership practitioners who are interested in reaching the apex of their organisations and leadership researchers who are interested in understanding the social circumstances of strategic leadership development.

As Turner and Mavin (2008) note, many leadership theories express a relationship between attributes and outcomes without addressing the emotional process of a leader. Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Popper and Mayseless (2007) also note that little has been said in the leadership literature about the messy individual experience of becoming a leader. This study seeks to narrow the knowledge gap by focusing on participants' leadership learning experiences. It presents the processes they undertook to become leaders in enough detail and sufficient depth to help future strategic leaders achieve a good understanding of their predecessors' inner feelings and struggles. Although it is true that the findings of this interview study should not be generalised to a broader population, they should nevertheless allow future strategic leaders to connect to the participants' leadership development and gain a more sophisticated understanding of the possible issues encountered during the process of becoming a leader. As Denzin (1997) argues, an important characteristic of qualitative studies is that they allow readers to make their own interpretations. In foregrounding the differences and presenting illustrative example narratives, this study invite future strategic leaders to determine for

themselves whether its findings 'strike a resonant chord', as suggested by Atkinson (2001, p. 135).

In terms of the practical implications of this study on individual leadership researchers, although it is true that 'it is never possible, given a coherent set of facts, to arrive by induction at a single, ineluctable theory' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107), this study nevertheless contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of the complicated, multifaceted perspectives of leadership development by allowing other leadership researchers to trace the processes by which its participants became leaders to the respective relevant structures that oriented their actions. As Meuser and Nagel (2009) emphasise, social knowledge is not a fixed intellectual or technical product but a 'process within definite context of production' (p. 30). Research that focuses narrowly on an individual or individuals without acknowledging the complex interplay of the numerous interacting forces in which strategic leadership is embedded has been criticised for failing to adequately reflect reality (Cross et al., 2008; Schneider and Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). This being the case, the high degree of sensitivity of the findings of this study to context can be considered as a crucial advantage that can help leadership researchers appreciate the complex social circumstances involved, albeit within a specific social setting. Moreover, the 'openness' and 'communication' emphasised in this study may help less-experienced leadership researchers plan their studies and make good on their methodological promises (Trinczek, 2009, p. 204)

In the field of leadership research, as Bogner and Menz (2009) note, '[W]hat we encounter in practice is usually a mixture of different conceptualizations oriented towards specific research interests' (p. 48). The many different approaches adopted

in leadership studies are a reflection of this reality. In each of the research settings, the leadership researcher 'implicitly draws upon his or her common sense cultural knowledge – or "stock of knowledge", and creates or structures a truth or interpretation that will work for a practical intellectual purpose' (Johnson, 2001, p. 106). The findings of this study relate to the processes senior police commanders undertake to become strategic leaders are no exception. Although they should by no means be interpreted as the ultimate truth that purists seek to establish, they represent an outcome of one of the qualitative leadership investigations that when put together with others should lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the strategic leadership development process and help future leadership researchers identify areas for further study.

### 6.3.1.2 The organisational level

At the organisational level, the findings of this study have practical value for two types of organisations: those seeking to improve their leadership development programmes and those offering such programmes.

In today's turbulent operating environments, 'learning how to lead is both a personal and organisational imperative' (Brown and Posner, 2001, p. 275). As many organisation theorists have observed, organisational adaptive capacity depends on the ability of top leaders to thrive on the challenge of change and chart a course into uncharted territories (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Brown and Posner, 2001; Leskiw and Singh, 2007; Self and Schraeder, 2009). Such an observation underscores the importance of leadership, strategic change and organisational learning in a rapidly changing environment.

Before organisations can become learning organisations, their top leaders must successfully navigate deep personal change to be able to appreciate their organisational role from a perspective different from that adopted in their positions as functional leaders (Bottger and Barsoux, 2009; Brown and Posner, 2001). However, despite huge investments in training and development, the effort of many organisations to develop their top leaders does not pay off (Bottger and Barsoux, 2009; Ladyshewsky, 2007; Self and Schraeder, 2009). As Ready and Conger (2003) note, leadership development initiatives will continue to produce flawed results until we can successfully identify and address the real issues involved in the process individuals undertake to become leaders.

