

Developing Leaders for a World Disrupted:  
A Case Study Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program

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## **Abstract**

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This qualitative case study sought to better understand the complexity of developing executives to lead in a landscape of disruption and uncertainty, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the development intervention in a world that is constantly changing. The purpose of this study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how their organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The researcher chose a single-case study design to evaluate the long-term impact of an executive development program within a bounded organization by looking at three key areas for the research questions: individual development, facilitators and barriers to learning transfer, and organizational outcomes.

The 13 study participants were a subset of a cohort from an Executive Development Program (EDP), designed to harness the power of disruption to prepare leaders to navigate their teams through a constantly changing landscape with care, curiosity, and courage. The EDP took place at Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI), a pseudonym, which is a firm providing essential information to the global financial markets to inform decision-making.

The data collection methods leveraged to conduct this case study were semi-structured interviews with the 13 participants and program architect, and a review of archival program documentation. The data were coded and organized according to the research questions and

conceptual framework. Analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the findings were organized into four analytic categories: (1) individual shifts in mindsets or behavior; (2) enabling factors of learning transfer; (3) barriers to learning transfer; and (4) tangible or intangible benefits for the organization.

This study revealed that all 13 leaders in EDP experienced a shift in their leadership style in at least one of the three lenses of care, curiosity, or courage. It also revealed that all participants encountered facilitators and barriers to learning transfer, which were grouped into the themes of individual motivation, work environment, and program design. All leaders were able to describe at least one way that GFAI benefitted from the investment in the EDP, with the top benefit being an engaged and committed network of leaders who could rely on each other to solve problems across the firm.

Recommendations are offered to practitioners who aspire to build highly capable leaders prepared to navigate a dynamic and disruptive world, including: (1) leverage measurement tools to understand a leader's ability to adapt to complexity; (2) design learning experiences that provoke new perspectives to enable transformation; (3) evaluate programs over time to allow for participants to apply their learning and for others in the organization to recognize the shifts the leader is making; and (4) engage the Executive Team (the level of leadership that reports directly to the CEO) as program sponsors and champions early in the design process and clearly articulate what is expected of them as organizational leaders and role models. Recommendations for future research are also included.

# Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
Dedication .....	ix
Chapter 1—Introduction .....	1
Background and Context for the Research Study .....	1
Organizations Disrupted by Continuous Change.....	1
Executive Development Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment.....	3
Evaluating Programs through Learning Transfer and Organizational Benefits.....	5
Research Problem .....	7
Purpose and Research Questions .....	9
Research Design Overview .....	10
Researcher Perspectives, Assumptions, and Anticipated Outcomes .....	11
Rationale and Significance of the Study .....	12
Definition of Key Terms Used in This Study .....	13
Chapter Summary .....	15
Chapter 2—Literature Review .....	17
Overview of Literature Review .....	17
Process for Selecting Sources .....	19
Topic 1: Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities.....	20
The Dynamic External Environment Impacting Modern Organizations .....	20
Changes in the External Environment Impact an Organizational System .....	23
Trends in the External Environment Impacting Workplace Learning.....	26
Topic Summary: Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities ...	28
Topic 2: Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment .....	28
Background and Purpose of Executive Leadership Development.....	30
Holistic Frameworks for Executive Leadership Development Design.....	32
Limitations and Critiques of Executive Development.....	33
The Business Case for Executive Development .....	34
Adult Learning Considerations for Designing Executive Development Programs .....	34
Experiential Learning Theory .....	35
Transformative Learning Theory .....	37
Adult Development Theory .....	38
Topic Summary: Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment.....	41
Topic 3: Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs .....	43
Overview of Learning Transfer Theory .....	43
Enabling the Learning Transfer of Executive Development Programs .....	45
Evaluating Learning Transfer in Executive Development Programs .....	47
Kirkpatrick Model of Program Evaluation .....	49
Program Evaluation through Organizational Outcomes .....	50

Topic Summary: Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs .....	53
Conceptual Framework .....	54
Organizations Respond to Disruptive Change by Advancing Their Leadership Capabilities .....	55
Executive Development Programs Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment.....	56
Transfer Occurs through Leadership Actions, Facilitating Organizational Outcomes .....	57
Conceptual Framework.....	57
Chapter Summary .....	59
Chapter 3—Research Methodology.....	62
Research Design.....	63
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design .....	63
Rationale for Single-Case Study Methodology .....	64
Research Site and Participants .....	65
Research Site.....	65
Study Participants .....	67
Overview of Information Needed .....	70
Contextual Information .....	71
Perceptual Information.....	72
Demographic Information.....	72
Theoretical Information .....	72
Data Collection Methods .....	73
Archival Documentation .....	73
Interviews.....	74
Semi-structured Interviews with Participants .....	75
Semi-structured Interview with EDP Program Architect .....	76
Interview Protocols Mapped to Research Questions .....	76
Triangulation of Methods .....	78
Data Analysis and Synthesis .....	79
Ethical Considerations .....	81
Pre-IRB Research Site Approval .....	81
Researcher’s Role within the Site .....	82
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	83
Credibility .....	84
Dependability .....	84
Confirmability .....	85
Transferability.....	85
Limitations and Delimitations of This Study.....	86
Limitations .....	86
Delimitations.....	87
Chapter Summary .....	88

Chapter 4—Case Study Setting .....	90
Research Setting: Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI).....	90
Company Overview .....	91
GFAI’s Purpose-Driven Response to Critical Events in the External Environment.....	92
Overview of the Executive Development Program (EDP) .....	93
Program Design .....	94
Program Evaluation and Measurement.....	97
EDP Learning Journey.....	98
Q1 2019: Program Design and Selection.....	99
Q2 2019: Program launch, Discovery and Insights, and First Immersion in Mexico City .....	99
Q3 2019: Development of Strategic Projects.....	102
Q4 2019: Second Immersion in New York City and Strategic Project Meeting with ET.....	103
Q1-Q2 2020: COVID-19 Global Pandemic Impacts EDP and GFAI .....	105
Q3-Q4 2020: Program Close and Ongoing Individual Development.....	107
Chapter Summary .....	109
 Chapter 5—Research Findings .....	 110
Research Finding 1: Shift in Leadership Style .....	111
Shift in Care .....	113
Care for Self.....	113
Care for Teams.....	114
Care for Communities.....	116
Shift in Courage .....	117
Speaking Truth to Power .....	117
Courageous Conversations Involving Social Justice Issues .....	119
Shift in Curiosity.....	120
Research Finding 2: Learning Transfer Enablers .....	122
Learner Motivation .....	123
Cohort as a Supportive Community to Learn and Grow .....	124
CEO Engagement in Participants’ Development.....	126
Research Finding 3: Learning Transfer Barriers .....	127
Lack of Engagement from GFAI’s Executive Team .....	128
Lack of Support for Strategic Projects was a Barrier to Enacting Real Change at GFAI .....	128
ET’s Disengagement Created a Collective “Disorienting Dilemma” for the Cohort.....	129
Executive Team’s Lack of Role Modeling Strong Leadership Behaviors .....	131
A Counterargument: Did the ET’s Lack of Engagement Inspire More Learner Motivation?.....	132
GFAI’s Culture as Barriers to Care, Curiosity, and Courage .....	133
Barriers to Care .....	133
Barriers to Curiosity.....	135

Barriers to Courage .....	136
Conflicting Priorities with Roles as Leaders of Large Teams at GFAI .....	137
Disruption of COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted Job Responsibilities and Program Design .....	138
Research Finding 4: Organizational Benefits .....	140
Network of Leaders Enables Business Results .....	141
Empathy Contributing to Enterprise Mindset .....	141
Collaborating across GFAI for Better Results .....	142
Network Effects of Talent Development across GFAI .....	145
Leading with Care, Curiosity, and Courage Yields Positive Impacts across GFAI .....	147
Strengthened Ability to Lead through Massive Change and Disruption .....	149
Other Organizational Benefits to GFAI .....	151
Selection for EDP Created a Sense of Loyalty and Belonging .....	151
Participants Given Expanded Roles .....	152
Chapter Summary .....	154
 Chapter 6—Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings .....	158
Analytical Category Development .....	158
Interpretation of Findings Based on Analytical Categories .....	160
Analytic Category 1: Individual Shifts in Mindsets and Behaviors .....	160
The Best Learning Happens Outside Your Comfort Zone .....	162
Differences in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants .....	163
Analytic Category 2: Enabling Factors of Learning Transfer .....	165
Motivation: High Levels of Autonomy and Authority .....	165
Work Environment: Engagement with Program Sponsor .....	166
Program Design: Multiple Opportunities to Work and Learn Together .....	167
Analytic Category 3: Barriers to Learning Transfer .....	168
Work Environment: Lack of Senior Leadership Support .....	169
Work Environment and Program Design: Lack of Support in Strategic Projects .....	170
Work Environment: Cultural Norms .....	171
Motivation: Tension with Conflicting Demands .....	172
Could the Barriers to Learning Transfer Also Serve as Facilitators? .....	173
Analytic Category 4: Tangible or Intangible Benefits to the Organization .....	174
Leadership Network .....	174
Impact on Teams .....	175
Navigating through Disruption .....	176
Linkages to the Literature .....	177
Organizations Respond to Disruptive Change by Advancing Leadership Capabilities .....	177
Executive Development Programs Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment .....	179
Learning from EDPs Transfers to Organizations through Leadership Actions .....	181
Organizations Benefit from Highly Skilled Leaders Prepared to Lead through Disruption .....	182



Summary of Interpretation of Findings.....	183
Chapter 7—Conclusions .....	186
Research Study Conclusions.....	188
Conclusion 1: Development Programs Can Enable Adaptable Leaders.....	188
Conclusion 2: Learning Transfer is Complex .....	190
Conclusion 3: Development Programs Benefit the Organization.....	191
Implications for Future Research.....	192
Leverage Multiple Perspectives to Determine Organizational Impact .....	192
Conduct a Comparison Study on Multiple Programs .....	192
Researcher as Observer in Development Program .....	192
Recommendations for Practice .....	193
Stay Attuned to Trends in External Environment that Impact	
Leadership Capabilities .....	193
Leverage Tools Rooted in Adult Development Theory to Determine	
Change Readiness .....	194
Design Learning Experiences with Transformation in Mind .....	194
Evaluate Programs over Time and Involve Multiple Perspectives .....	195
Engage Executive Team as Program Sponsors and Advisors .....	196
Revisiting Researcher Assumptions .....	196
Researcher’s Reflections on This Study .....	198
Chapter Summary .....	198
References.....	200
APPENDICES	
Appendix A—Conceptual Framework .....	210
Appendix B—Pre-Approved Template to Conduct Research at GFAI.....	211
Appendix C—Executive Summary Presented to Site Leadership.....	212
Appendix D—Research Site Approval Form .....	215
Appendix E—Participant Informed Consent .....	217
Appendix F—Participant Rights.....	222
Appendix G—Recruitment Letter to Participants.....	223
Appendix H—Demographic Inventory.....	225
Appendix I—Interview Protocol for EDP Participants .....	227
Appendix J—Interview Protocol for EDP Architect .....	228
Appendix K—Document Summary Form Template .....	229
Appendix L—Participant Demographic Summary.....	230
Appendix M—Final Coding Scheme.....	231

## List of Tables

Table		Page
3.1	Composite Demographics of Research Study Participants .....	69
3.2	Types of Information Needed for Each Research Question .....	70
3.3	Correlation of Interview Questions to Research Questions .....	77
3.4	Triangulation of Data Collection Methods for Research Questions .....	78
4.1	Replica of Initial Success Metrics Presented to GFAI’s CEO.....	98
5.1	Summary of Research Findings and Sub-Findings.....	112
6.1	Research Questions, Findings, and Analytic Categories .....	159
6.2	Sub-Findings and Links to Program Elements .....	161
6.3	Patterns in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants .....	164
6.4	Patterns in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants .....	175

## List of Figures

Figure		Page
2.1	The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992).....	23
2.2	Kolb’s Cycle of Experiential Learning (1984) .....	36
2.3	Visual Representation of Mindset Shifts as Adults Progress in Kegan’s Model of Development .....	41
2.4	Conceptual Framework for Developing Leaders for a World Disrupted: A Case Study Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program.....	58
5.1	Sub-findings for Research Finding 1 .....	113
5.2	Sub-findings for Research Finding 2 .....	122
5.3	Sub-findings for Research Finding 3 .....	128
5.4	Sub-findings for Research Finding 4 .....	140

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Lastly, I am grateful to my partner, family, colleagues, and friends who supported me throughout this journey. It takes a village and I'm very lucky to have such a strong and committed community standing with me in the pursuit of my passion for learning and growth.

S. F.

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to my niece, Violet. I hope you continue to be curious about the world and allow your own pursuit of passions to emerge. May you always surround yourself with people who support and champion your dreams, and who can also provide a safe space to work through the inevitable challenges you'll encounter along the way.

*“If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning.”*

– Carol Dweck

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter will introduce the single-case study on evaluating the long-term impact of an executive development program intended to prepare executives to lead through disruptive change. The program took place in a unique moment in time, beginning in 2019 and continuing through 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. While no organization was prepared for the level of disruption that resulted from the pandemic, the organization described in this case study was developing their executives to lead their teams in a dynamic environment. The massive global disturbance of the pandemic gave the EDP participants an unanticipated opportunity to immediately apply their learning by leading their teams through change with care, curiosity, and courage.

This chapter will discuss the background and context that situates the study, the research problem and purpose, the research questions, the approach to answer the research questions, anticipated outcomes, researcher perspectives, researcher assumptions, rationale and significance for the study, and definition of key terms used in the study. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

### **Background and Context for the Research Study**

This research study evolved from the researcher's curiosity around how leaders adapt to the changing world around them and guide their teams through the constantly shifting environment. The following sections describe the context for this research study.

#### **Organizations Disrupted by Continuous Change**

Organizations today face many challenges in a complex landscape: globalization, increased competition, domestic and international conflict, and digital disruption (Akrofi, 2019;

Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). In 2020, another level of complexity was added due to the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, which fundamentally shifted the nature and locations of work for many global organizations (Carr, 2020; Hart, 2021).

The shifting landscape of the dynamic external environment impacts how executive leaders operate to ensure that their organizations can adapt to change and generate consistent financial growth needed to survive against growing competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). The speed at which change is occurring is increasing at a rapid pace, largely due to disruptive technology, which impacts nearly every aspect of doing business (Pasmore, 2015). Pasmore warns that as change becomes more complex, many companies are still struggling to find approaches that ensure positive outcomes. He refers to it as a “wake-up call” (p. 14) for executive leaders to rapidly learn to increase their capacity in order to navigate the complexities of today’s dynamic environment. Further to this, according to the 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report, organizations and leaders need to prepare for a world of “perpetual disruption” (p. 4) by shifting mindsets from “disruption as episodic” to “disruption as continuous” (p. 4) and to embrace disruption as a catalyst to accelerate the organization’s progress.

The evolving nature of today’s world calls for a change to how the executive leadership function operates. Executive development programs are mechanisms that can help prepare leaders for the capabilities needed to lead in these uncertain times (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021, Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

According to Akrofi (2019), an executive development program (EDP) is comprised of the combination of formal and informal learning interventions designed to facilitate greater efficiencies, creativity, and innovation, with the goal of improving organizational performance. Development at the executive level enhances both management and leadership capabilities to drive organizational value and enable leaders to offer better support and resources to employees within the organization. Executive development is intended to improve the performance of individual executives and equip them to exert their full potential for the benefit of the organization (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021, Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

An organization's ability to embrace disruption depends upon its leadership's ability to influence change (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Senge (1994) postulated that leaders are responsible for building organizations where people can continuously learn and expand their capacities to understand complexity in order to thrive in a dynamic environment. Leaders must first develop these capacities within themselves before they are able to develop them in others, which is why executive development is a key enabler for organizations to navigate the environment of complex change and disruption (Henderson, 2002; Pasmore, 2015; Torbert, 2004).

### **Executive Development Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment**

Executive development can be a strategic tool in preparing leaders for a dynamic environment, but also in helping these leaders make meaning, shift perspectives, and transform their leadership style for the constantly evolving world (Akrofi, 2019;; Conger & Zin, 2000 Loveless, 2021). Executive development programs ready leaders for positions of increased scope and responsibility, while also equipping them for the evolving nature of the world in which they



lead (Loveless, 2021). As technology evolves, work becomes ever more complex and abstract, demanding a different type of mental model or cognitive structure from leaders (Mezirow, 1997). In this new world of work, leaders need to understand and manipulate information rather than just merely acquiring it, which requires a different set of skills and abilities (Burke & Noumair, 2015; McLagan, 2003; Mezirow, 1997; Pasmore, 2015). According to Mezirow (1997), resources should be directed toward creating a workforce that can adapt to changing conditions of employment, exercise critical judgment on systems-related issues, and engage in more collaborative decision-making.

While there are many methods to design executive development programs, understanding how adults learn and make meaning out of their experiences is crucial to the success of any program design (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Three perspectives on how adults make meaning are experiential learning theory (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Kolb 1984, Lewin, 1946), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000), and adult development theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Rooke & Torbert, 2009). Leveraging adult learning theories can help practitioners design executive development programs to deepen a leader's capacity for critical reflection, self-awareness, and engagement with the larger world (Ciporen, 2010; Loveless, 2021; Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1997) stated that a "defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experiences" (p. 5). Further to this, Ciporen (2010) suggested that the competencies that define transformative learning—becoming more open, reflective, inclusive, discriminating, and emotionally capable of change (Mezirow, 1990, 2000)—have the potential to help leaders address the complex challenges of leading in a world of continuous disruption.

## **Evaluating Programs through Learning Transfer and Organizational Benefits**

Increased attention to continuous learning and a deeper understanding of how knowledge and learning are applied within organizations have become even more critical when developing leaders to lead in a world disrupted by continuous change (Pasmore, 2015). Recognized as seminal researchers in the field of learning transfer, Holton et al. (2000) offer a generally agreed upon definition of transfer of learning: “transfer of learning involves the application, generalizability, and maintenance of new knowledge and skills” (p. 334). The terms “transfer of learning,” “learning transfer,” “training transfer,” and “transfer of training” are all synonymous with a topic that has been researched as far back as the early 20th century. For instance, Thorndike and Woodworth’s (1901) identical elements theory showed that there was a higher degree of transferring learning when content taught in school matched the problems students were attempting to solve outside of the classroom. In its most rudimentary sense, transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context impacts performance in another context (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). In organizational learning, leveraging identical elements theory would include designing off-the-job learning experiences that are directly applicable to the on-the-job work experiences, thereby increasing the extent to which the learning that results from a training experience leads to meaningful changes in how work is performed (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Holton et al., 2001).

Numerous studies (e.g., Akrofi, 2019; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2000; Noe, 1986; Pontefract, 2019; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986) have pointed out a recurring problem with learning transfer: organizations invest in learning experiences for employees but fail to yield positive results when learners leave the training environment to go

back into their roles in an organization. The learning transfer problem is complex, and researchers (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005) recommend evaluating learning transfer as a multidimensional phenomenon, with the three main categories of factors that influence learning transfer: individual learner, work environment, and intervention design and delivery (Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007).

Given the shifts in the organizational environment that call for a new kind of executive leader, when an organization decides to invest in leadership development, the program evaluation can determine the effectiveness of the learning transfer (Akrofi, 2019; Belling et al., 2004; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaides, 2012). Program evaluation is the process by which program planners determine whether the design and delivery of a learning program are effective, as well as what and how learning from the program is transferred back to the work environment (Belling et al., 2004; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998).

A widely used tool in program evaluation is the Kirkpatrick model (1998), consisting of four levels. The first level measures satisfaction with the learning experience, the second level measures whether the participants experienced an increase in knowledge or skills, level three measures whether the participants transferred their learning back to their day jobs, and level four measures the degree to which the learning experience contributed to outcomes or benefits for the organization. Level four is the most difficult to measure because it takes time for changes to occur in the organization. Because of this, and the multidimensional influences on learning transfer, level four results are not typically considered for most development programs(Alvarez

et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005).

### **Research Problem**

The shifting landscape of the disruption and continuous change impacts how executive leaders operate to ensure that their organizations can adapt to change and generate consistent financial growth needed to survive against growing competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). As disruption becomes more complex, executive leaders will need to quickly build their capacity to navigate the complexities of today's dynamic environment (Pasmore, 2015). Organizations that invest in leadership development programs to prepare their executives to lead their teams through disruption will be better equipped to navigate today's tumultuous environment (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Executive development initiatives are deployed as a means of equipping executives to prevent organizational decline, prepare the organization for threats from external environment, and futureproof the organization in the face of the emerging digital revolution, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and other challenges that will transform the business landscape (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015).

Executive development can be used as a strategic tool to strengthen leaders' ability to understand how the ever-evolving external environment impacts internal factors for an organization's culture, strategy, and leadership capabilities (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021, Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). Scholars throughout the last several decades (e.g., Akrofi, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Novicevic, 2009) have noted that without executive leadership development, there would be an inadequate

supply of leaders who are able to manage the complexities of a dynamic modern world, and that sentiment remains true today. Organizations that invest in and intentionally embed leadership development into their fabric stand a better chance of surviving this era of constant change because they will become more proactive instead of reactive to disruptions and adjust their business models to be ahead of the competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

In the ideal scenario, executives will immediately apply what was learned in a development program to make valuable contributions that propel the organization forward and increase its value (Akrofi, 2019). However, according to a 2019 report by the Association for Talent Development, research has consistently shown that, on average, less than 30% of learning from off-the-job training programs is applied on the job. Researchers (e.g., Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Georgenson, 1982; Pontefract, 2019; Saks, 2002) have been studying what is referred to in the literature as the “transfer problem” for decades and have found similar results. In terms of value to organizations, Pontefract (2019) reported that in 2018, \$87.6 billion was spent on corporate training. If roughly 30% of that learning is being applied on the job, then 70% of what is being spent on training is wasted or not realized.

This study explored the following research problem: if modern executive development programs are intended to prepare executives to lead through the complex landscape of disruptive change, then new ways of understanding learning transfer, behavior and mindset shifts, and evaluating effectiveness of these programs are also needed (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015, Watkins et al., 2011). The multidimensional factors involved in learning transfer (i.e., learner motivation, work environment influences, and intervention design and delivery) make the evaluation process increasingly complicated (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume

et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2001; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005). Another problem presented in the learning transfer research is, while many studies have been conducted on whether learning has been transferred (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012), there is a gap in the literature on studies that show what, if any, organizational outcomes were generated because of the executive learning intervention. Behavior change takes time not only to develop in the individual but also to be recognized by others, and organizations often want to see immediate returns on the investment for costly executive development programs (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Packard et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). Time is also a factor when measuring medium- to long-term outcomes for the organization, as this often involves using qualitative methods, such as interviewing and questionnaires with open-ended questions, requiring a level of resources that organizations may not have to leverage (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al. 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The research questions were devised to examine several key areas: individual development, learning transfer, and organizational outcomes:

1. *Development*: How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?

2. *Transfer*: What enabled or disabled the participants' ability to transfer their learning?
3. *Outcomes*: What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?

### **Research Design Overview**

This single-case study examined the experience of a cohort of leaders who went through an Executive Development Program (EDP) at Global Financial Analytics and Insights (GFAI), a financial services organization. Rich descriptions are provided for the organizational context of GFAI, EDP program design, experiences of the cohort of leaders, enablers and disablers of learning transfer, and how the organization benefitted from the investment in the EDP.

To select the research site for this single-case study, the researcher sourced an executive development program where the program owners, stakeholders, and sponsors were interested in studying the long-term impact of the participants' learning experiences to the organization. The research participants comprised of 13 members of a 23-person cohort, from a single development program within a bounded organization. This case study is based on the experience and perspectives of the participants.

A combination of data collection methods akin to the sources of evidence outlined by Yin (2017) for use in a case study methodology was used to explore and describe the learning experience of the cohort and what benefits they perceived for the organization. The data collection methods for this case study were archival program records and semi-structured interviews with both the participants and the program architect. The participants who consented to being part of the research received a questionnaire to gather initial demographic data. These participants consented either to being recorded or to having the researcher document the

interview through robust notetaking. In Chapter 3, the ethical considerations and procedures put in place to protect the identity of the organization and participants are outlined.

### **Researcher Perspectives, Assumptions, and Anticipated Outcomes**

The researcher's background is in organizational development, change leadership, adult learning design and facilitation, and executive coaching. Developing executives to manage transformational change sits at the intersection of the researcher's portfolio of skills and interests.

Based on the researcher's experience in development programs, three primary assumptions were made regarding this study. First, each participant will have experienced some type of shift in their perspectives on leadership. This assumption is based on the length of the program, the way in which the program was designed, and observations about leaders after they have experienced an intensive development program. This assumption is also based on the researcher's own experience in various leadership development programs.

Second, because leaders at GFAI have reached a certain stage of life where they can be considered mature adults, there will be a level of self-sufficiency and self-efficacy in applying learning from the program back to their job responsibilities at the firm. This assumption is guided by a predominant adult learning principle that says adults prefer planning and directing their own learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Third, the researcher assumes there will be at one least way in which the organization benefitted from having this cohort of leaders go through the EDP. This assumption is based on the researcher's experience with development programs and the fact that while program outcomes are not always measurable and tangible, there are typically intangible benefits associated with having more engaged and committed leaders.



In seeking to understand the extent to which executives were able to transfer learning from the executive development program into their work experiences, the researcher anticipated discovering how executives made meaning from their experiences and how they applied that learning to leading their teams in a dynamic environment. The researcher also anticipated discovering how, if at all, the executive development program was perceived to have generated organizational outcomes.

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study emanated from the researchers' desire to uncover ways in which organizational leaders can be better prepared to lead their teams through the complex and continuous change of today's dynamic world (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). The executive development program described in this case study was GFAI's intervention to increase the capacity of high-performing executives to lead in a dynamic environment. This study is situated in a unique moment in time because the EDP was designed in 2019 to prepare the cohort of selected leaders to lead in through disruption. The program launched in mid-2019 and was expected to conclude by the end of 2020. The original intent of the program was to do four in-person learning experiences on four different continents over the course of 18 months. These experiences were referred to as "immersions", because the participants were fully immersed in the culture of wherever they were visiting by exploring significant artifacts and meeting local leaders to gain perspectives on various leadership topics. These immersions served as leadership learning labs to explore different ways of leading across disciplines. However, the program was disrupted in early 2020 by the COVID-19 global pandemic, thus giving the participants an unanticipated opportunity to immediately apply their learning.

Identical elements theory (Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901) has proven that increased results in learning transfer occur when the capabilities acquired in an off-the-job learning environment match capabilities needed in a performance environment. While the EDP was not designed to prepare the executives to lead through the unpredictable event of a global pandemic, the participants were presented with a perfect playground to immediately use their new capabilities to lead through an extraordinary disruption. This study explores how the executives in the EDP transferred their learning from the curriculum of leading in a dynamic environment to their daily work experiences, as well as how the organization has benefitted from having this cohort of leaders equipped with advanced capabilities to lead in a world disrupted. The context described in this study has the potential to lead many organizations to consider making large investments to develop new skills, behaviors, mindsets, and capabilities of their leadership teams to prepare them to navigate teams in a world disrupted with continuous change.

### **Definition of Key Terms Used in This Study**

- **Executive:** This study leverages Akrofi's (2019) definition of executive as a leader in the organization who is responsible for formulating long-range strategic plans, conducting high level boundary-management activities, and providing inspiration and talent management across the organization. Executive roles can include but are not limited to: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the "C-Suite" (e.g., chief marketing officer, chief information officer, chief people officer, chief technology officer, chief security officer, chief finance officer, etc.), senior vice presidents, divisional directors, and two to three tiers of direct reports of the C-suite. This study uses executive to refer to the two to three tiers of leaders at GFAI. The Executive Team (ET) refers to the layer of leadership that reports to the CEO.

- **Executive Development Program (EDP):** This study leverages Akrofi's (2019) definition of an executive development program, which is comprised of the combination of formal and informal learning interventions designed to facilitate greater efficiencies, creativity, and innovation and improve organizational performance. This study uses executive development and leadership development interchangeably.
- **Learning Transfer:** Learning transfer is defined as the ability of a learner to successfully apply the behavior, knowledge, and skills acquired in a learning event back to his or her daily job, resulting in higher levels of job performance (Leaman, 2014). The "transfer problem" is a phenomenon studied by researchers to address the challenge of investing resources in learning experiences that fail to yield positive results and/or behavior change back on the job (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2000; Noe, 1986; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).
- **Program Evaluation:** Program evaluation is the process by which learning and development practitioners determine whether the design and delivery of a learning program are effective. Program developers use informal and unplanned evaluation opportunities as well as systematic and developmental approaches. Typically, a program evaluation measures the extent to which the program met the learning objectives. Ideally, evaluation occurs throughout the planning cycle and is linked to learning transfer (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).
- **Experiential Learning Theory:** Kolb (1984) describes experiential learning as a process by which concepts are derived from and subsequently modified by life experiences. People have mindsets and belief systems based on the experiences that have shaped their lives, and the process of lifelong learning involves having those mindsets and belief systems modified in

some way after an experience takes place. In other words, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience (Dewey, 1938).

- **Transformative Learning Theory:** A form of experiential learning, Mezirow (1990, 1997, 2000) describes transformative learning as the process by which our mindset and belief systems change because of those learnings from experiences. Mezirow (1997) states that a “defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experiences” (p. 5).
- **Mindset/Mindset Shift:** This study leverages Mezirow’s (1990, 1997, 2000) use of mindset and mindset shift in a learning context. He describes how people develop and use critical self-reflection to consider their beliefs and experiences, and over time, become more discriminating, open, and emotionally able to change.
- **Adult Development Theory:** Adult Development theory offers a way to understand the multi-stage journey through the human meaning-making process, outlining how one develops from simple to complex ways of knowing, relating to others, and engaging with the world (Kegan 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert et al., 2004).

### Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research study on evaluating learning transfer for a leadership development program intended to prepare executives to lead through disruption. The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today’s dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change.

Executives today are faced with leading in a world of disruption and continuous change (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015). Organizations can invest in development programs to prepare their leaders with skills and capabilities to lead their teams through this landscape (Akrofi, 2019). However, research on leaning transfer from development programs indicates that knowledge gained from these programs yields poor rates of transfer to the work context (e.g., Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Georgenson, 1982; Pontefract, 2019; Saks, 2002). This is a problem because organizations invest significant amounts of money to upskill their executive leaders, with a large percentage of that geared toward developing leaders, and do not see the results from their investments (Akrofi, 2019; Pontefract, 2019). While many studies have been conducted on whether learning has been transferred, there is a gap in the literature on studies that show what, if any, organizational outcomes or benefits were generated because of the learning intervention (e.g., King & Nesbit 2015; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

This chapter discussed the background and context that situated the study, the research problem and purpose, the research questions, the approach to answer the research questions, anticipated outcomes, researcher perspectives, researcher assumptions, rationale and significance for the study, and definition of key terms used in the study, and concluded with this summary.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of literature. The literature review consisted of three topics: (1) Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities; (2) Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment; and (3) Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs.

### **Overview of Literature Review**

The first part of the review explores how disruption impacts an organization's need to develop executives who are capable of navigating and leading through a dynamic environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Burke & Litwin, 192; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). Change is the only constant in today's world, and the tumultuous environment creates an economic imperative to develop capabilities of leaders to drive value amidst disruptive change as a mechanism for their organizations' survival (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015). This section reviews trends in the external environment that impact the capabilities of an organization's leadership function (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015), as well as trends that shape workplace learning (Carr, 2020; Hart, 2021; McLagan, 2003). The implication for this section is to provide the context for why leadership development requires an understanding of

the complexity of the external environment and how these trends impact factors within an organizational system.

The second part of the review discusses how executive development programs (EDPs) are strategic tools for an organization to survive disruptive change (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Pasmore, 2015). This section describes the history and purpose of executive development (Akrofi, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Novicevic, 2009), as well as typical design methods and frameworks for holistic program development (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Hanson, 2013; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006). This section also includes a brief overview of adult learning theories that, according to the literature, have been leveraged in the design of executive development programs to provide a theoretical foundation for how adults construct meaning (Dewey, 1938; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kolb, 1984; Lewin, 1946; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000; Rooke & Torbert, 2009). The implication for this section is to provide context for designing executive programs for value creation by using theoretical underpinning of how adults learn and make meaning from their experiences.

The last part of the literature review discusses how evaluating learning transfer enhances the business case for executive development. Development programs can be a costly investment for organizations (Pontefract, 2019). Even with the knowledge of the new economic imperative to develop leaders to compete in the dynamic environment, organizational learning practitioners will need to balance the risks and rewards of the programs (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015). This section of the review will discuss the multidimensional complexity of learning transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1998; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Holton et al., 2001), the traditional practices of program evaluation (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998), and the recommended practices for how to successfully evaluate learning transfer over time (Akrofi, 2019; van Hoek et al., 2013;

Watkins et al., 2011). The implication for this section is to explore ways to evaluate the longer-term impact of the investment in developing executives to lead in a dynamic environment.

### **Process for Selecting Sources**

To conduct this literature review, the researcher used multiple sources, including books, dissertations, scholarly and academic journal articles, and internet resources. These sources were accessed through CLIO, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Initial search terms included the following, in various combinations: *learning transfer, transfer of learning, knowledge transfer, executive development, executive education, executive leadership development, developing executives for VUCA, developing executives for complexity, organizational outcomes of executive development programs, measurement of executive development programs, and evaluation of executive development programs*. For most of the literature review, sources were limited to the past ten years to review the most current trends. However, for the review of transfer of learning, no delimiting timeframe was used because the historical development and theoretical foundation of this topic were considered significant, and a timeframe may have precluded the inclusion of substantial relevant material. The researcher found some recent studies on transfer, but the seminal studies and literature reviews have been around for several decades and provide the foundation for understanding this concept.

This literature review builds the case that for an organization to survive amidst disruptive change, it will need to invest in development for their executives to lead their organizations in generating value in today's dynamic environment. This section provided a roadmap of the literature review, including the topics explored and how the review was conducted. The following sections will review three main topics relevant to the study: (1) Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities; (2) Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic



Environment; and (3) Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs. The objective of the initial review of literature is to ground the study in the context of the research problem and to identify gaps in the current literature. There were ongoing literature reviews throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis phases of the study.

### **Topic 1: Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities**

For organizations to survive in the modern world, they need the ability to create consistent value and financial growth (Akrofi, 2019). The evolving nature of the external environment creates an economic imperative that forces internal change in the skills and capabilities needed by modern executives to shape their organizations and teams to stay relevant in the markets in which they operate (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015). Executives need to understand that their ability to adapt to change and develop new capabilities in these complex modern times facilitates their organizations' survival amidst disruption (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015).

This section of the literature review will discuss how the demands of today's dynamic environment shape the organizational landscape and the expectations of leaders. This section is relevant to the study because it provides the context for why development programs are focused on preparing executives to expand their capabilities to face unpredictable business challenges in today's modern world.

#### **The Dynamic External Environment Impacting Modern Organizations**

In today's modern world, change and disruption are occurring quickly and constantly, and in multiple dimensions all at once, creating an uncertain environment in which organizations and leaders operate (Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). Courtney et al. (1997) suggest that there are four levels of uncertainty: level one involves a clear enough future, level two

involves alternative futures, level three involves a range of futures, and level four is true ambiguity. Level four involves several dimensions of uncertainty, creating an environment that is virtually impossible to predict. Levels three and four involve learning through complexity, where future outcomes are influenced by choices made in the present but are difficult to predict with a high degree of certainty (Nicolaidis & Yorks, 2008, 2009). The only way to be truly prepared is to embrace ambiguity and learn to lead others through this dynamic and uncertain environment (Akrofi, 2019; Nicolaidis & Yorks, 2008, 2009; Pasmore, 2015).

According to Bennett and Lemoine (2014), researchers have been preparing for levels three and four for several years by studying a phenomenon referred to as VUCA, which stands for *volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity*. VUCA describes an external environment that is difficult to predict and requires constant adaptations to navigate disruption. According to Bennett and Lemoine, in the VUCA framework, *volatility* refers to an unexpected and unstable challenge. Knowledge about the challenge is often available and easy to understand, but the challenge has unknown duration. *Ambiguity* is characterized by causal relationships that are unclear. These relationships have no precedents and can be referred to as “unknown unknowns.” *Complexity* is characterized by situations that have many interconnected parts and variables. Some information may be available or predicted, but the volume or nature of it can be overwhelming. *Uncertainty* refers to a condition where despite a lack of other information, an event’s basic cause and effect are known. Change is possible, but not a given (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Today’s executives need to lead through high degrees of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in order to be future-oriented as the global landscape continues to shift (Akrofi, 2019; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Nicolaidis & Yorks, 2008, 2009; Pasmore, 2015).

