



Eftenaru, C. L. (2024). Experiencing leadership: Perceptions of leadership development for higher education contexts. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 24(1), 154–190. <https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll49>

## **Experiencing Leadership: Perceptions of Leadership Development for Higher Education Contexts**

*Cristina L. Eftenaru*

### **Abstract**

Higher education is complex and so is the leadership needed in this context. Educational leadership is not well understood despite an increasing interest in studying the phenomenon. This interpretive study aimed to identify aspects of leadership theory found in practice and implications for leadership education by exploring, analyzing, and interpreting experiences of people who earned an Educational Leadership Doctorate at Simon Fraser University. I conducted in-depth interviews and analyzed data to identify themes within and across interviews while also triangulating with my systematic reflections. This paper presents findings on leadership development, focusing on four themes that emerged from 18 interviews with higher education participants: Pathways to Formal Leadership, Learning “How to Be a Leader”, Learning “About Leadership”, and Learning “the Dialogue of Practice”. Leadership was perceived as an intricate lifelong journey. Overall, participants developed their leadership through their own experiences as leaders, followers, or observers of leadership, by engaging in leadership education (formal, informal, and non-formal), and by interacting with others. Finally, both successes and challenges supported learning, yet challenges were more salient and had more memorable lessons. This paper provides valuable insights on leadership development to leadership scholars and practitioners, as well as organizations offering leadership education.

**Keywords:** leadership, higher education leadership, leadership development, qualitative interpretive study, leadership education

## **Experiencing Leadership: Perceptions of Leadership Development for Higher Education Contexts**

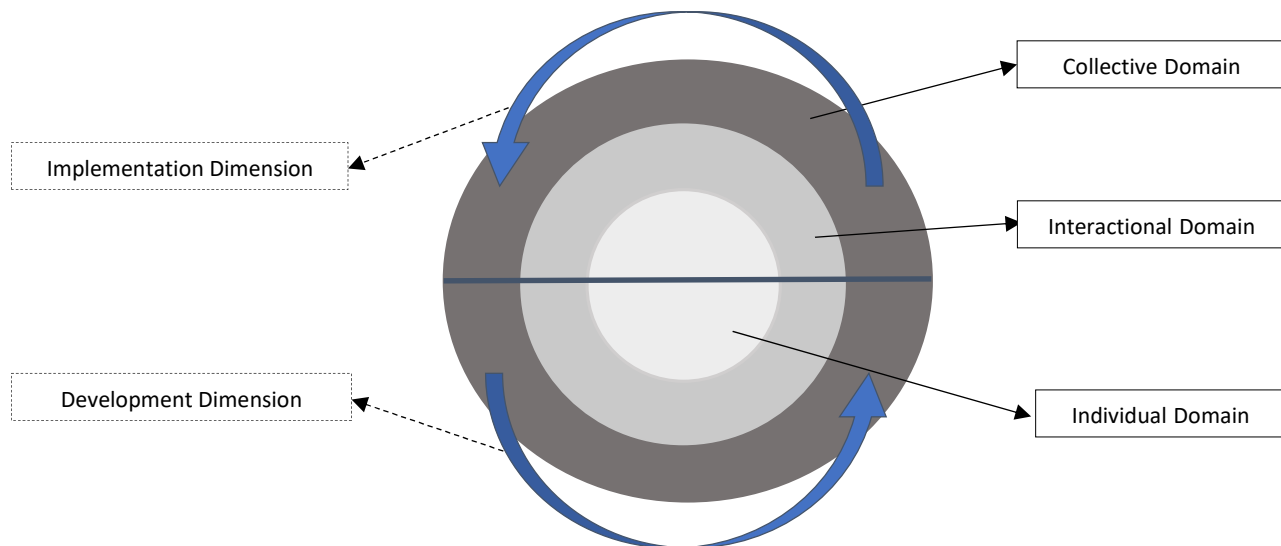
Leadership research has expanded in recent years, but the phenomenon is still not completely understood (Gronn, 2016; Northouse, 2016; Simkins, 2005). It seems that studying leadership systematically and connecting theory to practice contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Eftenaru (2020) was framed within this paradigm and used a conceptual framework grounded in key themes emerging from the literature, called Leadership Domains (Individual, Interactional, and Collective) and Leadership Dimensions (Development and Implementation). The study's overarching purpose was to identify elements of leadership theory found in practice by exploring, analyzing, and interpreting how people who earned an Educational Leadership Doctorate (EdD) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) experienced leadership. Specifically, it aimed to provide a better understanding of how participants perceived, defined, and experienced leadership, to determine leadership theories that prevailed in practice, to find approaches that supported leadership development and helped alleviate challenges occurring in practice, and to inform the design of leadership education. Data were collected via in-depth interviews and the researcher's reflections and analyzed to identify themes within and across interviews. This paper presents the study findings focusing on the leadership development themes that emerged from the interviews with higher education participants. Participants developed their leadership through the various experiences, interactions, and forms of education. This study also showed the importance of leaders' development of numerous skills and abilities to draw from in practice. The study is helpful to leadership scholars and practitioners, as well as organizations offering leadership education.

## Literature Review

Despite an increasing interest in studying leadership, the phenomenon is not well defined and understood (Gronn, 2016; Northouse, 2016). The complexity of higher education adds to the ambiguity of conceptualizing leadership that occurs in these settings and thus, there are few leadership theories tailored to education (Cardno, 2013; Sathye, 2004; Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). Although there has been an “explosion of leadership literature” (Simkins, 2005), this has not led to a consensus of what leadership is and how it is understood (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). On a broader spectrum, Northouse (2016) identified 130 leadership definitions and more than 60 existing leadership classification systems whereas Dinh et al. (2014) identified 23 thematic categories and 66 domains of leadership theory. There is a need for more systematic research to generate a better picture of educational leadership. One way to accomplish this task is by mapping leadership theory and practice (Dinh et al., 2014; Lamm et al., 2016; Simkins, 2005). This interpretive study falls within this realm. The study’s conceptual framework (Figure 1) was constructed by integrating three major themes (domains) and two subthemes (dimensions) identified during the literature review. The Leadership Domains—Individual, Interactional, and Collective—represent the spheres where leadership occurs and reflect the major shifts in leadership conceptualization. The Leadership Dimensions—Development and Implementation—showcase how leadership is learned and practiced within each domain.

