Playing to Win: A Case Study of a Fortune 100 Corporation’s Actors’ Workshop in Leadership Development

Caroline M. Woitas

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.stthomas.edu/caps_ed_lead_docdiss

Part of the Education Commons
Playing to Win: A Case Study of a Fortune 100 Corporation’s Actors’ Workshop in Leadership Development

Caroline M. Woitas
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, carolinemwoitas@gmail.com
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

Playing to Win: A Case Study of a Fortune 100 Corporation’s Actors’ Workshop in Leadership Development

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

________________________________________
Donald R. LaMagdeleine, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Diane Fittipaldi
Diane Fittipaldi, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____________________________________
Michael C. Porter, Ed.D., Committee Member

November 19, 2019

Final Approval Date
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how a Fortune 100 health care organization’s leadership development program prepares promising leaders for executive level positions. The primary research questions were: 1) What are the recruiting practices for attracting high potential candidates into the organization’s leadership development program? 2) What is the curriculum that guides the development of the program’s participants? 3) Does the program’s pedagogy align with the curriculum and practice for developing leaders? 4) How should an organization evaluate the success of their program? The collection of qualitative data involved semi-structured, one-to-one, in-depth interviews totaling 23 program associates, graduates, directors, and steering committee members.

This study required a complex integration of sociological and anthropological theories using a normative case study and grounded theory tactics to uncover how executive leaders establish, grow, and sustain their power in order to survive the competitive world of organizational leadership. Further, this study produced meaningful findings showing how leaders acquire and monetize their social and cultural capital through information, influence, and innovation. There are no comparable studies involving organizational leadership development programs offering detailed analysis and critical findings illuminated by the data collected, coded, and analyzed.

Participants revealed a strategic pattern of professional development, years in advance of leadership development program auditions. While the program structure is consistent with Talent Management research for developing high potentials, such as mentoring, coaching, assessments, formal and experiential learning, special events, and access to high-ranking executives, the data demonstrates that the program’s structure does not consistently produce the caliber of leadership required for the organization’s talent pipeline.

Further examination of the data revealed a set of leadership markers common amongst executive leaders and necessary to maintain power, missing from the program’s pedagogy. These markers are ambiguously defined by executive leaders and undetected by the program’s director and participants. Other contributing factors include the curious and transitional role of the program director, along with a
spoiled rite of passage resulting from missing graduation criteria, the lack of program elders and adepts, and other distractions that extend the participants’ liminal period.

While the health care industry is complex due to the broad range of stakeholders, the required leadership markers remain consistent with other industries. In this study, leaders acquire power through hierarchical status and their aptitude for influencing other leaders, generating social and cultural capital necessary to reinforce organizational power. The objective of these leadership programs is to produce viable leaders, capable of competing for the limited number of executive roles that requires organizational power yet is critically missing from this program.
Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the help and support of an amazing network of family and friends who enabled completion of my personal milestone. I sincerely appreciate the following individuals and other influences that inspired me to undertake and complete this journey. First, to my parents Marty and Stella Rossbach, for their commitment to education and confidence that I could accomplish anything I chose to pursue. My parents taught me that education is one of the greatest gifts we give to ourselves and pass along to others in order to enrich our social fabric. It is telling that I began and end my doctoral journey recognizing their influence.

To my husband Gary, always standing by my side through every endeavor, never questioning or challenging my dreams and consistently offering support and assistance. Whether it was luck or fate that brought us together at 26th and 26th, I know that I am fortunate to experience adulthood with a life partner who shares my curiosity and interests.

To our children Brooks and Mallory, I am grateful to witness your transformation into amazing and accomplished adults. Brooks, thank you for your role as guidance counselor when you sensed my waning confidence. Your logical approach and pragmatic views helped keep me grounded, focused on important matters in order to let go of the trivial. Mallory, thank you for your inspirational role, pushing me forward to finish this journey. Your sense of humor and constant support provided the meaningful sparks to re-ignite my curiosity, laugh off frustrations, and complete this study.

To my siblings, Patty, Kathie, and Marty, thank you for leading me through my developmental years by role modeling what it means to be a caring, compassionate, and valued citizen. For my friends, Jean and Cindy, through thick and thin, I know that I can count on your friendship and support. To my in-laws, thank you for welcoming me into the family, for which I consider myself fortunate.

I need to acknowledge another cadre of influences while a student at St. Thomas. First, to Dr. LaMagdeleine, thank you for agreeing to work with me and continuously challenging me to dig deep and surface meaningful findings. To my fellow C-26 cohort members, thank you for inspiring, guiding,
challenging, and bringing so much joy to my life during our weekend classes and rousing discussions. I count our time together as a very special experience. In closing, a sincere thank you to all.
# Table of Contents

**Abstract**  
Acknowledgements  
Table of Contents  
  – Table of Tables  
  – Table of Figures  
**Introduction**  
  Reflexive Statement  
  Definition of Terms  
**Chapter One: Review of Literature and Analytic Theory**  
  Introduction  
  Review of Literature  
    – Generational, Birth, and Life-Cycle Cohorts  
    – Educational Trends  
    – Birth Year Socialization Trends and Experiences  
      – Global Affects  
      – Technology Impacts  
    – Workforce Experience  
  Millennial Workplace Characteristics  
    – Technology and Information Experts  
    – Integration Expectations  
      – Professional and Team Relationships  
      – Adding Organizational Value  
    – Common Millennial Values  
  Formal High Potential Development Programs  
    – Master of Business Administration (MBA) Programs  
      – Structure of MBA Programs  
      – Formal Leadership Development  
      – Evolving Business Practices  
    – High Potential Leadership Development Programs  
      – Talent Management Strategies  
      – Identification of High Potential Employees  
      – Development of “High Potentials”  
        – Ratings Transparency in High Potential Programs  
  Review of Analytical Theories  
    – Goffman’s Dramaturgy, Total Institution, and Moral Career  
      – Dramaturgy  
      – Total Institution with Strong Cultural Systems  
      – Moral Career  
      – Summary  
    – Bourdieu’s Social Structuration Theory  
      – Habitus  
      – Forms of Capital  
      – Symbolic Violence  
      – Role of Educational Institution  
      – Summary  
    – Turner’s Liminality Theory  
      – Liminality  
      – Communitas
The Role of Elders and Adepts 34
Summary 34

Jackall’s Corporate Moral Leadership 35
Looking Up and Looking Around 36
Modeling Bureaucratic Ethic 37
Powerful Social Networks 37
Luck 39
Summary 39

Chapter Summary 39

Chapter Two: Normative Case Study Methodology 42
Introduction 42
Interpretive Framework 42
Normative case study 43
Grounded Theory 43
Data Collection 44
Data Analysis 47
Ethical Considerations 51
Data Integrity and Limitations 53
HC’s Leadership Development Program 54
HC Career Architecture 58
HC LDP Program Structure 60
Rotations 60
Enablers 61
Graduation 62
Summary 62
Participant Overview 62
MBA Program: Elite and Non-Elite Participants 63
Participant Group: Recruitment Prior to 2013 65
Participant Group: Recruitment After to 2013 68
Program Directors 72
Steering Committee Members 73
Summary 73
Chapter Summary 73

Chapter Three: The Ups and Downs of My Moral Career as a Leader in the Health Service Industry 75
Introduction 75
Professional Reentry 76
High Times at Feel Good 77
Advancing Up the Corporate Ladder 79
Organizational Change: The Long Shadow of National Care 80
Meaningless Titles 81
What I Learned as a Corporate Leader 82
Moving Forward 84
Summary 86
Chapter Four: Structure and Origins of an Organization’s Leadership Development Program: Enter the Stage as an Actor, Exit as a Director?

Introduction

Section One: Preparing for the Role
The Work of Becoming a Serious Actor
  Headshots: Projecting the Right Image
  The Importance of Organizational Fit
Casting Calls
  Elite Casting Calls
  Open Casting Calls
  Local University Casting Calls
  Internal Casting Calls

Section Summary

Section Two: The Leadership Workshop Production in Five Scenes
Introduction

Scene 1: The Actors’ Stages
  Helpful Corporation’s Global Office
  Executive Wing Front Stage
  Cubicle Farm Back Stage
  Summary
Scene 2 – Rotation 1: Foundational Leadership
  The Duality of Roles and Performances
  The Actor’s Personal Brand
  Summary
Interlude – Program Swag Bags
  Day One Tools
  Fast-Passes
  Student/Teacher Learning Curricula
    Mentoring
    Recruiting
    Influencing
  The Actor’s Personal Agent
  Summary
Scene 3 – Rotation 2: Personal Leadership and Global Mindset
  The Actor’s Brand
  Personal Brand as Social Capital
  Summary
Scene 4 - Rotation 3: Managing Others and Strategy Development
  The Significance of Stretch Roles and Influence
    The Purpose of Stretch Roles
    Alliances and Influence
  Summary
Scene 5 - Rotation 4: Enhancing the Business
  Ceremonial Marker
    The Final Rotation
    Graduation as Program Closure
    Spartan Program Graduation

Section Three: From Scripted Drama to Improvisational Rite of Passage
Introduction

Scene 4 - Rotation 3: Managing Others and Strategy Development
  The Significance of Stretch Roles and Influence
    The Purpose of Stretch Roles
    Alliances and Influence
  Summary
Scene 5 - Rotation 4: Enhancing the Business
  Ceremonial Marker
    The Final Rotation
    Graduation as Program Closure
    Spartan Program Graduation
# Chapter Five: Barriers That Impede LDP Associates’ Progression to HC Executive Leadership Roles

## Introduction

- HC’s Organizational Power Tree
- The Presence of Leadership Markers: Naturals, Potentials, and Contributors
- Summary

## I. The Largely Silent Program Pedagogy: Incomplete Development for the HC Way of Executive Leadership

- HC Leadership Markers
  - The Moral Career of an HC Executive
  - Playing the Long Game
- Pedagogical Gaps
  - Collaboration: Sponsors and Advocates
  - Decision-Making: Track Record of HC Performance
  - Influence: The Cornerstone of Organizational Power
  - Ambiguity: Making Sense of the White Space
- Summary

## I. The Confused Role of Program Director: Churn, Turn, and Burn

- Program Director Turnover
  - The Personal Agents’ Revolving Door
  - Shifting Strategic Directions and Managing Expectations
  - Unbalanced Demands
- Summary

## II. A Spoiled Rite of Passage

- Limitations of HC’s Elders and Adepts
- The Trouble with Anti-Structure
  - Third Rotation as Unintended Counter-Structure
  - The Lure of Alternative Rituals
  - Graduation as Amorphous Ritual Structure
- Summary

## Burnishing HC’s Executive Brand

## Chapter Summary

## Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

- Background
- Study Summary
- Findings and Conclusions
  - Program Pedagogy: The “Power” of Education
    - Hobble Development
    - Missing Enablers
    - Advancing the LDP’s Curriculum
      - Sponsorship
      - Branding
      - Influencer
      - Risk Taking
Summary 213
Program Leadership Role Requirements: Churn, Turn, and Learn 213
  Options for “fixing the Program Director’s Role” 214
Summary 215
Program Structure: Required Infrastructure for an Unspoiled Rite of Passage 216
  Liminal Boundaries 216
  The Missing Roles of Elders and Adept 217
  Distractions Resulting in liminal Extensions 217
Summary 218
Implications of this Research for the Leadership Development Program 219
  Implications for the LDP 219
    Retention 219
    Curriculum 220
    Third Rotation 220
    Program Director 221
    HC Policy 222
  Implications for Future 222
  Closing Words 223
References 225
Appendix A – Researcher’s Request to participate in the Study 231
Table of Tables

Table 2.1 Alphabetical Arrangement of Initial Codes Resulting from Data Analysis 48
Table 2.2 Focused Codes Resulting from Data Analysis 49
Table 2.3 Axial Codes Resulting from Data Analysis 50
Table 2.4 Helpful Corporation’s Career Architecture 56
Table 2.5a HC LDP Cohort Size for Participants’ Recruited Prior to 2013 57
Table 2.5b HC LDP Cohort Size for Participants’ Recruited After 2013 57
Table 2.6 LDP Graduate Study Participants, by MBA Program, as reported in US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018 63
Table 2.7 LDP Associates and Former Associate Study Participants, by MBA Program, as Reported in US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018 64
Table 2.8 Longitudinal Tracking of Study Participants’ Recruited Prior to 2013 and Rotational Status 66
Table 2.9 Longitudinal Tracking of Study Participants’ Recruited After 2013 and Rotational Status 69
Table 5.1 – Developmental Classification of HC Associates and Graduates as of January 2019 150
Table 5.2 HC LDP Directors’ Tenure and Reason for Leaving the Role 174
Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of HC Front and Back Stages Including Executive Wing and Cubicle Farm, with Walkway Connector (Horizontal View)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of HC’s Executive Wing Front Stage, First Floor Layout (From Above)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of HC’s Cubicle Farm Second Floor Including Executive Offices, Conference Rooms, and Cubicles (From Above)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Visual Representation of LDP Actors’ Personal Branding Development from Rotation 1 through Graduation</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of Associate Network Development Resulting from HC “Deep Dive” Sessions</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of HC’s LDP Enablers Diminishing Value over Time</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Visual Depiction of HC’s Organizational Power Tree and Steps to Acquire Power</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>HC LDP Visual Depiction of Required Program Support throughout Program Participation</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Visual Representation of Associate’s Performance in Rotation and HC’s Compensation Cycles</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Reflexive Statement

Curiosity and frustration triggered my interest in this topic. Curiosity regarding a formalized approach for organizational leadership development and frustration with my career. My interest began accidentally through a promotional mailing to my husband from a local university, in the form of a postcard-type advertisement for a graduate level leadership program. I recall a tag line something to the effect, “a master’s degree that makes a difference,” which drew my attention since I was considering enrolling in a graduate level program. As a business professional, it was evident I needed to bolster my educational credentials by pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree as the program of choice. While I knew an MBA was the logical choice, I wanted something different as my next step. I wanted a degree that made a difference for both my personal and professional growth, which led me to the study of leadership. Maybe if I understood the science, it would enable my practice and assist others in their development, which resulted in my decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Leadership.

The study of leadership is both complex and its own industry. Leadership is an important function and role in our culture. Flip through the channels on your television and you find some form of guided discussion on the topic of leadership. Walk through any bookstore and see shelves dedicated to the study of leadership from individual leaders such as entrepreneurs and CEOs, to self-help guides for improving one’s practice. Yet most of these instructional leadership forums do not explain the real story of the complex social interactions found within an organizational leadership setting, nor do they discuss the inner secrets for advancement into prominent leadership roles.

Leadership is a social construct that takes place in a social setting involving social manipulation of others. There is a dynamic interface between the social setting and its leaders, where the practice is influenced by the setting and the setting influenced by leaders, creating an ebb and flow of social dynamics between leaders and their followers. Changing social and economic environments affect organizations ensuring leaders must react to different sets of stimuli, pressures, and barriers furthering the complexity of leadership studies. Organizations need leaders able to rise to the unique set of challenges,
steer the organization, and develop successors. They need to understand what makes a leader effective and how to groom the next generation.

The global demand for top leadership talent is intense (Juhdi, Pa’wan, & Hansaram, 2015; Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011). A survey of Chief Executive Officers, identified growth, innovation, and talent as the three most significant business challenges organizations face (Barrington, 2010). Organizations must remain competitive in order to grow, which requires innovation that leads to new products and new markets. The connector between growth and innovation requires leadership talent, individuals with a strategic mindset whose vision creates the future. This type of leadership matures over time and elevates the importance of an organization’s process for recruiting, developing, and managing leadership talent.

Identifying and managing talent is an important responsibility of senior organizational leaders (Martin & Schmidt, 2010; Stahl, Bjorkman, Farndale, Morris, Paauwe, Stiles, Trevor, & Wright, 2012; Conaty & Charan, 2011). Where talent is the single most important contributor to an organization’s competitive advantage (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Gelens, Dries, Hofmans, & Pepermans, 2013). Finding the right talent and then managing, developing, and retaining that talent is critical to an organization’s success (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008). Because of the social dynamics that differentiate organizations, leadership development is context dependent, requiring studies rooted within an organization to understand the perception and experiences of individuals aspiring to become leaders.

Many social dynamics influence individuals’ perception of self and their concept of leadership, including their background, beliefs, and goals. Some individuals discover early on their desire to lead, the thrill of influencing others, making decisions, taking risks, celebrating successes, and downplaying failures. Others remain cautious, taking small steps, building power coalitions, while creating their personal “formula” for achieving success. Still others accidently stumble into a leadership role while pursuing a personal interest that turns into something they did not anticipate. Regardless of the underlying influences, these experiences become part of individuals’ self-perception they carry into their next social context, adding another layer of complexity to the study of leadership.
I have pondered the topic of leadership for years wondering how individuals become leaders, questioning the label and the process that recognizes some individuals as leaders. As a business professional, I observed the rise and occasional fall of executive leaders, marveling that individuals who led unsuccessful initiatives were later promoted as opposed to “let go.” There is something about the term “leadership” that implies an elite classification, a sense of awe and respect that comes with the title of leader. The demand for and ambiguity of leadership fascinates me. As I reflected upon leadership and my interest in this field, I knew I needed to dig deeper into this topic and pursue my personal interests.

This study provided an opportunity for me to take on several different roles throughout the course of the data collection and analysis. In the role of researcher, I was mindful that my responsibility involved the facilitation, discovery, and collection of data, allowing the participants to share their stories. At times, I was tempted to visualize the participants’ experience; for example, by imagining how the participants presented themselves when networking with senior leaders. I reminded myself that I needed to stay present in the moment with the participants, following their story and prompting additional details when needed.

Through my experience, I observed mature leaders’ ability to “think on their feet,” preparing for my next question, sometimes pausing slightly to think through their responses. Other participants demonstrated common practices for collecting their thoughts before responding to my questions, such as repeating the question or injecting phrases while they collected their thoughts. I referred to this as “tells,” or signs unconsciously conveyed by participants to their audience. Mature leaders, which I describe as those who have been with the organization, Helpful Corporation, more than seven years, generally did not display obvious tells, as if their training and experience eliminated these subconscious communication techniques, presenting themselves as confident, capable, and composed leaders.

I vividly recall the opportunity to meet with steering committee members. While those sessions were brief, they contained an amazing amount of insight and data. I remember feeling breathless during those interviews as if to keep pace with the rapid-fire responses. The interviews flowed quickly, covering the pathway program and participants’ performance. I kept a watchful eye on the clock to respect the
executives’ limited time and schedule. I left those interviews eager to transcribe the data knowing that it would triangulate nicely with the program participants’ and directors’ insights.

Interviews with program directors provided the third source of data, adding another dimension of analysis to the data. Program directors offered unique insights into the programs, participants, and development of talent assets. Their roles are to facilitate progress and performance of leadership talent, a field they studied and practiced before taking on the responsibility of leading their programs. As program directors, their roles balance between product development and sales, since they are responsible to produce valuable resources to meet organizational demand.

I began this study thinking that the characteristics of generational cohorts would play a significant role in my findings, since Millennials are the primary participants in Helpful Corporation’s leadership development program. Early in the research process, it became clear that millennial characteristics did not play a meaningful role in the development of promising leaders. By following the research methodology, I was able to “follow the data” and produce this case study.

Throughout this study, I was able to assess my own professional role and experience. At times, I used my personal experiences to assist with data analysis, as if I was working on a large puzzle with many pieces. Some of the pieces were unrecognizable at first, where I needed to apply my personal experience to discern where that piece might fit. At other times, I could read the puzzle piece and recognize it as insight outside of my personal experience. Every time I was able to connect a puzzle piece, it drew me closer to this study and my findings. I appreciated the whole experience, the ability to step outside of myself to analyze an organization’s dynamic social context. An experience that transcends the actual study, which I carry forward with me in my day-to-day activities, by curiously looking at all forms of organizations, studying their leadership structures, and analyzing how individuals represent themselves and their organization.

My experience has taught me to follow a thread of inquiry, pausing from time to time to distill my thoughts and test my analysis. I have learned to look beyond the tangible evidence of leadership, the symbols of success, looking for social cues that embody an organization’s culture, its values, and what it
Playing to win

expects from its leaders. I have learned that paths of inquiry grow hot and cold, “hot” when inquiry leads
the researcher into new insights or new ways of knowing that reach beneath the surface to produce
something of value. Sometimes, the path grows “cold” when data becomes repetitive or when I have
strayed from my path of inquiry.

My experience reminded me that writing is a skill kept fresh and focused by practicing
consistently. The ability to narrate a story from beginning to end requires endurance, along with
appreciation and respect for the reader and the participants whose story I narrate. This requires diligence
and critical analysis for letting go of points that distract the reader’s attention. As my experience has
taught me, the process for honing one’s craft and building a set of skills is complex and never-ending,
similar to the development of organizational leadership.

This leadership study is a case study of one Fortune 100 health care corporation that offers a
formal leadership development program. Through a series of interviews and observations, I explored new
dimensions surrounding the study of leadership that I have not previously experienced. This study
represents my professional and personal journey using a deep and reflective process resulting in my
professional growth through an enlightened understanding of organizational leadership development.
More importantly, this study represents my personal growth by exploring the complex world of social
interactions, structures, and dynamics surrounding the field of leadership.

I close this reflexive statement by acknowledging that while I have learned a lot from this study,
new insights remain for the next explorer to undertake. Leadership is both simple and complex. In its
simplest form, individuals take a risk, willing to expose themselves as leaders knowing others will
scrutinize their actions before criticizing or applauding the outcomes. In its complex form, leadership
represents a vast matrix of people, pursuing personal agendas in the context of shared organizational
objectives. In this scenario, individuals desire a meaningful set of events, while competing with others to
secure or maintain their power, under the guise of building a stronger organization to stay ahead of the
competition. I now look closer at the process of organizational leadership development, starting with the
definition of terms I will use throughout the study.
Definition of Terms

All organizations develop “insider” language, creating new words, altering the meaning of common terms, or create acronyms to convey shared meaning. This study includes common terms used by Helpful Corporation (HC); (a pseudonym) and its Leadership Development Program (LDP); (another pseudonym), as a user guide for the reader. The following terms, arranged alphabetically, include a brief definition.