There are many factors that create the imperative for organizations to prepare their leaders to embrace and navigate change in the VUCA world. The speed at which change occurs is increasing at a rapid pace, largely due to disruptive technology, which impacts nearly every aspect of doing business (Pasmore, 2015). Other external forces for change that influence the organizational landscape include globalization, sociopolitical context, ever-shifting customer needs, natural disasters, epidemics, and most recently the COVID-19 global pandemic (Akrofi, 2019; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). The combined effects of these challenges impact the capacity for organizations to create consistent value and financial growth because there are so many unknown factors at play at any given time. The natural evolution of business and the impact of the external environment make some competitors less viable, leading to increasing business failure rates and acquisitions (Akrofi, 2019; Pasmore, 2015). To survive in this increasingly complex and volatile world, organizations will need to create consistent value, which is typically done through either organic growth and/or business combination or partnerships (Akrofi, 2019). Pasmore (2015) warns that as change becomes more complex, many companies are struggling to find approaches that ensure positive outcomes. He refers to it as a “wake-up call” (p. 14) for leaders to rapidly learn to increase their capacity to navigate the complexities of today’s dynamic environment.

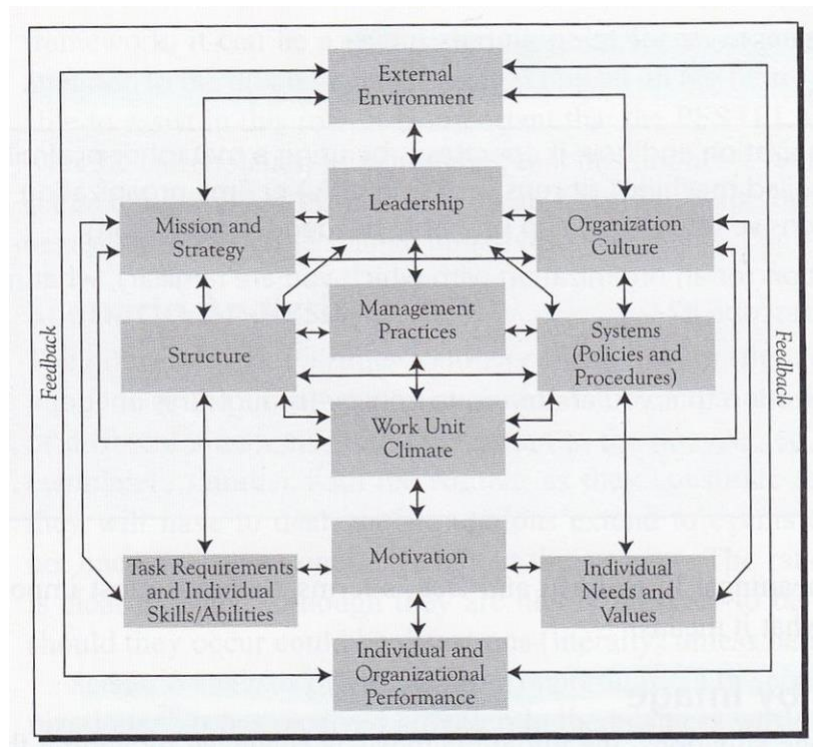
The next section will describe the causal relationship between the dynamic external environment and the organizational system, including the executive leadership function, which plays a critical role in ensuring an organization survives by expanding its capabilities to prepare for emerging business challenges (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015).

## Changes in the External Environment Impact an Organizational System

The executive leadership function plays a critical role in leading the performance and effectiveness efforts within the organization, and successful executives will rely on a wide range of capabilities to deliver value for their organizations (Akrofi, 2019, Burke & Noumair, 2015; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). One lens to view this causal relationship is the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992), represented in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1**

*The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992)*



Source: From Serrat, O. (2018). "Change Management Strategy in Action: Independent Evaluation for Learning." <https://libguides.tru.ca/c.php?g=714411&p=5093134>.

The overarching premise of this model is to show the influential relationships between the interconnected factors within the organization. When one factor experiences a change, it has upstream and downstream impacts to the entire system (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015). For example, a change in the external environment impacts elements that have the ability to transform an organization, such as mission and strategy, leadership, and organizational culture, as well as transactional relationships between people and groups, such as structure, systems and processes, management practices, and work unit climate. The model also provides a framework for how to provoke change in an organization. If an organization is looking to fundamentally shift its way of operating, a way to facilitate this is through the transformational levers in the model: leadership, mission/strategy, and culture. Changing these levers will have impacts on the transactional levers in the organization: structure, management practices, systems, work climate, tasks, motivation, individual needs and values, and individual performance (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015).

According to researchers (e.g., Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015), every company needs transformational leaders who can spearhead changes that elevate profitability, grow market share, and disrupt their industry through innovative ideas and products. When designing executive development, practitioners will need to consider the trends of the complex environment (Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015) in which the organization (or groups of organizations) operates. Change is happening in various dimensions all at once, and therefore executive leadership capabilities should strike a balance between results-orientation (to address short- and medium-term goals), people-orientation to unleash maximum productivity from employees, and future-orientation to prepare the organization for disruptive innovation and long-term survival (Akrofi, 2019). Developing leaders by expanding their capabilities to prepare for

emerging business challenges in the external environment impacts the organization's ability to survive through disruption and increases the organization's ability to generate value and consistent financial growth (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015).

While the Burke-Litwin model (1992) is one way to view the systemic impact of change on organizations, the design of the model is seen by some critics as problematic in terms of how the factors have been applied and defined (Bejinariu et al., 2017; Spangenberg & Theron, 2013). Another critique is the model's relevance and how it has not evolved over time (Bejinariu et al., 2017; Spangenberg & Theron, 2013). Researchers have added dimensions to the model to fill some of the gaps and limitations. For example, Gephart and Marsick (2016) added a learning and performance dimension to the model that represents what they believe to be critical capabilities needed for effective performance in a dynamic environment. Spangenberg and Theron (2013) provided an adaptation to the model that includes a human capital component because the researchers argue that understanding and developing talent plays a critical role in organizational performance and effectiveness.

Despite the limitations, the researcher chose this model out of the many models that depict organizational change (Bejinariu et al., 2017) to help explain the causal relationship between the external environment and the impact to the internal organizational system, including transforming how executive leaders respond to change and how they lead their respective teams through ambiguity and uncertainty. Viewing the organization as a system and the transformational role that executive leaders play builds the case for investing in executive development for organizations to survive the complex landscape of today's dynamic environment (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015).

While leaders are an important piece of an organizational system, another important factor is the process by which learning is designed, consumed, and transferred to the work experiences (Hart, 2021; McLagan, 2003). The next section will review the relationship between the impact of the external environment impact and the internal processes involved in workplace learning.

### **Trends in the External Environment Impacting Workplace Learning**

As the world around us changes and evolves, so does our understanding of how learning is constructed, consumed, and therefore transferred (Hart, 2021; McLagan, 2003). Learning is a natural process that occurs within the workplace by the need to solve problems. It is not something that can be controlled because people within the workplace have different styles and orientations toward learning and how they construct meaning out of their experiences (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1984; Kolb, 1984; McLagan, 2003; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000; Rooke & Torbert, 2006).

For example, a trend that shaped the early 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace learning environment was the sociopolitical context associated with a constantly changing world (McLagan, 2003; Mezirow, 1997). Democracy is a major sociopolitical format, so designing processes for learning will be affected by the norms and expectations developed within our social institutions. For democratic nations, the goal essential to citizenship is to think as an autonomous and responsible agent (Mezirow, 1997). Within an organization that operates globally, the context of national culture could play a role in influencing how learning is designed, consumed, and transferred. Democratic design methods for learning include involvement, transparency, opportunities for collaboration, and critical reflection (McLagan, 2003; Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow (1997) suggested that 21<sup>st</sup>-century workers need to be empowered to think as “autonomous agents in a collaborative context” (p. 8) rather than just to accept and act upon the received ideas and judgments of others. Workers need to become socially responsible critical thinkers. Further to this, with the advent of more virtual organizations, people are connected by processes and systems, rather than organizational charts (McLagan, 2003).

A major trend that caused organizations to rethink their workplace learning strategies was the COVID-19 global pandemic (Carr, 2020; Hart, 2021). Because the pandemic impacted how and where people work, organizations were forced to re-think their approach to organizational learning and what a learning culture means in a world of hybrid work environments (Hart, 2021). Because they are working from a space away from their managers and team members, virtual workers bear the most responsibility for self-directing their learning and continuously improving their contributions (Carr, 2020; McLagan, 2003).

Digital disruption and evolving technologies are trends that have changed the way in which organizations function and how tasks are performed (Akrofi, 2019; Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019). The emerging digital economy will require executives to consider the human-machine collaboration, its impact on the workplace, and how this can be enhanced to deliver value and long-term growth. Executives will be responsible for identifying the systems, processes, and roles to automate whilst determining which work will be taken up by employees (Akrofi, 2019). Bersin and Zao-Sanders (2019) found that 80% of CEOs believe that their biggest challenge is the need for new skills among their workforces because of the shifting nature of work. Building on this, employees reported that opportunities for development have become the second most important factor in workplace satisfaction (behind the nature of the work itself). In contrast to the need for skill building, Carr (2020) reports a trend in the rise of capabilities over skills. Instead



of acquiring finite skills, learning will need to address the role that individuals play in enabling the business strategy and outcomes (Carr, 2020). Whether it is developing skill or capability, self-directed learning has become the imperative in today's rapidly changing environment as automation, AI, and new job models reconfigure the landscape of modern organizations (Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019; Carr 2020).

### **Topic Summary: Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities**

The evolving nature of the external environment creates an economic imperative that forces internal change in the skills and capabilities needed by modern executives to shape their organizations and teams to stay relevant in the markets in which they serve (Akrofi, 2019; Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019; Carr, 2020). The ability to lead through change consists of an executive's capacity for adaptation, as well as actions the organization can take to cultivate the capabilities needed through executive development programs (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Bourke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). The first section of this review presented the context related to the current external environment and the impacts to the organization's leadership abilities, as well as systemic implications for how learning is designed, consumed, and transferred within an organization.

The next section of this review will discuss how organizations can design executive development programs to prepare their leaders for the dynamic external environment.

### **Topic 2: Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment**

In the previous section, the Burke-Litwin model (1992) for organizational change and performance provided a perspective on how the dynamic external environment calls for a change in how the executive leadership function operates (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore 2015). According to Yorks and Nicolaidis (2012), under conditions of rapid change, the ability to

generate superior insights is in many ways the most critical competitive advantage an organization (or individual) can have. Executives with the ability to quickly adapt to change will be better poised to generate insights resulting from the complexity of the world around them (Yorks & Nicolaidis, 2012). Executive development programs are mechanisms that can help prepare leaders for the capabilities needed to lead in today's uncertain times (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

Akrofi (2019) defines *executives* as leaders in the organization who are responsible for formulating long-range strategic plans, conducting high-level boundary-management activities, and providing inspiration and talent management across the organization. Executive roles can include but are not limited to: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the “C-Suite” (e.g., chief marketing officer, chief information officer, chief people officer, chief technology officer, chief security officer, chief finance officer, etc.), senior vice presidents, divisional directors, and two to three tiers of direct reports of the C-suite. Those included in the term “executive” vary by the type and size of an organization, including titles as well as tiers within the organization that are considered at the executive level; however, executive leaders often have at least 15 years of management experience and have teams of 100 or more people (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021). An *executive development program (EDP)* is comprised of the combination of formal and informal learning interventions designed to facilitate greater efficiencies, creativity, and innovation and improve organizational performance (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021). Development at the executive level enhances both management and leadership capabilities to drive organizational value and to enable leaders to offer better support and resources to employees within the organization; in other words, executive development is

intended to improve the performance of individual executives and enable them to exert their full potential for the benefit of the organization (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

This section of the literature review continues to build the case that executive development can be used as a strategic tool to prepare leaders for how the ever-evolving external environment impacts organizational leadership capabilities (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). This section discusses the background and purpose of executive leadership development in helping to shape an organization's readiness to adapt to change. Program design considerations will be discussed, as well as theories and concepts for how adults construct meaning from their experiences to enable knowledge creation.

### **Background and Purpose of Executive Leadership Development**

The main purpose of leadership development programs is to increase the capabilities of both current and future leaders to enable them to take on positions of increased scope and responsibility (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021). Executive development can be used as a strategic tool to prepare leaders for how the ever-evolving external environment impacts organizational culture and change (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). Executive development programs use various methods, such as 360-degree feedback assessments, one-on-one coaching, formal learning sessions, case studies, and experiential events, to promote introspection, increase self-awareness, and facilitate personal growth (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Culpin & Scott, 2012; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Schön, 1993; Senge, 1990).

The design and content of the executive development program should be largely driven by the challenges the organization faces in navigating the dynamic external environment (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). For example, the early pioneers of executive education in the United States were mainly universities, such as Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, during the 1920s and 1930s, where the curriculum was focused on war production competencies (Crotty & Soule, 1997; Loveless, 2021; Wuestwald, 2016). Scholars throughout the last several decades (Akrofi, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Novicevic, 2009) have noted that without leadership development, there would be an inadequate supply of leaders able to manage the complexities of a dynamic modern world, and that sentiment remains true today.

As executive development continued to evolve, more universities offered programs, and organizations also sought to develop programs customized for their culture and strategy (Crotty & Soule, 1997; Loveless, 2021; Wuestwald, 2016). Early executive education consisted of analyzing case studies and listening to lectures from subject matter experts on various topics, including leadership, organizational change, industry related knowledge, etc. (Conger & Xin, 2000; Culpin & Scott, 2011; Loveless, 2021; Novicevic, 2009; Wuestwald, 2016). Research into these methods has found that, while the cognitive approach to learning is useful for building functional knowledge, it is less effective for developing “social-behavioral skills” in senior leaders (Daniels & Preziosi, 2010). Examples of social-behavioral skills include effective communication, emotional intelligence, collaborative problem solving, and leading organizations through transformational change (Beechler et al., 2013; Conger & Xin, 2000; Crotty & Soule, 1997; Daniels & Preziosi, 2010; Wuestwald, 2016). Further to this, Lawrence (2013) asserts that traditional executive leadership development methods such as on-the-job training, job

assignments, coaching, and mentoring are falling short in developing the capabilities needed for leaders to succeed in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment.

Many researchers suggest that the most effective executive development programs use experiential learning methods to promote critical reflection and enable executives to access emotional and cognitive information when forming key judgments and making critical decisions (George, 2000; Goleman, 1998; Kendall & Kendall, 2017; Loveless, 2021; Shepherd, 1984).

Another popular method is using scenario planning, which involves projecting possible situations and then deciding which actions the organization should take to react and respond (Horney et al., 2010; Yorks & Nicolaidis, 2012). By forcing discussions of different alternatives to the scenarios, leaders can move away from their current ways of thinking and shift their mindsets about their future people needs, thereby developing leadership agility (Horney et al., 2010; Yorks & Nicolaidis, 2012). Leadership agility is the ability to sense and respond to changes in the business environment with actions that are focused and flexible (Horney et al., 2010). One way to better understand an executive's capability for leadership agility is to leverage 360 feedback reports, which can offer perspectives from various stakeholder groups and identify personalized development areas for executives who are growing their ability to respond to the dynamic external environment (Hanson, 2013; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021).

### **Holistic Frameworks for Executive Leadership Development Design**

Hanson (2013) provides a research-based model based on the "leadership system," which was developed from two academic research studies that included qualitative methods for analysis. Viewing executive development in terms of the leadership system involves the interconnectedness of the leader with their organization to drive better outcomes. The model consists of four quadrants: (1) leader reflection and discovery, (2), leader multilevel feedback,

(3) leadership context, practice, and fit, and (4) leadership learning and development (Hanson, 2013). Programmatic learning experiences combined with application and practice in the work context facilitates alignment between the leader and his/her organization. The model tests the assumption that an aligned view of the leadership development system will lead to more effective and measurable program outcomes (Hanson, 2013).

Akrofi (2019) offers a framework of blended learning that categorizes the various methods for development: *education*, *exposure*, and *experience*. *Education* consists of formal academic or leadership training led by internal learning practitioners or other internal subject matter experts or external facilitators. *Exposure* includes executive coaching, mentoring, leadership assessment instruments, and team-based learning activities. *Experience* includes stretch assignments, job rotations, international assignments, custom simulations, action learning projects, scenario planning, community service, and assignments that deepen reflective practice (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Within this framework, the capabilities should strike a balance between results-orientation to address short- and medium-term goals, people-orientation to unleash maximum productivity from employees, and future-orientation to prepare the organization for disruptive innovation and long-term survival (Akrofi, 2019).

### **Limitations and Critiques of Executive Development**

A key limitation of executive development programs is that they can be costly without a clear way to measure the return on the investment or how the learning from the program is applied back into the organization (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Culpin & Scott, 2012; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Schön, 1993; Senge, 1990). According to Strebler and Keys (2005), learning is transferred when the content of the program is linked to the organizational

and environmental contexts and is applied by the executives, generating changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. A further discussion of evaluating executive development programs for learning transfer is presented in the third topic of this literature review.

### **The Business Case for Executive Development**

To survive in this increasingly complex and dynamic world, executive development initiatives must be deployed as a means of equipping leaders to prevent organizational decline. This involves futureproofing the organization to prepare for threats in the face of the emerging digital revolution, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and other challenges that will transform the business landscape (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Developing capabilities within executives will build the capacity to confront and shift old paradigms and replace them with new ways to influence the value and growth trajectory of the organization (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Noumair, 2015). Organizations that invest in and intentionally embed executive learning into the fabric of their culture stand a better chance of surviving this era of constant change because they will become more proactive instead of reactive to disruptions and more quickly adapt their business models to be ahead of the competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021, Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009).

### **Adult Learning Considerations for Designing Executive Development Programs**

While there are many methods to design executive development programs, understanding how adults learn and make meaning out of their experiences is a crucial consideration (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Three perspectives on how adults construct meaning are experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984, Lewin, 1946), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000), and adult development

theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Rooke & Torbert, 2009). These theories were chosen from a range of adult learning theories, as they tend to be the foundation for many executive program designs (Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The basic premise of each theory, as well as critiques and limitations, is discussed to ground the research in adult learning theory and concepts.

### ***Experiential Learning Theory***

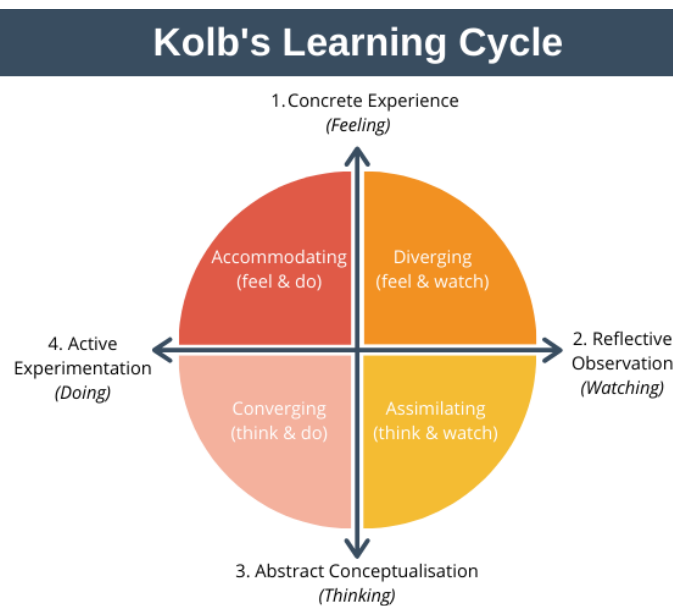
Experiential learning is impactful for executive development because making the learning stick relies heavily on the experiences executives are given to apply their learning in their day-to-day work (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Strebel & Keys, 2015). Kolb (1984) describes experiential learning as a process by which concepts are derived from and subsequently modified by life experiences. People have mindsets and belief systems based on the experiences that have shaped their lives, and the process of lifelong learning involves having those mindsets and belief systems modified in some way after an experience takes place. In other words, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience (Dewey, 1938).

According to Kolb (1984), the process of shifting mindsets and belief systems involves the tension and resolution of conflicts between opposing modes of adapting to the world. Depending on the experience, learners will choose between four different kinds of abilities to process their learning, which are illustrated in Figure 2.2: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). The act of choosing which ability or combination of abilities involves a stimulus-response between the environment and the learner. The ability to question, reflect, and converse is the capacity by which we grow and learn through experiences presented to us (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).



**Figure 2.2**

*Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning (1984)*



Source: Expert Program Management, *Kolb's Learning Cycle*.  
<https://expertprogrammanagement.com/2020/10/kolbs-learning-cycle/>.

Kolb's learning cycle is based on the complexity of a stimulus-response to make meaning out of experiences represented in Lewin's (1946) formula: *behavior is a function of the person and the environment* ( $B = (f) P + E$ ). Lewin's research suggests that learning happens through an integral process that begins with a focus on concrete experiences, followed by the collection of data and observations about those experiences. A learner's immediate personal experience is used to validate and test concepts. Experience gives life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to concepts and theories.

Experiential learning is the holistic process of adapting to the world around us, involving the integrated functioning of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb 1984). Ultimately, the goal of any type of learning is to create new knowledge. Kolb states that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"

(p. 38). Knowledge creation in experiential learning is the result of the transaction between the experience in the environment and the mindset and beliefs of the individual (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Lewin, 1946).

Different philosophical viewpoints offer critiques on experiential learning theory. Fenwick (2003) criticizes the inattention to the context of the learner, including ingrained beliefs of the individual and the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the learner's community that may impact how they make meaning from their experiences. Fenwick also suggests that experiential learning can occur in a variety of contexts, and therefore needs to be bounded. If all of life's activities are considered experiential learning, how does an educator distinguish between learning that happens in a classroom through discussion and reflection versus the learner's experience of life outside that classroom (Fenwick, 2003; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020)?

### ***Transformative Learning Theory***

Another theory used in adult learning program design is transformative learning (TL). TL describes the process by which mindset and belief systems can shift depending on how an individual constructs meaning from his/her experiences (Mezirow 1990, 1997, 2000). According to Mezirow (1997), adult learners acquire a collection of experiences that form their individual frames of reference that define their world view. Mindset refers to a person's frame of reference which is primarily the result of cultural assimilation and influences throughout a person's upbringing. Frames of reference can be transformed or modified through critical reflection on the assumptions by which an individual's interpretations, beliefs, and mindsets are based (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000).

According to Mezirow (1997), facilitating transformative learning involves guiding learners to become aware of and critically reflect on their own and others' assumptions. Mezirow

(1997) recommends reflective discourse with others to validate what and how a learner understands their own and others' assumptions. Learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and redefining problems from different perspectives. In this way, transformative learning becomes a social process, and discourse is central to the meaning-making process (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000).

The growing prominence of transformative learning theory in education has prompted critics to scrutinize several aspects of it. According to Clark and Wilson (1991), this theory is reflective of traditionally male values of individualism, rationality, and autonomy, and would benefit from a more diverse view of identity and values. Collard and Law (1989) critique that Mezirow's theory underemphasizes the importance of collective social action, and that it lacks an underlying theory of social change. Dirkx (2006) critiques the overemphasis on rationality in Mezirow's theory, arguing that emotions also play a role in learning. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is overly dependent on rational discourse, while not attending to the emotions involved in a transformative experience (Dirkx, 2006). Closely tied to this is the role that relationships play in transformative learning, which is largely absent from Mezirow's theory (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

### ***Adult Development Theory***

When designing programs for adult learners, practitioners may also consider adult development theory. The challenges that face executives in today's dynamic environment are complex and cannot be solved through short-term learning interventions (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Adult development researchers offer a perspective on why some leaders adapt to change more easily than others – it is the result of higher stages of adult development (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Rooke & Torbert, 2009). As life becomes more complex, those who have

higher stages of adult development have a greater tolerance for and understanding of complexity (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Rooke & Torbert, 2009). When combined with adult development theory, leadership development employs practices designed for ongoing personal growth through a combination of learning experiences (Day et al., 2014; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loveless, 2021; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000; Rooke & Torbert, 2009).

McCauley et al. (2006) identified more than 30 studies that employ the constructive-developmental framework to better understand leadership effectiveness and performance. Kegan (1982, 1994) and Loevinger and Torbert (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Torbert et al., 2004) are theorists most cited in the leadership literature (McCauley et al., 2006). These theories offer a multi-stage journey through the human meaning-making process, outlining how one develops from simple to complex ways of knowing, relating to others, and engaging with the world (Kegan 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert et al., 2004).

Although each theory has a different way of labeling, describing, and assessing the various stages of adult development, McCauley et al. (2006) offer a summary of the basic propositions and assumptions of constructive-developmental theory:

- People actively construct their understanding and meaning-making processes of both themselves and the world around them.
- There are identifiable patterns that describe how people make meaning referred to as stages, orders, levels of development, ways of knowing, worldviews, and/or action logics.
- Stages of development unfold in a logical, specific sequence from birth to adulthood, and in general, people do not regress back to a previous stage.

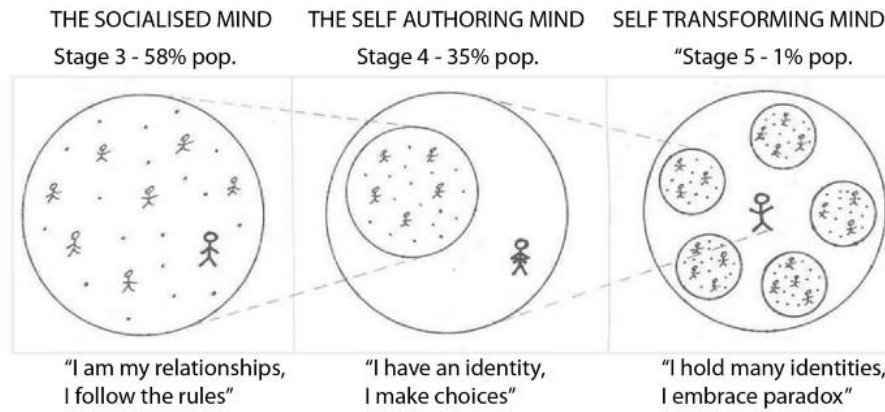
- To stimulate shifts in developmental processes, executive development programs often use learning methods that cause participants to experience a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000).
- A person’s stage of development influences what they become aware of and their ability to adapt to change.

The summary provided by McCauley et al. (2003) leverages many theorists, most notably Kegan (1982, 1994) and Loevinger and Torbert (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Torbert et al., 2004). Figure 2.3 provides a visual for Kegan’s view of the mindset shifts that occur as adults advance in stages of development. As noted by McCauley et al. (2003), each theorist represents his/her own stages of adult development a bit differently, so this is just one of many perspectives.

Adult learning theory provides context for how leaders operate and respond to their environment, depending on their stage of development. Every company needs transformational leaders who can spearhead changes that elevate profitability, grow market share, and disrupt their industry through innovative ideas and products (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Great leaders are differentiated not by their personality or philosophy, but by how they interpret their own and others’ beliefs and how they maintain power or protect against threats – a concept Rooke and Torbert (2009) refer to as “action logics.” Depending on a leader’s action logic, he/she can hinder or enhance the organizational performance. Those with action logics that can generate organizational and personal change or generate social transformation tend to be in higher stages of adult development.

**Figure 2.3**

*Visual Representation of Mindset Shifts as Adults Progress in Kegan's Model of Development*



Excerpt: Constructive Development Theory - Robert Kegan "In Over our Heads"

Source: Morad, N. (2017). *Part 1: How to be an adult – Kegan's theory of adult development*. <https://medium.com/@NataliMorad/how-to-be-an-adult-kegans-theory-of-adult-development-d63f4311b553>

For some executives, evolving changes in the environment allow them to take advantage of under-realized opportunities and adapt their leadership style to the shifting landscape around them. To thrive in today's dynamic world, executives will need to make changes that allow their organizations to flourish in turbulent times (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). There is enormous pressure put on leaders to respond to the anxiety of others with authoritative certainty, even if in times of uncertainty we know that nothing is assured. Adult development theory provides context for why some leaders are better at responding to challenges than others (Kegan, 1984; Rooke & Torbert, 2009).

**Topic Summary: Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment**

The second section of this review has continued to build the case that executive development can be used as a strategic tool to prepare leaders for how the ever-evolving external environment impacts organizational culture and change (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992;

Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). Scholars throughout the last several decades (Akrofi, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Novicevic, 2009) have noted that without executive leadership development, there would be an inadequate supply of leaders able to manage the complexities of a dynamic modern world, and that sentiment remains true today. Executive development initiatives must be deployed as a means of equipping executives to prevent organizational decline, prepare the organization for threats from the external environment and futureproof the organization in the face of the emerging digital revolution, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and other challenges that will transform the business landscape (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Organizations that invest in and intentionally embed executive learning into their fabric stand a better chance of surviving this era of constant change because they will become more proactive instead of reactive to disruptions and adjust their business models to be ahead of the competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). While there are many methods to design, understanding how adults learn and make meaning out of their experiences is a crucial consideration when designing executive development (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Three perspectives on how adults make meaning are experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984, Lewin, 1946), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000), and adult development theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Rooke & Torbert, 2009; Torbert et al., 2004). These theories were chosen from a range of adult learning theories as they tend to be the foundation of many executive program designs (Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

The next section of the review will discuss how to evaluate the learning transfer to determine the success of an executive development program.

### **Topic 3: Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs**

Learning transfer has been studied for over a century and has evolved as workplace learning practices and technology have evolved (McLagan, 2003; Pontefract, 2019; Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901). Learning from an off-the-job development program is transferred when the content of the program is linked to the organizational and environments contexts, and is applied by the executives, generating changes in attitudes, beliefs, habits, and behaviors (Strebel & Keys, 2015; Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901). A brief overview of learning transfer theory will be provided, followed by research studies on how to evaluate learning transfer in executive development programs.

#### **Overview of Learning Transfer Theory**

Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) conducted the first documented transfer of learning study by testing their theory of identical elements. The researchers studied 8,564 high school students and noticed that art and science courses had very little effect on strategic thinking and problem-solving skills. These courses developed general learning skills and intellectual abilities but did not serve for tackling problems encountered outside of the classroom. This study emphasized the significance of the relationship between content taught in a classroom environment and applicability to a real-world context, which set the foundation for the learning transfer research over the next century (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Salas et al., 1999).

A more current study that builds on the foundation of identical elements theory was conducted by Bersin and Zao-Sanders (2019), who argue that for learning to *really* happen, it



must fit around and align itself to the work. Their research found that there are 780 million knowledge workers worldwide, and they spend 6.5 hours per day in front of the computer. On average, knowledge workers spend 28% of their time on email, 19% of time gathering information, and 14% of time communicating internally through formal and informal meetings. For most knowledge workers, finding data, facts, information, and insights, and then sharing their knowledge with others is a daily activity. To complete these tasks, knowledge workers are using tools like Google, You Tube, internal databases, and intranet spaces to provide answers to real-time questions, thereby generating new knowledge that can be instantly applied to the task at hand. People are learning in the flow of their work every day and may not even be aware of it, which is a form of informal and incidental learning (Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019; Watkins et al., 2018).

While learning transfer has been studied for over a century, there seems to be no clear answer to the best way to design programs to maximize learning application. Numerous studies (e.g. Akrofi, 2019; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2000; Noe, 1986; Pontefract, 2019; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986) have pointed out a recurring problem with learning transfer: organizations invest in learning experiences for employees but fail to yield positive results when learners leave the training environment and go back to their work environment. In terms of value to organizations, Pontefract (2019) reported that in 2018, \$87.6 billion was spent on corporate training. In 2019, the Association for Talent Development reported that less than 30% of learning from training programs is applied on the job. Taking these numbers at face value, if 30% of learning is applied back on the job, then 70% of the learning (and investment in the learning program) is not realized. This research shows that, while

learning transfer has been widely studied, the transfer problem remains a persistent challenge for organizations that wish to invest in the development of their workforces, particularly at the executive level.

The learning transfer problem is complex, and researchers (e.g. Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005) recommend evaluating learning transfer as a multidimensional phenomenon, with the three main categories of factors that influence learning transfer: individual learner, work environment, and program design and delivery (Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007). The next section will discuss the complexity of factors that positively influence transfer for executive development programs.

### **Enabling the Learning Transfer of Executive Development Programs**

While learning transfer has been studied extensively, the researcher found only a handful of studies specifically related to learning transfer in executive development programs (EDPs). The results of these studies are discussed to provide context for evidence-based practices used in EDPs. Each of these studies provides further evidence that learning transfer is a multidimensional and complex process (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005).

In a study conducted by Ciporen (2010), facilitators and barriers to transfer were examined for 28 participants in an executive development program. The findings suggest that participants' ability to identify and use enablers for transfer is in and of itself an important leadership competency. Another commonality between these participants was the reported love

of learning and their intrinsic curiosity, which correlates to learner's motivation to transfer and, more specifically, a learner's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Culpin et al., 2014; Ciporen, 2010; Noe, 1986). Motivation to transfer is the learner's intended effort to utilize skills and knowledge learned in training settings to a real-world context (Culpin et al., 2014; Noe, 1986). Bandura (1982) defined self-efficacy as judgments an individual makes about his/her competency to perform a defined task. This study highlights characteristics in executive learners that enable learning transfer.

Culpin et al. (2014) conducted a study with 400 leaders in five cohorts of an executive development program at a German IT company to understand the relationship of intention to transfer and executive education. The results revealed two factors that enabled high rates of learning transfer from the EDP: (1) the executives had some prior knowledge of topic areas covered in the program; (2) the strategic nature of the program addressed a critical organizational gap that the executives sought to fulfill. The program allowed for significant opportunities outside of the classroom environment to apply the practice of differing communication styles, team communication, and networking. The study also postulated that four basic principles should be applied when designing EDPs: (1) active engagement, (2) limited but some prior knowledge of topic areas covered in the program, (3) clear applicability back to the workplace, and (4) opportunity for repeated practice in the work environment. The combination of explicit opportunities to develop skills within the program and the implicit learning outside of the core program were seen as conditions that facilitated learning transfer (Bandura, 1982; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Krishnamani & Haider, 2016; Noe, 1986).

Another study on learning transfer for an executive development program was conducted with a group of learners in Chennai, India who participated in an executive development

program delivered by the Great Lakes Institute of Management (Krishnamani & Haider, 2016). The results of the study showed a clear link between the role of executive learner motivation in the enhancing their skills, behaviors, and knowledge and transferring these enhancements back to their work environments. It also established a clear relationship between motivation to transfer and self-efficacy. When a learner is motivated and has the intention to transfer what is learned in a development program back to their job context, the learning is more likely to become embedded as a new skill or behavior (Bandura, 1982; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Krishnamani & Haider, 2016; Noe, 1986).

The researcher found several implications for this study in the learning transfer research. Burke and Hutchins (2007) noted that future research should theorize and assess learning transfer as a multidimensional phenomenon. Several researchers (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005) provided evidence that transfer is affected by multiple variables, with three main categories being individual learner, work environment, and program design and delivery. Burke and Hutchins (2007) also suggested that future research should address the need to view transfer from a systemic perspective and incorporate variables that have been shown to have consistently strong correlations with transfer, such as how the learning program facilitated organizational outcomes (Bates & Khasawneh, 2005; Burke & Hutchins, 2007).

### **Evaluating Learning Transfer in Executive Development Programs**

Given the shifts in the organizational environment that call for a new kind of executive leader, when an organization decides to invest in executive development, the program evaluation can determine the effectiveness of the learning transfer (Akrofi, 2019; Belling et al., 2004;

Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). Program evaluation is the process by which program planners determine whether the design and delivery of a learning program are effective, as well as what and how learning from the program is transferred back to the work environment (Belling et al., 2004; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Typically, a program evaluation measures the extent to which the program met the learning objectives (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Packard et al., 2013); however, many researchers (e.g., Edwards & Turnbull, 2013; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012) have noted that evaluation models solely based on measuring fixed learning objectives do not capture program outcomes robustly enough. Further to this, given the multidimensional factors that influence learning transfer in terms of learner motivation, work environment influences, and program design and delivery (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005), it is often difficult to evaluate programs because the number of variables affecting the program outcomes are too numerous to allow the planners to demonstrate that a given program produced the desired result (Packard et al., 2013).

Another challenge with evaluating learning transfer is that behavior change takes time, not only for new behaviors and mindsets to develop in the individual but also to be recognized by others, and organizations often want to see immediate returns on the investment for executive development programs (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Packard et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). Research shows that measuring medium- to long-term outcomes for the organization takes time and often involves using qualitative methods, such as interviewing or surveys with open-ended

questions, for which organizations may not have the necessary resources or funds to leverage for this depth of analysis (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al. 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

### ***Kirkpatrick Model of Program Evaluation***

The most frequently cited program evaluation model in the literature, developed by Kirkpatrick (1998), uses a “levels of evaluation” approach:

- Level 1 – **Reaction**: Measures the degree to which participants are satisfied with the training they have received. Practitioners refer to these evaluations as “smile sheets,” as they merely measure whether the participants enjoyed their experience.
- Level 2 – **Learning**: Analyzes if the participants had an increase in knowledge, skills, or experience because of the training program.
- Level 3 – **Behavior**: Reviews whether the participants have transferred what they learned in the program to their daily jobs.
- Level 4 – **Results**: Determines if the training program contributed to organizational outcomes.

In the Kirkpatrick model, level four is the most difficult to measure because it takes time for changes to occur in the organization. Because of this, and the multidimensional factors involved in learning transfer (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005), level four results are not typically considered for most programs. However, an argument can be made that the most meaningful evaluation data are realized by understanding how the organization benefitted from the investment in the program, and therefore building time into the evaluation protocol to collect

these insights would be ideal (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

A limitation of the Kirkpatrick (1998) model was found in a study by King and Nesbit (2015), who sought to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of a leadership development program. The researchers conducted critical incident interviews with 30 participants from an executive development program for an Australian government organization responsible for monitoring and enforcing financial services legislation. The researchers evaluated the program using a level one analysis after the initial completion of the program (Kirkpatrick, 1998) and then semi-structured interviews to explore connections made between the developmental experience, work environment, and the approach to business challenges. The research found that the program was generally considered successful; however, the positive emotional experience was not necessarily indicative of the acquisition of new learning, knowledge, or skills. Learning can be very uncomfortable and confronting, leading to a negative emotional experience at the close of a program, but this study concluded that more learning could be realized when participants were given time to reflect and synthesize their experience (King & Nesbit, 2015).

