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Choosing To Thrive: Finding Self And Fulfillment Through My Organizational Dynamics Learning Journey

Lisette J. Garza
University of Pennsylvania, garzali@upenn.edu

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Choosing To Thrive: Finding Self And Fulfillment Through My Organizational Dynamics Learning Journey

Abstract

As I sought a better life for myself, making me *first in my family* in many ways, I struggled to navigate the uncharted territories of college and the workplace far away from home. I was racked with guilt, shame, and fear about the *what-ifs,* which held me back from living a more authentic life. Various frameworks from the Organizational Dynamics program and other influential experiences have given me the tools to reposition my thinking more purposefully, and to create a vision for living and to uncover my potential as an instrument of change. I describe the powerful moments that propelled me into wanting to thrive and not just survive. I also share my exploration in learning and identifying with the impostor phenomenon experience.

Comments

CHOOSING TO THRIVE: FINDING SELF AND FULFILLMENT THROUGH MY

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS LEARNING JOURNEY

by

Lisette J. Garza

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,
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CHOOSING TO THRIVE: FINDING SELF AND FULFILLMENT THROUGH MY

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS LEARNING JOURNEY

Approved by:

Charline S. Russo, Ed.D., Advisor

Bruce W. Friedman, MSOD, Reader

ABSTRACT

As I sought a better life for myself, making me *first in my family* in many ways, I struggled to navigate the uncharted territories of college and the workplace far away from home. I was racked with guilt, shame, and fear about the *what-ifs,* which held me back from living a more authentic life. Various frameworks from the Organizational Dynamics program and other influential experiences have given me the tools to reposition my thinking more purposefully, and to create a vision for living and to uncover my potential as an instrument of change. I describe the powerful moments that propelled me into wanting to thrive and not just survive. I also share my exploration in learning and identifying with the impostor phenomenon experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

MY STORY: TO SURVIVE OR THRIVE

I have held strongly to my family values of hard work and self-sacrifice for most of my life. More recently, however, I have come to understand that all along I also have the *desire to thrive*. In grappling with my attachment to merely surviving and the conflicting desire to take more risks and be more authentic, I can see how this *internal dynamic* had led to paralyzing self-doubt and self-sabotage.

I was a voracious reader as a young girl, which planted the seeds of curiosity and knowledge-seeking. Now 36, working and studying at the University of Pennsylvania, 2,000 miles away from home, these seeds have started to give fruit. Through my studies in the Organizational Dynamics (OD) program at Penn and other important experiences, I have come to understand the value of getting to know myself, getting to know others, and in seeking purpose and fulfillment. In constructing my new vision and seeking to uncover my potential, I have been led on a path to finding meaning in my career, my personal life, and my dreams for the future.

My story of origin

My mother bought me a computer when I was 14, a rarity to have in our low-income community of Brownsville, a border town in the southernmost tip of Texas. She hoped that I could learn to type so that someday I could be a secretary and not a migrant field laborer like she had been as a young girl. Later in her life, she had arduous factory jobs, an improvement from her childhood and young adult days in the fields. At 61, the effects of this lifelong work have taken a toll on her health. Bearing witness to her life of manual labor has instilled in me the value of hard work and an appreciation for the

opportunities I have had and will have going forward because of her. I am grateful to my mother and those before her for persevering and seeking a better life for their children.

Like any parent, she wanted more for me, but she was modest in her aspirations. Leaving home, college, and travel, were incomprehensible and nonexistent choices to her. She believed that one *only* had to work hard and survive, and *that was it*, that was enough. Exploring passions and seeking joy went beyond the immediate needs of food and shelter. As a result, I grew up not truly knowing who I was and lacked confidence in embracing interests and hobbies.

I used to look back at the moment in which my mother told me that she had hopes in my being a secretary with a sense of anguish; being a secretary signaled an inevitable gender dynamic of being in a subservient role to a man. Where I grew up that was expected of women, the way things were supposed to be, but working at a desk, indoors also meant that I had *made it*. This was what my mother had envisioned.

The paradox in *making it* and the understanding that my potential would be limited by gender norms did not feel right to me even at a young age. I had a strong role-model in my mother who was a young single-parent of three. She went against *her* family values and traditions when she divorced her first two husbands, due to domestic abuse the first time and unfaithfulness the second. As a single parent of three, she worked hard to save money and to move us into our own home; we had been living in the homes of different relatives for several years. She saved money for a down payment on a small trailer and rented a lot on the outskirts of the city. Humble and simple, but the pride that we had in calling it ours was unshakeable. Now I see how *her* drive to *survive* meant she was first in our family to break the generational cycle of domestic violence and to bravely

challenge the gender norms in her family. I am thankful for this, and now, years later, I see how this has inspired me to pursue a lifelong journey to survive *and thrive.*

A few years later, my mother saved enough money for a down payment on a three-bedroom home in town, improving our quality of life. She did all this on her own, taking help from others only when in dire need. As the oldest, however, *helping* went without asking. I was *handed* the responsibility of being a second parent. This led to not experiencing a normal childhood in which a child feels supported and safe as they start to form their concept of self and explore their strengths and passions. My mother had wanted more for me, but we were limited by our conditions. The lack of resources and the immediacy of need did not provide an opportunity to fathom what *more* could mean in our context.

Being the *second parent* to a younger brother and sister meant that I had to step up, *be in charge* when our mother had to work, there were the early mornings to prep for school, the late nights (when she worked the night shift), the weekends, and the endless summers. Dedicating myself to the care of others starting at the age of nine, led to not knowing how to care for myself and conditioned me to put myself, my thoughts, ideas, and well-being second to others.

Some might say that this type up of upbringing builds character and resilience. For me, however, these qualities did not translate into instant success in adulthood. I lacked the tools, role models, and templates I needed to navigate these new spaces and was often too afraid to ask for help. Having had a computer at 14, however, was a turning point. The computer that once symbolized a small step in creating a better life became my gateway to a vast world of information and freedom.

<u>Why thrive?</u>

For me, thriving means going beyond fulfilling my basic needs, and flourishing by being authentic, expanding my potential, and helping others with my gifts. Abraham Maslow (1954) referred to this state as *self-actualization* in his *Hierarchy of Needs* model. Self-actualization is defined as having a clear sense of who you are and where you are going, and "the ability to enjoy a state of completeness and wholeness in life." Self-actualization is not a destination; transient moments of self-actualization can occur anytime and intermittently. This theory states that self-actualized individuals do not make the distinction between work and play, meaning that both areas are similarly embraced. Being self-actualized increases the "capacity for spontaneity" while being able to express and accept the "inner core of self" (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p.7-8).

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
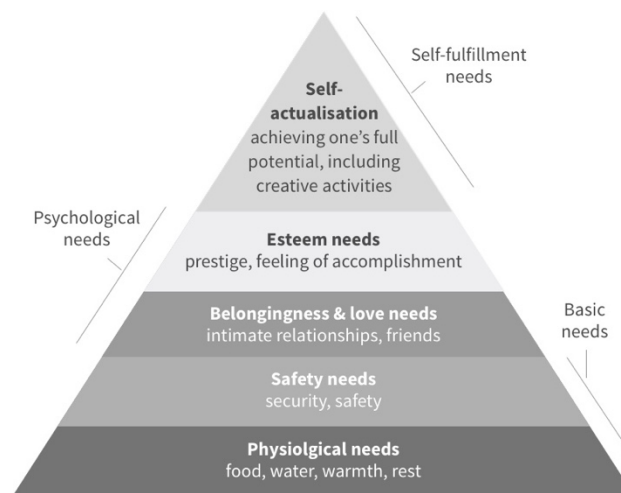
Through my young adulthood up until beginning my journey, I had spent most of my life in the lower parts of the hierarchy in the *basic needs* areas, seeking only to fulfill my *physiological needs* and my *safety needs*. *Belongingness and love needs,* which is a step above *safety needs,* were fleeting experiences I did not know how to embrace and

often felt unsafe as if I was risking losing or failing. I have had several significant experiences in the *esteem needs* level throughout my life. For instance, I have had the experiences of attending college at the University of Texas at Austin, where I studied filmmaking. I received a Fulbright grant to teach English in South Korea for two years, where I remained for five additional years to work and to continue immersing myself in the language and culture. This led to Philadelphia and a job at the University of Pennsylvania.

My time in the upper areas representing *psychological needs* also felt like temporary stints. Although these experiences were life-changing, they did not help me in propelling me to the apex of *self-actualization*. Externally, my experience could be a model of success in overcoming personal obstacles in having come this far. However, internally, I carried with me a heavy sense of self-loathing and low self-esteem. This had previously kept me from fully embracing experiences, such as pursuing an earlier dream in filmmaking, and connecting more authentically with others.

When I moved to Philadelphia six years ago to work at Penn Alumni, I continued to feel out of my depth. By engaging in the OD program and its content, I became aware of these feelings and started to take steps to face these negative thoughts, patterns, and behaviors to seek change,

Tools to survive and a budding desire to thrive

In my role as assistant director of Multicultural Outreach at Penn, I focused on building relationships with alumni of color and LGBTQ alumni to strengthen their affinity to Penn. I managed alumni volunteers for various associations and initiatives by providing leadership development opportunities as they built chapter communities

throughout the United States. I was a strategic partner in helping to develop and execute programs to increase visibility and representation of their communities. Through the OD program, I was able to leverage principles I was learning in the classroom to my work. Learnings on *group development*, *social identity*, *membership*, and *importance of belonging* helped ground my work to be more effective in my role.

My professional experience at Penn ran parallel to my learning in the program and prepared me to take on my current role as director of Penn First Plus Alumni and Penn Career Resources Initiatives. This new purview engages alumni who were first-generation and/or lower income (FGLI) during their time as Penn students, an experience and identity that I also uphold. Responsibilities in this role include building a program from the ground up, defining the criteria for membership, and developing a vision alongside institutional partners, students, and alumni.

Because FGLI initiatives have been identified as top priorities for the university, I work with colleagues across Penn to establish university-wide messaging to strategically plan the growth of the cadre of support for FGLI students and young alumni. My learnings on *change management*, *group identity*, *asking questions*, and *systems thinking* have proven invaluable as I work with other stakeholders on defining the mission and desired outcomes for student and alumni communities.