- **Associate(s)** – Current and active member(s) of the LDP
- **Band or Career Band** – Helpful Corporation’s human resources career architecture. All HC roles align to one of seven Bands. Bands 1-4 reserved for non-executive level employees and Bands 5-7 reserved for executive level leaders. Band is a term used to classify an employee’s level of importance and responsibilities within the organization.
- **Cohort** – Associates who begin the LDP annually as part of a new group of recruits. For example, new associates entering the program in 2020 will form a new cohort.
- **Conversations** – An HC colloquial term, broadly used when referring to interactions between a participant and at least one other individual within the organization. The term “conversations” frequently applies to job interviews, mentoring sessions, hallway discussions, or formal meetings. It generally signifies a one-to-one interaction, sometimes applied when referring to group discussions.
- **Day One** – the first day of work at HC for external hires and generally coincides with the cohort’s first day participating in the LDP. For internal hires, this refers to their first day participating in the program.
- **Elite Schools** – Core recruiting schools with highly ranked Master of Business Administration programs.
- **External Hire** – Associates recruited from select business schools, not currently employed by HC.
- Functional Peer(s) – Non-program peer(s) performing a similar role within the same organizational unit.
- Graduate(s) – Past associate(s) that have officially completed the LDP.
- High Potential – Term or label used by Talent Management to signify individuals as elite performers, capable of accelerated performance. Common characteristics include showing initiative, taking the lead, getting things done, and exceeding goals.
- Internal Hire – Existing HC employees that join the LDP as an associate.
- Leadership Development Program (LDP) – HC MBA graduate level leadership program for the development of general managers as organizational leaders, the focus of this case study.
- Marketing Leadership Development Program (MLP) - HC MBA graduate level leadership program for the development of marketing leaders.
- Non-Program Peer(s) – Non LDP HC employees holding similar roles to the associates outside of the functional organizational unit.
- Participant(s) – Individual(s) interviewed for this study
- Program Director(s) or Director(s) – HC employees responsible for the oversight and management of HC leadership development programs supporting specific talent pipelines. I will use the terms Program Director and Director interchangeably throughout this study. A few of these programs are:
  - General Managers – graduate level program, generally recruited from an MBA program into the LDP, the basis of this case study.
  - Marketing Managers – graduate level marketing leadership development programs
  - Operations Managers – undergraduate leadership development program
- Stretch Assignments – A temporary or short-term role change where an employee takes on a new or challenging assignment. Generally, a manager selects and asks the employee to take on the stretch assignment.
• Stretch Roles – An employee role change involving a significant expansion of leadership responsibilities, generally involving placement in a new functional area.

• Super Day – Term used specifically within the LDP program. This is the final interview process conducted on an invitation-only basis. It is a full day, on-site session for potential associates involving interviews, business casework, tours, and meeting with program associates, graduates, and executives.
Chapter One: Review of Literature and Analytic Theory

Introduction

Surprisingly little research literature exists on contemporary high potential leadership development programs. The research’s paucity led me to a series of questions surrounding leadership development programs, participant experiences, and organizational return on investment. I conducted a thorough research of scholarly literature searching for studies of high potential leadership development programs and talent management practices. I also looked for insight into participant experiences with leadership development and organizational expectations by searching for generational characteristics and birth year cohorts. I found a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research that used a variety of data collection methodologies and analytic theories.

I became interested in this topic from my own experiences and through the voices of millennials expressing frustration with the slow pace of professional promotion. I initially looked for research specifically addressing millennials participating in organizational development programs since this topic sparked my interest; I found limited studies focused upon generational characteristics and their influences upon participant outcomes. I focused my search on business, health, and human performance databases, using various search terms including high potentials, leadership, leadership development, development programs, talent management, Millennials, and organizations. These search terms returned peer reviewed quantitative and qualitative research studies across different dimensions of leadership development. Few involved case studies of leadership development programs.

The research I assembled includes insight on the talent management field, cohorts and social developmental considerations, and formal high potential leadership development programs. Much of the high potential research focused upon talent management, high potential programs, and development strategies with very limited research available on organization specific leadership development programs. Studying participants in an organizational leadership development program must consider various factors that differentiate the current participants from past participants; one such factor is birth cohorts. I begin this discussion with the research on various cohort classifications.
Review of Literature

Organizations use high potential leadership development programs to attract and develop leadership candidates recruited from specific universities known for producing graduates that demonstrate the desired set of competencies and characteristics sought by the organization (Cappelli, 2008). Top talent is a unique competitive advantage that provides organizations with the greatest positive impact, or return on investment (Kotlyar, Richardson, & Karakowsky, 2015). High potential candidates search for leadership programs in pursuit of their professional objectives involving contemporary organizations that competitively reinforce this behavior by designing and marketing their programs.

Leadership development is a fundamental requirement of organizations and fosters advanced intellectual capital as a critical resource (Ruvolo, Petersen, & LeBoeuf, 2004). Assessing value of high potential leadership development programs is complex and marginally evaluated. One estimate suggests 10 to 20% of organizations evaluate the effectiveness of their program by assessing their performance outcomes (Avolio, Sosik, Jung, Jung, & Berson, 2003). Since Millennials are the primary participants in today’s leadership development programs, I began this study anticipating this would factor into my analysis and findings. I expected the data would identify a different set of values for the millennial participants, which would affect how organizations measure the value of high potential leadership development investments. While there are some indications that generational characteristics are important, the data suggests that common millennial characteristics are not evident in the participant pool comprised of Generation X and Millennials.

Generational, Birth, and Life-Cycle Cohorts

Much of the research on socialization uses birth as the defining event for inclusion in cohort research. Social scientists argue the definition of a cohort is an “aggregate of individuals…who experienced the same event within the same time interval” (Ryder, 1965, p. 845). Socialization is a function of the age when individuals experience the event as opposed to their generational classification. Generational cohorts, such as Millennials, are heterogeneous, differentiated as much within the cohort as they are across cohorts. This distinction is important when discussing the existing body of research.
Isolating variables when studying the social effects upon a specific population is complex (LaMagdeleine & Gessner, 1991). There are at least four approaches for consideration. 1) Erikson’s eight stages of life consider the impact of external factors on personality development from childhood to adulthood (Erikson, 1982). 2) Cohort specific links within generational classifications such as Millennials (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014). 3) Macro societal impacts caused by size and timing of generational cohorts (Easterlin, 1980). 4) Birth year cohort social implications as a function of age and common experiences (Ryder, 1965). The complexity surrounding the study of social effects is evident in the existing research on the topics of education, socialization, and workforce experiences.

**Educational trends.** Millennials are the most educated generation in American history (Joint Economic Committee, 2014). Nineteen percent of Millennials participated in graduate level programs in 2010. As of 2013, 47 percent of Millennials received postsecondary degrees. The high rate of formal education reflects compensation trends rewarding individuals with higher levels of education, increasing workforce expectations because of their enhanced skillsets.

Stronger intrinsic preferences are present amongst those with higher levels of education (Gallie, 2007). Today’s workplace reflects the changing intrinsic preferences of individuals more confident, courageous, and empathic. As educational patterns evolve, the pedagogy imprints changing attitudes of character and behavior on each cohort (Foote, 1958). The quality of teaching and the nature of materials carry forward innovative pedagogy leading to new research and breakthroughs, new ways of understanding the world, and new ways for cohorts to teach and socialize others.

The relationship between increasing levels of education and social change is intimate (Ryder, 1965). Tolerance serves as a core principle for engaging participants to experience growth and development through education, meaning it is through increasing levels of education the individual respects others rather than judging their beliefs. This tolerance carries forward with leaders willing to listen and consider other ideas during times of decision-making. Cohorts experience similar levels of awareness and collectively use that to make sense of their social fabric.
**Birth-year socialization trends and experiences.** Major changes or events influence cohort perceptions and reactions in context to the age of the individuals (Ryder, 1965). Generational cohorts span 14 to 30 years between youngest and oldest members. It is illogical to think each member of the generational cohort experiences major changes or events in the same way. These experiences shape the norms and values of the individuals and guide their responses to change as they influence new trends in socialization.

**Global affects.** Terrorism and recession are two global social trends within the last 20 years influencing dramatic social change (Schwadel & Stout, 2012). For example, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers and 2007-2008 global recession affected all generational cohorts yet were experienced differently within and across these cohorts. Socialization of individuals born in proximity to one another differs from generational members born during different social periods (Ryder, 1965). A person’s experience with 2007-2008 global recession depends upon his or her skill sets, income needs, and employment status. Some industries minimally effected by the global recession were able to grow and thrive, enhancing these employees’ sense of confidence. Other industries struggled to recover, laid off employees, who lost confidence in the job market. Other factors influencing intra-generational experiences include the explosive growth of technology.

**Technology impacts.** The increasing role of technology in people’s lives accelerates the pace of social change (Putnam, 1995). For example, the millennial cohort has vastly different experiences across the spectrum of technology and innovation. Early Millennials socialization involved cell phones while younger Millennials socialization involved smart phones, a significant upgrade within this generational cohort. The evolution of smart phones with innovative capabilities quickly replaced outdated cell phone technology.

The dynamics of timing, age, and experiences influence how individuals experience or socialize events. Recent global trends and technological innovation accelerates and differentiates the experience, making it less about a common shared generational experience and more about a common shared
experience in proximity to age. A third consideration found in the literature for studying social effects involves lifecycle experiences.

**Workforce experience.** The length of time a person is in the workforce leads to differing experiences and expectations within each generational cohort (Ryder, 1965). When individuals enter the labor market, their initial experience will have a lasting effect upon them. This is especially meaningful for new entrants facing recessionary markets, who experience frequent rejection or limited advancement opportunities. Workforce entrants during periods of low unemployment experience a sense of prosperity, options, and a position from which to negotiate. Workforce entrants’ career initiation experience influences their future commitment and decision-making.

New entrants to the labor market display greater amounts of youthful idealism offsetting their limited experience (Saar, 2008). Younger adults, 18-35, seek relationship development as opposed to middle-aged adults, 35-55, who seek to make a difference through their contributions (Erikson, 1982). As entrants become acclimated to the organization’s culture, they begin to test their perception against reality. Over time, idealism clashes with reality forcing younger workers to choose between adapting expectations or altering reality to fit their intentions. Individual response to conform or leave will differ based upon the individual’s initial workforce experience and lifecycle stage, where young adults may continue to seek their idealistic state through a series of job changes.

Consistent with social pattern trends, individualist orientations are replacing traditional views in the workplace (De Witte, & Näswall, 2003). Today’s generation of younger workers, prioritize self-determination, personal development, and promotion of intrinsic goals over collective and traditional goals. Technological innovations further individual mastery of information and communication lessening the dependency upon older cohorts to pass along tacit, or undocumented, knowledge.

As new generations enter adulthood, the literature surrounding generational cohorts expands to fill new gaps in the study of that generation. Generational cohorts include a wide array of beliefs and practices because of their age-specific socialization experiences. Each generational cohort includes an age continuum of members with birth year experiences and perceptions influenced by educational, social,
and workforce trends adding a dimension of complexity to social research. Next, I will discuss the literature on Millennials who are the current participants in organizational high potential leadership development programs.

**Millennial Workplace Characteristics**

The literature on Millennials produces a core set of unique attributes that are critical indicators for understanding the motivations and influences that define this generation. Characteristics include technology and information expertise, organizational interface expectations, and shared values. A key differentiator for this cohort recognizes they are the first generation immersed in technology since early childhood.

**Technology and information experts.** Millennials have a distinctive relationship with technology (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Cell phones and social networks revolutionized this generation, which explains why researchers refer to Millennials as digital natives (Skiba & Barton, 2006; Wankel, 2009; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Emanuel, 2013). Technological innovations created new pathways to limitless information surrounding Millennials from their early socialization years.

Millennials use their devices as information access points, to source and produce immediate solutions and answers (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). They trust their devices to produce desired information within seconds requiring minimal effort. For Millennials, technology becomes a sixth sense as it forms their way of knowing and how they interact with the world through social networks (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The explosion of social media forums coincides with the formation of millennial identities (Doster, 2013). Public sounding boards fueled the expansion of social forums and content innovation empowered Millennials to voice their opinions and concerns.

Millennials are assertive and ambitious demonstrating minimal separation between personal and professional lives (Twenge, 2006). Millennials expanded the constructs of social media through the formation of new relationships and public dissemination of personal profiles. Virtual communication technologies removed physical limitations for transferring an interconnected perspective to the workplace, challenging formal hierarchies, and bureaucratic standards for business structures.
Integration expectations. Millennials view the workplace as a social setting for relationship building, team empowerment, and organizational contributions (Martin, 2005; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). They look for an inclusive and transparent culture for easy assimilation and limited political influences. As new organizational entrants, Millennials turn to the person they trust the most, their hiring manager.

Professional and team relationships. Millennials consider their manager their personal advocate, personally vested in their work, poised to provide continuous feedback, and guide their development (Winter & Jackson, 2014; Maier, Tavanti, Bombard, Gentile, & Bradford, 2015). Consistent with their earlier experiences, Millennials see their managers as mentors and friends responsible to guide their career path towards success (Winter & Jackson, 2014). This a collaborative process emphasizing open, transparent, and direct communication that extends to their work within teams.

Millennials experienced team structures starting with early educational experiences and extracurricular activities developing a transferable sense of community and collaboration (Eisner, 2005; Twenge, 2006). The collective expertise of a team involves creative problem solving and strategy formation to achieve shared goals (Ingols & Shapiro, 2014). Teamwork challenges participants to work hard and leverage the power of the group to achieve better results, producing a collective sense of creativity greater than the output of a single person resulting in productive solutions to organizational issues.

Adding organizational value. Lifelong technological experience underscores an entrepreneurial nature and belief that meaningful work is innovative, promotes organizational change, and professional agility (Winter & Jackson, 2014). Millennials are frustrated with tedious processes they perceive as inefficient or bureaucratic, ambitious to test their skills and impatient with the slow rate of change (Ferri-Reed, 2014). Repetitive or highly structured tasks disengage millennial workers who thrive on finding alternate solutions, efficient methods, and meaning from their workplace contributions.

Millennials digital world-view experiences influence their workplace expectations. Integration begins immediately through relationship building with their manager and teams furthered by the
contributions of the work they produce. They are committed to the organization’s mission and rely upon their personal values to guide their career decision-making.

**Common Millennial values.** Millennials base their career decisions upon personal fulfillment and generally look for organizations characterized as pro-social, that promote professional and personal balance (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Winter & Jackson 2014). Their altruistic view of the world influences their career decisions as opposed to chasing job titles (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). There is a core set of common values consistent across this generational cohort where the organization’s mission is equally important as their role and the ingenuity they bring to the workplace.

Millennials are attracted to organizations that share their personal and social values (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They study an organization’s mission and value statements to determine alignment between the organization and themselves (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). Further, Millennials look at an organization’s social footprint as an indicator of the organization’s transparency and commitment to its stated purpose (Winter & Jackson, 2014). This collection of information creates an image of the organization’s values and social perspective critical to Millennials’ perception of their role and alignment of values.

Millennials advocate for professional and personal life balance believing that personal time enriches their workplace contributions. (Kultalhati & Viitala, 2014). Personal fulfillment is a holistic experience, requiring a balance of time and energy distributed between work and personal interests. The more Millennials balance the two perspectives, the greater their sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment, enhancing their work contributions (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

How they use their skills, what they produce, and how it contributes to a larger social need are important aspects in their professional lives. One study found nearly 90% of Millennials believe that alignment between organizational and personal values produces better results (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2008). Millennials are multi-dimensional and driven to succeed given the right setting and alignment of values.
Millennials offer a unique set of skills, values, and beliefs influencing how organizations think and act. The Millennial worker challenges conventional practice requiring organizations to deepen their social awareness and impact to community, customer, and workforce. Research conducted on millennial workplace expectations finds a core set of characteristics and values. Millennials bring a well-formed digital background, seeking deep and meaningful immersion into roles that offer social and organizational contributions. I will now discuss the research on formal high potential leadership development programs.

**Formal High Potential Development Programs**

Leadership development is a complex subject. The traits of successful leaders change over time, and by industry, influenced by environmental and economic contexts (Ahn & Ettner, 2014). Organizational leaders today face many different challenges than their predecessors requiring new skills and competencies to lead through challenging times. Ryder (1960) argued that identification of leaders requires a trait-based approach followed by development of key competencies. Today’s formal leadership development programs are structured and designed to develop skills and competencies of individuals with demonstrated leadership traits. Entry into select programs is competitive requiring applicants to groom their resumes in advance of selection consideration.

Contemporary business demands leaders with integrated skills to compete in the global marketplace (Heames & Harvey, 2006). Leaders must be able to anticipate and navigate change while making sense of marketplace ambiguity. The evolution of organizational leadership requires new skill configurations and practices enabling nimble leaders able to apply personal and organizational experiences. I will now discuss two formal leadership development programs in place today, primarily populated by Millennials as the youngest workforce cohort. The first is the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program, which is a graduate-level structured offering available through universities. The other is organizationally based high potential leadership development programs, designed by talent managers to attract and source leadership talent pools. I begin this discussion with the research findings of MBA programs.
Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs. MBAs are products offered by higher education institutions that act as performance indicators (Muff, 2012). These programs develop job specific skills commonly preferred by large organizations (Juhdi et al, 2015). MBA programs target Millennials interested in developing their careers and leadership profiles. Bennis and O’Toole (2005) describe MBA programs as “a model of science that uses abstract financial and economic analysis, statistical multiple regressions and laboratory psychology” (p. 98). While the model emphasizes the development of leadership decision-making skills, it can be problematic lacking current business practices for today’s trends and complexities.

Structure of MBA programs. MBA instruction is typically done within a formal educational context, designed to teach scientific knowledge and managerial competencies described as “the most conspicuous and systemic effort to equip individuals with the skills needed to manage people and organizations” (Varela, Burke, & Michel, 2013, p. 436). Millennial learning goals and values underlie current MBA program objectives including collaborative behaviors required for team-based task accomplishment (Varela et al., 2013). While critics of MBA programs challenge the leadership development value, researchers continue to study how these programs remain relevant for Millennials in today’s business environment.

MBA programs use a structured approach to teach students the skills necessary to lead and manage (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). The structured approach aims to approximate a scientific model used by hard disciplines such as physics and economics to incorporate research into the curriculum. Professors set up hypothetical experiences for students to practice their learning and develop skills. While this structure allows students to learn, it is static compared to actual organizational decision-making involving incomplete and piece-meal data (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). Skill mastery requires years of practice and experience, much of which takes place outside the formal program, as employees within an organization.

An important feature of MBA programs is the incorporation of soft skill development and learning (Muff, 2012). In a study of CEO responses to what components are missing in today’s business teaching, the data firmly established the need to develop people or soft skills. To address this
requirement, MBA programs incorporate pragmatic and critical thinking, along with management and leadership skill development. These findings provide evidence that soft skill development is critical and relevant for Millennials as part of their learning process.

**Formal leadership development.** A true measure of leadership learning is not limited to the lessons in the classroom but the ability to transport the learning into future practices (Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011). To further practical experience, formal MBA programs should involve a transformational learning process positioning the students with the tools necessary to be successful in their practice. Sustaining transformational learning outside the formal program prepares Millennials for the agile business environment and process of leadership development.

“Learning from experience is an active, personal, and social process” (Petriglieri et al., 2011, p. 432). The learning process is unique, a reflection of personal experiences and examination of inner images, assumptions, and narratives (Dominick, Squires, & Cervone, 2010). Experience provides opportunities for real time decision-making, to test and observe the consequences of the individuals’ actions. By applying personal lenses, emerging leaders grow their reflective practice alongside their leadership learnings.

Transformational learning involves a process of personalization when individuals apply their formal learning to current situations while examining their decision-making (Petriglieri et al., 2011). Individual life stories underlie decision-making and learning with different lenses filtering information. Each experience or decision becomes part of the person’s self-awareness and self-management. The same is true of classroom lessons transported to new situations enabling alternative views and critical consideration of one’s life stories as a key competency for navigating the complex and changing business environment.

**Evolving business practices.** Leadership requires the development of reflective practice to form professional artistry “to make sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations of professional practice” (De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009, p.157). MBA programs should embed the development of reflective practice in their structures guiding the learner to use a nimble process alternating between leadership
action and reflection. Leaders drive important decision-making processes and must draw upon their experiences and project how their decisions influence a chain of activity upon the organization, community, and competitors.

MBA programs are formally structured higher education offerings teaching students the scientific practice of management while developing leadership skills (Varela et al., 2013). Research identifies important and relevant Millennial learning needs for incorporation into MBA programs. These skills include the reevaluation of life stories, formation of new lenses, and reflection in practice for development of flexible decision-making skills. Challenged by a dynamic and changing business environment, yesterday’s lessons may not transport to tomorrow’s leadership demands. Formal high potential leadership development programs should incorporate current and relevant business practices in addition to functional skill development such as those found in organizational programs.

**High potential leadership development programs.** An alternative formal approach to leadership development involves a proprietary, systemic process for identifying, socializing, and growing employee skills for advanced levels of responsibility and leadership within a corporation (Church & Silzer, 2014). It is estimated that 40-60% of global companies use high potential programs to identify and build their talent pool (Dries and De Gieter, 2014). How organizations differentiate their programs is a function of the talent management strategy that includes identification, development, and transparency of high potential candidates.

In today’s knowledge economy, human talent is a unique resource that cannot be easily copied or stolen and offers a competitive advantage to organizations (Dries and De Gieter, 2014). High potential employees are innovative, risk taking, and more likely to succeed as senior leaders (Corporate Leadership Council, 2012). Investing in the development of human talent provides both an economic and innovative edge with Talent Management leaders responsible for this important resource.

**Talent Management strategies.** Talent development strategies can be inclusive or exclusive and involve various funding strategies to influence how talent will be developed (Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, and Pepermans, 2014). Inclusive strategies assume all employees have the potential to demonstrate higher
levels of talent, where organizations invest equal amounts for all employees with the objective of developing a higher performing workplace believing each person’s contributions are equally meaningful. Critics of this strategy contend that high potentials miss development opportunities, and, in the end, the organization loses money on their overall investment.

Exclusive talent management strategies direct an organization’s investment towards those previously identified as “valuable” to the organization and subjectively applied based upon skills and competencies the organization views as desirable (Gelens, et al, 2014, p. 160). Value further assessed based upon the projection of the individual’s contributions over an extended period, for example, a rising leader is considered more valuable than a front-line service worker. Organizations may select individuals, roles, or critical contexts they consider valuable.

The individual strategy identifies specific employees and considers their potential value to the organization. This strategy applies to strategic positions and the value these positions generate for the organization. Another strategy, the contextual approach is more holistic identifying individuals based upon the context of the team or leadership requirements. Talent Management’s investment depends upon the value the organization places upon the different talent strategies for driving performance.

Identification of high potential employees. During the recruitment process, organizations leverage various tools to identify high potential candidates (Juhdi et al, 2015). External recruitment strategies often start with universities with a reputation for producing graduates that match desired high potential competencies and characteristics, including customer orientation, initiative for self-development, drive to excel, active learning, enterprising spirit, ability to sense opportunity, and manage changes (Ready, Conger, Hill and Stecker, 2010). Resumes, educational performance, and interviews all factor into the assessment of the employee’s potential.

There is a different set of tools used to identify internal employees’ high potential competencies and behaviors including performance appraisals, talent reviews, individual development and career plans, or anecdotal data (Downs, 2015). Talent reviews involve a comparative dimension by ranking individual potential in context to a larger group of employees. Self-assessments offer an alternative by comparing
the consistency of leadership traits and skills captured in performance appraisals (Juhdi et al, 2015). Each of these tools involves some type of performance-based assessment to measure past and current results. Once identified as a high potential, the next step involves development.

