

Understanding the Process of Leadership Development that Promote Learning and Performance

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Adult Learning Symposium 2018
2 November 2018

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the understanding of the developmental process of professional military leaders, develops a grounded theory of their development, and derives leadership development implications that promote learning and performance. The paper is based on a study that used a non-positivist grounded theory approach to establish the understanding and theorize an integrated processes of military leaders' development. The study was conducted through 19 in-depth interviews with officers who had sufficient leadership and leadership development experiences within a military organization. For the findings, the grounded theory paradigm model consisting of coded categories was developed to describe the process of military leaders' development as professionals through the storyline of their developmental experiences. Three paradigm models described their developmental trajectories covering the beginning, advancing, and maturing phase. The structure of their developmental trajectories was also explicated to identify the factors and how they were related in the process of them developing as professional military leaders.

From the findings, a model of the theoretical integrated processes of the military leaders' development as professionals was proposed. The theoretical contribution of this study is the examination of the ontological and praxiological dimensions that impact these leaders in becoming military professionals and how these factors contributed to the leaders' *being and becoming* and *learning and doing* of their leadership practice belonging to the military profession. Besides the above findings and theoretical contribution, the paper will also present the three practical implications of the study where: (1) Formal development of leaders could be made more complete by challenging and re-conceptualizing the philosophical assumptions of professional leadership development program, (2) Leadership learning needing to be situated in the context of leadership practice, and (3) Sequencing of both formal and informal varieties of developmental experiences within workplace learning and development needs to be emphasized.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the understanding of the developmental process of professional military leaders, develops a grounded theory of their development, and derives leadership development implications that promote learning and performance. The paper is based on the author's study¹ that used a non-positivist grounded theory approach to establish the understanding and theorize an integrated processes of military leaders' development. The study was conducted through 19 in-depth interviews with officers who had sufficient leadership and leadership development

¹ This paper is extracted from the author's thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

experiences within a military organization.

This paper will not dwell into the literature review and methodology of the study. It will present the findings and focus on discussing the implications that impact learning and performance of leaders in general, and specifically of military leaders.

FINDINGS

Grounded Theory Paradigm Model of the Development Trajectory

Line-by-line open coding and analysis identified 5,296 items (labels) that reflected single ideas of the lived experiences of respondents' developing as professional military leaders. These open codes were combined into coded categories using the grounded theory paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) during axial coding. Initial coding and analysis of the data from the first eight interviews found that the respondents perceived themselves to undergo three phases of development as leaders. These three phases of development – beginning, advancing, and maturing – also corresponded closely with the vocational training and professional development program that they had to attend in order to be “technically qualified” to hold the next higher appointments in a typical military progression pathway.

Table 1 shows the summary of the axial coding coded categories based on the paradigm model for the three phases with 28 “categories” and 50 “properties.” The core process of the respondents' developmental trajectory can be considered to have the three sub-processes of the beginning, advancing, and maturing phases. Within each sub-process or phase, the core and main categories are highlighted in bold (e.g., “Taking charge as junior leader”). Within each category, the properties are shown as bullet points (e.g., “Vocational responsibility” under “Taking charge as junior leader”). For the core category and intervening subcategory, the properties are further “dimensionalized” (e.g., “Leadership confidence” has the dimension of “low to high”).