Although the findings of this study may not be generalised to other leadership situations, the narratives provided by its participants clearly demonstrate that the leader development process is complex and that it is unrealistic to assume that there are quick fixes to the challenge. Even innovative initiatives such as setting up corporate universities cannot be the complete answer (Fulmer, 1997), as successful leadership development requires input and support from not only the training experts but also the entire organisation. Participant 1 explained how the Force attempted to deal with this complex process.

> **Participant 1:** *For those officers we identify as having long-term potential, we use several methods to help them develop themselves. First, we always encourage officers to take up private studies on their own time if they can afford to. We emphasise lifelong learning. And then we have different management development programmes for officers at different stages of development. We also use P Wing (personnel wing) as the centre for our HR planning to move those identified potential officers around and develop their different attributes and skills. As I*

*said, we put them into suitable secondment and training programmes. […] By using different methods to develop officers coupled with suitable encouragement and guidance, we hope we can find the right people to do the right job.   That said, we want to play on a levelled playing field and not exclude anybody from the programme.   Once somebody shows that they have the potential, commitment and willingness to do it, we try to get them into the Force system.*   (pp. 20-21)

The findings of this study, which are supported by illustrative example narratives with enough detail and sufficient depth, can help organisations review and identify the real issues in their own leadership development programmes.

In terms of the practical implications of this study for leadership training/education institutes, the 18 participants had attended a total of 75 formal leadership training/education programmes in different parts of the world, most of which took place in the two decades before and after the change of sovereignty.   The programmes they attended included command courses for senior officers run by internationally reputable law enforcement agencies such as the Australian Federal Police, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, UK police forces and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation; public administration courses provided by top universities such as Harvard, Oxford and UC Berkeley; and senior executive management courses offered by renowned management institutes such as Stanford Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School, Henley and the Royal College of Defence Studies. Hence, their lived experience participating in various leadership development programmes worldwide represents a large reservoir of knowledge that could help clarify the unique role of formal leadership training/education in the leadership development process and provide much-needed feedback to leadership developers/trainers based on their many years of practical post-course leadership

experience.

The findings of this study reaffirm the significance of formal training/education in an individual's leadership development. Based on these findings, leadership developers and trainers may review their current approaches and make use of the participants' experience to enable them to support one another in their learning; develop appropriate teaching strategies to reach the participants at personal and emotional levels to facilitate critical self-reflection; design curricula in such a way that theoretical material is situated in actual practice; provide goal-setting and reflective opportunities to explore the application of theories in context; and combine the two bodies of theories on transformational learning and leadership to make formal training/education more effective at achieving its objectives.

6.3.2 Theoretical implications

Integrating the participants' lived experiences with the leadership literature reveals that there are certain grey areas in the literature, the clarification of which may help develop more effective leadership development theories. For the sake of easy discussion, these grey areas are divided into two categories: those relating to the notion of leadership itself and those relating to leadership development.

*6.3.2.1 Grey areas relating to the notion of leadership*

This study reveals at least three grey areas relating to the notion of leadership that must be explored further before means to develop leadership with confidence can be discussed. These three grey areas are a) the role of ethics in leadership, b) the effect of cultural diversity on leadership practices and outcomes and c) the effect of shared/distributed leadership on organisational performance.

*6.3.2.1a The role of ethics in leadership*

Successive instances of large-scale organisational failure with a global effect in recent decades have drawn the attention of leadership researchers to the role of ethics in leadership (e.g., Derr, 2012; Klenke, 2007).  As such, there are many situations where the line between a sharp business decision and an unethical leadership practice is difficult to draw.  The following is an illustrative example from Participant 10, who considered himself 'incurably romantic' (p. 27).