**Development of “high potentials.”** Organizations use a variety of development tools such as mentoring, coaching, assessments, formal and experiential learning, special events, or communications as part of their high potential leadership development program with mentoring and coaching the cornerstone of development (Downs, 2015). Formal classroom learning reinforces key development needs or traits. Experiential learning includes on-the-job development, stretch assignments, job rotations, or shadowing and is a key development tool (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Integration of tools and perspectives is necessary for building a robust program.

High potential development programs require integrated perspectives and alignment of stakeholder expectations for high potential participants (Downs, 2015). High potentials find mentoring, coaching, access to executives and defined measures of success important to their development. One study found that six of ten organizations include these tools in their programs (Global Leadership Forecast, 2015). This demonstrates a gap between participant needs and program structures. As companies invest in the development of their high potentials, a full array of tools is required to address the unique needs of individuals. Another area of program differentiation involves the transparency of high potential ratings.

**Ratings transparency in high potential programs.** Organizations use different communication strategies involving transparency of high potential ratings (Downs, 2015). Transparency of individual rating ranges from full transparency to complete non-disclosure resulting in different benefits from these strategies. The benefits of full transparency include formation of community support, retention of top talent, and employee empowerment. The positive benefits attract greater resources for developing employees with the greatest potential but create some organizational risks.

When applying full transparency of ratings, organizations report disconnected planning and increased communication challenges (Downs, 2015). The downside of full transparency is that it can
trigger inflated egos, decreased productivity, and increased expectations. Labeling employees as high potentials creates high expectations (Dries & De Gieter, 2014). Rather than encouraging development, some candidates expect different treatment and rewards. The downside of full transparency leads organizations to adapt a policy of strategic ambiguity.

Strategic ambiguity applies any time there is a communication imbalance that favors the organization; meaning that the organization controls the dissemination of information based upon roles or functional groupings, where some groups have full access to information and other groups less access (Dries & De Gieter, 2014). Strategic ambiguity involves asymmetric distribution of information cascaded to different roles and functions such as leaders and Talent Management. For the organization, it allows flexibility in decision-making, minimizing the potential for perceived promises and preventing high potentials from forming a casual mindset in their work. Organizations must be careful in their application of strategic ambiguity as it may limit the acceleration of development, commitment, and loyalty. For employees, asymmetry affects retention, lowers morale, impacts health due to stress and burnout, and intensifies office gossip.

There are a variety of practices used as part of organizational high potential development programs that vary by industry and investment. Identifying, developing, and managing expectations are common features of these programs. Each organization must assess its goals and objectives when designing programs and the degree they will leverage various features. Next, I will discuss theoretical approaches used in this research study.

**Review of Analytical Theory**

The study of everyday life requires a network of social and anthropological theory to understand the complexities of meaning making experienced through social interactions and affected by environmental factors. Each social interaction is dependent upon context, time, and space, where no two interactions are identical or completely dissimilar. I begin this discussion of analytic theory with Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis as it provides the foundation of this case study, which will be further
refined using Goffman’s total institution, and moral career theories to describe specific aspects of the
participants’ experiences and program expectations.

**Goffman’s Dramaturgy, Total Institution, and Moral Career**

While often associated with the Chicago School tradition, Erving Goffman emphasizes a
Durkheimian approach to the study of everyday life by including rituals, slogans, and myths to develop
his dramaturgical analysis, a metaphor applicable to individuals’ everyday lives (Goffman, 1959b).
Dramaturgical sociology extends the metaphor of the stage to understand much of social life and lived
experiences. Actors deliver performances as part of their daily rituals, responding to changing contexts
and audience reactions. One cannot separate the actor from the role or environment, as the scenes and
social surroundings, are equally important to the performance. Dramaturgy does not see a performance as
the work of a solo actor; rather a performance is a social act requiring interactions with other performers,
stage managers, or audience members.

**Dramaturgy.** Goffman describes social interactions as deliberate and constructed, with meaning
conveyed through the selection of actors, scripts, costumes, stage design, and settings. Nothing happens
by chance and interpretation of a scene or the intended social meaning must consider the setting rather
than attaching meaning to individual events and activities. Goffman’s theory is applicable to all social
activities including organizational life.

Organizational leadership development programs offer a view into a dramaturgical setting where
actors perform corporate roles in various settings, which Goffman refers to as either the front or backstage
(Goffman, 1961). The front stage is reserved for formal performances that leave a lasting impression
upon the carefully assembled audience. These performances are considered critical to the actors’ future
opportunities within the organization. The backstage is an informal setting where actors relax and
perform in their natural state. Here, they break from their scripts and perform as their authentic self,
practicing different methods, trying out new dialects or testing a variety of props. They receive scripts
that guide their performance with cues taken from the organization’s culture, or total institution. A
A discrete set of job titles arranged in hierarchical charts offers transparency into the organization’s structure with clearly defined job descriptions outlining required actor traits.

Strong organizational cultures present themselves through the myths and rituals of daily life. For example, corporate myths may involve stories surrounding a leader’s reputation for being difficult to work with. Similarly, organizational rituals involve actions performed as prescribed by or in response to other actions. For instance, employees log into their work computers each day and in doing so automatically click the “OK” response when reminded that all content must be appropriate. The organization’s culture ingrains these myths and rituals upon the actors’ daily lives.

Goffman’s dramaturgical theory applies to the actors’ role, planning and preparing for their performance starting in advance of the actors’ organizational stage entrance. Individuals learn how to perform professionally early on through their social interactions and experiences. They build a set of tools to elevate their craft and technique when working with new teams, audiences, and stages.

Prospective actors seeking entry into leadership development programs generally follow a similar path involving a careful series of actions and decisions. Early in their professional careers, they identify personal leadership goals that require dedicated training at prestigious business schools, often at great personal cost, with the anticipation of a valuable return on investment that comes with higher levels of organizational leadership. As actors, they immerse themselves in their careers, within an organization that shapes their development in what Goffman refers to as a total institution.

**Total institution with strong cultural systems.** Organizations are institutions that have “encompassing tendencies” (p. 4), which means that individuals are consumed within the setting and in their everyday life by the organization (Goffman, 1961). Goffman studied what he referred to as total institutions, places where individuals reside and work, such as mental institutions, religious convents, or prisons. In these settings, individuals experience life only within the structure of the institution and its norms, values, and behaviors. Individuals separate their personal sense of self from the institutional collective identity, meaning that the institution strips away their original identity through mandated
haircuts, clothing, roles, and conforming behavior. In this way, individual identity transforms to the institutional imposed expectation of behavior, reinforced through rituals and ceremonies.

This is a similar experience for employees entering larger organizations with clearly defined cultures, norms, and behaviors. As individuals enter the organization, they separate their personal identity to assimilate to the organization’s collective identity. Individuals that conform to the institution’s expectations acquire a “good” reputation as opposed to individuals unwilling to conform establishing a “poor” reputation.

Moral career. The concepts of good and bad reputation closely align to Goffman’s moral career (Goffman, 1961). Actors that strongly identify with the total institution’s character over time incrementally develop their moral career as team players, who place the organization ahead of their personal needs. They have a reputation for successfully separating themselves from their personal identity to take on the traits of the institution’s collective identity. In doing so they become a role model for others to follow. Conversely, an actor can develop a checkered moral career by behaving in ways not consistent with the organizational culture.

Actors’ behavior contributes to their own moral career and interacts with the moral career of other actors. In Goffman’s case study of patients in a mental institution, a patient known to be difficult, or acts out upon others, forms a reputation as a person to stay away from if they want to avoid trouble (Goffman, 1959a). Others view this “difficult” patient’s moral career as problematic, which in turn forms the moral career of those around this patient. By avoiding this individual, other patients or attendants moral career acquiesces in response to this person, similar to life within other large organizations.

Roles within organizations can take on mythical identities, where new actors observe successful actors’ mannerisms and technique, considered the organization’s blueprint for others to follow. Actors that strongly identify with, and exhibit, valued modes of operating successfully transform themselves into the embodiment of an executive leader. The development of the moral career starts early in the actors’ career as they learn to model the expected behavior. For example, new employees who are part of a high potential leadership development program may take on added responsibilities to demonstrate their
leadership skills. By taking on these responsibilities, managers recognize employees for their self-directed behavior, an important trait within the total institution and a demonstration of the actors’ willingness to evolve their moral career. Actors’ gain a repetition based upon their performances that further informs the actors’ behavior and identity formation.

**Summary**

Organizations carefully design their high potential leadership development programs to achieve specific goals and objectives. Programs design the stage, create scripts, assign roles, and attract a specific audience to manage organizational impressions within the total institution. Inside the institution’s walls, the culture controls the setting and norms expected of actors aspiring to assume an executive level moral career. Behind the scenes, actors constantly maneuver for a position in the spotlight using various types of social interactions that generate power, which I discuss next using Bourdieu’s social structuration theory.

**Bourdieu’s Social Structuration Theory**

Pierre Bourdieu’s work spans several traditions but remains firmly grounded in sociology and his interest in the dynamics of power within society. This includes the creation of power, its use, and transfer to maintain social order. Several of his theories are relevant to the analysis for this case study involving the social structure of Helpful Corporation and its leadership development program. Specifically, I will apply Bourdieu’s social structuration theory including the concepts of habitus, capital formation, and symbolic violence to analyze participants’ experiences within the organization, in addition to applying Bourdieu’s assessment of the role educational institutions play to reproduce organizational power structures,

**Habitus.** Social structures surround individuals and influence their perception of the world while altering their behaviors and attitudes (Applerouth, 2013). Formation of individuals’ perceptions involve their experiences, socialization, reaction to stimuli, and general disposition in response to their setting or what Bourdieu calls their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990 [1980], p. 55). Habitus involves a world within a world and informs individual understanding of physical and social interactions, similar to a series of
lenses applied to meaning making or interpretation of what is taking place around them within a specific social space. The surrounding habitus enables actors to make sense of the world and the interactions they have in it.

Habitus involves mental structures that help individuals organize and interpret their social world. Structures, acquired by experience guide and direct perception and meaning using shared symbolic interpretations (Bourdieu, 1984). These mental structures form individuals’ dispositions, their way of being and meaning making. Bourdieu tells us that an individual’s disposition attracts other individuals sharing similar dispositions in the context of their habitus creating social structures of people that think, act, and interpret interactions in a complementary fashion.

The habitus of an organization’s leadership development program consists of identified promising leaders who want to become executive level leaders. Program associates, drawn together with others that share similar dispositions and experience meaning making through shared social interpretations. In this setting, associates hold an elite status, forming an internal language that separates them from other organizational employees.

In a similar way, other social factors also affect the habitus such as an imbalanced distribution of power and resources, such factors may include economic capital, such as money or materials, or cultural capital, such as verbal skills, credentials, and expertise (Applerouth, 2013). Others operating within a specific social space are aware of how various resources fit within the habitus. They can interpret and react along with other individuals based upon the resources exhibited. These individual experiences further define the construction of a person’s habitus. Another way to characterize such resources and the differentiated power they can convey is to liken them to capital.

**Forms of capital.** Bourdieu describes four types of capital: 1) economic, 2) symbolic, 3) social, and 4) cultural, (Bourdieu, 1984). Economic capital is the foundation for acquiring other capital forms and visible through resource acquisition or ownership of tangible items. Symbolic capital represents artifacts and symbols of an individual’s prestige or status, including a reserved parking spot or a lapel pin that symbolizes membership into an exclusive club. Social capital includes influence or power, derived
from an individual’s social interactions and organizational position. Cultural capital is intangible yet influences social mobility, as actors know how to position their behavior within a specific context, adopting the language of an elite social organization or powerful leadership circle. Actors acquire cultural capital and convey it through their cultural knowledge or insight that enables them to integrate into a social setting, knowing the language and making connections.

Within a given organization, cultural capital is more valuable than economic capital since it requires economic capital to acquire cultural capital. For example, organizations recruit high potential individuals from elite universities for participation in their leadership development programs. Perhaps, an elite university has a reputation for producing graduates skilled in the acquisition of specific types of cultural capital sought by an organization (for example, name-dropping). This common trait among its graduates becomes part of the elite university’s mythical character for producing high potential candidates. This process of transforming a “student” into an “educated person” involves what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence.

**Symbolic violence.** According to Bourdieu, the production of a skilled graduate involves a process of symbolic violence that alters an individual to produce a reflection of the institution’s principles and practices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Students experience messaging, teaching, and other forms of reinforcement that alter their worldview and transform them into a desired professional. The process of education subjugates the individual’s past by constructing an institutional experience that overcomes purportedly false or outdated practices, beliefs, and behaviors.

While Bourdieu directly discussed school-based educational processes and impacts, his theory on symbolic violence is relevant here as it involves the program participants’ willingness to subscribe to the organizational institution’s premises for leadership and its development. In this case, program associates compete for an opportunity to enter an elite leadership development program with full knowledge that their education will transform them into promising organizational leaders. They are willing to subjugate their personal identity as part of their education for attaining the identity of an elite HC executive. This
process takes place as part of high potential leadership development programs’ training classes, seminars, and networking events.

**Role of educational institution.** While HC is not an educational institution, the LDP’s role for transforming promising leaders into powerful executives does resemble the type of institution capable of transmitting privilege, status, and respect to its participants (Schwartz, 1977). Bourdieu’s study of France’s elite educational programs found institutions designed to reinforce the existing social class system using a process of reproduction. Bourdieu found that an individual’s academic performance is linked to his or her cultural background and the institution’s pedagogy makes a difference as to the quality of learning for preparing individuals for their post academic life. Further, educational institutions reward students for their upper-class linguistic, cultural competencies, and achievements (Schwartz, 1977, p. 547).

The system maintains the social order by using a process of pedagogical actions to link knowledge, power, socialization, and education of the individual (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The system sustains itself by “cloning” the next generation of leaders, capable of controlling the process for rewarding culturally competent individuals. For example, an elite educational institution may value cultural capital associated with critical literature, symphonies, or other art forms. The institution’s pedagogy reinforces this type of knowledge through required classes and grading policies. Students who possess insight and knowledge of the preferred works will likely be “fluent” in the language of these works where their subsequent grade reflects their advanced cultural capital. Other students lacking similar cultural capital will speak as novices when compared to their elite peers. Later, as the institution looks to fill an educator’s role, they will seek a comparable replacement, or an individual well versed in the desired cultural capital and sustaining its pedagogical preference for “cultured” individuals.

There is a similar process within the structure of an organization’s leadership development program, designed to produce executive level leaders for the talent pipeline. The structure of these programs includes a series of pedagogical actions for promising leaders to learn about the industry and the organization. These actions include socialization of participants to recognize the formation, presentation,
and expansion of organizational power by “cloning” the characteristics and behaviors of powerful leaders. This assures that leadership development programs retain their elite classification through careful screening of potential participants’ presence of preferred cultural capital, necessary to look, sound, and act the part of a powerful executive leader.

Summary

The social structure of organizations and their leadership development programs is influential to the development of a promising leader. As prospective leaders enter an organization, they begin to mingle within a habitus constructed of elite and high potential individuals, drawn together by similar dispositions and aspirations for becoming an executive leader. Within the organization, individuals experience and demonstrate various forms of capital including symbolic, social, and cultural. While economic capital is meaningful to the actors, much of this study focuses specifically on the social aspects of capital. Through the development program, actors willingly subscribe to the intended symbolic violence, or transformation through education to become a model of a desired state. These programs incorporate pedagogical actions into their design to reinforce the preferred executive leadership model and maintain a self-sustaining process for developing replacement leaders. Next, I will discuss the inclusion of Turner’s anthropological theory of liminality and everyday acting.

Turner’s Liminality Theory

To analyze how an organizational leadership development program prepares promising leaders, it is necessary to build upon Goffman and Bourdieu’s sociological foundation, in this case, inclusion of Turner’s “rite of passage” theory. For LDP participants, the program involves ceremonial events that mark their passage starting with their entry as a novice through the time they graduate as an executive. For these actors, their passage requires an extended period, five to seven years, where their program participation period suggests a liminal phase of transition.

Victor Turner’s theory of liminality evolved from his research upon cultural rites of passage, such as initiation into adulthood, taking on a life partner, or becoming a parent (Turner, 1969). As individuals undergo a rite of passage, they transition from their existing state, into a liminal state, before they arrive at
their final state in which they form a new identity. To enter a liminal state, individuals must separate themselves from their previous identity to evolve into their next state of being. The social context influences the liminal process surrounding the individual and further influences the struggle between structure and anti-structure present within the culture, similar to a participant’s leadership development experience. For this analysis, I will use Turner’s concepts of liminality, communitas, and the role of elders.

**Liminality.** Turner applies Van Gennep’s rites of passage theory that includes three phases of transition, separation, transformation, and aggregation to develop a deeper understanding of the space in between separation and aggregation (Turner, 1969). During a rite of passage, individuals must separate themselves from their past identity, transform through a process of change, and collect themselves to present their new identity. The reference to collecting themselves intends to emphasize the change one experiences during a rite of passage in which they enter as a being and exit as a new being.

Turner (1969) considers the liminal state to be ambiguous; a necessary condition for true transformation from one strong identity to another. He describes it as the experience of being “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between” (p. 95). While in a liminal phase, individuals are actors in an ambiguous play where they “wander” (p. 102) through their scenes working and playing to arrive at their final destination (Turner, 1982). The specific details of the liminal process are unknown to the actors; they must experience their own phase, in accordance to their timeline. While in a liminal state, the individuals’ behavior is submissive and humble, recognizing they must be fully open to the process of change. These individuals develop a closeness with one another, aware of their shared experiences through their liminal state, where they are equal to one another. Together they experience rituals and ceremonies that mark phases of their transformation from beginning to end of the process.

In a sense, participants in an organization’s leadership development program experience a similar change in identity and status, they enter as a promising leader but hope to exit the program as an executive leader. While in the program, they experience a liminal state, a state in between their past identity to the transformation of their new identity. The space in between is ambiguous, their new state
not clearly defined, nor understood which binds the individuals together in their shared state of being, within the organization’s culture.

**Communitas.** Turner uses the Latin term “communitas” to describe the culture surrounding and comprised of individuals involved in liminal transformation. Within a culture, there exists opposing forces involving structure and a lack of structure for human interactions. The structured society is of everyday life within a given culture structurally differentiated and hierarchical that separates some from others. Turner uses the term “communitas” to refer to the unstructured cultural norms that emerge when in a shared liminal experience. It is “an area of common living” (Turner, 1969, p. 96). In a later work, Turner emphasizes the essence of communitas as spontaneous and flowing resulting from the structure from which is transcends (Turner, 1982).

Structured social orders with clearly defined roles and titles arranged in a hierarchical chart include rules involving human interactions. For example, a front-line staff member would not “pop in” to the office of a c-suite leader. By contrast, social bonds produce unstructured communitas that bring individuals together as equals undergoing a shared liminal phase. There is no social separation between classes of individuals, because members see each other as the same, humble since they share a social bond. Turner terms this social state a form of “anti-structure.”

For Turner, anti-structure or communitas exist where structure does not, meaning that communitas fills the space left open within the structure. For the liminal process, individuals come together as equals, stripped of their previous identity to formulate their new one. Structure guides them through the process with rules surrounding social interactions. Yet, much of their social experience is outside of these rules, filled by the space of communitas or shared sense of being with others. Much like the experience of individuals in a leadership transformation program, where they bond with other liminal individuals.

Liminal individuals experience the opposing forces of hierarchical and differential structure along with the undifferentiated community of equal beings. This push and pull between the forces remain in place throughout the liminal phase and until the individual fulfills their liminal transformation and returns
to the formal structured organization. While in this liminal phase, an elder or adept guides individuals towards their new identity.

**The role of elders and adepts.** Turner’s work stresses the role of elders and adepts (Turner, 1969). While Turner limits his discussion of these roles as part of the liminal process, they remain central to his theory of liminality. Elders are the leaders, the individuals who make the rules and construct the special rules and behaviors true of communal anti-structure. Elders generally receive the title through their own ritual passage experiences and maturity. Adepts are the individuals who are proficient or experts in a specific field. They experienced first-hand the specific rite of passage, the ambiguity of the liminal phase in communitas with others until they formed their new identity.

Both elders and adepts are critical to the liminal process. Without these roles, individuals may exist in their liminal state forever, never knowing how, or what their new identity will be. Elders provide strength through the structure they impose, which is to assure liminal individuals have guidelines to follow, tangible expectations for their progression, and assurance of an eventual resolution of the liminal state. Adepts speak from direct experience as well, and can relate to liminal beings, their sense of ambiguity, their loss of identity, and their desire to formulate their new identity. For individuals within a leadership development program, the development phase is their liminal state, guided by their elders, (such as mentors or program directors,) and surrounded by adepts (program graduates) who have successfully emerged at the end of the program. Each of these roles critical to the formation of the participant’s new identity.

**Summary**

Participants in a leadership development program undergo an experience similar to a traditional rite of passage requiring a lengthy liminal phase or a state of in-between. While in the liminal phase, actors’ separate themselves from their previous identity to be fully open to the process of discovering their new identity. They experience conflicting forces including structure, the organized and hierarchical rules surrounding social interactions, and lack of structure, the communitas of equal and socially bonded individuals undergoing transformation. Critical to their identity formation are the roles of elders and
adepts. Elders, the trusted leaders who inform and guide the individual with adepts acting as the empathic sage who understands the language of the liminal state and use it to assist individuals to overcome the ambiguity until they arrive at their new identity, corporate moral leaders.

**Jackall’s Corporate Moral Leadership**

This study also required contemporary organizational sociological theory of corporate leadership to complete the analytical framework involving an organization’s leadership development program. Because this case study is rooted within a powerful and prominent Fortune 100 organization, the analysis would be incomplete without the application of everyday life found in a corporate setting to study the practices and behaviors of leaders within an institutional setting. Program participants are promising leaders with a defined goal for becoming corporate executives with their experiences rooted and interpreted through the lens of corporate leaders.

The sociologist, Robert Jackall, studied the corporate world of managers to understand how bureaucracy influences their moral consciousness, finding that Weber’s theory of bureaucracy falls short of the model found in U.S. corporations (Jackall, 1988). Weber’s findings describe bureaucracy as fixed and structured, hierarchical in nature, with work broken down into detailed tasks, and coded through documentation (Weber, 1904). Jackall, using an interpretive sociologic approach to study organizations, looked deeply within their social structures to understand how power influences meaning making and the organization’s bureaucratic ethic. He found that Weber’s bureaucracy theory meaningful to lower level employees but did not cover the competitive world of organizational leadership.

Jackall casts a more critical lens upon the world of corporate leadership, finding success anchored to a leader’s ability for figuring out the undocumented rules and always acting in the best interest of the organization. While Jackall uses the term manager consistently in his study, his findings apply to all organizational leadership roles. For this discussion, I will use the term “leader” in place of Jackall’s reference to manager.

