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**GOLF AS A TOOL FOR EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

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**A Research Project**  
**Presented to the Faculty of**  
**The George L. Graziadio**  
**School of Business and Management**  
**Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**  
**of the Requirements for the Degree**  
**Master of Science**  
**in**  
**Organization Development**

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**by**  
**Dawnet Beverley**  
**August 2014**

This research project, completed by

DAWNET BEVERLEY

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2014

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## **Abstract**

This study examined executives' subjective experiences playing golf to identify what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. Twenty executives were interviewed. Participants reported that golf strongly enhanced their leadership. They reported developing approaches, attitudes, and skills that enhanced their ability to manage themselves, manage others, and react to changing conditions. Participants noted that golf had transformative aspects and that it could be adapted for leader development, team building, and relationship building purposes. Based on these results, it can be concluded that golf is an effective tool for leader development. Leaders are advised to begin playing golf as a means for cultivating their own leadership abilities, and organizations are advised to support their efforts in doing so. Organization development professionals and the golf industry are advised to design innovative offerings using golf as a leader development tool. Additional studies are recommended to confirm these findings.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Executive leaders hold the most influential roles in organizations (Watts, 2012). Although a *leader* is defined as anyone who is in a designated position of authority and who is given the responsibility to manage the affairs of an organization and make decisions within specified boundaries, *executive leadership* is distinct in that it refers to highest levels of responsibility in an organization and includes titles such as chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer, president, executive vice president, and senior vice president. Executive leadership differs from other leadership roles in that executives run whole companies rather than single regions, units, departments, or projects. Because executives play such a pivotal role in organizations, quality leadership at this level is critical.

When quality and effectiveness at the executive level are absent, profound and negative impacts on communities, nations, and the world can result (Foldvary, 2009; Searcey & McLaughlin, 2009; Verschoor, 2008; Werther, 2003). Explanations for what contributes to executive effectiveness vary widely (Northouse, 2012), although some common attributes concern managing oneself, determining direction, and aligning and inspiring others toward the goal (Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012).

Given the importance of the leadership role, various researchers and practitioners have sought to design effective ways to enhance leaders' effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities. This practice area is called *leader development* (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010). Developing organizational leaders is increasingly urgent given the impending wave of retirements by Baby Boomers (Groves, 2007). Various approaches to leader development range from external training and degree programs to in-house

training, mentoring, and development experiences (MacKinnon, 2012; McCauley et al., 2010).

Organizations such as General Electric, Shell, and Johnson & Johnson consider leadership development programs as a key tool for enhancing competitive advantage and supporting corporate strategy (Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001). Many of these programs are costly for leaders and their organizations. In 2008, U.S. organizations spent \$34 billion on learning and development for all employees (American Society of Training & Development, 2008). More than 20% of these training dollars are spent exclusively on the training and development of leaders (Bersin and Associates, 2008).

One innovative approach to leader development that has been proposed is the development of leadership competencies through involvement in sports (Danish, Pettipas, & Hale, 2007). McNutt and Wright (1995) point out, “The parallels between sport and business are numerous,” such as developing vision; practicing good communication; and cultivating teamwork, motivation, high performance in oneself and others (p. 27). In contrast to formal programs, regularly engaging in a sport over a sustained period of time provides continuous and extended reinforcement of the principles and practices being developed—and often at lower cost than a formal program. Whiteside (2013) concluded based on her study of leader development that immersion in a development program was a critical success factor for cultivating desired leadership attitudes and behaviors. It must be noted, however, that she did not study sports. Davids and Mickey (1993) noted that many sports consultants and athletes are capitalizing on the idea that lessons from athletics, such as developing a winning mental edge to staying in good physical condition, transfer well to leadership. Training theorists agree that the techniques associated with the greatest transfer of training include the use of feedback; coaching;

experiential activities (e.g., ropes courses, outdoor training, equine leadership [De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009; Doh, 2003; Navarro, 2008]); and post-training goal setting (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Brown, 2005; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005).

Examination of literature on golfing, in particular, reveals several similarities with regard to the competencies required for golf and executive leadership. Such competencies include building a commitment to ethics and holding oneself accountable, mastering the fundamentals, intentionally focusing on the goal, and adapting to changing conditions without succumbing to negativity (Locander & Luechauer, 2007). Locander and Luechauer add that golf develops one's concentration, confidence, emotional control, and commitment. If these traits developed through golf are transferable to the workplace, it follows that leaders may become more effective in their leadership if they seek to develop mastery in golfing. Moreover, golf may be an ideal forum for leader development, as studies report that a 90% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers play golf and nearly one quarter of the 25 million golfers in the United States are top management executives.

Although it is known that executive leaders flock to golf, it is unclear whether leaders are consciously pursuing golf for the purpose of leader development and if they are, whether they are applying the transferable skills and competencies to the workplace. Although some golf practitioners are beginning to advertise golf clinics as a tool for leader development, no research has been found that examines participants' perceptions of these programs' effectiveness or outcomes. This lack of evidence points to an interesting gap in the literature. This study examined the value of golf for the purpose of leader development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine executives' subjective experiences playing golf and identify what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. Three research questions were defined:

1. What shifts in leadership thinking and behavior do executives attribute to playing golf?
2. What personal and leadership outcomes do executive leaders attribute to playing golf?
3. What is the perceived applicability of learning golf as a means for leadership development?

### **Significance of the Study**

Examination of leadership research (Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012) and popular golfing resources (Amster, Salk, & Lockwood, 1999; De la Torre, 2001; The Golf Connection of Palo Alto, 2013; Hogan & Wind, 1957; Locander & Luechauer, 2007; McCormack, 1986; Mecca, 2009; Nicklaus & Bowden, 1974; Penick & Love, 2011; Price, 2009; Puterbaugh, 2012; Rotella, 2004) suggests that a number of transferable leadership competencies may be gained from playing the game. As a result, engaging in the game may represent an effective and affordable way to develop one's leadership—whether one is currently an executive or desires to become one. Despite the parallels that are evident when comparing the body of golfing literature to the body of literature on leadership effectiveness, research on the use of golf as a leader development tool is lacking.

The present study helped to fill that gap. Namely, it gathered data on the leadership lessons players gain through the game and what personal and professional changes and outcomes they believe they have achieved by playing golf. These data have

provided needed empirical findings about the utility of golf as a leader development tool, which in turn may lead to more informed decisions about how to incorporate golf into executive development and succession planning.

Although the recommendations emerging from the present study could be adopted at a corporate level, these findings also provide insights for small businesses, nonprofits, and individuals who need to find affordable and effective leader development approaches. Such findings and recommendations are particularly valuable for this population, as formal external training and degree programs often are out of reach for them, although their need to develop effective leadership remains.

### **Researcher Background**

Some 16 or so years ago, I worked in Los Angeles as a regional service and operations manager for a financial services company. My boss at that time was the president of sales and service for the Western region. In a conversation regarding my development, he told me that he had observed that I had the keenest eyes and ears, a pleasant disposition, and the wisdom of a person many times my age. I was humbled by his accolades and quite surprised when he continued by saying that he would like me to be mentored to replace him in a couple of years. After my jaw dropped and my eyes popped, I managed to ask, “What is the catch?”

He replied, “You must learn to play golf.”

“Golf? Golf? Why golf? Why not tennis? I am good at that. How about basketball or cricket?” I protested.

He smiled graciously, placed his hands on my shoulders, looked me in the eyes, and said the following words, which changed my life forever. “You are a good leader.

Your potential is to be a great leader. By learning the game of golf, I guarantee you, the great leader will emerge. *Trust me.*”

Although it took 11 years, I eventually was able to act on this recommendation. I signed up for golf lessons and have been a student of the game for the past 7years. Over this time, I have been amazed at the leadership lessons I have learned and continue to learn through the game, such as adapting to the elements, maintaining my focus and positivity, and never straying from the goal.

My boss was right. I believe that my leadership has been sharpened through my exposure to the game. My experience with golf piqued my interest in formalizing its use in leader development and led to my interest in the present study.

### **Organization of the Study**

This chapter presented the background, purpose, and significance of the present study. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature, including studies and theory about executive leadership, leader development, and golf. Chapter 3 details the methods that were used in this study, including the research design and procedures related to sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports the study results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, including conclusions, implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for additional research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This study examined executives' subjective experiences playing golf and identified what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. This chapter provides a review of relevant literature. Studies and theory about executive leadership, leader development, and golf are provided.

#### Executive Leadership

The *Business Dictionary* defines a leader as someone who is in a designated position of authority and who is given the responsibility to manage the affairs of an organization and make decisions within specified boundaries ("Executive," 2013). For purposes of this research, *executive leadership* refers to highest levels of responsibility in an organization and includes titles such as chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer, president, executive vice president, and senior vice president. Anyone who reports to a C-suite position or a board of directors also is considered an executive leader. Executive leadership differs from other leadership roles in that executives run whole companies rather than single regions, units, departments, or projects.

Executive leaders were the focus of this study because they bear the largest single share of responsibility for the organization's outcome (Watts, 2012) and lack of effectiveness at this level have very far-reaching and even devastating effects (Foldvary, 2009; Searcey & McLaughlin, 2009; Verschoor, 2008; Werther, 2003).

Additionally, executive positions theoretically connect better to golf. Examination of the literature on golfing, in particular, reveals several similarities with regard to the competencies required for golf and executive leadership. Such competencies include a

commitment to ethics and holding oneself accountable, mastering the fundamentals, intentionally focusing on the goal, and adapting to changing conditions without succumbing to negativity (Locander & Luechauer, 2007). Locander and Luechauer add that golf develops one's concentration, confidence, emotional control, and commitment. If these traits developed through golf are transferable to the workplace, it follows that leaders may become more effective in their leadership if they seek to develop mastery in golfing. Moreover, golf may be an ideal forum for leader development, as studies report that 90% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers play golf and nearly one quarter of the 25 million golfers in the United States are top management executives.

Other leadership roles in organizations are important and share some characteristics associated with executive leadership. For example, all leaders manage people, process, and technology, and all leaders are expected to meet financial goals, sales targets, and execute strategies in support of a company's vision. However, a clear distinction between executives and other types of leaders is that executive leaders are responsible for articulating the organization's vision, leading the creation of strategies to support the vision, and are accountable to a range of internal stakeholders and external shareholders. In short, much is expected and required from these executives.

Because executives play such a pivotal role in organizations, quality leadership at this level is critical. When leadership is lacking or unethical, profound consequences can follow, such as lost jobs, compromised careers, dashed hopes, lost pensions, and even distressing ethical dilemmas (Werther, 2003). Within the last 15 years, numerous instances of faulty public and private leadership has become known, such as in the cases of Enron (Werther, 2003), MCI/Worldcom (Verschoor, 2008), Madoff's Investment Securities firm (Searcey & McLaughlin, 2009), and the American housing bust

(Foldvary, 2009), to name only a few. Collectively, the impact of these scandals and failures has a profound negative impact on communities, nations, and the world. It is critical that executive leaders understand their roles and the ripple effect their day-to-day decisions and seemingly insignificant and private actions have on the economy and sectors. On the flip side, cases of outstanding executive leaders also abound. For example, Jack Welch, acclaimed and widely admired leader of General Electric, was noted for creating a strong culture of excellence and quality and dramatically increased corporate earnings from \$1.6 billion in 1981 when he took the reins, to \$15 billion in 2001, when he stepped down from his executive role (Hill, 2001). Additionally, the group's market capitalization has grown from less than \$14 billion to more than \$400 billion, in spite of the recent share price decline.

**Executive leadership competencies.** Executives are expected to be visible spokespeople for the organization (Watts, 2012). In this role, they need to set and communicate expectations, share information (both the good and the bad), monitor and measure performance, provide support, and acknowledge performance (Tiffan, 2011; Watts, 2012). They also need to be able to set and achieve challenging goals, take swift and decisive action, outperform the competition, take calculated risks, manage others, embrace change, and persevere in the face of failure.

Various theories have been offered regarding what executive leaders need to possess to carry out these roles effectively. Northouse (2012) wrote a well-regarded book reviewing theories and practices of leadership. The present literature review draws from this work to present a brief overview of common leadership theory as it is organized in the field. Northouse explained that primary explanations of leader effectiveness include trait approaches, skill approaches, and style approaches. Northouse explained that trait

approaches assert that leaders require intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, sociability, and emotional intelligence to be effective. Stogdill's (1974) survey of 163 studies of leadership concluded that 10 characteristics were necessary for effective leadership: drive for responsibility and task achievement, persistence in goal achievement, initiative, self-confidence and clear self-identity, taking responsibility for one's actions and their consequences, ability to handle interpersonal stress, tolerance for frustration and delay, persuasiveness and influence, ability to mobilize social systems toward desired ends. Tiffan (2011) asserted that an additional critical competency of executives that has been studied within the past decade is being introspective. Watts (2012) asserted that introspection helps executives become more self-aware, which in turn "can positively tip the scales in favor of making the right call" (p. 149). Watts asserted that introspection fosters emotional maturity and the control of ego.