What I have come to understand now, is that I had always possessed this capacity to achieve and succeed and the OD program helped me bring my strengths and skills to the fore. Despite this, however, I still found myself struggling with my confidence and inner critic, saying that *I was not enough*. No matter how well I had seemed to be doing, I

never felt satisfied or happy. As I earnestly sought change, I recognized the source of this *inner turmoil* as impostor phenomenon, which I will also explore in this capstone.

Foundations of this capstone

This capstone will be a study on my learning trajectory on *the self* and how I begin to carve out a unique path and personal vision specific to my own set of values, strengths, and passions.

Organizational Dynamics was a catalyst in helping me build self-awareness and to explore *purpose* and *meaning-making*. Adjacent to OD and its faculty were other experiences that I will discuss (Figure 2), which helped create a more holistic approach to increasing self-awareness and the potential to thrive.

Figure 2. A Holistic Approach to Thriving (Garza, 2020)
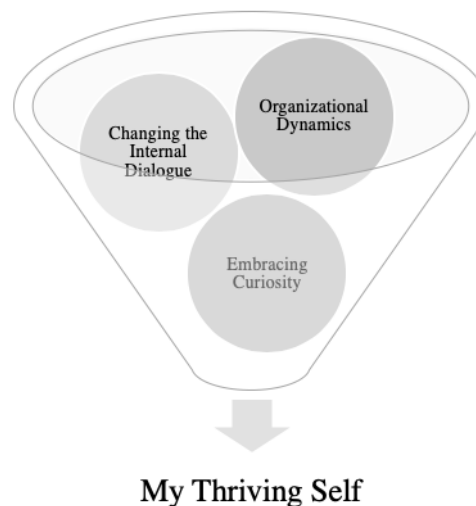
My experience in therapy and learning to reflect with mindfulness has helped me develop the tools I need to change my internal dialogue of *I am not good enough* to *I am enough*. Also, foundational to this journey has been embracing my curiosity on *what thriving means to me*.

Goals of this capstone

In this capstone study, I will describe my process in building self-awareness and discuss key concepts as tools in overcoming impostor thoughts and behaviors. My OD experience has allowed me to unlock my potential to discover my passion for coaching and consulting. My experience in the program has inspired me to pursue a Master of Philosophy in Organizational Dynamics by taking part in the Organizational Consulting and Executive Coaching program to further my training as a coach and consultant.

As I continue my education, I am using the experience of this capstone to take stock of the following powerful lessons.

1. To relate how the course-related dialogue on building self-awareness led me on a path to a better understanding of myself, on which to ground my professional and personal endeavors.

2. To encapsulate the significant learning that inspired me to adapt change model theories based on the act of reflecting, reframing, and being honest with oneself to identify *root causes* for my risk-aversion in making lasting change.

3. To process my findings on impostor phenomenon and pinpoint its impact on my process and sense of self in order to develop a unique framework for working through my impostor thoughts and feelings.

4. To summarize how these experiences and moments have led me to find the authentic parts of *me,* helping me to define my aspirations and strengthening my sense of self.

Structure of this capstone

        Throughout this capstone, I touch and elaborate on important learnings informed by relevant literature on how my thoughts and patterns have impacted me and others. The sequence of this study began with discussing my story of origin in the context of building self-awareness while describing the internal process in my journey to Penn in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I present early speculations on who I am, my personal vision, and my values, alongside essential theories that helped enhanced my self-awareness. Here, I will also provide foundational details on impostor phenomenon (IP) to explain how I identify with this experience. In Chapter 3, I describe how my exploration of seeking myself started to take shape by experimenting with change models and theories. I will take my study of IP to conceptualize my own experience with this phenomenon and to find more opportunities for transformation by presenting three original models on my IP experience. In Chapter 4, I will show how this journey has helped me make meaning of my story and purpose and discuss my approach to *self as an instrument of change* in more detail. I conclude this chapter by providing perspective on the helping field and my personal aspirations as a helper.

CHAPTER 2

DISCOVERING THE SELF

I have described how I grew up in an environment that did not encourage self-expression and self-discovery, but rather working hard, keeping your head down, and being self-sufficient. This mindset was challenged early on in the OD program where I gradually came to realize that successful learning meant taking the time to explore questions about my identity and purpose:

- Who am I?

- What are my strengths?

- What are my blind spots?

- What is my personal vision?

- How can I be more effective in pursuing this vision?

I believed that idea of *finding myself* was frivolous and reserved for others. Reflection and introspection were interruptions to my *survival mode.* I also believed that to build capacity as a leader, one only had to learn the right skills to manage and communicate. I had not conceived that self-awareness could play a role in building a more effective leader. My resistance to entertaining these questions and embracing self-awareness clashed with my constant and urgent need to feel successful and *up to par* with others. I was overcompensating for what I thought were weaknesses in character. I felt ashamed and guilty for not being better, and it was of the utmost importance to keep it all to myself.

As I started to learn about organizational dynamics and human behavior, I became aware of the existing paradoxes between what I was learning and how I was personally

relating to the material. For instance, in learning about effective leadership or group development, I understood concepts and ideas *in theory*, but I did not know how to apply this knowledge to myself. This was a hunch that I did not have a strong enough sense of self to know where and how change can occur. My curiosity about increasing self-knowledge and the potential to more fulfillment has led me on a quest to uncover my self-awareness as a multidimensional process.

Layers of self

For the purpose of this study, I looked into how some scholars and practitioners define self in internal and external contexts. Carl Rogers (1959) describes the *concept of self* as being composed of three parts: *self-worth*, what we think about ourselves; *self-image*, the influence of our body image on inner personality affecting how we think, feel, and behave in the world; and *ideal-self*, consists of our goals and ambition, the person we would like to be, which is everchanging (p. 200). In *On Becoming a Person* (1961), Rogers discusses "the enormous pressures to conform" by surrendering one's individuality "to fit into the group needs," (p.168). Rogers found that many individuals try to please others while they are creating who they are, thus forsaking their true selves. "I find that many individuals have formed themselves by trying to please others," forsaking true self (p. 170). To be their true self, Rogers states, individuals should not wish to mold themselves and their behaviors into a form "that would be merely pleasing others" (p. 171). Roger's theories and approach clarified for me the effects of *outside forces* and pressures (society, workplace, family) places on one's individuality and shape their expectations.

I explored the concepts of *use-of-self* and *self-as-instrument* to enhance my understanding of the outcome in potential and power in knowing myself. In the journal article *Using One's Self as an Instrument for Organizational Diagnosis* (2000), Donald McCormick and Judith White posit self as being "the emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes that make up a person" (p. 50). McCormick and White refer to use-of-self as becoming aware of "emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes" (p. 50).

Self-awareness, according to C.G. Jung (1950, 1953) is recognizing that we contain many minds. "Our actual knowledge of the unconscious shows it to be a natural phenomenon, and that, like nature herself, it is at least neutral. It contains all aspects of human nature— light and dark, beautiful and ugly, good and evil, profound and silly" (Jung et al., 1990).

The idea of multiplicity of the mind and the defined role of the subconscious added to my understanding of self and its place in complex systems, i.e., family and organizational systems. Parts, formed by past experiences and one's essence, are a product of our internal and external conditions. In internal family systems (IFS) therapy, self is described as the "natural occupant of the seat of consciousness," who we really are, the interconnectedness of our essential nature and spiritual center (Earley, 2009, p.79). Everyone has access to self, but at times it is obstructed by "protective parts that dominate us" (Schwartz, 2013, p.809). Dr. Richard Schwartz (1997) developed this model to engage our multiple selves, or *parts*, with a calm and centered *self*, as the essence and strength of our being. Managing our parts by being in *self* allows us to "achieve greater clarity, awareness, purpose, potential, and happiness in our lives" (Wildflower and Brennan, 2011, p. 127). In IFS, there are eight characteristics that can

strengthen the self in building capability to bring more of us in the present: *calmness*, *clarity*, *curiosity*, *compassion*, *confidence*, *courage*, *creativity*, and *connectedness*. Everyone has access to self, but at times it is obstructed by "protective parts that dominate us" (Schwartz, 2013, p.809). Acceptance of all of our parts is a start in accepting self and inviting transformation.

Power and politics of the self

I had my first experience of exploring the concepts of *values* and *personal vision* in DYNM 612 *Mastering Organizational Politics and Power* with Professor John Eldred. I was inspired to embrace power and politics when he said, "the best predictor of longevity is work satisfaction" (Eldred, 2016). This spoke to my intrinsic desire to thrive and search for a more fulfilling life.

Early in the course, Professor Eldred dispelled my long-held assumption and focus on surviving as *just needing to work hard and tirelessly to get ahead by keeping my head down, always producing, and performing*. He explained that to find work-life harmony, one had to be savvy in their knowledge of self and have a personal vision. At the time, I was in my early 30s, and I had begun to tune into the soft voice within saying, *it is okay to want personal fulfillment and seek enjoyment in what you do.* In taking in these words, I started to fathom what that could mean and began to feel empowered.

Before coming into Professor Eldred's class, I had shied away from politics and had little curiosity about what it meant or felt like to assert any influence and power. My other assumption for this class was that it was going to teach me techniques on how to win arguments, gain the upper hand, and dominate. Professor Eldred reiterated that if you had "a clear vision and goal, then you know what you are working toward" (Eldred,

2016). As the class progressed, I found power and politics to be much less about techniques and strategies for winning, and more about becoming certain in who I was and what I wanted.

In my role, at the time, of managing alumni volunteers leading cultural affinity groups, I had difficulty supporting their visions for more advocacy and open dialogue on social justice issues at Penn. I was inconsistent in the way that I worked with volunteers, I was rigid at times, and other times I relented to their persistent appeals whether it was organizing last-minute programming or a board management decision. I operated with uncertainty and little confidence, leading to mounting tension and unpleasant feelings for all involved. I cared deeply about the mission of my work and Penn, I wanted to be successful. In this class, I realized that I had to do more than just say that I cared and work hard, I had to work smart. I realized that I had to understand at a deeper level why this was important *to me* and why success in this job mattered *to me*.

Professor Eldred led us through two exercises to help us create our vision and to navigate how to "negotiate" living our vision more fully in the reality of our work and personal life. In the exercise titled *Developing a Personal Vision,* we were asked to break down our key values and how we would advance them in our lives. We then identified behaviors we want to practice *more of* and *less of* to bring these values to the fore in our daily life.

In this exercise, I identified my values as *fairness*, *opportunity, personal growth, professional growth, making an impact,* and *trust.* As I was responding to the prompts, I started to see more clearly what mattered to me. We were also asked to write about the opportunities we had at work and elsewhere to further develop our values. This

experience was my first opportunity in understanding why *meaning-making* is essential to thriving and finding purpose.