Organizations are fluid, constantly changing directions, and strategies, where leaders must adapt to the changing social environments to remain viable within the power structure. Leaders must perform
as a team, take on “stretch assignments,” which are temporary roles requiring them to enter new situations, learn quickly, “think on their feet,” manage their emotions, and build strong relationships with organizational power players. As leaders rise within an organization, they must manage and expand their power structures to sustain prestige and influence. Leaders are players in the social game of power and control, where the rules involve learning the organization’s accepted practices, modeling the bureaucratic ethic, and constructing a broad and powerful social network.

**Looking up and looking around.** To rise in status within an organization’s structure, individuals must be adept at knowing what Jackall calls “the moral rules in-use” (Jackall, 1988, p. 5), which involves acceptable organizational leadership behaviors. These are undocumented standards, common within a functional unit used to guide decision-making and agenda setting. These standards may differ across functional units, which is why leaders must quickly adapt by observing and learning new standards when changing roles across functional units.

Organizations operate through broad networks, with actions and decisions distributed across an array of organizational units, each specializing in a specific area of the business, for example marketing, finance, and communications. As leaders enter these functional units, they quickly learn that there are acceptable “ways of working” for interpreting information leading to decision-making. These “ways” described as perception or in some cases rule bending. By this I mean that leaders select the necessary information required for a decision, apply the functional unit’s “ways of working” that determines which rules are critical and which rules are negotiable, to deliver the best decision in the interest of the organization.

Functionally distributed organizations create a vast web of broadly disseminated information, developing experts within areas, consciously aware of their decision-making, yet not fully attentive to the complexities that exist across the organization. Jackall found that each functional area establishes undocumented “rules” guiding interpretation and establishing a level of tolerable ambiguity, supporting by a series of rituals. These rituals limit the leaders’ use of accessible information, establishing a network of imperfect information that increases the level of ambiguity found within a functional unit.
Organizational leadership development programs train their participants to adopt a tolerance for ambiguity yet may not train them how to interpret the “rules in use” and unable to model the accepted behaviors.

**Modeling bureaucratic ethic.** Jackall (1988) found that leadership success revolves around the perception of being a team player, where individuals conform to the accepted standards within the organization. An individual’s success does not depend upon their own efforts, but upon the internal rules created by the organizational bureaucracy and the individual’s aptitude at modeling these rules and acting in the best interest of the organization. He provides examples where a manufacturing plant’s processes likely impacted employees’ health, yet leadership decided not to inform employees of the potential health risk, rationalizing that the employees’ poor health choices acted as precursors for other health events.

Here leaders are consciously aware of “drawing lines” around the knowledge and information necessary to inform the “best” decision. Within the context of an organization, the best decision involves consideration of a course of action judged acceptable by the legal, financial, and public relations units. In this way, leaders encapsulate the information they need to make decisions, altering the lines as necessary to address each decision, allowing leaders to assume higher levels of responsibility because the organization views them as trusted advisors. Here, they build a record of accomplishments based upon their decision-making skills that come their brand or in Goffman’s terms, their moral career.

This is a skill not easily acquired through formal MBA programs. It requires personal insight and awareness of a particular organization, where promising leaders are trained to read the cues, or in Jackall’s terms “looking up and looking around” (p, 82), to become aware of the practices that surround them (Jackall, 1988). In this way, leaders learn to take risks, assessing their actions upon the organization’s moral consciousness, presenting a fluid sense of decision-making and generating new forms of power through their relationships with others.

**Powerful social networks.** In Jackall’s study, he finds two forms of social structure critical to a leader’s ability to survive and thrive in an organization (Jackall, 1988). Networks are one of these forms where individuals develop informal relationships with others based upon their personal goals and
objectives. Often these networks involve the acquisition of power through knowledge and insight. Networks are socially engineered organizational structures that bring together a web of individuals, grounded upon the person at the center of the network. Networks are comprised of individuals with different organizational power levels that may overlap from one person to another, with no two networks identical due to the social nature and goals of the individual at the center of the network. The other powerful social structure required for organizational leadership is alliances.

The second social form or alliances differ from networks, as the relationship is direct between two individuals, one who holds organizational power, and the other who wants to acquire more power. Jackall focuses on two types of alliances, advocacy, and patronage, with patronage the more important structure (Jackall, 1988). Advocacy refers to a professional relationship an individual has with a person who generally holds more power, such as an employee and their manager. Patronage refers to a professional relationship an individual has with a person who holds a high status and a concentration of power, whose sponsorship of the individual “play a crucial role in advancement” (Jackall, 1988, p. 21) through their influence and mythical organizational status.

Jackall found that social networks play a critical role in the making of an organizational leader. While he does not use the term monetization in his discussion of social networks, his findings suggest that patronages act as social assets with power accrued through a monetization process. This process converts the social relationship into a form of “revenue” for the employee, as their patron has the power to convert the relationship into new roles by vouching for the employee’s leadership aptitude.

Organizational leadership program participants are well aware of the value that social structures have within an organization, having formed their own networks through experience, such as their MBA programs, which teaches students the fundamentals of business administration and the social structuration necessary for achieving higher levels of leadership. Participants enter these programs having connections with influential decision makers that led to an offer to participate in the program. Once in the program, networks and alliances fuel their development and growth, critical to the individuals’ ability to succeed as a corporate leader.
**Luck.** Jackall also found that luck or good fortune separate one leader’s success from another leader’s failure. While the role of luck is a factor for all organizational leaders, luck is not predictable or planned. For this reason, I limit the inclusion of luck in my analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, acknowledging luck” as a developmental factor for promising leadership in organizational developmental programs.

**Summary**

Participants in a leadership development program must learn to play the game to acquire the framework of a corporate moral leader. Jackall states that the fluid social nature of an organization requires leaders to be agile, quickly learning the rules in play. They must take on stretch assignments, leverage their networks and alliances for new roles, and quickly assimilate to new functional units. Leaders must be team players, able to recognize and incorporate the rules of the social structure when forming networks and building their alliances. Successful leaders must model the organization’s bureaucratic ethic, tolerate a high level of ambiguity to construct the logic necessary to make decisions and that benefit the organization. In this way, they are consciously aware of the undocumented rules in place, necessary for organizational decision-making.

**Chapter Summary**

In this section, I discussed the analytical theories I will apply to this case study involving one organization’s leadership development program. I began with Bourdieu’s social structuration theory because it incorporates power into the social interactions that surround individuals within the setting. Bourdieu describes individuals drawn together in a habitus of like-minded individuals where they share meanings that inform their experiences. In this social setting, individuals generate four types of capital: economic, symbolic, social, and cultural. I will apply the latter three to this study as they involve the role of power for acquiring and leveraging various forms of capital. The final piece of Bourdieu’s theory includes symbolic violence described as a complicit educational process an individual embarks upon to form a new way of knowing, which is developed over the participants’ program experience.

Next, I will apply three analytical frameworks in sequential order reflecting the participants’ transition starting with the first rotation through graduation. I begin by applying Goffman’s
dramaturgical analysis by analyzing the participants as actors under the guidance of directors who perform in front of powerful audiences with the intention of conveying a desired set of impressions. The social setting of the dramaturgy takes place within the framework of Helpful Corporation, a total institution that encompasses the daily rituals of individuals, consuming their thoughts and actions on their way to forming an executive level moral career. Next, I will apply Turner’s rite-of-passage liminality theory.

Turner’s liminality theory studies the ritual process by focusing upon an individual’s state of liminality, or the space in between their old identity and their desired future identity. This process begins upon separation of an individual’s previous identity and the start of their ambiguous state of liminality. Here the individual undergoes a transformative process marked by rituals and ceremonies under the guidance of elders and adepts. While in this state, they experience the oppositional forces of the culture’s structure and the communitas anti-structure. This push and pull continues throughout the liminal state until individuals move beyond the ambiguity where they collect and present themselves through their new identity. Similar to the experiences of participants in a leadership development program, individuals enter the program stripped of their previous identity with the anticipation of spending five to seven years in a liminal state on their way to developing their new identity, an executive level leader, which is an ambiguous time marked by rituals and ceremonies.

Finally, I will apply Jackall’s corporate moral manager theory to look deeper into the formation of an executive level leader, described as a set of attributes common amongst powerful corporate leaders able to sustain their influence while promoting their organizational careers. He is quick to point out that luck plays an important role in the rise and fall of leaders, yet luck is not predictable. Successful leaders must be able to tolerate a dense field of ambiguity in the corporate structure through the dissemination of information. Leaders assemble their acquired information imperfectly to act quickly and remain flexible in their perspectives applied to each decision. They strive to make “good” decisions, described as those that benefit the organization, building a solid performance record and recognized as their professional brand.
Within the social structure of these powerful organizations, leaders must survive by monetizing their social relationships, such as networks and alliances. Networks are one form important to the leader’s acquisition of power, with alliances, the second form necessary for career advancement. It is not enough to be an expert in a field to thrive within an organization; leaders must constantly apply the shared rules for playing the game where each participant is competing and playing to win. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology used including the interpretive framework, data analysis, ethical considerations, and an overview of the participants and program.
Chapter Two: Normative Case Study Methodology

Introduction

I selected a normative grounded theory case study to research the experiences and perspectives of promising leaders participating in the leadership development program of a Fortune 100 company that I will call “Helpful Corporation.” A normative case study encourages deep analysis into a specific issue that may affect other organizations with similar models (Thacher, 2006). Leadership development programs are increasingly common organizational talent management strategies across all industries.

Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) qualitative research recommendation, I began the case study focused on one overarching question and four sub-questions. My primary question asked, “How does an organizational leadership development program prepare promising leaders for executive level positions?” To support the complexity of this topic, I developed four sub-questions focused upon the program, its leaders, and participants. These questions include: 1) What are the recruiting practices for attracting high potential candidates into the organization’s leadership development program? 2) What is the curriculum that guides the development of the program’s participants? 3) Does the program’s pedagogy align with the curriculum and practice for developing leaders? 4) How should an organization evaluate the success of their program? Through this case study, I will demonstrate how my findings contribute to the scholarly literature on high potential employees participating in an organization’s leadership development program.

Interpretive Framework

Case studies are ideally suited for analyzing and interpreting social interactions and outcomes (Flyvberg, 2001). Case studies involve all data collected allowing the researcher the ability to detect power dynamics usually ignored. By looking deeply into one setting, for an extended time, the researcher can carefully separate the data comparing social patterns from one point in time to the next, to understand the presence and effect of power. Because social interactions are context-dependent, power dynamics vary resulting in different participant experiences. Power also influences resources, and information available to participants, ensuring that each case study offers insightful analysis of specific issues. This
study analyzes the dynamics of how these social interactions illuminate influences upon the institutional socialization of Helpful Corporation’s (HC) promising leaders. In general, case studies allow researchers to dig deep into social settings, beyond stated criteria to study the undercurrent of social interactions.

**Normative case study.** A normative case study sheds light on new or existing issues in organizations that yield significant implications for society because they concern emergent or increasingly common issues with ethical overtones (Thacher, 2006). This type of case study brings obscure situations into view, allowing us to rethink our ideas and judgments as it reveals new insight on existing topics. It involves thick ethical concepts with rich, descriptive content and moral value such as influence, power, or leadership. These studies produce findings beyond explanatory theory with implications for future actions and decisions surrounding meaningful concepts such as relative value and development.

In addition, organizational leadership development programs include structured educational, cultural, and social events that highlight the power-infused dimensions of social life emphasized by Bent Flyvbjerg. In line with Flyvbjerg’s (2001) call for field-based case research, these programs contain overt and tacit messaging best observed in situ to understand the interactions and influences of power. Yin concurs, and in general recommends empirical inquiry to investigate the holistic event, experience, or socialization process (Yin, 1994). Social structures influence the level of individual perception and consistency of messaging for any kind of program participation, and these structures may change with the passage of time (Bazely, 2013). In this study, after reviewing program records and participant lists, a normative case study allowed me to bring attention to a seemingly obscure organizational issue.

**Grounded theory.** This study required an inventive and analytical approach that broadly follows the grounded theory method. This involves a fluid process to collect and analyze data simultaneously, and then develop a coding methodology for deductive reasoning and continuous comparison of data (Charmaz, 2006). These guidelines remained flexible and adjusted when needed in response to data analysis, allowing me to probe new findings and key themes.

For example, as I noted earlier in my Reflexive Statement, this methodology allowed me to “follow the data” early in the process. I initially anticipated the data would lead to analysis surrounding
high-potential millennial leaders. Instead, as I began collecting data, I realized this study would address the development of high potentials within an organization rather than generational characteristics influencing high potential development. Grounded theory methodology allowed me to recognize this case study was not about “how” millennial characteristics influence the development of promising leaders; rather it would reveal “how” the organization’s characteristics influence participants’ development. By using grounded theory tactics, I completed a holistic analysis of all data, and was able to discern at least some of the leadership program’s different manifestations. The analytical journey required a confluence of qualitative research, normative case study, and grounded theory tactics in which to study the program and participants’ experiences.

Organizational leadership development programs involve a process experienced uniquely by the participants, program directors, and the organization. Qualitative research ensured a source of scholarly inquiry used to assess and describe the process and human experiences (Creswell, 2013). There are five elements necessary for a qualitative study all present here: 1) research centered upon the participants’ natural environment, 2) collection of descriptive data, 3) actions to minimize my influence upon the process, 4) inductive data analysis, and 5) participant centric meaning making (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Next, I will outline my data collection process.

**Data collection.** This case study focused on the pseudonym “Helpful Corporation,” (HC), which operates in the health service industry headquartered in New England. HC offers a range of products and services mainly in the United States, with limited products offered internationally. Some of these products include medical and dental insurance, along with Medicare and supplemental accident coverage, to name a few. In addition to their global headquarters, HC has offices across the United States and in select countries.

I chose interviews as my primary source of data collection, combined with field observations and other internal and external data sources. I used data available through HC’s website, such as program and job descriptions in addition to data found on other websites such as LinkedIn. Internal program data included strategy and planning presentations, recruiting agendas, recruiting interview data, such as the
roles and hierarchical placement of interview teams, and some other data provided by the program’s director. This broad array of data sources assured in-depth understanding of the problem along with robust data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Following grounded theory tactics, I developed a series of questions used as a guide for each interview. For each initial interview, I began with a standard question opening the discussion with “Tell me about your educational and/or professional background.” I used this question to connect with each participant, allowing them to relax and narrate their story.

This starting question assisted me when gauging the participants’ level of trust and details willing to share. I could tell from their responses whether the participants were willing to share details or if I needed to rely upon prompts to dig deeper to find meaning. Following the initial question, I allowed the participant to lead me through the interview. Pausing and prompting additional details as new data surfaced, returning to my standard questions on occasion to open new avenues of inquiry.

I remained cautious during the interview to assure the participant’s data remained intact. When I needed to paraphrase a participant’s response, I asked questions to confirm or reject my understanding of the data. At times, I would take their response and phrase it in the form of a question to assure the participants agreed with their initial response. At times, I detected a note of frustration from the participants, impatient that I could not follow along and needed to confirm their response through a question. At these times, I reminded the participant that my role is to collect data and not to assume intention. My response seemed to mitigate the participants’ frustration, reinforcing the data collected is their story and not mine.

As the researcher, I recognized and appreciated the unique opportunity to interview high potential employees and leaders, honoring the trust they placed upon me during data collection. I conducted face-to-face interviews with nineteen participants in a location they chose, most often in conference rooms or offices with a few interviews taking place in public spaces. I treated the interviews as quasi-field observations that included notes on the interview space and demeanor of the interviewee. Due to travel
schedules and personal needs, I conducted some interviews telephonically using video cameras when available.

Supplementing the data collected through interviews, I conducted three separate observations, documented in my field notes. Two of the three observations involved the 2017 cohort, which officially began on July 10, 2017. Since I began interviewing participants at HC’s global headquarters starting the week of July 17, 2017, I was able to leverage my time on location to conduct these observations. The first observation conducted on Thursday July 20, 2017 while the new associates participated in a leadership development exercise. The second observation conducted on Friday July 21, 2017 at the end of their second week where the group gathered in HC’s executive dining room for a meal and debriefing after a busy week of activities. The program director facilitated the session starting with a round table discussion asking participants to share what concerned them most at this time. Responses ranged from housing, to exploring the geographical location, to trying to make sense of HC and its businesses. Once everyone participated in this exercise, the program director than asked them to reflect upon their onboarding process, their current roles, and their professional objectives to begin establishing their professional HC goals and objectives. This would serve as a foundational construct for the participants to continuously reflect upon their experiences and plan their future. The third observation I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, which includes a personal guided tour of HC’s physical stages located in their global headquarters.

My researcher role assured a deep understanding of the issue through the collection of data from participants in addition to returning to the field often to assure data validity and topic saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013). To achieve these objectives, I conducted 31 in-depth interviews of 19 program participants representing 12 cohorts including current associates and graduates. To enhance the data, I conducted 3 interviews with 2 HC leadership program directors, and 2 interviews with 2 HC steering committee members. I purposely sought out a large number of interviews across a wide range of roles to carefully study the issue and collect a wide range of data for analysis.
Data Analysis

The lived experiences of participants, leaders, and decision makers are critical to assess the construct of value and its influence upon leadership development. Following grounded theory tactics, I transcribed and coded the data to identify themes that generated new lines of questions for further exploration (Charmaz, 2006). To carefully study and understand the themes, I triangulated the data collection process to include historical corporate documents, and strategic planning information where applicable. Based on the data patterns some themes emerged that required comparative analysis within and occasionally across other corporate units and programs, resulting in a more robust analysis.

The program I studied is highly valued by organizational leaders and prospective candidates who seek to become executive leaders within the health service industry. Still, individual experiences vary, often influenced by the cohort members and institutional power. Participants, leaders, and steering committee members all play a role in the evolution and development of the program and HC’s leadership talent pool.

Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that the study of social science must incorporate practical wisdom during data collection and analysis to inform practical reason. I applied practical wisdom through the process, using interviews as my primary source of data. I collected and transcribed nearly 26 hours of recorded discussions producing a vast source of rich, thick data. I transcribed all interviews, spending time reliving the experiences, social interactions, and settings to build intimate knowledge of my data (Bazeley, 2013). During the process, I used a notebook to capture, sketch, and develop generalized ideas and concepts requiring further exploration until I reached a point of topic saturation.

As part of my interview closing rituals, I offered a transcript to each participant to review and edit. Most participants requested a copy of their transcript sent to their personal email address and only
one participant returned a copy of their transcript with a few clarifying edits. Next, I began the formal coding process starting with initial coding. In Table 2.1, I include a listing of the 48 coded labels, or data names, listed in alphabetical order, I generated from my initial analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 2.1
Alphabetical Arrangement of Initial Codes Resulting from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access to Information</th>
<th>Development – Program Rotations</th>
<th>Influence - Program's Ability to Influence</th>
<th>Program Branding - Individual as an Extension of the Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Sessions</td>
<td>Diminishing Returns of the Program</td>
<td>Insider Behavior and Knowledge</td>
<td>Program Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Characteristics</td>
<td>Don't Need a Program</td>
<td>LDP Building Credibility</td>
<td>Program Culture and Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Due Diligence of the Actor (Researching Their Role)</td>
<td>Learning the Executive Level Role</td>
<td>Program Director Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Better Products with More to Offer</td>
<td>Elite Talent Pool of High Potentials</td>
<td>Legacy Development</td>
<td>Program Enablers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a Team - Planning for the Future</td>
<td>Exposure to Leaders and Access to the Right People</td>
<td>Network - Value of Professional Contacts</td>
<td>Reasons for Choosing the Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations</td>
<td>Fit</td>
<td>Network - Building a Web-like Network</td>
<td>Relationship: Mentoring &amp; Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1 Influence</td>
<td>Gapped</td>
<td>Organizational Culture</td>
<td>Role of Program Director or Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1 Network</td>
<td>Giving Back</td>
<td>Paying it forward</td>
<td>Secret Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development – Executive Level Leadership</td>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Performance feedback</td>
<td>Self-Sustaining Organism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development – Personal, Professional</td>
<td>Influence - being in the program</td>
<td>Professional Re-Entry</td>
<td>Strategic Career Development - Building your Legacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development - Playing the Role</td>
<td>Influence - Participant Building Organizational Influence</td>
<td>Program as an Enabler</td>
<td>Value of the Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I followed the initial coding process by reviewing all codes to determine which ones were meaningful to my analysis. This began by reviewing each transcript to identify data bits or clusters; described as sections within the transcribed interviews I considered important bits of data. I organized the autonomous data clusters by arranging them according to similar themes, participant experiences, or common phrases. I coded each participant data cluster using terminology meaningful to me, which in some cases produced a type of slang such as “Reason for Choosing the Program” or “Secret Society” (Table 2.1).
Once I thoroughly reviewed and captured data clusters from each transcript, I then reviewed the data collections, moving data around, in some cases creating or removing data clusters. I continued this process by taking breaks, pushing myself away from the analysis for days, to assure a fresh approach to the coding process. Once I was satisfied that I had captured and coded all data clusters, I moved on to begin development of focused coding supporting my research questions and to determine which codes offered deep insight and rich description. During this step, I produced 17 focused codes, finding three overarching themes emerging from the data collected (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2
Focused Codes Resulting from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of the Organization</th>
<th>Participant Roles</th>
<th>Rituals and Ceremonies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Institutionalization</td>
<td>· Recruitment</td>
<td>· Rituals and Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Mythological Program</td>
<td>· Being Recognized as a Program Participant</td>
<td>· Moving from One Rotation to the Next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Significance of Influence</td>
<td>· Behind Closed Doors</td>
<td>· Rituals and Social Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Performance Feedback</td>
<td>· Preparations to Assure a Strong Performance</td>
<td>· Graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Reading the Queues</td>
<td>· Role of the Team</td>
<td>· Ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· The Significance of Who I Associate With</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, the first theme, Influence of the Organization, found in first column of Table 2.2 refers to data clusters involving organizational influences upon participant development leading to the goal of becoming an executive level leader. The second theme, Participant Roles, refers to the program participants, a unique breed of high potential, high performing individuals, with clearly defined short and long-term professional goals. These participants exhibit a high level of strategic thought and planning to secure a role in the program as a vehicle for their professional goals. The third theme, Rituals and Ceremonies, captures the performance of activities involving program participants, executive leadership, and program directors. Ceremonies performed to mark high occasions such as the start of a new cohort or when participants graduate. Rituals performed to reinforce the program’s value within the organization and the participants’ sense of belonging to an elite and special group.
My final coding exercise required inductive and deductive thinking to apply what Charmaz (2006) refers to as axial coding. I looked at both sets of codes to assure a holistic view of the data, being careful not to overlook meaningful data while finding a way to synthesize these parts into a simple whole. I looked for relationships between my codes, patterns surrounding the lived experiences, and the observations I conducted. After careful examination, a pattern emerged involving values, expectations, and experiences (see Table 2.3). With this analysis, I was ready to narrate this case study.