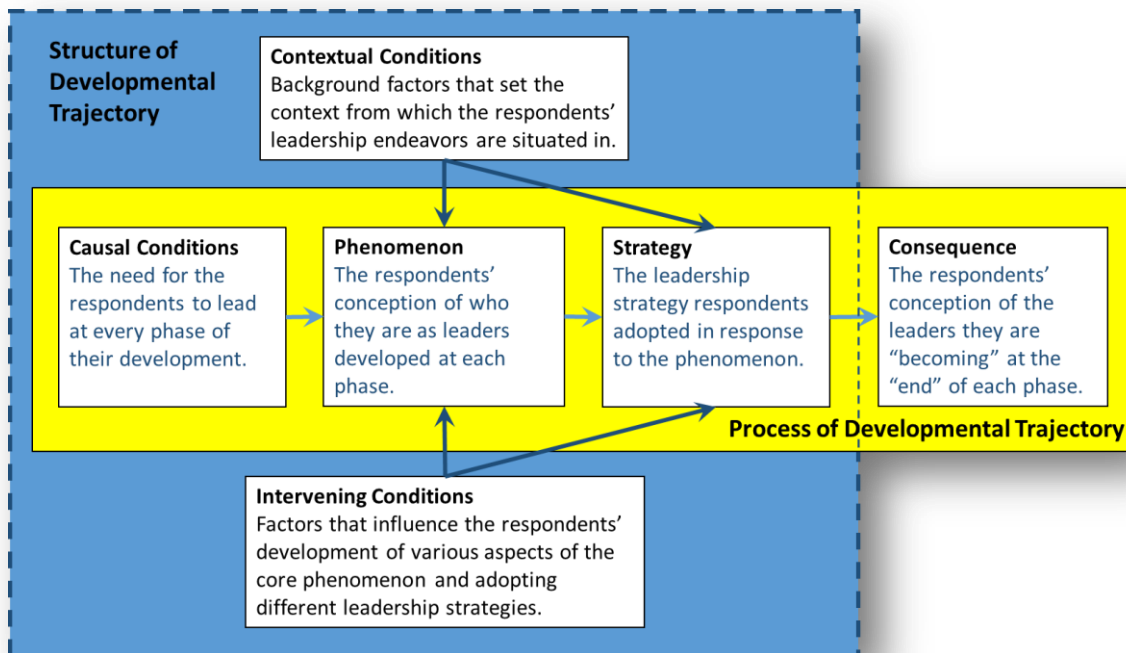
Table 1. Axial coding coded categories

Core Process	Developmental Trajectory		
Sub-Processes	Beginning Phase	Advancing Phase	Maturing Phase
Contextual conditions • Subcategory/ Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning appointment • Subordinate profile • Professional training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military appointment • Tour of duty • Professional training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Command and staff course • Senior appointment • Unit and organizational structure
Causal conditions - Main Category • Property	Taking charge as junior leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational responsibility • Vocational competent • Secondary tasking 	Leading in different mission context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational task • Staff work • Managerial task 	Satisfying operating demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal personnel demand • Internal unit demand • External stakeholders demand • External policy demand

Core Process	Developmental Trajectory		
Sub-Processes	Beginning Phase	Advancing Phase	Maturing Phase
Phenomena - Core Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property (dimension) 	Establishing self as vocational leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership confidence (low -> high) Leadership identity (weak -> strong) 	Leading for mission completion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of mission success (mission alone -> mission+men) Sense of purpose behind mission (unclear -> clear) 	Leading with professional maturity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational identity (self -> community) Leadership identity (self -> organization) Organizational identity (services -> national)
Strategies - Main Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property 	Managing transaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transactional execution Task execution Relational influencing 	Leadership by example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical leadership Transactional leadership Principle-based leadership 	Contributing beyond vocational competency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuous engagement Serving as a bridge Developing next generation of leaders
Consequences - Main Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property 	Confident and willing leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading with mission clarity Genuine concern for people 	Capable leader beyond leading by example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusted to lead Indirect influencing Organizational bridge 	Becoming an organizational leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to organizational purpose Improving organization Grounded in organizational values
Intervening conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcategory/Property (dimension) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to lead (few -> many) Encouragement to lead (low -> high) Work pressure (low -> high) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autonomy to lead (low -> high) Leadership of superior (negative -> positive) Subordinate needs (more diverse -> less diverse) Unit culture (perf driven -> people oriented) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social interaction (relational -> organizational) Leadership theorizing (self-application -> organization-application) Acceptance of feedback (high -> low)

The coded categories were used to describe the storyline of the military officers' leadership development experience during selective coding. The core process of developing as professional military leaders was then constructed through the storyline for the three developmental trajectories of the beginning, advancing, and maturing phases. These three phases described the sub-processes of the action/interaction over time of the respondents' reaction to the phenomenon of being developed as professional military leaders. Each sub-process was explicated from the "causal conditions" that triggered the "phenomenon," leading to the action/interaction "strategy," and finally influencing the "consequence" of their development, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The developmental trajectory explicated using the paradigm model process and structure



Within the three phases of the beginning, advancing, and maturing trajectories, the experiences and reflections of the respondents further revealed the dynamic process of military leaders' development as professionals. These processes were further explicated using the "categories and properties" within each phase of their developmental trajectory.