In creating meaning, one can ground themselves in who they are and what they value in everything they do. I often think about Viktor Frankl's words on the importance of having purpose and striving for fulfillment even in the face of tribulation. In *Man's Search for Meaning* (1963)*,* he speaks of making meaning as a *primary force* of one's life that must be sought outside of the self. "By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system," (p. 112). In creating my list of opportunities, I narrowed it down to two opportunities that felt essential to living my values:

- *Create more genuine connections with others.*

- *Embrace and find meaning in the subjects and things that interest me.*

Next, the worksheet asked us to build upon these discoveries by listing behaviors to practice doing *more of* or *less of.*

- Under *more of,* I wrote, "be clearer about where I stand on an issue and find ways to clearly communicate it*."*

- For *less of,* I wrote, "be less shy about speaking up and sharing my opinion."

The exercise asked us to plot down these behaviors as activities in what a "perfect week" would look like if we were to honor "the full mosaic of what the vision represents," (Eldred, 2016). I wrote that my ideal week involved doing the things I enjoyed, learning new things, caring for self, and reflecting.

The final prompt asked us to write our personal vision in 25 words or less based on what we had uncovered. I wrote: *My personal vision is to lead others fairly and compassionately to inspire them to do the same in the workplace and in their communities.*

This experience helped crystalize my personal vision and values and allowed me to reframe the way I approached my work. My mindset and approach were draining me and made me and others unhappy. My process in responding to these activities put into focus the capability and authority that I do have to bring more clarity to my role and to communicate it more effectively. I planned and engaged on a months-long project benchmarking how other university cultural affinity alumni groups operated and spoke to my counterparts at other Ivy League institutions about their best practices to put together a report and plan of action. This culminated in writing an alumni volunteer guide describing the importance of cultural affinity groups. This guide included a clear outline of available university resources for the groups, role descriptions, best practices for board governance, and procedures for event and activity planning.

This work resulted in stronger relationships with volunteers. Another result of our work was the growth of their communities as we established a regional chapter model. Professor Eldred's course helped me draw attention to not just the *doing* but *the why,* prompting a sense of urgency to live my values and personal vision, and to take steps to develop them further. For the first time, I experienced what it meant to live my vision and balance who I am with my actions.

<u>To know the self is to accept the self</u>

When I started the OD program, I was flooded with complex feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing as my insecurities intersected with my daily experiences in the job. I decided to see a therapist. In my journal, I wrote about how I wanted to be successful and thoughtful in my relationships, but I felt vulnerable and weak in my perceptions.

I wrote in my journal at the time that "my goal for seeing a therapist for this was not to just vent, but to learn *why* I feel the way I do and to overcome my issues to feel confident in my work and in who I am." I reflected on how I question every interaction I have with others at work and in class. I wondered if I was too sensitive or too defensive. I ended this journal entry expressing a desire for perspective, but also felt afraid of what could surface.

In therapy, I discovered an array of thought and behavior patterns that were at conflict with the confident and joyful person I wanted to be. In starting to note the overlap of what I was experiencing in the workplace, personally, and in OD courses, I realized that I had to stop compartmentalizing and needed a more holistic approach to my learning of self and of organizational systems and development. In my time in therapy, I was introduced to Internal Family Systems (IFS) and its application to all areas of my life.

<u>The power of vulnerability and risking with others</u>

By the following spring, I had completed three years of working at Penn and living in Philadelphia. I had also met my partner through whom I know what unconditional love and support mean. I was still plagued by my perceptions of being

undeserving of my *good fortune* in both my personal and professional life. I thought the only reason no one had confirmed my perceptions was because they felt sorry for me or because they liked me and were too nice to be honest.

I was at a good point in life, in a healthy and loving relationship, and seemingly successful at work, and yet, *I felt stuck*. Through therapy and in observing these feelings, I started to see how this mindset interfered with my vision. I was eager to find a new way of thinking and feeling about myself and found Professor Rodney Napier's class DYNM610 *Knowing Yourself: The Coach as an Instrument* as a possibility.

I first heard about the concept of the *story of origin* in Dr. Napier's class. The course was structured to create psychological safety among groups of three, who would be arranged in two separate coach and client pairs. Dr. Napier spent some time discussing the importance of being authentic in our roles of coach and client. He said that "to be self-protective is natural, but to be understood demands candor and openness." and that "Being heard gets you on the road to self-discovery," (Napier, 2017). I was on board, hanging on his every word, but I ran into an issue: my fear of vulnerability.

I *did not* want to be seen or known. I had spent most of my life hiding parts of myself I thought were shameful and broken, I avoided being my authentic self and resisting forming genuine relationships with others *was my default*.

Past experiences had conditioned me to seek perfectionism and to be averse to failure. This mindset kept me from taking big risks and from exploring who I was, my talents, and my strengths. I arrived at this point in DYNM 610 feeling hollow, lost and paralyzed. As the class progressed, I was heartened by the gradual discoveries I started to

make about the origins of some of my internal narratives by reflecting on my internal experiences and listening to the parts within.

Also ongoing at this time, was a campus-wide dialogue emerging from the undergraduate students about their experiences as first-generation college students. They were raising their voices, making themselves vulnerable by speaking their truths. *Truths* that I recognized and had never conceived. This brave group of students inspired *and urged* me to also rise, take up space, and say: *me too*.

Those moments in Dr. Napier's class helped me see that I would not be able to get much further in my pursuit of a fulfilling life and knowing myself if I did not start letting others in. Dr. Napier spoke at length about self-honesty, openness and candor, and mutual risking. In our group of three, I shared things that I had never shared with anyone before and experienced the power of risking with one another, feeling seen, heard, and safe.

Through this class, I gave myself permission to take time to delve into my story of origin, to understand the roots of my patterns and behaviors. It was not a complete process, but it gave me a start in building an awareness that I am a product of my home environment. It also made me aware of coping mechanisms I utilized to feel safe were a result of my upbringing. I started to feel more compassion for myself, viewing my story of origin objectively to identify the areas I would like to change. It helped me realize that perhaps, I had the potential to rise above.

Seeing how others see me

"Coaching," Dr. Napier said, "can be the process in which we become more aware of the unnecessary patterns and behaviors and develop a plan for behavior change that could lead to more fulfillment and a sense of purpose," (Napier, 2016).

Part of the coaching process required a 360 Degree Feedback Report in which my peer coach interviewed people from all over my life to understand how they experience and perceive me. Interviewees were asked about their experiences working or living with me, what they consider my strengths, advice on what areas to improve, among other things.

Receiving feedback was another turning point in extending my knowledge of self. Firstly, I realized that despite spending considerable effort in hiding parts of self, those closest to me detected elements of who I was and brought to light some of my struggles, which I had not had the language or clarity to understand or see for myself. I had only *felt* that something was amiss and often resorted to an extreme conception of self as a failure.

My coach reported the following on how others perceive me under stress and in normal conditions in my 360 Degree Feedback Report.

> Respondents viewed Lisette as a people-oriented person who focuses a lot of her efforts on building strong relationships through giving and investing time in the people she works with. For example, she has been known to take vacations with her coworkers and spend time with her supervisor's [*sic*] significant other outside of work. The general consensus is Lisette has a big heart, is a caring person, and will often go the extra mile for others.

Under stress:

> Lisette, under duress, can also become closed off and defensive. She tends to focus inward and puts up walls making her unable to reach out to others for help. There is a noticeable change in her energy, and she tends to move faster but, at the same time brush through things superficially in order to complete tasks and get back to

normalcy. Her co-workers really emphasized their concern about her becoming an "island" under stress and not utilizing her resources and the people around her.

…

When things are going well for Lisette under stress, she has a clear sense of vision and knows what she wants. Her hard work and strong work ethic make achieving her goals that much easier. But when things go wrong under stress, Lisette can become over-emotional. Her opinion can change frequently, and she can be seen as flaky, which is especially evident in situations of conflict and how she accommodates others readily.

In reading this feedback, I saw how some of my behaviors were impacting others, and the work we do together. My proclivity to not take up space or inconvenience anyone was challenged here. Many respondents expressed how some of my characteristics were negatively impacting them because they were not sure what I was really thinking or saying. I started to see how my *denial of self* had the opposite intended effect on others.

She can be indecisive in making decisions that affect others, and when decisions are made, she can sometimes fail to communicate her thoughts in a clear and understandable manner. This also leads the people that Lisette works with to view her as not being a visionary, which is possibly due to her being unable to communicate not only her decisions clearly, but the reasoning behind them. When conflict arises, Lisette instinctively retreats and fails to handle the conflict in an effective and timely manner making the people she works with to possibly view her as a person who lacks the necessary interpersonal and problem-solving skills to function in a team-based environment.

…

Lisette is viewed by her coworkers, her alumni volunteers, and her supervisor as lacking the confidence necessary to engage in conflicting conversation, and she appears to be too willing to acquiesce to other's positions/desires in the workplace.

…

Supervisors suggested that she needs to stick to what she believes in and not be so willing to concede her opinions. Coworkers and alumni volunteers urged her to trust in herself and her capabilities, to advocate for herself more and make her voice heard. They urged Lisette to approach conflict head-on and not to shy away from it. Once again, similar themes and similar areas for Lisette to focus improvement efforts in.

This feedback confirmed the difficult feelings I had about myself to the surface and gave me the clarity I needed to make a start in working through them. The class content prepared me for this stage of the process in that I was to consider this feedback as a gift, an opportunity, and a choice to decide what I want to do. We were told that the feedback may elicit an emotional and defensive response, but that what was more important was that we recognize, own, and choose how we responded to the data.

In my personal reflection, I wrote about how the data had confirmed a lot of my impressions of what I had started to uncover about myself. *I realized that I spent a lot of time trying to take as little space as possible, be as quiet as possible, and to not be a burden to others. In doing so, I had not only hidden from others but also from myself.* I also chastised myself with what I should and need to do to be better. Reading these reflections now helped me understand my perfectionist tendencies. I approached the data

as *fuel* to my perfectionist tendencies, and now I see how self-acceptance would have made a difference.

<u>Self as a coach</u>

In coaching and in being coached, I leaned on my sensibility of being people-centered. I became attuned to how I and others excelled at deflecting, projecting, and avoiding. Coaching is the act of helping our clients become aware of 'real choices' that exists and to see their own habits of mind and move beyond them (Silsbee, 2004 p. 36). By the same token, the coach also has *real choice* of their own on how they coach and grow through the process.