Another critique of this model is that it does not consider the cultural context within which executives lead and operate. Organizational impact of these cumulative individual changes will always be mediated by the cultural context—the structure, style, power, controls, communication networks, products, technology, and existing leadership style of the organization—and needs to be considered in the evaluation process (Edwards & Turnbull, 2013).

### ***Program Evaluation through Organizational Outcomes***

While Kirkpatrick's (1998) level four analysis of whether the development program contributed to organizational outcomes is the least used step in the model, several researchers

have conducted longer-term impact studies to capture how learning is transferred from executive development programs to enable organizational benefits and outcomes (Shammari et al., 2014; van Hoek et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). For example, in a longitudinal case study conducted by van Hoek et al. (2013), researchers studied the evolution of a customized executive development program in supply chain management. The purpose of the program was to prepare the leaders of the supply chain companies for changes to the industry. The program participants consisted of representatives from different sectors of supply chain management. The program's overarching objective was to increase the capability of executives to lead in the following strategic areas critical for supply chain management: globalization, competition, change management, and technology. After conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants and analyzing the archival records of the program, the researchers found that learning transfer occurred in all the strategic areas. The study concluded that linking executive development program objectives with strategic organizational objectives would better prepare leaders for the change required to drive the strategic imperatives (van Hoek et al., 2013).

A study by Shammari et al. (2014) sought to measure the impact of a five-day executive development program at Standard Charter Bank. This study used the case-study methodology to better understand how to measure the organizational outcomes from a development program. "Leading Across Boundaries" is the signature program at the firm, conducted in partnership with Oxford University. The program invites participants to think about challenges the organization faces, and how they need to adapt and respond as leaders. The researchers found that, over the course of time, leaders in the five cohorts have contributed to stronger organizational outcomes. The participants were able to connect the core program elements and leadership behaviors to organizational benefits and outcomes (Shammari et al., 2014).



Watkins et al. (2011) recommend using the Theory of Change model (Evaluation Forum, 2003) when developing and measuring executive development programs. The model begins by asking the program architects to identify the theory of change that underlies the program outcomes. These changes can be short-term, long-term, individual level, organizational level, and/or systems level. The next step is to identify relevant activities to show how they are linked to the intended outcomes of the program. The evaluation component of this model focuses on the essential premise that through a specified set of activities and experiences, individuals will change. This model was tested in two different research studies (Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaides, 2012) using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1957), where participant narratives were collected to increase understanding of how individuals changed within a specified organizational context. At the collective level, participants articulated a shift in their capacity to take in the process of change across the system and to act in new, more collaborative ways. Using a more qualitative approach revealed a more in-depth analysis of the changes across multiple levels (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaides, 2012).

The researcher found many implications to this research study when reviewing the literature on measuring program evaluation through organizational impact and outcomes. Akrofi (2019) advises that aligning executive development programs with value drivers of the organization will enable organizational outcomes from the EDP. Watkins et al. (2011) recommend that learning practitioners leverage Theory of Change (Evaluation Forum, 2003) when learning is action-oriented, emergent, informal, and incidental. The authors postulate that human behavior is not a discrete activity with a single trigger, but rather the result of a confluence of influences. Executive learners bring their past set of experiences to the EDP, while simultaneously operating within a present context, which has as much or more to do with what is

learned and transferred as the program itself (Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). Further to this, Watkins et al. (2011) call for studies using alternative methods for assessing learning transfer when executive development is more open-ended and complex. Qualitative techniques such as critical incident interviewing can be used in future research to capture organizational outcomes.

### **Topic Summary: Evaluating Learning Transfer for Executive Development Programs**

This section of the review was intended to explore practices for how to enable learning transfer and how to evaluate what learning was transferred, which enhances the business case for the investment in executive development (Akrofi, 2019; Culpin et al., 2014; Pontefract, 2019). This section also discussed ways to measure program effectiveness by evaluating the extent to which the program participants applied the learning and produced outcomes for the organization. The ideal scenario is that executives will take what they learn in a development program and immediately transfer their learning back on the job to make valuable contributions that propel the organization forward and increase its value. However, the research studies explored in this review revealed that it is difficult to do in practice because of the phenomenon known as the “learning transfer problem” (e.g., Akrofi, 2019; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ciporen, 2010; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2001; Loveless, 2021; Noe, 1986; Pontefract, 2019; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986).

Given the shifts in the dynamic environment that call for a new kind of executive leader, when an organization decides to invest in executive development, the program evaluation can determine enablers and barriers of learning transfer and whether the intended outcomes were delivered (Akrofi, 2019; Belling et al., 2004; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998;

Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). However, the multidimensional factors that influence learning transfer in terms of learner motivation, work environment influences, and program design and delivery make the evaluation process very complex (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005). It is often difficult to evaluate programs because the variables affecting the program outcomes are too numerous to allow the planners to demonstrate that a given program produced the desired result over a specified period of time (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Packard et al., 2013; Watkins et al. 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

A combination of approaches can be used to navigate the complexity of program evaluation and capture useful program insights about the impact of the learning experience, including linking executive education program objectives with strategic organizational objectives (Akrofi, 2019; van Hoek et al., 2013) and using more qualitative techniques, such as critical incident interviews, to capture changes in behavior over time (Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

While learning transfer and program evaluation have been widely studied, the lack of studies specifically related to evaluating learning transfer in executive development programs identifies a gap in the literature in this area, which provides further evidence to the research problem and purpose of this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) described the use of a conceptual framework to identify new relationships and perspectives after a critical review of the literature. The review of the literature, combined with the researcher's own experience and insights, informed the

development of a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework helps to focus and shape the research process, informing the design of the proposed methodology and data collection methods. The framework provides an organizing structure for reporting the study's findings and for the analysis and synthesis of those findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

This literature review provided a comprehensive perspective of why executive leadership development is needed to prepare leaders for the dynamic external environment, considerations for program design to include research-based methods and frameworks as well as adult learning concepts, and how to measure learning transfer. Several themes surfaced when conducting the literature review, which are discussed in the following sections.

### **Organizations Respond to Disruptive Change by Advancing Their Leadership Capabilities**

The complex, uncertain, and dynamic nature of today's modern world shapes the need for executives to lead their organizations and teams through disruptive change (Akrofi, 2019; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Courtney et al., 1997; Pasmore, 2015). Developing leaders by expanding their adaptability to emerging business challenges in the external environment impacts the organization's ability to survive through disruption by generating value and consistent financial growth (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). The Burke-Litwin Model for Organizational Performance and Change (1992) shows the causal relationship between the external environment and the organizational system. Developing executive leadership has both internal and external ripple effects because of the interconnectedness of the organizational system and the influence of the external environment (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). The systemic impact of change depicted in the model also impacts trends in workplace learning. These trends are reviewed and discussed to provide context for how the external environment

impacts the internal processes and landscape of workplace learning (Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019; Hart, 2021; McLagan, 2003; Mezirow, 1997).

### **Executive Development Programs Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment**

Executive development can be used as a strategic tool to prepare leaders for how the impact of the ever-evolving external environment impacts organizational culture and change (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). Scholars throughout the last several decades (Akrofi, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Novicevic, 2009) have noted that without executive leadership development, there would be an inadequate supply of leaders who are able to manage the complexities of a dynamic modern world. Development initiatives must be deployed as a means of equipping executives to prevent organizational decline, prepare the organization for threats from the external environment, and futureproof the organization in the face of the emerging digital revolution, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and other challenges that will transform the business landscape (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015).

While there are many methods to design, understanding how adults learn and make meaning out of their experiences is a crucial consideration when designing executive development programs (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Three perspectives on how adults construct meaning are experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984, Lewin, 1946), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000), and adult development theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Rooke & Torbert, 2009; Torbert et al., 2004).

## **Transfer Occurs through Leadership Actions, Facilitating Organizational Outcomes**

Given the shifts in the dynamic environment that call for a new kind of executive leader, when an organization decides to invest in executive development, the program evaluation can determine enablers and barriers of learning transfer and whether the intended outcomes were delivered (Akrofi, 2019; Belling et al., 2004; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). However, evaluating learning transfer is complex because of the multidimensional factors involved in the most referenced enablers of learner motivation, work environment, and program design and delivery (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2001; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005). It is often difficult to evaluate programs because the number of variables affecting the program outcomes are too numerous to allow the planners to demonstrate that a given program produced the desired result (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Packard et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). A combination of approaches can be used to navigate the complexity and capture useful program insights from participants about the impact of the learning experience, including linking executive education program objectives with strategic organizational objectives (Akrofi, 2019; van Hoek et al., 2013) and using more qualitative techniques, such as critical incident interviews, to capture changes in behavior over time (Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012).

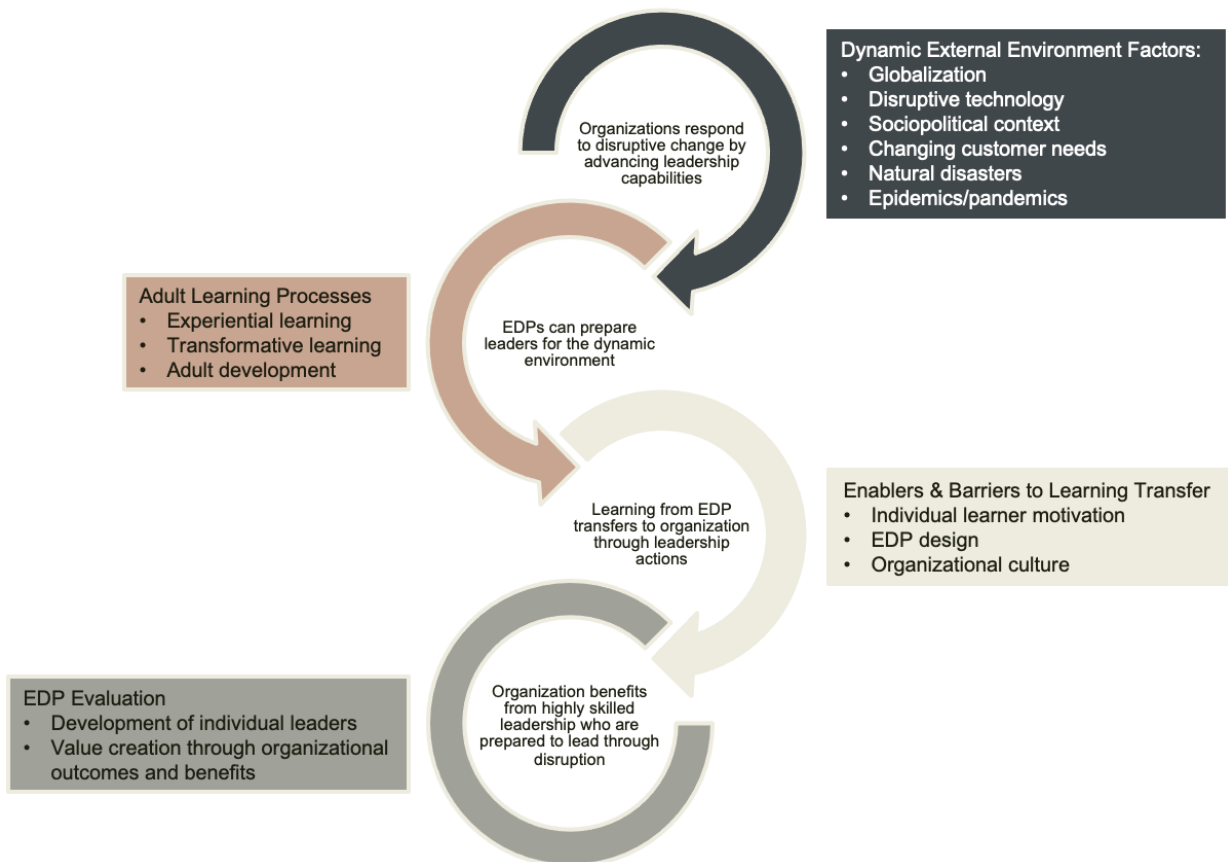
### **Conceptual Framework**

The analysis of themes from the literature review led to the development of a holistic conceptual framework displayed in Figure 2.4. The conceptual framework depicts the process of how organizations can respond to factors in the dynamic external environment through executive

development programs. The effectiveness of the program is a product of multi-dimensional factors of learning transfer that can be both enablers and barriers, including individual learner motivation, the program design, and factors within organizational culture/work environment. Over time, the organization may see outcomes from these programs that create value. This framework was refined throughout the research process and was used as a coding mechanism for the data analysis process. While many sources were discussed in the literature review, only the concepts and theories that relate directly to this case study were chosen to represent the conceptual framework.

**Figure 2.4**

*Conceptual Framework for Developing Leaders for a World Disrupted: A Case Study Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program*



## Chapter Summary

The purpose of this case study is to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of current literature. The literature review consists of three topics: (1) Forces of Change Calling for Expanded Leadership Capabilities; (2) Developing Executives to Lead in a Dynamic Environment; and (3) Evaluating Learning Transfer in Executive Development Programs.

The first part of the review discussed how disruption in the external environment impacts an organization's imperative to develop executives capable of navigating and leading through a dynamic environment (Akrofi, 2019; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Courtney et al., 1997; Pasmore, 2015). Developing leaders by expanding their capabilities to prepare for emerging business challenges in the external environment impacts the organization's ability to survive through disruption and increases its ability to generate value and consistent financial growth (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015). Developing executive leadership has both internal and external ripple effects because of the interconnectedness of the organizational system and the influence of the external environment (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015).

The second part of the review discussed how executive development programs are strategic tools for an organization to survive disruptive change (Akrofi, 2019; Conger & Xin, 2000; Pasmore, 2015). Executive development initiatives can be deployed as a means of equipping executives to prevent organizational decline, prepare the organization for threats from



the external environment, and futureproof the organization in the face of the emerging digital revolution, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and other challenges that will transform the business landscape (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015). Organizations that invest in and intentionally embed executive development into their culture stand a better chance of surviving this era of constant change because they will become more proactive instead of reactive to disruptions and trends, increasing their ability stay ahead of the competition (Akrofi, 2019; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Burke & Noumair, 2015; Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; Mirvis, 2009; Novicevic, 2009). While there are many methods to design, programs that leverage theoretical foundations of how adults learn and construct meaning from their experiences is a crucial consideration (Akrofi, 2019; Allen & Hartman, 2008; Horney et al., 2010; Loveless, 2021). Three perspectives on how adults make meaning are experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984, Lewin, 1946), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000), and adult development theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Rooke & Torbert, 2009; Torbert et al., 2004). These theories were chosen from a range of adult learning theories as they were referenced throughout the literature reviewed for this study (Conger & Xin, 2000; Loveless, 2021; McCauley et al., 2006; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

The last section of the review discussed how evaluating learning transfer enhances the business case for executive development. Executive development programs can be a costly investment for organizations (Pontefract, 2019). Even with the knowledge of the new economic imperative to develop leaders to compete in the dynamic environment, organizational learning practitioners will need to balance the risks and rewards of the programs. The ideal scenario is that executives will take what they learn in a development program and immediately transfer their learning to the work context to deliver value for their organizations, but this is quite

difficult to do in practice (e.g., Akrofi, 2019; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Burke & Hutchinson, 2007; Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Ciporen, 2010; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2000; Loveless, 2021; Noe, 1986; Pontefract, 2019; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986). This section of the review discussed the complexity of the multiple dimensions of learning transfer and measurement (Baldwin & Ford, 1998; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Holton et al., 2001), the traditional practices of program evaluation and the limitations (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998), and the recommended practices for evaluating learning transfer through organizational outcomes (Akrofi, 2019; van Hoek et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011).

This chapter concluded with a discussion of the how the main themes in the literature shaped the development of a conceptual framework that will be used as the coding mechanism while analyzing the data collected in the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The research questions were intentionally developed to examine several key areas: individual development, learning transfer, and organizational outcomes. The research questions explored in this study are:

- **RQ1: *Development*:** How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?
- **RQ2: *Transfer*:** What enabled or disabled the participants' ability to transfer their learning?
- **RQ3: *Outcomes*:** What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?

This chapter will discuss the methods used in this research study, revealing the researcher's rationale for choices made throughout the research process. The chapter will begin with an outline of the research design, followed by the data collection methods and data analysis approach the researcher used, ending with a discussion on ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

## **Research Design**

This study used qualitative research methods and a research design of a single-case study to explore the research questions. Rationale is presented for all research design choices. The selected approach adds to the body of literature that researchers and practitioners may use to better understand how to evaluate learning transfer for leadership development programs.

This single-case study documents the experience of a cohort of leaders from an executive development program (EDP) deployed within the boundary of a single organization. The research participants were a subset of that EDP cohort. The case study setting presented in Chapter 4 describes the context of the single organization and the design components of EDP and its intended outcomes. The findings presented in Chapter 5 describe the experiences of the cohort of leaders, the enablers and barriers of learning transfer, and the benefits the organization received from the investment in the EDP.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was chosen. Qualitative research involves studying events in their natural setting and using a variety of methods, including case study, personal experience, interviews, and observational data, to interpret the phenomena in terms of how the participants construct meaning from their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The researcher ascribes to the constructivist research paradigm, which is a belief that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research study was designed with a constructivist lens and thereby involves the following assumptions inherent to constructivism: human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world they are interpreting; humans engage with the world and make sense of it

based on their historical and social perspectives; meaning is generated through interaction with a human community (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As an organizational learning and development practitioner, the researcher has experienced how realities can be constructed concurrently based on how different individuals are examining their context and making meaning out of events within their environment. The approach to this study is not to seek a universal truth but, rather, to discover the multiple experiences of the participants and how these experiences illuminate the transfer of learning from the executive development program (Yin, 2017).

### **Rationale for Single-Case Study Methodology**

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, this study was suited for a single-case study design. Yin (2017) defines a case study as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (‘the case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). The rationale for using a single-case study is attributed to Yin’s definition of a common case, which is a type of study that captures the circumstances and conditions of a relatively common situation (i.e., an executive development program) because of the lessons it might provide in relationship to theoretical interest.

Case studies have been used in evaluating learning interventions with at least four different applications. One of these applications is to explain causal links in a real-world intervention that may be too complex for survey and experimental methods. Another application is to describe the real-world context in which the intervention occurred. A third application is to illustrate certain topics within an intervention and the real-world context in which it occurred. Last, the case study research may be used to enlighten those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2017).

While there are many benefits to using a case study design, there are also some limitations. Some researchers have concerns over the level of rigor involved in case study research. Common examples of this are when researchers have not followed systematic procedures or have allowed equivocal evidence to influence the direction of the findings. To avoid this, the researcher has laid out a clear plan for how data was collected and triangulated, and the ethical considerations taken to ensure issues of trustworthiness were addressed (Yin, 2017).

### **Research Site and Participants**

The following sections describe the study participants and the research site for this qualitative single-case study. Purposive sampling was used in this case study, which is a strategy typically used to yield insight on the phenomenon being studied (in this case, the executive development program). The intent of this strategy is to explain a particular context in depth by accessing appropriate data that aligns to the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints and challenges being faced (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

#### **Research Site**

Based on the literature review on executive program design and development, the researcher developed the following criteria to select a research site: (1) an objective of the EDP related to developing executives to lead through disruption, transformation, or change; (2) program designers and sponsors had an interest in exploring long-term learning transfer and organizational outcomes attributed to the EDP; and (3) the researcher was granted permission to the site in order to speak directly with the participants.

The research site selected was Global Financial Analytics & Insights (a pseudonym), a financial services organization specializing in providing data analytics and insights to the global financial markets. At the time the researcher began conducting the study, Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI) consisted of nearly 25,000 people operating in every major region of the world. The strategic imperatives for the company were focused around five core elements: prioritize the customer experience, develop a global mindset, embrace technology to forward innovation, achieve operational excellence, and inspiring, caring for, and challenging their global workforce. These elements provided the frame in which GFAI operated and made decisions, and the criteria to develop leaders who could enable, facilitate, and guide their teams through strategic transformation.

To this extent, in 2019, GFAI deployed an executive development program with the objective of enabling a cohort of leaders, who were selected as potential successors to the current executive team, to lead their teams through times of change and disruption. This study took place in a unique moment in time, both for GFAI and the world. The executive development program began in 2019, was interrupted in early 2020 because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, was redesigned as a fully virtual program, and then concluded earlier than intended in mid-2020. The interviews took place roughly 18 months after the onset of the pandemic, and roughly one year after the program concluded. While this was not intended to be a pandemic study, because it took place during this unique moment in time, an emerging theme throughout the interviews was the extent to which the executive development program prepared the participants to lead through change and disruption, against the backdrop of the extraordinary, unplanned disruption of COVID-19.

Toward the end of 2020, after GFAI had successfully navigated almost an entire year in the COVID-19 global pandemic, the executive team announced a large strategic change: a merger with another large financial data provider, ABE (a pseudonym). This merger led to significant changes in leadership, culture, and the strategic direction of GFAI. The process to get all approvals for the merger took nearly a year and a half, and the closing of the merger was announced in the first quarter of 2022. The participant interviews took place from November 2021 through February 2022. A detailed overview of the *Case Study Setting* is provided in Chapter 4.

This is a site that the researcher had access to because she was employed at this organization during the time of the study. The researcher was given permission to access this research site by the necessary approving parties within the firm. The *Ethical Considerations* and *Issues of Trustworthiness* sections of this chapter review the procedures the researcher took to mitigate risks of conflict of interest and maintain a level of confidentiality for the research site and de-identification of the specific participants interviewed in the study. It will also detail how the researcher separated her role as researcher from her role at the firm.

### **Study Participants**

This qualitative single-case study researched the long-term impact of an executive development program within a bounded organization. The study participants were a subset of the first cohort of the Executive Development Program (EDP) at GFAI, which consisted of 24 participants. One participant left GFAI to work at another firm towards the start of the program, so it ended with 23 participants.

The cohort of participants were selected for EDP in 2019 because they were identified as potential successors to the executive team at GFAI or were being positioned for larger, more



influential roles. The EDP participants were a mix of leaders from different divisional and functional areas. While the cohort was global, the majority were based in the United States, where GFAI was headquartered.

Because the research study took place nearly a year after the program concluded, not all participants were available to be contacted as part of the study. The researcher was given access to 17 participants of the 24 that originally were selected for EDP. The researcher contacted all 17 participants, and of those contacted, 13 agreed to take part in the research study. Of the four people who declined to participate, two declined because they did not have the time, one declined because of the risk of discoverability, and one was unable to be contacted with the email provided to the researcher.

Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect confidentiality, and their real job titles were not used as part of the case study. These 13 participants represented three divisions and three functions at GFAI. The participants who contributed to the findings in this research study were:

1. Carol (Female)
2. Wanda (Female)
3. Natasha (Female)
4. Janet (Female)
5. Jessica (Female)
6. Kate (Female)
7. Jean (Female)
8. Tony (Male)
9. Clint (Male)

- 10. Steve (Male)
- 11. Bruce (Male)
- 12. Sam (Male)
- 13. Hank (Male)

The researcher collected demographic information using Qualtrics, a survey tool (see Appendix H). Participant demographics are summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Composite Demographics of Research Study Participants*

<b>Total Participants</b>	13
<b>Gender</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female: 54%</li> <li>• Male: 46%</li> </ul>
<b>Ethnic Diversity Ratio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15%</li> </ul>
<b>Age Range</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50-59: 54%</li> <li>• 40-49: 46%</li> </ul>
<b>Years Worked at GFAI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under 5: 31%</li> <li>• 5-10: 23%</li> <li>• 11-15: 0%</li> <li>• 16-20: 31%</li> <li>• 20+: 15%</li> </ul>
<b>Region</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North America: 77%</li> <li>• Europe, Middle East, and Africa: 23%</li> <li>• Asia Pacific: 0%</li> <li>• Latin America: 0%</li> </ul>

Some of the original cohort members of EDP no longer worked at GFAI. If forwarding email addresses were left with the program architect or if they were searchable via LinkedIn, the researcher was able to contact them to participate in the study. Being currently employed at GFAI was not a pre-requisite to participate—only that the participants went through the first cohort of the EDP. The researcher found that all participants, including those who left the firm, were able to provide meaningful data for all the research questions.

Participants were asked for their consent in the research study, as this was not initially agreed upon at the onset of the executive development program in 2019. The templates for the participant consent and participant rights are found in Appendices E and F, respectively. Only those participants who agreed to consent were included in the case study.

### Overview of Information Needed

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) state that typically information can be divided into four major categories to answer qualitative research questions: contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical. The researcher determined all four types of information were needed, based on Yin's (2017) sources of case study information. The correlation between the research questions and the type of information needed can be found in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2**

*Types of Information Needed for Each Research Question*

Research Question	What Data are Needed?	Area of Information	Population
<b>RQ1: Development:</b> How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?	How did the leaders change their leadership style?  What areas of program do they attribute this to?	Contextual; Perceptual; Demographic	EDP Participants
<b>RQ2: Transfer:</b> What enabled or disabled the participants' ability to transfer their learning?	What knowledge and/or behavior was transferred?  What enabled this transfer?  What were barriers to transferring more knowledge and/or behaviors?	Contextual; Perceptual; Theoretical	EDP Participants

**Table 3.2** (continued)

Research Question	What Data are Needed?	Area of Information	Population
<b>RQ3: Outcomes:</b> What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?	How did the organization change as a result of the program?  What benefits did the organization receive because of the program? Why are these considered benefits?	Contextual; Perceptual	EDP Participants EDP Architect

### Contextual Information

Contextual information refers to the context within which the participants reside or work. Context matters when studying learning and behavior change because, according to Lewin (1946), human behavior is a function of the interaction between the person and their environment/context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

The context of the learning program studied in this case was an important part of the information gathered. Once the researcher was given approval to use the research site, she visited the organization’s website and publicly available information, such as annual reports and letters to shareholders, to gather information about the organization’s culture, leadership, and role in the global markets and with their customers. This information also illuminated the environment in which the development program took place and the work environment in which the leaders operated.

The researcher also was granted access to archival program files, which gave context to the program itself. The researcher was able to put together a program timeline using these files, which is represented in the *Case Study Setting* presented Chapter 4.

## **Perceptual Information**

The participants' perceptions of their developmental experience, the enablers and barriers to their learning transfer, and the organizational outcomes and benefits of the program are critical to this study. This information was predominantly accrued through semi-structured interviews that were conducted with each participant who consented to be part of this research study. This type of data is not necessarily factual but is rather what the interviewee believes to be true at that moment in time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

## **Demographic Information**

Demographic information is participant profile information that describes factors in the participants' history that are relevant to the study and data analysis (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, country of residence, etc.) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

For this study, the researcher gathered demographic information through a demographic inventory provided to all participants. The demographic inventory was administered through a survey tool (Qualtrics) and was also incorporated in the tool used for data analysis and synthesis (Dedoose) in order to review data by different demographic profiles. Appendix H includes the demographic questionnaire. A summary of demographic information is presented in Appendix L.

## **Theoretical Information**

A review of literature grounding the research in theoretical frameworks was an essential foundation of this research study. The areas of literature reviewed are: (1) forces of change calling for expanded leadership capabilities; (2) developing executives to lead in a dynamic environment; and (3) evaluating learning transfer for executive development programs. The researcher grounded this study in what was already known in her topic of inquiry and what still

warranted further research. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provided support and evidence for the methodological choices and the research problem.

### **Data Collection Methods**

This section describes the data collection methods the researcher used to answer the research questions. Yin (2017) posits that six sources of evidence are commonly included in case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. The researcher leveraged multiple sources of evidence to provide a level of rigor in the research process (Yin, 2017). Using multiple sources of evidence facilitates an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context. Being both in-depth and contextual means collecting a variety of relevant data from multiple sources (Yin, 2017).

Benefits and limitations of the data collection methods are discussed.

#### **Archival Documentation**

As part of the data collection process, archival program documentation was collected as a source of evidence, including design documents, presentations to program sponsors on progress, and program evaluations filled out by the participants. This documentation is considered archival data because the program had concluded at the time the study was conducted. The documentation was reviewed to get an understanding of the program objectives, the program design, the experience of the participants, and milestones that were noted during the program itself.

The researcher leveraged a document summary form, provided in Appendix K, as the method of recording the findings from the documentation. Several dozen program files were combed through to determine documentation that was relevant to this case study and the types of contextual information needed. This document review resulted in the completion of 30

Document Summary Forms. The main use of this source of evidence was to describe the program accurately in the contextual information presented in the case study. The researcher also triangulated the main themes presented in the research findings with the archival documentation for consistency and alignment.

An advantage of this type of evidence is that it is relatively unobtrusive as it is not created because of the case study. Archival documentation is a stable source of evidence that can be reviewed repeatedly and can cover a long span of time, many events, and many settings, which is important and relevant to this study (Yin, 2017).

A typical challenge that researchers encounter for this type of evidence is access. However, the researcher was granted access to archival data by the Chief Human Resources Officer, who signed the site permission letter, and by the EDP architect. Another typical challenge for this source of evidence can be biased selectivity, based on what the program architect and team are willing to share with the researcher (Yin, 2017). The researcher was given access to the entire database of existing program documentation, and this was verified by both the program architect and one of the program team members.

## **Interviews**

Interviews are widely used to collect qualitative data and are often selected as the primary method of data collection because they elicit rich descriptions. This method also provides an opportunity to probe for additional information and to clarify statements. Interviews aim to capture participants' attitudes, perceptions, and emotions through their narrative stories. While interviews can range in structure from a list of predetermined questions to free-flowing dialogue with no structure set in advance, the method chosen for this study was semi-structured interviews to facilitate a focused exploration using an interview guide (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

While interviews have inherent strengths, there are some limitations. Not all people are equally cooperative and perceptive, and interviews require the researcher to have skills in listening, probing, and facilitating conversations. Interviews are also not neutral tools for gathering information because they are a result of the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and the context in which the interview takes place (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Two sets of interview protocols were designed for this study, one to capture insights from the participants and one to capture insights from the EDP architect, in order to understand both the perspectives of the participants and the intentions of the program.

### ***Semi-structured Interviews with Participants***

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the participant perceptions of how they made meaning from what they learned in the EDP, how the learning was transferred to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and what, if any, organizational outcomes can be attributed to the EDP. These interviews were structured to include questions on the overall experience in the program and the impact of the EDP. They were intended to elicit data for all three research questions, as they were all based on participant perceptions. Appendix I contains the interview protocol the researcher used in her interviews with the EDP participants.

One of the interview questions specifically and intentionally utilized the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), which is a systematic and sequential method for collecting observed incidents, or observations previously made that are reported from memory (Flanagan, 1954). The CIT enables deeper analysis of data that can create more “actionable knowledge” (Argyris, 1995). Since this technique was introduced in 1954, numerous scholars across disciplines have employed the CIT to collect and analyze qualitative interview data (Butterfield et al., 2005; White & Locke, 1981).



According to Flanagan (1954), the critical incident technique “does not consist of a single rigid set of rules governing such data collection; rather, it should be thought of as a flexible set of principles that must be modified and adapted to the situation at hand” (p. 335). While the flexibility of CIT can be perceived as a strength, it can also present challenges in terms of approaches and terminology, leading many researchers to argue for standards and protocols for the technique (Butterfield et al., 2005).

The CIT is an appropriate method for qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to explore a social or human problem and build a complex, holistic picture by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

#### ***Semi-structured Interview with the EDP Architect***

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the architect of EDP, Diana Prince (a pseudonym). Diana led a team to design and deliver the 18-month executive development program. This interview was used to provide further context to the document review and *Case Study Setting* by providing detailed insights for the intention and outcomes of various program design choices. Appendix J provides the interview protocol used with Diana Prince.

#### ***Interview Protocols Mapped to Research Questions***

The interview protocols for both participants and the EDP project were intentionally designed to capture insights for the research questions of this study. Table 3.3 maps the interview questions in the respective protocols to the information the researcher intended to collect for the research questions.

**Table 3.3**

*Correlation of Interview Questions to Research Questions*

Research Question	Interview Question from Participant Protocol	Interview Question from the EDP Architect Protocol
<p><b>RQ1: Development:</b> How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Critical Incident Interview Question:</b> Think about a time when you shifted your approach, mindset, or leadership style because of something you learned in the EDP. Describe what happened in narrative form:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes did you notice in the participants as they were going through the program?</li> </ul>
<p><b>RQ2: Transfer:</b> What enabled or disabled the participants' ability to transfer their learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interview Question:</b> In what ways, if at all, were you able to apply what you learned in the EDP?</li> <li>• <b>Probing Question:</b> What, if anything, enabled you to apply the learning?</li> <li>• <b>Probing Question:</b> What, if anything, got in the way of you applying the learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who was the biggest champion/supporter of the program?</li> <li>• What do you think were the most successful elements of the program? Why?</li> <li>• What do you think were the least successful elements of the program? Why?</li> </ul>
<p><b>RQ3: Outcomes:</b> What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interview Question:</b> In what ways do you think the firm benefitted from having this cohort of executives complete the EDP?</li> <li>• <b>Probing Question:</b> What impact do you think this program had on the organizational goals and strategy?</li> <li>• <b>Probing Question:</b> What, if any, organizational outcomes can you attribute to EDP?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you communicate the results and/or capture the learning experiences from the program?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, did you notice about the organization? Were these changes occurring during or after the program concluded?</li> </ul>

## Triangulation of Methods

This study used multiple sources of evidence as a deliberate strategy to develop a more complex understanding of the Executive Development Program and the participants’ perceptions of the resulting outcomes. Combining methods strengthened the study and enhanced the quality of data by gathering from multiple sources in multiple ways to achieve triangulation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Table 3.4 provides triangulation of methods based on how they were applied to each of the research questions.

**Table 3.4**

*Triangulation of Data Collection Methods for Research Questions*

Research Question	Data Collection Method
<b>RQ<sub>1</sub>: Development:</b> How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program document review: design documents, presentations leadership on milestones and participant progress, participant evaluations of the program</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with the EDP Project team</li> </ul>
<b>RQ<sub>2</sub>: Transfer:</b> What enabled or disabled the participants’ ability to transfer their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with the program design team</li> </ul>
<b>RQ<sub>3</sub>: Outcomes:</b> What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with the program design team</li> </ul>

## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a methods discussion in a qualitative proposal needs to specify the steps in analyzing the various forms of data the researcher intends to collect. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe qualitative data analysis as “a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (p. 207). One clear commonality between various scholars is the process of analyzing and synthesizing the data, which can be massive and unwieldy without the right procedures in place (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Yin, 2017).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) break down analytic procedures into seven commonly used categories: (1) organizing the data, (2) data immersion, (3) developing categories and themes, (4) data coding, (5) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (6) seeking alternative understandings, and (7) writing the findings and report.

The researcher leveraged an outside service to transcribe each interview upon completion. She then reviewed the transcripts and scrubbed them of identifying information for both the research site and the research participants. She kept a log of pseudonyms and terms used during the interview process to ensure consistency. She reviewed the interviews on a rolling basis to identify emerging themes. The conceptual framework presented in Appendix A served as the basis for guiding the coding scheme for the data analysis.

The researcher reviewed all sources of evidence gathered and began the analytic process with pattern matching for processes and outcomes (Yin, 2017). A qualitative data analysis software (Dedoose) was used to assist with the coding process. During this stage, a peer was enlisted to review the data and draw their own conclusions to establish inter-rater reliability.

The researcher engaged in several rounds of coding. The first round was done using open coding, reviewing the data for responses that addressed the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher also employed in vivo coding, which is coding specific words or phrases by the participants in their own language, and descriptive coding, which refers to assigning words or short phrases to summarize the main points of the excerpts (Saldaña, 2016). Examples of in vivo codes found in the data for this research study were “vulnerability,” “empathy,” and “comfort”/“comfort zone.”

In the next round of coding, the researcher employed several other coding methods. Structural coding refers to a method of coding that applies a conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry that relates to the specific research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Examples of this type of code for the data in this research study include “learning transfer enablers,” “learning transfer barriers,” and “organizational benefits.” Because many of the excerpts could be assigned more than one code based on what the participants were describing in their interview, the researcher also employed simultaneous coding (Saldaña, 2016). For example, excerpts where participants shared examples of how they applied their learning or when they noticed a shift in their perspective could be coded under “organizational benefits” or “transformative learning.”

The researcher then reviewed the data and consolidated codes that had similar themes. During this process, primary codes were deconstructed into subcodes, which is the process of breaking the codes into smaller components to provide more detail (Saldaña, 2016).

For the last rounds of coding, the researcher employed different coding techniques. Focused coding refers to searching for the most frequent initial codes to develop into categories. Pattern coding was used to organize the data into themes. After the interview with the program architect, Diana Prince, the data was mapped to the three leadership themes of EDP: *care*,

*curiosity*, and *courage*. These codes were organized under the primary code of “transformative learning: shift in point of view.”