For each phase of them developing as professional military leaders, the structure (conditions) creates the circumstances in which the core phenomena of their conception of who they are as leaders arises. The paradigm model describes this *structure* as the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, and together with the *process*, capture the dynamic and evolving nature of the phenomenon of the military leaders' development as professionals.

Leadership Development in the Three Phases

Beginning Phase. In the beginning phase, becoming professional military leaders at the junior level is a process that is marked by the struggle towards establishing themselves as vocational leader (core phenomenon), and becoming confident and willing leaders (consequence) who are able to lead with mission clarity and genuine concern for the people under their charge.

Advancing Phase. In the advancing phase, which lasts between six to eight years, the respondents emphasized leading for mission completion (core phenomenon). In the advancing phase, military officers may be posted to different "tours," each spanning two to three years, and they may undertake leadership appointments in vocational, staff or managerial capacities. In the advancing phase, becoming professional military leaders is a process that is marked by them leading for mission

completion (core phenomenon) in becoming capable leaders who go beyond leading by example (consequence) using leadership by example strategy.

Maturing Stage. As the respondents progressed to the next phase of their development, more experiences fostered their maturing identity as leaders. In this phase, they would have accumulated, on average, a minimum of 15 years in service. Besides other vocational-based training, they had also attended the Command and Staff Course (CSC) as part of their formal professional and leadership development in preparation for higher-level appointments. In this maturing phase, becoming a military leader at the senior level is a process that is marked with leading in professional maturity (core phenomenon) in becoming an organizational leader (consequence) who is able to contribute beyond his vocational competency.