**Figure 1.**

*Conceptual Framework: Leadership Domains and Dimensions*



In this conceptual framework, the *individual leadership domain* shows the variety of skills, behaviours, and styles that leaders need to develop and apply, as well as which ones may be suitable to educational settings. Catalfamo (2010) claimed that leadership could be developed in formal (academic programs), informal (work experience, on-the-job training, mentoring, networking), or non-formal (workshops, seminars, training courses) settings. As leadership was embedded in everyday organizational practices, all members needed to understand how they related to their team and/or organization in order to contribute in meaningful ways. Thus, personal characteristics and interpersonal skills development of individuals engaged in assigned or emergent leadership were of utmost importance (Lamm et al., 2016; Temple & Ylitalo, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The *interactional leadership domain* focuses on the interactions and influence processes between leaders and followers. Leaders were responsible for developing profound relationships with followers and for facilitating their followers' professional development (Avolio et al., 2009;

Uhl-Bien, 2006). Depending on what followers needed and/or expected from their leaders, one leadership style might be preferred over another (Northouse, 2016). Hence, leaders needed to be adept at adjusting their styles to respond to situations they encountered and support follower, team, and organizational growth (Bryman & Lilley, 2009; Riley & Russell, 2013; Woodard et al., 2000).

The *collective leadership domain* shows that organizations are complex systems where people influence one another and/or work together toward common goals regardless of their formal role. A positive work environment benefited everyone as it generated a climate where dialogue and feedback were encouraged, and self-awareness and welfare improved (Uusiautti, 2013). All members had an important role in their organization. By applying their professional capabilities and expertise, people would take initiative, influence change, and contribute to important decisions (Bolden et al., 2008; Cloud, 2010; Fullan, 2005; Torres & Evans, 2005). Individuals are valued for their contributions, yet work interdependently, are interconnected, and depend on one another.

This conceptual framework grounded in a select body of leadership literature informed the data collection by guiding the instrument development and the analysis by connecting participant leadership perceptions and practices to theoretical concepts identified in the literature review. A complete account of the framework development process and description may be found in Eftenaru (2020).

## **Methods**

This study aimed to investigate the leadership phenomenon as it emerged from analyzing the participant leadership experiences. I recruited 22 SFU EdD Leadership alumni primarily for two reasons: (a) they self-identified as interested in the scholarship of leadership and broadening their leadership understanding; and (b) they considered their studies as an opportunity for

meaningful leadership development, which informed better practice. To collect data, I developed a 10-question interview guide, which was pilot-tested in a three-phase process. The questions focused on three leadership areas: perspective, development, and implementation. I analyzed the dataset to identify emerging themes within and across the interviews and integrated my systematic reflections (Eftenaru, 2020; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldaña, 2013). To ensure the study trustworthiness, I used the following techniques: member-checking, transcript verification, journaling; developing a coding system; and data triangulation within and across the interviews as well as with my systematic reflections (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). These techniques ensured that the data enabled me to see different perspectives of how participants perceived the phenomenon.

## **Findings**

The 22 participants interviewed in this study worked in multiple roles and organizations, some across sectors or geographical areas. Eighteen participants worked in higher education at some point in their career and the findings are drawn from these interviews. Participants' leadership developed by gaining experience, pursuing education, and interacting with or observing others. There were four emerging leadership development themes that are presented next: *Pathways to Formal Leadership*, *Learning "How to Be a Leader"*, *Learning "About Leadership"*, and *Learning the "Dialogue of Practice"*.

### **Pathways to Formal Leadership**

Although participants acknowledged that leadership emerged informally, it was perceived as mostly occurring in connection to formal roles. The first theme describes participants' pathways to formal leadership and how their leadership conceptualization developed over time or by

changing organizations or roles. In higher education, the pathways to formal leadership were described as non-linear and as depending on the organization size and focus (e.g., university/college, research/teaching, community-focused unit). This section presents findings related to stages of leadership development, career transitions, and challenges and rewards of leadership.

### ***Leadership Development Stages***

Participants distinguished between leadership development stages and shared the different expectations depending on one's experience level. For example, Avery indicated that experience taught him "*how to be a leader*" whereas education taught him "*about leadership*". Emma and Sunny claimed that student or early-career leadership "*in less sophisticated roles*" involved following instructions to complete tasks and having an "*instrumental understanding of leadership*". Jake's leadership approach changed with learning more about leadership. These participants also noted gaining maturity in thought and action by engaging in learning and undertaking leadership roles. Timothy argued that leaders needed more than "cooking recipes", which presented leadership as transactional or cause-effect, as these would "*point out situations, but they don't necessarily change your attitude and it becomes more like a conditioned response*". He highlighted that only the long-term exposure to and "*interactions with philosophical frameworks and constructs*" changed one's leadership perception. Alex preferred the "*academic leadership perspective*" as it seemed appropriate for educational contexts. But Maggie chose to explore *why* leadership concepts and practices established in a context were not suitable or transferable to other contexts rather than disregarding the differences altogether. It seemed that leadership development was a lifelong process that required continuous commitment to learning.

## *Career Transitions*

Hope referred to her career path as “unorthodox”, Jake as “circuitous” and “eclectic”, and several others as “complex”. Several highlighted that life experiences helped them develop compassion, gave them the courage to advocate for people or causes, and to eliminate systemic or organizational barriers. But many recognized that “I needed a degree” or “I needed a doctorate” to move into roles where they could initiate change and “make a difference”.

Participants who worked across sectors (i.e., K-12, post-secondary, or corporate) acknowledged that they were searching for “*adventure [or] progressive and diverse opportunities*” (Noah) or better-suited responsibilities. Some changed sectors because of organizational changes, involuntary termination, or retirement. Transitions within the sector were motivated by career advancement prospects, lack of professional growth, or negative leadership experiences. Leadership approaches were not the same across sectors. For example, Sunny highlighted that his consultative and participative approaches were not transferable between corporate and education. Ernest also commented that the “*educational leader brand*” might prevent someone from “*climbing the corporate ladder*”. Jake shared his challenges in transitioning to a non-academic leadership role, as well:

I didn't really know much about being [a leader] in the university. I was quite ignorant about how things worked [there]... I found that everything I did I got push back from somebody. People would get outraged about different things. I didn't have any power.