**Participant 10:** *[In one of the case studies,] they were describing how a British company was taken over by a guy who then did a deal with a bank. The company was second to Marks and Spencer in terms of quality and things like that.  Basically what this guy did was he focused on niches. So he aimed at niches and then he got his suppliers.  He started producing stuff that was as good as Marks and Spencer's, but his was cheaper.  How could he do this?  The reason he could do this was because he had his suppliers by the balls.  He would say [to them], 'This year I'll pay you this much'.  [So he got them working for him.]  But then next year he'd say, 'I'm going to pay 10% less [or] I'll go somewhere else.  I don't care myself'.  'But I have just tooled up my entire factory. I've got 5,000 employees who all have wives, and the children.  They've got...'  '10% less!'  That's how he built up the company.  And then he did this deal with the bank where basically he formed a holding company from the company.  The bank bought out the entire value of the holding company, so he left the company.  And he got that sum of money that he could then use for other things.  And it was so close [to theft].  First of all, it was unethical.  Although there was nothing actually illegal in it, it was so close to... not obtaining property by deception, but it was almost theft.  This was outrageous.  And the guys said, 'Oh, it's a great move'. [I said,] 'What?  No, no!  It's outrageous!  This is not how you should run a company'.  'But he is a great man'.  'No, he is not a great man. He may be a great entrepreneur.  He may be a great businessman, and he may be a very good father, you know, his own father, his own kid, because he is making millions and things like that.  But he is not a great man'.*

(pp. 27-28)

Research has shown that a combination of financial incentives, shareholder expectations and CEO dishonesty can result in catastrophic outcomes for an organisation (Jones and Millar, 2010).   Although some people see these instances as merely a volitional issue rather than a cognitive one, Price (2000) takes the view that this volitional explanation of human immorality is not sufficient to explain ethical failures of leadership: '[S]imply applying the volitional explanation of human immorality to leadership context ignores the fact that leadership brings with it peculiar cognitive challenges that can lead to ethical failure' (p. 177).

Noting today's business and political settings, which pressure leaders to focus on short-term, quantifiable results, an increasing number of leadership theorists have raised concerns about the inadequacy of transformational/charismatic leadership theories in ensuring good organisational outcomes.   For example, Howell and Avolio (1992) argue that charismatic leaders without ethics can do as much harm as good to both an organisation and society.   Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) also argue that leadership not grounded on moral foundations can hardly be considered as truly transformational.

Although the importance of ethics to good leadership has been increasingly recognised, as Brown and Mitchell (2010) point out, there remains much to be learned about ethical leadership, including its antecedents and outcomes.   Not until a better understanding of these factors, the current approach to leadership development may cover only essential but insufficient components of good leadership, resulting in catastrophic rather than prosperous outcomes (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

*6.3.2.1b The effect of cultural diversity*

Participant 11 made the following comments.

> **Participant 11:** *People who are willing to relocate to a place they've never been to – there's something about them as people. That sets them apart from others because most people would never do that. 'What the hell? I've never been there. I don't know what to expect. It's just a total mystery'. So why on earth would you volunteer for it unless you got something out of it? That makes you different from other people.* (p. 31)

The globalisation of marketplaces together with growing opportunities in emerging markets has resulted in organisations expanding internationally with increasingly ethnically diverse workforces (Mazur, 2010; Watson et al., 2002). Consequently, strategic leaders are becoming more and more likely to find themselves working with team members of different nationalities and race/ethnic origins. Given these trends, as Cooper (2013) argues, it is important for leaders to understand how diverse team composition affects team performance.

Research has shown that cultural diversity can affect team performance in three important ways. First, at the individual level, different cultures represent different cognitive and interpretation patterns and taken-for-granted beliefs. As such, cultural diversity within a team can lead to confusion when it comes to interpreting a situation, resulting in cognitive disorientation among individual team members (Cooper, 2013; Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013; Joshi et al., 2002). Second, at the team level, cultural diversity can create more conflicts between team members, as different cultures may favour different decision-making processes, authority distributions and patterns of

integration and control (Mense-Petermann, 2006). For example, as Yang (2006) notes, in places where Confucian doctrine is worshipped, people tend to define human relationships in terms of hierarchies, such as superiors versus subordinates and rulers versus the ruled. Hence, a culturally diverse team may need a longer time to establish a common identity among its members (Watson et al., 2002). Third, at the organisational level, different cultures may demand different decision-making processes and patterns of integration and control. Consequently, internal systems and strategies may need to be redesigned to ensure local responsiveness and global competitiveness (Mense-Petermann, 2006).

Although the number of cultural studies has been growing, as Mense-Petermann (2006) observes, researchers have only lately started paying attention to conflicts within multinational corporations as an important research topic. Given that cultural diversity is a complex and sensitive subject, there is much to be investigated before its full effect on leader behaviour and organisational performance can be understood (Cooper, 2013; Denis et al., 2001; Watson et al., 2002). A leadership development programme grounded in one dominant culture, be it Western or Eastern, is unlikely to meet the learning needs of present-day strategic leaders.