DISCUSSION

Integrated Processes of Military Leaders' Development as Professionals

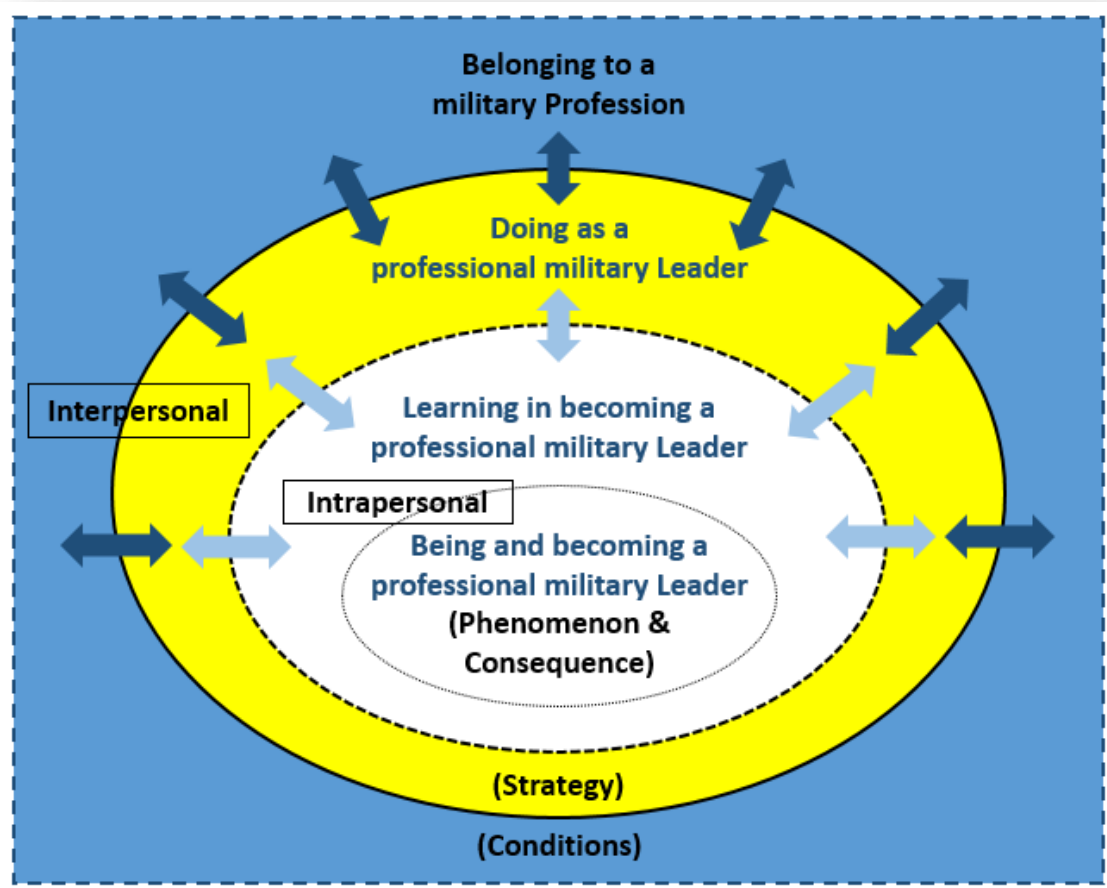
A comprehensive and dynamic leadership development process is multilevel and multidimensional (Avolio & Chan, 2008; Day & O'Connor, 2003). Findings from the study show that military leadership development needs to be considered from these different perspectives. The development of professional military leaders is not just intrapersonal competency development, but includes the interpersonal aspect of social interaction with their significant others (superiors, peers, and followers), their vocational community, as well as the military organization at large. It goes beyond the single dimension of leader development, which is so often the focus of leadership development program (Day, 2000; Day & Harrison, 2007). The integrated processes of professional military leadership development could be represented by Figure 2. The process of military leaders' development as professionals is therefore more "integrated" between the "within" intrapersonal (denoted by the two white ovals) professional military leader and the "without" interpersonal (denoted by the yellow oval and blue rectangle) social interaction with the military profession that the leader belongs to.

The intrapersonal processes represent the "being and becoming" and "learning in becoming" of a professional military leader. The "being" and "becoming" processes represent the ontological dimensions that were elucidated by the *phenomena* and *consequences* (see Figure 1) of the paradigm model respectively. The "learning in becoming" process represents the epistemological dimension of the professional *knowing* learned by the professional military leader. The interpersonal processes represent the "doing as" a professional military leader who is "belonging to" a military profession. The "doing as" process represents the praxiological dimension that was elucidated by the *strategy* (see Figure 1) of the paradigm model. Finally, the "belonging to" process represents the *conditions* (see Figure 1) of the paradigm model that influenced the leader's practice within the military profession.

These suggested integrated processes build on Day et al.'s (2009) integrative theory of leader development and extend it to leadership development using the identity lens in development efforts ("being and becoming" process) to bridge the two leader and leadership developmental levels (Day & Harrison, 2007). Two additional dynamic processes of "learning in becoming" and "belonging to," essential to the

development of professional military leaders, are integrated with the three processes (developing expert leadership, identity processes, and adult development processes) of Day et al.'s (2009) model.

Figure 2. Integrated processes of military leaders' development as professionals



At the core of the suggested integrated processes is the “being and becoming” process of the military leaders’ development as professionals. It encapsulates the development of the professional being of the military leaders as they developed. It also captures the lived experience of the military leaders’ development by the *phenomenon* and *consequence* within the paradigm model illustrated in Figure 1. The “being and becoming” process is integrated with the “learning in becoming” process of the military leaders’ learning as part of their professional leadership development. The “learning in becoming” process captures the professional knowing embodied by the military leaders’ leadership learning as they struggled through their “being and becoming.” The “learning in becoming” process is in turn integrated with the enactment of the “doing as” process by the military leaders as they performed their leadership practice. It captures the professional doing of the military leaders’ actions and interactions in their development with the *strategy* adopted within the paradigm model. Finally, the enactment and embodiment processes of the professional military leaders’ development are integrated to the “belonging to” process of their being in the military profession. The “belonging to” process captures the *structure* created by the professional environment that sets the *conditions* (causal, contextual, and intervening) of their social interactions illuminated by the

paradigm model.