In my role as coach in Dr. Napier's class, I learned and applied principles from Douglas Silsbee's *The Mindful Coach: Seven Roles for Helping People Grow* (2004), which also helped me perceive the *use-of-self* as a culmination of seven voices or helping roles. Silsbee encourages practitioners to develop self-awareness and mindfulness to truly be of service to others in growth and change. The author recognizes the nature of human relationships and interactions, in that, through helping others to change, we (coach and client) affect one another. In his foundational principles, Silsbee leads us through developing our self-awareness to recognize our limitations, biases, as well as our skills and expertise to be of service to others as a coach, guide, and teacher.

<u>Mindfulness</u>

True mindfulness requires attention and effort. Silsbee refers to the Buddhist tradition of being mindful as being "aware of our bodies, aware of our feelings, and emotions, aware of our thoughts, aware of events, as they occur, moment by moment (p.37). Silsbee introduces the concept of *self-observation* as a way to help one cultivate

mindfulness, to notice our thoughts, emotions, and impulses as they arise, and think about their origins. This, in turn, will lead to noticing our *habits of mind* and increased self-awareness. Habits of mind refer to our patterns of thoughts and interpretation we develop early in our life to help us make sense of the world (p. 30). As we grow and develop, some of these patterns have *stuck* when they are no longer useful to our current circumstances and desire and may get in the way of pursuing a more authentic self or experience. Some patterns can be embraced as being helpful, some *habits of the mind* can impede access to self (p. 27). Slowing down the mind and paying attention to objectify the situation and apply an appropriate lens (or in the case of Silsbee, embody a role or a voice) to the moment was essential in tapping into inner wisdom. In my first experience as coach, I was able to practice mindfulness for the first time.

My peer client 'R' represented someone I, at the time, thought I wanted to be. I admired her, she was confident; the way she made everything seem effortless, our classmates also seemed to respect and admire her. Before we were assigned our coach/coachee roles, I noted how I felt intimidated, reverting to a younger version of myself, always on the sidelines admiring others who seemed to *have it all*. When we were grouped together, I started to note that I was following in typical pattern, of being in a *follower* role, putting myself down while putting others on pedestals.

Being grouped with R for classwork that extended beyond traditional boundaries of completing an assignment as a team made me aware of the strongly held values and assumptions I had about myself and others, including R. In being tasked with challenging activities that required vulnerability and building trust, I got to know R, her story of

origin. This opened my understanding that everyone has their unique story and vulnerabilities and that there is more than meets the eye.

Coaching R was an exercise in learning first-hand how a coach and client relationship can influence both parties, challenging my assumptions in the process. Silsbee refers to these experiences as building self-awareness, learning how our habit of the mind limits access to the true potential existing in self (p. 27). A "real moment of awakening," Silsbee states is for the reader to accept the habits of the mind without judgment or self-flagellation (p.50). In his book, he introduces the term *beginner's mind*, a state of mind in which we look at what's before us with fresh eyes (p.48). In maintaining a beginner's mind, one does not think about what they have or what they will gain; instead, he encourages us to embody curiosity and genuine interest in the client and let go of all else. In letting go of what we think we know, we are more open to change.

In being mindful in our coaching process, *parallel processing* is essential to a technique in which the coach notes their own thoughts and feelings to reflect on later to a.) give additional insight or data about that coaching moment, and/or b.) process or work through why a particular thought or feeling popped up as a way of building self-awareness (p. 57).

Seven voices

Silsbee developed the Septet Model, a series of seven voices and roles from which to approach various stages of coaching and the coaching relationship. It is not meant to be a linear or step by step model, but an integrative framework to help coach train their own inner voices in service to their work as coach. In drawing from the Seven Roles, I was able to unpack my experiences in coaching R, who, as I mentioned, stirred up so much in

me. In these roles, I was able to center myself as a coach and to center R, while also tuning into my thought patterns and experiences to help inform the content of our coaching and to build my self-awareness. R was a challenging client who had built up a lot of walls to keep others out.

She was charming, beautiful, and accomplished but committed to maintaining her life as it was. She saw no reason to change or opportunity to grow when I asked her why she enrolled in the class, she had said that it worked best for her schedule as it was only a few weekends in the spring. On another occasion, she offered me some advice or more like a directive when she said, "don't take this too seriously, this is just a class." She was trying to protect herself from being known and seen. I grappled with these moments. I wanted to please R because I admired her, but I also wanted to challenge myself by doing what I *felt I wanted to do.*

The Septet gave me a foundational framework to try something different, beyond shying away and stepping back and giving up. In the experience of using the seven voices, I let my curiosity and inner wisdom guide the process

More data on the self through LIFO

My interest in coaching and consulting continued to grow as I moved on from my experiences as coach and client in DYNM 610. In conceiving the roles of coach and consultant, it resonated with me that the essential and ongoing requisite for practitioners is to continue their lifelong journey to knowing and improving the self as they lead others in doing the same. Professor Charline Russo's DYNM 614 *Tools and Techniques of Coaching and Consulting* was integral to developing additional sensibilities to this mindset, pointing to the importance of data and to the significance of trusting the self and

the process. In this course, I was able to build upon my self-awareness, increase my knowledge of organizational behavior and principles on change. Furthermore, I was introduced to and adopted a new language in building self-awareness and learning about others through LIFO.

LIFO is a strengths-based tool that helps one understand their orientation to life to improve productivity, communication, and collaborative teamwork. Dr. Russo emphasized that the LIFO assessment is meant to describe behaviors and not types (Russo, 2017). Valuable learning for me was the importance of not labeling people as a type. A personality type refers to who you are as fixed; in understanding that LIFO describes behaviors, we are led to objectify parts of the self that are capable of change. Table 1 refers to the core philosophies relating to each behavioral style as noted in my LIFO Report and Profile (2017).

Table 1. LIFO Behavioral Styles and Philosophies

Behavioral Style	Philosophy
Supporting Giving	"If I prove my worth by working hard and pursuing excellence, the good things in life will come to me."
Adapting Dealing	"If I'm aware of other people and fill their needs first, then I can get the good things in life I've wanted all along."
Controlling Taking	"If I can get results by being competent and seizing opportunity, the good things in life will be there for the taking."
Conserving Holding	"If I think before I act and make the most of what I've got, I can build up my supply of the good things in life."

LIFO positions report findings as a foundation of self-knowledge and refer to our preferred behavioral styles as "success patterns" to build upon strategies to be more successful in work and more influential when dealing with stakeholders (p. 2). Strategies

are formulated by thinking about balancing our styles by doing *more of* or *less of* our known behavioral styles to take us to the next level. LIFO confirmed a lot of what I had already uncovered but allowed me to see how my various behaviors interact with one another and how they have the potential to impact outcomes and concept of self.

LIFO analysis

At the time of taking my first LIFO survey, I had been in a previous role for three years and was interested in leveraging my strengths to find new challenges. The comprehensive analysis and overall outcome served me beyond my initial intent. LIFO gave me an additional tool to enhance and reframe what I can do to improve upon my current circumstances and relationships to reposition myself and extend my capacity and potential in several areas of my life.

From my LIFO analysis, I learned that I lean too much on my Supporting Giving behaviors, overshadowing my other skills and abilities. In seeking excellence, I am also focused on fairness and equity; in other words, I have perfectionist tendencies that impact my ability to adapt to reality and make the most of a situation. This results in not being certain of myself, defaulting to my comfort zone of being sociable and empathetic without giving any indication of what *I or others want or need*.

My most preferred styles in *favorable* were Supporting Giving and Adapting Dealing, which dictate my daily life and habits. Dr. Russo refers to this as "too much of a good thing" (Russo, 2017). Overusing strengths means that one is not stepping out of their comfort zone to challenge and grow. Behaviors in both Controlling Taking and Conserving Holding are less accessible to me and require special attention and focus to tap into.

I have also come to understand that in balancing my *most* with my *least preferred behaviors* that I would be better able to bring more of my authenticity. Under stress, my behaviors go to the other extreme from being idealistic and enthusiastic to being focused on detail and process, as Conserving Holding indicates. Alongside and, *at conflict* with, my shift to be more analytical is that of remaining flexible and adaptable, impacting my ability to act on intentions drawn from Conserving Holding activities.

I feel the impact of not accessing Controlling Taking behaviors in any condition more often and more intensely. This led to a lack of confidence and trust in myself and has kept me from *flexing* my other strengths. These underused strengths give way to overused strengths to function on high alert, continuing to enable a behavioral cycle of overthinking, idealizing, and *not* acting genuinely in self.

Throughout the OD experience and by the end of DYNM614, I gathered an interesting collection of tools for organizational development and self-leadership. Inside of me, however, remained the voices of dissent and lifelong patterns that expected and prepared for my *inevitable failure* that will finally expose me as an impostor. Inspired by the confirmation of these undesired thought patterns in my various OD experience, I looked into the literature on impostor phenomenon to help me break down my experience by approaching it with an academic and research lens, leading to a deeper understanding of myself and my process.

Discovering impostor phenomenon

 So far in this capstone, I have described moments in which my self-doubt has stood in the way of my growth and development. In DYNM 612 and DYNM 610, I began to gain clarity on how I and others perceived me, inspiring me to experiment with class

learnings. In contending with these data and observations, I developed a deep desire for more growth toward self-acceptance, self-compassion, and creating a more purposeful life. I started to focus on what I was learning and intuiting.

- I seem to not believe in myself, yet there were data disconfirming this belief system.

- I felt overwhelmed by self-doubt.

- My vision for leading a fuller life in service to others requires me to be more self-aware and mindful.

By turning inward and reflecting on the experiences I described, I started to become aware of some of the deeply rooted notions of myself that I had held for most of my life as unworthy, unqualified, and unwanted. A part of me knew these beliefs were not warranted. Logically, I knew that I was accomplished and was loved and cared for by many. In my darkest moments, which came often, of self-doubt and self-hate, I could not internalize successes, love, gratitude, and joy. I spent a lot of time and energy trying to fit into what I perceived was the mold for successful living at the cost of repressing and hiding parts of myself that made me unique. In processing all of these experiences, I came to understand that these feelings and thoughts were symptomatic of impostor phenomenon (also known as impostor syndrome).