*6.3.2.1c The effect of shared/distributed leadership on organisational performance*

Participant 2 made the following remarks about the strategic challenges the Force is facing.

> **Participant 2:** *I think the Force at the moment is struggling because we are sticking to this structure. We are sticking to this silo structure, which is based on CROs and programme directors. I would say to you that you like to think that a CRO can influence the Force a lot. It's not that easy under the current structure, especially something like my area – service*

> *quality. I told them, 'Look, I'm warning you now. I am going to be*
> *coming into your area. But if we are going to be believers in service*
> *quality, I must commit you to this because it relates to everything we do'.*
> (p. 36)

As Burgoyne and Reynolds (1997) note, leadership development built on humanistic developmental psychology harbours 'too simple [an] idea of the individual self, unable to cope with the dynamics of power in organisations' (p. 330). Boal and Hooijberg (2000) also note that strategic leadership occurs in an environment embedded in ambiguity, complexity and information overload. In these circumstances, strategic leadership not only involves the input of an organisation's titular heads but also the collective effort of the entire organisation. Recognition of this reality has led to an increasing number of leadership researchers expanding the scope of their research from vertical leadership to shared/distributed leadership (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Gronn, 2002; Denis, 2001; Pearce, 2004). In addition to the developmental needs of individual leaders, leadership development has been reinterpreted to address the overall leadership capacity in organisations (e.g., McCallum and O'Connell, 2009).

This widening of the research focus from individual leadership to shared/distributed leadership calls for a focus on at least two areas. First, as some leadership researchers have noted, the appropriate unit of analysis in leadership research must be reconsidered to gain a better understanding of the different patterns or varieties of distributed leadership and their effectiveness (e.g., Gronn, 2002; Hiller et al., 2006). Second, as Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) and Fulford (2013) note, if leadership is defined as not merely what the leader does but rather the result of the interactions of leaders and collaborators, leadership development may need to be reformed to allow professionals to use other professionals to support their learning.

Instead of continuing to ground leadership development in rationality and objectivity, which cause people to interrogate knowledge, attention must be paid to the intuition, feelings and experiences of leadership learners to facilitate collective reflections and transformation (Berings et al., 2008; Ladyshewsky, 2007).  Much research work remains to be done in this area.

### 6.3.2.2 Grey areas related to formal leadership training/education

This study identifies four grey areas related to formal leadership training/education: 'the formal curriculum', 'the hidden curriculum', 'transfer of learning' and 'course evaluation'.

### 6.3.2.2a The formal curriculum

In 1949, Tyler made the following comment:

> *If an education programme is to be planned and if efforts for continued improvement are to be made, it is very necessary to have some conception of the goals that are being aimed at.  These educational objectives become the criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed and tests and examinations are prepared.*   (p. 3)

Strategic leaders have the additional responsibility of determining strategic directions for their organisations and shaping whole systems (Jaques, 1986; Rowold and Laukamp, 2009).  Unlike functional leaders who focus on helping their organisations do well and better, strategic leaders carry the important responsibility of helping their organisations do good (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004).  Seen in this light, it can be argued that one of the key objectives for the formal training/education of future strategic leaders is to equip them with the necessary leadership skills, strategic

thinking capabilities and motivation to put them in a position to lead their organisations to fulfil their expected social roles effectively. Focusing narrowly on how to further advance the interests of their organisations and stockholders is not enough (e.g., Jennings and Zanbergen, 1995; Jones, 1995; McWilliams and Siegel, 2006; Waldman and Siegel, 2008).

Balancing the interests of different groups of stakeholders is a requirement for not only strategic leaders working in the business sector, but also the participants in this study who worked in the public sector.

> **Participant 8:** *Policy at the strategic level actually involves wider areas. You need to consider the views of all of the stakeholders, not just one or two parties. You need to consider politics, the economy, social issues, etc. etc. […] I consider not only the views within my organisation, but also the views from society, the community and the policy bureaux.* (pp. 35-36)

To pursue the social good beyond the immediate interests of an organisation involves the concept of corporate social responsibility (McWilliams and Siegel, 2006), which remains a controversial subject of debate among organisation theorists (Waldman and Siegel, 2008). Some scholars best represented by Levitt (1958) consider the concept dangerous because it mixes up the function of corporation with that of government. However, other scholars believe that because the sustainability of an organisation depends on the sustainability of society, strategic leaders have to consider the needs of the society in which the organisation operates when formulating their long-term strategies (e.g., Jones, 1995).