At the end of the coding process, the researcher had coded 438 excerpts from the participant interview transcripts and found 8 primary codes with 33 subcodes. This coding scheme was also used to triangulate the data in the document review and Diana Prince’s interview. The final coding scheme for the data analysis process is presented in Appendix M.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The following section reviews how the researcher addressed issues of trustworthiness related to this study, including strategies the researcher used to ensure that an ethical approach was used. In any research study involving human subjects, it is essential to consider the ethical implications to protect the participants.

As an initial step, the researcher became certified in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program in March 2020. This program covered the ethical considerations around conducting research with human subjects, including a detailed view on unethical and harmful historical examples of research. Upon passing the proposal hearing, the researcher applied for clearance to conduct research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Teachers College, Columbia University.

### **Pre-IRB Research Site Approval**

Because this research is site-specific, the researcher obtained a letter from GFAI to give pre-approval for conducting the research at the site. This pre-approval letter was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was the first step, which allowed the organization to consent to having the research conducted at the site. After the researcher received approval from IRB, an official site approval form was signed by the Chief Human Resources Office with

consensus from the Chief Legal Officer. To the extent possible, the researcher was careful not to disclose details in the study that would lead to discoverability of the firm, the program described, or the participants. Pseudonyms were used for the organization and the research participants. The development program is simply referred to as “EDP”.

While the researcher has taken all measures to keep the organization, the development program, and participants confidential, there is still a risk with modern technology that the researcher’s association with the organization is discoverable. This information was disclosed to the organization in the pre-site approval letter and the site approval form, approved by IRB. The researcher also disclosed this risk of discoverability in the participant consent form. She met with each participant personally to review the form and answer any questions. Only one participant declined (out of the 17 the researcher was given access to) because of the risk of discoverability. The researcher leveraged the IRB-approved site approval form as the official record for the approval and ensured that GFAI signed off on the form before the research commenced.

### **Researcher’s Role within the Site**

While the researcher was employed at the research site at the time the study was conducted, her specific role within the site at the time of the study did not compromise her ability to conduct research. Her role within the organization at the start of the research collection process was in an internal consulting group within the Human Resources function. She was not part of the team which designed and delivered the EDP. Her interaction with participants up until conducting the research had been minimal.

The researcher was not in a position to deny resources to the individual participants, nor was the participants’ job status impacted by opting not to participate in the study. In terms of

hierarchy within the organization, all EDP participants held more senior positions than the researcher, and she had no level of authority or management over any of the participants.

All potential participants in this study volunteered to participate after a personal consultation with the researcher to answer any questions. No participant was pressured or obligated to participate. Potential participants were informed about the study via email and asked of their interest to participate. If they decided to participate in the study, they were asked to sign an informed consent form that outlined the risk and benefits of the study, the time commitment, and the participant rights. If at any point during the research process a participant no longer wished to continue his or her participation, this would have been fully respected by the researcher and their participation would end, effective immediately.

While full confidentiality was not possible for this study, due to the sampling strategy and the researcher's role within the organization, the researcher took all appropriate measures to protect the identity of the participants. Both the site and the participants were notified of the risk of discoverability in the site approval forms and participant consent forms, respectively. The measures to protect the identity of participants included using pseudonyms, removing identifiers that are publicly known or easily discoverable (e.g., exact job title within the organization), and keeping all the data in a password-protected personal hard drive. All work related to the research was conducted using a personal laptop, which was separate from her company-issued laptop. The participants also had the opportunity to review the data presented in the final dissertation study to ensure there was no identifiable information presented.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

While issues of trustworthiness are present in all research studies, these issues often vary between quantitative and qualitative research. This section will discuss how the researcher



addressed the issues of trustworthiness associated with this qualitative research study, according to Bloomberg and Volpe's (2018) categorization. This section will review the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in research refers to whether the participants' perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them. For example, has the researcher accurately represented the participants' experience? Many complexities present themselves in a qualitative research study with human participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher addressed credibility in the following ways:

- Disclosed any researcher biases and relationship to the organization up front to participants.
- Explained how her role in the organization is different than her role as a researcher.
- Monitored her subjectivity through reflective journaling and leveraging that journal to check biases throughout the research process.
- Engaged in member checks with the participants to ensure their perspectives are represented accurately.
- Asked a doctoral student to peer review the interviews for a critical outside perspective.

### **Dependability**

To achieve dependability, the researcher ensured that the process was clearly documented, logical, and traceable. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data over time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). To achieve dependability in this study, the researcher presented a discussion of how data were triangulated. This includes a well-articulated and

transparent rationale for the choices made by the researcher. Table 3.4 refers to how the various data collection methods were triangulated as an intentional part of the research design and data collection process. The researcher also kept clear records of interview notes, data analysis processes, reflective journals, interview transcripts, critical incident questionnaires, and easily marked files for the documentation review.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability in the qualitative research process refers to the extent to which the researcher has established findings and interpretations that are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to clearly articulate how conclusions are drawn (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). To achieve confirmability, the researcher remained as transparent as possible throughout the research process to uncover and identify the trail of decisions made throughout. A clear rationale for methodological, theoretical, and analysis choices is provided. Table 3.1 outlines how the interview protocol maps to the research questions.

In addition, the ongoing critical reflection through the researchers' reflective journal provided an opportunity to assess trustworthiness of the study's findings. The researcher also used interrater reliability by selecting a trusted peer to review several of the interview transcripts. Confirmability was achieved because at least 80% of the codes developed by the researcher matched the codes developed by the peer reviewer.

### **Transferability**

In qualitative research, transferability refers to the extent to which the study's results can be related to broader populations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The intent of this study was to provide insights that other leadership development practitioners can use when considering how to measure the impact and transfer of learning in similar development programs. To achieve this,

the researcher provided rich descriptions of the participants' experiences and the context in which the study took place as a basis for comparisons across different contexts. The researcher provided detailed information regarding the context, background data, and findings for readers to have an opportunity to make comparisons amongst both similar and different contexts.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of This Study**

The intent of this section is to disclose the limitations and delimitations of the study. Every study, no matter how well it is designed and conducted, has certain inherent limitations and delimitations that expose the conditions that may weaken the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

#### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study are characteristics of the research design that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings in the research. The first element of this study that could be considered a limitation is the small participant size. Because the cohort size was 23 executives total, it was assumed that not all cohort members would consent to participate. A smaller participant size has the potential to limit the perspectives in the research. However, the 13 participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences and there was enough saturation within the data and alignment on themes that could be extracted for the findings.

Another limitation of the study was the potential for the researcher's bias to possibly impact the outcomes of the study. The researcher's role within the research site, background, and experiences may naturally lead to biases and assumptions of what may occur in this study. The interrater reliability was used as a measure to overcome this, as well as using member checks and having peers review the findings for a critical outside perspective.

A third limitation in this study is that minimal time was spent with the executives who attended the executive program. Due to the busy nature of executive leaders, the researcher was confined to interviews of not more than 75 minutes to ensure that the participation would not interfere too much with their busy professional and personal lives.

Another limitation to the study was the risk of performative answers from the participants. While the researcher held no authority over the participants, there was still a risk that the participants, because of their positions within the organization and proximity to the Executive Team, would want to ensure the organization, EDP project team, and/or the researcher are pictured in a favorable light. The researcher mitigated this risk by asking probing interview questions to present a full picture of the outcomes of EDP.

Finally, this study was conducted during a global pandemic. This was a novel experience and posed limitations to how and where interviews could be conducted. The participants were located all over the world. The researcher was unable to do the interviews in person, so they were conducted and recorded via video conference. While this was helpful for recording and audit trail purposes, the participants may have been distracted and prone to multi-tasking during the time negotiated for the interview.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to the initial choices made about the broader, overall design of the study. Delimitations arise from specific and intentional choices that narrow the scope of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

A delimitating factor in this study was the intentional choice of researching an executive development program within a bounded organization to evaluate the learning transfer. The researcher chose to do this because she wanted to better understand how the learning from a

specific program impacted the respective organization, and what organizational factors facilitated or served as barriers to the learning transfer. The researcher made this choice because there was a lack of cases that studied learning transfer at this depth in the research studies she accessed as part of literature review.

Another delimiting factor of this study was the choice to only include the perceptions of the participants. The research site chosen for this study was not only managing a global workforce in the midst of a pandemic, but they were also actively working through a large-scale merger that would nearly double the size of the firm. The researcher understood that her access to the Executive Team at the research site and executives who participated in the development program would be limited because of the intense level of work and the time constraints the organization was under to close the merger. She chose to focus the study on the perceptions of the participants and to triangulate the data through document reviews and interviews with the program architect.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of the research design and methods the researcher used to answer the research questions. The chapter subsections are as follows: research design, research site and participants, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations and delimitations of the study.

The research findings are presented in the form of a qualitative single-case study in Chapters 4 and 5. The methods of data collection included archival program documentation and semi-structured interviews with participants and the program architect. The plan for triangulation of methods reviewed how each method was used to answer a particular research question or questions. A discussion was included on how the data were analyzed and synthesized. The

chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and this chapter summary.

## **Chapter 4: Case Study Setting**

The purpose of this research study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The research questions examined several key areas: individual development, enablers and barriers to learning transfer, and organizational outcomes.

The following sections provide a detailed description of the setting for the case study, including the research site, the executive development program being studied, and the learning journey the participants experienced. As stated in Chapter 3, all identifying details for the research site, executive development program, and study participants have been removed to mitigate the risk of discoverability.

### **Research Setting: Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI)**

The following sections will describe the setting in which the research study was conducted. This is a single-case study intended to review one cohort's experience in an executive development program and that program's impact within a bounded organization. Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI), a pseudonym, is the organization in which the study takes place. The descriptions of the company were obtained through the company's public website.

## **Company Overview**

According to the company website, Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI) has a rich history of providing essential information to the marketplace to inform decision-making, dating back to the mid-1800s. GFAI has grown through a series of mergers and acquisitions, developing new capabilities to stay relevant over the last 100+ years, including data, analytics, research, and benchmarks in areas such as global economics, capital markets, global trade, energy, commodities, environment social governance (ESG), and technology innovation. GFAI is a publicly traded company, governed by 14 representatives on their Board of Directors (BoD).

At the time this case study was written, GFAI was led by an Executive Team (ET) of 12 people, representing six business divisions and six corporate functional areas (e.g., human resources, finance, technology, etc.). Some of the divisions within GFAI have regulatory commitments and frameworks that need to be followed, which means that the products and the ways in which business is conducted are under increased scrutiny. Since the launch of the Executive Development Program (EDP) in 2019, many of the Executive Team members referred to in the participant interviews have transitioned out of the company or have changed roles within the executive team.

According to their website, GFAI is a purpose-driven organization dedicated to helping companies, governments, and individuals make a positive impact and accelerate change in the global financial markets. An example of this is GFAI's persistence to find new ways of measuring Environmental Social Governance (ESG)'s impact to the capital markets, which has been an emerging trend over the last several years. GFAI is committed to a more equitable future and helping its customers find sustainable ways of conducting business.



### *GFAI's Purpose-Driven Response to Critical Events in the External Environment*

GFAI claims to be a purpose-driven organization, and the Executive Team's response to three critical events throughout 2020 provides evidence that this organization cares about their impact on the world around them and their global employees. Several documents on GFAI's website provided context for three critical events that surfaced throughout 2020 and how the company responded to these events: the COVID-19 global pandemic, the George Floyd murder, and a merger between GFAI and ABE (a pseudonym), another financial data firm.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s website, on March 11, 2020, after several months of tracking cases of a novel virus named COVID-19, the WHO reported that the virus had spread through 114 countries with 118,000 cases and over 4,000 people had already lost their lives. WHO declared that COVID-19 would be characterized as a "pandemic" and called for every country to take "urgent and aggressive action" to address the "public health crisis" (WHO, 2020). Shortly following this announcement, as an emergency response mechanism to keep their employees isolated from the virus, GFAI closed their offices in 45 countries and transitioned 23,000 employees to remote working. In a letter describing the events in 2020, the Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) reflected on the organization's commitment to its people and customers by saying, "People have gone beyond their normal day jobs to continually push forward and deliver the things that our customers need."

Another critical event occurred on May 25, 2020, when a Black man named George Floyd was killed by Minnesota State Police Officer Derek Chauvin, when Mr. Chauvin knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, while onlookers heard Mr. Floyd tell the officer that he was unable to breathe (Furber et al., 2020). The murder of George Floyd ignited protests across the United States over racism and police violence, demanding justice for Mr. Floyd and

the many other Black Americans who had lost their lives due to excessive force by the police over the last several years (*New York Times*, 2020). The nationwide protests prompted several companies to speak up about racial injustice (Sherman, 2020). According to GFAI's 2020 Case Study presented as part of the 2020 Annual Report, the CEO issued a statement promoting change in the face of racial injustice. He wrote:

At Global Financial Data & Insights, we can't change the world overnight. But we can take action to effect change. We have no tolerance for racism or discrimination of any sort. We put our people first, and we live and demonstrate our core values.

The third critical event occurred at the end of 2020, when GFAI announced its intention to acquire ABE, a complementary financial data firm. This merger enabled more content creation, new modes of delivery, coverage of new sectors, and expertise across a variety of disciplines to create more value for customers and shareholders. The merger also brought about career mobility opportunities, including role changes, promotions, and opportunities to exit GFAI because of duplications of roles. According to the 2021 Annual Report (published in March 2022), this merger expanded GFAI's portfolio to over 100,000 customers in 150 countries. GFAI operates in four major regions of the world: North America (NAM), Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA), Asia/Pacific Islands (APAC), and Latin America (LATAM). At the close of the merger, GFAI had 35,000 employees, one-third of whom are data scientists and/or data managers.

### **Overview of the Executive Development Program (EDP)**

The following sections will describe the Executive Development Program used in this case study, including how the program was designed, the goals and objectives, and the measurement strategy. To build this narrative, the researcher was provided with program documentation and conducted an interview with Diana Prince (a pseudonym), the program architect for EDP.

## **Program Design**

In early 2019, the Talent Development team was given an opportunity to redesign the executive learning experience. Diana led the redesign project and became the program architect of the new learning experience. Diana's project team consisted of the following: one project manager, seven project team members, two team members from Corporate Events, and one Communications team member. Not all these team members contributed full-time to the project; their roles were task-specific (Diana reported that she had the equivalent of about three full-time team members at any given point in time, plus herself).

Diana led her project team in reimagining EDP and was given the necessary funding and resources to launch the program in mid-2019. According to the initial estimates in the program documentation, the EDP budget was \$48,000 per participant per year (approximately \$2 million estimated total program cost).

EDP was an 18-month learning experience designed to strengthen the leadership bench and enhance performance and business results through three "leadership imperatives": embrace agile leadership, harness the potential from disruption, and prepare for change. Its mission was to: "develop a generation of values and purpose driven leaders who relentlessly, yet empathetically, challenge their own and others' thinking to power an innovative and sustainable enterprise with greater personal and professional fulfillment. "

To fulfil the mission of EDP, there were four core components presented in the initial design:

1. Assessments and coaching to gain self-knowledge (referred to as the "Discovery and Insights" process).

2. Learning experiences designed to provoke new ways of thinking and challenge current perspectives (referred to as “Immersion”). The themes for these experiences were:
  - a. Curiosity to innovate, discovering new ways of working and leading.
  - b. Care for self, community, and organization.
  - c. Courage to spark change and lead others through uncertainty.
3. Strategic Projects to drive meaningful top-line and/or bottom-line impact. EDP participants would collaborate to ideate, develop, pitch, and implement their projects.
4. Peer coaching to strengthen coaching capabilities and provide a safe space to work through challenges associated with putting the learning into practice.

When asked about her intentions for the program design, Diana reported that she was really thinking differently about how to shift the organization from a “mechanistic approach” (e.g., “here are the things you need to do, if you do those things, we will pay you”) to a more “humanistic approach.” She also mentioned that this program was built with a transformative learning theory lens, which led to some of the design elements as well as the 18-month timeframe. She felt strongly that presenting the participants with “disorienting dilemmas” followed by reflective discourse would challenge their thinking and assumptions to provoke a perspective shift.

A key component of EDP was building innovation mindsets for the Strategic Projects. Diana felt the innovation mindsets would help these leaders become more future-focused. The projects were not set by the ET; the participants were expected to come up with innovative ideas to move the business forward and then pitch these ideas to the ET for funding. Diana designed plenty of opportunities for dialogue and discourse to involve multiple frames of reference on the

experiences throughout the program. She leveraged experiential learning theory by intentionally creating situations where participants could learn from different organizations, countries, cultures, and ways of working and leading.

Diana obtained sponsorship from the CEO and support from the CHRO and the entire Executive Team at GFAI to launch this program. In an interview with Diana, she commented about how the CEO and CHRO of GFAI were really the true enablers for the program's success:

I've got to say it was the CEO and the CHRO [who were the main champions of EDP]. The CEO put all that money out there. He was the one. He was there every time, he participated. He was open to different ideas. He was open to thinking differently about leadership development. It was very different from what he had ever experienced. He valued leadership development greatly. And he had experiences when he was at other firms that really stuck with him and that he felt were crucial to provide to our leaders in the organization ... But he was very open as well. He didn't have to have it the way he knew, the way he had experienced it. And of course, I would also add the CHRO. She's a bold thinker and she was always empowering me to think boldly, to think differently. And that sat with me very well because I was always a bold thinker.

In a document shared with GFAI's Executive Team prior to the start of the program, Diana presented a detailed list of roles that the ET could play to support the development of the participants, many of whom reported directly to an ET member:

1. Coaching and developing the participants, advocating for their continued growth.
2. Devoting time to become familiar with participants, especially those out of their own reporting line.
3. Familiarizing themselves with tools and models that the cohort was experimenting with, to build these concepts into the fabric of the organization.
4. Role modeling the themes of care, curiosity, and courage to drive meaningful change within the broader organization.

A similar document was shared with the Human Resources Business Partners (HRBPs) explaining their role in the selection of leaders, including diversity considerations. It also

contained a detailed explanation of how the HRBPs could encourage internal mobility of the participants to retain leaders and provide continuous development through on-the-job experiences. This presentation laid the groundwork for an important partnership to “create an internal talent experience that proactively enables career development through internal mobility.”

### **Program Evaluation and Measurement**

EDP had several methods for program evaluation. One of those methods was “pulse checks” with the participants’ managers and key stakeholders over the course of their time in the program. Diana also held regular check-ins with the individual participants, gathering feedback organically about their experience and ideas on what they wanted to see in the next phases of the program design. Diana and her project team were designing the program using an iterative approach to each module, and were able to immediately act on some of the participants’ insights to make meaningful changes to the program design.

In a document shared with the CEO in June 2019, several potential success measures were outlined, including measures for the collective leadership cohort, individual leaders, and potential business impacts. These success measures are replicated below in Table 4.1.

A measurement dashboard was created to track progress across key capabilities at the start of the program and at the conclusion, including:

- “Using insights to transcend the industry standard”
- “Brings a global and enterprise mindset to lead broadly”
- “Accelerates the shifts to agile ways of working”
- “Mobilizes people to adapt and act with urgency in executing”
- “Inspire, care for, and challenge their people.”

**Table 4.1**

*Replica of Initial Success Metrics Presented to GFAI's CEO*

	<b>Collective Leadership Measures</b>	<b>Individual leadership measures</b>	<b>Business impact</b>
<b>Short term (less than 1 year)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluation of current bench to understand gaps in succession</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase the number of agile initiatives run by EDP participants in their BAU roles</li><li>• Quality of implementation</li><li>• Career development plan completion</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic projects that can drive significant revenue growth</li></ul>
<b>Long term (1+ years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindset shifts</li><li>• Movement inside and outside of company</li><li>• Growth of networks across the company</li><li>• Increase # of ready now successors</li><li>• Increase in enterprise leaders who can move across divisions and function</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growth of networks</li><li>• Improved leadership scores</li><li>• Execution of career development plan</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revenues generated from strategic projects</li></ul>

Another measurement in the dashboard detailed the readiness of the cohort members to succeed Executive Team members. The dashboard also tracked career mobility, including promotions, cross-divisional moves, role expansions, and external opportunities.

### **EDP Learning Journey**

The following sections provide a detailed overview of the timeline of EDP, starting with program design and selection in 2019, highlights from the in-person immersive weeks, activities in between the immersions, shifts made due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the program concluded in 2020.

## **Q1 2019: Program Design and Selection**

In the first quarter of 2019, Diana and her project team designed the first two immersions and were given the green light to launch the program from the ET. The next step was to select the cohort. Participants were either in the succession pipeline for GFAI's executive team and/or they were in roles with the potential for extraordinary impact. Other considerations for selection included leaders who:

- displayed GFAI's values and led with purpose;
- exhibited a global mindset and were perceived as a partner to customers;
- were innovative and tech-savvy; and
- were recognized for attracting and developing talent.

GFAI's Executive Team nominated the participants through their succession planning conversations with the CHRO and CEO. Twenty-four participants were selected for the 2019-2020 EDP cohort. One leader left GFAI just as the program started, so the total number of participants who completed EDP was 23. Each division and function had at least one person represented in the EDP cohort. The cohort consisted of participants from three out of the four major regions in which GFAI operates: 16 participants from North America, 4 participants from Europe/Middle East/Africa, and 3 participants from Asia Pacific. The cohort was 43% women and 18% ethnically diverse.

## **Q2 2019: Program Launch, Discovery and Insights, and First Immersion in Mexico City**

Once participants had been confirmed, Diana sent a welcome letter to share what they could expect from the program. Diana explained that EDP would require a substantial ongoing time commitment and gave participants the opportunity to opt out or express concerns with the time commitment. The note explained that the program would be designed using an iterative



approach but provided a tentative timeline so that participants would get an idea of what to expect, including the dates for the first two immersions scheduled for 2019. The note also detailed the major components of the program, including the assessments, immersions, and strategic projects. The estimated time commitment was the equivalent of roughly 3 months of work time over the course of 18 months, broken out as follows:

- Discovery and Insights: eight hours
- Immersions: ten days per year
- Strategic Projects: average one day per week
- Peer coaching: 90 minutes per quarter
- Individual learning: as designated in the curated career plan

Once participants were confirmed, the “Discovery and Insights” process began.

Comprised of three steps, it started with an interview between the participant and a consultant, and three psychometric assessments. The results of the assessments led to a debrief to discuss the strengths and areas that the participant would like to develop for their future career endeavors.

The career development plan was intended to be an ongoing conversation between the participant and the manager, during and after the program.

The venues for the immersive sessions were selected with extreme care to create a physical container that matched the cognitive experience. All the choices were made to elicit a full experience into the themes of care, curiosity, and courage associated with the immersion. Using the theme of “curiosity,” the first in-person “immersion” was held in Mexico City in June of 2019. In an email written to GFAI’s Executive Team, Diana detailed some of the experiences from the four-day immersive learning program:

- First day consisted of “setting the stage.” All the events held during this first day were intended to give the participants an understanding of the culture in Latin American countries. The day concluded with a discussion with the CEO around the purpose of EDP to develop “enterprise leaders,” present the background on the Big Bet Project component of EDP, and what it is like to work at the ET level.
- Second day consisted of company visits where the group split into four teams, collectively visiting nine companies. Five of the companies were large multinational corporations that had “successfully undertaken large organizational transformation to become more innovative.” Four were local start-ups at various stages of development. The purpose of these visits was to “disorient” participants and challenge them to be more innovative to inspire their Strategic Project ideas. Some of the themes from these visits included clarity of mission and sense of purpose, integration of innovation into all processes, relentless focus on the client (not competitors), culture of trust and accountability, and systematic rotation of talent across divisions, functions, and geographies.
- Third day was centered on learning about “Agile leadership,” which consists of four roles: visionary, architect, catalyst, and coach. An important component presented was moving from “reactive to creative mindset,” which involved choosing how to respond in situations by understanding your reactions and learning how to pause and step back to allow more creative choices and options to unfold. After the workshop, participants went on “client listening tours” with the goal of understanding how business is conducted in Latin America and to understand the needs of clients that may contribute to their Strategic Project ideas.

- Fourth day consisted of a deep dive into operating with an Agile mindset. The participants immersed themselves in Agile methodology through simulations intended to provoke new ways of working through experimenting and learning. The participants then spent time with local employees who led them on cultural walking tours through different neighborhoods in Mexico City to continue learning about the local customs and culture.

At the end of the week, Diana asked participants for their take-aways, which included new ways of working, thinking big and bold, moving from a reactive to a creative mindset, and the strength of the cohort of leaders who were developing new networks and meaningful relationships through their experiences together.

### **Q3 2019: Development of Strategic Projects**

Over the following two months, the participants' main task was to work on their Strategic Project ideas within their project teams. There were four groups of four to five people each. In a document shared with the CEO, the purpose of the Strategic Projects was to “increase capacity for renewal while maintaining efficiency/capturing margins.” The criteria for the projects included four key elements:

- “Net New”: The project generates a new product or a new way of working. No one is currently tasked to work on this effort at GFAI.
- “Bold”: Represents a potential budget impact for GFAI greater than 5%, either through revenue growth or cost avoidance.
- “Enterprise-level”: Project must impact more than one business and geography for GFAI.
- “Multi-disciplinary”: Requires expertise from multiple functions, geographies, and businesses.

The initial work on the Strategic Project ideas was presented at a Strategy offsite in September 2019. The Strategic Projects ideas were discussed and further brainstormed with the EDP cohort, ET members, and a select group of senior leaders across GFAI. Bringing together others outside of EDP allowed the projects to gain momentum and buy-in within GFAI and allowed team members outside of EDP to contribute to the efforts of these projects.

#### **Q4 2019: Second Immersion in New York City and Strategic Project Meeting with ET**

The second in-person “Immersion” was held in October 2019 in New York City. The theme for this immersion was “Care,” which included care for self, community, and humanity.

The following events were planned for the week:

- First day was centered around care for community. After an optional morning wellness activity to demonstrate the importance of self-care, the group was split into teams to visit local non-profits across New York City. This was intended as a high-impact learning experience that was removed from everyday work. An example was a visit to the Center for Recovery and Wellness, where participants met with recovered drug addicts and formerly incarcerated men who were working to prevent incarceration in the community and serve as recovery counselors. After these visits, the group held a discussion and debrief with the Executive Team, and then spent the afternoon visiting marginalized communities to continue learning about issues that they faced.
- Second day was centered around care for self. The group met in a public park in Brooklyn and spent the day with a consultant specializing in energy management. The morning was spent on physical energy, specifically food as fuel, nutrition, and

strategic exercise. The second part of the day was spent on emotional, spiritual, and mental energy and well-being.

- Third day consisted of care for humanity. After an optional morning wellness activity, the group spent time in a leadership experience designed to give them insights into global change and challenges. The second part of the day was spent with leaders of purpose-oriented companies that embody new ways of working. After these leadership experiences, the group discussed and reflected on what they had learned over the last few days.
- Fourth day was centered around sense-making and sharing their insights. The group started the day with a two-hour dialogue with the Executive Team, discussing what they had learned throughout the week and insights they wanted to share because of their learning. They also spent time on their Strategic Projects and participated in a workshop on “inner leadership.”

At several points throughout the program, it appeared to Diana and the participants that the Executive Team members, apart from the CEO and CHRO, had not fully bought into the Strategic Project ideas, nor were they role modeling the themes of care, curiosity, and courage that were central to the EDP curriculum and experience. In a document from July 2019 regarding the funding and governance for the Strategic Projects, it was noted that the ET expressed concern that if the projects were put through the traditional prioritization process for GFAI, money may be taken away from important divisional projects. In an interview with Diana, she reported that the participants did not feel supported and that it seemed to the participants that ET members were just going through the motions because it was what they were supposed to do, but nobody was really on board with what the cohort was trying to achieve. This lack of support came to a

head at the December meeting with the ET around the Strategic Projects. It is further detailed in Chapter 5 of this study, whereby the ET's lack of support was viewed as a barrier to learning transfer and a barrier for the cohort to achieve real change within the organization. While this may have served as a barrier, Diana viewed it as an opportunity to show up as leaders:

We were in New York and the ET members had been there and then they had left and the whole group was just so deflated... because they felt that all of the work that they had been doing was just being ignored. And one of the participants [Kate] basically, I can't remember exactly what she said, but she turned it around and said, "Let's do something good with this."... She just, all of a sudden had so much courage. She embodied courage by saying, "Okay, so what are we going to do about this? How are we going to turn this into something good, this experience? How are we going to take some of the feedback that we got from the CEO and turn it into and make it useful?" And I think that that was a point in time where I saw a transformation. (Diana)

Inspired by Kate's act of courage and call to action to turn their experience into something meaningful and productive, in the weeks that followed the second immersion, the cohort prepared presentations for the Executive Team on their Strategic Project ideas. The ideas were a continuation of the work from the Strategy offsite in September. The groups created "pitch decks" for the ideas listing out the opportunity, what gives GFAI "the right to win" in the space, the key risks, and budget and resource requests. These ideas were presented to the ET in December 2019. Some of the projects were given funding to continue, while others still had a bit more work to do before they could move forward.

### **Q1-Q2 2020: COVID-19 Global Pandemic Impacts EDP and GFAI**

The intent of EDP was to prepare leaders to lead their teams through change and disruption with care, curiosity, and courage. No one could have predicted the type of global disruption that the world would face in early 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and GFAI transitioned offices in 45 countries around the world to virtual work. The last two in-person immersions for EDP were put on hold, and in April 2020, the CEO

of GFAI wrote a letter to the participants detailing a plan to transition EDP to a virtual learning experience. The October immersion focused on the theme of “Care,” and the CEO wrote:

We could not have imagined how important the theme of care would become only a few months later. Now I see each of you rising to the occasion and demonstrating the empathy that will allow us to thrive in these challenging times and emerge stronger.... I am proud of what you have accomplished as a cohort over the past year and remain fully committed to continuing your development as part of EDP.

Diana reported in her interview that she felt that the leaders in the EDP cohort were more prepared for the pandemic after the second immersion, which focused on care. Never had care and empathy come more to the forefront of leadership qualities than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Diana said:

You had these senior leaders who had already been focused on the topic of care, and I think it just made it so much easier for them to be able to support the needs of the people who were in their organizations who were going through this very traumatic pandemic experience.

The transition to a virtual learning experience began in the summer of 2020, with topics on the evolving role of business in today’s world, leading through uncertainty, fostering courage in tough circumstances, building a future amidst uncertainty, learning to embody courage through movement, using leadership archetypes to notice styles and preferences, and stepping into your most courageous self. These virtual workshops had the same design principles as the in-person immersions, which were to “disorient” participants through challenging their assumptions and perspectives by hearing the experiences of others. The modified plan was intended to keep the group connected, yet give everyone more time to deal with unanticipated issues of continuing to operate as a remote workforce and critical business challenges that inevitably arose during this global disruption.

While the virtual immersions were taking place, in June 2020, the United States reached an inflection point with social justice issues. The murder of George Floyd by a Minnesota police

officer opened a dialogue across the world regarding social justice issues, but especially in the United States regarding the ongoing treatment of Black Americans by the police force. As a purpose-driven organization, GFAI responded to this issue with a commitment to educating its employees and opening lines of communication to share experiences. This topic was integrated into the EDP virtual learning experiences, and many of the participants referenced in their interviews having a better understanding of global social justice and racial inequity as a result.

### **Q3-Q4 2020: Program Close and Ongoing Individual Development**

Although EDP was intended to be an 18-month learning experience, because of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision was made to close the group learning portion of the program in July 2020. A program document detailed the plan for ongoing individual learning through development plan coaching and individual work toward development goals through December 2020. If circumstances with the pandemic changed, there was a plan to get the cohort together in person for a formal program close in early 2021; however, at the time this dissertation was written, that in-person event had not yet happened.

A document from July 16, 2020 detailed the themes from the closing session of EDP, including bold actions that the cohort recommended GFAI leadership should take to address some salient issues. Some of the closing actions recommended by the EDP cohort were:

- Build a client success organization that deepens connections with clients beyond transaction and into relationships by aligning Commercial, Product, and Operational priorities.
- Bridge the global digital divide by accelerating the development of underserved and underdeveloped markets in Latin America and parts of the Middle East by leveraging



some of GFAI's products, data sets, and services in a more altruistic manner for non-institutional market segments.

- Leverage GFAI's position in the marketplace to influence companies toward sustainable growth and social equality/diversity by taking a deliberate stance to push the frontier on topics such as climate change, diversity, and social and community impacts.

Each leader was also asked to share a personal transformation statement. These statements were written from the participants' perspective on how EDP transformed their leadership style and incorporated some of the major themes of care, curiosity, and courage from the EDP learning experience journey:

- “EDP provided multi-dimensional insights, a curated self-learning journey, elevated awareness of the importance of purpose and leadership archetypes, and social community impact. I appreciated this forum to sharpen intellectual curiosity, deepen networking with colleagues, and zooming out for external perspectives.”
- “EDP energized me to be a more relational, curious, and empathetic leader, to call others into walking that same journey and to create an environment where our people feel safe, valued, and empowered.”
- “EDP aided my leadership journey by making me more effective and purposeful through imbibing care for society, employees, and self in my daily life, bringing in innovation more centrally in my leadership toolkit and learning from the leadership styles of my fellow participants.”

## Chapter Summary

The case study setting described in this chapter supports the research purpose, which was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. It provides rich descriptions of contextual information, including elements of the organizational culture that appear in the findings described in Chapter 5.

This chapter provided a detailed description of the setting for case study, including the research site of Global Financial Data & Insights (GFAI), the executive development program studied (EDP), and outlined the learning experience journey for EDP. To construct the case study, the researcher consulted publicly available information on GFAI's website and was given access to internal documentation for EDP as part of her research site permissions. Perspectives from Diana Prince, the architect of EDP, were gathered through an in-depth interview and were woven throughout the case study setting to provide additional context for design choices and her view of the participants' learning experience. The findings that address the research questions are detailed in the following chapter and are largely based on the participant interviews.

## Chapter 5: Research Findings

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred their learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The researcher believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow leadership development practitioners to have more insights about the long-term impact of executive development to both individual leaders and their organizations.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 13 in-depth interviews with participants from an Executive Development Program (EDP) within the context of a financial services organization (GFAI). EDP was launched in the first quarter of 2019 and concluded at the end of 2020. The interviews were conducted roughly 12-18 months after the program concluded to capture what learning stuck with them and what changes they made in their leadership style. Four major findings emerged from this study:

1. **Shift in Leadership Style:** All 13 participants expressed a shift in their point of view on leadership in a dynamic environment based on their experience in EDP. These perceived changes were grouped into sub-findings that correlate with the three main leadership themes of EDP: shifts in care, curiosity, and courage.
2. **Learning Transfer Enablers:** All 13 participants reported that they were able to apply at least one aspect of their learning from EDP into their leadership roles at GFAI. Enablers for learning transfer were grouped into the following sub-findings: learner

motivation, cohort as community of practice, and commitment from the CEO (sponsor of EDP).

3. Learning Transfer Barriers: All 13 participants reported that they found at least one barrier for learning application. The barriers were grouped into the following sub-findings: Executive Team engagement, behaviors within GFAI's culture that served as antagonists to the program themes, and distractions from their day jobs (which was further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic).
4. Organizational Benefits: All 13 participants were able to think of at least one way that GFAI benefitted from having this cohort of leaders participate in EDP. These benefits were grouped into the following sub-findings: a network of connected leaders who can enable business results; leaders who display care, curiosity, and courage, yielding positive results for teams; and a group of leaders prepared to lead through disruption.

The findings of this qualitative case study address the research problem, which was understanding how to develop leaders for a constantly changing world that is challenging them to lead in new ways, and how to evaluate the impact of that development. Table 5.1 on the following page provides a summary for the findings and sub-findings of this research study.