Impostor Phenomenon (IP) originated from a 1974 study by Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes on successful women professionals who struggled with legitimizing success despite achieving numerous professional accomplishments. Further study on the topic has uncovered the more profound effects that IP can have on job satisfaction, relationships, and developing potential in both men and women.

In developing an interest in learning about IP, I read trending articles with prescriptive lists on how to overcome IP written by individuals who identified with IP and related their journey on overcoming it. It was comforting to learn that this was a prevalent condition suffered by millions throughout the world. I was not alone. Reading these pieces made me feel hopeful that if I followed the outlined suggested steps, I could overcome IP.

This hope, however, was temporary. By learning about IP, I started to become aware of some of my coping behaviors adjacent to some of my IP experiences. I also recognized that I was dealing with emotional exhaustion and a persistent lack of self-esteem. I started to develop some questions probing into how these characteristics were connected to my IP experience. My struggle was much larger than a prescriptive listicle, so I dug deeper.

The impostor cycle

Dr. Clance developed the Impostor Cycle (1985) to outline the impostor's process in tackling an achievement-related task. The cycle factors in anxiety-related traits, the impostor's reaction to the anxiety by procrastination and over-preparing behaviors. Upon completion, the impostor is dismissive of positive feedback, attributing it to luck or the amount of effort that went into it, and they resume believing their inner critic and inherent belief of being a fraud. This perception increases self-doubt and other psychological traits. These feelings are "carried into" their next pursuit of an achievement-related task, contributing to anxiety, self-doubt, and worry. The cycle continues with compounded anxieties from previous iterations (ch. 3, par. 3-4.).

Figure 3. Diagram Illustrating the Impostor Cycle
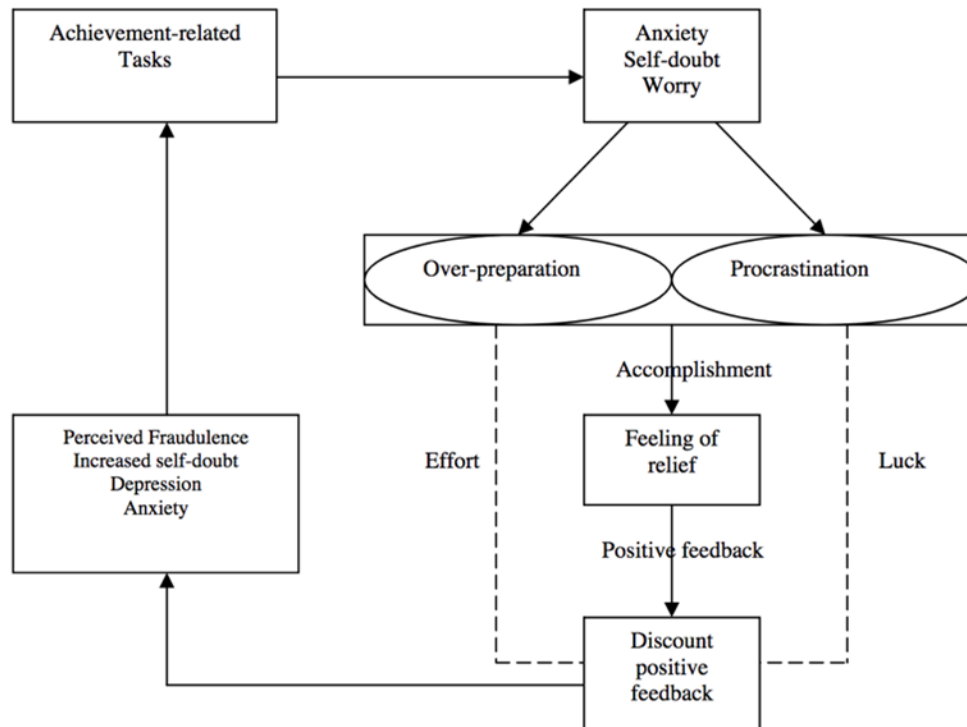
By creating the space for myself to identify my values and develop a personal vision, I took the first step in changing my internal process and dialogue. I discovered the power of vulnerability in that, by sharing more of myself and asking for feedback, I was clearer on the thought and behavior patterns that required change in my pursuit for more fulfillment. Furthermore, by adopting elements of mindfulness in my experience as a coach, I was able to access different parts or roles within me as guided by the septet. This helped me become more cognizant of my feelings, taught me to simultaneously tune into my internal process, while centering others in my role as helper. My learnings on IP and on the impostor cycle broke new ground in understanding myself from an academic perspective, which gave way to designing the next part of my journey with intention.

CHAPTER 3

ENHANCING THE SELF

My original intent in pursuing this degree was to build skills to advance

professionally. Around the time of starting the program, however, I started to *feel an itch*

for more than *just* an MSOD. The OD program unexpectedly inspired me to take my

learning further by embracing the emphasis many of its faculty place on *reflection,*

meaning-making, and *self as an instrument of change.* I was challenged by their

instruction on the value of capturing observations and other data more accurately by

incorporating frameworks into my mental processes and discussing *what the findings*

mean to me.

An adaptive approach

 In the book *In Over Our Heads* (1994), Robert Kegan presents one's inner logic

as the "deep structure" of their mental organization. His Subject-Object theory refers to

observing the development in our minds when shifting the Subject-Object relationship.

As one reflects on a situation, Kegan proposes that we see concepts and events as objects

to better understand them and their impact. Object refers to framing feelings, and other

self-concepts in the language of *I have.* These are factors that we can detach from and

observe, control, and connect to something else. Subject refers to the *I am*, the parts that

one may be more attached to, that we cannot objectively observe, like our mindset and

personality traits (p.32).

In my earlier experience of coaching R, where I practiced mindfulness for the first

time, I became aware of the internal and external experiences that had the potential to

affect my role and intention as a coach. I needed a system to help me organize and

manage internal and external events. In considering Kegan's Subject-Object theory with mindfulness, I started to build my capacity to reflect, reorganize, and reframe issues to understand their origins and to assess their potential impact. Doing so has helped me grasp my own internal processes in understanding IP as an *enmeshed experience* that had been occurring throughout my life. With practice, this theory helped me shift my mindset and further develop self-awareness. For instance, in processing the IP experience, it would be important to see the experience as something that occurs and not something that defines me. This mindset shift brought on a new way of thinking and adapting.

The *know-how* and *how-to* aspects of my learning in the OD program helped me tackle the *technical challenges* of my work and has given me strategies to be more effective in the workplace. In my learnings and exploration, I have also come to see that there are aspects of my work and personal life, where technical knowledge and frameworks cannot be as easily applied. As I began to identify IP thoughts and feelings, I recognize the need to seek transformation from the inside out.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) refers to these types of issues as Adaptive Challenges. By looking deeply within the self and to the root of organizational culture (or in my case, my internal process), one can more deeply understand the issues and to accept that a solution may "require turning part or all of the organization upside down" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Adaptive change can be difficult to understand, Heifetz and Linsky use *the balcony metaphor* to help visualize the process of working through an adaptive challenge. They refer to this skill as "getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony," which illustrates the "mental activity of stepping back from the action and asking, 'what is

really going on here?'" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Taking this metaphorical distance has served me well in reflecting and assessing how I am being affected by what I am observing. It has been especially valuable during my moments of anxiety and self-doubt in better understanding the situation and my emotional reaction to it.

<u>Understanding my experience with impostor phenomenon</u>

Subject-Object Relationship and Adaptive Change theories have helped me break down my IP experience and brought to light the severity of any situation to understand its impact. I learned that for me, in setting out to complete a task I had to repeat a process or cycle that "reinforces the feelings of fraudulence instead of weakening the links to the Impostor Cycle" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 242). Jaruwan Sakulku and James Alexander (2011) draw from the research by Clance, Imes, and others to summarize key characteristics in IP to confirm the close links to personality traits and family achievement environment, and to elaborate on psychological distress (i.e., anxiety, depression, and burnout) as a consequence of IP (p.75).

As I explored the IP literature, I started to feel relief in realizing that I was not alone in this; millions throughout the world have experienced IP at some points in their lives. In reading about various definitions and narratives about IP felt overwhelming. The first question that arose for me was, *am I successful enough to have IP? Would I be a fraud if I claimed I had it?* I thought I was not high-achieving enough to relate to this condition. Even in self-diagnosing myself, I wanted to be perfect.

Major learnings in delving into Sakulku and Alexander's work was that of the complex interactions and overlap of impostor feelings and thoughts with a psychological predisposition to neuroticism and family dynamic and background. Other researchers

have studied the existing relationships between IP and its negative effects on work satisfaction (Hutchins, Penney, & Sublett, 2018) as well as one's capacity to build potential or attain career success (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). Research on IP has also leveraged existing theories to better understand the correlation of IP to psychological distress. Looking at these theories has helped me identify that some of my behaviors are influenced by conservation of resources (COR), a theory which refers to the sense of urgency one has to preserve resources when feeling threatened, depleted, or when they do not feel like they will gain any new resources. This leads to burnout, which increases self-doubt and other feelings of distress, which prompts me to turn to my maladaptive or avoidant coping behaviors to bear with the resulting emotional exhaustion. Realizing that my persistent state of feeling emotionally drained and anxious, as well as the maladaptive behavioral patterns I used to cope, were all elements of IP was also a relief.

In an email, I described to Dr. Russo, my capstone advisor, the *twisted realization* I had in reading about avoidant coping behaviors attributed to IP. I noted how these behaviors were present in my capstone writing process. I was feeling guilty because I was not jumping into immediate action to improve or change, but instead, I observed myself engaging in my IP thoughts and behaviors. In this experience, I more fully understood how high-IP sufferers expend greater resources to over-perform and to mask their self-perceived inadequacies, resulting in high levels of fears and anxiety about performance, leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

<u>My impostor phenomenon approach and emotional cycle</u>

In the research, Clance also writes about impostors having a secret need to be "the very best" and "expect to do everything flawlessly and with ease," (ch. 3, par. 7). Impostors often fail to meet their expectations due to the impossible nature of the goal and timeline they set. Their high expectations for perfection while mitigating intense IP behaviors are short-lived, leading to overpreparing, procrastinating, freezing, and disengaging. This sequence of events leads impostors to feel "overwhelmed, disappointed, overgeneralizing themselves as failures" (ch. 3 par. 2).