Northouse (2012) further explained that according to a skills approach outlined by Katz in 1955, leaders require technical, conceptual skills (e.g., strategy and visioning) to be effective. Bennis (2007) argued that one of the most critical leadership skills is judgment, primarily concerning the judgments leaders make about people, strategy, and crisis management. Judgments concerning people affect who is in the organization and what positions they hold. These decisions, in turn, have powerful effects on what occurs within the organization. Judgments concerning strategy affect the organization's vision, mission, competitive positioning, and subsequent design and operations. Leaders must recognize when these factors need to be revisited and how they need to shift. Crisis judgments are particularly critical, as they require immediate and effective action when unforeseen or catastrophic events happen, such as when Johnson & Johnson immediately recalled Tylenol from the stores after it was discovered that seven people had died from

Tylenol capsules being laced with cyanide. Bennis added that effective judgments are the result of a three-step leadership judgment process of (a) preparation, including sensing and identifying what needs to be done; (b) framing and naming what the leader will do; and (c) aligning and mobilizing the workforce to act before issuing the order to advance. Moreover, he stressed that leaders require four areas of knowledge to make sound judgments:

1. Self-knowledge, meaning self-awareness of one's own biases, desires, ambitions, strengths, and limitations. Bennis (2007) asserted that this kind of information is best gained through various sources and feedback from others.
2. Social-network knowledge, meaning recognizing and assessing the information that is around the leader. Importantly, this requires access to various streams of information and openness to data that conflicts and departs from one's own beliefs and biases.
3. Organizational knowledge, meaning awareness of the total organization, in part and in whole. This includes understanding the organization's actions and inactions as well as its cultures and subcultures.
4. Stakeholder knowledge, meaning awareness of the needs, wants, and offers related to the organization's various stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, and shareholders.

Finally, Northouse (2012) described style approaches, such as Blake and Mouton's (1964) Managerial Grid, that categorize leaders based on the pattern of their behaviors. Blake and Mouton conceptualized leaders as being plotted on two dimensions: concern for people and concern for results. This leads to five types of management: country club management (high focus on people, low focus on results), team management (high people, high results), impoverished management (low people, low results), authority-compliance management (low people, high results), and middle-of-the-road management (moderate results, moderate people). Each type of leader is associated with a different style and outcomes.

Table 1 presents a summary of four types of leadership theories, including trait approaches (Stogdill, 1974; Tiffan, 2011; Watts, 2012); skill approaches (Bennis, 2007; Katz, 1955); style approaches (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass, 1985; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Greenleaf, 1977); and situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), contingency (Evans, 1970; House, 1996), and path-goal (Fiedler, 1967) approaches. Examination of this table reveals more similarities than differences, in that leadership according to any approach requires certain base knowledge and skills (e.g., conceptual skills and intelligence, human skills such as being able to motivate and support employees), and self-confidence to issue direction. The ways that the theories differ may concern how, when, and under what conditions these various skills and styles are applied.

**Table 1**

*Types of Leadership Theories*

Theory Type	Requirements for Leadership	Theorists
Trait approaches	Intelligence Self-confidence Determination Integrity Sociability Emotional intelligence	Stogdill (1974) Tiffan (2011) Watts (2012)
Skill approaches	Technical skills Human skills Conceptual skills	Bennis (2007) Katz (1955)
Style approaches	Managerial Grid Transformational Transactional Servant Authentic	Avolio and Gardner (2005) Bass (1985) Blake and Mouton (1964) Greenleaf (1977)
Situational, contingency, and path-goal approaches	Adaptability Directive behaviors Supportive behaviors Motivational tactics	Evans (1970) Fiedler (1967) Hersey and Blanchard (1969) House (1996)

Thus, although the explanations for executive effectiveness somewhat vary and the mechanisms of effectiveness may be viewed differently, depending upon the lens through which leadership is viewed, the present researcher suggests that some common threads weave through the various explanations: knowledge of oneself; ability to manage oneself; access to and interaction with others and one's environment; and the ability to receive, reflect on, and integrate these various internal and external streams of information. These abilities are strikingly similar to those competencies required by and developed through golf. The next section briefly examines the popularity of golf among executives.

**Adoption of golf by executives.** A recent study of executive leaders in the United States found that 90% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers play golf. Another study reported that almost a quarter of the 25 million golfers in the US are top management executives and 80% of the top executives agreed that a game of golf is an important business development tool (Prayag, 2012).

Executives play golf for a number of reasons, including the opportunity to network with peers; relax in their "own" space as members of the golf club; and conduct business in a safe, familiar, and comfortable setting. According to research of 401 global executives cited by MGT Open (2012), 54% of business professionals call golf the sport of business, 25% of business decision-makers play golf, and 48% of executives see the golf course as an ideal business environment, with more than one third reporting that some of their biggest business deals were made on the course. Golf also appears to be an equalizer and bonding experience, as MGT Open's statistics suggest that 38% of executives use golf as a type of international language to level language and cultural barriers. Given these statistics, it is not surprising that 27% of executives consider golf as

a helpful tool for advancing in their careers and 41% believe it is a helpful networking tool. MGT Open stressed that executives playing golf for business purposes should approach it with a focus on their clients and colleagues rather than focusing on their own golf game.

Although the literature reviewed in this section provides helpful statistics for the rationale and benefits executives report related to their participation in golf, literature on the interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that may be developed through golf—and how these relate to one's leadership is noticeably lacking. Moreover, it is curious that MGT Open (2012) explicitly states that executives playing for business reasons should not focus on their own golf game. Instead, based upon the present researcher's synthesis of the golf and leadership literature, it appears that perfecting one's game would have natural spillover impacts on one's leadership competencies. Examining this link remains as a direction for continued research.

**Summary.** Executive leaders hold the most influential roles in organizations (Watts, 2012). Quality leadership at this level is critical. When quality and effectiveness are absent, profound and negative impacts on communities, nations, and the world can result (Foldvary, 2009; Searcey & McLaughlin, 2009; Verschoor, 2008; Werther, 2003). Explanations for what contributes to executive effectiveness vary widely (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Katz, 1995; Northouse, 2012). However, knowledge of oneself; ability to manage oneself; access to and interaction with others and one's environment; and the ability to receive, reflect on, and integrate these various streams of information coming internally and externally appear to be common elements of these explanations. Comparing the golf literature to leadership literature reveal several similarities between the competencies developed through golf and the competencies required in executive

leadership. Although it is known that executive leaders flock to golf, it is unclear whether leaders are consciously pursuing golf for the purpose of leadership development (and if they are translating this experience back to their workplace and their leadership).

Available explanations for golf's popularity among executives center on more instrumental reasons, such as the ability to network (MGT Open, 2012). Examining the role of golf in leadership development is a direction for continued research. To understand how this type of investigation may contribute to the existing body of literature, the next section examines current approaches to leader development.

### **Leader Development**

MacKinnon (2012) asserts that if organizations want to improve, the best place to begin is at the top by developing their leaders. Several authors have noted the need for leader development, including objectives such as facilitating cultural change (MacKinnon, 2012), providing competitive advantage (Thompson, 2002), and building leader effectiveness (Center for Creative Leadership, 2013). For example, the Center for Creative Leadership's programs have been described as having a profound impact on leaders and their organizations in terms of helping leaders accelerate their strategic and business outcomes by identifying and uncovering leadership potential. Additionally, development programs can help leaders become more nimble and innovative in their careers and in their day-to-day work (Jackson, Farndale, & Kakabadse, 2003). Leader development is of particularly critical importance today, given the rapidly aging workforce and impending wave of retirements by Baby Boomers. Organizations stand to lose substantial knowledge and skill over a short period of time; thus, developing an organization's leadership has become both important and urgent (Groves, 2007).

It follows that leader development refers to "the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes" (McCauley et al., 2010, p. 2). McCauley et al. (2010) further specify that leadership roles and processes refers to actions such as setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining organization members' commitment to the common goal. McCauley et al. have deliberately chosen the term *leader* development to emphasize their focus on developing individual leaders, versus *leadership* development, which often refers to developing an organization's collective leadership strength.

Leaders naturally learn, grow, and change over their careers (McCauley et al., 2010), whether through formal or informal and planned or unplanned means. The practice of leader development seeks to deliberately enhance leader effectiveness to benefit both the individual and his or her organization. McCauley et al. outlined several fundamental questions that have shaped the field of leadership development:

What does it take to be an effective leader? Are some leadership practices more effective in particular contexts? How do people learn important leadership skills and perspectives? What are the necessary ingredients for stimulating development in leaders? What are the impacts of societal and cultural factors on the development of leaders? What are the best strategies for development shared leadership beliefs and practices in groups, teams, and organizations? (p. 1)

Executive development began almost a century ago, through approaches that ranged from university degrees such as the master's in business administration to non-degree executive development courses (such as those offered through the Center for Creative Leadership), to tailored, in-company equivalents (such as General Electric's educational center), to flexible e-learning approaches (Jackson et al., 2003). Other organizations bridge internal and external offerings by partnering with universities. For example, British Aerospace and Cranfield University in the United Kingdom have

designed an educational approach customized to the development needs of British Aerospace leaders. Across these programs is a common goal of leader development, namely equipping leaders and potential leaders with the knowledge and skills to develop into mature, motivated, and experienced managers.

Groves (2007) conducted a review of extant research on leadership development best practices, including reviews and meta-analyses by Collins and Holton (2004), Day (2001), Burke and Day (1986), and Kur and Bunning (2002). Based on this review, Groves determined that companies are using six key tools for developing organizational leadership strength: 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and action learning (learning through project-based experiences). Based on his own original interview research with 30 chief executive officers and human resource executives across 15 best practice organizations, he concluded the most common practices in his study organizations included mentoring, identifying and developing high potential employees through project-based learning experiences and manager-facilitated workshops, constructing a succession planning process, and instituting a supportive organizational culture.

**Development process.** Regardless of the specific tools and designs for development, MacKinnon (2012) asserted based on this review of studies that executive leaders need development from the beginning and until the end of their careers. Development professionals and firms, such as MacKinnon (2012) and McCauley et al. (2010), advocate for a customized leader development program that begins with assessment and goal-setting, designing customized challenges, and supporting and measuring their subsequent learning.

Assessment can be achieved using objective or standardized instruments (e.g., personality questionnaires or “ideal leader” profiles), 360-degree feedback, or self-awareness techniques (MacKinnon, 2012). The Center for Creative Leadership (2013) pointed out based on their studies that assessments and feedback can offer executives an external perspective of who they are as leaders.

The specific structure of the development programs can vary. Some organizations contract with external providers to create identical courses for all of their executives. Other organizations encourage executives to determine what their own development needs are and to select their avenues for getting it. Still other organizations offer structured but individually tailored interventions (MacKinnon, 2012). MacKinnon asserted that it is important to allow leaders to have a say in choosing their own learning interventions.

Support and measurement can occur through executive coaching or mentoring that helps solidify learning gained through education programs, 360-degree feedback that provides information about how the leader is performing against his or her goals, or a repeat of any standardized measures used during the assessment phase (Johnson, Garrison, Hernez-Broome, Fleenor, & Steed, 2012). Training theorists agree that the techniques associated with the greatest transfer of training include the use of feedback; coaching; experiential activities (e.g., ropes courses, outdoor training, equine leadership, [De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009; Doh, 2003; Navarro, 2008]); and post-training goal setting (Blume et al., 2010; Brown, 2005; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Taylor et al., 2005). Kirkpatrick (1994) asserted that transfer of training could be assessed using a four-phase approach of (a) gauging participants’ reactions (did they like it), (b) assessing learning (new knowledge gained), (c) measuring behavior change, and (d) measuring results.

For example, Schon (1987) asserted that learning approaches need to be active, involving dialogue with and among students and coaching from instructors that foster self-reflection, the discovery of new meanings, interpretations, and problem-solving ideas within the learner. Specific to courses for executives, instructional strategies need to encourage learners to explore their lived experiences as a source of learning. Other strategies that have been shown to be effective for motivating action and reflection include case studies and role-playing (Dewey, 1933; Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1987). Additionally, activities that have been effectively used for leadership training, such as equine leadership training, ropes courses, and outdoor training offer what Schon (1987) called *microworlds*, which are learning environments that reproduce the essential characteristics of the practice to be learned and allow for experimentation without the risks of a real situation; facilitate adjustment to the pace and the focus of work, according to the students' and instructor's needs; and enable the repetition of actions when necessary. The present research examines whether golf offers a similar type of microworld that is conducive for leadership training.