### **Research Finding 1: Shift in Leadership Style**

All 13 participants were able to convey salient examples of how they experienced a shift in their leadership style. Participants were asked to describe the ways in which they felt they changed their leadership style because of what they learned in EDP. This was designed as a critical incident question to elicit detailed examples of shifts in behaviors or mindsets. When reviewing and analyzing the data, the researcher was able to map these shifts to the three themes

**Table 5.1**

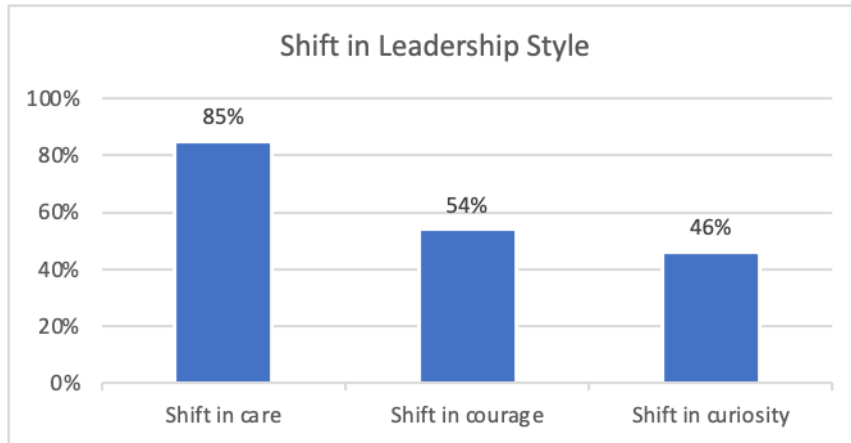
*Summary of Research Findings and Sub-Findings*

Finding	Sub-Findings
100% of participants experienced a change in leadership style.	<p>Three key aspects of the change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85% shifted in care for self, teams, and/or communities</li> <li>• 54% shifted in courage, notably in speaking truth to power and engaging in courageous conversations on social justice issues</li> <li>• 46% experienced a general shift in curiosity</li> </ul>
100 % of participants were able to transfer at least one aspect of their learning.	<p>Three key factors for enablement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85% attributed their own intrinsic motivation to learning application</li> <li>• 69% found the cohort to be a safe space to try out new skills and share learnings as a community of practice</li> <li>• 38% felt encouraged by the support and engagement of the CEO, who role modeled the leadership qualities taught in the program</li> </ul>
100% of participants reported that they encountered at least one barrier when attempting to apply their learning.	<p>Three key barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85% felt that the Executive Team’s lack of engagement hindered their ability to transfer their learning</li> <li>• 54% described several pervasive behaviors in GFAI’s culture that served as antagonists to the leadership themes of care, curiosity, and courage</li> <li>• 46% experienced tension with conflicting priorities from their day job and program activities</li> </ul>
100% of participants were able to think of at least one way that GFAI benefitted from having this cohort of leaders participate in EDP.	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% believed the leadership network built during the program afforded GFAI such benefits as increased understanding of enterprise mindset, collaboration across business lines, and talent mobility</li> <li>• 77% described how leaders made broad impacts to the company and their teams in the ways they applied their learning through the lenses of care, curiosity, and courage</li> <li>• 46% described how GFAI benefitted from having a cohort of leaders who were prepared with tools to lead through disruption</li> <li>• 38% experienced a higher degree of loyalty and belonging because of the investment GFAI made in EDP and their development</li> <li>• 30% reported that several cohort members were promoted into larger roles during or after EDP</li> </ul>

of EDP, which were care, curiosity, and/or courage, displayed in Figure 5.1. The findings described in this section are grouped into those themes.

**Figure 5.1**

*Sub-findings for Research Finding 1*



**Shift in Care**

Eighty-five percent of participants felt a shift in the way they expressed how they cared for themselves, their teams, and their communities. EDP provoked a shift in how expressing care and being vulnerable were seen as part of their role as leaders. Participants were able to pinpoint moments in the program that provoked the beginning of a change in their perspective on how to express care as leaders. The themes in this section are grouped and presented in the following order: shift in care for self, shift in care for teams, and shift in care for community.

***Care for Self***

Several participants expressed a shift in care for self by describing different ways they increased their self-management. One of the sessions from EDP focused on energy management for leaders, and this session brought greater awareness to how leaders deplete and restore energy and how this energy management has positive and negative implications for their relationships

with others. For example, Clint, Jean, and Jessica described a new understanding of how physical exercise, diet, and nutrition fuel energy needed for both the mind and body, and to manage stress through challenging times. According to Jean:

[During the pandemic] I started running again on the treadmill. And I started realizing that even if it was 2:00 in the afternoon, if I had an hour where I didn't have a meeting I wasn't going to sit here and do email for an hour. Because it's not going anywhere.... So, I run on the treadmill. And the shift in my brain and the shift in my productivity and the shift in how my day goes and how I sleep was noticeable. (Jean)

Wanda described a shift in her awareness of how the negative energy she was bringing home from a stressful day at work was impacting her ability to bond with her family. She described a vivid moment where she recognized she wasn't showing up at home as her "best self" because of how drained she felt after her day at work. As the primary income earner in her home, her role was to make the money for the family, but because of the session in EDP on energy management, she recognized that by focusing so much on work, she was missing out on some formative moments to bond with her daughter through creative play:

I felt like I was always on fire at work, but then what was I bringing home? I remember thinking a lot about how with my daughter, she's such a creative kid, she loved to play pretend. My brain doesn't work that way at all. It takes everything I have to pretend something. And I just remember what a struggle that was for me and still is.... But I just remembered thinking after that session, I felt like I was not giving [my family] my best self. Because I was just like, "All right, I'm going to focus on what I'm really good at, which is work and making money for our family and I'm going to let [my husband and daughter] do their own little thing." But I'd have these moments where I thought, "Oh, I'm going to regret this. I've got to fix this in my life." (Wanda)

### ***Care for Teams***

Participants also provided specific examples of ways in which EDP shifted how they demonstrated care for their teams. Each of the leaders understood the value of their teams; however, they were able to describe ways in which they shifted a behavior or mindset to demonstrate how they cared for their team members. Several leaders also felt so inspired by their

experiences in EDP that they wanted to mimic these experiences for their teams to share in the same learning process.

Jessica shared how EDP shifted her thinking on how to empower her team, moving from the perspective of “driving the team to get results” to thinking about how to empower her team for shared success:

The biggest [takeaway] is how to straddle leading from the heart and leading from the mind. I’ve always been a leader that you can count on for results. Results are not feelings. As I lead a bigger team and take a bigger role and continue to evolve my career, being a leader is about inspiring your team every day, and not about having the right answers and getting to the finish line first. Empowering the team to raise them up and change my vernacular to be less about business and more about empowering success. (Jessica)

Clint shifted his thinking around managing senior leaders and how everyone needs support, regardless of their position or tenure in the firm. Before EDP, he had an expectation that because one of his direct reports was a senior leader in the organization, they should be able to figure things out without a lot of supervision. Through EDP, he began to understand that his role as a team leader, regardless of the seniority of his team, was to offer coaching and be a thought partner in solving complex problems. Leaders at all levels experience challenges in today’s world of uncertainty. EDP exposed Clint to experiences he had not had in his career, and it opened his eyes to how uncomfortable these experiences can sometimes be, regardless of how seasoned you are as a leader. He felt more empathy for leaders at all levels and tenures who were experiencing situations outside of their comfort zone.

Kate brought the theme of care back to her team by putting together what she referred to as “a day gratitude.” Kate left GFAI when the merger closed with ABE, and as her final send-off, she wanted to create a day for her team that threaded some of the concepts from EDP. She wanted to prepare them with tools to manage the complexity and uncertainty that comes with the merger:



I want to do a day of gratitude for my team whom I've known for a long time and we're no longer going to be a team as of Q1. I want to create a thank-you kind of a milestone moment for them. And so, I've been thinking, just a thank-you dinner isn't good enough. I need to leave them with something that will make them more powerful next year when they're going through a lot of change and ambiguity. (Kate)

Wanda felt more comfortable displaying vulnerability during the pandemic and sharing the challenges her family was having in managing the challenges presented during that time. She dedicated work time to be vulnerable with her team and share how she and her family were coping. This role modeling enabled Wanda's team members to share their own struggles, creating a support system for the team during a very traumatic time.

Sam also reported an increased understanding in how displaying vulnerability created a safer environment for his team during the pandemic. He described this as a "big transformation" on how he viewed leadership, because normally he is focused so much on the work and not on the emotional state of himself and his team members.

### ***Care for Communities***

Participants described a shift in their understanding of the responsibility they played as global leaders to care for their communities. Sam was inspired and encouraged by the CEO of GFAI to join a non-profit board of directors as an ethnically diverse leader to increase the representation on that board:

The CEO said, "Well, you have an opportunity, there are very few people like you on these not-for-profit boards. How can having a representative on the board make an impact?" I think going to some of these EDP sessions really opened my eyes. If I can give back intellectually, a little bit financially, or give people an opportunity to see somebody like them in a different capacity. I thought that that was one of the X factors of EDP. (Sam)

Carol increased her understanding of how corporations can play a role in impacting the global markets by having GFAI influence other companies on their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) philosophies and commitments. She felt that she shifted her understanding of

how companies have a role in creating a more sustainable world. She believed this purposeful approach to sustainability does not need to be a detriment to the fiduciary responsibilities of companies to produce profits for their shareholders.

Additionally, both Steve and Tony reported a more focused effort on “give back” initiatives with their teams. For Steve, these community service initiatives became part of the quarterly planning process to develop a habit of thinking how the team could have a positive impact on their communities. He made giving back and caring for the community part of the business routines for his team. For Tony, his team incorporated the theme of care by thinking of ways they can use their technology skills to make a positive impact on their community. He said it meant more to his team members to use their core skills and find ways to impact the community, rather than things like cleaning up a park. The team wanted to create higher impact by using their products and core skills for positive change. Both leaders credit their experiences in EDP as the reason for making this community focus a part of their teams’ imperatives.

### **Shift in Courage**

Fifty-four percent of the participants reported feeling a shift in courage because of their experience in EDP. When describing their critical incidents, participants linked specific elements of EDP that allowed them to feel more confident and courageous than they had before the program. The main themes of the critical incidents included examples of speaking truth to power and participants leading courageous conversations on social justice issues to spread awareness within their teams.

### ***Speaking Truth to Power***

In Chapter 4, EDP’s program architect, Diana, mentioned an incident where Kate spoke courageously on behalf of the cohort to GFAI’s executive team. She described this as an example

of when she saw a shift in courage from the participants. This public moment of speaking truth to power stuck with the cohort and Diana as a critical demonstration of courage.

According to Kate, she felt there was a crucial moment in the NYC immersion when the cohort were discussing how the ET were not role modeling the leadership themes that they were learning in EDP. There was a discussion amongst the cohort on how they were going to share their feedback with the ET:

I thought, “Well, who’s going to tell the ET that it would be really helpful if the leadership principles from the program were modeled from the top?” I ended up sharing this message with the CEO and CHRO in that forum, and it was a scary moment, but the voice in my head was saying, “Okay, do it, I’m speaking on behalf of this team.” And I would say they were shocked. I mean, I still don’t know how they really feel about it, but I was pleased to hear that CHRO did some team building right after that, within the next couple months.... EDP taught me that I can be a lot more direct and that I can carry a really tough message without offending people. And so, that was also a strength that I hadn’t fully realized until it came out through the program. And it’s probably a reason that I was able to stand up in that auditorium. I thought to myself, “I think my delivery will help me here,” because I’m not an intimidating person and my delivery isn’t overly emotional.... I think the way that the CEO’s team showed up during COVID, I could tell they were more gelled.... I like to think that I had a little something to do with that. I’m likely giving myself too much credit, but I think it was the program and the concepts that allowed me to speak so firmly on behalf of the cohort. (Kate)

Jean displayed courage when she spoke to her manager (a member of GFAI’s Executive Team) about needing more flexibility during the pandemic to take care of her family and manage her home life. When GFAI moved to fully remote work during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, Jean found herself trying to juggle her work demands while also helping her four school-age children manage virtual classrooms and assignments. Her home was not set up in a way that allowed everyone to have their own private work and/or learning space, and she described this as “chaos.” She made the choice to tell her manager what she needed to integrate her work and home responsibilities. It meant her workday would look a bit different; she would need flexible hours, and she might miss some meetings. In the end, she was happy with the tradeoff because she was able to show up for her family. Before EDP, she felt that she needed to draw a line

between work and home, but she shifted into thinking about her life in a more integrated way. This shift in thinking led her to be more courageous with her manager to ask for what she needed to make this happen.

Wanda felt EDP gave her the courage to speak to the Executive Team member that led her division about how his leadership team members were acting as roadblocks to a project she was leading. She described a message she sent to this ET member expressing how his leadership team did not seem aligned on the project outcomes, and how this misalignment was creating frustration on her team and causing the work to stall. Although she did not feel like she had the type of rapport with this leader to openly share feedback about his leadership team, she knew that, for the sake of her team members, she needed to be courageous and speak truth to power.

### ***Courageous Conversations Involving Social Justice Issues***

Cohort members became better versed in engaging in conversations around the social justice issues that were having global impact throughout 2020. After the George Floyd murder, GFAI invested time and money in an initiative called “Courageous Conversations,” where external thought leaders were invited to speak to the entire company about their research or experiences in social justice. A microcosm of these conversations was also happening within EDP; however, more discourse was enabled because of the smaller group format of 23 leaders in a session (versus several thousand employees who participated in the Courageous Conversations speaker series). The EDP leaders were able to foster dialogue within the safe space they created in their cohort and process what they were experiencing. Some of these participants created a ripple effect by hosting similar dialogues with their own teams.

Hank described how he used a town hall meeting to give a platform to members of his leadership team. These leaders displayed vulnerability and shared how they had experienced bias

throughout their lives, and how that bias impacted their sense of inclusion and belonging. Hank described how he felt more courageous bringing some of these social justice topics to larger format meetings and having leaders share their experiences with racial injustice and bias:

I did a town hall meeting with my leadership team and very much tilted towards DEI in that meeting. In my leadership team, I have a couple of people with quite a diverse background. And so, we had quite an open discussion. Different people spoke about their backgrounds and things that have happened to them throughout their lives. And that was actually quite a different style of meeting for me. It was less business focused, and a very vulnerable meeting. (Hank)

Additionally, Steve shared his learning about systemic racism with his team members. He expressed feeling an increased level of courage in discussing diversity topics openly as a white man because of the discourse fostered within EDP. He said that before EDP, he did not understand how to participate in the conversation in a productive way, and he was uncomfortable to broach the topic. He role modeled courage for his team in stepping into an unfamiliar and sometimes inflammatory dialogue for the sake of learning and growing.

### **Shift in Curiosity**

Forty-six percent of participants reported feeling a shift in curiosity because of their experience in EDP. Participants described critical incidents where they recognized a shift in perspective or behavior, and how certain concepts from EDP helped them to be more curious through demonstrating growth mindset, asking powerful questions, and taking a reflective pause to self-regulate before reacting.

Steve described how the Strategic Projects inspired him to be more curious about product development at GFAI. He recounted how the question, “Do we have a right to win?” was used a lot in the Strategic Project work, and how that question remains with him today:

The phrase was, “Do we have a right to win?” and that was used a lot in the Strategic Projects. I realized what we were trying to do in the first Strategic Project idea was a stretch and we didn’t have a right to win. So now, it makes me think a little bit about new products or new product development or partnerships. Is it really the right one? So, I

think from that perspective, it made me think about products and strategy a little bit differently. (Steve)

Jean and Natasha reported that the concepts around growth mindset helped them approach their work differently, more as a problem to be solved versus tasks to be completed. Jean reflected that she realized that life is not actually about balance but rather “the integration of things” and what can be learned from different experiences. Natasha described how her increased curiosity allowed her to hold multiple perspectives when solving a business challenge. She learned that there wasn’t “one right way” of doing something. According to Natasha, curiosity facilitates more options by staying open to possibilities and perspectives, enabling stronger decision-making.

Bruce’s shift in curiosity enabled him to ask different questions when interviewing candidates. He shifted from interviewing solely for technical skillsets to interviewing for qualities of “grit,” perseverance, and resilience. He spoke about wanting to build a team with people who can adapt and flex with the dynamic environment. He developed a recruitment interview protocol to surface examples of times when someone faced a challenge and what they learned from it.

Clint’s curiosity was piqued when traveling to foreign places with colleagues and experiencing the local customs and culture. He described a dining experience where team members from GFAI’s Mexico City office took the EDP participants around their city to show them what was special about this place. They went to lunch and ordered traditional Mexican dishes, and questions about the country, the cuisine, and customs naturally surfaced:

We knew that eating together and cooking and cuisine was a very strong tenet of Mexican culture. But by sitting down with [the team members from the Mexico City office], we learned about the culture through talking to them. Because we asked them, “Can you please choose the dishes for us?” They picked out some selections and we started to talk about the food, and then we started to talk about the country, the people. That was a fascinating moment. And that’s not something that came across as stilted or

prepared or anything. It all came very naturally. So, there was this strong sense of common experience. (Clint)

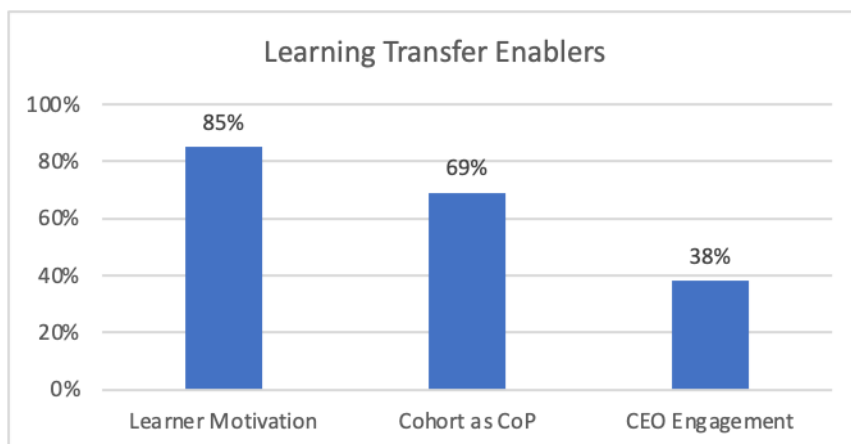
Janet described how the reactive-creative leadership model was particularly profound for her. She found that being curious about herself and her reactions allowed her to regulate her emotions in high-stress situations. She learned to take a reflective pause and ask questions before jumping to conclusions or responding with an immediate decision.

### **Research Finding 2: Learning Transfer Enablers**

All 13 participants attributed at least one factor that enabled them to transfer their learning from EDP into their leadership role at GFAI. Participants were asked to provide examples of how they applied the learning from EDP back to their roles, and what factors may have enabled this application. Enabling factors for learning transfer were grouped into three sub-findings: individual leaders felt motivated to create developmental shifts and change their behavior; cohort as a community to share insights and practice new skills; commitment to the participants' development from the CEO (program sponsor). Figure 5.2 displays the sub-findings for this section.

**Figure 5.2**

*Sub-findings for Research Finding 2*



## **Learner Motivation**

Learner motivation was the most common enabler for learning transfer in this study, with 85% of participants reporting that their own intrinsic motivation to learn and grow enabled them to transfer their learning from EDP back to their roles at GFAI.

Jessica, Bruce, Steve, and Tony specifically referenced their autonomy as leaders as an enabling factor to apply the learning and lead their teams differently. They all described feeling high levels of agency by being chosen to take part in EDP and that agency gave them freedom to work with their teams as they saw fit. According to Jessica:

Desire, to be honest [is what enabled me to apply the learning]. I wanted to do it, and when I did, I saw what I did for people and how it impacted results and collaboration. I get emails all the time from people that read something like, “You’ve inspired me to be my best and I’m so thankful to you for what I learned from you.” That hit my heart. If I’m in a skip-level 1:1, someone will say, “Thank you so much because you’ve helped me do this and that and the other.” It’s not about me, it’s about them feeling they can do anything. That’s the magic. The magic is that you feel confident, that you can lead and that you feel good about what you do every day. (Jessica)

Bruce, Hank, and Clint demonstrated intrinsic learner motivation by holding themselves personally accountable for completing the action items they set for themselves at the end of each EDP session. They relied on their EDP action planning notebook as a reminder of the lessons in EDP and what actions they wanted to apply. They all referred to their notebook during the interviews, using examples of how they applied the learning from EDP. They felt that having this structure allowed them to retain the learning and gave them personal accountability to follow up on their action items from the program. According to Bruce:

I always wanted to try to take one thing, like one thing out of each session.... And listen, while I didn’t incorporate all of them, I felt like if I could take two or three things out of the entirety of EDP, it’s worth it. Because that’s going to be a significant positive change as part of those learnings.... I think that being selected for EDP gave us a bit of agency to say, “Hey, we’re going to go do this in our professional jobs.” It’s like, listen, whatever you learn here, you should go and do.” It became kind of like this theory to execution really quickly in my mind. (Bruce)



Additionally, Steve shared that while his job was very intense, he was intrinsically motivated to work on the Strategic Project from EDP on weekends. He reported that the project was an enormous amount of work, but he was committed to finishing it. He was interested in seeing this project through and seeing the positive impact their ideas could have on the company. Steve was intensely passionate about the Strategic Projects, and that was a driving force for his motivation to put in the extra effort.

Janet felt intrinsically motivated to bring the learning from EDP back to her team members. She coached one of her leaders on how to be less reactive, which is a lesson that she learned through the reactive-creative leadership scale taught in EDP. The reflective pause that helped her shift her own curiosity was also something she was able to pass on to her team members through the use of coaching techniques.

Wanda was motivated to apply the learning from the energy management session to make her home life more manageable during the COVID-19 pandemic. She reported feeling more connected to her family during that time because she became more reflective and appreciative about finding things to be grateful for in the present moment.

### **Cohort as a Supportive Community to Learn and Grow**

Sixty-nine percent of the participants found the cohort to be a safe space to try out new skills and share learning as a community of practice, which enabled them to apply their learning. The participants bonded during their time in the program by experiencing new and sometimes uncomfortable things together. When they were in the immersive sessions, they spent all their time with each other, including meals, excursions, and traveling to the various locations. They referenced being in various permutations of small groups throughout the program, which allowed

even more opportunities to get to know each other and share different perspectives in intimate forums.

Sam described the cohort experience as an “opportunity to bring diversity of thought and different backgrounds to drive high performance in what we do.” He reported that the cohort provided a space to test ideas and work through individual challenges in a supportive environment. The relationships and trust built through the experiences in the program enabled this support.

Clint felt that EDP was different from other leadership programs he had attended because of the cohort element. He believed that the experiences they went through together enabled them to build a community of leaders who trusted and relied on each other. He reflected on the way the community continued to support each other throughout the pandemic and the merger. He felt they had gone through something special together and it bonded them as a group of connected leaders across the organization and across the globe.

Janet shared that the EDP cohort had various permutations of groups around different topics and subject areas throughout the program. These groups created space for discussion on different leadership topics. Discovering the topics together and engaging in reflective dialogue enabled a sense of social learning and helped the concepts “stick.”

The sentiments from this cohort show that their experiences in the program enabled them to form a community for learning and practicing new tools and concepts, which made them all better leaders. Bruce summed up this experience:

I used EDP as sort of a safe space to be able to have some conversations that maybe I wouldn't have had in the past. So, throwing ideas out that weren't necessarily in line with the way that others were thinking. Or throwing out a challenging retort to an argument, comment, or statement. So, those were some of the things that I used, almost as a probing ground. (Bruce)

## **CEO Engagement in Participants' Development**

Thirty-eight percent of the participants reported that the support and engagement of the CEO, who was the program sponsor, enabled them to apply their learning. In the case study overview presented in Chapter 4, Diana Prince also described the CEO as one of the program's biggest champions.

Sam and Hank felt increased interaction and engagement with the CEO because of their participation in the program. Sam felt seen by the CEO and invested in by being selected for the program. He reported feeling an increased sense of commitment and belonging to GFAI because of the engagement from the CEO. Hank had felt a level of engagement with the CEO prior to the program; however, the interactions with the CEO during the program built an even stronger relationship.

Jean was impressed with how invested the CEO was in EDP and with getting to know the participants. He would ask her for feedback about the program, even when they were talking about day-job related topics. She felt that he valued her opinion on the program and her insights into how things were working in the broader organization. He also asked what he could do differently in his role. She felt supported by the CEO in her learning journey with EDP.

Tony perceived that both the CEO and CHRO showed a high level of commitment to the program and to developing the cohort. He felt this engagement sent an important signal that the program was important to the organization and the leaders' development outside of the program would be supported.

The commitment from the CEO, in particular, and some of the Executive Team to actually show up to the meetings [and engage with the cohort], that's really important. I mean, it's an important signal that this matters and that the people matter.... And it's not just showing up and giving a speech and disappearing. It's actually really engaging with the teams and start showing them that what they do in the program matters outside of the program. (Tony)

Janet felt an increased level of engagement in the program because of the CEO's commitment. She was motivated to demonstrate her learning from EDP back on the job. She also followed Diana's advice to be fully present at the in-person sessions so that she could engage with the CEO, CHRO, and the rest of the cohort in a meaningful way. The CEO's opening remarks at EDP inspired her because he shared his vision for the cohort of being the future leaders of the organization. She recounted how the CEO told the cohort he was relying on this group of leaders to drive strategy and innovation and how she felt a strong sense of obligation to apply her learning back to her role at the firm.

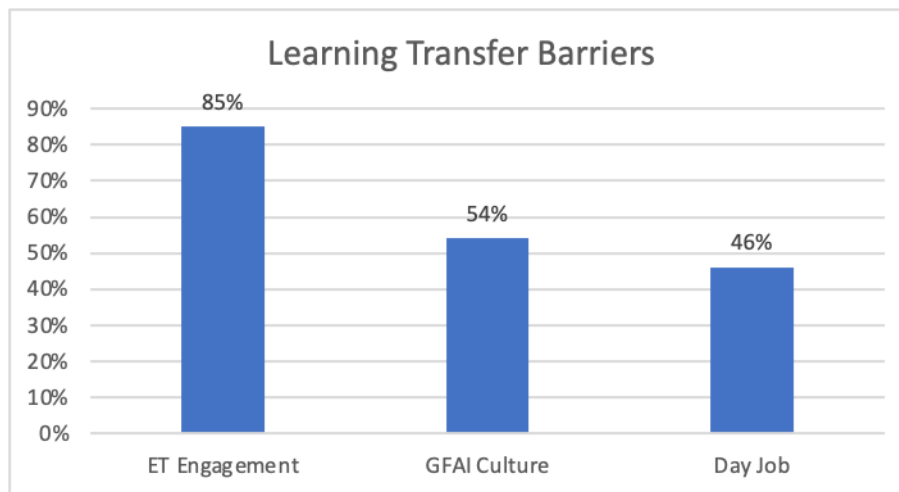
### **Research Finding 3: Learning Transfer Barriers**

All 13 participants revealed that they encountered at least one barrier when attempting to apply their learning from EDP to their roles in GFAI. Participants were asked if there were components of EDP that they were not able to apply and, if so, what factors served as barriers to their learning transfer. Disabling factors for learning transfer were grouped into the following sub-findings: lack of engagement and role modeling from the GFAI executive team (apart from the CEO and CHRO); factors within GFAI's culture that became a barrier to the participants' ability to enact real strategic change; and how the priorities in their roles as senior leaders of large teams at GFAI were at times in conflict with their responsibilities in the program.

Figure 5.3 displays the sub-findings for this section.

**Figure 5.3**

*Sub-findings for Research Finding 3*



### **Lack of Engagement from GFAI’s Executive Team**

Eighty-five percent of the participants reported that the Executive Team’s lack of engagement hindered their ability to transfer their learning back to their roles at GFAI. The participants described feeling frustrated and disappointed with the ET’s lack of support for the program activities (apart from the CEO and CHRO). The participants also felt discouraged by the Executive Team’s lack of role modeling the leadership behaviors that were central to the learning curriculum for EDP.

### ***Lack of Support for Strategic Projects was a Barrier to Enacting Real Change at GFAI***

A particularly challenging element for the participants was the lack of engagement from the ET in pushing the strategic projects forward, which impacted the cohort’s ability to experiment with results and enact real change at GFAI. The Strategic Projects were one of the key benchmarks to measure the success of the program and took up a large percentage of the program activities.

Jean shared that, while the Executive Team appeared to support EDP in theory, when it came to engaging with the cohort on their Strategic Projects, it did not feel like they were invested in the outcomes. She felt that the ET looked at the Strategy Projects as “pet projects.” The ET’s lack of engagement led her to question her own investment in wanting to push change at GFAI. She felt discouraged that the leaders at the top were not role modeling change leadership, nor the curiosity to explore innovative ideas.

Tony perceived that the ET were not engaged in dialogue around how to shape the Strategic Project ideas into something actionable and useful for GFAI. His group came ready to have a dialogue about their ideas, and he felt like the ET was dismissive and disinterested:

The problem was not that [the ET] rejected the ideas; rejecting ideas is fine.... It’s actually worse that they didn’t reject the ideas early and didn’t engage to try to shape them to make them better and plausible. It was as though everybody on the Executive Team was treating this as your kid’s macaroni art and thinking, “...We’ll let them play and they’ll come up with their nice art and we’ll stick it on the fridge for a couple of days until they forget about it, and then we’ll throw it away.” (Tony)

Additionally, Bruce felt that the ET’s risk aversion was a barrier for the Strategic Projects to get off the ground and for the participants to learn by experimenting with the results of their project ideas within the organization.

Carol saw different levels of receptiveness from the ET members in the strategic project ideas. Some were more involved than others, and the lack of engagement impacted the cohort’s ability to execute their innovate ideas, experiment through testing and learning, and enact real change as a result.

### ***ET’s Disengagement Created a Collective “Disorienting Dilemma” for the Cohort***

There were some specific moments during the second immersion in New York City that left the participants questioning the ET’s leadership and the perceived lack of support they were

receiving in the development program. These memories seemed visceral for the participants, as many of them were able to recall specific details of disengagement, nearly two years later.

Jessica described a disappointing moment when she felt blocked by the ET's lack of support for the cohort's ideas. Jessica was one of the many participants who referenced the critical incident where Kate gave constructive feedback to the ET about how she did not feel like they were supporting their development, specifically by the lack of role modeling and their dismissiveness over the Strategic Project ideas. The cohort felt the ET were being blockers to the projects, which was a barrier to executing their ideas and experimenting with results, a critical component of their learning experience.

We were in this theater in New York with the ET. I was thinking, "You've got to be kidding me." They were asking us to do things that we were asking them for. Kate got up and spoke up on behalf of the group, and we thanked her for it. It had to do with getting behind the idea and making things happen. If we don't have your support, it will go nowhere. It was a moment of disappointment with the ET. The most telling thing was that it was clear to us they didn't even know each other. We were doing all of this work to get to know each other, and they didn't know each other in that way. As if we were ever going to get somewhere without their support. (Jessica)

Clint described similar sentiments from that same moment in the theater in NYC, where the cohort was asked to provide recommendations to the ET, and he did not feel they were receptive to the insights from the leaders, many of whom reported directly to these ET members. In his mind, by the nature of the program, there would be some blunt questions likely generated that would require a degree of listening from the ET that did not happen. The cohort was being asked to lead change at GFAI, and part of that change was courageously providing feedback to the leaders at the top about things that were not working. He felt frustrated that the ET were not engaging in discourse with the cohort, which felt like a barrier to being able to enact any real change:

We were trying to establish conversations and send quite an authentic message around the need for stronger alignment and for the Executive Team to communicate more

as a team and give us a strong sense that they were making decisions together, they were prioritizing together, that they were all in agreement with the strategy and the tactics to deliver the strategy. It felt like they were not there to take in those recommendations... Some of the other Executive Team members who were there, they started looking at their shoes.... My perception is that there was probably a high level of discomfort within the Executive Team at the time. So, I think they were all in agreement with investing in people, giving them the resources, the training, the experience, but I'm not sure the Executive Team had internalized the fact that in order for the program to run its course and achieve its objective, there was also a requirement placed on them to take it in and react and respond. (Clint)

Wanda described that same critical incident in the NYC theater as a lack of engagement in dialogue. She felt that the ET members did not want to be there, and they did not want to hear the feedback about how their dysfunctional dynamic was impacting the learning experience of the cohort. She recalled that "a lot of them were just sitting there with their arms crossed, not really giving us anything."

### ***Executive Team's Lack of Role Modeling Strong Leadership Behaviors***

Another area of perceived lack of support from the ET was their inability to role model the leadership behaviors being discussed in EDP. Kate explained that when the ET weren't role modeling the same leadership principles that the EDP cohort was expected to learn and apply, it made it more difficult to make real changes in behavior and leadership style:

If we're appreciating the whole human as we lead, and if the CHRO is doing it, that's great. But if the ET isn't approaching relationships with one another using that same leadership principle, then it falls down.... I had hoped to have a chance to affect the leadership at the top [with the ET] and the message we kept getting was, "You guys [the EDP cohort] are the leaders at the top, it's on you." I get that, but actually there's work to do up here that I want to help with. And don't you want my help? And that's where it just felt a bit disappointing. I feel like even if you're at the very top of the top of your career, if you don't think you have learning to do then you're not modeling leadership. That was disheartening. (Kate)

Natasha shared that the ET did not seem invested in coaching or developing their direct reports in EDP. She felt a lack of supplemental development and was disappointed that her ET-level manager was not role modeling the coaching that was such an integral part of the EDP



curriculum. She also expressed frustration that there was no follow-up development plan that she and her manager could work on together at the close of EDP. She wanted to understand what was the complementary commitment that the organization and the ET were making to the cohort since they were committing their time to the learning experience:

I don't think there was a lot of sync up from Executive Team members to follow up on what we learned as leaders, and to continue a development plan around it. I don't know if that was part of the intent, for our leaders to continue to work with us. After it ended, it's over. (Natasha)

***A Counterargument: Did the ET's Lack of Engagement Inspire More Learner Motivation?***

While the ET's lack of engagement was perceived by the participants to be a barrier to learning transfer and impacting real change, a counterargument is that the cohort persevered, despite the ET, to apply their learning because of their high intrinsic motivation. One such story was captured by Wanda when reflecting on the impact of the ET's lack of role modeling and engagement:

We'll show them that we all actually really want to work together. We like this. We like what we're doing now. We now know people across all these divisions, and we want to be part of something together. So, let's set a good example and not worry about the people that are above us. We'll just try to show what a good strength it would be for the company to bring us together more in this fashion. (Wanda)

Other participants reflected that perhaps the cohort's influence on the ET had some positive impacts. Bruce commented that he'd "like to think that maybe there's a reality where the things that EDP brought to the Executive Team during that time period maybe opened up some new thinking." While the cohort didn't see immediate changes in the ET's behavior while they were part of EDP, there were several changes in the structure of the ET in the years following the program's conclusion. Some ET members left the organization or changed roles, and there were also efforts made by the CHRO to develop stronger ties within the team.

Kate's demonstration of courage has been documented throughout this study and had an impact on her fellow cohort members, as well as the program architect, Diana. While Kate did not see an immediate shift in the ET's behavior after she spoke up at the New York City immersion, she commented that she noticed that the way the ET showed up during the COVID-19 pandemic was much more united. There was a greater degree of care and courage in the way they led during that crisis, and she hoped the EDP cohort may have influenced some of those shifts.

While is not conclusive evidence to show whether or not the ET's disengagement facilitated more learning transfer for participants, specifically their motivation to apply their learning and prove that they could be leaders who displayed care, curiosity, and courage, but several stories emerged that indicate this could be a factor.

### **GFAI's Culture as Barriers to Care, Curiosity, and Courage**

Fifty-four percent of the participants described several pervasive behaviors in GFAI's culture that served as antagonists to the leadership behaviors taught in EDP. Specifically, behaviors such as risk aversion slowing innovation, the siloed nature of the organization, internal politics, and conflict avoidance made applying themes of care, curiosity, and courage quite difficult.

#### ***Barriers to Care***

The participants reported many instances where they perceived the cultural norms at GFAI served as a barrier to care. Some of these behaviors showed up within the cohort members themselves. Jean reported that some of the participants seemed like they did not want to be in the program, but they showed up because their Executive Team member put them on "the list," so they went through the motions. This lack of care from other cohort members made it hard to

connect to these participants and to develop trust. She felt that this behavior of showing up and going through the motions was something she had experienced outside of EDP as well, which led her to conclude that it was possibly pervasive within GFAI's culture.

Jessica also described a barrier to care and forming trust with some of the participants because of the way they behaved in the program. Some participants worked very hard in the program, but others did not contribute as much. She mentioned that some of those who did not contribute were given larger roles or promotions, which felt defeating to those in the program who were contributing and doing the work to be better leaders. Politics outside the program were impacting some of the dynamics inside the program.

Natasha felt that some of her fellow EDP participants acted nicer in the program than they did in their jobs. When they were outside of EDP, she experienced some participants in different ways, describing them as "sharks" who were just out for themselves and their own business. She questioned the role of politics and "gamesmanship" with some of her fellow participants that eroded trust. She felt disillusioned with leadership team dynamics after witnessing some of the behavior of her fellow participants (and the ET).

Tony reported that the ET's lack of engagement with the EDP participants in their Strategic Project ideas demonstrated a lack of care. He felt that productive conflict in an environment is a foundational component to building trust. Without trust and the tension of challenging ideas, it is difficult for innovation to happen:

It requires that the Executive Team care, it requires a bit of engagement. And it also requires enough willingness to have a bit of conflict. And not bad conflict, not in an unprofessional way, but actually pushing back on ideas to make those ideas better.  
(Tony)

### *Barriers to Curiosity*

In terms of curiosity, several notable characteristics within GFAI's culture were perceived as barriers. Hank described a lack of drive and innovation in comparison to similar companies. He reported that ABE, the company that GFAI was merging with, built their business in less than 20 years by doing smart acquisitions. He explained that ABE built a valuation of over 40 billion dollars in less than 30 years, whereas it took GFAI 100 years to get a valuation of \$100 billion. He felt that GFAI was slow to enter new markets and accept innovative products and ideas.

Another perceived characteristic in GFAI's culture that served as a barrier to curiosity was the siloed nature of GFAI's operations, which was seen as an impediment to partnership. Jean reported that the organizational design of GFAI was rooted in silos and impeded collaboration across the organization. GFAI's divisions are all former companies with their own cultures and normalized behaviors. While EDP was challenging the participants to explore solving organizational problems collaboratively across these divisions and functions, this was not something being done within the broader organization. She mentioned that this design encouraged competition over collaboration, which is the opposite of what they were learning in EDP.