Career transitions required dedication, grit, and continuous learning. Pursuing leadership in education was motivated by the prospects to make a difference in the organization or field. But



transitions to senior educational leadership involved a “decision to stay” in those roles long enough to reap the results of their work. Two participants considered senior educational leadership but realized that such roles would not be a good fit. Others moving to leadership mentioned their “missing working with students” and assumed short-term teaching opportunities. When discussing what contributed to their career transitions, several participants mentioned their being prompted by challenges related to socio-economic or political factors, organizational changes, and life events. Timing was also an important element and so was the alignment between their own and the organization’s values and goals.

### ***Challenges and Rewards***

Leadership comes inherently with challenges. Acknowledging that one cannot *know* or *do* everything prompts leaders to seek advice and support from others. When referring to formal leadership in education, participants linked it to “a great deal of transactional leadership” and interest in and knowledge of the political system. Some challenges highlighted were leading large teams, managing large budgets, dealing with human resources and/or union issues, and completing “mountains of paperwork”. Handling these challenges involved working long hours, stress, lack of life-play balance, and facing others’ preconceived ideas about formal leadership. For instance, Hope mentioned “*being unhappy and burnt out*”, Sunny met with others’ “*distrust of management*”, and Alex said that “*even when you think you’re acceding to people’s wishes, they’ll still find something [to complain about]*”. I heard “you can’t please everyone” and “you can’t control everything” many times during the interviews. Though reflection was crucial for leadership development, the challenging and complex situations leaders faced often hindered it:

reflection is a huge piece of experiential learning and I think it's a downside of the huge and often impossible role those senior leaders take on. The workloads are ridiculous! [...] You realize that you get so caught up in that business that you lose that time for reflection that I think is critical for leaders. (Hope)

Formal leaders needed not only to be reflective but also comfortable with their vulnerability. Along these lines, Hannah pinpointed how she strived to find new ways to connect with learners and *“remember what it's like to start at the beginning [and be] vulnerable”*.

Overall, participants found their work rewarding as it supported the development of people and organizations. Many participants stressed that they were not driven by titles or paycheques. In fact, Hope emphasized that *“if [paycheques are] your driver, or if the title of the position is your driver [...] I think, it's leaders like that people should run away from”*. The primary goal of participants' pursuing formal leadership was to make a difference in others' lives—students, colleagues, or clients.

### **Learning “How to Be a Leader”**

The second theme reflects leadership as evolving with gaining experience. Participants' leadership developed by approaching situations arising in practice through trial and error and by experiencing moments that offered life-changing lessons.

#### ***Trial and Error***

Participants shared that approaching issues through trial and error offered meaningful leadership development opportunities. The process entailed deploying new strategies to find viable

solutions for practice, influencing how people perceived challenges, and dealing with uncertainty and perceived risks. In a sense, it was a “refining-by-doing” process, which offered participants new motivation to undertake challenges and to persevere in finding better strategies to address issues. What seemed to help in the pressing moments of ambiguity were: being comfortable with the unknown, openness to disagreement, resourcefulness, persistence, organizational support, curiosity, and courage. Participants acknowledged that, though not always easy, their leadership was meant to inspire change, encourage initiative, and empower others “to do their best work” and “be their best self”.

### ***Defining Moments***

Participants recognized that leadership involved both successes and struggles. Jake and Hope shared life changing events that provided lessons transferable to the professional realm. Also, seeing and partaking in “*the acts of courage and bravery, ... being empathetic, and understanding the [crisis] situation, doing whatever you could to make a difference*” had “huge impact” on Hannah’s leadership development. Many shared that success motivated them and increased their confidence. Yet Noah was somewhat reserved about celebrating achievements:

what I take pride in and what I like to do is lead in ways in which I can move organizations forward. Sometimes there are successes and sometimes there are challenges. Sometimes we win, sometimes we fail. Don’t take too much credit for the wins and try not to personalize the losses.

Although all experiences provided learning, the struggles were most impactful. The *feeling* sparked by the “*memorable teeny, tiny little blips*” (Timothy) when participants were set up for failure, undermined, devalued, silenced, or coerced into something was the most prominent.

Perhaps, challenges left a bigger imprint because they stimulated reflection. Recalling these moments was often followed by “I don’t want anyone else to feel that” or “I don’t want to be like that”. Zachary evoked how he felt after a meeting where his responsibilities were changed without consultation:

I walked away from that experience thinking ‘Wow, that is something that I will never do to somebody else!’ If I ever have the chance to be in a formal leadership role, given *that* negative experience of just being told what to do without prior consultation, I will never do that to another person or another faculty member.

Ernest talked about the impact of observing the disconnect between words and actions in a higher education context:

if you’re saying to your direct reports ‘It’s really important that you develop good relationships with your people and that you listen to them’, then, I think, it’s important for strong leaders to do that. [...But in that context,] it wasn’t done! [...] it was something that I saw that changed my approach to leadership.

Other participants shared lessons learned as new leaders. For example, Maggie talked about a “*public demonstration of dissent*” as being the turning point for her team, which resulted in better capacity to solve conflict and participate in discussions that improved teamwork. Reflecting on a specific role, Shirley said: “*I don’t think I did a very good job as I would’ve hoped in bringing those values [diversity, engaging conflict and different perspectives] into the team*”. Ernest shared his struggles when dealing with the misalignment between his own values and expectations and the deep-seated unprofessional behaviours of his new team. Other defining moments, such as

overcoming failures and disappointments, making or correcting mistakes, and job loss were also memorable. As Hope stated,

while it's very difficult, many leaders, at some point in their career have to face up to a failure—whether it's a failed project, whether it is leaving a role, or being asked to leave a role, or being terminated from a role.

A “good support network”, resilience, and reflecting on questions such as “what did I learn from this?” or “what is my part in this?” helped participants overcome these challenges faced in leadership roles.

### **Learning “About Leadership”**

The third theme shows how pursuing various types of learning opportunities—formal, non-formal, or informal—contributed to participants' leadership development. This learning equipped them for formal (assigned) and/or informal (emergent) leadership.

### ***The Doctoral Journey***

The doctoral program contributed the most to participants' leadership development. Their journeys varied, but they all evoked the impact of their learning. They shared what motivated them to pursue further education, their experiences in the program, and the perceived program benefits. These findings are presented next.

**Motivators.** The main reasons to pursue doctoral studies were the desire to improve their practice and inspire change in their organizations or field. Some participants were motivated by curiosity or personal and professional growth. For instance, Ernest decided “*to go back to school*”

*and learn about leadership and higher education and policy”* upon observing a lack of leadership. Maggie shared that the program helped her shift her perspective. She recalled that at the beginning,

I was paralyzed! [...] I was learning so many conflicting aspects of what I had previously been doing [...] I was finding new ways in which I could reconcile my work that would still allow me to be curious.