Burke and Day (1986) found that leader development had moderate effects on leaders' competencies based on their meta-analysis of 70 managerial training studies representing six training content areas, seven training methods, and four types of criteria (subjective learning, objective learning, subjective behavior, and objective results). The researchers concluded that human relations training programs, particularly those that focused on increasing motivation or improving values as measured by objective learning criteria, were quite effective: managers who received training were moved to the 79th percentile of the untrained group. The present study similarly measured subjective learning and behavior as reported by executives.

Later, Collins and Holton (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 83 studies from 1982 to 2001 that involved formal training interventions for managers. The purpose of their study was to determine the trainings' effectiveness for enhancing performance, knowledge, and expertise at the individual, team or group, or organizational level. Study results indicated that more training interventions had substantial effects than Burke and Day (1986) concluded earlier. In Collins and Holton's (2004) study, the effect size for knowledge outcomes ranged from .96 to 1.37; expertise outcomes from .35 to 1.01; and system outcomes averaged .39. Interventions with knowledge outcomes were found to be more effective than in the Burke and Day (1986) meta-analysis, with the most effective interventions using a single group pretest-posttest research design. Based on their results, Collins and Holton conclude that practitioners can attain substantial improvements in both knowledge and skill if sufficient front-end analysis is conducted to assure that the right development is offered to the right leaders. As a result, the present researcher anticipated that golf as an intervention may be expected to have substantial effects on leaders' attitudes, thinking, and behavior.

**Summary.** Leader development refers to the practices and programs that serve to enhance leaders' effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities (McCauley et al., 2010). Developing organizational leaders is increasingly urgent given the impending wave of Baby Boomer retirements (Groves, 2007). Various approaches to leader development exist, such as external university degree programs, corporate-university partnership degree programs, in-house corporate training programs, and a range of other tools and techniques, such as 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and action learning. These approaches seem to be most effective when they incorporate iterative cycles of assessment, challenge and learning opportunities, and

support and measurement (MacKinnon, 2012; McCauley et al., 2010). In the next section, golf is more deeply examined to formulate a better understanding of its nature, principles and philosophies.

## **Golf**

The game of golf originated in 13th century Scotland. The word *golf* is linguistically derived from the Dutch word *kolf* or *kolve*, meaning *club*. The term evolved from *kolf* to *goff* and, finally, in the 16th century, to *golf*. The aim of golf, even at its inception, was to hit a ball from one pre-designated place to another using a predetermined object (the club) using the least number of strikes. Golf was played by royalty and commoners alike and soon spread throughout Europe. The game was so popular that the Scottish parliament passed a law to prevent playing the game out of concern that archery skills, which were necessary during wartime, would be lost.

Nevertheless, the game continued to thrive. Competitive golfing emerged in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the first Open Competition of golf was held in Scotland in the 18th century. In early 19<sup>th</sup> century, golfers John Henry Taylor, Harry Vardon, and James Brad dominated the competitions with fierce rivalry that further fed the game.

However, the game suffered a serious blow with World War I in the early 20th century, as many players died. A second major blow to the game occurred only a few decades later during World War II, when a great number of golf courses were destroyed through their use as disembarkation sites and airplane landing sites. Thus, golf migrated to and flourished within North America, Asia, and other regions during the first half of the 20th century. The next section discusses the current nature and reach of the game.

**Accessibility of golf.** At the time of the present study, golf players of all ages, genders, and races can be found on all continents. Tournaments occur nearly every month

and the winnings are quite attractive (often in the millions of dollars). Top golf players also make millions of dollars in product endorsements (National Golf Foundation, 2009).

As of 2009, the number of golfers over age 6 in the United States totaled 28.6 million, (National Golf Foundation, 2009). In 2008, 1.7 million new golfers took up the game and another 2.3 million started playing again after not playing the year before. Nearly 32,000 golf courses exist worldwide. Golf20/20 reported that golfers and golf enthusiasts spent \$76 billion dollars on the game in 2008.

Accessibility to golf is possible at any age for a sizable proportion of the world's population. Golf is offered as a sport in many secondary schools and colleges worldwide. Golf country clubs are available in almost every state in America. Adult women's and men's leagues compete regularly. Golf clinics are provided online, on television, and at courses and clubs worldwide. Golf tournaments can be viewed on television—whether on network channels or on cable channels dedicated to the game. Both public and private clubs and courses are in operation. Additionally, stores, advertisements, and information on every aspect of the game and the industry can be rather easily located. Although the game is traditionally thought of as an expensive hobby, many private clubs are now public and have reduced their pricing significantly. Formerly exclusive clubs now exist in every state that have converted their operations to be open to the public.

**Principles and philosophies.** Locander and Luechauer (2007) outlined four key principles guiding the game of golf, arguing that “golf provides a means for exploring leadership and imparting valuable lessons for the leadership journey” (p. 66). These principles are to exercise integrity, master the fundamentals, be intentional, and adapt to changing conditions. It is important to note that although these principles are important to

golf, they are not exclusive to this game. Other sports and pastimes likely observe similar principles to a greater or lesser degree.

***Exercise integrity.*** The first principle is to exercise integrity by holding oneself accountable to the rules (Locander & Luechauer, 2007). Whereas other sports have referees, umpires, judges, testing panels, and other structures to monitor whether players are abiding by the rules, golf relies on players monitoring themselves. Thus, in the game of golf, all players are responsible for knowing, playing by, and enforcing the rules, which are universal and foundational to enjoying the game. One such rule concerns keeping track of one's own score, calculated as the number of strokes the player needed to complete each hole. A player's score for an entire game is calculated as the sum of scores for all the holes on the course. The player with the lowest score wins. Scores are further modified by player based on his or her handicap, defined as

A number assigned to each player based on his [or her] ability and used to adjust each player's score to provide equality among the players. In simplified terms, a handicap number, based on the slope of a course, is subtracted from the player's gross score and gives him a net score of par or better half the time. (“Glossary of Golf,” 2013, para. 255)

The procedure of handicaps allows all players—whether professional, advanced, or novice—to play together because it “levels” the field. Moreover, comparing each player's scores to the course *par*, meaning the standard number of strokes needed to complete the course, produces another measure of the golfer's competency (“Glossary of Golf,” 2013). Par also is computed for each hole. For example, *birdie* means the golfer has completed the hole one stroke under par. *Bogey* means playing the hole one stroke over par.

Keeping track of one's own scores ushers in multiple opportunities for integrity (or lack thereof) to be exhibited. Many examples of admirable integrity are evident on the golf course. For example, Bobby Jones, a golf legend, lost what would have been his fifth

US Open title in 1920 to a self-imposed penalty because his ball had moved during a chip shot, even though no one else had witnessed this infraction (Locander & Leuchauer, 2007). McCormack (1986) speculates that those golfers who do not maintain their integrity in tracking their golf scores should not be trusted in business dealings either. Leuchauer reflected on his experience as a young caddy, commenting that he or was astonished by

. . . the number of doctors, lawyers, and business leaders who were more competent with their “foot wedges” than any other club in the bag. [I] could never understand why people entrusted bankers with accounting for millions of dollars even though the latter regularly swore to making a five on a hole when it was actually a six, seven, or eight! (Locander & Leuchauer, 2007, p. 68)

Similarly, Gentry et al. (2013) found based on their study of integrity and other character strengths among middle-level managers and top executives that, based on relative weight analysis, “integrity was relatively less important to middle-level managers' current performance compared to other character strengths (e.g., social intelligence)” but that integrity was more important for the performance of top-level executives than other character traits (p. 395).

***Master the fundamentals.*** Locander and Leuchauer (2007) argue that the great athletes, artists, actors, and even every day talented professionals share one key trait: they master the basics of their craft. That may be a runner’s stride, the artist’s brush stroke, the actor’s reflection on a character, or the accountant’s knowledge of tax law. Professional golfers agree that the fundamentals of their craft include their grip of the club, their stance with regard to the ball, and their alignment with their target. These fundamentals are foremost in the golfer’s mind each time they prepare for a shot and play the game. Moreover, mastery of these fundamentals are among the first things to break down under pressure or lack of focus. When mastery of the fundamentals wanes, the consequences

can be catastrophic. For example, if a player's grip is too tight, the stress could affect the golfer's accuracy, sending the ball straight into the water, the sand trap, or hopelessly off course. Standing uphill or downhill will determine the height and direction of the ball. Unless the golfer's hips, feet, and shoulders are aligned and parallel to the desired line of flight, the ball is unlikely to reach its target. A similar breakdown and resulting series of catastrophic impacts can be observed when executives are under pressure if they fail to stick to the fundamentals (Johar, 2002).

Thus, grip, stance, and alignment also are effective leadership metaphors (Locander & Leuchauer, 2007). A leader must have the appropriate "grip" on their organization—one that is neither too loose nor too tight. Moreover, in golf, three basic grips are typically used. Similarly, the leader's technique may vary. A leader's stance, such as his or her vision and position on strategies, affects the direction the organization will travel. Finally, the leader must assure alignment within the organization and alignment of the organization to the goal. Without proper alignment, desired outcomes are unlikely to be met.

***Be intentional.*** One of the most popular and widely read golf books of all times is Penick's (1993) *Little Red Book: Lessons and Teaching from a Lifetime of Golf*. In it, Penick, who coached golf greats such as Ben Crenshaw and Mark Kite, advised his clients to always "take dead aim" (p. 10). The idea behind this saying is that golfers should focus their attention on where they want their balls to go, rather than to focus on the obstacles they want to avoid. In other words, a central principle in golf is to be intentional and focus on one's goals. These ideas are consistent with social constructionism, which asserts that people tend to create the world they pay attention to and consciously and subconsciously dedicate their energies toward their object of focus

(Gergen, 1985). This concept also is a major component of a lot of sports psychology (Philippen & Lobinger, 2012). It follows that if golfers (and leaders) focus on obstacles, they invariably land right on them. Thus, it is critical to harness one's attention to land on the target instead—both in golf and leadership (Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012).

*Adapt to changing conditions.* Despite mastery of the fundamentals and intentionally focusing on the target, every outcome still is subject to chance and various intervening conditions. In golf, those conditions could include wind and other weather events, interfering elements on the course, and the playing surface, among others. Scholars of the game use phrases such as “the rub of the green,” “the course giveth and the course taketh,” and “Oh well, I'd be darned” to capture this idea (Locander & Leuchauer, 2007). Locander and Leuchauer cited the example of Tiger Woods in a 2007 tournament who, by all definitions, played a perfect shot. Nevertheless, his ball hit the flagstick, ricocheted, and plunged into the water. By some accounts, this event cost him the tournament. Another example of unintended outcomes was witnessed at the 2013 British Open played in Scotland, where Phil Michelson went on to win the tournament, aided by a shot that ordinarily would have entered a bunker. Instead, the ball hopped right by the edge of the bunker and meandered close to the pin, resulting in a birdie on the 18<sup>th</sup> hole that secured a historic tournament win for Michelson.

Similarly, in leadership, the best attempts, strategies, intentions, and plans are sometimes subject to unusual and unexpected occurrences. The best laid plans do not always yield the best results. When this occurs, in golf and in business, it is important to take the good with the bad and to keep going, knowing that tomorrow will bring another result (Locander & Leuchauer, 2007). One's resilience in the face of these adversities on the golf course (and in leadership) reveals much about one's character (Gentry et al.,

2013; Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012). After only a few holes, some speculate that a person's attitude toward adversity and accomplishment are revealed.

**Behavioral and psychological ingredients.** Rotella (2004), noted scholar and speaker on the game of golf, has written extensively about the behavioral and psychological ingredients to playing the game well. He frames the game in terms of a *process goal*, meaning that success in golf comes from patiently and persistently doing the right things over and over again. This type of reliable performance, in turn, is rooted in the mental and subsequently behavioral processes that drive performance.

Rotella (2004) has found through his work that four emotional states are associated with successful performance on the golf course. Although he does not discuss how to achieve these states, he describes these as optimal states to be in to perform well. The first is confidence, which occurs when the golfer feels that this is his or her opportunity to demonstrate an excellent performance and that he or she could beat anybody. The second state is calm but nervous, meaning that the golfer feels nervous but is simultaneously at ease with these feelings. The third state is feeling anxious but excited, meaning he or she feels ready to compete, although he or she is a little nervous. Rotella stressed that nerves and excitement come together. The fourth and final emotional state is confidence that he or she remembers all his or her successful training sessions and best past performances is ready and able to apply them to the current performances.