Several studies have shown an association between impostorism and neuroticism and its resulting impact in prolonged dissatisfaction in life. Neuroticism refers to trait feelings of stress, threat, and unsafety. A study measuring the relationship between neuroticism and conscientiousness concluded that the lower conscientiousness of impostors was connected to lower self-discipline in the impostor's pattern of work (Chae et al., 1995, p. 480).

I have come to see how my unrealistic expectations and perfectionist tendencies were previously disguised as hope, optimism, and determination. The reality was that my desire to be perfect trapped me in a repetitive pattern of wanting to prove myself without really knowing why or without assessing the realistic opportunities I had for positive change. In the IP cycle, one's earnest desire and attempts at reaching perfection are thwarted by their inability to:

- Accept the self as enough and as capable

- Set realistic goals and plan accordingly

- Ask for help or seek a different perspective

Creating the perfect conditions for a lifelong sentence with IP.

In applying the Adaptive Change and Subject-Object Relationship frameworks to process my IP, I have created two models interpreting my experience. In My *IP Approach* (Figure 4), I present my process in five stages to show the progression of my behavior in tackling a task.

Figure 4. My IP Approach in Completing a Task (Garza, 2020)

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
I have high expectations to have the perfect outcome.	I immerse myself in over-preparing for the task and procrastinate on starting the task..	I experience burnout from expending energy in over-preparing; Extreme self-doubt emerges. "I hit a wall." I disengage from the task, I feel ashamed by this experience, so I keep to myself and avoid the task.	I am forced to jump into action and "just do it" due to time constraint.	I feel drained from the process, but relieved to have finished and not think about it or how I experienced the process. I ignore praise, recognition, and feedback about the work. I vow to myself that next time I will be perfect.

In Stage One, I bring to the process my personal context, expectations (both mine and societal), and fear and anxiety about failure. I begin the cycle and task with the best of intentions with the grand ambition to deliver a perfect outcome. In those moments, I believe that I can achieve, but it is also shortly followed by consuming questions in Stage Two: *How will I achieve? What will I need? What will my process be like?* Leading me to spend a lot of time researching and planning my approach, procrastinating on getting started. I begin to hesitate and doubt my capability as I go into Stage Three.

Stage Three is the most arduous point of the process. My COR (conservation of resources) tendencies becomes the most apparent here. I start to feel emotional exhaustion from processing my inner critical voice and the mounting pressure to be

perfect. I disengage from thinking or doing because it is too painful to process. I turn to maladaptive or avoidant coping behavior as a way of escaping these feelings. *I hit a wall* and disengage from my initial enthusiasm and hope for success, and feel alone in the struggle, evade talking about this experience with others because I am ashamed. I continue to feel frozen and devastated about all the wasted time and energy, at Stage Four the deadline is near, and I am forced to jump into action and *just do it*.

Clance states that the most dominant characteristic of the IP experiences is that the impostors "are unable to hear and believe the compliments of others, and they can't accept the objective evidence regarding their success or intellectual ability. Paradoxically, they desperately want to know that they're competent, well-liked, and respected. Most, in fact, want to be considered brilliant and outstanding and wish they were in the genius category" (ch. 8, par. 1). This confirms my own experience at Stage Five, which I think is important to include in this process. It is important to note that at this stage, while I may feel relieved to be done, I try my best to put the experience behind me and pay little attention to any acknowledgment or recognition I may receive. I do not seek to learn or improve upon the work. I believe that it was not good enough and not representative of my true ability; therefore, any feedback would be invalid. It will be different next time, I will be perfect. Stage Five sets me up for the next time when the "whole vicious cycle is repeated, and the success of the previous project is negated." This results in developing superstitions that the impostor "must endure all of the torment again in order to succeed," thus making the cycle very challenging to break (ch. 3, par.7).

In Figure 5, I illustrate *My IP Emotional Cycle* that occurs parallel to the events in my previous model, *My IP Approach* (Figure 4) represented by numbered flags. This model focuses on the progression of my emotional state in being in an IP frame of mind.

Figure 5. My IP Emotional Cycle (Garza, 2020)
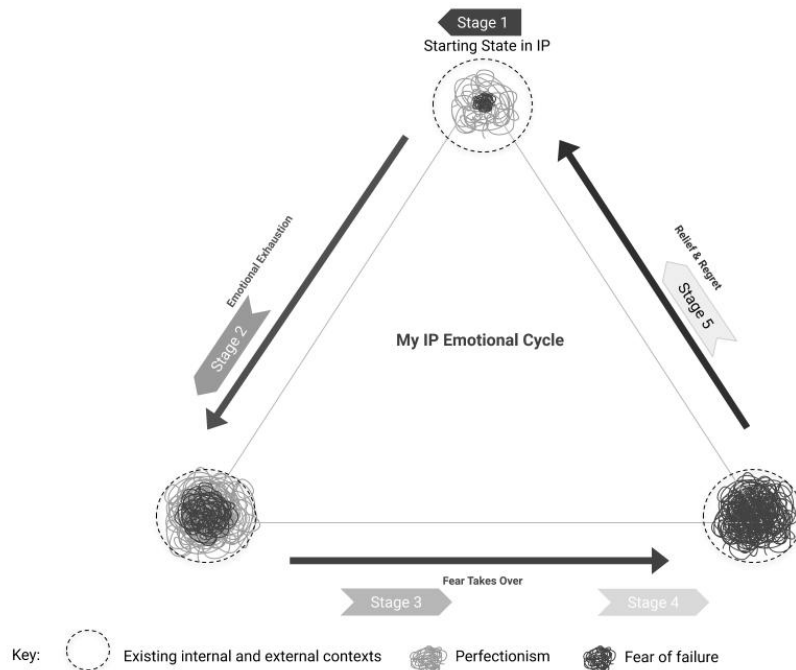
We start at the beginning in Stage One of the process in which I bring me with me my context, combined with expectations for perfection and fear of failure. In this state, my ambition for perfection is more prevalent than my fear of failure. As I proceed to Stage Three, my fear begins to increase, quelling any optimism and energy I had in completing the task. Fear takes over as I move to Stage Four and Five. While reacting to my feelings of fear, emotional exhaustion, and my attempts to conserve my energy, fear fuels my final action in completing the task. As I experience relief for finishing and also regret for not being perfect. I *reset* to my starting state, grounded in my hope for perfectionism and not addressing my innate fear of failure, ready to repeat the pattern.

<u>Success as limiting potential</u>

The idea of success can feel like a heavy burden that needs to be *untangled* to understand the roots of how one can differentiate their own perception of success from others. Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries (2005) points to birth order being a contributing factor. First-borns, he states, may mirror parents' experiences as first-time parents where they project anxiety and greater expectations for the first-born to rise above (p. 112). As a first-born myself, I feel like I was a receptacle that held the anxiety and problems of others, and there was little expectation for me to differentiate from this and seek my own form of success.

Clance notes that "fear and guilt about success" is a characteristic of IP. Through this lens, success can be viewed as negative due to how unusual it may be in their own home communities, which leads to distancing and feeling guilty about being different and fearful of rejection (Clance, 1985, ch. 9 par. 9). Kets de Vries discusses how one can be predisposed to IP, which he refers to as *neurotic impostorism,* in individuals who are not expected to succeed and or be ambitious was not encouraged because it was inconsistent with the family expectations. This may lead to more self-isolation and negative psychological experiences for the impostor.

In thinking about the impact and influence of the family environment on IP, the experience of *survivor's guilt* also comes my mind. Nancy Sherman describes survivor's guilt as "counterfactual thoughts that you could have or should have done otherwise, though, in fact, you did nothing wrong" during a life-threatening event, that you survived, and others did not (Sherman, 2011). Although my experiences are not equivalent to the trauma experienced from surviving natural disasters and humanitarian crises, connecting

to aspects of this phenomenon has given me some clarity in understanding the emotional distance I feel between my family and me. In addition to extreme self-doubt that I experience daily, there are ongoing feelings of guilt for having left behind my siblings in their young ages for opportunity and social mobility. This contributes to my downplaying what I have achieved and to feeling guilty about *making it out* of poverty while loved ones still struggle. This sense of responsibility and feelings of helplessness in wanting to improve their circumstances further exacerbate my feelings of shame. Subconsciously, I have let this guilt and shame drive a wedge between them and me, leading me to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

In moments of intense impostor feelings, anxiety and depression can be exacerbated. This is one reason why "impostors may try to avoid being successful because it may bring greater expectations and more responsibility threatening their ability to keep their intellectual phoniness undercover" (Clance 1985). Kets de Vries also points to the positive correlation between impostor's ambivalences of achievement to lower expectations. For me, these factors exist as an *enmeshed* experience, creating a muddled sense of self and feelings of unworthiness that affect my approach and ability to be myself.

Having this knowledge has helped me better understand how some of these triggers came to be. I have learned about my sensibilities and have paid more attention to them, starting with the question*, why does this matter to me*? For example, I described earlier my experience in observing others raise their voices and publicly share their FGLI experiences while I grappled with my resistance to searching within myself to figure out who I was. In deciding to turn inward, I gave myself permission to relate and see myself

in others and worked to unpack my self-doubt and sense of self. It is in this type of experience and curiosity that I discover what truly matters to me and what I must keep in mind going forward. In the instance of discovering my FGLI identity, it culminated in pursuing a new role where I feel grounded in the sense of purpose and brings me much joy. The paradox of undergoing the application process for the role and experiencing all the peaks and valleys of IP made me observe what it felt like to take into consideration my self-awareness and my desire to be true to myself in my endeavor to seek more fulfillment and to accept myself as I am. It is in this self-acceptance that I feel motivated to strive to change.

<u>Making meaning from my impostor moments</u>

Several active coping behaviors have been identified by researchers as useful in reducing impostor feelings and thoughts. Some behaviors include building strong social support in the workplace (Vergauwe et al., 2014, p. 578); assessing one's impostor thoughts and feelings to understand what they are trying to avoid (Clance, 1985, ch. 13, par. 38); and taking intentional steps to remove the stressors by investing resources in actively planning their approach in a task (Hutchins & Penney, 2017, p. 37). Of course, these suggestions are easier said than done. In looking at *My IP Approach* and *Emotional Cycle* as adaptive challenges that require an amalgamation of self-knowledge, OD theories, and psychotherapeutic approaches, I have created a new model to help me navigate my IP process.