Janet encountered barriers to partnering with different divisions at GFAI when setting up a cross-divisional council to share best practices on a specific type of work. She felt that some divisional leaders would get very territorial or feel threatened, as if the council was meant to scrutinize or evaluate work being done. That kind of protective behavior prevented collaborative problem solving and sharing best practices:

It was always a controversial thing because the immediate assumption, when you set up something cross divisional, is you're trying to take over some other function or some

other department. It was very hard to believe for people that I just did it because I thought it was a useful way of people sharing best practices.... When you spend time with leaders of a particular division, they'll often get very sensitive about you stepping into that area. But understanding this is just a natural response to feeling threatened, feeling like their value's being questioned, or that they are being scrutinized by someone else. And I think when you get past that, and make it clear, and communicate that you're just there to share best practices, and ensure that we all work well together, people eventually get over it. (Janet)

Natasha shared her perspective that GFAI is not able to operate as an integrated organization because of the siloed nature of the how the divisions operate. She felt that the ET did not operate as a collective leadership team with a shared vision and values. She believed this behavior was replicated with the subsequent divisional and functional leadership teams that reported to the ET. There was no incentive or role modeling to collaboration across GFAI.

### ***Barriers to Courage***

Another perceived characteristic in GFAI's culture that served as a barrier to learning transfer was how risk aversion and conflict avoidance were in direct conflict with the innovative spirit of EDP. Innovation requires courage, which participants did not see in the ET or within GFAI's culture. Several participants mentioned risk aversion as a barrier for the strategic projects. Natasha felt that the company's risk aversion came through with the lack of engagement on the Strategic Project ideas. She felt like there were mixed messages from the ET about having the EDP participants research their ideas and come up with pitches, but there was no real follow-up from the ET on the ideas.

Bruce shared that risk aversion was pervasive in GFAI's culture because some of the businesses have regulatory requirements and external governing bodies that hold them accountable. Some of these regulations were put in place because of infractions throughout the company's history. His hope was that merging with ABE, which is known to have a more innovative culture, would create some much needed tension. He mentioned that GFAI's

acquisition of an innovative company called LVI (a pseudonym) several years prior was meant to bring about a cultural shift, but many of the LVI leaders have left and he believes it is because of the risk-averse culture they experienced with GFAI:

I think [risk aversion] is part of the culture. For example, with Division F, we have a process, we have a methodology, and it all works, and brings in lots of money. Don't change it. Conservative, and risk averse but with good reason. We have a lot of scrutiny on that group from the regulators. But I think that becomes part of the greater culture. (Bruce)

Additionally, Hank reported that cohort members displayed some risk aversion when it came to speaking to the ET and giving feedback about their observations on the organization. He felt that some cohort members were worried about their careers and didn't want to say things in front of the cohort and the ET that could negatively impact their reputation. He felt that some of the participants were more vocal when the ET weren't around, and then they adjusted their behavior to be more diplomatic when ET were present.

Tony perceived that GFAI's culture of being polite and conflict-avoidant impeded innovation. He felt that saying no and pushing back on ideas challenge people to make the ideas better and more innovative; however, GFAI's leadership wasn't even willing to engage in meaningful dialogue to forward the EDP participants' thinking around their innovative ideas. He also felt that the "imbedded inertia" at GFAI slowed innovation and caused missed opportunities:

Going back to the lack of traction on any of the Strategic Projects really comes down to more of an embedded cultural issue that GFAI has, which goes beyond EDP. It's a broader issue about resistance to innovation and change and being pretty slow moving in terms of responding to opportunities in the world. At one level it's a very successful business that just churns cash out and isn't rewarded a lot. There's not a demand for massive innovation at high speed. But on the other hand, when stuff does change, it means you're likely to miss opportunities. (Tony)

### **Conflicting Priorities with Roles as Leaders of Large Teams at GFAI**

Forty-six percent of the participants reported that, at times during the 18-month program, they found it difficult to process and apply their learning due to the demands of their "day jobs"

as leaders of large, global teams operating in a dynamic and complex landscape. These demands increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Steve reported that the biggest barrier for learning transfer was managing the competing demands of his job. He was motivated to do the work of EDP, but he struggled to manage the commitment of the program with the demands of his work week. He also explained that, in the Strategic Project work, there were people outside of the program who wanted to help with his team's project idea, but they also had competing demands and were unable to fully commit to the Strategic Project execution. According to Steve:

These systems have to run 24/7. If the system doesn't produce a number exactly at a specific time, we're testifying in front of Congress.... Also, we're always developing new products and hitting the new product delivery dates and so forth. So, the job in itself is very demanding.... It was so stressful. That's where my weekend and free time was—it was all EDP. (Steve)

Sam shared that some cohort members could not be as fully committed to components of the in-person sessions because the timing conflicted with the closing of deals and other client engagements. He understood that the program design was intentional to create this bubble effect for the participants to shut off the outside world and fully engage in the learning experience; however, he felt there should have been more leniency in the schedule to allow for these types of demands from clients.

### ***Disruption of COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted Job Responsibilities and Program Design***

For many participants, the COVID-19 global pandemic was a barrier to their learning transfer for two reasons. The first reason was that the leaders were presented with a series of complex problems and increased demands in their job responsibilities because the pandemic disrupted how and where employees worked, and how GFAI interacted with customers. The second reason is that it changed the design of the program from in-person to virtual. The participants reported that they did not find the virtual program design as effective or engaging as

the in-person intensive sessions and therefore did not take as much learning away as they had from the in-person immersions.

Jean described how the demands of her job increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost everyone at GFAI needed time to adjust to the drastic changes in lifestyle and family situations. Parents with school-aged children had a particularly difficult time managing virtual school in their homes while also doing their jobs remotely. There was simply not enough room to process and apply learning during this time of intense change and adjustment. Jean felt the virtual program design was less engaging because the sessions did not allow for the same amount of connection they experienced in person. She explained how the content discussed was important for how to lead in their current context, but it was difficult to focus on the learning because there were so many challenges that needed immediate attention. She expressed how virtual experiences lose the organic interactions to discuss the learning over coffee, drinks, or meals together.

Hank shared that once the program moved to a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was much easier to “hide behind the day job.” In addition to the pandemic, he perceived that many of the cohort members were beginning to get pulled into the ABE merger, and that became GFAI’s top priority. He felt EDP lost momentum when it was switched to a virtual design. He felt that there was not as much learning or engagement with other participants, which they had been able to foster during the intensive in-person sessions. He reported feeling a sense of loss in terms of the cohort dynamic and the safe environment that was created for learning together.

Steve, Natasha, and Wanda found that the virtual format and content were less impactful from a learning engagement standpoint. Natasha felt the virtual program design was not as



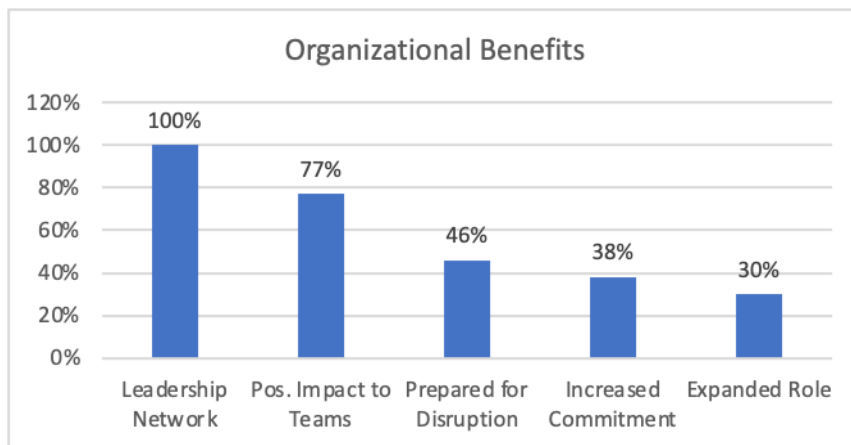
dynamic, and it was much more difficult to take as much learning away from those sessions as with the in-person immersive sessions. Wanda said the program “fizzled out” during the pandemic. She appreciated the effort to try to keep it going, but the connection to the cohort and the organic social learning components of the program did not feel as impactful as they were when the group could come together in person. Steve felt that losing the opportunity to be together for the last in-person immersion challenged the group’s ability to engage in a productive learning experience.

#### **Research Finding 4: Organizational Benefits**

All 13 participants were able to convey salient examples of how GFAI benefitted from the investment in EDP. Participants were asked to describe what, if any, benefits GFAI received by having this cohort of leaders go through the development program. The top benefits included: a network of connected leaders who can enable business results; leaders who display care, curiosity, and courage, yielding positive results for teams; a group of leaders prepared to lead through disruption. Figure 5.4 displays significant sub-findings for this section.

**Figure 5.4**

*Sub-findings for Research Finding 4*



## **Network of Leaders Enables Business Results**

One hundred percent of the participants in EDP reported that GFAI benefitted from the network that was built during the program. According to the participants, this network enabled a better understanding of how leaders across the organization play an important role in GFAI's success. This is referred to at GFAI as "enterprise mindset," which is thinking about how to balance the divisional or functional priorities with those of the collective organization. Enterprise mindset also enables GFAI to show up as "one company" with their customers and in the global markets. Another benefit of the network of leaders was the ability to collaborate across GFAI's vast enterprise of divisions and functions to get things done. Participants gave examples of how the cohort members reached out to each other and collaborated to solve problems. A final benefit of the network of leaders was the ability to recruit talent internally and create mobility across divisions and functions. This allowed GFAI to retain people they considered high potential leaders and give them new challenges to develop a portfolio of skills outside of their current division or function.

### ***Empathy Contributing to Enterprise Mindset***

Because GFAI contains many different businesses that at one point operated independently, there is a tendency to operate with the sole interest of one's division or function in mind, without realizing that there are downstream impacts to other groups across the organization. This can be problematic, especially when it comes to customers who leverage products across the divisions. If GFAI does not show up as a unified company, it doesn't inspire confidence in their products. One of the themes from the participants was that the leaders in EDP were able to have empathy and respect for other divisions and better understand the potential for

the company to operate more holistically after building relationships with leaders outside of their divisions.

Bruce shared that EDP allowed him to deeply understand some of the struggles his colleagues around the globe were faced with. When he took the time to listen and process what they were experiencing, his perspective shifted. People that he found challenging before EDP turned into his biggest champions and supporters. These relationships have enabled faster decisions because they trust each other. He felt that the power of the relationships determines whether a company will succeed or fail.

Sam perceived that EDP gave the participants an opportunity to see issues they were facing across the divisions and the commonalities between some of these challenges. EDP brought together leaders who could work together to problem solve, pool together resources, and influence toward solutions. He said that he felt EDP was an early seed for how to integrate the two organizations once the merger with ABE was completed.

Janet gained a better understanding of how the different divisions can sometimes compete with each other, and how it is their responsibility as leaders to role model collaborative problem solving across the divisions. It is a shift from competing to collaborating:

It really hit home for me around our organization that we think we work as one, but very often we are probably competing with each other, or showing off to each other. And there is learning that can be applied in one group and learning that happens in one group that not only can be applied elsewhere, but as leaders I think we have a responsibility to apply it elsewhere. And to look for those opportunities to solve problems that we know the answers to, because we've solved them before. And it was just a real live physical moment of interacting with the team that made me realize this is something we can translate into the real world. (Janet)

### ***Collaborating across GFAI for Better Results***

The leaders in EDP were able to go through experiences together that allowed them to know each other personally, build trust, and see the different capabilities that each person

brought to the table. Building trust in the program allowed the leaders to take that trust back into their teams and create results together.

Sam felt that experiencing the intensive immersive sessions together in EDP and the organic relationship building inherent in traveling to new places fostered psychological safety with this cohort of leaders. There was a natural opening up over meals and learning about each other's lives and careers. That vulnerability allowed participants to build trust, which makes the nature of doing business easier. Sam has a role involving internal controls and regulations. When risks are identified, it is much easier for Sam to call up the leaders in this network and get honest answers to quickly remedy the issue:

We built a reservoir of equity.... The work I do, we review things and sometimes identify key gaps and risks. I think one of the things EDP has done is the ability for me to tap into the divisional leaders and say, we have this issue being raised by my team. Let's talk through it.... It's a good engagement and a good dialogue because we've built trust. We've gone through the battles of EDP. We've been vulnerable, we know our lives, so we could have a good conversation. (Sam)

Jessica felt that the leadership network allowed them all to do their jobs better because they have access to different perspectives they didn't have before EDP. For example, Bruce was part of a large project involving reimagining the future of work at GFAI, and Jessica was able to discuss critical operational risk issues openly with him. She has peers in the network who play a similar role in other divisions, and they meet regularly to share best practices and give each other advice when issues arise.

Hank described quicker decision-making as an organizational benefit to having a leadership network. He felt that decisions can be made faster if there is trust between the leaders involved. He believed that the relationships built in EDP made it easier to pick up the phone and get things done versus second-guessing the other person or going back and forth in lengthy emails:

You have more trust in each other, and trust means you can rely on each other because people accept each other's skills and knowhow.... I think you can go faster because you know they are very competent people and they're professionals. And sometimes you don't need to question. When you don't know the person that well, sometimes you feel like, "Okay, what does he or she mean with this?" And you might not always have the full context. So, I think [the network] helps in that way. And the advantage to the company is, you can be faster with your decision-making execution. (Hank)

Jean felt that her relationships with some of her fellow cohort members allowed her to quickly solve business problems. She moved into a new role during EDP, and two of her cohort members were her main stakeholders. Because of their relationship, they were able to collaborate and fix a system that had been broken for years.

Tony described having a network of leaders who can easily come together to solve business problems as "a subtle, immeasurable benefit." As the CEO of Stark Labs (a pseudonym), which was acquired by GFAI, his group gained more visibility when the leaders in EDP wanted to collaborate with his team to solve problems using their patented technology. These partnerships benefitted the divisions at GFAI because Stark Labs was able to make the workflows more efficient. The partnerships also benefitted the team members at Stark Labs by giving them more exposure to leaders and opportunities across GFAI.

Kate felt inspired by one of the virtual speakers during EDP. He was a city leader who challenged GFAI on their approach to environmental, social, and governance (ESG). He encouraged the leaders of EDP to question how assessments were being made of certain US municipalities and asked that the assessment be broadened to include the programs that cities are leading in response to the social justice movements. Kate pulled together a group of people across the firm to collaborate and create measures to assess social impact. She wanted to connect GFAI's business more to the communities it serves.

Carol shared how EDP inspired her to think about GFAI as a whole and how to collaborate across divisions. She created a cross-divisional research council with the heads of research across the different businesses. She now thinks about how to leverage resources across GFAI to build research labs that are tasked with providing data and analytics that can help inform and potentially solve important problems in the markets they serve:

I'm really thinking about what could make GFAI a stronger company, and how can we better leverage the disparate parts of the organization.... I've created this GFAI Research group, and then put together a series of cross-divisional research labs on different themes or topic, which are of value for the whole franchise.... I think what's maybe different, what EDP made me think differently is that each time there's a topic, a question, be it through Research or with sustainability and ESG, my first question is always to think broadly how that might be relevant for GFAI as a whole, and who might need to be associated into that project across divisions ... so that we can best leverage the extraordinary resources and expertise we have across divisions.... I think this has completely transformed my perspective about the company and my way of thinking about the company holistically. (Carol)

The collaboration didn't just stop at the cohort members. Because they were demonstrating collaboration, it created what Steve referred to as "shadow of a leader." Steve reported that the network of leaders helped build a collaborative mindset across the organization. When leaders are role modeling collaboration, this mindset influences their teams. For example, he noticed that, when he works well with other leaders in different functional areas like risk and controls, his team shows more respect for the teams in those groups.

### ***Network Effects of Talent Development across GFAI***

Lastly, a benefit of this network of leaders was the ability to mobilize talent from their teams across the organization. According to the program documentation, retaining and developing high potential leaders across the firm was one of the EDP success measures because moving talent around the organization brings diverse perspectives to the work. GFAI had a culture of thinking division or function first; it was rare that employees would transfer to roles across divisions. Technical skills, industry expertise, and customer relationships typically took

precedent over transferable skills and finding candidates with a growth mindset. The network of leaders in EDP helped each other see the benefits that outside expertise and perspective could bring to their work, and it opened opportunities to mobilize talent.

Wanda recounted that the relationships she made in EDP turned into a job opportunity for her in managing a group in a different division. This was a courageous move, as she had spent over 15 years in her previous division and was deeply ingrained in that culture. She also recommended Janet for a job within her former division. Not only were the leaders of EDP able to move around the organization; they also were able to mobilize their team members and deploy talent to new opportunities.

I think one thing that stuck with me as we started going through this experience was how important it was to put yourself outside of your comfort zone. And so that's something that I definitely applied in my work as well. I mean, I think if I would've stayed in my comfort zone, I wouldn't have [changed roles to a different division]. I wouldn't have temporarily moved my family up to New York. I don't think I would've ever taken that leap if I hadn't been challenged on that more. (Wanda)

The talent mobility didn't just benefit participants. The participants leveraged the leadership network to recruit for roles internally with candidates in other divisions and functions they would not have been exposed to before EDP. Carol described how she leveraged her network in EDP to help recruit for a new position. She was able to interview candidates from across divisions that she would normally not have access to without this network. She was able to get recommendations from leaders that she trusted. She felt this was a benefit not only to her but to the organization, because the leadership network increased talent mobility.

Additionally, Jessica became more involved in talent selection across groups than she had been prior to EDP. Jean had an open role, and they discussed talent on Jessica's team that might be a good fit for the role. Bruce put Jessica on an interview panel for a role he was hiring for.

This benefitted the organization by creating more mobility across groups and bringing diverse perspectives when interviewing candidates.

### **Leading with Care, Curiosity, and Courage Yields Positive Impacts across GFAI**

Seventy-seven percent of the participants reported that GFAI benefitted from leaders who made a broader impact on the company and their teams in the ways they applied their learning. This broad impact showed up in the way these leaders developed their teams by incorporating some of the themes and lessons from EDP and translating them into the daily work environment.

Steve described how the partnerships created in EDP “fan down” into the organization and shape the culture. He brought a lot of the EDP concepts back to his team, including shining a lens on diversity dynamics. His team started a book club to become more informed about the Black Lives Matter movement. He also brought care for the community into his team by having a community impact project as part of their quarterly planning process. He wanted to continue bringing the aspect of care and empathy into his team to keep the EDP learning alive. The most recent project was writing letters to college freshman and sending care packages. He illustrated that these results can be measured in GFAI’s engagement survey, which showed very high engagement scores from diverse team members, especially compared with external benchmarks.

Bruce was inspired by some of the leadership immersions to think about talent selection differently. As referenced previously, he incorporated questions that sought examples of grit, determination, fortitude, and resilience into his interview protocol. He started asking interview questions that probed more deeply into times of failure and strife, how a candidate moved themselves out of that space, and what they learned about themselves along the way. This type of thinking broadens the selection process and gives an opportunity to candidates who may not have



had the privilege of specific types of education but had learned certain skills through the circumstances presented in their lives:

Everybody loves to talk about the “Oh, well, I did this, and I did that, and I built this thing, and my team is awesome.” But tell me about the times when you languished, and you had turmoil, and you couldn’t come out of that immediately. And there wasn’t a spectacular result on the other end. Those are the types of things that I really want to know. Tell me how you persevered after you were laid off.... That’s one of the things that I’ve incorporated, and I’ve asked my team to include in their own interview processes. So, when I’m thinking about the employees that I want on my team, resilience, grit, determination, and fortitude, those are key competencies and characteristics that we want to look for and that we want to promote. (Bruce)

Natasha was inspired by EDP’s focus on purposeful leadership and wanted to give her leadership team an opportunity to work through their own leadership purpose. At the beginning of 2020, she put a new leadership team in place and gathered them together for a week-long session primarily focused on giving the leaders space to define their leadership purpose, building a foundation of trust and belonging, and laying the groundwork for business planning. She shared that prior to EDP she would have just focused on business planning and skipped the relationship building and leadership development pieces. She credits EDP for showing her how important those components are to the success of a team:

I’m usually a very execution/performance focused leader, who just starts to run after the business plan and executing the business plan. I do think that EDP influenced me at that time period and caused me to take a different approach going into that year, to be more about building relationships and trust across my leadership team. And that’s when I did a leadership gathering, where we spent more time as leaders connecting and working to build relationships and trust before we just ran into the business plan for that year. And I got a lot of great feedback around that leadership session. (Natasha)

Janet incorporated concepts from EDP into coaching one of her direct reports. She wanted to help him understand the impact of his reactive tendencies, so she used coaching questions to enable him to unpack some of the things he was doing and discuss why this was happening. She did not scold him for his reactive tendencies, but rather approached him with

curiosity. EDP gave her a lot of self-awareness about her own impact, and she wanted to pass this along to her team members and coach them into understanding their impact as well.

### **Strengthened Ability to Lead through Massive Change and Disruption**

Forty-six percent of the participants reported that a benefit to GFAI was having a cohort of leaders who were prepared to lead their teams through disruptive change with care, curiosity, and courage. These leaders were armed with tools that allowed them to navigate the massive global disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted ways of working and daily life, as well as the disruption and change to the current organizational culture that would be caused with the merger between GFAI and ABE.

Diana and her team began designing EDP in early 2019 as an executive development program to prepare leaders for disruption. She sought to arm these leaders with the qualities of care, curiosity, and courage to guide their teams through change. Janet was in awe of how Diana, while she could not have known a global pandemic was about to disrupt the world, seemed to be preparing the participants for “something big.” Janet felt that the human-centric leadership that was taught in EDP was what the world needed during the pandemic, and will continue to need through continuous change and disruption. She described feeling more prepared to lead empathically when the pandemic hit because of being in EDP:

I think that we’ve taken a leap of about 20 years, unnaturally leapt forward in the way we think about leadership. And I think some level-setting around what it means to lead in, God willing, a post-pandemic era is going to be really interesting. You’ve got a gift in a way. It’s a terrible way to talk about COVID. But I think you’ll understand what I mean, in that you’ve got this massive global case study of change, and disruption, and challenge, that you can leverage to help people think about the way they lead differently. The emphasis on humanizing leadership is still needed. The emphasis on diversity of all kinds is still massively needed. And I would say in our organization probably more than ever now, with the combination of the two companies. (Janet)

Kate felt that EDP prepared her to lead her team through the COVID-19 pandemic. While there was no way to predict the pandemic, EDP set leaders up with tools to lead through an

environment of volatility, uncertainty, change, and ambiguity. She felt that EDP reinforced her natural inclination to connect with her team and show that she cares. Leading through a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic required a high degree of care and connection from leaders.

Bruce described how the COVID-19 pandemic required a strong degree of empathy from leaders. GFAI had to quickly pivot and set up 23,000 employees worldwide to work virtually with the right equipment while mitigating cybersecurity risks. It was a delicate balance of empathizing with employees to ensure they had flexibility while also safeguarding the assets of the company:

We had to be decisive in some cases when it came to COVID. Like there was a decision that I made, and, yes, there was conflict around it, because there was a concern that it was going to open a pretty significant security risk and I basically said, “Hey, we’ve just got to do it.” Because we don’t have a choice, otherwise we shut down operations... I think empathy is another one ... understanding it from the point of view that it’s not just about people going home and being able to work. It’s about being able to work with screaming kids in a 700-square foot studio apartment, having to take their mom to the hospital. I mean, dealing with sickness and dealing with death. I think that the focus on empathy [in EDP] helped quite a bit. (Bruce)

Jessica, Wanda, and Carol felt more prepared to lead their teams through the challenges of COVID-19. They believed the pandemic required a higher level of leadership than previous crises because of the humanitarian element and the global disruption and suffering caused by the virus. They also believed they came out of EDP as stronger leaders who were able to keep their businesses afloat, make quicker decisions, keep their teams connected by focusing on care and empathy, and leverage the network to solve challenges together.

While COVID-19 proved to be a world-wide disruption to work and personal lives, the merger between GFAI and ABE was also a disruptor for both company cultures and leadership teams. It presented an additional challenge amongst the already uncertain times caused by the pandemic. Because of her time in EDP, Jean reported feeling more ready for an environment of uncertainty, especially with the impending merger with ABE. She felt more confident in leading

her team through that change. According to Jean, how leaders manage the change determines the success or failure of a merger:

I hope that [having leaders go through EDP] created an environment where we are more ready for what's coming. I will say for the majority of people that I meet with; they've never really experienced a merger of this size. And so, it's going to be a shock to the company, to the culture, to the people, to the leadership. And so, that much growth that quickly is something you really have to be ready for. And I will say, personally, that's why I think a lot of mergers fail. I don't think it has anything to do with money or expense or revenue. I actually think it's because you don't manage the change well enough. (Jean)

### **Other Organizational Benefits to GFAI**

The most significant organizational benefits were described in the prior sections; however, two benefits mentioned by some participants provide additional color to this case study and may be of interest to leadership development practitioners. These include feeling a sense of loyalty and belonging to GFAI and leaders who were given expanded roles because of their selection in the program.

#### ***Selection for EDP Created a Sense of Loyalty and Belonging***

Thirty-eight percent of the participants reported that GFAI benefitted from EDP by creating leaders with a stronger sense of loyalty and belonging to the organization. These leaders recognized that GFAI had invested a significant amount of time, energy, and money into their development. Janet described how being selected for EDP gave her a sense of pride. She felt that the organization was sending a signal that she played an important role in its future:

The invitation came with a recognition, or a sort of explicit statement that being included in EDP meant that you were tapped for something bigger. And that the organization had such confidence in you that they were willing to invest a significant amount of time and money to make you one of the special people. So, there's something very rewarding about working hard for a number of years for a company, and then somebody recognizing that, and seeing that you've got potential to do more. So, even being selected was a big deal for me. (Janet)

Similarly, Carol felt honored to be selected as one of 24 participants out of hundreds of executive leaders at GFAI. She described how being part of EDP gave her more access and exposure to the CHRO and CEO, as well as to other executive leaders with whom she could share ideas, ask questions, get help in solving problems, or offer insights into ways of collaborating better:

It was so selective in terms of who was chosen, I think you really felt you were part of a special club in a way. And just saying that you are part of EDP was like a badge of honor in a way, it was really important, and it opened doors. And I think before EDP, probably the CEO and the CHRO had an idea who I was, but I think that participating in EDP has been raising my visibility in the organization and the network, which meant that if I have some ideas to share or some questions or some feedback, then I'm now able to have that access. (Carol)

Sam felt more valued at GFAI after his experience in EDP. He perceived that more doors were opened to him because he was more visible to the Executive Team, specifically the CEO. Before EDP, he wondered if he had hit a ceiling at GFAI and would need to leave to grow in his career. But during EDP, Sam was given a larger role, and he now has a very strong relationship to the CEO. Sam explained how this investment in his career development and increase in visibility has increased his loyalty to GFAI.

Bruce and Clint felt motivated by the investment GFAI made in their careers. Bruce compared his experience to that of a stock, where you put money into it and let it grow over time, as a long-term investment. He referred to his experience as “discrete, subconscious loyalty” because of the nature of the investment the company made in him. Clint felt cared for in the way the company was investing in him. He felt motivated that, because of his experience in EDP, he could continue to expand his career at GFAI.

### ***Participants Given Expanded Roles***

Thirty percent of the participants reported that GFAI benefitted by having leaders who were more prepared for larger roles. Several of their cohort members were given larger

leadership roles in terms of the scope of their work and the size of their teams. This was especially beneficial when the organizational design conversations were happening during the merger. Even the EDP participants who remained in similar roles prior to the merger are now leading larger teams with a mix of team members between GFAI and ABE.

Sam perceived that EDP accelerated his career, allowing him to be ready to take on a new role and strengthening his engagement with the CEO and GFAI's Board of Directors. GFAI continued supporting his development by providing him with an executive coach to support his transition into this expanded role. According to Sam:

I think EDP for me has been an accelerator.... I was appointed into my role in [early] 2020. So, I think EDP has given some of our leaders an opportunity to see me and my engagement with my peers. And I think that has led to an abundance of opportunities. I got closer to the CEO. I have stronger engagement with the Board [of Directors]. My reporting line was changed. I got an executive coach.... I think I could look at it and say, I did it all, but no, the glue for all of those things is EDP.... But being part of EDP doesn't mean you're automatically going to have an expanded role. That's not what EDP is. EDP is about building leadership capacity and management. But also, you could end up with an expanded opportunity, like me, and EDP prepares you for that. (Sam)

Janet was also given an expanded role. She had an ambition to run her own P&L (Profit & Loss), and she was given that opportunity once the merger closed. She felt a level of support from the CEO, CHRO, and the CFO and felt EDP prepared her for this larger responsibility:

I'm going to be running my first P&L, which I've wanted to do for a very long time. And I've gone from thinking I would never be given that experience because I hadn't done it before, to having very strong support from the CEO, the CHRO, the CFO, and a lot of the managers, to run a really big P&L in the new organization. So, I think the company's benefited because it's allowed people to have a voice in deciding what their future ambitions look like. It's also benefited because it's taken a bet on some of those people, and really followed through on its promise that EDP is going to be this playground for new leaders. (Janet)

Additionally, Jean's role has changed and expanded several times over the last two years. When the merger closed, she was put in charge of one of the largest teams at GFAI, tasked with integrating the operational processes across the different historical systems of both companies.

She also reported that her relationships in EDP made her job easier because she has already formed trust. EDP allowed her to connect with leaders across the organization and understand their challenges. This understanding prepared her and her team to quickly start solving some of these issues and produce positive outcomes.

Carol was given an expanded role because of her participation in EDP. Her strategic project in EDP enabled her to better understand the ESG businesses at GFAI and form strong partnerships with the leaders in those groups. As part of her expanded role, she was given a team tasked with activities related to sustainable finance, so her knowledge about ESG, the key players at GFAI, and the regulations allowed her to better coordinate an integrated ESG strategy, not just for her division, but across all divisions at GFAI.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the four findings uncovered by this study. The findings were organized according to the research questions, and sub-themes were organized by their prevalence in the data. Data from the participant interviews revealed the participants' perceptions of how they developed as leaders, what experiences in EDP they applied to their roles as leaders at GFAI, what were some of the barriers to their learning experience and application, and how GFAI benefitted from the investment made in EDP.

The first finding surfaced examples of the developmental process and how leaders experienced shifts in their leadership style. All 13 participants were able to convey examples of how they experienced a shift in their leadership. The researcher mapped these shifts to the three themes of EDP, which were care, curiosity, and/or courage. Eighty-five percent of the participants reported experiencing a shift in care for themselves, their teams, and their

communities based on their experience in EDP. Fifty-four percent of the participants reported feeling a shift in courage, and 46% reported experiencing a shift in curiosity.

The second finding focused on the enabling factors for learning transfer. All 13 participants were able to attribute at least one factor that enabled them to apply their learning from EDP into their leadership role at GFAI. Learner motivation was the most common enabler for learning transfer, with 85% of the participants reporting that their own intrinsic motivation to learn and grow enabled them to transfer their learning. Sixty-nine percent found the cohort to be an enabling factor for learning transfer because it became a safe space to try out new skills and share learnings as a community. Thirty-eight percent reported that the support and engagement of the CEO, the program sponsor, enabled them to apply their learning.

The third finding presented in this study addressed the factors that served as barriers to learning transfer. All 13 participants were able to attribute at least one factor that disabled their ability to transfer their learning from EDP into their leadership role at GFAI. The most prevalent barrier to learning transfer, reported by 85% of the participants, was the perceived lack of engagement by GFAI's Executive Team. The participants described examples of how the ET members were perceived as blockers to their Strategic Projects, which prevented the cohort from enacting real change at GFAI. The participants also perceived that the Executive Team was not role modeling the leadership behaviors that the participants were being taught in EDP, including coaching, and developing the cohort outside of the program and preparing them for larger roles. Another barrier to learning transfer was GFAI's culture. Fifty-four percent reported that certain behaviors associated with GFAI's culture served as a barrier to learning transfer, specifically risk aversion slowing innovation, the siloed nature of the organization, internal politics, and conflict avoidance. Each of these cultural behaviors impacted one of the three main themes of EDP: care,



curiosity, and courage. Forty-six percent reported that at times during the 18-month program, they found it difficult to process and apply their learning due to the demands of their day jobs. The distraction of the day jobs only got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic because job responsibilities increased, and leaders needed to be deployed to solve the complex problems of transitioning to a fully remote workforce.

The fourth finding was intended to surface examples of organizational outcomes that GFAI experienced from the substantial investment that the CEO, CHRO, and GFAI's Board of Directors made into this executive development program. All 13 participants were able to describe how they perceived GFAI benefitted from the investment in EDP. The highest reported benefit to GFAI was the leadership network formed from the experience of going through the program as a cohort, a unanimous agreement from all participants. GFAI benefitted from the network in terms of collaborative problems solving across the enterprise, faster decision making, and inherent trust in the leaders in this network. Seventy-seven percent reported that GFAI benefitted from leaders who made a broader impact to the company and their teams in the ways they applied their learning to their daily work. This broad impact showed up in the way these leaders developed their teams by incorporating some of the themes and lessons from EDP and translating them into the daily work environment. Forty-six percent of the participants reported that a benefit to GFAI was having a cohort of leaders who were prepared with tools to lead through disruption. The two major disruptions faced during and after EDP were how the COVID-19 global pandemic dramatically changed ways of working and daily life and the cultural change caused by the merger between GFAI and ABE. Two additional benefits that emerged in the data did not have high frequency but add additional color to the narrative of the case study. The first was that 38% of the participants reported that GFAI benefitted by creating a

stronger sense of loyalty and belonging. Lastly, 30% of the participants reported that a benefit to GFAI was that some of their cohort members were given larger leadership roles in terms of the scope of their work and the size of their teams. Even the EDP participants who remained in similar roles were now leading larger teams with a mix of team members between GFAI and ABE, which was a cultural shift for them.

## **Chapter 6: Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred their learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The researcher hoped that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow leadership development practitioners to have a more informed perspective about the long-term impact of developing executives to both individual leaders and the organization.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretive insights into the findings. Whereas Chapter 5 split apart and separated chunks of data to tell the story of the research, this chapter reconstructs a more holistic understanding of the developmental experience of how executives learn and transfer that learning back to their organization, and how the organization benefitted from investing in this type of development program.

### **Analytical Category Development**

This research study used qualitative analysis to compile data by conducting in-depth interviews and collecting supportive data through documentation review. Participants in the study included 13 cohort members from the Executive Development Program and the Program Architect. The data were coded, analyzed, and organized first by the research questions and then by analytic categories guided by the conceptual framework as depicted in Chapter 2 (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The analytic categories enabled the researcher to uncover more depth and draw further meaning from the research findings.

This study addressed the following research problem: if modern executive development programs are intended to prepare executives to lead through the complex landscape of disruptive change, then new ways of understanding learning transfer, behavior and mindset shifts, and evaluating effectiveness of these programs are also needed. Table 6.1 shows how the analytical categories were developed, based on this study’s research questions, findings, and how the findings are relevant to the research problem.

**Table 6.1**

*Research Questions, Findings, and Analytic Categories*

Research Question	Finding Statement	Relevance to Research Problem	Analytic Category	Themes Across Analytical Categories
1. How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?	1. All 13 participants expressed a shift in their point of view on leadership in a dynamic environment based on their experience in EDP.	Development programs can be evaluated through understanding behavioral shifts experienced by the participants.	<b>Category 1:</b> Individual shifts in mindset or behavior	Comfort Zone
2. What enabled or disabled the participants’ ability to transfer their learning?	2. All 13 participants reported that were able to apply some aspects of their learning from EDP into their leadership roles at GFAI.	Evaluating a development program’s success involves understanding both enabling factors and disabling factors to the participants’ ability to bring the program learning back to their role within the organization.	<b>Category 2:</b> Enabling factors of learning transfer.	Individual motivation  Program Design  Work Environment
	3. All 13 participants reported that they encountered at least one barrier to learning transfer.		<b>Category 3:</b> Barriers to learning transfer.	
3. What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?	4. All 13 participants were able to think of at least one way that GFAI benefitted from having this cohort of leaders participate in EDP,	Measuring a program’s long-term success involves evaluating organizational outcomes and benefits.	<b>Category 4:</b> Tangible or intangible benefits for the organization.	Leadership Network  Impact on Teams  Navigating through Disruption

In the following analysis, the researcher looked primarily for connecting patterns and themes within and across the analytic categories, which are based on the four research findings. The researcher reviewed the data through different demographic lenses and found the most significance in the stories through the lens of gender. Of the 13 participants, seven identified as female and six identified as male. Significant themes are presented as part of this analysis. As a second level of analysis, the relevant theory and research presented in the literature review are tied in to show comparisons and contrasts to issues raised in the literature.

### **Interpretation of Findings Based on Analytical Categories**

The following sections provide an interpretation of findings through the lenses of the analytic categories presented in Table 6.1. These categories enabled the researcher to go into further depth in analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting the data.

#### **Analytic Category 1: Individual Shifts in Mindsets and Behaviors**

The first research question sought to determine the extent to which the participants experienced a change in their leadership style within the dynamic environment because of their experience in EDP. Participants indicated shifts in all three of the major themes in EDP, which were care, curiosity, and courage. All 13 participants reported experiencing a shift in at least one of three and provided salient examples for what they perceived to be elements of the program that initiated that shift.

The sub-findings provide more detail about what types of changes the participants experienced and how those changes related to their experiences in EDP. These linkages were drawn from the critical incident question, where participants were asked to describe when they noticed a shift in their behavior or way of thinking. A probing question was asked about which

program elements they could attribute to the shift. Table 6.2 provides the sub-findings and the program elements that served as enablers for their shifts.