Rotella (2004) asserts that these performance-enhancing emotional states can be produced through mastery of the four Cs: concentration, meaning the ability to maintain focus; confidence, meaning belief in one's abilities; control, meaning the ability to maintain emotional control regardless of distraction; and commitment, meaning the ability to continue working in accordance with agreed goals. Rotella adds that the

techniques of relaxation, clearing the mind, and visualization further aid the golfer in achieving the four Cs. The following sections examine each C in more detail.

**Concentration.** Concentration refers to the mental ability to focus on the task at hand. If the golfer lacks concentration, then his or her athletic abilities will not be effectively or efficiently applied to the shot. The needs for focus can be plotted on a two-dimensional scale (see Figure 1).

	Broad	Narrow
Internal	Taking inventory of a large number of internal stimuli, such as feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and so on	Deeply focusing on only one or a few internal stimuli (e.g., body awareness relative to one's grip)
External	Taking inventory of a large number of external stimuli, such as other golfers, the course, the weather, and so on	Deeply focusing on only one or a few external stimuli (e.g., the wind's strength and direction)

*Note.* Original figure created based on *The Golfer's Mind: Play to Play Great*, by B. Rotella, 2004, New York, NY: Free Press.

**Figure 1**

### **Dimensions of Concentration**

Rotella (2004) added that the demand for concentration varies in golf. For example, golf requires short bursts of deep concentration followed by sustained focus between shots. The strategies for improving one's concentration are very personal. One way to maintain focus is to set process goals for each round. The golfer will have an overall goal for which he or she will identify a number of process goals that help focus on specific aspects of the course. For each of these goals, the golfer can use a trigger word or phrase that helps him or her regain focus, such as "ready, relax, release." This is related

to the concept of motor imagery, wherein players use mentally produced simulation process of imagining going through the actions without engaging in the actual physical movements (Moran, Guillot, MacIntyre, & Collet, 2012). Ploszay, Gentner, Skinner, and Wrisberg's (2006) study of multisensory imagery on putting performance among four NCAA Division I golfers suggested that the intervention was effective for some participants.

The dimensions and concepts of concentration have natural transferability to leadership. For example, during organizational assessment or diagnosis, the leader may take a broad internal focus to identify areas for improvement. Alternately, attention to optimizing a single function may reflect a narrow internal focus. Conducting a competitive analysis of one's industry market may reflect a broad external focus, whereas examining the strength of a single fierce competitor may reflect a narrow external focus (Northouse, 2012). Moreover, being mindful to when a broad versus a narrow focus or an internal versus external focus is needed is arguably important for effective leadership and having the discipline to instantaneously harness one's concentration on appropriate focuses would thus be invaluable.

***Confidence.*** Confidence is a positive state of mind in which one feels in control and believes one can meet the challenges ahead (Rotella, 2004). Feltz (1988) offered a description of self-confidence as "the belief that one can successfully execute a specific activity rather than a global trait that accounts for overall performance optimism. For example, one may have a high degree of self-confidence in one's driving ability in golf but a low degree of self-confidence in putting" (p. 423). In their Self-Confidence Scale, Lam, Yim, and Ng (2008) defined *self-confidence* as considering oneself successful, competent to handle the challenges facing oneself, and being more competent than others.

Hardy et al.'s (2010) later Self-Confidence Scale defined the construct as meeting the challenges of training, being able to concentrate on the task at hand, performing the various tasks necessary to be successful, and being able to perform under pressure. Based on these definitions, confidence may be conceptualized as an equation:

$$\text{Confidence} = \text{Ability} - \text{Challenge}$$

When one's ability is perceived to be equal to or greater than the challenge, the individual perceives parity or surplus and high self-confidence exists. High self-confidence is characterized by positive thoughts of success; feelings of excitement, anticipation, and calm; heightened focus on oneself and the task; productive behaviors (e.g., appropriate risk taking, resilience, learning), commitment, and effort; and accountability for outcomes. Self-confident golfers tend to persevere, even when things are not going to plan; show enthusiasm; demonstrate a positive attitude in their approach; and take their share of the responsibility in success and failure.

When one's ability is perceived to be lesser than the challenge, the individual perceives a deficit and low self-confidence exists. Low self-confidence, in contrast, is characterized by negative thoughts of defeat and failure; feelings of doubt, helplessness, anxiety, dread; focus on others and less relevant factors; unproductive behaviors such as withdrawal and poor effort; and blaming others or the conditions for the outcome.

It is critical to emphasize that it is one's perceptions rather than one's actual ability that leads to high or low self-confidence. Due to these perceptions, Rotella (2004) explained that golfers can increase self-confidence by (a) visualizing previous good shots and recalling the body memory of the swing and (b) imagining various challenging scenarios on the course they handled successfully and recalling how to cope with them.

The construction and implications of self-confidence again transfer well to the leadership situation. Leaders routinely encounter challenges and their perceptions of their abilities compared to the challenge lead to their level of confidence and subsequent feelings, behaviors, and outcomes. Although appropriate assessments of deficit can guide the leader to important training and development experiences, problematic low self-confidence should be identified and ameliorated. Rotella's (2004) strategies for improving golfer self-confidence may be equally effective for leaders.

**Control.** Emotional control refers to identifying and regulating one's emotions and remaining positive—especially in the face of adversity (Rotella, 2004). It can also be maintaining control amidst successes. For example, having a great shot does not mean that it is okay to get overly excited and then fail to appropriately set up the next shot. Rotella believed control was essential to successful golf performance, commenting that two emotions that often arise in the face of adversity are anxiety and anger. Anxiety may manifest in physical symptoms such as feeling jittery or nauseated, sweating, or needing to use the toilet. Anxiety also can produce psychological symptoms such as worry, negative thoughts, confusion, and lack of concentration. Anger can erode performance because it often diverts the player to focus on the cause of the anger rather than on the goal. This leads to a slippery slope of diminished concentration, performance, and confidence. Being able to identify one's emotions, their causes, and to choose to remain positive can mean the difference between having a poor shot but rebounding and having a poor shot turn into an entire botched game. Emotional control also is essential for leaders, as discussed by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004). They explain that leaders need to possess “a powerful ability to drive emotions in a positive direction to get results—and . . . fluidly interchange among a variety of leadership styles as the situation demands”

(p. 1). Of course, needing to do this well in leadership does not mean that leaders automatically control their emotions well; hence, the need for socioemotional competence among leaders.

**Commitment.** Achieving high performance in golf relies upon the player sustaining a strong level of commitment to the game over many years (Rotella, 2004). Yet, the daily tasks of life such as work, studies, family members, partners, friends, and other pastimes all compete with the demands of golf. Moreover, a player's commitment also can be eroded by factors related to his or her playing, such as a perceived lack of progress or improvement, lack of adequate skills or skills training, an injury, lack of enjoyment, excessive performance or competition anxiety, and boredom. Active self-awareness and self-management are critical to detecting and addressing commitment problems. For example, detecting the need for golf lessons, honoring the need for rest, making an attitude adjustment, or seeking helpful feedback all can help address the common causes of commitment problems. Although these traits are not unique to golf, they are important to golf. Similarly, leadership requires commitment to be effective and many forms of support are available, if the need is detected (Yukl, 2012).

**Golf as leader development.** Locander and Luechauer (2007) pointed out that golf clinics are increasingly being used to convey the leadership implications of golf principles and philosophies. For example, in 2012, CUNA Training Facility conducted an executive development program called *Learn from the Links: Lessons in Leadership*. This program used golf as a metaphor for leadership and business situations and included topics such as creating a dynamic and productive team, finding calm in stressful situations, and moving through change by having a plan.

Davids and Mickey (1993) further noted that executives and athletes often seem to perform at their peak when the stakes are highest. They argued that executives and top athletes are not that different in that they require similar qualities to be successful. These qualities include ability to concentrate and focus, have ambition and drive, and sustain one's motivation and endurance. All of these competencies are common to golf and leadership.

A program entitled *Golf and I* scheduled for April 13-15, 2014, in Bangalore, India, brought together more than 20 chief executive officers for an experiential development program. Interspersing classroom sessions with several rounds of golf, the workshop explored and connected the game and the way the person leads the organization (Prayag, 2012). The program explored executive skill sets and objectives such as risk taking, skill development, setting individual goals, and learning transferable leadership skills on the course. Human resources practitioners who also play golf facilitated the classroom sessions, while professional golfers analyzed the leader's game on the course. Mr. Ravindra, chief executive officer for the program explained, "Information that the leader would give during the classroom sessions would be used to analyze his or her game and vice-versa," (Prayag, 2012, para. 6).

Although many leader development programs that utilize golf as a metaphor exist, studies on the actual contributions of golfing to leadership development is lacking. This presents a key opportunity for research.

**Summary.** Competitive golfing originated in 13th century Scotland and, since then, has spread throughout the world. Holding oneself accountable to the rules, knowing and mastering the fundamentals, intentionally focusing on the goal, and adapting to changing conditions without succumbing to negativity are central to mastering the game.

Additionally, golf is believed to require and develop certain behavioral and psychological competencies such as concentration, confidence, emotional control, and commitment. Examining the principles, philosophies, and behavioral and psychological ingredients to success in golf reveals the many parallels between the requirements of the game and requirements to be a successful leader. As part of this literature review, many golf clinics were identified being used as tools of leadership development. However no research is available on these programs to demonstrate their effectiveness or outcomes related to this end. This lack points to a substantial gap in the literature.

### **Summary of the Literature**

Today, the game of golf has become considered the game of business: a staggering 90% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers play golf and nearly one quarter of the 25 million golfers in the United States are top management executives. Explanations for golf's popularity among executives include offering networking opportunities and the opportunity to conduct business in a safe, familiar, and comfortable setting (MGT Open, 2012). Examination of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral competencies required by golf, however, reveal many parallels to those competencies required in leadership. Such competencies include a commitment to ethics and holding oneself accountable, mastering the fundamentals, intentionally focusing on the goal, and adapting to changing conditions without succumbing to negativity (Locander & Luechauer, 2007). Golf additionally is believed to develop one's concentration, confidence, emotional control, and commitment. It follows that leaders may become more effective in their leadership if they seek to develop mastery in golfing.

Although there are golf clinics advertised as opportunities for leadership development, research is lacking on the actual contributions of golfing to leadership

development and outcomes of these programs. Given the apparent overlaps between golf and leadership principles, further examining these linkages presents a key opportunity for research. Examining this linkage was the focus of the present study. The next chapter describes the methods that were used in this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to examine executives' subjective experiences playing golf and identify what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. Three research questions were defined:

1. What shifts in leadership thinking and behavior do executives attribute to playing golf?
2. What personal and leadership outcomes do executive leaders attribute to playing golf?
3. What is the perceived applicability of learning golf as a means for leadership development?

This study used a qualitative research interviewing approach as described by Kvale (1996). The strength of qualitative studies is that they produce both a depth of insights about the phenomena being studied and also are highly effective for exploratory studies. Participants' interview responses can provide the rationale for additional explanations to deepen the researcher's understanding of the quantitative survey data (Creswell, 2009). Drawbacks of qualitative approaches include the inability to produce generalizable results and the subjective nature of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

This chapter describes the methods used in this study. Procedures related to sampling are described first, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations, and the steps of data collection and analysis. The chapter closes with a summary.

#### **Sampling Procedures**

Traditionally, qualitative studies draw small samples to promote in-depth examination of the phenomena being examined. Qualitative research focuses on

exploring a wide range of variables in-depth using a small set of participants (Creswell, 2009). Although the rule of thumb in sampling is to recruit as many participants as necessary to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996), no hard and fast rules govern appropriate sampling sizes qualitative research. The sample size for this study was 20 leaders.

Convenience and snowball sampling strategies were used to locate participants. Convenience sampling involves identifying study candidates through the researcher's personal and professional networks. Snowball sampling involves asking participants to recommend more study candidates (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

Sampling began with the researcher making a list of her colleagues and golf acquaintances who satisfied the following criteria for participation:

1. The individual has held a C-suite position (senior vice president or above) for at least 1 year. This criterion assured that the participant is an executive leader who has had sufficient experience in the position to comment on possible parallels between golf and leadership.
2. The individual has played golf for at least 6 months to 1 year (equivalent to golfing a minimum of 24 times). This criterion assured that the participant has engaged with the game of golf to a sufficient extent to have had exposure to its principles and insights about how golf may apply to leadership.

Potential participants were then contacted in person, by telephone, or by email (see Appendix A) to describe the study, the nature of participation, the type of participants sought, and to invite them to participate in the survey. These individuals also were asked to suggest additional possible study candidates.