Table 2.3
Axial Codes Resulting from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Benefits</th>
<th>Duality of Roles</th>
<th>Branding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immediate Benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Program Requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Personal Branding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence</td>
<td>• Giving back to the Program</td>
<td>• Developing a Strong Resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Network</td>
<td>• Self-organizing</td>
<td>• Strategic Selection of MBA Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family</td>
<td>• Ambiguous and Soft Graduation Requirements</td>
<td>• Portraying the Right Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Like-Minded Individuals</td>
<td>• Stretch Roles</td>
<td>• Building My Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Enablers</th>
<th>Organizational Roles</th>
<th>Program Branding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mentoring Networks</td>
<td>• In-Role Performance</td>
<td>• Roles &amp; Rotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to Executives</td>
<td>• Timing of Rotation and Compensation Cycles</td>
<td>• Catching an Executive's Eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional Training</td>
<td>• Staying within a Vertical</td>
<td>• Opening Doors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Like-Minded individuals</td>
<td>• The Difference Between Advocacy and Sponsorship</td>
<td>• Responsibility to Maintain the Brand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talent Manager</th>
<th>Cohort Roles</th>
<th>Executive Branding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Full-time Personal Consultant</td>
<td>• Accountability Sessions and Critical Expectations</td>
<td>• Forming Your Power Coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participant's Talent Broker</td>
<td>• Your Performance Affects Mine</td>
<td>• Influencing without Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Program Director's Role of Influencer</td>
<td>• Casting a Wide Net in Search of Open Roles</td>
<td>• Building Credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The full coding process was much more complex than it appears. I began with hard copies of transcribed interviews, highlighting important sections, which I refer to as data clusters. Next I electronically cut and pasted the data clusters into an excel file. As I became more familiar with identifying possible data clusters, I transitioned to reviewing and working with electronic copies of transcribed interviews.
As my collection of data clusters expanded, I began to see emerging initial codes which then became the bolded column header within my excel file. I added new data clusters fitting the initial code to the rows below. Data clusters that did not initially fit moved to new unlabeled columns, sometimes beginning a new initial code. Once I finished the initial coding process, I reviewed each initial code and data clusters found in the column to assure that the label and clusters matched, occasionally moving some data clusters around until I was satisfied with the data clusters and coding.

The process of coding and sorting data bits electronically allowed me to locate rich, deep sources of data, easily identified due to the rows of data underneath. These clusters of data bits indicated points of saturation, supported by strong data collection. As I examined the electronic data file, it was clear that my case study was materializing before my eyes.

**Ethical Considerations**

My reputation as a researcher is dependent upon my demonstration of ethical considerations. To protect the privacy of the organization and participants, I immediately applied numeric coded pseudonyms to protect all identities and locations, later changing the numeric code to a person’s name randomly selected. Because the study looks at one organization in one industry, I applied extra precautions to assure no outside individual or organization is able to identify the sources for this case study. For example, one of my data sources is an overview of HC’s LDP program, publicly available through their internet site, which I cited as Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019. Yet, I did not publish the actual link or name the organization when referencing strategic material provided by the program director, as doing so would violate the confidentiality placed upon me by this study’s participants.

While the topic for study does not offer competitive intelligence, industry secrets, or personal indiscretions, the nature of this study and personal experiences are meaningful to the participants and the organization. My participants revealed personal data about themselves, their families, and their cohorts. Participants spoke candidly, offering insight into their strategic planning and actions necessary to secure a job offer that will enable their rise as a leader within HC.
To conduct this case study, I met with members of HC’s Talent Management team, proposing a case study of their LDP program, centered upon my initial research question, “How to measure success of an organization’s leadership development program?” I presented my proposal believing that the data would reveal how millennial characteristics influence participant development and stated this during the discussion, yet confirmed the case study would apply grounded theory tactics, allowing the data to lead the research. The Talent Management team approved my request and connected me to the LDP director.

The program director suggested sending an introductory email to all potential participants, which included associates, active program cohort members, and graduates of earlier cohorts. I offered to prepare the email to assure the request accurately reflected their role and study intent, with the expectation that the program director refine the content. Once we both reviewed the final content, the program director, using the program’s name in the subject line, sent the email to 32 potential participants. Within 24 hours of the introductory email, I sent a personal email (Appendix A) to the same distribution list with the specific request to participate in the study including an outline of the interview process, time commitment, and the nature of the study.

Twenty-two potential participants responded indicating their interest in this case study. I was able to interview 18 program participants and graduates in addition to a former program associate. The former program associate was a person I had previously met through mutual contacts. Using the LinkedIn application, I located this former associate. I discovered this person left HC about a year earlier, taking a position outside of the health service industry. I messaged this person using LinkedIn, requesting their participation in this study, to which they agreed.

In total, I interviewed 19 active or former participants. The initial request to interview participants resulted in a response rate of 69%, 22 of 32. From this candidate pool, I interviewed nearly 82%, 18 of 22, from the LDP’s current or past members. The remaining 4 were excluded due to work schedules and geographical locations. The demographic breakdown of the 19 participants includes 6 females, and 13 males, from across a narrow spectrum of ethnic diversity (Table 2.4). While I did not inquire into participant ethnicity, it appeared 15 participants, or 79%, would fit the category of Caucasian.
This study also includes two program directors and two steering committee members, all of which are female and appeared to fit the Caucasian classification.

**Data Integrity and Limitations**

At the center of a qualitative research study is the role of the researcher and their responsibility towards data integrity (Creswell, 2013). Recognizing the significance of my role, I consistently reminded myself of the sacred responsibility involved for collecting and analyzing participants’ data. I followed all required and recommended practices throughout the course of this study to assure my analysis produced an accurate reflection resulting from this normative case study.

While program associates and graduates offered the richest source of data, I needed to validate my findings by expanding the potential panel of participants to program directors, steering committee members and a former participant. I also used my own observations to enrich my data collection and to form new insights and questions. As noted earlier, I conducted three formal observations, two involving the newest cohort completing “onboarding” activities and leadership development exercises. My third formal observation involved a concentrated observation of HC’s global home office, the physical manifestations of the organization, and social rituals taking place within the physical structure on a specific day and time.

Ahead of the interviews, I followed all participant consent best practices, personally transcribing the data and immediately applying a six-digit numeric code as the initial pseudonym. Later, I would transcribe the numeric code to a random application of popular American names chosen from a list found on the internet. I provided participants with interview transcripts for editing. I applied Charmaz’s (2006) guidance for grounded theory coding resulting in initial, focused, and axial coding. I triangulated my data to include internal and external documents integrating the data for a holistic perspective. I applied Flyvbjerg’s (2001) guidance by incorporating practical wisdom to inform practical reason.

My commitment to critical inquiry became the foundation of my research and served as a reminder that my actions must not influence the process. While a student within the University of St. Thomas’s doctoral program, I practiced the role of critical inquiry, respecting the long tradition of
qualitative researchers and their scholarly contributions. I modeled my behavior from these practices with the objective to produce a meaningful case study. While great care and insight went into the study design, data collection, and analysis process, there remain some limitations, which I will discuss next.

First, while I initiated interview requests from a total of 32 associates and graduates, 10 responded that they did not wish to participate or were too busy at this time. While I did eventually achieve topic saturation, whereby further data collection produced little or no additional themes, the experiences of these 10 may have generated additional meaning to assess the program’s value. Second, while my participants appeared ethnically diverse, I did not specifically inquire about ethnicity, which may have been beneficial to the data analysis process. Third, I was unable to conduct follow-up interviews with the longest tenured program associates, who have participated in the program in excess of five years, whose insights may be meaningful to the longitudinal view of how the program works. Finally, I used convenience sampling of one leadership development program within one organization. While my findings may not be too dissimilar from similar programs in similar organizations, this study is limited in the comparison across other leadership development programs.

In my role as researcher, I honored the rituals and traditions of qualitative research. I centered my study around participant experiences, probing for richer data sources while honoring areas the participant did not want to explore further. I used the analysis process to develop themes, which I shared with participants during follow-up interviews, showing them sketches to convey meaning or generate deeper inquiry into specific words or phrases. I applied my whole self to the researcher role, following my curiosity as I critically inquired about participant experiences. I will now introduce the program and participants in this study.

**HC’s Leadership Development Program**

Helpful Corporation (HC) is a global health service organization, whose primary business involves insurance plans and products, working with health care providers and systems, employer groups and individuals. The company has been in existence for over 100 years, leading the transformation of
health care in the United States and over 25 countries. It is a Fortune 100 company with over 35,000 employees worldwide. HC is a significant player in the health service industry.

HC’s Leadership Development Program’s (LDP) purpose is to develop general management talent, which requires a broad knowledge of the industry and operations. HC offers similar graduate-level leadership programs serving other functional areas such as Finance and Marketing, designed to develop future executive level leaders. HC offers undergraduate programs for supervisory and managerial leadership development. This study involves the general management LDP, which has been in place for nearly 20 years and considered a model of leadership development. Next, I provide an overview of the program’s structure and design, which I cover in detail in Chapter 4.

Each year a new cohort of promising leaders enters the program as associates who begin their career as individual contributors at the Low Band 4 Career Professional level with the goal of reaching the Low Band 5, Expert Professional level upon graduation (See Table 2.4). While individual contributors work on teams, they do not manage other employees. Eventually, associates will take new roles that involve managing other employees, as this is a critical component of the Band 5 general management role. A Low Band 5 position is an entry-level executive leader at HC, where all official Band 5 job titles include the term “Director,” symbolizing the employee’s status in the organization.

Table 2.4 includes a distinctive green line that separates the non-executive and executive levels, Bands 4 and 5, respectively. I have included a bold red bracket to call out the focus of HC’s LDP, starting at the Low Band 4 level. The LDP’s goal is to develop promising leaders who are able to achieve an executive level Band 5 director position. In Chapter 5, I will discuss why the green line is more than a hierarchical separator, representing a significant and challenging milestone for promising leaders.
Table 2.4
Helpful Corporation’s Career Architecture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Organizational Designation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Enterprise Leaders</td>
<td>Strategic enterprise role, employees lead multiple functions or a major strategic function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Multifunctional Leader</td>
<td>Strategic roles and leaders of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Expert Professional</td>
<td>Technical/functional expert or manager of teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Executive Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Career Professional</td>
<td>Individuals possess technical expertise or manage individual contributors. Employee executes at the organization's direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Entry Professional</td>
<td>Roles are primarily tactical with some operational focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Senior Associate</td>
<td>Transactional focus and directed by standard operating procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working under the organization's direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The program conducts an annual recruitment process resulting in the formation of a new LDP cohort. Cohort sizes vary from two to as many as 11 associates. Table 2.5a portrays the cohort sizes for study participants recruited prior to 2013, with Table 2.5b portraying the cohort sizes for study participants recruited after 2013. I segmented participant data based upon recruiting patterns, finding a natural separation between the two periods. In Chapter 5, I will thoroughly discuss the significance of these data segmentations.

The data found in Tables 2.5a and 2.5b, capture meaningful insights related to recruiting patterns and strategy based upon the sampling, or participants, in this study. For example, I interviewed one participant from the 2002 cohort, whose starting size was four associates. Years not included in the table, such as 2003, 2006, and 2011, indicate that original cohort members do not remain with HC or did not participate in this study. The 2016 cohort of six was one of the larger cohorts, consistent with the 2007
cohort size. More surprising is the size of the 2017 cohort, which nearly doubled in size with 11 associates. Nearly all the participants referenced the size of the 2017 cohort, with many questioning the program’s ability to develop all associates within HC’s leadership pipeline.

Table 2.5a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HC LDP Cohort Size for Participants’ Recruited Prior to 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting Cohort Size by Program Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HC LDP Cohort Size for Participants’ Recruited After 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting Cohort Size by Program Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data does not demonstrate that cohort size is a predictor of success for reaching a Band 5 leadership position, yet cohort size does influence participant development, which I discuss in Chapter 5. These tables demonstrate variability in cohort size for the 12 cohorts represented in this study, indicating no standards for the preferred cohort size. On average, it appears that HC recruits 4.3 promising leaders annually to participate in the LDP. However, the cohort size range is nine, the difference between two and eleven, suggesting a significant variance in recruiting patterns and strategy.

The program’s structure includes four rotations, with the expectation that each rotation involves one role. This is not always the case for associates in the third rotation, a topic treated in Chapter 5. For example, a new associate from the 2017 cohort began their first rotation, in their first role, in 2017. Their next rotation will involve a new role, in another part of the organization. Each participant’s experience is unique, and no two associates will follow the same rotation schedule or hold identical roles. Due to the size of HC and the program’s concentration on general management, associates gravitate towards different areas based upon their preferences, experiences, and developmental needs.

Individual experience varies for associates, which prompts the program director to remind associates to “stay in your lane,” a reference directing associates not to compare their progression with
their peers. Not everyone will progress at the same level or find opportunities that challenge their developmental learnings. While the program describes a structure of four rotations, each lasting between 12 and 24 months, associates may actually complete four to six roles prior to graduation. Before introducing the HC’s LDP program structure and participants, I will return to Table 2.4 HC’s career architecture. This is important to understand the content within this study and the details found in the remaining tables.

**HC Career Architecture**

Returning to Table 2.4 HC’s career architecture consists of seven different bands and general role titles. Band 4 is the highest career band before the executive level Band 5. The architecture produces a distinct hierarchical structure, evident when studying the aspirations of promising leaders in the program. The movement from one band to another is significant in both economic terms and symbolic artifacts. For example, when moving from a Band 4 to a Band 5, associates are eligible for a larger bonus and leave their cubicle office space, moving to a physical office that includes a small conference table and door that locks. The structure contained in the table is deceptive, suggesting a simplistic approach to career progression and mobility that is often more complex.

As noted earlier in this chapter, HC is an international health service organization that employs over 35,000 individuals worldwide. New employees enter the organization, and classified within the band structure, at the level appropriate for their aligned role. The structure found in Table 2.4 applies to all employees, with each employee classified in one of seven bands. Entry-level staff members begin at the Career Band 1 level. At Career Band 1, employees perform administrative duties at the direction of a supervisor. Their value to the organization is low since there is very little skill required for the type of work they produce. If a Band 1 employee leaves the organization, a new employee fills the open role, quickly trained to perform the role.

At the Band 2 level, individuals possess some additional skills, with much of their work classified as administrative. In this role, their productivity measured according to prescribed metrics for speed and accuracy, reporting to supervisory leadership. Higher performers receive higher levels of pay signifying
their increasing value to the organization. When a Band 2 employee leaves the organization, a new employee takes their place, but it requires more training and experience to prepare the newcomer.

Band 3 employees take on additional responsibilities, and many of these employees assume supervisory roles and functions. Most often highly skilled Band 2 employees aspire to move into a supervisory leadership role at the Band 3 level. Not all employees in this band manage other employees; rather they may be individual contributors, or individuals with an increased skill set that comes with higher levels of education or tactical insights. Individual contributors at the Band 3 level possess a specialized skill set. When a Band 3 employee leaves the organization, a more detailed search is required to locate new employees who possess the required skill set. For example, these individuals may perform analytical tasks and a replacement must possess similar training or education to perform the needed tasks.

The same is true for Band 4 employees, except that Band 4 employees include managers responsible for one or more teams of highly skilled individual contributors, each of whom possesses much higher skill levels, not easily replaced. For example, a Band 4 manager may oversee a group of Band 4 process engineers, whose role is to optimize the processes that drive services for the organization. Band 4 employees are leaders able to develop strategy and lead a variety of teams through their ability to influence others. When a Band 4 employee leaves the organization, the recruiting process takes even more time to locate potential candidates to fill the open position.

Bands 5 through 7 represent higher-level leaders or highly skilled individual contributors, with the Band 5 level described as an entry-level executive. While not all employees in Bands 5, 6, or 7 manage teams, all employees aligned to this classification are considered executive leaders. From this point upward, individuals demonstrate leadership through strategic actions, influencing, and building power coalitions to navigate the political waters within this large organization. These leaders are highly skilled and difficult to replace. There is no simple, clearly defined process for employees to follow if interested in achieving one of these roles. Rather, the process involves a compilation of formal and informal education, competency training, experience, and insight, in addition to natural talent, where natural talent suggests a type of “street-smarts” or tacit knowledge where individuals seem to understand
organizational expectations with limited direction and know how to get things done through social interactions. It is for this reason that organizations invest in talent development and maintain a talent pipeline to assure seamless transition from one executive leader to another, suggesting the benefit of a case study to understand how these programs work. Next, I describe the LDP’s structure for developing promising leaders.

**HC LDP Program Structure**

**Rotations**

Associates begin their HC LDP career in their first rotation, where the LDP recommends each rotation should last between 12 to 24 months. The program director assigns associates to their first rotation, generally based upon their backgrounds and experience. This is to assure the role is not too demanding, allowing the associate to gain a broader overview of Helpful Corporation. During this rotation, associates strengthen their organizational acumen, understand profit levers, and build their network, which will become very important in the associate’s search for their second rotation. Besides learning and performing well in their rotational role, associates are responsible to research career opportunities, apply for open positions, and eventually secure their next rotation. The second rotation typically involves a promotion to the High Band 4 level (Table 2.4) and a move into another part of the business.

The second rotation develops associates’ personal leadership and global mindset. Here associates will dive deeper into a specific business unit building their personal brand and organizational credibility. In this role, associates will take on increasing responsibilities, expand their network, and continue their leadership and organizational development through a series of formal trainings and programs offered to associates in preparation for their third rotation.

For associates’ third rotation, they seek out roles with added responsibilities such as leading a team and gaining experience with strategy development. Generally, this rotation does not involve a formal promotion, but a horizontal move to a managerial role to gain experience in motivating and influencing others. The size of the associates’ team varies by role and department, as the purpose of this
rotation is to develop associates’ strategic and influential leadership. The associates’ ability to execute performance at this level is critical for preparing them for their final rotation.

The fourth rotation, also referred to as the capstone rotation, acts as the key differentiator of the associates’ development while in the program. Here the objective is for associates to enhance the business by driving change, creating a legacy of improvement within that business function. Generally, this rotation involves a significant promotion to the Low Band 5 director role. Not all associates will achieve this accomplishment prior to or after their graduation, even though it is the stated goal.

The program makes no formal promises that new entrants or current associates will reach the Director level while an employee of Helpful Corporation. The program is careful to describe the course of action, offer a high degree of support and development, while reminding associates they control their destiny. Associates must work to secure a new role for rotations two through four by networking and exploring opportunities. The program assists with this skill development early on through a number of program enablers.

**Enablers**

The program offers many enablers, which are features and processes to enhance and accelerate the development of promising leaders. Enablers, which I discuss in Chapter 4 as part of associates’ “swag bag,” include internal and external mentoring processes, additional leadership and business unit training, executive speakers, networking mixers, assessments, and consultants from the Talent Management area. All associates receive the benefits of the program enablers while participating in the program. In Chapter 4, I thoroughly explore these features, as part of the program’s rotations.

For new associates, the enablers are very important to their development, yet, over time, enablers are less effective. Meaning that the associates report the value of program enablers diminishes as they incorporate their learnings into their tacit knowledge. Put another way, as associates mature in the organization they rely less upon enablers and rely on their accumulated insight and brand management, moving closer to program graduation.
Graduation

Program graduation takes place during the associates’ fourth rotation, somewhere between five and seven years [60 – 84 months] in the program. There are limited program graduation criteria, with limited documentation surrounding the specifics. The program director is responsible to monitor associates’ progression, looking for markers of completion, which I discuss further in Chapter 4. Some of these markers include length of time in program, number of rotations completed, or achieving a Band 5 director role. Generally, these markers present themselves during associates’ fourth rotation. The program director monitors associates for evidence of these markers, arranges a meeting to confirm the markers and determine whether the associate is ready to graduate. If the associate agrees they are ready to graduate, planning begins for a graduation ceremony. There are no annual standing graduation ceremonies, signaling the infrequent nature of program graduation, an issue I discuss further in Chapter 5.

Summary

HC’s LDP is a semi-structured program consisting of four rotations, where each rotation includes one role for a period of 12 to 24 months. The program expects that within this timeframe, associates will master the role and the program’s objective for that rotation, then move on to their next rotation, which they are responsible to secure. The structure of the LDP is comparable to other HC graduate level leadership programs. The LDP program offers many enablers to facilitate associates’ development and their process for finding new roles that achieve the rotation’s objective. Upon starting their fourth rotation, if the associates meet the criteria for program graduation, the program director will initiate a discussion with the associate to confirm their readiness to graduate from the program, changing their status from LDP associate to graduate. I will now introduce the participant’s in this study.

Participant Overview

Rather than using personal introductions for each participant, I will introduce my participants through a summary, involving data segmentation. Here, I will apply two approaches that break the data into subgroups. The first data segment describes the participants’ LDP status at the time of the interviews, broken into two subgroups, Associates and Former Associates, and Graduates. The second
Playing to win

Data segment breaks describe the participants’ recruitment year at the time of the interviews broken into two subgroups, Recruitment Prior to 2013 and Recruitment After 2013. Because this study is limited to one organization in a specific industry and due to openness of social media applications, along with my duty to protect the identities of the participants, I will introduce my participants only in categorical summaries, starting with program classification and the type of MBA degree they received.

**MBA Program: Elite and Non-Elite Participants**

The initial data segmentation involves participant program status, starting with graduates. The first subgroup within this data segment includes eight program graduates representing seven cohorts whose starting year covers the period of 2002 through 2010. Graduates received their MBAs from seven different programs (see Table 2.6) with 63% attending elite programs according to the national top 20 MBA program ranking (US News, 2019).

Table 2.6

**LDP Graduate Study Participants, by MBA Program, as reported in US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>US News 2018 Ranking</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Male Associates</th>
<th>Female Associates</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Chicago</td>
<td>Booth</td>
<td>1 (tie)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>Fuqua</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>The School of Management</td>
<td>11 (tie)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell University</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigham Young University</td>
<td>Marriott</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Connecticut</td>
<td>School of Business</td>
<td>85 (tie)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple University</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>unranked</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Graduate Totals By:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender - All Programs</th>
<th>Elite MBA Program and Gender</th>
<th>Non-Elite MBA Program and Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6 summarizes graduates participating in this program broken down by their MBA program and its ranking, whether that program met my definition of elite and the gender of the participant. I excluded the cohort year from this table to protect the participants’ privacy; however, I will comment that cohort year does not indicate a trend with newer graduates attending elite schools. For example, the three participants that did not attend elite schools represent three different cohorts. The
graduate gender distribution includes 25% female and 75% male. The female participants include Hannah and Isabel with Hannah holding an elite MBA. The male participants include Alex, Jacob, Luke, Michael, Nathan, and Ryan, with Jacob, Luke, Nathan and Ryan holding an elite MBA degree.

The second subgroup in this data segment includes 11 associates who entered the program in one of five cohorts for the period 2012 through 2017 (Table 2.7). “Associates,” represents promising leaders in one of four rotations at the time of their interviews that have not graduated, “former associate” represents one participant, no longer in the program or employed by HC. Of the 11 participants, 64% received their MBAs from elite programs, which I define as those nationally ranked MBA programs in the Top 20 as reported in US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018 (US News, 2018).