Whichever side one supports, organisation theorists generally agree that investigation into this important area is still in the embryonic phase (Lindgreen and

Swaen, 2010). As McWilliams and Siegel (2006) note, there are numerous unresolved theoretical and empirical issues related to the strategic implication of corporate social responsibility including its definition, institutional differences across cultures, motivations and implementation strategies. In the absence of a clear conception of course goals, the view that the current formal curricula for management training/education are merely messy compromises of discrete self-contained modules is unsurprising (Hamilton et al., 2001; Ottewill et al., 2005).

*6.5.2.2 The hidden curriculum*

As Gofton and Regehr (2006) note, learners learn to conform to not only the formal rules of the teaching institute but also the informal rules, beliefs and attitudes perpetuated throughout the socialisation process. Hence, in addition to the formal curriculum, which covers knowledge and skills, classroom-based formal training/education involves a 'hidden curriculum' through which teaching institutes can transmit a vast array of norms, beliefs and attitudes to the learner (Gofton and Regehr, 2006; Ottewill et al., 2005; Rowntree, 1981). This observation was echoed by the learning experiences of the participants in this study.

> **Participant 17:** *You've got social discourse. You meet for dinner, meet in the bar in the evening. You are sharing an experience that may be totally unrelated to the material taught on the day. […] You are thrown into the melting pot, so that you share, build the team, etc.* (p. 41)

As Chalkley (2006) comments, the most valuable contribution of higher education to the future 'lies in providing large numbers of graduates with the knowledge, skills and values that enable a business, government and society as a whole to progress towards a more sustainable ways of living and working' (p. 235). This necessarily means that in addition to teaching knowledge and skills, successful

leadership training/education programmes must shape the learner's values, attitudes and behaviour.

The limitations of the formal curriculum are well known among education theorists. As Allan (1996) notes, generalised patterns of behaviour such as critical thinking are difficult to write down as learning objectives in the formal curriculum. In addition to being vague, the specific context and curricular component to which the behaviour applies are difficult to stipulate. Hence, the 'hidden curriculum', although informal, does have a key role to play when it comes to shaping learners' values, attitudes and behaviour. It is therefore important to ensure coherence between the explicit course goals as expressed through the formal curriculum and messages emanating from the hidden curriculum (Ottewill et al., 2005). Unless this is done, the aims of the formal curriculum may be undermined, as exemplified by one participant's observation.

> **Participant 16:** *One thing I feel very sad and disappointed about was that the course instructor was an absolute racist. In the course […], there was also a black guy – I can't remember from which country – just a black guy. The course instructor didn't talk to [him] almost throughout the course – no eye contact, no casual chat. [He was] totally ignored by the course instructor.* (p. 15)

However, despite the important role played by the hidden curriculum, there appears to be insufficient research interest in the subject among management scholars. An exact search of the phrase 'hidden curriculum, management education' through Google Scholar Advanced Search in March 2014 returned only three results. Searches using the phrases 'hidden curriculum, leadership education' and 'hidden curriculum, leadership training' produced zero results in both cases. This is in stark

contrast to the exact search of 'hidden curriculum, medical education', which returned about 32,300 results. As Porter and McKibbin (1988) note, in the area of management education, the formal curriculum is structured lopsidedly on the cognitive domain of learning, i.e., what we know and understand and how we describe, comprehend, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate this knowledge and understanding. The danger of this approach, which emphasises building a technical foundation, is that it may result in the propagation of ideologically inspired amoral theories that free learners from any sense of moral responsibility (Ghoshal, 2005; Waldman and Siegel, 2008). In fact, some have raised concerns that the current approach to leadership education, training and development remains too superficial despite educators' efforts to reformulate the management and organisational practices at which they are targeted (Burgoyne and Reynolds, 1997). Further research work is required before the potential benefit from instituting the two complementary curricula can be realised.