All recruitment occurred through one-on-one communication solely through personal relationships. Potential participants were not contacted at or through any particular business or golfing organization. Therefore, it was not necessary or possible to

seek permission from any particular organization or setting related to participant recruitment.

Candidates who expressed interest were contacted to schedule a telephone interview time. Semi-structured interviews were used to assure that relevant data would be gathered while allowing flexibility in the conversations as needed according to the unique dialogue with each participant (Robson, 2002). Telephone interviews were used because the participants were geographically dispersed. Interviews were conducted one-on-one by telephone and lasted approximately 1 hour each. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed for later analysis. Each participant was sent a consent form (see Appendix B) by email and asked to return a signed copy on or before the interview date.

The 20 participants in this study were from a range of industries, including professional services (n = 4), sports and entertainment (n = 4), technology (n = 3), energy and utilities (n = 3), and others (see Table 2). Participants reported their current leadership role as being director, vice chairman, or vice president level (n = 9); chief executive (n = 8); or president (n = 3). Participants had played the game of golf for varying lengths of time, with 18 of the 20 participants having played 10 or more years.

**Table 2**

***Participant Demographics***

Industry	Current Leadership Role	Length of time golfing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Services (4)</li> <li>• Sports and Entertainment (4)</li> <li>• Technology (3)</li> <li>• Energy and utilities (3)</li> <li>• Industrials (2)</li> <li>• Financials (2)</li> <li>• Nonprofit (1)</li> <li>• Education (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director, vice chairman, or vice president level (9)</li> <li>• Chief executive (8)</li> <li>• President (3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-9 years (2)</li> <li>• 10-19 years (6)</li> <li>• 20-29 years (5)</li> <li>• 30+ years (7)</li> </ul>

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The interview script presented in Appendix C was used to guide the interviews. At the start of the interview, the study purpose was reintroduced and reiterated the confidential and voluntary nature of the participation. They were aware that they could omit answers to any question and could drop out at any time for any reason without penalty. The interview consisted of 18 questions designed to gather in-depth information about the impacts golf has had on participants' lives and their views regarding the use of golf for the purpose of leader development.

The interview began with the statement "I want to begin by asking you a few basic questions about golf," followed by four warm-up questions to ease participant into the interview. Questions gathered data related to the participants' golf game. For example, Question 3 was, "What is your favorite thing about golfing?"

After stating, "Now I would like to turn the focus of our discussion to the context of your role as an executive leader," seven questions were posed about the participant's leadership role and the impact of golf on their leadership. For example, Question 7 was, "Can you think of a particular example in which you may have (consciously or subconsciously) drawn from your golf experience to inform your thinking or behavior as a leader?" Participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible. Subsequent questions probed for additional information about specific personal and professional effects they might have experienced as a result of golfing. The researcher also probed for both negative and positive impacts. Finally, the participant was asked to describe any specific outcomes in their work that they attributed to their exposure to golf. Prompts and probes were used to elicit rich data.

The third set of questions examined participants' views regarding the use of golf as a leader development tool. For example, Question 12 was, "When you reflect on the impacts golf has had on your work and your life, what are your thoughts about using golf as a tool for leadership development?"

The fourth set of questions inquired about the impact of golf on participants' lives outside of work. For example, Question 17 was, "As you reflect on your golfing experience, in what ways (if any) do you believe your exposure to the game has influenced your life outside of work?" The final question in the interview was, "Is there anything else you would like to add that would be helpful to this study?"

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Content analysis as described by Miles et al. (2013) was used to examine the qualitative data. The following steps were followed:

1. The researcher read through each transcript several times to confirm their accuracy and become familiar with the general nature of the responses.
2. The first round of coding focused on identifying the main ideas present in each block of text (meaning unit). A meaning unit represents a block of text (e.g., a single word, a phrase, or an entire paragraph) that reflects one cohesive idea.
3. After the initial round of coding was completed, the data were reorganized as needed and then reviewed to group like codes, split out large categories into smaller categories, and reorganized data again as needed.
4. When the coding was complete and the wording and hierarchy of the codes adequately reflected the data, the number of participants reporting each theme was determined.
5. As a final step, the analysis was reviewed by a second rater who examined the analysis and identified any perceived errors. Interrater reliability was assessed as the quotient based on the number of codes in agreement (based on the researcher and second rater review) divided by the total number of codes. Disagreements were discussed and resolved until the goal of interrater agreement of 0.80 was reached.

**Summary**

This study used a qualitative design. Twenty executive leaders volunteered to be interviewed to examine the impact of golf on executive leadership and evaluate its use as a tool for leader development. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was applied to the data. The next chapter reports the results of the study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to examine executives' subjective experiences playing golf and identify what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. Three research questions were defined:

1. What shifts in leadership thinking and behavior do executives attribute to playing golf?
2. What personal and leadership outcomes do executive leaders attribute to playing golf?
3. What is the perceived applicability of learning golf as a means for leadership development?

This chapter reports the results of the study. The perceived impacts of golfing on leadership, gathered in support of Research Question 1, are presented first. The second section reports the skills and attitudes participants believe they developed through golf, in support of Research Question 2. Next, participants' views regarding the applicability of golf as a tool for leadership development as well as for other purposes are reported, in answer to Research Question 3. Additional, unanticipated findings that emerged are then reported. The chapter closes with a summary. Pseudonyms have been used to facilitate the reporting of the data in this chapter.

#### **Impacts on Leadership**

Nineteen of the 20 participants reported that they do reflect on their golf game, including thinking about how to master the game (n = 15); thinking about their enjoyment, success, and the rewards of golf (n = 8); the challenge and commitment required in golfing (n = 6); and golf as a metaphor for life (n = 6).

Seventeen of the 20 participants reported that golf has had a strong impact on the way they think and act as leaders, as well as the quality of their leadership (see Table 3). Two participants stated it had an impact “without a doubt,” and Simon shared, “Yes, golf definitely affected my career.” Despite the many affirmative responses, Jackson contended that he found “value to an extent” regarding golf’s impact on leadership, and two participants saw little or no impact. Ivan explained, “I think while I am golfing there are things that I can discover about myself which are useful, but I wouldn’t say it guides me.”

Many participants were enthusiastic in stating that golf had made them better leaders because of the impact on their leadership thoughts and behaviors. Patrick claimed, “I can absolutely say that playing golf has made me a better leader.” Three leaders responded, in contrast, that golf’s impact on their leadership is no greater than the impact of anything else. Sharon elaborated, “I think all your life experiences make you a better leader.” The next section outlines the specific skills and attitudes participants believe they developed through playing golf.

**Table 3**

*Impacts on Leadership*

Impact	n
Impact on thoughts and behaviors as a leader	
Strong impact	17
Little or no impact	3
Impact on the quality of my leadership	
It has made me a better leader	17
Impact of golf is no greater than impact of anything else	3

*N* = 20

## Skills and Attitudes Developed

*Attitudes*, meaning participants' way of feeling and thinking about things; *approaches*, meaning participants' way of dealing with their experiences; and *skills*, meaning a learned power to do something competently were identified in this group of data. For example, *attitude* would reflect the participant's overarching feelings and thoughts about something, *approach* would reflect how they deal with that thing, and *skill* would reflect what they do regarding that thing.

The leaders interviewed revealed that their participation in golf contributed to the development of particular approaches to leadership (see Table 4). Participants most frequently cited perseverance, meaning steady persistence in a course of action and the tendency to continue trying to do something even though it is difficult, as the leadership approach developed through playing golf (n = 13). Paul explained how perseverance, required on the golf course, transfers to the workplace:

You have to grind it out. There are good days and bad days, when you say I will be happy to be over this round. I have never quit in a round. Golf reinforces that. You cannot quit at work; you come back another day.

**Table 4**

### *Approaches Developed*

Approach	n
Perseverance	13
Deliberation and patience	10
Adapt to situations as they are	10
Ethics and integrity	7
Strategic and visionary	4
Work hard	3
Take action	1

*N* = 20

Jason similarly described the parallels between work and golf and the need for perseverance:

[If] I had to name one thing golf helps me with it's persistence. . . . I think the key to be secure in this industry is persistence and I think golf teaches you persistence and teaches you to stay in there. . . . [In] golf [without] correcting your mistakes and moving forward, your golf will never get any better and if you don't do the same thing in business and press forward, your business will never get any better.

Deliberation, the tendency to be careful and assuring one's actions are well thought out, and patience, meaning the tendency to bear provocation or misfortune without complaint, was another common theme (n = 10). Antonio stated, "I am now more patient, more deliberate [thanks to playing golf]." He elaborated, "The game of golf has taught me that when faced with a challenge, don't just do what seems obvious. Spend some time thinking about the end result that you really desire and select your club." Garrison provided a golf analogy for approaching a new task, offering, "If you are reckless off the tee, you will be scrambling to recover. If you are diligent off the tee, the outcomes are better." Jason added, "Golf has taught me patience. I think to be a leader you have to have patience, you have to listen."

A third common theme was adapting to situations as they are (n = 10).

Participants explained that in golf, the ball may land in advantageous positions (e.g., on the green) or in highly challenging positions (e.g., in a sand trap, in tall grass). Moreover, the ball must be played from where it lands. This requires the player to assess the current conditions, evaluate alternatives, and select appropriate action. Jason explained,

From playing golf, I learned that whatever condition the ball is in, your job is to move it forward. . . . Everything is more crystallized moving forward, because of knowing that you have played it where it lies, not where you'd like it to be.

Similarly, Garrison emphasized that the changing conditions a player is presented with in golf requires acceptance and adaptability:

Golf is both a journey and a destination. The destination is about an efficient outcome. The journey is filled with adaptability. . . . At all times, going forward, even though forward sometimes is like going backwards. Plan, but accept and adapt to situations as they unfold.

Yet another commonly mentioned theme was ethics and integrity (n = 7), which participants emphasized as being important both on and off the golf course. Jason shared,

The game teaches you ethics. The game teaches you honesty, because there's always opportunities to do what's not right in golf and you chose to do what's right. If you choose to do what's right in golf then you always choose what's right in your life.

Similarly, many of the participants referred to the “self-policing” that happens in golf. Kerry stated, “I often reflect on how golf demands the highest integrity of each individual who participates—self-policing in regards to the rules of golf.” Paul stated, “Stay true to the spirit of the sport and this applies to business as well. Take responsibility for yourself. It is about yourself. You penalize yourself; there is no referee.”

Interview participants then were asked about golf's influence on their attitudes as leaders (see Table 5). The most common theme was the importance of keeping everything in perspective and maintaining a positive outlook (n = 8). Maintaining perspective in business was linked explicitly to golf by Jason, who said,

Golf is life. You have ups, downs, and it is just like life. In life no matter how successful you are, you will always have ups and downs. And the key in golf is not to get carried away with the good or the bad. And the key in business is not getting carried away with good or the bad, but just to persist.

This also suggests having a process versus an outcome orientation, meaning it is important to focus on the process of accomplishing something rather than simply on the outcomes achieved. Other attitudes participants believed golf helped cultivate included focus (n = 4), staying present (n = 3), humility (n = 2), and reflectiveness (n = 2).

**Table 5*****Attitudes Developed***

Attitude	n
Maintaining perspective and a positive outlook	8
Maintaining focus	4
Staying Present	3
Having humility	2
Being reflective	2

*N* = 20

Participants also described the task-related, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills developed through playing golf (see Table 6). The most commonly reported task-related skill was the importance of planning ahead, being prepared, and practicing (*n* = 5). Carter noted that these skills are “essential for golf, essential for leadership. Default rapidly takes over, unless you practice and continuously generate. If you are aware of your default in golf, you are aware of your default in leading.” Patrick stated simply that golf contributes to his “building the value of practice.” Participants also mentioned golf’s influence on their artful execution of tasks (*n* = 3), and time management (*n* = 2).

**Table 6*****Skills Developed***

Skills Developed	n
Task-related skills	
Planning, practice, and preparation	5
Artful execution	3
Time management	2
Interpersonal skills	
Managing and interacting effectively with others	8
Appreciate diversity	2
Intrapersonal skills and attitudes	
Managing one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors	12
Self-confidence	10
Self-acceptance	5
Self-awareness	4

*N* = 20

Participants also stated that golf helped develop interpersonal skills, specifically managing and interacting effectively with others (n = 8) and appreciating diversity (n = 2). Jensen shared,

The skills I have to develop are that I should care about other golfers too, spend more time finding their balls than mine. So in a sense team work and awareness, sense of camaraderie and relationships with somebody else whether I know them or not.