Table 2.7
LDP Associates and Former Associate Study Participants, by MBA Program, as reported in US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>US News 2018 Ranking</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Male Associates</th>
<th>Female Associates</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
<td>Kellogg</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>The School of Management</td>
<td>11 (tie)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>Darden</td>
<td>13 (tie)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Mellon University</td>
<td>Tepper</td>
<td>17 (tie)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Carolina</td>
<td>Kenan-Flagler</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Connecticut</td>
<td>School of Business</td>
<td>85 (tie)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns Hopkins</td>
<td>Carey Business School</td>
<td>unranked</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associates and Former Associate Totals By:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Gender - All Programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender breakdown of participants is notable in that there are four females (36%) and seven males (64%), a trend that is consistent with the graduate participants. Yet the potential pool of participants I did not interview includes six females and two males, which indicates that the program’s recruitment efforts are fairly balanced. The female associates include Emily, Emma, and Olivia, of, which only Olivia received an elite MBA. The former associate, Mandy is included in the elite MBA data found in Table 2.6. The male associates include Ben, Bill, Jack, James, Josh, Nick, and Tom; all but Nick and Tom attended an elite MBA program. Next, I look at the categorical summary using recruiting data.
Participant Group: Recruitment Prior to 2013

The study includes participants from a wide range of cohort groups, beginning with a participant from the 2002 cohort and a participant from the 2017 cohort. Across the timeline of 15 years, there were at least five LDP program directors responsible for recruiting and “seating” each cohort. I continue with my introductions using a categorical participant summary by breaking the participant data into two subgroups, Recruitment Prior to 2013 and Recruitment After 2013. In Chapter 5, I will provide a detailed discussion supporting this decision to segment my data by recruiting year and program director in place at that time.

Table 2.8 presents a second view of the participants in this study and a snapshot view of their role at three points in time. Table 2.8 is comprised of three periods, displayed as “panels,” capturing the participants’ role at the time of their first interview, conducted between July and October 2017; their role at the time of their second interview, conducted between October 2017 and January 2018; and their role approximately one year following the second interview, January 2019. This is to capture a longitudinal view of the participants’ leadership development as conveyed by their HC roles. Prior to 2013 and during their recruitment phase, nearly all the participants interacted with a single program director. Due to the limited demographic details provided by the program, it is not clear if there were other program directors responsible for the “seating” of the 2002 and 2004 cohorts (See Table 2.5a).

Table 2.8 captures 10 of the 19 LDP participants in this study. Of the 10, eight are graduates (80%) and two remain active associates (20%). Nearly 63% of the graduates, five of the eight, received an elite MBA, including Hannah, Ryan, Jacob, Nathan, and Luke. Three participants, 37%, received non-elite MBAs, including Michael, Isabel, and Alex. The two associates split evenly, with Jack receiving an elite MBA and Nick receiving a non-elite MBA. Gender distribution by participants in this data segmentation is unbalanced with 80% male and 20% female.
Table 2.8  
*Longitudinal Tracking of Study Participants’ Recruited Prior to 2013 by LDP Rotational or Graduation Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Hannah*</td>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jacob*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Isabel*</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Jack*</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Nick*</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Nathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Rotation 3, Role 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the first interview, 40%, four of ten, participants held roles at the High Band 4, non-executive level (See table 2.4). Six of the participants or 60% held roles at the Low and High Band 5 levels, the stated goal for program participants. Hannah and Nick graduated from the program at the High Band 4 level, which suggests they did not achieve their stated goal when entering this program. At the time of the first interview, Jack and Nick remained in their third rotation at the High Band 4 level.
Approximately three months passed between the time of the first and second interviews. Participant role status is captured in the second section of the table under the heading Role Status as of Interview 2, producing three data points. The first involves Hannah, Nathan, Isabel, Jack, and Nick, who did not participate in the second interview, which I discussed in the limitations section of this chapter. I was unable to coordinate a second interview with Hannah and Isabel. Nathan, Jack, and Nick did not respond to my requests for a second interview. As their participation was voluntary, I did not pursue an interview with these participants after my second unanswered request.

The second data point involves Jack and Nick, who moved into a new role as part of their third rotation. I will thoroughly discuss this data point in Chapters 4 and 5. For now, I will note that it is not uncommon for participants to take on a new role during their third rotation. While this is not consistent with the program’s design, the need to locate and take on a new role while in the third rotation suggests programmatic issues. The third data point notes that participants already in an executive role, Band 5, did not change roles between the time of the first and second interviews. This suggests that upon reaching an executive level role, the progression upward requires an extensive body of leadership work produced over an extended period.

The third section of Table 2.8 presents an updated view of HC role status approximately one year following the timing of second interviews. There are three findings from this section. First, Hannah and Michael remain at the High Band 4 level, unable to achieve the stated goal of the LDP. Second Jack and Nick remain in their third rotation, second role, unable or unwilling to achieve the program’s graduation requirements. I will discuss this further in Chapters 4 and 5. Third, Ryan accepted a new role, promoted to the High Band 5 level, joining Luke and Alex. One other note, Nathan, who was unresponsive to my request for a second interview, left HC. Using the LinkedIn application, I was able to determine that Nathan joined a smaller organization in the health service industry, holding the impressive title of Vice President.

Overall, the data in Table 2.8 provides a longitudinal snapshot of role progression for the participants recruited prior to 2013. There are 10 participants found in this table, with six, 60%, securing
Playing to win

a Band 5 director position. This suggests that 40% have failed to achieve the stated goal, transitioning from promising leader to HC executive. Two of the four, Jack and Nick remain active in the program and may still achieve this goal. For those successful in achieving a Band 5 position, Jacob, Isabel, Luke, Ryan, Alex, and Nathan, only one participant, Ryan, advanced to a higher-level, and one participant, Nathan, left HC, for what appears to be a higher-level role.

The data in Table 2.8 does not suggest that MBA program type is a strong predictor of which participants will reach a Band 5 position. Of the four participants holding a non-elite MBA, two of the four, Isabel and Alex, achieved the Director level goal, a 50% success rate. Of the six participants holding an elite MBA, four of the six, Ryan, Jacob, Nathan, Luke, achieved the Director level goal, a 67% success rate. While there is a difference between the rates, there is not enough data to demonstrate a correlation between participants with an elite MBA achieving the stated goal of the program.

**Participant Group: Recruitment After 2013**

A second view of data segmentation by recruiting timeline includes participants recruited after 2013, found in Table 2.9 that includes a similar snapshot view of participant roles at three points in time, displayed as “panels”. The first section presents role status at the time of participants’ first interview, conducted between July and September 2017; their role at the time of their second interview, conducted between September 2017 and January 2018; and their role approximately one year following the second interview, January 2019. This is to capture a longitudinal view of the participants’ leadership development as conveyed by their HC roles. The participants in this data segmentation involve three different recruiters, or program directors, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

Table 2.9 represents nine of the 19 LDP participants in this study, spanning four cohort classes 2014 through 2017. Consistent with the analysis of program graduates discussed in this chapter, nearly 67% of this group, six of nine, received an elite MBA, including Bill, Josh, Olivia, James, Ben, and Mandy. Three participants, 33%, received non-elite MBAs, including Emily, Emma, and Tom. Gender distribution is fairly balance in this segmentation, with 56% male and 44% female. Mandy, the former
associate left the program near the end of her first rotation, while in a Low Band 4 role. For purposes of
the following discussion, I now exclude Mandy from the longitudinal analysis.

Table 2.9
Longitudinal Tracking of Study Participants’ Recruited After 2013 by LDP Rotational Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>LB4</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>James</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel 2: Role Status as of Interview 2 (September 2017 - January 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>LB4</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>James</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandy*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel 3: Role Status as of January 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Status</th>
<th>MBA Program Type</th>
<th>LB4</th>
<th>HB4</th>
<th>LB5</th>
<th>HB5</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandy*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first panel of Table 2.9 represents program status at the time of the first interview, 75%, or
six of eight, participants from cohort years 2016 and 2017, were in their first rotation, at the Low Band 4
level. This includes Bill, Josh, Olivia, Emily, Emma, and Tom. Twenty-five percent of the participants,
James and Ben, representing cohort years 2014 and 2015 respectively, held High Band 4 roles, while in
their second rotation, consistent with the program’s rotational design. James and Ben represent the first
associates participating in this study, joining after 2013, when the program renewed its focus upon leadership development, a very important data point that I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

Approximately two months passed between the time of the first and second interviews. Participant role status is captured in the second panel of the table under the heading Role Status as of Interview 2, producing three data points. The first involves Emma and Mandy, highlighted in yellow, who did not participate in the second interview. I was unable to coordinate a second interview with Emma and excluded Mandy from the second interview to focus on emerging themes surrounding the acquisition and expansion of power associated with HC executive leadership positions, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

The second data point involves Josh, Olivia, Emily, and Emma, who successfully moved into their second rotation at the High Band 4 level, consistent with the program’s design. It is important to note that this group represents the 2016 cohort year, successfully moving into their second rotation within 18 months of their HC start date, well within the 12-24 month program guidance for rotation cycles. Bill, also from the 2016 cohort year, lagged behind his peers at this time, remaining in his first rotation, still within program guidance. Tom, representing the 2017 cohort, remained in his first rotation. The third data point notes that James and Ben remained at the High Band 4 level, in their second rotation. At the time of the second interview, James was approaching the 24-month mark of his second rotation, beginning the early steps to secure his next rotation. This suggests a lag on his part for remaining within program guidance, an issue I explore further in Chapter 5.

The third panel of Table 2.9 presents an updated view of HC role status approximately one year following the timing of second interviews. There are five findings from this section. First, Ben achieved the program’s goal for his third rotation, moving to the Low Band 5 director position, demonstrating an accelerated leadership trajectory, the ultimate goal of the program as I describe in Chapters 4 and 5. Second, James remained at the High Band 4 level, yet moved into a new position, consistent with the requirements of the third rotation, which I discuss in Chapter 4. It is important to note for James’ second rotation, he took on an expanded role, managing a department. Program guidance does not suggest taking
on a people management role until the third rotation. For James third rotation, he moved into another area of the company, leading a new department.

Third, Emily left HC’s LDP and the organization. Using the LinkedIn application, I was able to determine that Emily joined a competitor in the health service industry, returning to a similar role she held prior to entering HC’s LDP as an internal recruit, which I discuss further in Chapter 4. The fourth finding notes Tom, now in his 24th month in the LDP, remains in his first rotation at the Low Band 4 level. This indicates Tom is falling outside of program rotational guidance, reaching the 24-month mark of his first rotation, suggesting a developmental lag, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5. The fifth finding is simply an assessment of success based upon which participants achieved the program’s stated goal for becoming a Band 5 director. As of January 2019, the participants recruited after 2013 demonstrate a 13% success rate, as Ben achieved the Band 5 director position. It is too early to state the full success rate of this group, yet I will note that there are markers within the data that suggest which participants appear to match the trajectory of promising leaders that will achieve the Band 5 director level at the time of graduation. In Chapter 5, I will produce extrapolated data to treat these markers, for now I will introduce the extrapolated classifications.

The longitudinal view suggests three classifications of participants, which I have named: naturals, potentials, and contributors with the following definitions. “Naturals” refers to associates who accelerate through the program, with rapid promotions culminating in a director level role prior to program graduation, generally within five years. Ben is an example of a “natural” (Table 2.9). “Potentials” refers to associates who navigate the program, reaching a Band 5 director position in years six or seven, and then graduate from the program. Examples include Josh, Olivia, and Emily. “Contributors” include two groups; the first group may remain active in the program, seeking out new roles as part of rotations three and four, examples include Jack and Nick (See Table 2.8). The second group of “contributors” agrees to graduate starting at year five as a High Band 4 manager but continue to work towards a promotion to the Band 5 director level as a graduate of the program; examples include Michael and Hannah (See Table 2.8). Next, I will introduce the program directors participating in this study.
Program Directors

Included in my study are program directors from two of HC’s three graduate level leadership programs. I interviewed Rebecca, who was the director of the leadership development program for this study, referred to as HC’s LDP and designed to develop high potentials into executive leaders as general managers. At the time of the interview, Rebecca had been in her role for less than one year, recruited by the previous program director, Barbara. Within one year of our interview, a new program director replaced Rebecca, since she took another Talent Management position within HC. There is a noticeable trend involving frequent HC LDP director changes, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5. For this study, I found Rebecca to be refreshingly open and candid in her responses and a good source of data.

I also interviewed Stephanie, a program director for a different HC start-up graduate level leadership program who also leads an undergraduate level functional-based program. Stephanie’s graduate level program intends to develop executive leaders for a specific functional part of the business such as Marketing or Communications. At the time of our interview, Stephanie explained that she was in the process of actively recruiting her first cohort for the graduate level leadership program and that she was modeling her program similar to the structure of Rebecca’s general manager LDP. While the structure of the LDP appears to be sound, the data will demonstrate that Stephanie may want to reconsider modeling her graduate level leadership development program after an alternative model, a topic I will discuss further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Because of time restrictions, I ended up interviewing Stephanie twice. For our first interview, Stephanie requested a list of the questions in advance, which ended up producing some generic and standard responses. For our second interview, I was able to meet with her in person and bring in a new set of questions, following data already collected from other interviews, allowing me to ask probing questions about program leadership, design, and strategy. This second interview produced a good source of data. I was also able to interview two LDP program steering committee members, which I introduce next.
Steering Committee Members

I requested interviews with three of the ten steering committee members at the direction of Rebecca who noted that these individuals were actively engaged in the program, serving as mentors, program speakers, and in some cases sponsors for participants. I was able to meet with two of the three steering committee members, Natalie and Nicole, both female. While Andrew confirmed his interest in participating, his travel schedule did not allow a time to meet.

I planned to meet each steering committee member in person, as these are senior level executives. Interviewing them in their physical space, surrounded by HC artifacts would prove meaningful to the data analysis portion of my study. Unfortunately, only Nicole’s interview took place in person as Natalie had an unexpected event take place that resulted in a telephonic interview. While these interviews were short (30 minutes), the data produced was rich, packed full of insight, experience, and perspectives upon the program, its ability to develop high functioning leaders, along with program shortfalls.

Summary

I found the interview process energizing and engaging, a time for personal reflection and creativity. Listening to the participants’ stories, hearing their passion for the industry and professional career, and capturing their frustrations during the interviews proved a powerful source of data for the normative case study that I will now present. An interesting item to note is that there was a cross-section of interest in this study. By this, I mean that steering committee members commented on the need to measure the program’s value and retention was not a good indicator for that purpose. The program directors’ expressed interest since their roles require them to demonstrate the value of their work leading these programs, yet, were unsure of the best method to measure value. The participants, associates, former associate, and graduates expressed interest in the topic and agreed to participate in the case study process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the details surrounding this normative case study including the interpretative framework, a discussion surrounding data analysis, some ethical considerations, in addition
to steps taken to manage data integrity issues and a few limitations resulting from this study’s process. I introduced three tables that outlined my process for data coding and theme development (Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). Once I completed the foundational overview of the study, I then introduced the program.

I presented an overview of HC’s LDP program, outlining the program’s structure, its rotational objectives, enablers, and program graduation along with a brief introduction of another HC graduate level leadership development program. I introduced HC’s career architecture, Table 2.4 and presented a thorough discussion of the architecture’s hierarchical job bands that are applicable to all HC employees. Following an overview of the program, I introduced the participants in this study.

To protect the participants’ identities, I limited the demographic breakdown of details, presenting the participants using data segmentations. As part of the participant introductions, I introduced six tables outlining cohort sizes, classification of MBA programs completed, and longitudinal tracking of participants’ career progression at the time of this study (Tables 2.5a, 2.5b, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9). I also tracked the participants’ career progression during the time of this study, July 2017 to January 2019. For each table introduced, I conducted a thorough analysis of the data to allow the reader complete understanding regarding the importance of my research question and the significance of this case study.

Next, I introduced other study participants including two program directors responsible for two graduate level development programs, one of whom is the director for this program. I was also able to interview two steering committee members, which I briefly introduced in this chapter. I assured a broad sample of perspectives in this study from executive leaders, program directors, and LDP participants to assure I achieved topic saturation. Before I present the data, I will present my story that led me to this research and my interest in this study.
Chapter Three: The Ups and Downs of My Moral Career as a Leader in the Health Service Industry

Introduction

My interest in organizational leadership development began while reading a weekly millennial blog published on my employer’s internal portal. The blog is open to millennial writers as a social platform to express their opinions, interests, concerns, and issues. I enjoyed reading the blog to keep a fresh perspective on what is important to a growing proportion of my fellow employees.

One of the emerging themes focused upon workplace dissatisfaction with the extremely slow pace of professional advancement. Several authors expressed frustration with their professional career development and unrealized leadership potential. I found myself thinking, “Get in line with the rest of us; you are not the first and only group of employees questioning how one advances their career.” Did they not realize advancement is hierarchical in nature and promotions are a mix of timing, skills, advocacy, and luck? Did they really expect to join the workforce and leapfrog past experienced employees with a demonstrated record of success?

As I asked myself these questions, I paused to think about my professional advancement experiences including the leaders that helped facilitate my development. I remember hearing about a leadership development program offered by my employer for recruiting and developing young, influential talent. At one time, I reported to a member of this program, someone I respected and admired as she advanced her career and supported mine. I wondered how the program worked. Was it the program, or the caliber of talented people that successfully navigated organizational advancement? Through this study, I discovered my professional career mirrored the experiences of HC’s LDP participants, suggesting a common interest share by many. To study these questions, I reflected upon my own professional experiences and periods of rapid advancement and stagnation, similar to the experiences of HC’s LDP participants. My corporate leadership development period began upon the start of my second career.
Professional Reentry

Upon college graduation, I worked for a Fortune 500 health service corporation. After a lengthy relationship, a key client decided to move its healthcare service to a competitor, resulting in the closing of the office and the termination of all staff in that office, including myself. Due to the extensive notification period before the termination, I began my job search, during the fall of 2003. During the interim, following the office closure and the start of my job search, I realized this was a good opportunity to reflect upon the industry, my personal interests, and my career goals.

I used this period of unemployment to step away from the hectic requirements of balancing a young family and professional career. I was able to take a break, recharge my batteries, and spend additional time with my family. Starting in the summer of 2003, I did not think about resumes, job searches, or professional goals. I took up new hobbies, tried a few athletic endeavors, visited local parks, and enjoyed my time away from work. As the summer wound down, I began working on my job search. Re-energized, I viewed this as my fresh start and my professional reentry into an exciting career based upon what was meaningful to me.

My professional criteria included the desire to lead and work for a respected employer, which would inform my planning and decision-making. I was not concerned with the organizational mission statement. Rather, I wanted a culture that allowed employees to have fun while working toward the organization’s objectives. I wanted the opportunity to make a name for myself and be fairly compensated based upon my contributions.

During October 2003, my job search narrowed when I received two offers from different health organizations, one organization on the supply side and the other on the service side. While the offers were comparable, the cultures were not. I used the onsite interviews to assess the corporate culture, observe the surroundings, and social interactions to determine which organization offered a supportive environment for a working parent and developing leader.

One organization was stiff and formal, the other relaxed and engaging. The latter offered a stretch leadership role that would place me in a position to oversee a small service division with two
supervisors and forty employees. In this case, the stretch leadership role meant I would manage supervisors and their teams, a step forward in my professional career. I viewed this as an opportunity, where the organization “trusted” I was capable of expanding my skill set further than my demonstrated track record. My resume demonstrated past leadership experience, but this offer elevated my role and span of leadership control. With that in mind, I chose the latter offer from Feel Good Corporation (pseudonym), a subsidiary of National Care Corporation (another pseudonym).

As a subsidiary of a larger organization, Feel Good’s stand-alone operations meant they were responsible for their own financial results, with Feel Good’s leadership held accountable for their profits or losses and employee’s compensation a function of these results. Fortunately, Feel Good’s results were always profitable, so I experienced increasing compensation year over year. Upon joining Feel Good, I felt an immediate connection with its culture, inspired by the CEO’s internal motto, “Work hard, make money, and have fun.” Years later, I never second-guessed my decision to join Feel Good Corporation.

**High times at Feel Good.** As I re-entered the workforce, I was energized and eager to immerse myself in my next career, my role, and the organization. In my stretch role, I had an opportunity to take a risk, be a leader, and learn about the inner workings of corporate management. This was a fresh beginning to create my professional image within a successful organization.

I was returning to health care service operations, an area I was very familiar with from my past employment. My stretch role replaced a female leader, Elizabeth (pseudonym), terminated for poor performance and conflictual leadership style. I later learned Elizabeth focused on staff productivity by continuously raising performance goals without working with the staff to understand the challenges preventing continuous productivity increases.

During the interview process, I inquired why the position was open and learned of Elizabeth’s termination. Using this information, I applied a different approach to build trust. I met each employee discussing their issues, listening to their concerns, and remaining open to their ideas. I enacted new policies to improve the environment, while conveying the message that we needed to deliver results. At the end of the first year, my division outperformed expectations. During my annual review, my manager,
Jake (pseudonym) demonstrated his trust in my leadership abilities by classifying me as a high potential leader.

The classification as a high potential leader is an important marker for individuals. The Talent Management function of Human Resources closely monitors the lists of high performers, passing along the names to other areas of the organization and acting as a watchdog to assure these performers continue to grow. Managers look for unique growth opportunities for their high potentials as a reflection of their ability to select and develop talent. High potentials receive challenging assignments and public acknowledgement of their accomplishments, a win-win position for the employee and their manager.

Much of my success in the first year reflects luck and timing, as I replaced an unpopular leader, who failed to motivate her unit and deliver results. Using a few simple strategies, I empathized with the staff, united the team, and focused the unit on a set of shared goals. I formed a strong relationship with Jake, who subsequently mentored me as a leader and his future successor.

During my second year, my division continued to outperform expectations, elevating Jake’s Feel Good leadership profile and reflecting his ability to hire the right person to turn-around a failing division. Jake became my advocate, promoting my abilities and creating opportunities for me to meet influential leaders. In this way, Jake became my personal agent acting as a Feel Good leadership development program director, similar to HC’s LDP program director role, described in Chapter 2. My professional career began to shadow his. As Jake’s responsibilities grew, he reassigned some existing responsibilities to me. I observed Jake at work: his ability to influence others and apply strategic leadership. As Jake’s leadership role expanded, so did his ability to navigate political situations in preparation for his move into an executive leadership role.

During this time, I was fortunate that my professional relationship with Jake was more than a reporting relationship. Jake took me under his wing, acting as my mentor to help me learn and develop, an elder to guide my own rite of passage leading to a director’s role, an important aspect missing from HC’s LDP that I will discuss further in Chapters 5 and 6. As Jake’s Feel Good’s leadership grew, our professional relationship evolved from mentor, to advocate and later to sponsor, similar to Jackall’s
findings on corporate alliances a form of organizational social structures necessary for leaders to develop and thrive, discussed in Chapter 1 (Jackall, 1988).

**Advancing up the corporate ladder.** When I was entering my third year with Feel Good, Jake received an executive level promotion to Vice President of Operations, his new peer group only one-step below the executive leadership team. Jake’s new role provided autonomy for development of his high potential staff including selection of stretch assignments, mentoring relationships, training, and executive exposure. I experienced all of these development opportunities as one of Jake’s high potential leaders.