As the military officers go through each of the developmental phase, they grow continually through these integrated processes, and become military professionals who understand themselves in terms of possibilities (or possible ways of being) and are “continually in a process of becoming that is open-ended, never complete,” oriented to what they are “not yet” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 55). They perpetually embody the “learning in becoming” professional military leader through enacting their “doing as” professional military leaders, and engaging with the military profession they are “belonging to” in each phase of their developmental trajectories. The following sections discuss in detail, these integrated processes across the military leaders development as professionals with respect to the wider leadership development discourse.

Theoretical implications

The findings from this study indicate that the military officers’ leadership development experience in becoming professionals could be divided into three dominant developmental phases. Within each phase, it is theorized that the officers grow continually through the dynamic *integrated processes of military leaders’ development as professionals*, depicted by Figure 2. These phases illuminate the “continuous processes” of their leadership development, instead of the more “deterministic stages” that are based on their fixed years of experience, rank seniority, or “expertise levels.” The officers will continuously embody their “learning in becoming” professional military leaders, through enacting their “doing as” professional military leaders, and engaging with the military profession they are “belonging to.” This suggested integrated model agrees with Day et al.’s (2009) proposed integrative theory of leader development in which:

the observable, behavioral level of *leadership skills and competence* [emphasis added] (i.e., expertise and effectiveness) was supported by deeper level processes associated with more Gestalt-like mental structures and frameworks. At a meso-, less-observable level it was proposed that the processes of *leader identity* [emphasis added] formation and self-regulation motivate and support the development of leadership skills and expertise that undergirds leadership effectiveness. But at the deepest and most fundamental level, the entire leader development process takes place in the context of ongoing *adult development* [emphasis added], which may not be completely under conscious awareness or control. (Day & Sin, 2011, p. 546)

However, most organizations’ (especially the military) leadership and leadership development frameworks focus on the visible, behavioral competency level with detailed competency models, and pay less attention to the less visible leader identity and invisible adult development levels in their leadership development interventions. This in effect turns the “triangle” of Day et al.’s (2009) integrated model of leader development upside down on its head, with the “foundational” adult development processes at the top, supported by the expert leadership development processes at the bottom. This certainly erodes the “theoretical foundation” of leadership development research.

The suggested integrated processes model from this study builds on Day et al.'s (2009) model and extends it to leadership development using the identity lens in development efforts ("being and becoming" process) to bridge the two leader and leadership developmental levels (Day & Harrison, 2007). At the same time, on top of the three processes (developing expert leadership, identity processes, and adult development processes) for Day et al.'s (2009) model, the suggested integrated processes model includes two additional dynamic processes of leadership learning (learning in becoming) and the context of professions (belonging to) that are essential to the development of professional (military) leaders.

Professional learning. Chee, Loke, and Tan (2011) appropriated and extended Collen (2003) human inquiry framework as a conceptual tool for undertaking research on human learning. Using a performative framing, subsuming ontos, logos, and praxis, they emphasize that "human knowing is inseparable from human doing and human being" (Chee et al., 2011, p. 5) and is further subsumed within the context of axiology. At the same time, Webster-Wright suggests that the ontological understanding of being a professional facilitates axiological understanding of values and ethics in professional learning (p. 191). However, Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) lament that besides the more recent trends in positive psychology and positive organization research, there has been little discussion of values in management or leadership theory. This has implications especially for military organizations that view value-based leadership and ethical conduct as part of their profession (Day et al., 2009).