Similarly, Paul illustrated how caring about others carry across golf and leadership:

[Golf] reinforces a sense of selflessness. You want other people to do well. I hate losing and I love winning; but I want others to do well and that is how I manage my team—caring for others and wanting to see and bring out the best in each other . . . This is how I manage people. I don't expect them to shoot par every day, but I expect them to show up every day and do their best!

Participants also discussed intrapersonal skills, notably managing one's own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (n = 12). One self-management skill participants mentioned was discipline. Garrison pointed out that golf cultivates a mental discipline that influences the whole person. Jackson added that self-management and discipline are reflected in the etiquette of the game, meaning the rules governing how the game is played:

To play golf in accordance with the etiquette that is required, you must have discipline, you have to be able to manage mistakes, disappointments, frustrations and unlucky moments in a way that is calm, professional and polite and that makes other players feel good about being with you all the time. In that part, that requires discipline. And I think that discipline is applied and used in an abstract way in everything I do.

Self-confidence, mentioned by 10 participants, was reflected in Danielle's story of having to share an opinion she knows will be unpopular with her colleagues and supervisors:

A lot of it goes against the grain of the group, as I am the youngest member and only female. My mind has a lot to say about how this is going to go and should I

even be bringing up ideas. The practice of being present in golf has helped me to do this. Golf has built that mechanism of, “Okay, let’s just do this shot.”

Jason related the self-confidence golf has given him in all aspects of his life:

Golf has shown me that I can do things that I (thought I) can’t do . . . Because I can shoot two rounds under 75, on par 72 and 68 courses, to be able to be a medalist one year with my wife, it showed me that I can do almost anything with Gold’s help. It’s been a total blessing for my life.

Other intrapersonal skills cultivated through golf include self-acceptance (n = 5) and self-awareness (n = 4).

Finally, participants described the personal and professional outcomes they achieved through playing golf (see Table 7). Professionally, golf is a strong networking tool and business opportunities often emerge on the golf course or as a result of a connection made through golf (n = 6). Antonio explained, “Most of my business deals right now are done on the golf course. Most of these deals are achieved by playing with other chief executives.” Patrick added, “Golf provides great networking. It provides wonderful opportunities to gain access to customers and other policy makers who affect our work.”

**Table 7**

***Outcomes Achieved***

Professional outcomes	n
More business opportunities due to strengthened relationships	6
Recognized as high potential employee	2
Personal and professional outcomes	
Strong relationships	15
Exposes players’ character	10
Time for reflection, mental clarity	2
Personal outcomes	
Enhanced well-being	15
Social time	12
Enjoying the outdoors	10
Sense of accomplishment	4

N = 20

Both professionally and personally, participants noted that golf enables them to develop strong relationships with others (n = 15), largely because they get to know the character of those they play with (n = 10). Kerry elaborated,

Doing technology start ups and working closely with sales team members and also many, many customers who play golf and do business while golfing has allowed me to show who I am as a person to people who would like to know if I am trustworthy and a nice person to do business with. Have been able to show warm hospitality, good manners, etiquette, and an ability to be emotionally resilient when things are not going my way.

Paul added,

Golf has created some great friendships. Professionally, it helped me develop some strong business and personal relationships. My wife and I have social friends and a network who are golfers. . . . A significant percentage of my personal friends I golf with and I know an awful lot about them because I spend five hours each time. You don't talk about golf, you talk about life.

Sharon talked of the professional relationships that became personal relationships through golf. She said,

Certainly it's affected my life in a positive way. It's a great activity when you are together playing golf and you meet a lot of people through golf . . . I have a number of good friends that I met in my professional world and they are my personal friends now. I have been playing golf with them, most of them corporate golf, business golf, and meetings. One of the outcomes you have is relationships with people, and many of them are very rewarding. You have a deeper relationship.

Fifteen participants additionally noted the enhanced personal well-being. Antonio referred to golf as "therapeutic," and Patrick contended that it "helps [him] relax." Jensen called it "physical meditation," leading to an "expression of physical joy." Simon claimed, "I feel self-expressed, joyful, satisfied" through golf. The exercise and physical fitness from golf are valuable for Paul's leadership. He stated,

It functions to help keep me physically fit. I walk a lot and I believe part of being a good leader is being physically fit. I function at a higher level because I can walk 6 to 7 miles and I can clear my head and better prepared for new challenges.

Several participants noted they enjoy the time spent with others (n = 12). Kerry shared, “It has given me and my spouse and our friends a great activity we can do together at home and when we travel.” Golf is important to Jin and his family as well. He explained, “I didn’t teach my daughters golf because it can help them in the future. I simply did so that we can spend time together.” Similarly, Sharon stated,

Golf has been a great family activity. We spend a lot of time playing golf together. I also played golf over the year with my sister and her husband on a regular basis. It’s something you do together and you look forward to it and now my other kids play. If everybody is kind of into it, then it is very fun.

Enjoying the outdoors is a third benefit of golf to the interview participants (n = 10). Keith reflected, “It is great being outdoors on a nice beautiful day. Green grass, nothing between you and green. It’s just you and Mother Nature.” Some of the participants linked their enjoyment of the outdoors to the other personal benefits they get from golf. Jackson connected it to his sense of wellness, saying, “It’s a nice way of getting out and going things outside of an office, to be outdoors. It’s a great thing to be outside and relax and not think about other things that invade my thoughts.” Carter enthusiastically connected it to the social and physical benefits, offering, “I get great exercise, enjoy the great outdoors, meet truly fabulous people, and have a ton of fun! I love the fresh air. I love walking on the course.”

### **Applications**

The interview participants were overwhelmingly affirmative when asked for their thoughts about using golf as a tool for leadership development (n = 19, see Table 8). While Patrick simply stated, “It does have an implication from a leadership standpoint” and Kerry added, “I can’t think of anything negative that would come from this idea,” other participants were expansive on this topic. Carter, for example, stated,

Golf is wonderfully instructive and a rich opportunity for self-discovery and personal growth and development. Also of great importance and personal value is my continuing inquiry: What does bringing leadership to this golf game (or practice) look like? Am I bringing leadership to my golf today? . . . Golf is a *laboratory* for leadership development. It is not simply drawing on a golf experience to instruct someone about a leadership challenge.

Paul added,

Sports are a good tool for leadership development. Golf encompasses a lot of things to be developed in people, specifically life lessons, self-efficiency, and individual accountability for outcomes (you cannot blame it on the caddie or someone else). These skills are transferable to real world matters. Lots of life lessons that are important for good, strong, successful leaders.

Garrison was specific about what should be taught regarding golf and leadership. “It would be prudent to use this as a tool to really roll out the principles. You learn from the skills but also the history and the principles of golf. For example, fair play, etiquette, honesty, and self-regulation.” Joe was skeptical, however, about the adoption of golf as a leadership development tool. He contended, ““The biggest challenge to this line of thinking is the predominant culture of golf in the US. I imagine the percentage of golfers for whom this would resonate is low, a small minority.”

**Table 8**

***Applications for Leadership Development***

Implications for Leadership Development	n
Yes	19
No answer	1
Interest in golf as leadership development	
Yes	17
Possibly	3
Suggested golf to others as a means for leadership development	
Yes	12
No*	8

\*Two of these individuals reported that others have to be interested in golf for it to be effective; additionally, many who have not suggested golf to others in the past realized that they now would do so

Regarding whether or not they personally saw value in a program that explicitly combined golf and leadership development, they were mostly positive (n = 17). Antonio responded, “Yes I will support having such type of program” while Carter replied, “You betcha! I want to lead it. It has been a desire of mine for 10 years or so, and have not yet created the opportunity.” Three participants were uncertain of whether they would support such a program. Mark, for example, was supportive, although he warned of the negatives of such an initiative. He explained, “I am worried about the exclusion. It could create a culture of, ‘You’ve got to be a golfer there,’ that kind of thing.”

Twelve of the 20 participants reported that they had already recommended golf to others as a leadership development tool. Paul shared, “I have encouraged a few up and coming folks to take up golf and most have benefitted.” Jin shared, “I remember I did a panel on minority women on a career path. I remember saying my advice was to play golf and they thought I was cracking a joke. I said that I was actually serious.” Antonio said, “I suggest people to come play golf, because it helps networking with people and time management.” Similarly, Mark reported, “I have suggested it as a means to relationship building, but not leadership.” Of the participants who had not recommended golf to others for leadership development, two suggested that people need to discover the game on their own. Jackson stated, “Golf is a tough sport. You have to find it, find what you like on your own.”

The leaders interviewed in this study saw value in golf not only for work but for many areas of life (see Table 9). They saw playing golf as a way for an individual to continuously challenge himself and to engage in continuous personal growth and development (n = 13). Ivan said of growth and development through golf,

You get immediate feedback in the game and I really appreciate that. . . . For me, golf really can be an area of development. Through it, I am continuing to grow, develop, and discover new things about myself, and that influences my life. It's something that I can come home and show my wife. So, for me, it becomes a real life enhancer.

**Table 9**

*General Applications*

Application	n
Continuous, life-changing growth and development	13
Adaptable training tool	10
Team building	9
Relationship building	9

*N* = 20

Simon discussed the transformative aspects of golf from his viewpoint as a golf instructor. He shared, "I coached individual lessons for a long time. Those lessons were about how to make people better and then it changed to how people can learn more rapidly, and then it changed more into how they can transform themselves." Danielle provided the anecdote, "We have lots of guys who come join our coaching program. They go back home and their wife says, 'Start another golf school,' because they recognize their husband is a better person." Keith talked of personally challenging oneself in golf, saying, "The competition [is important] and competition doesn't necessarily mean against another person."

Participants additionally pointed out that golf can be useful not only for leadership development, but that it can be adapted for nearly any training purpose, because the skills and attitudes it requires (and develops) can be transferable to other aspects of life and work. Whereas Patrick commented, "I think there are a lot of different things that we can do with it," Paul elaborated,

The game can be picked up at any age and is applicable to anyone who wants to develop skills and principles that can guide their lives. You do not have to be

great at it, you can just be okay. Whether you shoot 120 or 72, the experience and all the things you can learn are the same. It is applicable to a broad scope of people.

Kerry added, “The way [one golf program] sets up “skills” and “challenges” to test your skill, emotional resiliency and strategic thinking about risk-taking and how to think your way around the course, not just hit your way around the course.

Other training applications of golf, according to participants, include team building (n = 9) and relationship building (n = 9). Stuart offered that golf would be a good way “to expose a relatively tight group of compatriots, and see how they adapt to it. . . . Get a group together saying, ‘Okay we just played it. How do we all feel? What would we have done differently?’” Jackson added that golf can be particularly good for a multinational or multilingual teams because all players operate according to a common set of rules.

### **Other Findings**

When offered the opportunity to share any other thoughts about golf as it relates to executive leadership, including any negative considerations, participants touched on a range of issues (see Table 10). Ten participants commented that a downside is its time-consuming nature. Brendan commented,

My least favorite thing about golf is the length of time I am there. I always say, “Who made this 18 holes?” It should be 12 or 13. I think from a business perspective it’s a problem. So very few people will go out and play golf, even if they do it on a nice course or it’s an event. It’s a distraction and they experience some scrutiny in taking that amount of time away. It’s hard to take people out to play golf, because of the amount of time it takes.

**Table 10*****Other Findings***

Finding	n
Drawbacks and challenges of golf	
Golf is too time intensive	10
Others' poor behavior is a downside	4
Self-disappointment is a downside	4
Accessibility to golf can be an issue	1
Inclement weather can be an issue	1
Recommendations and other comments	
Golf as leadership development is an exciting concept	7
Need to figure out how to engage non-players	2
Part of learning golf must include learning its history and fundamentals	2

*N* = 20

Jackson added,

People with home demands, work demands, with kids, they just say, "I don't have time. I can't do that." They don't practice. It's not fun when they go out. We need to find ways to make playing golf a shorter activity, more accessible to people who are beginners, so you can get more people out there. Golf takes too long to do.

The length of time golf takes is further compounded by encountering slow groups of players on the course. Several participants commented that although they are fast players themselves, they commonly run into "jams" on the course and then have to "stand around and wait." Another drawback mentioned was others' poor behavior (*n* = 4), such as losing composure, exhibiting poor sportsmanship and ethics, or being too serious or too competitive. Four participants also voiced frustration with themselves, such as not performing as well as they knew they could.

Other participants offered recommendations and other assorted comments. Seven participants voiced their excitement about the idea of golf as a tool for leadership development and their interest in the present study's results, with one suggesting that future research should compare the leadership of golfers and non-golfers. Two people

considered the challenge of engaging non-golfers in the sport and how that could be overcome. Two participants advised that any instruction in golf must include learning about its history and principles.