I call this cycle *The Process of Making Meaning from my Impostor Moments*. We are presented with similar junctions to my IP *Approach* and *Emotional Cycle* (Figures 4 and 5, respectively). Instead of starting with a tangled network of anxiety, fear,

exhaustion, and less-than-desirable norms, I propose starting from the *Whole Person*. One who accepts past experiences, internal and external expectations, and the darker parts (anxiety and depression). Within me as well, is the capacity to reflect, remind, and reframe as a way to bring to the surface past successes, recall strengths and abilities, and note potential blind spots and maladaptive patterns that have persisted. I remind myself that *failure or success does not define me. I contain multitudes in experiences, knowledge,* and *the capacity to learn and love others and self.* In tackling a task through this cycle, I will also note its usefulness in applying this framework in managing the change process.

Figure 6. Making Meaning from My Impostor Moments
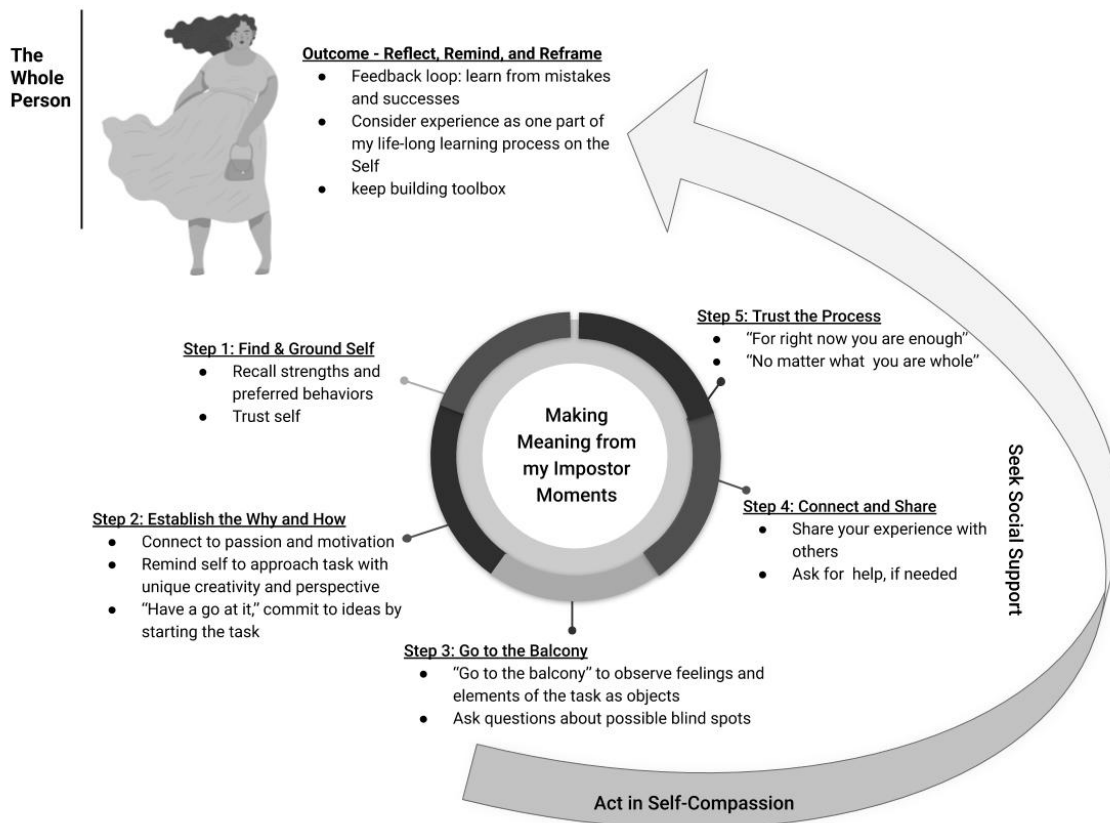
Step 1: find and ground self

In Step 1, I recognize my impulse to get ahead of myself and to give into my urgency to be the best and perfect, I refocus the desired outcome to reflect on what it would *mean to me* to finish or succeed in the task or change process. I have discovered that in the past, ambition for perfection and recognition stemmed from a desire to please and impress others.

In learning about my behavior preferences through LIFO, I remind myself to boldly own all the parts within me, whether an overused or underused strength. I tap into my creativity to perceive how this is a reflection of who I am, my strengths, and my unique perspectives. I seek a way to channel this creativity with what I am uncovering about myself as I bring into focus the task at hand.

Upon reflecting on my past processes, I came to the interesting discovery that I tend to always brush off my initial ideas and thoughts in approaching a task. Upon my reflection on this, I realize how I had not trusted myself and capability, and always thought it had to be better. The irony to this circumstance is that in Stage 4 of my IP Approach (Figure 4), I always up went back to my original idea because it was the most accessible approach in my rush to complete the task. In retrospect, I see how these initial thoughts and ideas were always the best. I use this powerful discovery as a reminder to trust in myself and my process.

Step 2: establish the 'why and how'

As I plan my approach and timeline in Step 2, I take a moment to reflect on my motivation for the task and start to explore some preliminary self-doubt and anxieties. This, in a way, is a form of parallel processing to view the task or subject matter with

objectivity while also taking notes of auxiliary thoughts or internal processes to consider

in my reflection at a later time. In this step, it is important to connect the task as

something that I wholeheartedly believe in. I have to be cautious, however, to not spend

too much time thinking about and planning the process as I have learned that I tend to get

stuck with thinking that I need to find the perfect path to the desired outcome.

In thinking about the change process, Kegan and Lahey (2009) refer to Adaptive

Challenges as change that requires transforming one's mindset, tapping into a more

advanced stage of mental development (p.29). The authors emphasize that these

challenges must be met with an adaptive learning approach in tackling one's current

limits to their mental growth by "connecting head and heart, thinking and feeling" (p.

30). At this step, I seek to establish *the why* (motivation for the task) and *the how* (my

strategy and approach). I use the language of commitment from Immunity to Change

(ITC) to set my goals for the task.

In the instance of adapting the ITC model to plan my approach, I can reflect on

my Immunity to Change Map, to set a realistic goal and to identify the parts within it that

make me immune or resistant to taking action. By undergoing this exercise, I uncover

some big assumptions that helped me focus on the root issues that had enabled the

behavior I wished to change, or that stands in my way of completing a task. Below is an

example of my findings in completing an ITC map to make a behavior change.

- Goal: *I want to find my voice and stand by it with confidence. I want to*
  speak up more.

- Behavior that stops me from achieving my goal (hidden commitment): *I am committed to not speaking up because I think others have more important or insightful things to say.*

- Big assumption: what would happen if I stopped that behavior: *If I were to stop doing this, it would mean that my knowledge, capacity, and role may be challenged. Others will think I am not smart or sophisticated enough for this job or this place.*

This gave me the data I needed to understand and address the stressors that stood in my way.

Step 3: go to the balcony

In Step 3, I may start to feel like I could *backtrack* into old patterns since some of my self-doubts are well-supported and aided by my inherent feelings of not being or doing enough, which is compounded by patterns of depression and anxiety. I may hit a wall. This is an opportunity for me to *go to the balcony* to observe myself and reassess what is needed to continue on.

I recall my LIFO knowledge and use it to address *feeling stuck* or *not challenged enough* by turning inward and asking myself:

- What are my blind spots?

- Am I doing too much of a good thing and missing something?

- In this moment, what can I be doing more of or less of ?

This helps me reposition myself by seeing where I am in the process and what I need to keep going.

Step 4: connect and share

In previously planning change, I had looked to Kotter's Eight-Stage Process to help me create a strong infrastructure for the change process. For the purpose of my planned change, I adapted several steps of the process that call for accountability and organizational buy-in as an opportunity to talk and garner feedback to support my vision for change. This built an accountability process to ensure I stayed the course and resulted in stronger relationships based on clear communication and mutual respect. This has primed me to seek out others more often and helped me rediscover the joy and beauty of friendship.

In Step 4, I take the opportunity to connect with others, asking for a sounding board if I am feeling stuck, or just simply to take a break. This in it of itself is productive to the spirit in accepting that the outcome of this task is not the end-all, be-all of who I am. Here, I give myself *permission to indulge* in something that gives me pleasure.

Step 5: trust the process

In what I anticipate as the most challenging part of this cycle, grappling with the pressure of time and reassuring myself that it does not have to be perfect. In Step 5, I must remind myself of some important truths. My therapist pointed me to a lifechanging truth in the words of Dr. Brené Brown (2010), *"*No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough," *(p.1).* In her own words, my therapist affirmed: "without changing, adding, or subtracting a thing, who you are right now is enough." Meaning that *I am whole* no matter what. Carl Jung explains that "the right way to wholeness is made up, unfortunately, of fateful detours and wrong turnings" (Jung et al., 1983). I interpret these words to mean that wholeness does not mean perfection, but a mix of imperfect

parts and contradictions and to be whole is to accept this truth. As I continue on in the task grounded in these principles, I do not look at the task's end as a final destination or point of completion, but as an opportunity to keep building and learning.

I remind myself to be grateful for the journey, give myself permission to feel relieved and to celebrate. I remind myself to not shy away or avoid learning from the result or outcome, I write down my reflections and feelings about how I think I did and cross-check with feedback from others. In terms of accepting success, I have found this the most difficult. The best strategy in doing this is to honestly reflect and journal about the sequence of events and outcomes. It is especially helpful to write down the praise and feedback received regardless of whether or not I am ready to accept in the moment. I hope that this will culminate into a collection of wins and successes, perhaps seeing it as a metaphorical glass curio case that, over time, can instill feelings of pride.

<u>Self-acceptance and change</u>

Through OD and in my internal work, I have spent some time untangling my emotional experiences and mental processes to better understand the root of my thoughts and behavior patterns. I spoke earlier about my experience in being coached in Dr. Napier's course, a result of this experience was that of recognizing and challenging assumptions I had about myself and others by engaging in my curiosity.

I have learned that every issue or problem has a root cause and potential for improvement. Change is hard, painful, and inevitable. In getting to know myself and my IP patterns, I was inspired to rise to the challenge of untangling these difficult layers to find ways to cope and to accept myself as I am. In looking to the future, I hope to continue challenging myself to grow to be of service to others.