The process of "being and becoming" leaders "belonging to" their profession entails enacting and embodying their professional being, knowing, doing, and valuing learned throughout their career (Webster-Wright, 2010). These "learning in becoming" leaders can take place both during formal professional development (specifically leadership development) programs or informal learning within the workplace (Daley, 2001). What changes through these learning is brought about by the "understanding of being a professional [leaders] that underpins all interpretation, reflection, action or interaction as a professional" (Webster-Wright, 2010, p. 176). Webster-Wright (2010) introduces the notion of authentic professional learning (APL) that involves a change in the understanding of being a professional that involve being "embodied and expressed through a particular way of being a professional in practice" (p. 179). Therefore, as practitioners of leadership (Riggio, 2008), leaders need to embrace the notion of authentic professional learning that brings about the understanding of being a professional.

Professional leadership development. Professional leadership development that overly emphasizes pre-defined skills or competencies disregard and fail to appreciate the ontological dimension of leaders' professional learning ("learning in becoming" process) and leadership practice ("doing as" process) to be professional leaders (Dall'Alba, 2009). Focusing narrowly on human knowing (epistemology) in professional leadership development separates the human doing (praxiology) and human being (ontology) of the performative conceptual framing of human learning (Chee et al., 2011). It also does not allow discursive account foregrounding the developing aspects of an "always in motion and always unfolding" leadership development process offered by a praxiology framework proposed by Smolović Jones, Smolović Jones, Winchester, and Grint (2016, p. 425).

Not paying attention to the value-laden context (axiology) of professional practice further separates the valuing of professional leaders from their thinking and being (Chee et al., 2011). In this study, the initial leadership experiences challenged the junior officers with respect to their valuing of task completion or maintaining relationships with their followers as they engaged in managing their work as a transaction. They started to develop some realization that leaders need to value relationships and not merely on task completion. This had great impact, especially for beginning leaders, since they were starting to align their personal values to the values of the new profession in their process of “being, becoming, and belonging” (Peers & Fler, 2014) with a new organization. Even for more senior leaders, such “valuing” would help clarify who they are as leaders (“being and becoming”), leading to them seeking out what they need to know (“learning as becoming”) as leaders, and ultimately influencing what they do (“doing as”) as leaders.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study indicate that the officers’ leadership development experience in becoming professionals could be divided into three dominant developmental phases. Within these phases, leadership and vocational competency were identified and described according to various stages of their developmental order. Though this seems similar to the Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ (1986) five-level skill acquisition stage model, the phases uncovered in this study clearly illustrates that there was more than “a single development path towards becoming professional” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 131) military leaders. Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) argue that the “focus on stages veils more fundamental aspects of professional development” that “directed attention away from what is being developed” (p. 399). Though they acknowledge that Dreyfus’ stage model highlights progressive skill development with increased experience, their proposed alternative model with the vertical dimension foreground the “variation in embodied understanding of professional practice” (p. 400). In the findings from this study, the officers’ understanding of being a professional military leader was embodied and enacted in their professional leadership identity and practice, especially during the maturing phase, which incorporated their development beyond leadership and vocational skills acquisition.

Similar to Dall’Alba’s (2009) longitudinal study of medical professionals, the military officers “construct, enact, and embody” the professional leadership “knowledge and skills in various ways and to differing ends” (p. 137). The findings in this study also support the mentioned longitudinal study’s finding that leadership knowledge and skills relating to professional practice cannot simply “be transferred” (p. 137) to professionals in formal leadership development programs. Though meta-analyses on formal leadership programs indicate positive impact on leaders’ acquisition of new knowledge, behavior change, and performance (Burke & Day, 1986; Collins & Holton, 2004), a stronger positive effect on knowledge outcomes in comparison to behavior or performance outcomes is noted (Collins & Holton, 2004; DeRue & Myers, 2014). This study’s grounded approach to understanding leaders’ developmental trajectory also indicates the struggle of beginning leaders as they attempted to *establish themselves as vocational leaders who were becoming confident and willing leaders* that went beyond what they had been taught in formal learning within the organization. Several practical implications for developing professional (military)

leaders can thus be gleaned from this study.