### 6.3.2.2c Transfer of learning

Learning involves different levels of input and can mean different things to different people, e.g., remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating (Athanassiou et al., 2003). Insofar as leadership learning is concerned, as Drucker (2004) observes, 'knowledge is useless to executives until it has been translated into deeds' (p. 60). This is echoed by Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004), who argue that 'the goal of leadership ultimately involves action not knowledge' (p. 27).

Training and development theorists have commonly referred to the process of translating knowledge into deeds as the 'transfer of learning' (e.g., Enos et al., 2003;

Lim and Johnson, 2002).   Baldwin and Ford (1988) argue that for a transfer to occur, learned behaviour must be generalised to the job context and maintained on the job over a period.   However, although a great deal of research work has been done, the degree to which learning from management/leadership education is transferred to the job is believed to be low.   In a survey involving 84 training and development specialists in the US, the learners transferred an estimated average of only 40% of their development effort to the workplace upon finishing their training courses.   This estimated transfer rate rapidly dropped to 25% when the period was extended to 'within six months' and further to only 15% 'after one year' (Newstrom, 1986).   In these circumstances, barriers to transfer have naturally become an area of attention for leadership researchers (e.g., Enos et al., 2003; Lim and Johnson, 2002).

In general, researchers have grouped the key inputs that may influence transfers into three categories: 'trainee characteristics', 'training design' and 'work-environments' (Broad and Newstrom, 1992).   Although their fellow researchers are striving to construct a more comprehensive list under each of these inputs, training and education theorists such as Beach (1999) and Hager and Hodkinson (2009) have raised questions about the appropriateness of using the term 'transfer' as a metaphor to describe the relationship between classroom formal learning and actual practice.   Their main argument is that learning is an on-going process rather than a series of disjointed acquisition events.   A focus on transfer places too much emphasis on the importance of educational knowledge, which is only one of the many contributing factors to actual behaviour.   It is along this line of argument that they propose using other terms such as 'transition' or 'becoming' to replace 'transfer' (Beach, 1999; Hager and Hodkinson, 2009).

Although the views of Beach (1999) and Hager and Hodkinson (2009) may be in the minority within training and development circles, their argument that learning is an on-going process rather than disjointed acquisition events seems to offer a better-fit explanation for the learning experiences of the participants in this study. Many of those participants required a long time to accumulate post-course practical experience until they realised the true meaning of things taught in formal training/education courses.

> **Researcher:** *When did you realise the effect that the SCC had on you? At what rank did you suddenly realise that the experience was very useful?*
>
> **Participant 6:** *I think it was a gradual thing. I think in the first year after coming back I didn't actually click. But after I became a CRO and gradually moved on, there was more and more reflection. And then I realised that vision was basically about a direction.* (p. 37)

> **Participant 10:** *You give people a tool. That's what we were talking about. And then two years later they go and do something, and they use that tool almost unconsciously. And if you think about it, 'Oh, bloody hell! Oh, I learned that [some years ago]. I haven't been able to apply it until now, three years later!'* (p. 26)

The delaying effect in the relationship between formal education and actual leadership behaviour requires further examination. Furthermore, how to measure the 'transfer' rate presents practical problems. As Berings et al. (2008) observe, any newly acquired leadership knowledge through formal training/education is likely to become part of a person's general capacity and is hence difficult to separate from the outcomes of other learning activities. The following reflection provides a good example of this.

**Participant 18:** *From the courses I attended and my encounter with senior officers, the human approach has changed me. The human approach has made me more considerate of the needs of others. […] All of these things complement one another. But if you ask me whether I have changed as a person , I would say I have changed more because I have become a Christian. That is crystal clear. I have changed because I have become a mother. […] So in that way, it is a combination of both my work experience, my better education and my own experience [that moulds my current leadership style].* (p .17)

Given all of these yet-to-be-clarified conceptual issues, there are concerns that the literature offers inadequate insight into the conditions under which a successful 'transfer' of learning can take place (Baldwin and Ford, 1988) and that formal management training/education only passes on 'commodified' and 'decontextualised' information to learners with little application in practice (Hussey and Smith, 2002).

*6.3.2.2d Course evaluation*

As Allan (1996) notes, any discussion of the term 'learning outcomes' is likely to reopen the debate over educational intention concepts and the terminology used to describe them. The different labels used to connote the statements of purpose operating at different levels of specificity have resulted in 'a minefield of terminological confusion' (Allan, 1996, p. 94). Moreover, even where learning outcomes are clearly articulated, it may be difficult for teachers in management/leadership education to assess performance and give credit for achievement in situations such as the following.