My responsibilities doubled with the addition of a second division requiring that I develop my leaders to be my successors, which is an important aspect of a leader’s role that assures a pipeline of highly capable talent.

Jake’s influence included on-demand training opportunities for me. When organizations develop or purchase new leadership training programs, the organizational demand exceeds supply, resulting in a limited number of seats available for select employees. Selection for the limited seats is determined by the leader’s level of influence within the organization. In my case, much of the training I participated in resulted from Jake’s prominence within the organization.

As I reflect upon my second rotation, I recognize that my alignment to the right leader and the designation as a high potential opened many doors, resulting in a number of promotions. I took on several national, high profile stretch opportunities, expanding my network beyond my division and geographical office location. My professional portfolio became a reflection of advancement, one of my initial goals when accepting Feel Good’s offer.

In this environment, I felt invincible. Surrounded by a strong staff, generous resources, and an influential leader, mentor and sponsor, I developed a personal brand, recognized as an organizational asset. What Goffman refers to as a “moral career,” a successful Feel Good leader, a person known for getting things done, highly respected, results-driven, and sound decision-making skills. My unit performed well, my managers were happy, and there was always a new adventure to take on. I was satisfied with my position, yet 18 months into my second rotation, I realized I needed to continue my
Playing to win

professional development. Looking back at my rotation timelines, I find my trajectory comparable to advanced LDP participants, who moved into their second rotation within 18 months of the start of their first rotation and ready for their third rotation ahead of the 24-month mark. As I started to look ahead, large-scale organizational changes began to take shape that changed my career trajectory.

Organizational Change: The Long Shadow of National Care

Four years after joining Feel Good, the environment changed as the parent company, National Care began integrating Feel Good into the centralized organization. Rather than acting as a standalone subsidiary with its own leadership structure, Feel Good’s structure folder into National Care’s leadership structure limiting the power of Feel Good’s leaders. Coincidentally, I moved into my third rotation during these structural changes.

As a survivor of corporate integration, I experienced organizational reprogramming as Feel Good conformed to National Care’s organizational culture. Mentally, I replaced Feel Good's internal slogan, “Work hard, make money, have fun,” with my perception of what National Care’s slogan could be, “Work hard and only the strong survive.” I considered my National Care experience to have amounted to what Goffman refers to as an unwelcoming total institution (Goffman, 1961). While I recently joined and thrived within the earlier culture, or habitus of Feel Good, National Care felt like the Matrix depicted in the popular movie series.

In becoming part of National Care’s culture, Feel Good complied with the parent company’s standards communicated through several new layers of leadership. Feel Good’s CEO now reported to a new leader who reported to the CEO of National Care. Looking back, I liken this experience to that of a balloon with a slow leak. National Care leadership scrutinized every Feel Good decision from organizational structure, to promotions, and professional development. Within two years, Jake and other innovative leaders left the organization determined to continue their careers with a local competitor.

With Jake’s departure, I reported to a new local leader, whose title no longer included Vice President. A year later, that person moved to another role, replaced by another local leader. The integration process limited local leadership’s influence and decision-making, transferring the real power
to the corporate headquarters, furthering a growing sense of frustration amongst Feel Good’s leaders. Though my responsibilities grew, promotions did not automatically follow as per my Feel Good experience.

Timing and luck played a significant role during my first two rotations, by my third rotation it was just the opposite. I had learned the Feel Good system guided by skilled leaders, and was on the fast path to leadership growth. My alignment with Jake resulted in him being a mentor and (more importantly) a sponsor, an executive level influential leader with authority to propel an individual’s career forward. This changed with the integration where I lacked the tools to adjust to the new standards of self-promotion and sponsorship.

**Meaningless titles.** From an employee perspective, the integration of Feel Good into National Care involved uncertainty and social change. At the same time, the organization was rapidly growing, resulting in more structural changes for my division. I moved into a director level role for my fourth rotation, which under the old Feel Good structure would have resulted in a promotion to an executive level role. However, within National Care’s structure, the promotion meant expanded responsibilities and a hollow title. My title stated director, but my decision-making authority remained limited.

While in this role, I experienced another round of integration, this time involving functional business units. This resulted in placing all similar business units together under a single, powerful leader. Again, my peer team and reporting structure changed and this time, became more geographically dispersed. My department was the last group to join this new division, adding to the new challenges ahead.

The geographical separation meant infrequent face-to-face meetings; instead, all interactions took place through electronic or telephonic communications. As the final member to join this structure, my peer team cautiously welcomed me to their closed-door interactions. Their behavior was guarded; our conversations stunted, making it difficult to interpret their true meaning. For the first time in my career, I experienced a slow learning curve and adjustment period.
My earlier reputation as a high potential Feel Good leader did not transfer with me in this arrangement. Now I had to learn the behaviors necessary for recognition of a high potential leader in the new highly centralized system; in other words, develop a new moral career within an organization I did not much like. I became uncomfortable with National Care’s valued behaviors, resulting in a professional decision whether to conform to National Care’s expectations in order to maintain my high potential status. This would require full adoption of the conforming behaviors prevalent in this new National Care arrangement. I chose not to pursue the high potential status in this new configuration, instead deciding to learn a new part of the business, moving into a new role and returning to the standard talent pool of employees.

What I learned as a corporate leader. In the years that followed Feel Good’s integration, the loss of my sponsor, and my division’s functional integration, I found my passion for work waning. Throughout my professional career, I have been a fighter, challenging barriers blocking my goals. I relied upon my innate sense of fight to test different approaches and develop my network in search of new advocates.

In this larger structure, decision-making took on a new meaning, with decisions woven together across layers of leadership. In Feel Good’s small organization, decision-making accountability was direct with each leader owning their decisions. Within National Care’s large organization, it appeared easier to bury decision-making accountability amongst the many levels of leadership. For example, it starts with a leader’s vision, translated into a lower level leader’s strategic policy, translated into a lower level leader’s tactical policy, and finally to a lower level leader’s directives to their staff. By the time these directives take effect, traceability of who owns the change is difficult to determine. This pattern closely approximates the kind of “looking up and looking around” described in Jackall’s Moral Mazes (Jackall, 1988).

As part of my second integration experience with National Care, I joined a team of seven leaders, (four females and three males), reporting to a young male leader, Frank (pseudonym). Many members of this team had been together at least 12 months before I joined. There was a familiarity amongst the team
and a clear sense of competition between the leaders regarding who managed their division best as determined by a key set of productivity metrics.

These metrics stood at the center of everything we did, all our discussions, and all our objectives. Each initiative connected to increasing productivity resulting in a reduction of operating expenses, as measured by people or full-time equivalents (FTEs). Rarely did we refer to people by name; instead, we used increments of a person such as “This initiative will reduce 2.5 FTEs.” While I spoke the language accordingly, I still viewed FTEs as people. They were Mary, Greg, Bob, or Valerie. Persons with a family, kids, ailing parents, an unemployed spouse, or an assortment of pets.

Early into this integration experience, it was clear that John (pseudonym) was the favored leader. John was young, newly married, and a constant promoter of productivity increases, in other words, the language of the organization’s culture. He spoke often that managers must aggressively manage their people; challenge them to work efficiently and provide rewards to the highest performers. This mantra was not a change to the corporate culture, but it became a repeated chant, which Frank valued, leading to John’s designation as a high potential leader. I knew it would be difficult for me to wrestle that crown from John. It meant I would have to match his professional brand solely focused on a set of productivity numbers.

The question I needed to address was how much of my values would I sacrifice in order to reclaim my title as a high potential? John was playing to win. Was I ready for that challenge? I could see my new boss, Frank, was John’s advocate, selecting him for stretch assignments that provided facetime with higher-level leaders. Frank’s boss, a very high-ranking influential leader, became John’s sponsor. Each of these relationships powerfully supporting John’s position and high potential label, making it very difficult for me to displace John. In the end, I chose not to pursue the high potential title.

I closed that part of my career, deciding to go in another direction as an individual contributor, moving out of that organization. John continued his successful career trajectory, years later moving into an executive level leadership role at National Care. I never questioned his ability to deliver results, which
he was quite good at doing. Still, I know I made the right decision, as even today, I cannot separate the human side of people from the work I perform.

**Moving Forward**

I reflect upon this experience, not with bitterness but with the realization of the choices, I made. When I joined Feel Good, the culture and organization allowed me to become a big fish in a small pond. In the National Care setting, I became just another fish in a very large pond, requiring me to develop my personal brand, or moral career, once again and with limited assistance.

Having experienced both sides of the leadership paradigm, both as a fast-rising star and later as a non-descript leader, who did not really fit, I recognized the power of one’s social position within the organization. An individual’s ability to generate what Bourdieu calls social capital, the concept of good will generated by a leader’s actions or bartered in return for a favor (Bourdieu, 1984). Generating social capital within National Care took on a different meaning, a different look, and a gregarious new skill set.

I observed my new team, to find cues for the accepted moral code desired by Frank. I used these cues to learn which mask to wear and when to put it on, consistent with Jackall’s corporate moral leadership theory (Jackall, 1988). The moral code of the team required an intense dedication to driving productivity and performance that disregarded the toll it took upon people. Here, people were expendable, new employees just a click away.

Self-promotion became the primary way for individuals to publicize their accomplishments, to outshine their peers, and recognized by senior level leaders as “players”. I learned that I needed to be my own advocate, feeling a constant need to talk about my good work. In this group, there was a common practice of leapfrogging each other publicly. For example, as John was proudly announcing that he reached an important metric, I must follow his self-promotion with my own, to publicly gain the edge.

In some ways, this functional integration experience amounted to a rite of passage into another version of my leadership development. It stripped me of my previous identity, a Feel Good high performing leader. The transition to my new identity, a National Care corporate leader, required significant changes, such as building credibility through public displays of self-promotion (Turner, 1969).
During this period of liminality, I immersed myself into my new peer network, to understand the way this team worked, and the internal rules expected by the organization. However, rather than completing this rite of passage, I intentionally removed myself from the organization while in an ambiguous period of liminality.

Had I decided to play the corporate game I would have needed to compete with John. I would have fully formed my National Care moral career by emulating the desired leadership behaviors (Goffman, 1959a). In the institution of National Care, the executives’ moral career includes their ability to demonstrate tough talk, self-promotion, and their drive to deliver key performance metrics. While this moral career is a good fit for some individuals, it was not for me. The National Care executive moral career was a powerful brand, reflecting in the leaders who continued to drive the organization’s expansion.

The fact is that organizations cannot stand still. Leaders steer their organizations to remain viable and competitive in a capitalist economy. Not all decisions benefit all employees and employees need to make personal decisions of what they want and what they are willing to trade off. Organizational leaders must continuously prove their value, knowing their relevance remains tied to their most recent accomplishments and ability to influence others.

My professional experience and interest in my employer’s millennial blog led me to ask a series of questions focused upon leadership development and high potentials. Having experienced both sides of the high potential designation, I was aware of the psychological and professional impacts the designation has upon an employee. When designated a “high potential,” there is a sense of responsibility to outperform and a confidence that every decision made is the right decision.

I reflect upon my personal experience wondering if the designation of high potential is structured or subjective. What role does a leadership development program have in developing executive leaders? How do organizations assess the value of their high potential programs? Is there a point of diminishing returns where an organization’s investment is not valuable? These questions formed in response to my professional experience and as a reaction to millennial advancement demands.
Summary

As I reflect upon my professional career, I wonder about the road not taken, the decision to follow my heart and find roles that offer a challenge and satisfaction. I do not believe in looking back or regretting a decision, as there is no value in contemplating regret. Instead, I look ahead, reflecting upon my motivations at the time of the decision, and apply that knowledge to future decisions. Next, I present a thorough analysis of the case study data by looking at the HC LDP.
Chapter 4: Structure and Origins of an Organization’s Leadership Development Program: Enter the Stage as an Actor, Exit as a Director?

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, when I re-entered professional life in 2003, I seized an opportunity to present myself as an emerging leader. I was fortunate that Jake’s Feel Good moral career presented him as an influential and well-connected leader. A leader who challenged me to take risks, act independently, and build my body of work. I joined Jake’s organization at a productive time in his career, which facilitated my professional development.

In this chapter, I will show how the process of leadership development occurs at Helpful Corporation (HC). To present HC’s LDP, I will present the program and the developmental process using three sections. Section 1 portrays the participants advanced planning and actions prior to joining the program with Section 2 covering the actors’ first two rotations. Section 3 includes the actors’ final two rotations and program graduation, which involves the manifestation of developmental issues in rotations 3 and 4. In the overarching metaphor at the core of this chapter, actors who successfully completed their auditions receive offers to join Helpful Corporation’s theater group where they spend years in the program, mastering a series of complex roles leading to an audition for the role of executive leader. Here, I limit my analysis to promising actors who master their performances graduating from the program as an executive leader, or in HC’s terminology, a Band 5 director (See Table 2.4). In Chapter 5, I will discuss the barriers inhibiting actors’ from reaching HC’s director chairs.

To understand the process of organizational leadership development, I will apply Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis arguing that program participants are actors entering HC’s grand stage. As program participants, the actors receive props and scripts, adapting to the various performance stages, settings, and scenery, receiving introductions to influential agents, directors, and other audience members. I will show how actors develop their moral career in the setting of the total institution.

It is not enough for the actors to master their performances. Organizational leadership requires a strategic mindset where the actors perform to win a seat in the director’s chair. To understand the
development process, I incorporate Bourdieu’s social structuration concepts into the conceptual metaphor of an extended stage production, where the actors’ roles and scripts reflect the capital expected of top HC leaders. Actors perform their roles in accordance with a script intended to acquire Bourdieu’s forms of cultural, symbolic, and social capital, in which these resources later used to accrue and barter leadership power as part of the developmental process leading to the directors’ chair.

The participants in this study shared their experiences from their desire to lead, their audition preparations, and participation in the actors’ developmental workshop, HC’s LDP. They revealed their audition strategies, providing an in-depth look at their performances and their strategies for selecting roles, extending their network, establishing their personal brand, or moral career, and generating capital, surrounded by like-minded actors. Using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, I will show how actors with similar inclinations come together and challenge each other as part of building a stronger program. I begin with the actors’ proactive development of their professional portfolio and the organization’s process for recruiting.

**Section 1: Preparing for the Role**

Auditioning for a role in HC’s LDP requires three to five years of professional experience and a Master of Business Administration degree (MBA). Actors interested in these roles must complete their MBA, for a chance to compete with other qualified actors for the limited number of available program roles. Using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, I will show that these actors share a desire to lead and influence, command the spotlight, and perform with other highly skilled actors. To accomplish their goals, they must plan and prepare years in advance for these auditions. Their preparation provides insight into the actors’ strategic thinking and planning skills, which becomes important for these actors to hone their craft. For many actors, early career social interactions and experiences influenced their preparations.

**The Work of Becoming a Serious Actor**

Earning an MBA is the first step for those pursuing the craft of executive leadership. Of the nineteen participants in this study, nearly 90% joined the program as external recruits, which means they completed their MBA programs before joining HC, while two (10%) pursued their MBA as part-time
students, while employed at HC and prior to joining the program. For all participants, auditions took place near the end of their MBA program.

The external audition process begins with on-campus information sessions led by the senior recruiter, who may be the program director, an associate, or program alumni. Sessions target second year MBA candidates, but first year students may attend to learn more about the organization and program in preparation for graduation. These sessions introduce the organization, the program’s goals, and expectations to prospective actors. Following the prepared presentation, prospective actors may network with recruiters, initiating a professional connection to differentiate themselves from other prospective actors interested in the role.

MBA candidates who the recruiters identified as potential future actors will be encouraged to apply using the online application process. The recruiting team notifies HC’s Talent Management to watch for specific applications to move them along the recruiting process. Prior to reaching this point in the audition process, all participants acknowledged a series of strategic actions and planning initiated years in advance knowing that an impressive resume will attract the attention of potential future recruiters.

**Headshots: Projecting the right image.** Early on, prospective actors recognize the significance of their professional image knowing that it is much more than their physical representation. In acting terms, the headshot is a promotional or branding picture that centers the actor’s face. By itself, it portrays an image, often accompanied by a biographical story that connects the actor to future roles (Newton, 2017). To gain the attention of recruiters and decision-makers, prospective actors develop the equivalent of such headshots along with associated compelling narratives in electronic resumes and professional portfolios that communicate a personal brand and project an image of the prospective actors’ leadership ability, often requiring advanced planning before selection of their MBA program. Potential HC candidates’ headshots portray their leadership experience and convey their skills, drive for success, and intellectual aptitude. For most participants, the drive to lead motivated them to reflectively assess their current leadership trajectory and take action to change their future.
In Tables 2.7 and 2.8, I introduced the actors using their MBA programs, noting participant trends surrounding elite MBA programs. While 67% of the participants held an elite MBA representing the top 20 programs, 33% of participants attended local or lower (in some cases unranked) MBA programs. While this may suggest actors from non-elite programs are less successful, that is not the case, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

Although I did not ask for their actual headshots, I structured the initial interview to capture some of its “content.” Participants spoke about their desire to lead and take on roles with increasing responsibility. Some participants described wanting to be decision makers while others spoke about the desire to steer an organization. There was a common point in time where each participant recognized their current roles would not lead to the performance stages involving or surrounding higher levels of organizational leadership.

I asked each participant to tell me about their background, starting at whatever point was meaningful to them. All elite participants began their story with the decision to pursue their MBA, focusing on their school selection. Non-elite actors spoke about the need to attain their MBA, citing location and in some instances cost as a determining factor. All actors confirmed the need to earn their MBA as a symbol of their commitment to the craft of leadership. Actors that pursued and completed elite MBA programs focused on their rationale for choosing their business program as conveyed by Josh, a program associate and an elite MBA graduate.

What really sparked a transition from [the work I was doing] was the opportunity to present in front of leadership. [That experience] exposed me to the types of questions they asked and the way they thought both individually and as a team.

It really excited me and exposed my thoughts to the gaps I currently have. …there was something missing. I was thinking about wanting to be there [italics add context/content “interpretation”]. Which led me to think about different options, but business school became the best choice for me (Josh, 2017).

I prompted Josh to say more about his process for selecting his MBA program, to which he responded by stating his desire to be amongst other serious actors pursuing their leadership craft.
Playing to win

[I viewed the MBA program selection as an] opportunity to make, meaningful connections. You know the main reason to be honest why I went to business school was not to learn more in the classroom; it was to build a network. That is a lifelong thing I get from it.

So when I was looking at different schools it was not about like, “Tell me about your core curriculum.” Every business school is going to teach you the same stuff. It was who I want to associate myself with for the next 50 years. In a professional and personal areas of my life too (Josh, 2017).

In Chapter 2, I introduced three classifications based upon my extrapolation of data referring to participants’ development, which I treat in Chapter 5. At the time of data analysis, I classified Josh as a “natural.” His reflection here, suggests a strategic mindset that may accelerate his leadership development towards becoming a Band 5 director.

The drive to build an impressive headshot involved family considerations requiring physical relocation, which was the case for several participants moving across the country to attend their chosen elite MBA program. Another consideration involved the cost of business school, which would be significant as only a few individuals worked while pursuing their program fulltime. While I did not ask questions surrounding how individual actors financed their education, none of the elite actors spoke about program cost as a factor in their decision-making, which suggests the value of an elite degree outweighs the economic cost for these actors. Actors attending local schools or lower ranked MBA programs indicated cost as a factor behind their decision, believing that in the end, all MBAs approximate one another.

Seventeen of the nineteen participants were external actors completing their MBA program in two years, an indicator of their commitment to their field. While many MBA programs offer online or part-time programs, none of these actors saw this as an option a serious actor should pursue. Instead, they removed themselves from their professional careers, returning to the role of full-time student, immersing themselves in their programs and building their surrounding network.

Elite MBA program participants commented on their desire to succeed in their programs, building a strong network, and fully investing themselves into the program’s culture. Bourdieu describes this as building social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984); the former a resource that provides a status
advantage over others, while the latter provides the individual with behavioral insight and practice into more and less acceptable verbal and behavioral modes of representing themselves. The decision to build strong and lasting networks, coupled with their insight to practice their craft amongst other professionals, factors into all actors’ strategic construction of their headshot.

Prospective actors are willing to take risks and make sacrifices to gain entry into elite business schools knowing their headshot conveys their desire to be a serious actor, committed to their craft. Their headshots suggest these actors have what it takes to generate social and cultural capital, which appeals to Fortune 100 recruiters, leading to offers for joining some of these elite theater groups, or leadership development programs. Actors want to have options for choosing between theater groups to assure their final selection is the best fit.

By the start of their second year of their MBA program, aspiring HC candidates began seriously looking for open roles across different industries. They searched for meaningful organizational characteristics such as mission, vision, and value statements, which they used to consider which places offer an attractive fit for their goal of becoming an executive leader. About half of the participants knew from the start they wanted to pursue roles in healthcare with the remainder drawn to healthcare after eliminating other industries.

The importance of organizational fit. For external prospective actors, organizational fit is a significant factor for returning to business professional life, as an improved version of themselves. While fit remains important to internal actors, their decision to remain at HC as members of the LDP confirm they already moved past this as a criterion for entering the program. Josh, an external recruit, described his return to work as his professional re-entry, suggesting a grand entry such as one might expect as part of a debutante’s ball. Josh, having experienced a disappointing summer internship with a different healthcare organization, was determined to explore various theater groups in search of the right fit as he revealed during our first interview.

It was a leadership development program that I interned for, and to be honest, there were some things that the leadership program was lacking that ultimately made me [decline] their offer to come back full time.
I was looking for opportunities…something like management consulting. Because I wanted an opportunity to do a residency after school. To be able to learn broadly and have exposure to senior leadership. Gain opportunities that otherwise would not come from *just a role* (italics added). Based upon that set of experiences, and then I would launch myself into a different part of the industry, a different role, and at a certain level, not with a title in my mind, but just a level of responsibility.

Josh continues, describing how his HC audition experience left him with a positive impression, suggesting a good fit for himself and the organization.

I met the leaders and learned more by talking to associates about what the program was all about and the themes that I picked up were exactly [what] I was looking for. To be able to have that experience and picture myself in a residency-like situation where I am learning to become a good leader, an effective employee. That is what I was looking for (Josh, 2017).

Josh’s comparison of HC’s LDP to a residency program is telling, as he is aware of the ability to move across the organization in a variety of roles. He has studied HC’s program having experienced a similar program at another organization, strategically searching for the right fit, and not being satisfied until he found what he needed to be successful.

Prospective actors prioritize the importance of organizational fit knowing that a strong support network enables the actors’ ability to master their performances. The term “organizational fit” describes compatibility between the actor and the organization’s values and objectives. Most of the external participants described the power of HC’s mission statement, attracting them to look further at this organization. The statement is an indicator that HC may provide a solid fit for the actor and acts as a sorting mechanism attracting promising leaders to the organization.