Formal professional leadership development program. First, the philosophical assumptions for formal professional leadership development program has to be challenged and re-conceptualized (Webster-Wright, 2010). Conceiving the program as a “process of becoming” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 53) that emphasizes inquiry-directed to professional practice could help move away from viewing knowledge as a “transferable object” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 713) and turn towards the ontological (“being and becoming,” and “belonging to” processes) and praxiological (“doing as” process) dimensions of human “learning, growth, and change” (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010, p. 18). A curriculum that is not overloaded or closed to inquiry, but encourages “letting learn” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 68) would allow professionals the space to pursue the questions related to their profession (they belong to) and who they are becoming, by considering “which possible and provisional selves are helpful in adapting to new roles” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 43) when they complete the formal program. This echoes John Dewey’s philosophy that education cannot be done directly, but indirectly through creating the appropriate learning environment (Garrison, 2010, p. 69). Within the adult developmental field, Day et al. (2009) also use the similar term of “letting go to develop,” for leaders to let go of certain day-to-day technical responsibilities and focus on new responsibilities as they moved to the next higher appointment (Freedman, 2005). Considerations for transitions in roles are thus crucial for leadership development program (McCall, 2010b), especially for organizations within a VUCA environment with increased pace of change in strategy and structure (Gibson, 2003).

Together with scholars of leadership and finance, Erhard, Jensen, and Granger (2012) have developed and delivered a leadership course that employs an ontological model and a phenomenological method promising participants “being leader and exercising leadership effectively as their *natural self-expression*” (p. 246) by the end of the course. Its pedagogical process differs from most leadership courses’ epistemological approach which is founded based on “the accumulation and delivery of knowledge, with emphasis on the practice and mastery of behaviors known empirically to be consistent with successful leadership” (Carney et al., 2017, p. 51). A pilot pre/post comparative assessment of the course indicated that the average scores for participants’ effectiveness (as leaders in the domains of relationships, vocation, avocation, and self) increased significantly with the measure of leadership as “one’s self-expression found in the results people produce in their lives” (Carney et al., 2017, p. 51).

The findings from this study also show that the military leaders typically adapted leadership theories from formal training as they had vague notions of how the leadership theories connected to their leadership results. Indeed, research suggests that seeing oneself as a leader not only enhances one’s motivation to lead and engage in the leadership process, but also promotes the seeking out of leadership responsibilities and opportunities to develop their leadership skills (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) in the workplace. The fact that individuals – especially leaders – actively co-construct their own careers by choosing between “taking advantage of or disregarding certain learning opportunities” within their workplace “situated curriculum” (Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998, p. 30). McCall Jr (2004) further suggests that formal leadership development program should be a supplement to,

rather than the core of, development. He highlights that the experience from formal program can play a significant part of learning when it is used as “an opportunity to reflect on and make better sense of actual experience,” (p. 129) echoing Jackson and Lindsay's (2010) proposition that the experience from formal lessons could complement workplace experience. McCall (2010a) attributes the failure in realizing this potential to how formal leadership development programs are treated as a primary development tool and are based on competency models instead of lessons from actual experience (p. 64).

Leadership practice. Second, for leadership practitioners, leadership learning must be seen in the context of praxis, or of practice. Since according to Gherardi (2000), practice connects “knowing” with “doing,” consideration of praxis is needed to situate leadership learning within leadership practice. From the better understanding of the military leaders’ trajectory in this naturalistic study, it seems to suggest that “on-the-job experience and contact with key people in the workplace” (Kempster & Stewart, 2010, p. 207) are the primary sources of leaders’ development, and the development of their leadership practice. The notion of *being and becoming* similarly relates to the developmental trajectory through which leadership practice is developed as a result of participative engagement *belonging* to a profession, where a beginning leader “progresses from a novice to a master through involvement in a community’s practice” (Kempster & Stewart, 2010, p. 208).