**Table 6.2**

*Sub-Findings and Links to Program Elements*

Sub-Finding	Program Elements
Shift in care	New York immersion, centered around the leadership theme of care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Care of Self:</b> Energy management session brought awareness to how leaders expend and replenish energy, and how their energy impacts those around them.</li> <li>• <b>Care for Community:</b> Participants learned from leaders in NYC, whose personal missions were to care for people in their community.</li> </ul>
Shift in curiosity	Mexico City immersion, centered around provoking curiosity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Customer insights:</b> Participants spoke with various customers to understand how they work with GFAI and their challenges.</li> <li>• <b>“Zooming Out”:</b> Learning from other industries, such as technology start-ups to gain insights on innovation.</li> <li>• <b>Strategic Projects:</b> The projects were introduced in this immersion as a lens for thinking about innovative ideas when interacting with customers and other business leaders.</li> </ul>
Shift in courage	Despite the pandemic’s disruption to the immersion planned around courage, this theme was still pervasive in other elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Empowerment:</b> Being selected for the program was seen as a signal that they were important to the organization, leading them to feel more agency and empowerment.</li> <li>• <b>“Be bold”:</b> Many participants referenced a theme of the program was to be bold and to push outside of their comfort zone.</li> <li>• <b>Learning through observation:</b> Many participants referenced feeling inspired by other participants’ displays of courage.</li> </ul>

While there could be a variety of factors to explain these shifts, the leaders were able to point out specific elements in the program and reflect on events in the external environment that enabled these shifts to occur. The program architect, Diana, mentioned that she intentionally used several design elements to provoke shifts in the participants’ thinking in the three leadership themes of care, curiosity, and courage. She specifically mentioned experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory as the basis for her program design.

Many of the participants' examples of what helped them shift can be linked to transformative learning theory, specifically the length of the program. Because the program took place over the course of a year, and the interviews were conducted 12-18 months after the program concluded, there was ample time for participants to experiment with new ways of thinking and being. One of the participants, Carol, summed this up in her reflection that the program timeline facilitated her shift in perspectives because "transformation is always a process," which takes time.

### ***The Best Learning Happens Outside Your Comfort Zone***

When looking across the analytical categories, a prominent theme was that the individuals experienced developmental shifts from experiences that pushed them outside of their comfort zone. These experiences stuck with participants and became memorable moments that they could attribute to their changes in perspectives and how they showed up as leaders. Diana mentioned that the immersive sessions were carefully designed in a way to allow the participants to experience perspectives and situations outside of their comfort zone. Carving out spaces for critical reflection and discourse allowed for that learning to emerge.

One of the participants, Natasha, reflected that the best learning happens outside of one's comfort zone. Many participants mentioned program design elements that forced them outside of their comfort zone, including something as simple as not having access to the agenda, so they had to think on their feet and ask more questions, rather than prepare in advance. That element of thinking on their feet made several participants feel a bit disoriented, but those participants also admitted that it made them more present in the moment.

Another example is that many of the participants had never traveled to Mexico City, so just being in a place that was so new and unfamiliar prompted curiosity to learn about the culture

from the local employees. One of the participants, Jean, reflected that she noticed some perspectives shifting from that first experience together in Mexico City. The participants were exposed to more organizations, cultures, and other types of leaders than they would be in their day-to-day lives. Another participant, Sam, referred to these experiences as “zooming out” to get ideas from the external environment and other types of organizations.

While New York City was a familiar place to most participants because it is a major GFAI hub, seeing it through the lens of mission-driven community leaders was a new experience. Even participants who lived in or traveled frequently to New York had not spent the extent of time learning about why these community programs exist and hearing the impact they have on the those they serve.

### ***Differences in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants***

In reviewing the data, the researcher found different patterns in the sentiments between the female participants and the male participants within this analytical category. In terms of reporting shifts in care, curiosity, and courage, it was an even split between male and female participants. However, the stories within these themes were different between the male and female sentiments. Overall, the female participants shifted more in caring for themselves, owning their authority and becoming more curious about themselves. The male participants shifted more in caring and curiosity for others’ experiences, role modeling leadership behaviors such as vulnerability, and creating spaces for others to courageously share challenges in a supportive environment. The implications in these patterns may indicate the different experiences that female and male leaders have in the corporate environment at GFAI. These patterns are illustrated in Table 6.3.



**Table 6.3***Patterns in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants*

	Themes in Female Sentiments	Themes in Male Sentiments	Differences
<b>Shift in Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift in prioritizing self-care, specifically in their awareness of how they were using their energy.</li> <li>• Reflected the importance in integrating their work and family lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift in caring for others</li> <li>• Reflected the importance of role modeling vulnerability, which was well received by their team members and created space for others to show more vulnerability</li> </ul>	The women shifted in their awareness of the importance of self-care, while the men shifted in expressing care for others
<b>Shift in Courage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling more courageous when speaking truth to people in positions of power</li> <li>• Being part of EDP enabled them to be bolder with authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling courage in creating space for others</li> <li>• Involved becoming more comfortable integrating social issues (specifically around diversity, equity, and inclusion) into their interactions with their team members</li> </ul>	Women became bolder in owning their authority and power; men used their authority to create spaces for others to be bold and share important issues and challenges
<b>Shift in Curiosity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming more curious about themselves and their own development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming more curious about the experiences of others</li> </ul>	Women focused more on their experiences and men focused more on experiences of others

Each participant in the cohort had their own individual development journey, based on their career goals and development plans; however, all participants in this study reported a shift in their behavior or mindset because of the program. They could clearly link specific elements of the program that provoked these shifts and enabled them to experience new perspectives. The

theme in all of these elements was experiencing something outside of their comfort zone, which Diana confirmed was an intentional design choice related to transformative learning theory. The researcher's use of qualitative methods, including a critical incident question to describe a shift in behavior or perspective, allowed for an in-depth evaluation of whether the program achieved its outcome to provoke new ways of thinking around leading teams with care, curiosity, and courage.

### **Analytic Category 2: Enabling Factors of Learning Transfer**

This analytic category examines factors that may have enabled the participants to apply their learning from EDP and possibly enabled the changes in behavior and mindsets illustrated in the prior section. Participants were able to identify at least one enabler of learning transfer, which centered around (1) the individual learner's motivation to apply their learning; (2) the work environment; and (3) intentional design elements of the development program. These enablers relate to the literature on learning transfer, which is further explored later in the chapter. According to the literature, the three major categories that influence learning transfer are individual learner motivation, work environment influences, and the program design (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005).

#### ***Motivation: High Levels of Autonomy and Authority***

The top factor for learning transfer was the participants' internal motivation to learn and apply their new knowledge to their roles at GFAI. Several participants reflected that their autonomy in leading their teams and their desire to apply the skills were enablers. Steve reflected this view by saying, "I run my team so I could apply whatever I thought was fit." When asked

what helped her apply the learning, Jessica reflected a similar sentiment: “Desire, to be honest. I wanted to, and when I did, I saw what it did for other people and how it impacted results and collaboration.”

Given that there appears to be a high motivation to transfer the learning as well as high self-efficacy amongst this cohort, it is important to consider the roles that these executives were performing in GFAI. As leaders of large, global teams, they were selected for this program based on their potential to succeed members of the Executive Team and/or because they had the potential to take on a bigger role in the organization. It could be argued that the seniority of their positions bolstered their ability to be self-directed in applying this new knowledge. They were already in positions of power, and it can be assumed that because of these positions, they had a large degree of autonomy in how to manage and lead their teams.

#### ***Work Environment: Engagement with Program Sponsor***

The next enabler is a work environment factor that facilitated learning transfer. Participants felt that the way the CEO and CHRO demonstrated the leadership themes taught in the EDP and their commitment to the participants’ development gave them agency to shift their behavior. Many participants reflected that the CEO’s engagement contributed to their desire to apply what they were learning and lead in different ways. They were given visibility and access to the CEO that made them feel exceptional. One participant, Carol, reflected that being part of EDP made her feel like she was in a “special club.”

An argument can be made that the additional exposure to the CEO could have motivated the participants to demonstrate how they were applying the learning from the investment that GFAI made into this program, and therefore show him that they were performing at a higher level. The CEO’s engagement with them could have acted as an accountability lever to prove

that they were developing into more capable leaders. It also had a positive impact on their engagement and commitment to GFAI.

When the CEO, who is the highest level of leadership at the organization, is invested in the program through his support of the development of the participants, the participants are being rewarded through their exposure and visibility to a person with a high degree of power and authority. The CEO was also role modeling the central themes of care, curiosity, and courage in the way he interacted with the participants and the program architect. The program architect, Diana, mentioned in her interview that the CEO “was open to different ideas” and “valued leadership development greatly.” He agreed to invest not just money in the program, but also his time. As the leader of GFAI, he was setting an example about the behaviors he wanted to develop in the organization, as well as the priority he placed on developing future leaders. These behaviors created a ripple effect, sending a signal not just to the participants, but also to the broader organization about the behaviors valued within the culture. One of the participants, Steve, referred to this effect as “shadow of a leader.” The CEO’s commitment showed that the highest level of leader at GFAI was engaged in the development of the future leaders of the firm.

### ***Program Design: Multiple Opportunities to Work and Learn Together***

Several program design elements were referenced in the prior section, in terms of factors that enabled the individual participants to shift their behaviors and mindsets. For enabling learning transfer, a different design element emerged as a facilitator for learning transfer: how the cohort became a community of practice. Part of the program design was to have participants placed in various permutations of groups throughout the program; however, the Strategic Project groups were together for the longest amount of time and met consistently throughout the program. These groups were a microcosm of the diversity of the larger cohort in the sense that

they were intentionally designed to intermingle participants from different areas of the company. Many participants referenced that working together in groups and experiencing program activities as a group helped to form the bond that built trust and expanded their networks.

Several participants referred to the cohort as a place to test out new skills and ideas, in essence to practice what they were learning and get insights from the other cohort members. An argument can be made that the same motivation displayed by the participants to show the CEO that they were developing was also present in the community itself, to show their fellow cohort members how they were developing stronger leadership. So not only was it a space to practice the new skills, but it also held the cohort accountable for changing behavior based on what they were learning in the program.

For this study, individual motivation to transfer appeared to be an enabler for the vast majority of the participants, and this may have been bolstered by the other enablers of commitment and engagement the participants experienced with the CEO and the accountability the cohort had as a community of learners.

### **Analytic Category 3: Barriers to Learning Transfer**

This section examines the barriers that participants perceived to transferring their learning back to their roles at GFAI. All participants were able to identify at least one barrier to applying their learning and/or to achieving the mission of the program. These barriers included: (1) lack of senior leadership engagement; (2) pervasive cultural behaviors at GFAI that served as antagonists to care, curiosity, and courage; and (3) competing priorities with their job responsibilities. The ET's lack of engagement can be viewed as both a work environment factor because it pervaded the culture, and a program design element because they were viewed as blockers to the strategic projects. While the ET served as one element within work environment,

certain cultural norms GFAI can also be seen as a work environment factor. Individual motivation could be a factor for the barrier that the competition priorities of day jobs served. These same categories of factors were also enablers for learning transfer in the previous section, illustrating the complexity of learning transfer discussed in the literature.

***Work Environment: Lack of Senior Leadership Support***

The highest perceived barrier was the lack of engagement from GFAI's Executive Team (with the exception of the CEO and CHRO), reported by 85% of participants. This can be categorized as a work environment factor. This barrier had two central stories: the lack of role modeling of the leadership behaviors the participants were learning in the program and the lack of engagement in the strategic projects. The program's architect, Diana, also felt disheartened by the way the Executive Team engaged with the program, despite her efforts. She presented a list of roles the ET could play in the program, including coaching and developing the participants, familiarizing themselves with the tools and concepts the cohort was experimenting with, and role modeling the three central program themes of leading teams with care, curiosity, and courage. As perceived by the participants, only the CEO and CHRO were playing those roles.

Given that many participants in the cohort of EDP reported directly to one of the ET members, by not role modeling behaviors and concepts taught in the program, the ET members were not creating a work environment on their teams that would enable these new behaviors. As the second highest level of leadership at the company, the ET roles held significant power and influence, so there is a downstream impact not only to the participants in EDP but also to the rest of their team members in terms of how they lead. By having leaders at the top layer of the organization who were perceived to be stuck in the old ways of doing things, a signal was sent to

the rest of the organization that behaviors such as risk-aversion and being slow to change were valued and rewarded in GFAI's culture.

***Work Environment and Program Design: Lack of Support in Strategic Projects***

The second story that emerged in terms of the lack of engagement by the ET was around the Strategic Projects. This factor embodied the complexity of evaluating learning transfer because there are two dimensions within it: work environment influence and program design. In Diana's welcome email to the participants, she noted that they would be expected to carve out the equivalent of one day per week to work on Strategic Projects, from idea conception to pitching the ET for funding, implementing the projects, and measuring the results. This element of the program was the one that would take up the most time away from their day jobs.

Many participants expressed disconsolate sentiments about the way the Strategic Projects were framed as ideas to move the company forward. The ET were asked to sponsor the projects but were perceived as barriers to impacting any real change at GFAI because of the lack of engagement with the project teams. Many participants expressed sentiments about the amount of work the projects entailed. They were considered a core element of the program, and yet, it appeared that the ET were being dismissive of the efforts. One of the participants, Tony, referred to the ET's treatment of the projects as "kid's macaroni art" that gets hung on the refrigerator and then tossed out. Natasha felt the ET put the participants in a corner to "go play with these toys." Jessica referred to the projects as a "wild goose chase" because none of the projects came to fruition. One of the theories the participants had about this was that the merger between GFAI and ABE was already underway, but the sensitive nature of the impending plans needed to remain confidential between the CEO and ET. The ET's treatment of the project ideas was an

example of both the work environment and program design elements that got in the way of participants' application of learning.

***Work Environment: Cultural Norms***

The next barrier to learning transfer was the risk-averse culture of GFAI, another work environment factor. The EDP participants were asked to come up with innovative ideas for their Strategic Projects to achieve revenue growth or significant cost savings. However, the participants found several barriers in implementing these projects, which they linked to behaviors prevalent in GFAI's culture, aside from the lack of engagement from the ET. The organization is a public company with responsibilities to shareholders and government agencies. Measures are put in place to safeguard GFAI's financial status and reputation. While these measures are meant to protect the organization, they can also serve as barriers. Innovation requires a degree of risk tolerance that the participants did not feel was present at the time they were doing their strategic projects. The participants also expressed that the culture of GFAI was not one of curiosity, which was one of the three main themes of EDP. Several participants commented on the fact that because GFAI has been so successful, there is a tendency to perhaps get too comfortable with the way things are and not get ahead of potential disruptions. Hank commented that there was a "certain drive and innovation that was lacking" because the company was so successful. However, he noted that the company could be even more successful if it took more risks and acted more quickly. He noted that "ABE built their business in less than 20 years by doing smart acquisitions." He commented that ABE built a "valuation of 44 billion dollars in less than 30 years," and it took GFAI "over 100 years to get a valuation of 100 billion."



The work environment factors between the ET's lack of engagement and the broader GFAI culture was perceived by the participants as a barrier to learning transfer. All the participants reported shifts in their own thinking; however, the main challenge for them was shifting thinking in other leaders who held positions of greater authority and power, especially the ET, whose positions have a strong impact on the behaviors of the rest of the organization.

***Motivation: Tension with Conflicting Demands***

Several stories also emerged in which the participants were not able to apply some of their learning because of the responsibilities in their day jobs. The leaders selected for EDP were seen as potential successors to the ET, and therefore were already in senior leadership positions with a lot of job responsibilities leading large, global teams. Diana set expectations with the cohort at the start of the program by giving them an estimate of the time commitment and explained the need to fully disengage from the day job when they came together for immersive sessions. Participants reported feeling pulled in terms of having to shut down during the immersive in-person sessions because they were closing deals and needed to be on calls with clients. These leaders play important roles at GFAI, which is why they were selected for the program, and at times it was tough to balance the demands of their role with the responsibilities of being part of this development program.

While most participants were able to find a balance with EDP and their job responsibilities as the program went on, the COVID-19 pandemic was an unplanned disruption that really forced the participants, the CEO and ET, and Diana to reevaluate the time commitment and rebalance the priorities of the day job. The last two in-person immersions were put on hold in 2020, and EDP moved to a virtual format that was much less time intensive. While COVID-19 was viewed by the participants as a major disruptor to their ability to finish out the

program and meet all the intended objectives, a counterargument can be made that the pandemic provided a landscape to apply what they learned thus far in EDP around care, curiosity, and courage. In the CEO's April 2020 letter to the participants, he noted that he saw each of the participants "rising to the occasion and demonstrating the empathy that will allow us to thrive in these challenge times and emerge stronger." Diana noted that the immersive learning experience in New York centered around care "made it so much easier for them to support the needs of their people ... who were going through this very traumatic pandemic experience."

***Could the Barriers to Learning Transfer Also Serve as Facilitators?***

While all participants were able to identify at least one barrier to achieving the mission of EDP and applying their learning to enact change at GFAI, these obstacles can also be seen as driving forces of change for the participants. From the sections above, it is clear that much learning was applied, and this cohort of leaders did shift behaviors and perspectives based on their learning in EDP.

A counterargument posed in the Chapter 5 was whether or not there was enough evidence to show that the ET's lack of engagement with the participants actually served as a motivator for the participants to apply their learning and become the leaders that they wished to see at GFAI. There were several stories of participants persisting forward with their development despite the roadblocks they felt from the ET.

The ET's display of leadership during the program, the risk-averse culture of GFAI, and the COVID-19 pandemic were seen as obstacles; however, many stories emerged about how this cohort persevered. The cohort may not have achieved all the desired outcomes of the program, but there are stories of care, curiosity, and courage that came out of their experiences in this

program. However, a question remains: How much *more* change could this cohort of leaders have driven at GFAI if they had encountered less barriers to their learning transfer?

#### **Analytic Category 4: Tangible or Intangible Benefits to the Organization**

This section analyzes the participants' perceptions of tangible or intangible benefits that GFAI received because of developing this cohort of leaders. All participants were able to identify at least one benefit for GFAI, including: (1) a network of leaders who can collaborate to solve business problems; (2) stronger team leaders, and (3) leaders prepared to navigate through times of disruption.

##### ***Leadership Network***

Developing a network of highly connected leaders was the highest reported benefit to the organization, mentioned by 100% of participants. Through their experiences together in the program, the participants reported that they felt bonded and experienced a higher degree of trust with this group of leaders than with others in the firm. In terms of why this was perceived as a benefit to the firm, and not just the leaders themselves, several examples were given about faster decision making and more collaboration for the benefit of the whole organization and not just a specific division or function. This network also created a downstream effect on other team members in the organization in terms of talent mobility and learning new skills through the experiences of others.

While there was an even split between male and female participants in terms of the benefits of the network, there were some nuances in the male and female sentiments, displayed in Table 6.4. The male sentiments had more themes of how experiencing things as a cohort built more trust and emotional equity, as well as how understanding the whole person allows for faster and easier business transactions and creates partnerships versus engaging in competitive

behavior that only benefits one person or a small subset. The female sentiments had more themes around opening doors across divisions and functions for talent mobility and creating similar types of “zooming out” experiences for their teams by introducing team members to other teams across the firm and learning new skills from these groups.

**Table 6.4**  
*Patterns in Sentiments Between Male and Female Participants*

	Themes in Female Sentiments	Themes in Male Sentiments	Differences
<b>Benefits of the Leadership Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased talent mobility and open doors across divisions and functions.</li> <li>• Shared experiences with their teams, including team development and partnering with other leaders from the cohort for knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced higher levels of trust because they got to know each other through shared experiences.</li> <li>• Increased appreciation for how relationships allow for faster and easier transactions.</li> <li>• Created partnerships rather than self-serving and competitive behaviors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women described the benefits in terms of how they can increase opportunities and experiences for others.</li> <li>• Men described benefits in terms of shifting their awareness of collaboration versus competition, and a new awareness that trust enables faster decisions.</li> </ul>

***Impact on Teams***

Another perceived benefit, reported by 77% of the participants, was that there was a positive downstream impact to the teams led by the EDP participants. By applying care, curiosity, and courage to their daily responsibilities in leading large, global teams, there was a multiplier effect in the development of new skills. One participant, Steve, referred to this ripple effect as “shadow of a leader.” Many stories emerged about ways in which leaders shared their

learning in EDP with their team members, including team development, coaching of individual team members, and creating more spaces of inclusion for courageous conversations to occur.

This is a benefit to GFAI because, going back to the mission of EDP, a central component was “to relentlessly, yet empathetically challenge their own and others’ thinking to power an innovative and sustainable enterprise with greater personal and professional fulfillment.” By leveraging their learning to develop their own team members, EDP participants are fulfilling the mission of the program to create more sustainable growth for the organization.

### *Navigating through Disruption*

As explored in prior sections of this chapter, while this study was not intentionally designed to research impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, several stories emerged about how the foundational theme of EDP of leading teams with care, curiosity, courage prepared this cohort of leaders for the massive global disruption experienced during the pandemic. In the case study, it was documented that GFAI transitioned from having most of their workforce distributed in offices around the globe to moving 23,000 employees to fully remote work. Moving from in-person face-to-face communication and managing by observing team members’ day to day activities was a big change for both leaders and team members. Creating spaces for virtual connection and checking in on team members’ well-being become an important transition for leaders at GFAI to make during this time of distress.

Both the duration of EDP, as well as the timing of when the researcher conducted this study, allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation of the program, including how the organization benefited from having this cohort of leaders develop skills in leading their teams with care, curiosity, and courage. While the perceived benefits reported by the participants are intangible and not easy to measure, there is enough data from the stories that emerged to

reasonably conclude that GFAI did see benefits from their investment in the program and building stronger, more capable leaders.

### **Linkages to the Literature**

In analyzing the data through the Analytical Categories and using the Conceptual Framework detailed in Chapter 2 of this study, the researcher found several linkages in the findings that support the body of literature reviewed to determine the research problem and research questions.

#### **Organizations Respond to Disruptive Change by Advancing Leadership Capabilities**

When determining the type of leadership capabilities an organization wants to develop, the literature recommends starting with trends in the external environment. For EDP, the leadership themes were about developing care, curiosity, and courage to lead teams through disruption. These themes were developed by the program architect in partnership with external consultants who were researching leadership trends.

Consider the theory of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992), where the external environment impacts the expectations and capabilities of leadership. In today's modern world, change and disruption are occurring quickly and constantly, and in multiple dimensions all at once, creating an uncertain environment in which organizations and leaders operate (Burke & Noumair, 2015; Pasmore, 2015).

While all participants in this study were able to describe behavioral shifts in care, curiosity, and courage, one thing to consider is what other factors may have led to these behavioral and mindset shifts. Was it being selected for this prestigious program, experiencing different types of leadership styles, being more visible to the CEO and ET? Or were there other factors in the environment that served as enablers to transfer learning and paved the way for

these types of leadership shifts to be rewarded? What was going on in the external environment that could have led to or accelerated some of these developmental shifts?

Referring to the case study in Chapter 4, there were two major external events that impacted GFAI during the time these executive leaders were going through EDP: the COVID-19 global pandemic and the social justice issues heightened by the murder of George Floyd in the United States. Interviews with the participants reflected the impact of both events on the leaders' development and how they helped shift perspective on how to lead.

People around the world were isolated because of the mandate around social distancing to keep the pandemic from continuing to spread (World Health Organization, 2020). A literature review on the impact of this social isolation indicated that individuals subjected to social isolation were more susceptible to mental health disorders related to stress, anxiety, and depression (Pereira et al., 2020). In turbulent times, there is enormous pressure put on leaders to respond to the anxiety of others with authoritative certainty, even if in times of uncertainty we know that nothing is assured (Heifetz et al., 2009). The literature supports that different types of leadership are called for when experiencing crisis: creating a culture of courageous conversations, leveraging diversity to help think through problems and distribute authority, and bringing more of your emotional self to the workplace (Heifetz et al., 2009).

We know from the findings on enablers of learning transfer that this cohort of leaders had high motivation to transfer their learning from the program into their job responsibilities. They showed an ability to take the learning from care immersion and apply it to help their team members in the unprecedented disruption of the pandemic. Research supports that for some executives, evolving changes in the environment allow them to take advantage of under-realized

opportunities and adapt their leadership style to the shifting landscape around them (Akrofi, 2019; Loveless, 2021; Pasmore, 2015).

### **Executive Development Programs Can Prepare Leaders for a Dynamic Environment**

From the interview with Diana Prince presented in Chapter 4, we know that intentional design choices were made to develop leaders to navigate in a complex and dynamic environment. Specifically, Diana mentioned experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory. The literature supports using experiential learning in executive development programs, paired with activities that promote critical reflection. When combined, this enables executives to access emotional and cognitive information when forming key judgments and making critical decisions (George, 2000; Goleman, 1998; Kendall & Kendall, 2017; Loveless, 2021; Shepherd, 1984). Mezirow (1997) supports these sentiments by suggesting that facilitating transformative learning involves guiding learners to become aware of and critically reflect on their own and others' assumptions. Learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and redefining problems from different perspectives. Mezirow (1997) recommends reflective discourse with others to validate what and how a learner understands their own and others' assumptions. In this way, transformative learning becomes a social process, and discourse is central to the meaning-making process (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000).

We also know from the participants' sentiments that various permutations of groups were used throughout the program that allowed the cohort to work together and build trust organically, which helped them form their leadership network. Many participants described how they used the cohort as a place to practice and hone their leadership skills and break outside of their comfort zone in a safe environment. According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice give access to reflection of personal experiences, learning new skills and competencies from others,



and a place to explore new insights and ideas. Given that this cohort was cross-divisional, any permutation of smaller groups would likely have perspectives representing different divisions and functions at the firm. Through this diversity of thought, different perspectives could emerge during reflective group discourse.

According to the literature, critical reflection and discourse facilitate both experiential learning and transformative learning modalities of adult learning, which we know were intentional design elements in EDP. The ability to question, reflect, and converse are the capacities by which we grow and learn through experiences presented to us (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984, Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2005). Ultimately, the goal of any type of learning is to create new knowledge. For experiential learning theory, knowledge creation is the result of the transaction between the experience in the environment and the mindset and beliefs of the individual (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Lewin 1946). In transformative learning, frames of reference are transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions by which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind are based. Reflective discourse with others to validate what and how a learner understands their own and others' assumptions is a recommended approach to facilitate shifts in mindsets and perspectives (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2000). The community of practice that was organically formed in the cohort served as good context to both acquire and create new knowledge because of the deep respect for the shared experience and bond of communal competence (Wenger, 1998).

The literature supports that the intentional design choices made for this program likely enhanced the participants' ability to shift perspectives and change their behavior.

## **Learning from EDPs Transfers to Organizations through Leadership Actions**

According to the literature, the three major categories that facilitate learning transfer are individual learner motivation, work environment influences, and the program design (Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005). For this study, there were both enabling and disabling factors in all three categories.

The top factor for learning transfer in this study was the participants' desire to apply the learning back to their roles at GFAI. This aligns with other studies on executive learners where a leader's self-efficacy and internal motivation to transfer the skills to their day jobs were found to correlate (Bandura, 1982; Ciporen, 2010; Culpin et al., 2014; Krishnamani & Haider, 2016; Noe, 1986). When a learner is motivated and has the intention to transfer what is learned in a development program back to their day job, the learning is more likely to become embedded as a new skill or behavior. (Bandura, 1982; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Krishnamani & Haider, 2016; Noe, 1986). The tension for the participants in this study is that while they were motivated to apply their learning, they were also motivated to perform well in their roles. The third highest barrier to learning transfer was the demands of their day jobs. Many of the participants found themselves in a position of conflicting priorities between the program activities and their roles at their firm.

For work environment influences, the CEO's sponsorship and engagement with the cohort was one of the top three enablers to transfer. However, the rest of the Executive Team's lack of support served as a barrier, as did certain cultural elements in GFAI's work environment. The literature supports that if a work environment is unable to facilitate the combination of

explicit opportunities to practice new skills outside of the core program, it will not support learning transfer (Bandura, 1982; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Krishnamani & Haider, 2016; Noe, 1986).

The dimension of program design in this study also had both enablers and barriers to learning transfer. The cohort developed a strong network which allowed the group to serve as a community of practice, which was an enabler to learning transfer reported by the participants. This was facilitated by the program design element of continuously mixing up the participants in different permutations of working groups so that they could develop relationships with everyone in the program. The design element of the Strategic Projects were not fully supported by ET, and therefore the participants hit a roadblock in feeling like they enacted real change at GFAI.

The results of this study support that learning transfer is a complex problem because of the many factors associated with it, and that these factors can serve as both enablers and disablers in learning transfer.

### **Organizations Benefit from Highly Skilled Leaders Prepared to Lead through Disruption**

When evaluating program effectiveness for both learning transfer and organizational outcomes, researchers (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Culpin et al., 2014; Ford & Weissbein, 1997; Holton et al., 2001; Kontoghiorghes, 2004; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Tracey & Tews, 2005) recommend evaluating learning transfer as a multidimensional phenomenon, with the three main categories of factors that influence learning transfer: individual learner, work environment, and program design and delivery.

According to the literature, a challenge in evaluating learning transfer is that behavioral change takes time not only to develop in the individual but also to be recognized by others, and

organizations often want to see immediate returns on the investment for costly executive development programs (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Packard et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011).

Research suggests that measuring medium- to long-term outcomes for the organization often involves using qualitative methods, such as interviewing and questionnaires with open-ended questions, which organizations may not have the time, internal resources, or funds for external resources for that level of analysis (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Watkins et al., 2011; Watkins & Nicolaidis, 2012). The researcher designed this study to support the theories found in the literature on program evaluation, which recommended using qualitative data collection techniques and conducting evaluation over time after a program concluded. Leveraging semi-structured interviews to collect data 12-18 months after the program concluded, allowed ample time for participants to apply their learning and shift perspectives and/or behaviors. The length of time between when the program concluded and when the interviews were conducted would also allow the organization to realize any benefits or outcomes associated with the program.

### **Summary of Interpretation of Findings**

This chapter portrayed the learning experiences of a cohort of leaders within a single organization who went through an Executive Development Program from 2019 to 2020. The discussions reveal their perceptions of shifts they experienced in their own development as leaders, the complex and multidimensional nature of the enablers and barriers they experienced in applying their learning back to their roles at the organization, and their perceptions of how the firm benefitted from investing in their development.

The goal of this analysis of findings was to produce a nuanced and multilayered, but also holistic synthesis. The challenge throughout the data collection and data analysis process was to

make sense of large chunks of data, distill them down to a meaningful collection, and identify significant patterns and themes to construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. In addition, the researcher performed an analysis to reveal significant relationships between any of the demographic factors. The most meaningful was between the male and female sentiments on some of the findings, which were presented as part of this discussion.

Because of certain research design elements, it is important to note that the implications drawn were specific to the experiences of the participants in this study. First, the research consisted of perspectives from 13 out of the 24 total cohort members. This study does not contain all the voices from this cohort of EDP. Second, this study was designed to only incorporate the perceptions of the EDP participants and represent their experiences, as well as those of the program architect, Diana. Thus, the perceptions of the CEO, the Executive Team members, and the team members who report to the leaders in EDP are not represented in this study. The study was designed in this way because numerous leadership and organizational changes occurred at GFAI from the time when EDP was launched in 2019 and when the interviews were conducted in late 2021 and early 2022. Because of the merger, new ET members were brought in from ABE changes were made to team structures and reporting lines.

In qualitative research, there are typical biases that can potentially be involved by using the researcher as the instrument to collect and analyze data. The researcher also acknowledges the possible addition of bias in analyzing the findings because of her experience in organizational and leadership development and her role at the organization being studied. To help mitigate this limitation, the researcher engaged in ongoing critical reflection through discussions with her advisory team as well as utilizing a research journal throughout the process of data collection and

analysis. This chapter is essentially a presentation of how this researcher made meaning out of the material and connections she saw within it.

A discussion on linkages to the literature was presented through the lenses in the Conceptual Framework presented in Chapter 2 of this study. The findings in this study support the arguments presented in the Literature Review and will add to the body of knowledge on designing executive development programs for maximum learning transfer and value creation within an organization.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred their learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change. The researcher hoped that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow leadership development practitioners to have a more informed perspective about the long-term impact of leadership development. To shed light on the research problem and carry out the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. *Development*: How do the participants experience a change in the way they lead in a dynamic environment because of their learning in the executive development program?
2. *Transfer*: What enabled or disabled the participants' ability to transfer their learning?
3. *Outcomes*: What, if any, are the perceived benefits to the organization from the executive development program?

The research questions were satisfied by four major findings:

1. *Shift in Leadership Style*: All 13 participants expressed a shift in their point of view on leadership in a dynamic environment based on their experience in EDP. These perceived changes were grouped into sub-findings based on the three main leadership themes of EDP: shifts in care, curiosity, and courage.

2. *Learning Transfer Enablers*: All 13 participants reported that were able to apply at least one aspect of their learning from EDP into their leadership roles at GFAI. Enablers for learning transfer were grouped into the following sub-findings: learner motivation, cohort as community of practice, and commitment from the CEO (sponsor of EDP).
3. *Learning Transfer Barriers*: All 13 participants reported that they also found at least one barrier for learning application. These were grouped into the following sub-findings: Executive Team engagement, behaviors within GFAI's culture that served as antagonists to the program themes, and distractions from their day jobs (including the COVID-19 pandemic).
4. *Organizational Benefits*: All 13 participants were able to think of at least one way that GFAI benefitted from having this cohort of leaders participate in EDP. These benefits were grouped into the following sub-findings: a network of connected leaders who can enable business results; leaders who display care, curiosity, and courage, yielding positive results for teams; and a group of leaders prepared to lead through disruption.

This chapter presents the major conclusions that follow the research questions and the findings. The conclusions are:

1. *Development Programs Can Enable Adaptable Leaders*: Executive development programs can be effective in shifting ingrained leadership behaviors and mindsets to prepare leaders for the constant change of our modern world.
2. *Learning Transfer is Complex*: Evaluating learning transfer involves a confluence of factors that can be both enabling and disabling, depending on the learner, the work environment, and the program design.



3. *Development Programs Benefit the Organization*: Measuring a development program's long-term impact requires in-depth analysis but can yield positive results in the form of stories that add to the program and organization's value proposition.

This chapter also describes implications for future research studies and presents recommendations for leadership development practitioners based on the findings and conclusions of this study. The researcher concludes this chapter by revisiting her initial assumptions presented in Chapter 1 and sharing her reflections on this study.

### **Research Study Conclusions**

Following is a discussion of the major conclusions drawn from this research. The conclusions are based on the research questions, findings, and analysis.

#### **Conclusion 1: Development Programs Can Enable Adaptable Leaders**

The first major finding of this study is that all participants reported a shift in at least one of the three foundational themes in EDP's design: care, curiosity, and courage. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that development programs can be effective in shifting ingrained leadership behaviors and mindsets, enabling leaders to adapt to the constant change of our modern world. As discussed in Chapter 2, today's modern world is one of continuous and complex change, making it difficult for leaders to stay stagnant in the way they lead. Different types of challenges will call for leaders who can adapt their styles to best support their teams and organizations.

To navigate in a world that is constantly changing, whether from technology, geopolitical issues, climate change, pandemics, or epidemics, etc., leaders must be adaptable and dynamic. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders at GFAI were tasked with caring for their employees, from navigating flexibility with working parents to dealing with employees who

were ill or had family members they needed to care for during illness. They also needed to make quick decisions for the safety of their employees in order enable the global workforce to become fully virtual at the height of the pandemic. A fully remote workforce was new to GFAI, and a lot of kinks needed to be worked out. Care, curiosity, and courage were the three main leadership themes of EDP, and they were needed more than ever during those times. The GFAI leaders who participated in EDP felt they were primed to lead through the disruption caused by the pandemic.

This study indicated that a development program, like EDP, can be used to build leaders who can adapt to the uncertain and ever-changing world around them by designing experiences that strengthen their ability to be adaptable to dynamic demands of the disruptive external environment. For example, when participants described their shifts in care, curiosity, and/or courage, they could link back to specific elements of the program that enabled these shifts. The program experiences in EDP were carefully curated to provoke different perspectives around these three themes. The participants in this study reported that by having their assumptions challenged and by being placed in deliberately uncomfortable experiences, they felt more prepared to lead in a dynamic world. When the COVID-19 pandemic challenged how and where GFAI employees around the globe worked, the participants in this study felt that their shifts in care, curiosity, and courage enabled them to be better leaders to their team during a time of unprecedented global disruption. They were empathic to the experiences of their team members, engaged in creative problem solving when it came to working virtually, and boldly asked for what they and their teams would need to thrive in the uncertainty.

Participants in a development program will have their own starting point and developmental journey, but levers within executive programs can be used to facilitate changes in

leadership style that can enable a higher level of capability to navigate the constant change and disruption of our modern world.