Rings of growth

This capstone is not meant to be a summation of my learning or a complete story, but a recounting of the beginning part of my journey to self-awareness and embracing my desire to thrive despite my early resistance to change. By processing my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, I have designed models that capture my experience and to help me better understand myself. In making meaning of the several theories, tools, and insights, I have created one last model to help me understand the relationship and impact of the powerful tools that I have adapted to seek change and fulfillment. I call it the *Rings of Growth.*

Figure 7. Rings of Growth (Garza, 2020)

This model is meant to clarify my process and the tools I have used to create my vision of a more fulfilled life. We start with the smallest ring at the bottom that represents the *IP Mindset,* the starting point for this chapter of my journey. My mindset here was filled with self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and an overwhelming need to free myself from these feelings by being perfect. My mind and sense of being were obstructed by my incessant

tendency to prove myself. In learning about Adaptive Challenges, I understood that I had

to start to look within to identify my inner barriers. By observing my IP experience as an

adaptive challenge, I designated the next ring as that of *Going to the Balcony* – a

metaphor to remind me to operate in and above the fray. *Going to the Balcony* is an

essential mental activity, prompting me to "step away from and back into the dance

floor" as much as needed to understand the need for and process to change from different

perspectives. This mindset shift has led me to understand my own process in managing

change.

As I ascend into uncovering my potential, I take note of the value of *Owning and

Accepting Myself* as the next ring. This refers to accepting myself as I am and owning all

my parts and actions, good or bad. Carl Rogers conveys in his book *On Becoming a

Person* (1961), that to see change in those you help, you must accept yourself and others

as they are first and foremost. He aptly speaks about how accepting our imperfections can

be a gateway to self-acceptance and lasting change, "one way of putting this is that I feel

I have become more adequate in letting myself be what I am. It becomes easier for me to

accept myself as a decidedly imperfect person, who by no means functions at all times in

the way in which I would like to function… I believe that I have learned this from my

clients as well as within my own experience - that we cannot change, we cannot move

away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are, then change seems to

come about almost unnoticed," (p. 17).

The final ring, the highpoint in my endeavor toward fulfillment, is *Uncovering

Potential.* In considering the various learnings and experiences that the previous rings

represent, I am led to more clearly see and grow my potential. The Rings of Growth is a

lifelong engagement, everchanging by new experiences and discoveries on the self. I look to the Rings of Growth as a mental model to remind myself of what I have uncovered and the potential that is still left to tap.

CHAPTER 4

EMBRACING MY THRIVING FUTURE

In my formative years, I had little support in cultivating my curiosity and lacked the safety I needed to explore who I was and what I liked. In my late teens and early 20s, I pushed myself to be in spaces where I had not felt invited or embraced, leading to feelings of *not belonging* and shame. I learned to make myself invisible as a protective mechanism. In my 30s, I came face to face with my core desire and longing to be seen and feel included. At times, straddling the two competing desires *to be invisible* and *to be seen.* Navigating these two needs exacerbated my depression and anxiety, generating intense IP experiences. By delving into IP and other important experiences to learn more about myself, I have been able to *paint a more complete picture* of who I am and have *collected important tools* in the process.

This sequence of events is indicative of my spirit of striving for more, of indulging in my curiosity and growth, and of my ability to take risks. In thinking about this exploration, I see that I have always had the components to be successful. However, a complex system of impostor views of myself had created barriers to seeing what was there all along.

What I understand now is that *self-as-instrument* means that I must help myself by creating the ongoing conditions of openness, safety, and mindfulness that can enhance my sense of self as a sharper and more durable instrument. Dr. Russo refers to this as "the oxygen mask metaphor" to illustrate the importance of taking care of yourself first before taking care of others. This has the power to save lives.

<u>Looking forward</u>

I have made the most of embracing the space that the OD program and its faculty created to facilitate my learning, which created the conditions for me to be open to other profound moments that have contributed to my self-awareness. I am fortunate to be in a position where I can similarly provide space and support to others. In my role, I am able to leverage my passion for the first-generation college student experience to help build and empower an alumni community of like-minded individuals. Taking stock of what I have learned so far has given me the confidence to continue ahead in sharing my life story to help others, which in turn brings me much joy and satisfaction.

Discussing IP is not only relevant to me in the practice of finding myself, but it is also a relevant construct on which to see how our organizational systems are built to capitalize on our internal drive to do and be better. Kets de Vries aptly notes that it is in our human nature to alter ourselves to fit in in one way or another. "To some extent, of course, we are all impostors. We play roles on the stage of life, presenting a public self that differs from the private self we share with intimates and morphing both selves as circumstances demand. Displaying a facade is part and parcel of the human condition. Indeed, one reason the feeling of being an impostor is so widespread is that society places enormous pressure on people to stifle their real selves." (Kets De Vries, 2005). In reflecting on my self-knowledge and awareness, I hope to use my experiences from this journey to help others navigate what, for some, are inevitable experiences with IP.

This learning journey has inspired me to continue to build my toolbox for a future career in coaching and consulting. I believe that my willingness and sincere desire to work in a relational capacity with tact, care, and passion for learning will make me an

effective practitioner in helping others uncover blind spots and the choices they have in reaching organizational and individual potential. In coming to this vision, I consider the following three key learning points as tenets to my budding practice.

1. The impact of our story of origin on human and organizational behavior and thus performance and outcome.

2. The significance of helping others by helping yourself

3. The core of a true helping relationship is congruency and trust-building that is only possible by understanding and bringing who you are to the relationship

<u>Self as instrument of change</u>

As the *Making Meaning from my Impostor Moments* model indicates, it is vital to continue to see our experiences as a continuous loop for learning, experimentation, and feedback. I spoke earlier on how I gravitated toward adapting the concepts of self-as-instrument and the use-of-self as an approach for living. What I appreciate about the idea is in the unspoken proposition that who I am at my core can uniquely serve others in a meaningful way. Operating at this level of authenticity means that I could live a more fulfilling and wholehearted life. Of course, use-of-self does not simply mean *going with your gut* in everything you do. Use-of-self requires care, attention, and maintenance of you as an instrument or tool to operate optimally. Most instruments become more finely tuned, resilient, and special with age, and I believe that this is a great aspiration in life.

In thinking about relying on self-as-instrument, I think that three conditions are needed to maintain self-as-instrument: mindfulness, trusting the process, and a sense of

curiosity. Each of these conditions works hand-in-hand with one another to support the self in any process.

Douglas Silsbee refers to mindfulness and awareness of our own habits of mind as cornerstones to being in self more and, therefore, more effectively helping others. Additionally, he speaks to the importance of knowing ourselves well enough to understand what we are bringing to the helping relationship, this includes limitations, biases, skills, and expertise (2004, p.3). Richard Schwartz (2013) describes the self as the "seat of consciousness," where the authentic self is not easily intercepted by its distressed parts (i.e., inner critic, self-doubt, fear) can remain centered and calm (p 809). These two perceptions on how to mindfully see the self as being composed of various parts help me better understand how impostor thoughts and feelings can be triggered. In taking a mindful approach through reflecting, reminding, and reframing, I can break through impostor moments to remain centered, calm, and in *self*.

I often recall a moment in DYNM 614, amidst feeling the most stress and pressure to complete a project or assignment, Dr. Russo once said, "trust the process." When I heard these three words, I could not conceive what that it meant or entailed. I may have at the time nodded vigorously and said, yes, *you are right, I'll trust the process*, but in actuality, I did *not know how*. Over the years, I have realized that it is a combination of a few things, to trust myself and my capability, and to trust that those whom you are helping are also resourceful and whole. I am learning to be more patient with myself and to quiet the mind in those moments where I might be overcome by fear and anxiety by going up to the balcony to observe, reflect, and reframe.

In his book *Flawless Consulting* (2011), Peter Block discusses the importance of trusting the change process. "There is a movement toward learning that has its own energy and own intention. The world will provide the events and will force movement. Life provides the disturbance. We do not have to induce change, drive it, or guide it. All we have to do is join it" (p. 315). He goes on to reaffirm that the helper is as much a learner as the client. His words strike me as a good interpretation of Dr. Russo's reminder to "trust the process." By accepting human nature and uncertainties of the world, we can ground ourselves in a spirit of learning and openness.

A sense of genuine curiosity is important to a continuous learning and growing cycle. It is curiosity that can help uncover truth and unlock potential in any situation. Edgar Schein offers principles and tips in his book *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help* (2009). Principle five: *Effective Helping Starts with Pure Inquiry,* Tip 5.1: "You must always start with some version of pure inquiry," (p. 153) expands my own notions of what it means to not rush into finding the answer or solution. Schein speaks to the value of pausing and reflecting before responding, no matter how clear the request for help may be. Tip 5.2: "No matter how familiar a request for help sounds, try to perceive it as a brand-new request that you have never heard before…access your ignorance" (p. 154). In other words, I should remember to suspend my biases and preconceived notions and ask myself *what it is that I truly do not know.* In my endeavor to be more authentic, I have come to see Schein's positioning of helping and inquiry, which he refers to as *humble inquiry,* as an important element in remaining authentic in the role as helper.

A lifelong endeavor in service to others

"Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose life we touch," (p. 30). Here, Parker Palmer in *Let Your Life Speak* (2000) describes the intersection of selfhood, society, and service and what is at stake when we are not true to self. He references the poet Rumi, who wrote, "If you are here unfaithfully with us, you are causing terrible damage," meaning that not being true to self can impact not just the self but others (p. 31).

Brené Brown, in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010), discusses her research and personal experiences on living wholeheartedly, "wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness… Wholehearted living is not a onetime choice. It is a process. In fact, I believe it's the journey of a lifetime," (p. 4). In writing this capstone, I often paused and asked myself *why was it that I was choosing to thrive, why do I want to feel more fulfilled, and live more authentically*? The answer did not come easily. In seeking an answer, my mind gravitates to the interconnectedness that exists between the questioning mind and our will to live. Victor Frankl (1963) speaks to our intrinsic motivation to thrive by pushing ourselves to survive and, in the struggle, realize our potential. In his words, "what man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him." (p.106)

I look back on moments in which my younger self felt *lost at sea,* vacillating on whether to believe in what she was intuiting or thinking or to just go with what everyone else was saying and doing. I did not have a strong connection to who I was at my core

and was confused as to who I was *supposed* to be even by others' standards. I intently hid this inner turmoil, believing that I was wrong for not knowing. By learning more about who I am, I have created a vision for myself that puts my desires, interests, and values into focus to help others do the same. I conclude this study with a reflection on hope. Just like my mother who did not give up or give in to her circumstances, I have chosen to honor her and my own journey by choosing to thrive. Although I may feel uncertain about what lies ahead, I feel more certain about who I am and what I am capable of achieving.

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