For novice leaders who are starting to experiment with their own leadership skills and style while in the process of influencing their followers, they need to be shown examples of leadership behaviors and gain external leadership knowledge (Dongen, 2014). By performing the “situated military curriculum” tasks, the beginning leaders learned beyond specific skills of the military profession, and gained the “local criteria of accountability, the specific set of values sustained by the community, and the local pattern of power relations, together with the proper strategies to cope with them” (Gherardi et al., 1998, p. 28). Although better understanding of the process of socialization at work focuses efforts and resources on facilitating and fostering the natural processes of co-constructing and acquiring working competences, overly formalizing the novices’ socialization path could produce unintended consequences (Gherardi et al., 1998, p. 30). Ultimately, the leadership practice of the beginning leaders has to impact their professional performance beyond their learning within the “living curriculum” as they go through their “apprenticeship” (Wenger & Trayner, 2015, p. 4).

Workplace learning and development. Third, professional leadership development should be a continuous learning process within a workplace “situated curriculum,” beyond formal program and other transient events (e.g., lectures, journals, conferences) that had failed to result in changes to professional practice (Yip & Wilson, 2010). Despite the lack of empirical evidence and agreement on its origin, the 70:20:10 model has been employed extensively by organizations (Kajewski & Madsen, 2013; McCall, 2010b) in stressing the importance of workplace learning. However, the key is not whether the learning is formal or informal but that of leaders focusing their attention on learning *from* the experience and not just having it (McCall, 2010b). For example, in this study, the military leaders learned to role model after “positive leadership” and avoided “negative leadership” from their personal experience through constantly observing their superiors, seniors and instructors, and

seeing how they led.

“Developmental trigger experience” (Avolio & Hannah, 2008, p. 339) that prompts leaders to focus their attention on the need to learn and develop from it would be important for professional leadership development. Sequencing of a variety of these developmental experiences, both formal and informal, should be a major consideration in professional leadership development (DeRue & Myers, 2014; Karaevli & Hall, 2006). According to Kegan and Lahey (2001), a “holding environment” (p. 184) setting containing psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999) relationships could serve as an important source of developmental support. This holding environment allows individual to self-reflect and experiment with new behaviors through developmental conversations and developmental tasks (Hall, 2004, p. 163).

Thus, the notion of “continuing professional learning” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 704) needs to be embraced by professional leaders as they learn to *being and becoming* practitioners of leadership (Riggio, 2008). Raelin (2008) argues that such learning needs to be centered around conscious reflection (Moon, 1999) on work practices with actual experience. He suggests setting up various experiences that make use of the organic and reflective processes embedded in work-based learning that view preexisting knowledge as not “fixed but rather as provisional until tried out in a given context or in practice” (p.7). He contends that leadership development needs to be brought back “into the group where the lessons of experience can be truly accessed,” (Raelin, 2011, p. 204) instead of sending leaders away to learn leadership.

Besides conscious reflection on work-based practices and experience, workplace learning also needs to focus on building individual, relational, and collective level identities (Day & Harrison, 2007) when developing professionals. In the extreme dynamic and hazardous environment of combat, the shared experiences of the military leaders often deepen their understanding of what it means to lead and learn with continual development of a collective professional identity (Allen & Kayes, 2012). This is similarly illustrated in the findings of this study in peacetime military operations, administration, and training. This implies that organizations must then be able to track individual leaders’ development over time, across different superiors, and with crucial transitions points (McCall, 2010a), so as to provide the appropriate experiences and developmental opportunities at different stages of their career. This is vital, especially since the development of professional leaders is not just a career-long but rather, a life-long process (McCall Jr, 2004, p. 129).

CONCLUSIONS

This empirical study explored the developmental trajectory of leaders in becoming military professionals, using the grounded approach of interviewing experienced military officers. The theoretical contribution of this study is the examination of the ontological and praxiological dimensions that impact these leaders in becoming military professionals, and how these factors contributed to the leaders’ *being and becoming* and *learning and doing* of their leadership practice. By challenging and re-conceptualizing the philosophical assumptions of formal professional leadership development program, sequencing of both formal and informal variety of developmental experiences, and situating leadership learning in the context of

leadership practice, leadership development of professional leaders could be made more complete. Continued research on understanding the processual and contextual leadership developmental experiences using qualitative and interpretative approaches should be conducted to advance further understanding of leadership learning and development of professional leaders as their being, becoming, and belonging to a profession.

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