### **Conclusion 2: Learning Transfer is Complex**

The second and third major findings of this study were related to the second research question, which asked what were the enabling and disabling factors of learning transfer. All participants were able to report at least one enabler and one disabler of learning transfer. As discussed in Chapter 2, learning transfer is a complex problem involving a variety of factors that typically fall into three categories: individual learner, work environment, and program design. All factors reported by the participants in this study regarding facilitators and barriers of learning transfer could also be grouped into those categories.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that evaluating learning transfer is complex, involving a confluence of factors that can be both enabling and disabling, depending on the learner, the work environment, and the program design. For example, in this study, individual learner motivation was the highest reported enabler, but participants also found barriers to applying their learning because of the demands of their day jobs. Both factors fall into the category of individual motivation, with one being an enabling factor and the other a disabling factor. The findings of this study also revealed that work environment factors were both enabling and disabling. The engagement from the CEO was the second highest reported enabler; however, the lack of support engagement from the rest of the Executive Team members was the highest reported barrier. This finding and conclusion add to the body of literature on learning transfer and support the complexity of measuring learning transfer because of the confluence of factors involved.

### **Conclusion 3: Development Programs Benefit the Organization**

The fourth major finding of this study was that all participants perceived at least one way that GFAI benefitted in their investment in leadership development. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that measuring a development program's long-term impact requires in-depth analysis but can yield positive results in the form of stories that add to the program and organization's value proposition. Some of the benefits reported by the participants were tangible, such as the participants who were promoted and those who moved into expanded roles; however, most of those benefits were not necessarily quantifiable in terms of measuring the impact by comparing dollars spent on the program versus dollars gained from the program. However, the intangible benefits were related to the participants' engagement, motivation, and commitment to GFAI because of the investment made in their development.

The literature supports that determining this type of organizational outcome and the longer-term impact the organization receives by having highly engaged, committed, and motivated leaders requires time and in-depth analysis. To collect this type of data involves qualitative methods such as interviews, critical incident questions, and document reviews, which can be a time-consuming and resource-intensive process. However, what is revealed through that type of diligence are perspectives and stories about how the organization benefitted from the program that simpler, less intensive methods of evaluation cannot provide. The qualitative data can be leveraged in a value proposition for the organization to share how they invest and develop leaders, which can be a tool for retention and recruiting highly capable candidates who value continued growth and development.

## **Implications for Future Research**

The researcher recommends that further research be conducted to continue to develop a deeper understanding of the complex problem of learning transfer, and to understand what types of experiences stick with leaders as the world around them continues change in a dynamic and disruptive way.

### **Leverage Multiple Perspectives to Determine Organizational Impact**

A delimiting factor in this study was the choice to only include the perspectives of the participants because of the amount of organizational change that GFAI had gone through and would continue to go through from the impending merger. To best understand how the organization benefitted, the researcher recommends including a broader view from people outside of the program itself. Future research studies would benefit from including multiple perspectives from the participants, the participants' manager, peers, and team members, as well as the program sponsors and executive team members.

### **Conduct a Comparison Study on Multiple Programs**

Another delimiting factor for this study was using a single case within a bounded organization. A useful addition to the body of literature on learning transfer could be a multiple-case study evaluating the long-term impact of several development programs at different types of organizations. Researchers could use the three lenses of program design, individual learner, and work environment across multiple organizations to better understand what types of organizations have better organizational outcomes and learning transfer.

### **Researcher as Observer in Development Program**

An additional way to capture individual development throughout the course of the program is to have a researcher observe and document a development program from the outset

through the conclusion. Multiple interviews could be conducted with participants, including at the start, midpoint, and conclusion of the program, to track how they are developing within the program, what types of learning they are able to transfer to their roles at an organization, and how the organization could be benefitting from the investment in leadership development. This type of study could be combined with the recommendation to include multiple perspectives to get the full picture of the program and the associated benefits to the organization.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher has several recommendations for leadership development practitioners who aspire to build highly capable leaders prepared to navigate a dynamic and disruptive world.

#### **Stay Attuned to Trends in the External Environment that Impact Leadership Capabilities**

The external environment has been referenced extensively throughout this study as a determining factor for the capabilities leaders need to guide their teams through the challenges of our modern world. In Chapter 2, the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992) was introduced to provide context for how changes in the external environment can impact what is needed from organizational leadership. The first conclusion of this study is that development programs can enable adaptability in leaders to shift their behavior and mindset. This study revealed that EDP was designed to prepare leaders for disruption. Diana and team determined that three leadership themes of care, curiosity, and courage were needed to lead teams through turbulent times. With the unanticipated massive perturbation of COVID-19, the leaders in EDP reported feeling more prepared because they acquired capabilities to guide teams through change. While it is impossible to predict the next global disruption, practitioners could continue to monitor trends in the environment that may call for different types of leadership

capabilities. We know that the only constant in today's world is change, so developing leaders who are change-ready would be particularly useful to any organization.

### **Leverage Tools Rooted in Adult Development Theory to Determine Change Readiness**

The first conclusion of this study is that development programs can enable adaptability in leaders to shift their behavior and mindset. For this study, the changes were aligned to developing leaders who can lead their teams through a dynamic world with care, curiosity, and courage. A way to determine a leader's ability to adapt to change and complexity is to leverage adult development theory when designing development programs. As discussed in Chapter 2, leaders in higher stages of adult development are better equipped to navigate the constantly changing world around them.

When designing a leadership development program intended to prepare leaders for change and disruption, using an assessment tool for adult development (such as Kegan's subject-object interview or the Leadership Circle Profile) would add quantifiable data on the participants' stage in adult development and their capacity to adapt and flex to the changing world around them. Depending on the length of the program, this assessment could be conducted at the beginning and end of the program to track each participant's progress and to determine if the experiences within the program prompted the participant to move into higher stages of adult development.

### **Design Learning Experiences with Transformation in Mind**

Based on the findings in this study, the program design of combining elements of experiential learning theory with transformative learning theory led to shifts in the leaders' development of three major themes of EDP: care, curiosity, and courage. The intentional design choices of provoking "disorienting dilemmas" by giving the participants experiences that were

outside their comfort zone, challenging them to understand multiple perspectives through the discourse after the experiences, and the 12-month timeline of the program allowed for transformation to occur throughout the learning process. The concept of creating experiences that allowed participants to “zoom out” from their daily work experiences to see what they can learn from other industries, cultures, and locations broadened the perspectives of the participants in this case study. These design concepts can be replicated in any type of executive development program, even if the timeline is much shorter.

### **Evaluate Programs over Time and Involve Multiple Perspectives**

This study was conducted 12-18 months after EDP concluded, which allowed for participants to have a longer period for application and for their teams to leverage the benefits of these leaders’ learning and experiences. While most programs conduct evaluation upon conclusion, a useful practice could be to have check-ins with the participants every six months for the next 12-18 months after the program concludes to allow the learning to be fully realized. Leveraging qualitative data collection methods, such as interviewing, during these check-ins enables practitioners to probe deeper into some of the responses to gain even more insights.

While not leveraged in this study because of the massive amounts of organizational change at the research site, it would be useful when determining organizational outcomes to leverage multiple perspectives from the program sponsors, participants’ managers, and team members. The six-month check-in practice could be leveraged when practitioners are using the multiple perspective approach as well. While this takes more time and resources to conduct these types of longer-term evaluation processes, it is useful to track organizational outcomes and participant development over time to provide examples of how the program continuously provides value.



## **Engage Executive Team as Program Sponsors and Advisors**

A final recommendation to practitioners involves engaging the Executive Team as program supporters and champions early in the process. We know from the findings of this study that, aside from the CEO and CHRO, Executive Team engagement and support were perceived by participants to be lacking. Practitioners would benefit from engaging with the Executive Team early into the program design process and clearly articulating what is expected of them in developing the participants outside of the program. One way to achieve this is by having executive team members sponsor participants in the program (either those in their direct hierarchy or outside of their hierarchy to get to know different leaders). A developmental sponsor is someone who expands visibility and opens doors for the participant for the purpose of career advancement. There is a responsibility involved with sponsorship to actively promote the participant's career aspirations and strengths and coach them in readiness for their next role.

It is also important to be aligned on who is the program sponsor within the Executive Team because that person will be the final decision maker on the program elements, including budget and selection process. The sponsor could be the CEO, who the Executive Team reports to, but it could also be a peer on the Executive Team, such as the Chief Human Resource Officer or Chief Operations Officer. Having an Executive Team that is committed and engaged to the program outcomes and individual participant development will enhance the experience of a leadership development program.

## **Revisiting Researcher Assumptions**

It is useful to revisit the three assumptions underlying this study that were stated in Chapter 1. These assumptions were presented at the inception of this study and are based on the researcher's background and professional experience in learning and development.

The first assumption underlying this research study was that each participant would have experienced some type of shift in their perspectives on how they lead. This assumption was based on the length of the program, the way in which the program was designed, and observations about leaders in general after they have experienced an intensive development program. This assumption was also based on the researcher's own experience in various leadership development programs and having shifted her own perspectives because of the learning experiences. This assumption held true according to the first finding. The study participants expressed that they perceived a shift in at least one of the central leadership themes of care, curiosity, and courage that were the foundation of EDP.

A second assumption posited by the researcher was that because leaders at GFAI had reached a certain stage of life where they could be considered mature adults, there would be a level of self-sufficiency and self-efficacy in applying learning from the program back to their job responsibilities at the firm. This assumption was guided by a predominant adult learning principle that says adults prefer planning and directing their own learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). This assumption held true, as it was the highest reported enabler of learning transfer by 85% of the participants. There were two other enabling factors of learning transfer and several reported barriers to learning that were reported by the participants that the researcher did not hold any assumptions about at the onset of the study. These factors were illustrated in the second and third findings presented in this study.

The third and final assumption was that there would be at least one way in which the organization would benefit from having this cohort of leaders go through the EDP. This assumption was based on the researcher's experience with development programs. While there are not always measurable, tangible outcomes for a program, there are typically intangible

benefits, such as leaders who are more capable leading larger teams and building a network of trusted colleagues who can facilitate decisions and outcomes for the good of the firm. This assumption also held true and was illustrated in the fourth finding presented in this study.

### **Researcher's Reflections on This Study**

As I come to the close of this study, I want to reflect on the experience of conducting the research and writing my dissertation. As a learning and development practitioner with over 15 years of experience in the field, this is the most in-depth analysis I have executed on a learning program. The stories that emerged from the participants about their experiences and how they transferred those experiences to their roles at GFAI to become even better leaders inspired me to think differently about how to design and measure program impacts. Many times, organizations focus on the immediate “return on investment” for learning programs, but learning doesn't necessarily work in a quantifiable way. It is an individual process, based on what each learner in a program wants to learn and take away from the intended program goals and outcomes. However, these programs are still worth the investment, even if we can't quantify each dollar spent, because the world needs stronger, better equipped, more emotionally intelligent, and change-ready leaders. Investing in leadership development provides a sustainable impact to our ever-changing world.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the three major conclusions based on the findings and analysis of this single-case study. Implications for future research were offered to researchers who want to conduct studies on long-term impact of leadership development programs. The researcher also described recommendations for leadership development practitioners to consider when designing

their programs. This chapter concluded with a revisit of the researcher's initial assumptions, her reflections on this research process.

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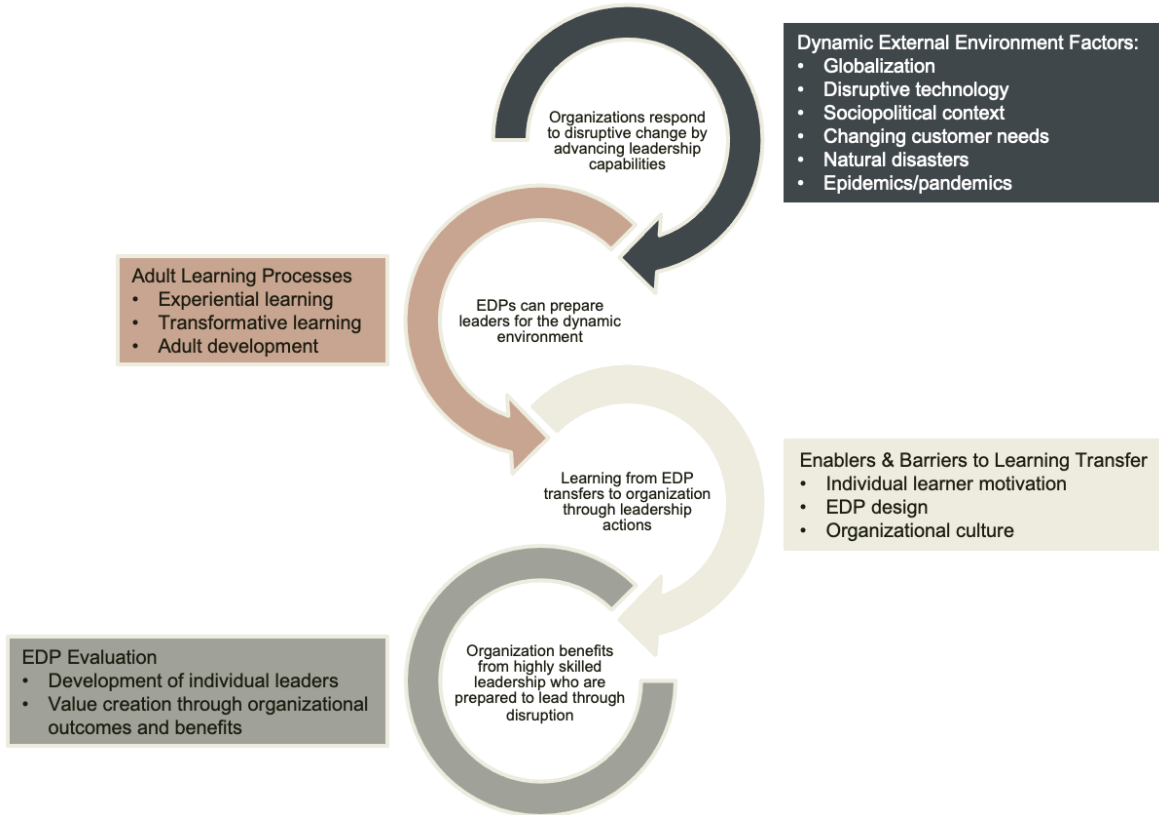
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## Appendix A: Conceptual Framework



## Appendix B: Pre-Approval Template to Conduct Research at GFAI

{Site Approver}  
{Site}  
{Site Address}  
{Date}

Dear Teachers College IRB,

Based on my review of the below executive summary for the dissertation proposal entitled *Developing Leaders for a World Disrupted: Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program*, I grant **preliminary permission** for the researcher, Stephanie Fritz, to select {Global Financial Analytics & Insights (GFAI)} as the research site and our Executive Development Program as the research participants.

I understand that this letter is a preliminary authorization for the Institutional Review Board approval from Teachers College, Columbia University. I understand that further documentation is required, in the form of an official IRB Site Approval Form after the researcher has been given approval.

I understand the purpose, benefits, and risks associated with this study. By signing this letter, I attest that I am authorized to grant preliminary research access at this site.

Sincerely,

{Signature}



## Appendix C: Executive Summary Presented to Site Leadership

**Name of Study:** Developing Leaders for a World Disrupted: Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program

**Researcher/Employee:** Stephanie Fritz, doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University

### **Purpose of the Study:**

- The purpose of this case study is to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change.
- This study will be presented as a single case study with a cohort of leaders from GFAI's executive development program (EDP).

### **Benefits to GFAI:**

It is rare that an organization can study the long-term (12-18 months) impacts on the learning transfer from a development program because of the resources required to do such an in-depth study.

GFAI will have unique access to information that can:

- Strengthen existing and future development programs.
- Provide research-based recommendations on future capabilities needed for leaders at the executive level.
- Offer justification for future investments in development programs program by providing evidence of learning outcomes at a personal/executive leader level and potentially at an organizational/systems level.
- Deliver further rationale for GFAI's value proposition as a learning organization.
- Build a case for GFAI's Education Reimbursement benefit, whereby a scholar practitioner who received tuition reimbursement gave back to the firm by providing in-depth research that strengthens the firm's development offerings.

### **Risks to GFAI:** (*see APPENDIX for Risk Mitigation Plan*)

- **Risk of firm discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify GFAI in the final dissertation, because the researcher works at the firm, there is a potential that a reader could do an internet search on the researcher and correlate her time of employment with the firm and when the study was conducted.
- **Risk of participant discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify participants in the study by using pseudonyms, broad job titles, and reviewing interview transcripts for identifying data, if a reader correlates the researcher with the firm through an internet search, the reader could also do an internet search on sites like LinkedIn to discover individual participants.
- **Disclosure of risks to firm and participants:** The researcher will disclose and be transparent about all risks to the firm and the participants before the study is conducted.

## **Use of Study by Teachers College, Columbia University**

Currently, the researcher does not intend to publish the research findings, but rather, to use these findings in order to complete her doctoral dissertation research study as part of the degree requirement for obtaining a Doctor of Education in Adult Learning & Leadership. The study will be housed in a dissertation database through Teachers College Library, which is accessible to students of Teachers College and other affiliated schools.

### **Proposed Timeline**

- **July/August 2021:** Socialize research plan internally and receive necessary approvals to conduct the study at the proposed research site
- **August 2021:** Dissertation proposal hearing with advisor and second reader
- **September 2021:** Submit research plan for Institutional Review Board Approval (Teachers College, Columbia University)
- **October 2021 – March 2022:** Interviews with executive development program participants
- **April 2022 – September 2022:** Data analysis and findings
- **September 2022 – March 2023:** Finalize dissertation
- **April 2023:** Defend dissertation

### **APPENDIX: Risk Mitigation Plan**

#### **Participant Rights and Informed Consent:**

- **Participation in this study is optional and without penalty**
  - Participants in the EDP will be asked if they are willing to participate and will affirm that participation by signing an informed consent form.
  - The consent form will be explicit that the researcher is collecting this information for her own academic use, and not on GFAI's behalf.
  - There is no penalty for the EDP participants if they do not wish to take part in the study.
  - Participants will be given access to review the manuscripts of their interviews as well as direct quotes that will be used as part of the study in order to ensure the participants are comfortable with how they are represented in the study.

#### **Data Privacy & Security Protocols**

- **De-Identifying the firm:**
  - The researcher will use a pseudonym in the study that is pre-approved by the internal sponsor(s) of the dissertation.
  - The researcher will describe the organization in a broad way so as not to distinguish it from other similar financial services institutions.
- **De-Identifying Participant Information:**
  - The researcher will use a pseudonym for all participants in the study. The participants may choose their pseudonym if they wish.
  - The researcher will use de-identifying job titles and/or role descriptions in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. If the researcher or participant deem this information identifiable, this information will not be included in the final dissertation.

- The researcher will share the final data analysis with the participants to ensure that they are represented accurately and that the data does not contain identifiable information.
- **Participants will control what data they give to the researcher:**
  - The researcher will not use her access at the firm to pull demographic data on the participants. Participants who elect to participate will be asked to fill out a demographic inventory as part of the data collection process.
  - Participants will only be required to answer questions they are comfortable with.
  - The demographic survey will be reviewed by all interested parties at the firm before sending to the participants.
- **Researcher will adhere to local and regional data privacy guidelines:** The study contains global participants and the researcher will follow all data privacy collection standards related to country and regional specific guidelines.

#### **Line of Delineation Between Role at the Organization and Researcher Role**

- **Separation of work files and research files:**
  - The researcher will keep the research files on separate password protected hard drive issued through Teachers College, Columbia University.
  - Participants in the study will be made aware of this delineation.
- **Use of secure data collection tool:** Demographic data and the pre-interview form will be collected via Qualtrics, a secure survey tool through Teachers College, Columbia University
- **Use of student email to contact participants:** Recruitment, scheduling, and links to the data collection tool will be sent from the researcher's email account at Columbia Teachers College to the participants preferred email address.
- **Contacting participants who have left the firm:**
  - Participants in the EDP that are no longer employees will also be contacted for the role of the dissertation through the researcher's personal LinkedIn account.
  - The researcher will take the same precautions to ensure data privacy and security as those within GFAI.
  - The researcher will make it clear that this study is not being conducted on GFAI's behalf, but rather as a personal and academic pursuit.
  - Additionally, if the participant and/or researcher feel that the identity of the participant is discoverable by mentioning that they are no longer with the firm, this information does not need to be disclosed in the dissertation findings.

## Appendix D: Research Site Approval Form

{Site Approver}  
{Site Name}  
{Site Address}  
{TC IRB Protocol Number}

{Date}

Dear Teachers College IRB,

Based on my review of the proposed research study, I give permission for Stephanie Fritz to conduct the study entitled *Developing Leaders for A World Disrupted: Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program* within {GFAI}.

### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this case study is to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change.

### **BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY:**

It is rare that an organization can study long-term (12-18 months) learning transfer from a development program because of the resources required to do an in-depth study.

GFAI will be provided with data in aggregate form that will provide the following benefits:

- Strengthen existing and future development programs.
- Provide research-based recommendations on future capabilities needed for leaders at the executive level.
- Offer justification for future investments in development programs program by providing evidence of learning outcomes at a personal/executive leader level and potentially at an organizational/systems level.
- Deliver further rationale for GFAI's value proposition as a learning organization.
- Build a case for GFAI's Education Reimbursement benefit, whereby a scholar practitioner who received tuition reimbursement gave back to the firm by providing in-depth research that strengthens the firm's development offerings.

### **RISKS OF THE STUDY:**

- **Risk of firm discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify GFAI in the final dissertation, because the researcher works at the firm, there is a potential that a reader could do an internet search on the researcher and correlate her time of employment with the firm and when the study was conducted.
- **Risk of participant discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify participants in the study by using pseudonyms, broad job titles, and reviewing interview transcripts for identifying data, if a reader correlates the researcher with the firm through an internet search, the reader could also do an internet search on sites like LinkedIn to discover individual participants.

- **Disclosure of risks to firm and participants:** The researcher will disclose and be transparent about all risks to the firm and the participants before the study is conducted.
- **Risk Mitigation:**
  - I understand that the researcher will take all measures to keep the data collected confidential, including using pseudonyms for the firm as well as for the individual participants.
  - I understand that while the researcher will take all necessary precautions and follow ethical practices, because of the nature of technology the name of the organization could still be discoverable because of the researcher’s relationship with the firm.
  - I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Teachers College IRB.

**AUTHORIZATION**

As part of this study, I authorize the researcher to access applicable program documents and archival records related to the Executive Development Program (EDP) conducted within the firm, interview participants from cohort (with their consent), interview members of the project team that designed and delivered the EDP and to share her findings with interested and applicable parties at the firm. Individuals’ participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. This authorization covers the time period of September 2021 to March 2022. I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

Sincerely,

{ Authorization Official signature }  
 { Contact Information }

## Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent

**Protocol Title:** Developing Leaders for A World Disrupted: Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program

**Principal Researcher:** Stephanie Fritz, Doctoral Candidate, Teachers College, 610-533-3267 or [sjf2148@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:sjf2148@tc.columbia.edu)

**INTRODUCTION** You are invited to participate in this research study called “Developing Leaders for A World Disrupted: Evaluating Learning Transfer for an Executive Development Program”. You qualify to take part in this research study because you participated in the first cohort of {GFAI}’s Executive Development Program {EDP}. Approximately twenty people will participate in this study, and it will take approximately 2 hours of your time to complete over the course of 4-6 weeks.

{GFAI Contact Name} has approved this research to be conducted within {GFAI}.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?** The purpose of this study is to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today’s dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** If you decide to participate, the primary researcher (Stephanie Fritz) will ask you to do the following:

- Fill out demographic inventory (10 min) (*EDP Participants only*)
- Participate in an interview with the primary researcher, at a time convenient for you (60-75 minutes)
- Option to review data analysis from interview transcripts to ensure your perspectives are represented accurately and no identifying information is being disclosed (15-30 min)

### **Demographic Inventory**

The purpose of the demographic inventory is to capture the important characteristics to identify trends within the data. You may decline to answer any question in which you are not comfortable. The inventory is approximately 8 questions and should take no more than ten minutes of your time to complete.

### **75-minute Interview**

Interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient for you. If you are {an EDP participant}, during the individual interview you will be asked to discuss your overall experience of the program, how you applied what you learned, what changes, if at all, you made in your leadership style as a result of what you learned in the program, and what benefits, if any, the organization received from the program. If you are {an EDP Project Team Member}, during the individual interview, you will be asked to describe the outcomes of the program, your observations of the

cohort, program design choices, and what benefits, if any, the organization received from the program.

The interviews will be conducted via Zoom to accommodate the global nature of the participants and will be recorded in compliance with S&P Global's Information Security Policy. After the video recording is transcribed, it will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will still be able to participate. Instead of video recording, the researcher will take hand-written notes and may ask to bring in a scribe to help capture the notes. The interview will take approximately seventy-five minutes.

You will be given a pseudonym or false name order to keep your identity confidential (you may choose your pseudonym if you prefer).

### **Review of Data Analysis (Optional)**

You will be given the opportunity to review themes from your interview transcripts to ensure your perceptions have been captured accurately and to ensure no identifying information is disclosed. This should take approximately 15-30 minutes of your time and will take place several weeks post the initial interview.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

#### **Risks**

- **Risk of firm discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify {GFAI} in the final dissertation, because the researcher works at the firm, there is a potential that a reader could do an internet search on the researcher and correlate her time of employment with the firm and when the study was conducted.
- **Risk of participant discoverability:** While the researcher will take all possible measures to de-identify participants in the study by using pseudonyms, broad job titles, and reviewing interview transcripts for identifying data, if a reader correlates the researcher with the firm through an internet search, the reader could also do an internet search on sites like LinkedIn to discover individual participants.
- **Disclosure of risks to firm and participants:** The researcher will disclose and be transparent about all risks to the firm and the participants before the study is conducted.

#### **Risk Mitigation:**

- I understand that the researcher will take all measures to keep the data collected confidential, including using pseudonyms for the firm as well as for the individual participants.
- I understand that while the researcher will take all necessary precautions and follow ethical practices, because of the nature of technology the name of the organization could still be discoverable because of the researcher's relationship with the firm.
- I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Teachers College IRB.

**Benefits:**

It is rare that an organization can study long-term (12-18 months) learning transfer from a development program because of the resources required to do an in-depth study.

{GFAI} will be provided with data in aggregate form that will provide the following benefits:

- Strengthen existing and future development programs.
- Provide research-based recommendations on future capabilities needed for leaders at the executive level.
- Offer justification for future investments in development programs program by providing evidence of learning outcomes at a personal/executive leader level and potentially at an organizational/systems level.
- Deliver further rationale for {GFAI}'s value proposition as a learning organization.
- Build a case for {GFAI}'s Education Reimbursement benefit, whereby a scholar practitioner who received tuition reimbursement gave back to the firm by providing in-depth research that strengthens the firm's development offerings.

**Intrinsic Benefits of Participation**

There will be no direct benefits to participants of this study. However, your participation in this study may allow you to experience the intrinsic benefits of: (1) reflecting on your own learning and change in leadership; and (2) helping to shape the continued design and development of the EDP for incoming cohorts.

**No Penalty for Declining to Participate**

If you decline to participate in the study, there is no penalty. This study is to be used for the researcher's academic use and there is no obligation to participate. Your employment status with the company is in no impacted by your participation in the study.

**PAYMENTS** You will not be paid to participate. For your participation, you will have the option to receive a summary of the dissertation's findings. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

**WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?** The study is over when you have completed the demographic inventory, the questionnaire, the individual interview, and checking the themes for accuracy. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

**PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY**

- **No Individual Participant Data Will Be Disclosed to {GFAI}:** Data will only be provided to {GFAI} in aggregate form (except for individual participant data provided to that participant to review for accuracy) to protect confidentiality of the participants.
- **Line of Delineation Between Researcher Role and Organizational Role for Data Collection and Storage:** The researcher will keep all data collected in the research study on a separate laptop than her {GFAI}-issued work laptop. The data will be stored on Teachers College encrypted drive and files will be password protected. The researcher will use Qualtrics, the approved secure data collection tool approved for use by Teachers College, Columbia University.



- **Interview Transcription Service:** The researcher plans to use a transcription service to transcribe the interviews. The transcription service will also adhere to all measures of maintaining individuals' confidentiality and will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement before the process begins.
- **Teachers College Internal Review Board:** For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

**HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?** The results of the study will be published as a dissertation, which is a partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. In addition, information, in the form of quotes from transcriptions, may be used for educational purposes in professional presentation(s) and/or educational publication(s).

**CONSENT FOR ZOOM RECORDING** Zoom recording will be used to record the individual interviews as part of the data collection for this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my consent to be recorded

---

Signature

**OR**

\_\_\_\_\_ I **DO NOT** give my consent to be recorded

---

Signature

**WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

\_\_\_ I consent to allow written materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

---

Signature

**OR**

\_\_\_ I **do not** consent to allow written materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

---

Signature

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

**If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Stephanie Fritz, at 610.533.3267 or [sjf2148@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:sjf2148@tc.columbia.edu)**

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email [IRB@tc.edu](mailto:IRB@tc.edu) or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

## Appendix F: Participant Rights

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Recruitment Letter to Participants

{Date}

Dear {Potential Participant Name}:

This letter is to invite you to participate in an exploratory research study that seeks to examine how you applied your learnings from the Executive Development Program {EDP} over the course of this last (extraordinary) year.

### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING CONDUCTED?**

The purpose of this case study is to explore how executives make meaning from what they learned in a development program, how these executives transferred the learning to lead their teams in today's dynamic world, and how the organization benefitted (if at all) from having leaders with increased capabilities in leading through change.

This research study will constitute a partial fulfillment for a degree of Doctor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City.

### **YOUR ROLE IN THE STUDY**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. However, your contribution will be greatly appreciated. Your experiences in {the EDP} and leading your teams through this last year will contribute to the understanding of learning transfer research and hopefully to benefit future cohorts of {the EDP}. The following is a brief outline of the study, should you partake:

- Demographic inventory (10 min)
- Seventy-five (75) minute interview
- If you agree, the interview will be recorded to allow the researcher a more accurate reflection of your views.
- Please note: your name and/or any other identifiers will be omitted from the report to preserve confidentiality.

Furthermore, I, as the researcher, will provide you with the themes from your interview for your review, as well as a hard copy of the interview transcript upon your request. I will also share the final findings of the study, should that be of interest.

I will work with your administrative assistant to set up a brief call (15 min) to go over the main points of this email and answer any questions you have about the study. If you agree to participate, I will send you an informed consent form that outlines the risks and benefits of the study and your rights as a participant.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by reply to this email or by telephone (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Fritz  
Doctoral Student, Teachers College, Columbia University

## Appendix H: Demographic Inventory

*(Collected via Qualtrics)*

Survey Instructions: The following information will help provide further context around the data gathered in this research study. Please answer each question by selecting the choice that best fits. Your responses will be kept confidential. To protect your identity, individual responses will not be seen by anyone other than researcher. In addition, a pseudonym will be assigned to you to protect your anonymity.

1. What is your age range?
  - a. Under 40
  - b. 40-49
  - c. 50-59
  - d. 60-69
  - e. Over 70
  
2. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Non-binary/gender conforming
  - d. Other
  
3. What do you consider your race or ethnic group (choose all that apply)?
  - a. Asian American/Pacific Islander
  - b. African American/African descent
  - c. Latinx – white
  - d. Latinx – not white
  - e. Middle Eastern
  - f. Native America
  - g. White/Caucasian
  - h. Other
  
4. How many years have you worked for this/did you work for this organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many different positions have you held at this organization? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What was your title when you participated in the executive development program?  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Has your title changed since you began the executive development program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. If yes, please provide your new title. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. If applicable, how many other organizations have worked at in your professional career, aside from {GFAI? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I: Interview Protocol for EDP Participants

The purpose of this semi-structured interview protocol is to have a starting structure for the 60-minute interviews, knowing that conversation will flow based on each individual participants' answers. The researcher will probe on both the answered questions and unanswered questions in the form.

1. **Interview Question:** How would you describe your overall experience in the program?
  - a. **Probing Question:** What is your most positive memory of your experience in the program?
  - b. **Probing Question:** What was the least positive memory of your experience in the program?
  - c. **Probing Question:** In general, how would you describe the impact of the EDP on you personally?
  
2. **Interview Question:** In what ways, if at all, were you able to apply what you learned in the EDP?
  - a. **Probing Question:** What, if anything, enabled you to apply the learning?
  - b. **Probing Question:** What, if anything, got in the way of you applying the learning?
  
3. **Critical Incident Interview Question:** Think about a time when you shifted your approach, mindset, or leadership style because of something you learned in the EDP. Describe what happened in narrative form:
  - a. **Probing Question:** What happened?
  - b. **Probing Question:** When did this happen (in relationship to the program)?
  - c. **Probing Question:** Who was involved?
  - d. **Probing Question:** What did you or do say?
  - e. **Probing Question:** What elements of the program can you attribute this to?
  - f. **Probing Question:** What, if any, organizational support did you receive?
  - g. How was this different what you might have done or said before you participated in the program?
  
4. **Interview Question:** In what ways do you think the firm benefitted from having this cohort of executives complete the EDP?
  - a. **Probing Question:** What impact do you think this program had on the organizational goals and strategy?
  - b. **Probing Question:** What, if any, organizational outcomes can you attribute to the participants in the EDP or the EDP itself?



## **Appendix J: Interview Protocol for EDP Architect**

The purpose of this semi-structured interview protocol is to explore the program design, objectives, and other important elements with architect of the program. The interview will follow the archival document review, which will be used as a basis for gathering information.

1. What was your role on the project team when the first cohort went through the executive development program?
2. In your opinion, what do you think the main objectives of the program were? Did these objectives evolve throughout the duration?
3. Who was the biggest champion/supporter of the program?
4. How did you communicate the results and/or capture the learning experiences from the program?
5. What do you think were the most successful elements of the program? Why?
6. What do you think were the least successful elements of the program? Why?
7. What changes did you notice in the participants as they were going through the program?
8. What changes, if any, did you notice about the organization? Were these changes occurring during or after the program concluded?
9. What changes, if any, did you notice in the organizational system – policies, procedures, systems, tools, processes, etc. – because of having better trained leaders in the organization?
10. If you could do one thing differently for the next cohort of leaders going through the program, what would that be?
11. What else do I need to know about the program that I haven't already asked?

## Appendix K: Document Summary Form Template

### Document Summary Form

**Name or Type of Document:**

**Document No.:**

**Date Received:**

**Date of Document:**

**Contact for Document:**

**Descriptive or Evaluative:**

<b>Page #</b>	<b>Keywords/Concepts</b>	<b>Relationship to Research Questions</b>
	•	•

**Brief Summary of Contents**

**Significance or Purpose of Document:**

**Is there anything contradictory about the document?**

**Salient Questions/Issues to Consider:**

**Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues:**

## Appendix L: Participant Demographic Summary

<b>Total Participants</b>	13
<b>Gender</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Female: 54%</li><li>• Male: 46%</li></ul>
<b>Ethnic Diversity Ratio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 15%</li></ul>
<b>Age Range</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 50-59: 54%</li><li>• 40-49: 46%</li></ul>
<b>Years Worked at GFAI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under 5: 31%</li><li>• 5-10: 23%</li><li>• 11-15: 0%</li><li>• 16-20: 31%</li><li>• 20+: 15%</li></ul>
<b>Region</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NAM: 77%</li><li>• EMEA: 23%</li><li>• APAC: 0%</li><li>• LATAM: 0%</li></ul>

## Appendix M: Final Coding Scheme

Codes listed in alphabetical order by parent code. Subcodes under Parent Codes are listed alphabetically.

<b>Code Abbreviation</b>	<b>Primary Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>	<b>Frequency (# of Excerpts)</b>
EL: Formal	Experiential Learning – Formal	Energy Management	9
EL: Formal	Experiential Learning – Formal	Immersion	16
EL: Formal	Experiential Learning – Formal	Strategic Projects	28
EL: Incidental	Experiential Learning – Incidental	Empathy	16
EL: Incidental	Experiential Learning – Incidental	Humility	15
EL: Informal	Experiential Learning - Informal	Coaching and Assessment	7
EL: Informal	Experiential Learning - Informal	Community of Practice	13
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Assessments	6
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Alumni Program	6
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	ET Engagement	5
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Intentional Career Development	13
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Other Design Considerations	10
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Selection	5
Future Prog Cons	Future Program Considerations	Strategic Projects	12
LT: Barrier	Learning Transfer: Barrier	COVID	8
LT: Barrier	Learning Transfer: Barrier	Day Job	8
LT: Barrier	Learning Transfer: Barrier	ET Engagement	25
LT: Barrier	Learning Transfer: Barrier	Organizational Culture	29
LT: Enabler	Learning Transfer: Enabler	Commitment from CEO and CHRO	6
LT: Enabler	Learning Transfer: Enabler	Community of Practice	5
LT: Enabler	Learning Transfer: Enabler	Learner Motivation	14
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Enterprise Leaders	9

<b>Code Abbreviation</b>	<b>Primary Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>	<b>Frequency (# of Excerpts)</b>
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Expansive Leaders	11
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Leader Impact	28
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Leading through Disruption	10
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Loyalty/Belonging	8
Org Ben	Organizational Benefit	Network of Leaders	14
TL: Design	Transformative Learning: Design	Deliberately Uncomfortable	7
TL: Design	Transformative Learning: Design	Program Timeline	3
TL: POV	Transformative Learning: Point of View	Shift in Care	37
TL: POV	Transformative Learning: Point of View	Shift in Courage	24
TL: POV	Transformative Learning: Point of View	Shift in Curiosity	10
TL: POV	Transformative Learning: Point of View	Shift to Enterprise Mindset	10