Mercedes said she had “*more questions than answers as a practitioner*”, Noah had a keen interest in research and program development, and Timothy wanted “*to stimulate the other part of the brain*”. The primary reason for choosing this particular doctoral program was the cohort model, which was conducive to discussions and collaboration.

**Experience in the program.** Participants shared what they appreciated in the program. Working collaboratively, sharing ideas, celebrating milestones, and walking through challenges together offered support, structure, and abundant learning opportunities during coursework. “*The richness of the education in my doctoral degree was in the dialogue with my cohort*”, Zachary said. Some participants also listed what they found useful and directly applicable to their practice: Johnny talked about topics related to policy and engaging diversity; Avery referred to courses about leadership theory and research trends; and Timothy highlighted educational theory and research, along with assignments addressing issues in practice. Several others enjoyed the cohort diversity in terms of roles, institutions, and career stages whereas one participant referred to the cohort as “homogeneous”. Storytelling allowed for sharing and learning about what worked and what did not in others’ practice. But awareness of others’ practices alone was not enough. Participants emphasized the need to be receptive and eager to apply what was suitable to their own practice. Some skills developed in the program that were vital in practice were dealing with

uncertainty, being able to clearly articulate and defend one's perspective, and complex problem solving.

There was consensus that education was about learning and change and participants were aware of their responsibility in this regard. Jake's concern that "*some students go through [a graduate program] pretty much unchanged*" could apply more widely. This change was a two-way street. Hope, Noah, and Mercedes gave examples of their impact on students' careers, which showed that the responsibility for learning was not only of educators, but students, too. The attitude toward learning in school may translate in the attitude toward learning or performance in the workplace. Others, like Maggie, also inspired their coworkers to continue their formal education in their areas of interest. It seemed that the participants' doctoral experience set the stage for lifelong learning "about leadership".

Participants talked about several challenges encountered during their program. What seemed to affect them the most was the disconnect from their classmates after coursework completion and dealing with the "*big void [after defence, when] nobody has any interest anymore in you*" (Timothy). Three participants felt that their leaders or organizations did not support their pursuing leadership education. Other ones mentioned that "life did not stop" just because they were doing a doctorate. Many had to navigate life altering events while in the program. But in the midst of these "life lessons", they had to "make it work", to "keep going", "draw on their inner reserves", and build resilience and endurance. "*Doctorate is very hard, and it plays on your emotions*", Emma said. It seemed that the doctoral experience was preparing participants for leadership as an emotional endeavour and a challenging journey.

The program's flexible structure helped participants integrate it within their complex lives by creating "the space for learning". Nevertheless, their own perseverance was not enough to handle the "*tremendous amount of work*" (Ernest) that going through a doctorate involved. Thus, participants needed others' support to succeed. They often leaned on their classmates and "thesis buddies" with whom they forged relationships and shared in the challenges encountered on their journeys. Many participants highlighted that their family's "altruistic support and push" and the committee members' dedication and encouragement were key in moving forward and completing the program. Joy's quote demonstrates leadership enacted by the faculty members: "*The professors were amazing! They knew when to step back and let us move forward or if they needed to intervene, or question, or suggest, they did.*" In a sense, all the supporters modeled leadership, offering valuable lessons to participants.

**Benefits.** When talking about how the program benefited their leadership development, participants highlighted that they learned about "what reflection really was" and how being a reflective practitioner improved practice. Other benefits were networking and career advancement. Sunny credited the program for broadening his understanding of leadership, emphasizing that "*the EdD definitely elevated my leadership, no question*". The program's reputation helped Hope "*make up for unusual credentials*" whereas the "formal paper" helped her build credibility and access new career opportunities. Many participants changed their jobs or organizations during or upon completing the program. Others were in formal roles that required a doctorate. Some started with a goal in mind (e.g., targeted role, sector, or organization), but the goal changed when finding a better fit or a different purpose.

The EdD program gave participants a basis for leadership development and access to leadership terminology and literature. By being exposed to theory and research, participants'



understanding of leadership deepened. The program offered opportunities to explore topics of interest (usually emerging from practice) and included readings that laid a solid theoretical foundation for their work. Many participants referred to becoming more grounded in their perspective or to experiencing a change in perspective, discourse, or leadership approach during their studies. Shirley described the newly found “comradery” in academic settings and Victoria mentioned her increased awareness of different leadership roles and responsibilities within her institution. Finally, the program offered several participants new beginnings for post-retirement endeavours.

The doctoral thesis was an important component of participants’ leadership development. Their research was grounded in personal interests or issues related to their practice. For instance, Mercedes said that engaging in her research “*brought me solace because I answered [important] questions*”; Sunny discovered that he was not “alone in his questions”; Emma and Ernest referred to developing self-confidence and skills such as writing, researching, and presenting; and Jake’s research helped him find “meaning and understanding”. Other lessons learned and program benefits stated were:

I was finally able to address [others’] questions differently, and we had a different level of conversation. (Shirley)

[the doctorate] helps you articulate yourself a little bit in front of yourself. You always knew what you knew, but you never really had a way to write it down in five sentences... and now, you can do that. (Timothy)

it showed me that post-secondary is a different world than corporate. In post-secondary, to solve an issue, you need not only to understand it, but have

evidence. [PSE is] a world [where] you can't wing it on opinion. And there's a lot of opinion out in the hallways [of organizations]. [...] EdD gave me an understanding of leadership, and confidence and strength to be a better leader and decision-maker. (Sunny)

absolutely without question, [the EdD experience] was transformative. (Joy)

### *Continuous Learning*

Leadership, learning, and reflection were perceived as closely connected. Participants saw leadership development as a lifelong learning process and not confined within a timeframe or space:

Good grief, I had an EdD in Educational Leadership! I thought I had thought and studied and reflected a lot on what it meant to be a leader, and yet when I got into the [formal leadership] role, there were still things that [were new]. (Hope)

Certainly, you never stop learning how to be a leader, or educator, or researcher, or whatever your role is. (Zachary)

I firmly believe in lifelong learning [...] and never stop learning. (Ernest)

Oh, definitely keep learning! Leadership it is all about learning and it's about dealing with people, but definitely learning, [and] facilitating. (Emma)