### **Summary**

Twenty executive leaders from a range of industries who had been playing golf for at least 4 years were interviewed about playing golf, including its impacts on leadership, skills and attitudes developed through it, its applications, and other findings.

The majority of executives interviewed reported that golf had a strong, beneficial impact on them as leaders. Through golf, they reported developing a range of approaches, attitudes, and skills that enhanced their ability to manage themselves, manage others, and react to changing conditions and that these helped them become more effective leaders in the workplace. Nearly all participants believed golf had implications for leadership development and that they were interested in golf as leadership development. Participants additionally noted that golf had transformative aspects to it and could be adapted to many different training purposes, including team building and relationship building.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine executives' subjective experiences playing golf and identify what they have learned about being leaders from playing the game. Three research questions were defined:

1. What shifts in leadership thinking and behavior do executives attribute to playing golf?
2. What personal and leadership outcomes do executive leaders attribute to playing golf?
3. What is the perceived applicability of learning golf as a means for leadership development?

This chapter provides a discussion of the study findings. Conclusions are provided first, followed by recommendations. Limitations of the study are then acknowledged and suggestions for continued research are offered. The chapter closes with a summary.

### Conclusions

This section outlines the key findings and conclusions emerging from the study. Key findings are organized by research question.

**Shifts in leadership thinking and behavior.** Most of the executives interviewed in this study believed that playing golf had a strong impact on their thoughts and behaviors as leaders, with several participants emphasizing that golf made them better leaders. The participants reported developing a range of approaches, attitudes, and skills that enhanced their ability to manage themselves, manage others, and react to changing conditions and that these helped them become more effective leaders in the workplace. Some of the most commonly cited approaches included perseverance, deliberation and patience, and adaptability. Similarly, Price (2009) and Puterbaugh (2012) stressed the

importance of perseverance in their works on golf principles and Tiffan (2011) and Watts (2012) emphasized that executives must persevere in the face of failure. Several resources on golf discussed the need to adapt to changing conditions (Amster et al., 1999; De la Torre, 2001; Locander & Luechauer, 2007; Mecca, 2009; Penick & Love, 2011; Price, 2009) and leadership theorists similarly discussed the need for executives to monitor conditions and their environments and take action accordingly (Northouse, 2012; Tiffan, 2011; Watts, 2012; Yukl, 2012).

Nearly half the participants mentioned they developed the ability to maintain perspective and a positive outlook through golf. Frequently cited skills developed through golf included managing one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; self-confidence; and managing and interacting effectively with others. These effects noted by participants reflected the golf principles and techniques outlined in several available resources on the game (Amster et al., 1999; De la Torre, 2001; The Golf Connection of Palo Alto, 2013; Locander & Luechauer, 2007; McCormack, 1986; Mecca, 2009; Nicklaus & Bowden, 1974; Penick & Love, 2011; Rotella, 2004). Similarly, leadership theorists have outlined key leadership traits as exercising self-discipline and focus and being able to manage and align others (Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012).

Thus, the findings from this study suggest that the participants developed approaches, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with those reflected in the available articles and books on golf principles and techniques (Amster et al., 1999; de la Torre, 2001; The Golf Connection of Palo Alto, 2013; Hogan & Wind, 1957; Locander & Luechauer, 2007; McCormack, 1986; Mecca, 2009; Nicklaus & Bowden, 1974; Penick & Love, 2011; Price, 2009; Puterbaugh, 2012; Rotella, 2004). More importantly, these approaches, attitudes, and behaviors are consistent with the key leadership traits and

behaviors outlined by theorists such as Bennis (2007), Northouse (2012), Stogdill (1974), Tiffan (2011), Watts (2012), and Yukl (2012). Cultivating these types of skills in leaders and thereby enhancing their effectiveness is the aim of leader development (Groves, 2007; MacKinnon, 2012; McCauley et al., 2010).

**Personal and leadership outcomes of golf.** The study participants reported experiencing professional and personal outcomes as a result of playing golf, most notably strong relationships and enhanced well-being. Improved relationships generally were the result of being able to demonstrate their own personality, character, and values, and getting to know those of others. Simply spending ample quality time with other individuals and discussing each others' lives while playing the game also contributed to the development of these relationships.

They additionally noted that enjoying the social time with others that golf afforded, getting some physical exercise, and enjoying the time outdoors enhanced their well-being. Some participants noted that had they gained business opportunities through playing golf and also enjoyed the sense of accomplishment and time for reflection it gave them.

Although the leadership literature and resources on golf reviewed for this study did not explicitly identify these kinds of outcomes, previous studies have demonstrated a link between psychological well-being and work performance (Wright, Bonett, & Sweeney, 1993; Wright & Bonett, 1997), thus suggesting that the enhanced well-being gained through playing golf may have additional beneficial impacts on leader effectiveness.

Regarding the outcome of strengthened relationships, Northouse (2012) and Yukl (2012) pointed out that key leadership behaviors of inspiring, influencing, and aligning

others are made easier through strong relationships. Moreover, strong workplace relationships have been associated with improved productivity and performance. For example, the body of literature on informal social networks within organizations has suggested that strong relationships (and, specifically, the complex pattern of interconnected relationships throughout the organization) aids the exchange of knowledge, skills, and other resources; helps workers cross formal boundaries; and reduces lengthy response times characterized by formal organizational processes (Athaide & Stump, 1999; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Liedtka, Haskins, Rosenblum, & Weber, 1999; Mintzberg & Van der Heyden, 1999; Smart, Brookes, Lettice, Backhouse, & Burns, 2002).

Another body of related literature concerns leader-member exchange theory, which addresses the social exchanges between leaders and subordinates and how these vary from low to high quality across leader-subordinate dyads (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991, 1995). Low-quality exchanges are characterized by formal role behaviors and low levels of trust, support, and rewards. High-quality exchanges are those where the relationship extends beyond formal roles and reflects high levels of trust, cooperation, and support. Leader-member exchange theory argues that mature leadership relationships promote trust, respect, admiration, subordinate engagement, employee performance, and citizenship behavior within the organization (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Sparrowe, 1994; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Based on the findings of this study, golf supports the development of high-quality exchanges between leaders and members because golf reportedly cultivates relationship building skills.

Although this body of literature focuses primarily on the network of relationships within organizations, the same can be true for the networks of relationships that cross organizational boundaries. Strong relationships have been associated with career advancement (Briggs, Jaramillo, & Weeks, 2012). Thus, the strong relationships gained through playing golf may have further impacts on leader development effectiveness, noted both in the present study's findings and in past literature.

It is additionally noteworthy that participants commented that playing golf exposes each others' characters with an acuity that other experiences and screening processes may not. These findings suggest that golf is a particularly powerful tool for revealing a golfer's integrity, ethics, and self-discipline. Similarly, past authors alleged that a leader's characteristics will become evident through concrete examples from the golfing experience. In sum, golf requires great discipline on the part of the individual to be successful and this requirement is consistent with the foundation of a quality leader. For example, creating a trusted golf swing requires practice and sound fundamentals. Likewise, a leader must not only have a solid base of skill and expertise, but also work in an ongoing manner to improve his or her skills. Moreover, a golfer strategizes and tries to find a way around obstacles and out of hazards in the same way that a leader is expected to be bold and fearless

**Applicability of learning golf for leadership development.** All but one of the 20 participants emphasized that golf has implications for leader development. Additionally, the participants were interested in golf as a tool for leader development and more than half had suggested golf to others for this purpose because of their belief that learning golf would help them develop important leadership qualities and personal values

that would benefit their work and their lives. Other participants added that they suggest it to others because it helps with cultivating networking and time management skills.

Moreover, the eight participants who had not yet suggested it as a leadership tool emphasized that they would suggest it to others after reflecting on its powerful impacts. Additionally, several participants had already thought about the parallels between golf and leadership and expressed their excitement about the present study.

Based on the present study's findings, three conclusions are evident. First, those who play golf perceive it to have had a positive impact on their development as a leader in ways consistent with the aims of leader development. This conclusion is understandable, as ongoing exposure and ability to practice a skill allows one to continually improve, refine, and master a set of skills. Moreover, as noted by many participants, every day at the golf course is like every day at work: Although they show up to the same job (whether it is completing the same 18 holes they have done many times before, or it is showing up to the workplace), each day brings new and varied challenges. Just like the golf course, the workplace is subject to many influences, planned and unplanned. The golf course is subject to rain, wind, movement of tees, pin placement on the green, aeration of the soil, animals' tracks, and disturbances by people. Similarly, the workplace and the content of one's work is subject to various factors such as stock price surges, client complaints, tragedy, brand degradation, and more. Whether on the golf course or in the workplace, the leader must contend with anticipated and unanticipated highs and lows in any given day. This requires them to develop mastery in handling diverse, unplanned volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments.

Second, the outcomes that players report as a result of playing golf have some potential implications for leader development. These include cultivating and utilizing

emotional intelligence, integrity, and wisdom. Whether in the workplace or on the golf course, the leader must identify, evaluate, and select the best alternatives for present challenges. This includes assessing the risk and rewards of various options; being nimble, yet deliberate; and practicing both humility and political savvy. The confidence it develops and the arena it enables where like minded executives, facing similar challenges on course as in workplace, can play and learn together.

Third, executives who play golf recognize and support the use of golf for leader development. Thus, the evidence is quite compelling that golf may be an effective tool for this purpose. It is not surprising that nearly all the participants supported the use of golf for leader development. They have seen and are forced to acknowledge their own and their peers' development and success. After all, they make up the top percentile of pay, influence, and political clout.

What remains unknown about the use of golf for leadership development is whether golf has this positive impact for everyone. Additionally, it is unclear how frequently someone needs to play golf and over what duration (in hours per outing and in years) to experience these effects. Determining these parameters would be the focus of future research.

Nevertheless, these findings have important implications for organizations, leaders and aspiring leaders, the golf industry, and organization development professionals. Importantly, the game of golf appears to be effective in cultivating a leadership ethos that can be difficult to train in other ways, particularly through classroom or other traditional forms of training. Organizations wishing to enhance leadership performance may encourage leaders to play golf through subsidizing golf club memberships or otherwise encouraging leaders to play the game. The leader development

aspects of playing golf also has implications for current and aspiring organizational leaders in that people who want to sharpen their leadership competencies or move up in the organization may learn golf to increase their skills. Instructional designers and organization development professionals might work to pair golf with leader development to design and deliver innovative, effective methods for cultivating leadership attitudes and behaviors.

Overall, the findings from this study indicate that golf has a beneficial impact on executives' leadership attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

### **Implications**

The study findings have several practical implications for organizations, leaders and aspiring leaders, the golf industry and golf professionals, and organization development practitioners. Organizations that want to develop leaders throughout the company may want to encourage employees to learn the game of golf, given that it appears to cultivate qualities of leadership that can be difficult to train in other ways. The organization may subsidize this pursuit in the form of reimbursing golf club memberships or hosting company or leadership golf outings. Alternately, the organization may offer more cost-effective options, such as offering a free lunchtime golf clinic once a week, offering select team-building exercises, or partnering with one or more golf instructors who offer employees lessons.

Playing golf also may be used as a diagnostic tool, both during leader selection, to aid in identifying whether candidates possess needed skills and abilities, and during leader development, to aid in assessing leaders' competencies. For example, in addition to (or instead of) having a meal together as part of the interview process, playing golf

together may be a better gauge of a candidate's fit with the organization and of his or her current leadership competencies. Even if the individual does not golf, the game has built-in features that enable novice players, including those who have never played, to play with more experienced players. If the individual has some limitation that prevents him or her from playing golf, then this part of the process would be eliminated and replaced with having the meal together, as in traditional interview processes.

Leaders wishing to enhance their own performance may opt to dedicate some time each week to playing the game. The leader development aspects of playing golf also has implications for current and aspiring organizational leaders. Namely, those who want to sharpen their leadership competencies or prepare for a move up in the organization may learn golf to increase their skills. Playing golf may be a particularly suitable option for those who wish to develop their leadership but who cannot afford the time or expense of other types of leader development, who have not been offered leader development programs at the workplace, and those who would like have but have not found a mentor. Although playing 18 holes of golf can take substantial time, especially for a beginning golfer, the benefits of golf can be gained even by playing four holes, nine holes, or even by simply renting a bucket of golf balls at the course and practicing one's swing.

Instructional designers and organization development professionals might work to pair golf with leader development to design and deliver innovative, effective methods for cultivating leadership attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, Kirkpatrick (1994) noted that transfer of training is heightened when participants enjoy the training. Given that the present study participants noted their immense enjoyment of golf, it is likely that knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained from a golf seminar may be retained and may transfer more readily to the workplace than those learned in other forms of training.