**Participant 16:** *It was quite a stressful course to me, stressful in the sense that I was not talking the same language as them. They used the same language among themselves because they talked about business, accounting, making profit, making a difference and marketing. I felt*

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> *quite a lot of pressure during that course. And I thought, 'Oh shit'. I even doubted my ability. When I attended the previous courses, I always felt quite proud when compared with the other police officers. We were in fact quite advanced in many areas. To some extent, I wouldn't say that I looked down on them, but I didn't really admire them. [In this course], I admired them. Wow, their way of thinking was different. In fact, their job nature was far more stressful than ours, because every day they had to count their figures and focused on making a profit. So that was the course. It was very interactive. I didn't have that much input because I wasn't used to talking about business. But I learned from this course. It was the only course that I learned from. The interesting point is that it was not a police course – it was a business course.* (p. 15)

As discussed previously, despite the importance of affect in leadership learning, the extension of cognitive theory to explain and exploit that affect remains in its infancy (Picard et al., 2004). The practical difficulties involved in assessing affect domain outcomes have led to the adoption of student self-assessment as a popular form of course evaluation in higher education, including management studies (Sitzman et al., 2010).

The limitations of student self-assessment as a tool for evaluating learning outcomes are well known among education theorists. Putting aside the yet-to-be clarified delay effect in applying what is learned from formal training/education to actual practice, there is also an overestimation problem (Dunning, 1999). Hence, as Sitzman (2010) notes, self-assessment should only be used as an indicator of how learners feel about a course than as an indicator of how much they are learning from it.

Apart from self-assessments and teacher assessments, evaluations of formal management training/education frequently involve a third group of stakeholders, i.e.,

organisations that sponsor the learners' studies. This third group of evaluators usually make their assessments based on the observable behavioural changes a learner displays after attending the training courses. Although this form of assessment has its value, one must not lose sight of the grim reality that growing competition has forced corporations to emphasise short-term targets that may or may not be compatible with the teaching objectives of classroom formal leadership training/education. During a leadership-development audit, the CEO of a Fortune 50 company made the harsh comment that 'we spent $120 million a year on this stuff, and if it all went away tomorrow, it wouldn't matter one bit' (quoted in a study by Ready and Conger [2003, pp. 85-86]). This comment clearly indicates an obvious and wide expectation gap between educators and employers. Indeed, the rapid rise of corporate universities since the early 1990s, as observed by Rademakers (2005), can also be interpreted as a sign of growing impatience among employers arising from the failure to get what they want from traditional educational institutes. Much research work must be done before a more reliable assessment system of leadership learning outcomes can be established.

To summarise this section related to the grey areas in the leadership development literature, there remain many unresolved conceptual issues surrounding the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum, the 'transfer' of learning and course evaluations. Until these conceptual issues are clarified, one may have to accept that the current approach to classroom formal leadership training/education remains very much at an experimental stage.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Based on the empirical evidence gathered in this study, strategic leadership development is a complex social learning process, involves both cognitive and

affective domains and is impossible to achieve simply through formal classroom-based training/development programmes. Given the complexities involved, despite the large volume of prior research, there remain important grey areas in the leadership literature. This is particularly true for the role of emotions in the affective process, which requires further clarification before a common conceptual framework can be agreed upon. As Turner and Mavin (2008) note, '[L]eaders are emotional beings who come to know and experience leadership through personal emotional journeys' (p. 381). However, due to the difficulties in measurement, affective processes have either been ignored or glossed over by mainstream leadership researchers in the past, resulting in many leadership constructs 'not adequately recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon' (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p. 321). Fontana (2001) attributes this stalemate to the attempt of mainstream leadership researchers to apply investigation techniques that are intended for studying natural sciences. Fontana (2001) argues that, influenced by purists' epistemological assumption that there is an objective truth, mainstream leadership researchers in the past century have sought to explain the relationship between leadership attributes and outcomes by capturing and analysing precise data that can be categorised, codified and generalised. This approach has not only resulted in the permeation of the language of natural science in the field of leadership studies, but also decontextualised and generalised findings, many of which are 'unhelpful in relevance and application to practising leaders' (Turner and Mavin, 2008, p. 376). As Seidman (1998) notes, social researchers who imitate the natural sciences in their approach ignore the important fact that there are basic differences between the subject of inquiry in natural sciences and those in the social sciences. One obvious difference is that human life and social interaction are far less predictable than a planet, a chemical or a lever. Findings that are statistically significant can mean something completely different

from findings that are meaningful and applicable to an individual case (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