We lead for different reasons: we lead to have power, we lead because it's more fun than being led sometimes. But [leadership is] about mentoring, supporting

your people, and protecting your people who support you in turn. [It is] about learning and personal growth, I think, as much as anything. (Jake)

I honestly believe that I don't know everything [...] I know there's so much I don't know, not that I just don't know everything. There's so much I don't know that the people that work with me need to be able to step in confidently to share what they know. Because then, we will—when we have everyone in the room—we'll have a more complete picture... still not totally complete. There's always a more complete picture [of leadership]. (Maggie)

Reflection also played an essential role in improving practice. It appeared that reflection became integral to participants' professional practice and helped them address complex situations by examining different facets thoroughly. For instance, Mercedes would gage "*what I'm experiencing, taking that moment to carve out, to understand what's happening and then, understand my role in it*", which suggests internalized learning and reflection on practice. Engaging in reflective processes helped participants learn from mistakes, identify and share "*promising practices*" (Victoria), analyze situations and differentiate between paradigms or practices; and recognize that some issues are beyond one's control.

Often, participants took part in workshops, conferences, and networking events. Many such events seemed too short to address complex leadership issues and seemed to focus on transactional and operational leadership. But these opportunities helped participants develop connections, begin conversations, and disseminate knowledge.

Participants highlighted their learning while undertaking new leadership roles. Those who were in or were transitioning to new roles when the interviews were conducted were excited to

find out what the roles entailed and seemed inspired by the possibility to make a more significant difference in their new setting. These new opportunities required them “*to learn a new way of being*” (Mercedes). Learning in new roles involved aspects such as: slowing down in making decisions and taking time to gather all information before making big changes; dealing with frustrations and the urge to “fix right now”; system thinking and “*strategies for navigating more complex settings*” (Maril); adapting to new situations; addressing conflicting demands; and helping others better understand their environment. Despite being somewhat anxious, these participants looked hopeful, determined to face new challenges and to discover new “*pathways to the possible*” (Noah). Like Maril, many were continuously looking for “*ways to update my skills to provide me with the competencies to manage those [new] aspects of my job*”.

### **Learning the “Dialogue of Practice”**

The fourth emerging theme focuses on learning through interacting, working with, or observing others. Participants often referred to developing their leadership by engaging in dialogue and by receiving feedback from other leaders, collaborators, critical friends, mentors, and role models.

#### ***The Case of Dialogue***

Participants emphasized that bringing stakeholders together, including them in decision making, and encouraging collaboration offered multiple perspectives of working through leadership issues. Avery highlighted that it was in a trusting environment and “*in the dialogue of practice that leadership can evolve*”. Several others stated that by establishing trust and participating in dialogue, people would share their experiences, expertise, and challenges without

the fear of being judged. Through dialogue, people found solutions to discipline-specific issues, supported one another, and disseminated knowledge. These learning spaces were created in their doctoral classes, through mentorship, within community partnerships, or through professional associations and events. Like Zachary commented: *“it’s not only attending these formal [events,] but it’s also being cognisant and aware of what’s happening in the practice of other leaders around you”*. Mercedes emphasized that creating space and dedicating time for discussions allowed people to *“connect and sense-make together and really feel that belonging, [the] membership to community”*. Open conversations allowed community members to contribute to change and learn by asking the *“really tough questions [before] moving forward on initiatives and [seeing] if they work or not”* (Mercedes). These inviting spaces and trial-and-error approaches created opportunities for non-leaders, informal leaders, and students to have their voices heard.

### ***Mentorship***

Mentorship provided the space for relationship building and feedback. In professional settings, mentoring relationships tended to be formalized. A mentor was someone people learned from, interacted with, or whose leadership approach they modeled. Participants shared that observing and emulating others’ practices, creating meaningful alliances, consulting with others about challenging situations or dilemmas, receiving feedback, and finding support with innovative ideas added value to their leadership journeys. Hannah highlighted the impact of her trusted supporters—whom she called the *“rocks of Gibraltar”*—who offered authentic feedback and advice when *“not so good intentions or self-serving tensions”* seemed to surface. Along these lines, Hope emphasized that leaders needed to intentionally seek mentors and reliable colleagues to hold them accountable as *“the higher up you get, the easier it is to dismiss [others’ feedback]”*. She continued, *“I think it’s very important that—as a leader—you be willing to be challenged and*

*hear ideas other than your own.*”. Hence, building relationships with trustworthy people who encouraged leaders to think critically and/or challenge decisions and actions were crucial.

Participants considered mentoring others “*the point of being an educator*” (Hope). Finding mentors for themselves was important and so were being mentors and helping others grow. Noah “learned tremendously” from his mentors and felt “*an obligation to do the same for others*”. Johnny also felt responsible for his faculty’s professional development. Many other participants commented on how rewarding the mentoring others was, especially on the long-term journeys. They shared stories of colleagues, leaders, followers, and students whom they mentored along the way and impacted their careers. Several insights emerged about meaningful mentorship. For example, mentors challenged their mentee’s perspective and offered constructive feedback. They were also comfortable with their vulnerability. By sharing their own life journeys, mentors inspired confidence, trust, and hope. But often, mentors learned from their mentees, too. Approaching mentorship with humility and respect for one another was key in leadership development. These reciprocal relationships of support, feedback, and recognition allowed for professional and personal growth. But rather than merely copying others’ practices or following their advice, participants encouraged reflection, astuteness, and authentic dialogue in a non-judgmental environment.

Open communication and trust were central in developing lasting and profound relationships. Participants admired their mentors’ dedication, fairness, thoughtfulness, humility, steadiness, and curiosity. Their mentors were courageous and influential people who left a legacy in their organizations. They were supportive, encouraging, and inspiring. Often, mentors were persuasive in guiding and helping their mentees gain clarity through questioning. Thus, mentors modeled leadership and inspired participants to become “*one of those [strong] leaders*” (Ernest),

who were described as balancing work and play, being honest, and knowing when and how to “show disappointment” in followers’ actions. Joy’s mentors were authentic, calm in crises, and good listeners, Victoria’s mentors inspired innovation, and one of Timothy’s mentors “*combined authenticity and scholarship perfectly*”. In short, mentors modeled leadership and helped participants become better leaders.