Developing leader and personal development programs using golf may further enable golf professionals and organization development professionals to refine their brand or offer unique services to previously untapped markets, including lower income individuals, individuals without college degrees, women, and minorities.

The findings from this study also hold important implications for developing the leadership pipeline. That is, if instituted early in an employee's career, their leadership traits and competencies could be steadily built over the course of their careers so that when leadership roles become available, they are ready to step into those shoes. Tichy, Harkins, and Pitt (2010) urged that chief executives and senior leaders revisit their leadership pipeline and development initiatives and take a more proactive stance in developing and measuring the effectiveness of these pipelines in order to make the leadership development effort more effective and efficient in terms of time and cost. Tichy et al. also urged organizations to increase the number of leaders within the leadership pipeline and confirm that the right people are being developed for the right reasons. Based on the findings of this study, instituting golf as means for developing the leadership pipeline is effective, scalable, and cost and time efficient.

No data were gathered regarding a design for a leadership development framework, nor did this study utilize a research design that lent itself to theory or model building. However, the researcher does suggest a 2-day experiential training design for leadership development that utilizes golf (see Table 11). This kind of experiential training is called *moneyball*. Leaders are strategically divided into teams and each team picks (or is assigned a particular leadership or sales topic on which to focus). Teams are then encouraged to think outside the box and be open to new perspectives that emerge while

playing golf. Insights that emerged while playing golf are then discussed over meals or during the debrief sessions.

**Table 11**

***Proposed Design for Golf-Based Leadership Training***

Timing	Topic
Day 1	
9:00-12:00	Introduce golf basics and two key leadership concepts and models that will be focused on during the workshop.
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-4:00	Golf outing (4-9 holes), focusing on one of the designated leadership concepts
Day 2	
9:00-12:00	Golf outing (4-9 holes), focusing on the other designated leadership concept
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-4:00	Debrief, reflecting on learning, creating intentions and action plans

**Limitations**

Three limitations affected this study: small sample size, self-reported data and researcher bias, and lack of data collection about needed golfing tenure to achieve results. First, this study relied upon a relatively small sample size of 20 leaders. Therefore, these findings cannot be considered generalizable to the total population of golfers and executive leaders. Future studies should aim to draw far larger, more representative samples of executive leaders who golf to produce such results. Future studies might utilize a quantitative survey based on the present study's findings to measure the extent to which executive leaders believe they have developed the approaches, attitudes, and behaviors identified in the present study through golf.

A second limitation concerns the use of self-reported data and researcher bias. Self-reported data are known to be subject to various weaknesses, such as hypothesis guessing, socially desirable answering, faking bad, faking good, and simple distortion. Future studies could utilize 360-degree assessments based on data from participants' peers, subordinates, and other stakeholders to reach a more valid and reliable assessment of their skills and attitudes. Other options could include gathering performance data, utilizing a control group, or comparing the development of non-golfing executives who start playing golf compared to the development of other executives who learn other sports. Additionally, the researcher is a strong advocate for golf and its use in leader development. Therefore, it is possible that she subconsciously influenced the participants to provide likeminded answers or that she subconsciously analyzed, reported, and interpreted the data in a biased manner. This type of bias was controlled through the use of a second rater who does not golf. Future studies should continue to make use of controls to enhance the validity and reliability of the results.

The present study also relied upon a sample of experienced golfers—most had played golf for 10 years or more. The study did not gather data regarding how frequently someone needs to play golf and over what duration (in hours per outing and in years) to experience the effects reported in this study. Future studies should be conducted using golfers who are various levels of experience and expertise to determine when the beneficial leadership effects begin to be achieved. Knowing these parameters is important for planning organizational or individual golf-based leader development interventions.

### **Suggestions for Continued Research**

Examination of leadership research (Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2012) and popular golfing resources (Amster et al., 1999; De la Torre, 2001; The Golf Connection of Palo

Alto, 2013; Hogan & Wind, 1957; Locander & Luechauer, 2007; McCormack, 1986; Mecca, 2009; Nicklaus & Bowden, 1974; Penick & Love, 2011; Price, 2009; Puterbaugh, 2012; Rotella, 2004) suggests that a number of transferable leadership competencies may be gained from playing the game. As a result, engaging in the game may represent an effective and affordable way to develop one's leadership—whether one is currently an executive or desires to become one. Despite the parallels that are evident when comparing the body of golfing literature to the body of literature on leadership effectiveness, research on the use of golf as a leader development tool is lacking.

The present study helped to fill that gap. Namely, it gathered data on the leadership lessons players gain through the game and what personal and professional changes and outcomes they believe they have achieved by playing golf. These data have provided needed empirical findings about the utility of golf as a leader development tool, which in turn may lead to more informed decisions about how to incorporate golf into executive development and succession planning.

Although the recommendations emerging from the present study could be adopted at a corporate level, these findings also provide insights for small businesses, nonprofits, and individuals who need to find affordable and effective leader development approaches. Such findings and recommendations are particularly valuable for this population of small businesses and individuals, as formal external training and degree programs often are out of reach for them, although their need to develop effective leadership remains.

Despite the study's contributions, several additional possibilities for research are recommended to continue investigation of the topic. First, a large quantitative study of the impacts of golf for executive leader development could be conducting based on the

present study's results. This follow-on study also should analyze outcomes by various player demographics, such as country club versus non-country club players, gender, ethnicity, nationality, golf competency, golfing frequency, amount of golfing experience, formal education, and other factors to gather additional insights about the factors that enhance golf's impact on leader development.

Second, the present study has suggested that several valued leader development outcomes emerge from playing golf. To confirm this, a sample of executive leaders who golf and those who do not should be drawn and their leadership competencies assessed to determine whether any significant differences exist.

Third, a study that may best isolate the impact of playing golf on leadership competencies and leader development may be one that examines the leadership ability of golf caddies from developing countries. These individuals often have extensive golfing experience and highly developed golfing skills; however, they also typically lack any other qualifications for leadership. If these individuals are found to have highly tuned leadership skills, such a study's results might provide the strongest evidence yet for the power of golf for cultivating leadership abilities.

Fourth, the present study has suggested that playing golf may be a highly effective method for cultivating leaders, as measured in terms of time, cost, and outcomes achieved. To confirm this assertion, studies should be done that compare golf interventions to other leader development interventions using various metrics. The results of this type of study would provide further justification for selecting golf versus other leader development options.

## Summary

Executive leaders hold the most influential roles in organizations; therefore, quality at this level is critical. Given the importance of the leadership role, various researchers and practitioners have sought to design effective ways to enhance leaders' effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities. This practice area is called *leader development*. One innovative approach to leader development that is being increasingly explored is the development of leadership competencies through involvement in sports. Examination of literature on golfing, in particular, reveals several similarities with regard to the competencies required for golf and leadership. The purpose of this study was to examine the ways that playing golf contributes to executives' leader development and identify what executives who golf have learned about being leaders from playing the game.

Twenty executive leaders were interviewed to examine the impact of golf on executive leadership and evaluate its use as a tool for leader development. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was applied to the data.

The majority of executives interviewed reported that golf had a strong, beneficial impact on them as leaders. Through golf, they reported developing a range of approaches, attitudes, and skills that enhanced their ability to manage themselves, manage others, and react to changing conditions and that these helped them become more effective leaders in the workplace. Nearly all participants believed golf had implications for leadership development and they were interested in golf for this purpose. Participants additionally noted that golf had transformative aspects to it and could be adapted to many different training purposes, including team building and relationship building.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that golf is an effective tool for leader development. Leaders and aspiring leaders are advised to begin playing golf as a means for cultivating their own leadership abilities, and organizations are advised to support and subsidize their efforts in doing so. Organization development professionals and the golf industry are advised to take advantage of this opportunity to design and deliver innovative leader development offerings using golf as a tool.

Additional research will further inform and support these various efforts. Namely, large quantitative studies need to be conducted to validate the present study's findings and determine whether the outcomes vary based on player demographics. Additional studies should compare leadership competencies of executives who golf to those executives who do not and assess the leadership competencies of developing world caddies. Finally, golf leader development interventions should be compared to other leader development interventions using various metrics.

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## Appendix A: Study Invitation

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am conducting a study in partial fulfillment of my master's in organization development at Pepperdine University. I am executive leader and an avid golfer. I often find myself applying golf principles to my professional life, which leads me to wonder if other executives who golf have similar views and what their experiences have been regarding the application of golf principles to their leadership.

I am looking for executive leaders who have been in their position and who have played golf regularly for 6 months or more to participate in a 1-hour interview. If you or someone you know fits this description and would be willing to participate, please feel free to contact me by telephone (xxx-xxx-xxxx) or email (xxxxxxx@yahoo.com) to learn more about the study and to schedule an interview time.

Sincerely,

Dawnet Beverley  
MSOD Candidate

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: Dawnet Beverley \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Project: Golf as a Tool for Executive Leader Development

1. I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Dawnet Beverley \_\_\_\_\_ under the direction of Dr. Darren Good \_\_\_\_\_.

2. *The overall research question is:*  
In what ways does playing golf contribute to the executive leader development? \_\_\_\_\_

3. My participation will involve the following:  
A one-on-one 1-hour interview \_\_\_\_\_

4. My participation in the study will be in the duration of 1 hour. The study shall be conducted by telephone or at in-person at my work site.

5. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research are:  
Increase my understanding of my own experience of golf and its impact on my leadership. I also may contribute to increased understanding of the utility of golf for executive leader development \_\_\_\_\_

6. I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. These risks include:  
Possible emotional upset as I recall limitations in my golf game and/or my leadership \_\_\_\_\_

8. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

10. I understand that the investigator(s) and the University will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be

revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.

11. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Darren Good at [contact information omitted] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Doug Leigh, Chair of the Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at [contact information omitted].
12. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
13. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

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Participant's Signature

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Date

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Witness

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Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

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Principal Investigator

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Date

## **Appendix C: Interview**

Thanks for your interest in the study. I am conducting this interview as part of my thesis, in partial fulfillment of my master's in organization development at Pepperdine University. The aim of this research is to learn about your experience playing golf and its potential application at work. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question, at any time, for any reason.

Before we begin, I want to reiterate that your responses will be kept confidential. With your consent, I will audio-record this interview so I can focus on our conversation. The recording will be used only to create notes of our conversation and then it will be erased. Your responses will be recorded and identified by a participant code.

### **Warm-Up Questions**

*I want to begin by asking you a few basic questions about golf. . . .”*

1. How long have you been golfing?
2. Do you regularly reflect on your golf game? If so, what do you think about?
3. What is your favorite thing about golfing?
4. What is your least favorite thing?

### **Golf & Leadership**

“Now I would like to the turn the focus of our discussion to the context of your role as an executive leader . . . .”

5. Tell me a bit about your current leadership position (*for example, where do you work, what do you do, what are some of the biggest challenges you face*)
6. Do you believe that golf guides your thoughts or behaviors as a leader in anyway? If so, how?
7. Can you think of a particular example in which you may have (consciously or subconsciously) drawn from your golf experience to inform your thinking or behavior as a leader?

#### Probes:

Was this explicit?

Did you reflect on it before, during, or after (regarding golf)?

#### Prompts:

Positive impacts?

Negative impacts?

Can you think of any other examples? [Force them to think of a couple]

8. Based on our earlier discussion of your major work challenges, can you imagine any in which golf could be used to inform or guide your thinking or behavior?

Probes:

Can you tell me how this may help?

What parts of golf may be of use here?

9. Can you think of any particular skills developed through golf that help you in leadership? (e.g. mental focus, adaptability, persistence, deal with ambiguity etc)

10. Can you think of a metaphor to describe your view of golf or the application of golf to leadership?

11. What specific outcomes in your work, if any, do you attribute to your exposure to golf?

Prompts: (only if they get stuck):

Networking, making deals, etiquette, ?

Positive impacts?

Negative impacts?

**Use of Golf for Leader Development**

12. When you reflect on the impacts golf has had on your work and your life, what are your thoughts about using golf as a tool for leadership development?

Probes:

Has playing golf affected you in different ways at different stages or your career?

13. Would you be interested in a program that explicitly combined golf and leadership?

14. Have you ever suggested that someone pick up golf to develop as a leader?

15. Do you think golf has made you a better leader?

**Impact of Golf Outside of work**

16. As you reflect on your golfing experience, in what ways (if any) do you believe your exposure to the game has influenced your life outside of work?

Probe: Tell me more.

17. How has this affected your life?

Prompts:

Positive impacts?

Negative impacts?

18. Is there anything else you would like to add that would be helpful to this study?