As Boal and Hooijberg (2000) note, ease of data collection is not a substitute for a proper theoretical construction. To explore alternative approaches, the design of the current study deviates from the mainstream leadership research in two significant ways. First, this inquiry focuses on the leadership development process. It seeks to expose the internal emotions, thoughts and feelings that developing leaders experience during that process rather than focus on the end points such as their behaviour, traits and influence styles. Second, by adopting interpretivist/constructionist ontological and epistemological assumptions that acknowledge the presence of multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), this study sets for itself a more modest aim of unveiling the inner theatre of senior police commanders who have acted as strategic leaders on the Force, allowing a better understanding of their unique and changing perspectives in context. By integrating their lived leadership experiences with current leadership theories, this study seeks to 'explore resonance of theory in practice' (Turner and Mavin, 2008, p. 377) rather than test theories. By (re)presenting selective example narratives from their life stories, this study offers readers who are interested in strategic leadership an alternative lens through which to understand the intricate and emotional 'becoming' process, particularly the role of formal classroom-based training/education in that process.

As Brown and Posner (2001) argue, '[W]when we observe a leader at work, what we may really be observing is a learning process' (p. 275). The volatile and virtual operating environment strategic leaders face today means that 'knowledge production is an open-ended process' (Meuser and Nagel, 2009, p. 33). By adopting

a qualitative method, this study helps its participants to reflect critically and make explicit their tacit knowledge in the course of narration (Meuser and Nagel, 2009), clarifying the long and emotional process that has been under-examined by the literature. I believe the results speak for themselves. The insights they provide into the realities of leadership development, albeit within a specific law enforcement context which is largely influenced by a masculine culture, contribute to a 'reservoir of experience to inspire and inform upcoming leaders in the development of their own reservoir of tacit knowledge about leadership' (Janson and McQueen, 2007, p. 647). I am hopeful that additional studies of a similar nature from different perspectives covering both genders in a variety of research settings will help to increase this reservoir of experience and make it big and deep enough to allow other leadership researchers to develop robust theories.

Although it is 'hard and sometimes draining' (Seidman, 1998, p. xxi) to collect, analyse and (re)present the interview data that adds up to 253,687 words, having been illuminated by many unexpected findings, I concur with other experienced qualitative researchers that a narrative approach to life stories offers a powerful opportunity to engage in reflexive learning (e.g., Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Turner and Mavin, 2008). My own perception of the subject of this study changed in many fundamental ways as a result of conducting this research project. The privilege of listening to and analysing the 18 participants' life stories has prompted me to critically review my long-held leadership beliefs and amend my views on qualitative approach as a research tool for investigating social phenomenon. If change is the outcome of learning, this study certainly helped me, as an individual with over 34 years of leadership experience, to gain an even more sophisticated understanding of the complicated and multifaceted perspectives related to strategic leadership

development.

Appendix

**Key phases of the analytical construction process employed in this study**

| Phase | Description of process |
|---|---|
| 1. Familiarising with the data | Immersing in the data by repeatedly reading transcripts line by line and word by word to familiarize with the depth and breadth of content. |
| 2. Generating initial codes | Generating initial codes of different levels of abstraction to explore meanings and their hierarchy.   In the process, noting down interesting features of data. |
| 3. Developing themes | Collating interesting features into potential themes by identifying patterns. Categorizing potential themes with reference to the research questions they related. |
| 4. Reviewing themes | Constant moving back and forth between the data set and potential themes to ensure compatibility.   Combining, refining, or discarding themes along the process as the significance of individual themes became clearer. |
| 5. Developing theme maps and diagrams | Exploring different possibilities to link themes together to answer the research questions through constructing theme maps and diagrams. |
| 6. Production of report | Providing a coherent and logical account of the participants' becoming processes that the interview data tell. |

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