## **Key Findings**

This paper offers insights into leadership development as they emerged from exploring, analyzing, and interpreting how participants experienced leadership in higher education. The study aimed to reveal aspects of leadership theory that were found in practice and implications for leadership education. In the context of this paper, which reported on major findings related to leadership development, there were two key findings that emerged from the data:

1. *Leadership is an evolving, multifaceted, and contextual phenomenon.* This key finding shows how people conceptualize leadership and how their perspectives advance and/or change with the studying and exercising of leadership.

2. *Leadership development is a lifelong journey of learning and growth.* This key finding shows how people embarking on leadership development journeys engage constantly in learning the various aspects of leadership.

## **Discussion**

The two key findings related to leadership development emerged from the data collected by interviewing 18 (out of 22) people who completed a doctoral program in leadership at Simon Fraser University and had experience in higher education settings. The full study was framed using

a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) that demonstrated how leadership conceptualization shifted over time, along with the spheres where leadership was developed and exercised.

### **Leadership is an evolving, multifaceted, and contextual phenomenon**

The first key finding shows how conceptualizing leadership changed over time, shifting from being associated with individuals in formal roles in organizations to leadership exercised by many within a context, and as a practice dispersed in organizations. Participants perceived leadership as a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon. They referred to changes in conceptualization from top-down to more participative leadership. Top-down approaches were more consistent with managerial, instructional, or transactional leadership and not always suitable to education (Bush, 2011; Middlehurst, 2008; Yelder & Codling, 2004). Participants shared early career experiences that revealed more transactional and authoritarian leadership approaches. But informal leadership has increased in education in the forms of project or committee work, and cross-department or community-oriented initiatives. Hence, development opportunities diversified and were made available to all people aspiring to be engaged in the various forms of leadership. In this study, leadership occurred within the individual, interactional, and collective domains, meaning that leaders, followers, and peers interacted with one another and took leading roles and initiatives when opportunities surfaced. Hence, leadership development needed to involve not only people in formal leadership positions, but everyone in the organization. These findings align with the literature focusing on the shifts in defining leadership and exercising educational leadership (Kezar et al., 2006; Northouse, 2016; Ramsden, 1998; Simkins, 2005).

Participants described leadership using established terminology, analogies, and metaphors. They perceived teaching and parenting as similar to leadership. Also, they mostly referred to what



the literature distinguishes as *the people-side of organizations*—individuals, relationship, influence, and change. Aspects of relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006), authentic (Avolio et al., 2009), servant (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), caring (Uusiautti, 2013), and transformational (Stewart, 2006) leadership emerged from the dataset. In participants' perspectives, leaders were responsible for the people in their organizations and for reaching goals intended to move people and organizations forward. There was also a sense of shared responsibility and high moral and ethical standards, which aligned with the literature (Bouchamma & Brie, 2014; Cloud, 2010; Fullan, 2005; Humphreys, 2013; Torres & Evans, 2005). Finally, participants mentioned collaboration and dialogue, which are aspects consistent with participative (Bush, 2011), shared (Avolio et al., 2009), and distributed (Bolden et al., 2008) leadership. Given the wealth of theoretical concepts that emerged from the dataset, it is vital that leaders access various forms of education to explore the leadership theory and research, as well as find relevant ways to exercise them in practice.

This study shows that leadership is contextual and multifaceted. Long-term mentorship and learning the contextual aspects of organizations helped those who transitioned to new roles or organizations. As these transitions involve steep learning curves and dealing with uncertainty, leaders often approached practical issues by trial-and-error and sought input from others. Bryman and Lilley (2009) argued that “higher education is itself a distinctive context and that therefore many of the leadership principles that are known to work in other spheres or sectors cannot be transplanted into universities” (p. 338). Hence, gaining experience, reflection, and building meaningful relationships supported participants' leadership development and career transitions. These findings are in line with the recommendations found in the literature that leaders need to develop awareness, adaptability, system thinking, and foresight (Kezar et al., 2006; Minarik et al., 2003; Thornton et al., 2004).

In summary, the complexity of leadership, the shifts in its conceptualization, the vast terminology available to define and describe leadership and its contextual nature align with what was found in the select body literature that informed the conceptual framework constructed for this study (e.g., Avolio et al., 2009; Bryman & Lilley, 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Kezar et al., 2006; Sathye, 2004; Simkins, 2005).

### **Leadership development is a lifelong journey of learning and growth**

The second key finding shows that participants' leadership perspectives developed over time and were informed by numerous sources such as the environment they grew up in, their interactions with others, and their education and experience. Their leadership approach changed upon accessing leadership theory, conducting research, or gaining experience. Their doctoral studies had the most impact, which contrasts the findings of Bryman and Lilley (2009), who claimed that engaging in leadership research did not always influence the practice of higher education leaders. In this study, participants' formal education enhanced how they defined and described leadership by expanding their use of terminology in interviews. But in their descriptions, they also drew analogies and metaphors from other aspects of life. Sharing experiences from various stages of life showed that leadership development could not be restricted to particular times and spaces (e.g., leadership role, organization, or classroom). The journey is never complete and does not follow a straight line. Studies that discussed different leadership development stages and how learning contributed to leadership development were conducted by Allison and Ramirez (2016), Amey (2005), Jameson (2012), and Madsen (2007).

There are many facets of leadership development that emerged from this study. For example, leadership developed through meaningful interactions between leaders, peers, and

followers. Participants emphasized the importance of interpersonal skills such as authenticity, active listening, relationship building, feedback, stakeholder engagement, and transparent communication. These are skills that the literature deems as essential to leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Basham & Mathur, 2010; Cloud, 2010; Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Learning from others through observation, mentorship, and dialogue had major influences on participants' leadership development. These interactions and forged relationships offered a critical eye, advice, or a non-judgemental space for thoughtful discussions. The impact of such forms of learning were also provided by Bryman (2007), Catalfamo (2010), Lawler and Sillitoe (2013), and Sathye (2004).

Through continuous learning and reflection on past experiences, participants improved their skills and practices. They also helped other leaders, colleagues, and students do the same. By being aware of and learning from both positive and negative experiences, participants improved their problem-solving skills and expanded their strategies to overcome future challenges. Studying leadership, engaging in reflection, and gaining leadership experience conferred participants opportunities to deeply analyze their experiences, draw lessons, and strengthen their perspectives of leadership. Avolio et al. (2009), Amey (2005, 2006), Kezar et al. (2006) and Schön (1983) argued that learning and reflection were central to leadership development and professional practice. Moreover, emotional intelligence promoted self-awareness and helped with relationship and culture building. As leaders' behaviours and actions influenced people's emotions and performance, the various leader-follower interactions impacted organizational culture and growth (Goleman, 2006; Lamm et al., 2016). Considering that the demands and complexity of higher education leadership are increasing, leaders need to develop capacity to evaluate priorities, cope with stress, and find support networks to ensure their own and others' well-being (Allison & Ramirez, 2016; Catalfamo, 2010; Lovelace et al., 2007).

In summary, learning “about leadership”, “how to be a leader” and the “dialogue of practice” is a lifelong journey that has lasting effects on both people and organizations. Participants strived to engage in various forms of learning to develop personal characteristics, relevant skills, and a “toolbox” of styles to draw from and adapt within their context. These approaches to leadership development are consistent with the literature (Amey, 2005, 2006; Dinh et al., 2014; Lamm et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016).

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The wide range of existing theories uncovers the various leadership facets, but the phenomenon is still not completely understood. This study shows the complexity and the multifaceted nature of leadership. It also shows that planned leadership development equips people to engage in their work more meaningfully. Leadership is contextual. Although the theory of leadership and general approaches are transferable between contexts, leaders need to continuously learn and adapt their approaches to the needs of the organization and those whom they lead. Catalfamo (2010) differentiated between three forms of leadership development: formal, non-formal, and informal. Regardless of where participants’ learning journey began, they engaged in all three forms of leadership development at some point in their career. Their formal education (i.e., doctoral program) had the most impact, followed by the long term informal and non-formal learning opportunities. Hence, it is recommended that current leaders and those aspiring to leadership pursue such learning for the best outcomes. In challenging times, during resource deficits or other crises, well-prepared leaders are assets to organizations. But some participants encountered challenges in engaging in leadership development activities such as heavy workloads, stress and burnout, lack of their leaders’ interest in, recognition of, or use of newly developed skills, and lack of financial support. Hence, educational institutions need to work with leaders on

identifying skill gaps and to offer adequate support to allow them to engage in relevant development opportunities.

There were numerous experiences that informed participants' leadership, which showed that leadership development could not be confined within one single approach, timeframe, or setting. The struggles offered valuable lessons whereas successes motivated them to persevere. Reflecting on learning and experience helped participants improve relevant leadership skills as well as better understand their enacted behaviours and how these affected others' performance and wellbeing. Consistent with what the literature shows (Lamm et al., 2016; Middlehurst, 2008; Minarik et al., 2003; Ramsden, 1998), participants needed to constantly renew their commitment to becoming skilled leaders and helping others develop their leadership. Thus, it is recommended that leaders engage in meaningful interactions and develop long-lasting relationships to offer and receive valuable input, support, and critical feedback. As purposeful relationship development takes time, they need to be a priority for leaders regardless of the other demands of their jobs.

Leadership is contextual and one's leadership style may take a different shape depending on where it is exercised. Designing leadership development opportunities—formal, informal, or non-formal—to address the needs and expectations of all leaders and/or organizations may not be possible. However, it is recommended that leadership education incorporate learning from both theory and practice. These programs need to allow people to consolidate and apply their learning. Thus, longer-term engagement and relevant activities (e.g., self-directed learning, groupwork, case studies, research, mentorship, and networking) are required to create opportunities to incorporate systematic studying of leadership and practical skills development. As Bush (2011) argued, for a “good practice”, leaders need to better understand how theory, research, and practice connect, as

well as integrate them into their day-to-day work. In some ways, participants engaged in these processes of “good practice” building throughout their careers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This paper provides valuable insights on leadership development to leadership scholars and practitioners, as well as organizations offering leadership education. The first study limitation is its focus on *leadership* and not on other overlapping concepts such as *management* or *administration* (Bush, 2011; Northouse, 2016; Yelder & Codling, 2004). As it emerged from the data, formal leadership, in particular, seemed to incorporate all three concepts. Secondly, the conceptual framework constructed for this study informed the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. Hence, the findings need to be considered within the context of this framework. Further research is recommended to incorporate the related concepts and/or expand the conceptual framework. Also, by focusing on a small group of participants who completed a doctorate in leadership at one university and worked in higher education settings, the study does not offer a full picture of what leadership development entails. To enhance the understanding, it would be valuable to engage and/or compare perspectives of people who pursued a doctorate in leadership (in education and/or another field) at another university or other forms of leadership education. Further research is also recommended to better understand how the conceptual framework constructed by Eftenaru (2020) may be used specifically in leadership development in formal, informal, or non-formal settings. Finally, the study was not meant to be used to generalize or to describe a larger population or the entire field (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). However, it shows that the incorporation of theory, research, and practice along with the long-term engagement in learning play major roles in leadership development. As it emerged from the study, leaders need to be prepared to handle complex challenges, identify structure and policy changes, and implement

processes that help people and organizations grow. There are numerous leadership development opportunities available. Leaders should assess and pursue those that are relevant to them in terms of needs, interests, resources, and anticipated outcomes. Future research is suggested to identify areas of development for specific leadership roles.

### **Conclusion**

Being grounded in participants' experiences, this study provides new insights associated with leadership development within the individual, interactional, and collective leadership domains. Higher education institutions have become more complex, and leaders face increasing demands. There are no quick solutions to issues arising in practice. Leaders need to be equipped to undertake challenges and promote growth. Learning "about leadership" by engaging in various forms of education and "how to be leaders" by applying learning to practice, along with developing the "dialogue of practice" are part of a lifelong journey. Participants in this study developed their leadership through their own experiences as leaders, followers, or observers of leadership, by engaging in various forms of leadership education (formal, informal, and non-formal), and by interacting with others. As leadership in higher education is multifaceted and evolving, it requires constant personal and professional growth of the leaders themselves, those whom they lead, and their organizations.

## References

- Allison, V. A., & Ramirez, L. A. (2016). Co-mentoring: The iterative process of learning about self and “becoming” leaders. *Studying Teacher Education*, 12(1), 3–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2016.1143809>
- Amey, M. J. (2005). Leadership as learning: Conceptualizing the process. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 29(9–10), 689–704.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920591006539>
- Amey, M. J. (2006). Leadership in higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 38(6), 55–58. <https://doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.38.6.55-58>
- Avolio, B. J., Walumbwa, F. O., & Weber, T. J. (2009). Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 421–449.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621>
- Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group and Organization Management*, 31(3), 300–326.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601106287091>
- Basham, M. J., & Mathur, R. P. (2010). Dynamic leadership development in community college administration: Theories, applications, and implications. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2010(149), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.392>
- Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2008). Tensions in higher education leadership: Towards a multi-level model of leadership practice. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62(4), 358–376.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00398.x>
- Bogdan, C. R., & Biklen S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.
- Bouchamma, Y., & Brie, J. M. (2014). Communities of practice and ethical leadership. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 42(2), 81–95.
- Bryman, A. (2007). Effective leadership in higher education: A literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), 693–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701685114>



- Bryman, A., & Lilley, S. (2009). Leadership researchers on leadership in higher education. *Leadership, 5*(3), 331–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715009337764>
- Bush, T. (2011). *Theories of educational leadership and management* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Cardno, C. (2013). Images of academic leadership in large New Zealand polytechnics. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 35*(2), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2013.775922>
- Catalfamo, H. (2010). An examination of leadership development in colleges. *Educational Planning, 19*(4), 8–31.
- Cloud, R. C. (2010). Epilogue: Change leadership and leadership development. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 149*, 73–79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.398>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Dinh, J. E., Lord, R. G., Gardner, W. L., Meuser, J. D., Liden, R. C., & Hu, J. (2014). Leadership theory and research in the new millennium: Current theoretical trends and changing perspectives. *The Leadership Quarterly, 25*(1), 36–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.005>
- Eftenaru, C. (2020). *Experiencing leadership: A study exploring perceptions of leadership of people who pursued doctoral studies in educational leadership at Simon Fraser University*. [Doctoral Dissertation, Simon Fraser University]. <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/20217>
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Corwin Press.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam.
- Gronn, P. (2016). Fit for purpose no more? *Management in Education, 30*(4), 168–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020616665062>
- Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2005). The study of educational leadership and management: Where does the field stand today? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 33*(2), 229–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143205051055>

- Humphreys, D. (2013). Deploying collaborative leadership to reinvent higher education for the twenty-first century. *Peer Review*, 15(1), 4–6.
- Jameson, J. (2012). Leadership values, trust and negative capability: Managing the uncertainties of future english higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 66(4), 391–414.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2012.00533.x>
- Kezar, A. J., Carducci, R., & Contreras-McGavin, M. (2006). Rethinking the “L” word in higher education: The revolution of research on leadership. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 31(6), 1–218. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.3106>
- Lamm, K., Carter, H., & Lamm, A. (2016). A theory based model of interpersonal leadership: An integration of the literature. *The Journal of Leadership Education*, 15(4), 183–205.  
<https://doi.org/10.12806/v15/i4/t2>
- Lawler, A., & Sillitoe, J. (2013). Facilitating “organisational learning” in a “learning institution”. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(5), 495–500.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2013.825415>
- Lovelace, K. J., Manz, C. C., & Alves, J. C. (2007). Work stress and leadership development: The role of self-leadership, shared leadership, physical fitness and flow in managing demands and increasing job control. *Human Resource Management Review*, 17(4), 374–387. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2007.08.001>
- Madsen, S. R. (2007). Developing leadership: Exploring childhoods of women university presidents. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(1), 99–118.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230710722476>
- Middlehurst, R. (2008). Not enough science or not enough learning? Exploring the gaps between leadership theory and practice. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62(4), 322–339.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00397.x>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Minarik, M. M., Thornton, B., & Perreault, G. (2003). Systems thinking can improve teacher retention. *Clearing House*, 76(5), 230–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650309602010>

- Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Ramsden, P. (1998). Managing the effective university. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 17(3), 347–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436980170307>
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X02239569>
- Riley, T. A., & Russell, C. (2013). Leadership in higher education examining professional development needs for department chairs. *Review of Higher Education and Self-Learning*, 6(21), 38–57.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Sathye, M. (2004). Leadership in higher education: A qualitative study. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(3).  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286563134\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Higher\\_Education\\_A\\_Qualitative\\_Study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286563134_Leadership_in_Higher_Education_A_Qualitative_Study)
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Simkins, T. (2005). Leadership in education: ‘What works’ or ‘what makes sense’? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 33(1), 9–26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143205048168>
- Stewart, J. (2006). Transformational leadership: An evolving concept examined through the works of Burns, Bass, Avolio and Leithwood. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, (54), 1–29. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ843441>
- Temple, J. B., & Ylitalo, J. (2009). Promoting inclusive (and dialogic) leadership in higher education institutions. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 15(3), 277–289.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13583880903073024>
- Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Perreault, G. (2004). Systems thinking: A skill to improve student achievement. *Clearing House*, 77(5), 222–227. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.77.5.222-230>

- Torres, C., & Evans, R. (2005). Contemporary community colleges: Presidential perspectives. *Community College Enterprise, 11*(2), 69–79.  
<http://www.schoolcraft.edu/pdfs/cce/11.2.69-79.pdf>
- Uhl-Bien, M. (2006). Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(6), 654–676.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.007>
- Uusiautti, S. (2013). An action-oriented perspective on caring leadership: A qualitative study of higher education administrators' positive leadership experiences. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 16*(4), 482–496. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2013.770077>
- Wang, V. C. X., & Sedivy-Benton, A. L. (2016). Leadership misplacement: How can this affect institutions of higher education? *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development, 28*(3), 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20148>
- Woodard, D. B. J., Love, P., & Komives, S. R. (2000). Leadership. *New Directions for Student Services, 92*, 81–91.
- Yielder, J., & Codling, A. (2004). Management and leadership in the contemporary university. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 26*(3), 315–328.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080042000290177>

## Biography

**Cristina L. Eftenaru** earned a Doctorate in Education Leadership from Simon Fraser University. She considers herself a lifelong learner who eagerly engages in exploring new topics using a variety of conventional and creative approaches. Cristina is a passionate researcher of leadership and learning. Her systematic approach to research along with her endeavor to bridge theory and practice and cross paradigm lines allow her to challenge viewpoints and weave in concepts that various perspectives reveal in new and innovative ways. Cristina enjoys tapping into her own and others' expertise and experiences and is committed to disseminating widely the findings of her work. Her career path has taken her into areas such as teaching, leadership, experiential learning, and consulting. Cristina works as an Instructor at Langara College and is a Coordinator in Work Integrated Learning at Simon Fraser University. She serves on ACE-WIL Board and on several institutional, provincial, and international committees.

**\*Corresponding Author:** Cristina L. Eftenaru, Simon Fraser University. Email:  
cristina\_eftenaru@sfu.ca