**Casting Calls**

Program recruitment is an active part of the program’s strategy, seeking out promising actors that reflect desired cultural capital. The selection process nicely fits the shape of Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor, where actors audition for coveted roles amongst a number of theater groups representing various Fortune 100 organizations. Recruiters actively look for a specific cultural currency, seeking the language and terminology commonly in use and modeled by adept actors who convincingly portray a promising leader.
The recruiting process for Helpful Corporation involves a series of auditions amongst promising potential candidates, where recruiters evaluate each performance looking for important aspects of cultural capital. Natalie, an influential leader and member of the program’s steering committee, brought this to my attention describing her ability to identify actors’ MBA programs during interviews.

I think there is a typical business school where we are going to find the right candidates. In fact, [these] schools have their own profiled candidate [that meet the required criteria or fit for the MBA program.]

I think that we have found success with certain schools more [than other schools]. Their students better fit Helpful Corporation (pseudonym) than other schools. I can tell when we interview students, what business school they actually attended (Natalie, 2018).

This example demonstrates Bourdieu’s (1984) description of cultural capital, where individuals know how to behave in various contexts, to “fit the profile” by conveying a meaningful level of business and leadership expertise, sought by HC’s recruiters. When prompted to explain what type of candidate recruiters look for, Natalie went on to explain the importance of the talent selection process for the program.

[We ask our recruiting team to be] hyper–selective in who we bring into the program. [For example, the program director] may have 10 slots available, but they may not find 10 great people. I have seen past administrators say, “I need to fill 10 spots.” [However, we should] not just fill a spot, but also be sure we have the right talent to fill the spot.

Natalie’s point is important. Filling spots in the leadership development program should not extend offers to actors that do not “fit the profile.” Instead, the program must find the right actors, regardless of count, that fit the criteria for entering the HC program. Natalie continues by discussing the objective of the recruiting role.

I would say there is a piece where [the program director] is a talent hunter. It is important that prospects have the ability to understand our business and [can become] highly connected into the business.

Here Natalie goes on to explain that at higher levels of leadership, actors must be influencers and build relationships to be successful.
Leaders, at a personal level, have relationships with executives in the organizations [and they are] able to ask for favors from [these] leaders. They need that skill set of being connectors and influencers and understanding how this business operates (Natalie, 2018).

Natalie’s “ask for favors” comment resonates with Bourdieu’s concept of social capital. She wants the program to recruit LDP associates who will be able to barter with other leaders using social capital as a common currency. Recruiters look for prospective actors able to demonstrate the aptitude to become future connectors and influencers. Graduates of elite MBA programs acquired sought after cultural capital that indicates their aptitude for generating their own social capital. Recruiters believe these actors will blend into the organization’s environment, taking charge of their leadership journey.

“Casting calls,” as used in this chapter, refers to the program’s MBA recruiting sessions and take on several forms, including on-campus, open, or public auditions targeting qualified actors. Panels or recruiting teams assemble to assess the actors’ performance and determine which actors receive invitations to the next round of auditions. Successful casting calls result in a stronger talent pool improving the selection of the most promising leaders that will challenge, innovate, and inspire the organization.

The objective is to enrich the organization through a diverse group of actors acquired through a variety of casting calls, Rebecca, the program director explains. To do this, Helpful Corporation applies a three-part recruiting strategy: 1) recruiting from elite or top ranked MBA programs, 2) open recruiting through the organization’s career portal, and 3) recruiting from local business schools. The program relies upon these casting calls to locate promising actors for the organization.

**Elite casting calls.** Helpful Corporation conducts casting calls during the fall semester, targeting a set of preferred schools described as “core programs.” Core programs include highly ranked, elite business schools, which have produced successful actors for the program (Tables 2.6 and 2.7). The graduate participants in this study include elite and non-elite MBAs (63% and 37% respectively). However, the MBA program is not really a reliable predictor whether actors graduate as directors because
not all elite MBAs graduated as Band 5 directors in HC’s terms. The two that did not graduate as a Band 5 director include an elite and non-elite MBA graduate (Table 2.8).

Each year HC forms several recruiting committees, which may include Talent Management representatives from the Human Resources department, LDP program director, current actors, or program graduates, with an assigned list of schools they will visit. Common across large human resources organizations, such as HC, the distribution of Human Resource responsibilities falls across several functions such as Compensation, Talent Management, or Policies. HC uses their Talent Management organization to lead and recruit for their LDP. The LDP recruiting committee also includes alumni from the MBA program to attract talented actors into HC’s LDP. Using program alumni is a common organizational practice as the alumni translate program experience into meaningful terminology for prospective candidates.

The list of core schools is not static, and changes based upon recommendations from the recruiting committee. As new actors enter the program, they can influence changes to the core programs, which was the case for Josh who influenced the recruiting committee to add his program to the list of core schools.

I wanted to include my business school as a core recruiting school for this program, which is now one of our core schools.

Last year I was able to go back and run the information session [alongside] the [financial leadership program, where I conducted] interviews and went to networking forums sponsored [by Helpful Corporation] (Josh, 2017).

All participants in this study recruited for the LDP, many proudly sharing their experiences and the feeling of success when they were able to recruit future actors.

One of the program’s goals presented in its business case states, “Attract and Recruit Excellent Talent” (HC Strategic Program Materials, 2017). The goal affirms the program’s value as the primary pipeline to attract external leadership talent, noting Helpful Corporation is in a dynamic industry that requires unique talent for unique career opportunities. Based upon past success, recruiting from core or elite business schools remains the most effective channel for attracting the type of talent required by HC.
**Open casting calls.** Open casting calls take place through HC’s career portal, which allows anyone to apply. The posting opens annually during the fall recruiting season, where actors complete an online application and include their headshot for consideration. However, only one of the nineteen participants entered the program through this process, suggesting entry barriers. I tested the application process myself, from the perspective of an outsider aware of HC’s program and identified several issues.

I accessed the posting by typing “leadership development” in the search feature on the central portal, returning 484 results. The first page contained 20 results with leadership development and hyperlinks to different types of programs and internships. From there, I located the specific program, clicked the apply button, receiving the job identification number and description. Next, I created a unique account after providing some high-level details, where I was then able to access the open position and begin the application process.

External prospective employees receive little to no feedback on the progression of their application. Weeks or months pass before the individual is aware that HC may be considering them. This was the case for Josh, who attended an on-campus casting call for another similar HC leadership development program in the field of finance, designed for accountants and actuaries. That program did not appeal to him, so he inquired about other options, which led him to the online portal for HC’s LDP.

The other barrier faced by these applicants is the inability to interact with a panel of observers early in the audition process such as those during on-campus sessions. On-line applicants often rely entirely on the strength of the electronic “headshot” rather than providing an opportunity to interact with members of the recruiting team. Josh was fortunate to receive an audition in front of a panel where he was able to convey the desired cultural capital sought by the recruiters. This request to perform for an audition rarely happens. While Helpful Corporation states a desire for diversity in thought and employee background, these open casting calls rarely produce eligible actors suggesting hiring decisions favor cultural capital ahead of participant diversity.

The casting call is an important activity for HC to engage a large selection of strong candidates. The other type of on-campus casting calls takes place at other sites in close proximity to HC’s global
headquarters. While not designated as core, or elite programs, recruiting from the local community promotes HC as a local ambassador and takes advantage of actors with ties to the community.

**Local university casting calls.** The program requires participants to work from HC’s home office located in the New England area outside of a major eastern city. Attracting top-level candidates to this part of the country is not easy, since external candidates are usually more interested in relocating to major east coast cities or better climates. While the requirement to work from the global headquarters is required for the early rotations, actors remain in this area for access to senior level officials.

Most of HC’s senior and c-suite executives reside near Helpful Corporation’s global headquarters, since they will spend the majority of their professional time there. Participants noted the significance of face time with influential executive leaders recognizing that working in the same location increases their chances for interacting directly with these leaders. As one participant stated, “Face time is everything.” Playing the corporate face-time game means that most actors intend to remain in this area, acknowledging the professional benefits behind their decision and reinforces the LDP’s recruiting strategy for conducting casting calls at local universities.

For those that already live in the area, local casting calls generate a lot of interest due to proximity and HC’s reputation as a good place to work. While the program recruits locally, the program recruiting committee favors actors from outside the local community found at elite programs. This is a point of contention among participants recruited from local MBA programs.

For instance, during one of my interviews, I spoke to Michael, a graduate of the program, about his feelings towards Helpful Corporation. He spoke highly of the trust and respect he has for the organization and its leaders. Michael went on to speak positively about program changes resulting from a series of leadership changes. However, he expressed disagreement with one of the program’s strategies for recruiting from elite universities; still he conveyed his intention to remain a team player.

My personal opinion is that I do not agree with the recruiting that we have done, but the organization is set on its way for recruiting. Therefore, I am on board with that.
I prompted him to continue by asking him how he would change the recruiting strategy. His response suggests some conflict between participants of local versus elite MBA programs as conveyed through his observations of HC’s top executives.

I look at the leadership team. The executive leadership team and the senior leadership team and ask where did they go to school? Where [did they earn] their MBA?

Our CEO went to [a local university]. I question why we go to top ten schools, when part of the challenge of bringing somebody in from a top ten school is that they demand a higher salary (Michael, 2017).

Besides noting the incongruence of privileging elite MBA graduates, when the CEO is not one, Michael also identifies compensation as a program issue, which I discuss further in Chapter 5.

The strategy of HC’s leadership development particularly its emphasis on elite schools, strongly demonstrates its interest in recognizable cultural capital. Several participants in the study acknowledge noticing differences in their formal education, as Tom describes when I asked him to share the three most significant influences upon his career, where one influence is acting alongside a cadre of elite recruits.

[Another influence upon my career] would be my cohort members and the other members of the program who have very different backgrounds both in terms of what they did in their MBA programs and in terms of their previous experience. We started out by talking about some of the differences in our MBA programs. There were some major ones compared to mine (Tom, 2017).

Tom explains the major differences involve instructors, their backgrounds, and experiences noting that those attending elite programs interacted with senior business professionals. Tom’s interactions with senior business professionals was limited, much of his learning and practice taking place with professors whose background involved academia, limiting Tom’s cultural capital development. While HC’s recruitment strategy includes elite and local universities, it rarely recruits from within their organization.

**Internal casting calls.** The program does not have an explicit policy whether to accept current employees in the leadership development program, yet the data show a strong preference for external candidates. When interviewing program directors, they confirmed HC does not have a stated policy barring internal employees from entering these programs, but that internal candidates are not generally interested in the rigors of a rotational program. Stephanie, a program director, explained to me that in her
experience, internal candidates seek leadership opportunities, yet are less interested in the long-term commitment.

[For my most recent cohort,] I did bring in one external person who is *amazing* (italics added). He has been with HC (pseudonym) about a year and a half. He has already demonstrated that [enterprising] attitude, passion for learning, and really nailing his day job.

Here, Stephanie speaks favorably about this individual’s ability to translate his cultural capital into meaningful development of his social capital, an early indicator that this actor will rise to higher levels of leadership.

I have had a few internal people that met with me to learn about the [leadership development] program. None has been that “above and beyond performer.” They have been “OK” performers. They have been looking for a change in their role, which is *different* (italics added) than wanting to be part of a rotational program. I was able to give them some guidance but did not consider them serious candidates for the program (Stephanie, 2018).

HC’s LDP seeks high caliber, motivated candidates prepared for an accelerated development trajectory. Rebecca, another LDP director, spoke about the volume of talent readily available within the walls of HC; yet acknowledges the program does not actively recruit from the in-house talent pool. This suggests an image problem for internal employees.

Only two of the participants in this study entered the program as internal employees of Helpful Corporation, 12 years apart from each other. This gap in time and minimal internal recruitment suggests issues with the development of internal actors’ moral career as perceived by those running the LDP. Applying Goffman’s term to the LDP dramaturgy suggests that internal actors may struggle to recognize the different leadership behavior expected of HC executives. It may also be that spending time as a “known commodity” within HC works against constructing a headshot consistent with a “future director.”

Both of the internal participants report they “stumbled” upon the program by accident, while pursuing their MBAs as part-time students. Neither actor attended an elite MBA program. Each participant applied for a position and networked internally to identify the decision-makers regarding the acceptance of an internal employee. Both participants had been HC employees for several years, before finding out about the program and upon completing their MBA, joined the LDP. Over this time, both participants molded their professional aspirations and behaviors upon their existing social circles, with
limited insight into the fully evolved moral career of an executive leader, with the graduate participant, Isabel, remaining in the Low Band 5 director position since graduation approximately 10 years earlier. The other internal recruit, Emma, terminated her employment and participation in HC’s LDP (See Table 2.8)

Internal employees seemed to build their leadership profiles based upon their current and historical roles while at HC. Here they were transmitting an image consistent with their earlier role, but lacking the desired cultural capital found in successful executive-level leaders. I will expand upon the discussion of the actors’ moral career in Chapter 5; here I limit my discussion to the two internal actors’ experiences

Section Summary

In this section, I analyzed participants’ actions leading up to their entry into HC’s LDP. It is clear from my research these participants strategically created their headshots for leadership roles following completion of their MBA program. Early on, participants recognized their professional gaps and invested in their development by earning their MBA degree. Nearly all of the participants, 17 of 19 left their earlier careers while pursuing their MBA as full-time students, demonstrating their commitment as a serious actor. The other two, pursued their MBA part-time from non-elite programs, accidentally learning about the LDP before arranging an audition.

My research uncovered recruiting themes involving the presence of cultural capital found in candidates attending elite or core programs. Another theme found local casting calls conducted to attract community-based actors to offset retention risks. Throughout this discussion, I have used Goffman’s dramaturgy metaphor, including the moral career of an HC executive leader, and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. In the next section, I look deeper into the Actors’ Workshop starting with a discussion of HC’s front and back stages.
Section 2: The Leadership Workshop Production in Five Scenes

Introduction

While the full LDP production consists of five scenes, I begin my analysis of the rotational program by separating the first two rotations from the latter two rotations, since there is a distinct separation evident between rotations two and three. I will discuss the program’s limited graduation process following the fourth rotation due to their close proximity to one another. I begin this discussion with my analysis of the actors’ stages.

Scene 1: The Actors’ Stages

All actors require an audience and performance stage for practicing their craft that will result in their ability to manage their audience’s impressions. The stage is an important part of the actors’ performance for delivering their scripts or improvising their performances. Recognizing the benefits of different organizational stages allows the actor to maximize their performance, taking advantage of each stage’s size, placement, and lighting.

Consistent with other Fortune 100 organizations, HC offers a wide range of everyday stages, ranging from a very formal executive setting to informal conference rooms. Such stages include cubicles, offices, cafeteria, hallways, and walkways with each stage designed to maximize audience impressions resulting from the actors’ performances. I begin with a discussion of HC’s elite pantheon stage, the Executive Wing, where new program actors are welcomed to the organization.

Early in my study, I conducted an observation of Helpful Corporation’s global headquarters intrigued by the physical design and presence of an executive front stage and prominent size of the backstage (Woitas Field Notes, 2017, Helpful Corporation Global Headquarters). On one of my early visits to HC’s global headquarters, I spent time observing the physical structure and environment, watching employees hurriedly moving through the hallways, aisles, shared spaces, and security gates, forming the basis of my field notes. Upon subsequent visits to conduct interviews, I expanded my observations producing a final set of field notes, which I will use now to describe HC’s front and back stages.
Helpful Corporation’s Global Headquarters

Helpful Corporation’s global headquarters consists of two buildings, a small Executive Wing (pseudonym used) and the large Cubicle Farm (pseudonym used), the latter housing ninety-five percent of the employees (Figure 4.1). Both buildings are equal in height, four floors, in addition to a lower level. The Executive Wing is approximately one-twentieth the size of the Cubicle Farm. The Executive Wing houses all local HC’s c-suite executives on the first floor, in large offices with expansive windows.

Figure 4.1
Visual Depiction of HC Front and Back Stages Including Executive Wing and Cubicle Farm, with Walkway Connector (Horizontal View)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HC Cubicle Farm</th>
<th>HC Executive Wing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Floor</td>
<td>4th Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Floor</td>
<td>3rd Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Floor</td>
<td>2nd Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkway</td>
<td>1st Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Floor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OC: While I did not enter the executives’ suites, I could see these offices each day I arrived to conduct interviews. I wondered if the executives look out their windows and watch visitors walking up to the front entrance. What would they see? It reminds me of a hidden camera where the “actor” is unaware they are being filmed, their moves studied, analyzed, and critiqued. Are the c-suite leaders so immersed in their work, they are unaware of employees and visitors entering the building? Yet, are there times when they may be “watching” for a person or a group of visitors to arrive, similar to when I am hosting a party at my home when I begin to “look” for my guests’ cars to arrive. On the other hand, do these expansive windowed suites provide a sense of separation, distancing the powerful executive from all others? Does anyone notice my arrival from behind these windows? If so, what would my expression convey?
The second and third floors of the building included several hundred cubicles to accommodate growth. The fourth floor includes two executive presentation centers and an executive dining room, each decorated with high-end furniture and state-of-the-art technology. See Figure 4.1, which provides a side-by-side view of the two buildings to demonstrate the physical size and proximity of the stages.

**The Executive Wing**

The Executive Wing is HC’s front stage surrounded by a mix of props that convey a sense of innovation, excitement, and good will. Figure 4.2 portrays the layout of the Executive Wing’s first floor, the main front stage containing c-suite executive offices. As one enters this building, they come face-to-face with the security guards who determine which visitors receive access to enter beyond the security gates. There are two informal seating areas, one inside the security gate and the other outside the security gate; suggesting a staging area for those who intend to conduct business with HC leaders. Figure 4.2 projects the layout of the Executive Wing first floor from a top down image, as if one is looking down upon the full stage seeing the different sections used during performance delivery.

Figure 4.2
*Visual Depiction of HC’s Executive Wing Front Stage, First Floor Layout (From Above)*
Upon entering the Executive Wing, one finds a spotless and shining stage. A sleek, low, white desk stretches from wall to wall, broken only by two entry gates, labeled Secured Entry Point. There is a wood relief art piece, constructed from what appears to be a mahogany wood, representing the world map that extends beyond the security guards’ desk. The surrounding walls are white or glass, providing an impression of accessibility.

OC: I suspect that underneath the simplistic white walls, there is an impenetrable steel material to assure security of the highly valued assets, both c-suite leaders and HC’s proprietary business information. Interestingly, the flooring is non-descript, suggest meager sourcing as opposed to importation from a distant country. The flooring stands out, as it is not consistent with staging of the props and décor, rather, the flooring appears to be tile purchased from a local home building store, a kind of do-it-yourself project for a handy person. Is this because visitors track dirt from their journey from the parking lot and nobody pays attention to the flooring? Could the flooring include high-end materials made to look uninteresting?

An all-white leather sitting area outside the security gates includes a sofa, chairs, and tables, suggesting a relaxed setting, as if one could pick up a magazine and stretch out upon the sofa for a period. Instead, I see guests arriving, nervously waiting for their escort or contact, preparing for their meeting or sales pitch to win HC’s business. There is a brightly lit award case rising beyond the secured entry gate, holding about fifteen uniquely shaped awards. Each award polished and shined to appear as if newly received and recently placed into the collection. The award case is fascinating, a simple glass case, with dramatic lighting arranged to shine upon each statue or figure.

OC: I wonder if the awards could talk what stories would they share. Would they speak about the purpose they symbolize or the extraordinary event that triggered the presentation of the award? Who curates the display case, since it is clear that the awards are not set upon the shelves to collect dust? Are there other awards rotated through the display case? If so, where does HC store them and what happens when a new award is received? Is there a ceremonial announcement when a new award arrives?

Music plays lightly overhead, suggesting an international feel, preparing actors for a sense of adventure and excitement as one enters the front stage.

OC: I feel like I want to step in time to the music, that each step I take should be part of a dance routine. Should I look for a dance partner or perform as a solo dancer? Do the security guards ever dance when no one is around?
There are a few guest offices designed for visiting leaders to conduct business while on the campus. Senior level leaders who hold the right credentials may reserve these spaces. C-suite offices are beyond another security door and accessible to HC employees’ whose identification card unlocks this door. Once a visitor passes through the security gate, an HC employee may escort them to their destination if they are new to the building. Employees and frequent visitors may direct themselves to their intended location. The majority of visitors conduct their business in the Cubicle Farm, a name I assigned based upon my first visit to this building; the Cubicle Farm is accessible from the Executive Wing’s first floor rear door, as if to hide the presence of this stage from the initial impression.

Upon entering the Cubicle Farm, through a set of double doors located at the rear of the front stage, it is apparent this building is HC’s backstage. The double doors open to a poorly ventilated walkway connecting the two buildings. The walkway physically and metaphorically separates the two stages. Upon reaching the other side of the walkway, another set of double doors opens to the second floor of the Cubicle Farm.

OC: The Executive Wing or front stage is much different from the Cubicle Farm and reserved for special performances. LDP participants will perform on one of the Executive Wing stages during the final interview process, during their early program onboarding period, and later during LDP graduation ceremonies. Outside of these “special events, LDP associates spend the rest of their time in the Cubicle Farm, which is stark contrast to the Executive Wing. I experienced the sensorial changes upon entering the Cubicle Farm, where I no longer felt special. There was no music to dance along with and I experienced a sense of dread looking at the maze of wall-to-wall cubicles all uniform in color and structure. The change in scenery between the buildings is profound and must sharpen promising leaders’ desire to return to the glitz of the front stage.

Cubicle Farm backstage. The Cubicle Farm includes a second secured entry point, near the employee parking ramps, and designed for higher volume entry. This portal greets employees and visitors with a second wood relief art piece, constructed of the same wood found in the Executive Wing, representing the world map that sits above a smaller security desk. Similar to the front stage entry, the backstage includes two secured gates, next to a short wall that acts as a corral for employees waiting for their guests to arrive.
OC: I get the impression that this “corral-type” wall is to separate the some from others, where “some” represents employees, and “others” represents guests. I notice people pacing behind the corral wall, suggesting a ranch-like environment where horses are kept in a corral eager to be free of the barrier that separates them from where they want to be, on the other side of the gate.

There is no overhead music playing as employees arrive. The atmosphere is less formal as actors perform the daily backstage entry ritual of swiping their security card and occasionally greeting the guard before hurriedly walking through the Cubicle Farm gates. Walking deeper into the Cubicle Farm, a visitor witnesses the density of the number of wall-to-wall cubicles on each of the floors, with the exception of the first-floor public spaces. Floors two through four are similar in design where executive offices ring the exterior windows and cubicles fill the vast open space as depicted in Figure 4.3, which provides an overhead view of the floor layout to emphasize the vast number of cubicles and the concentration of executive offices.

Figure 4.3
Visual Depiction of HC’s Cubicle Farm Second Floor Including Executive Offices, Conference Rooms, and Cubicles (From Above)
All the executive offices include exterior windows, locking doors, and small tables for group meetings. Each floor contains four open enclosures overseeing a courtyard filled with trees, plants, and decorative stone. Executive offices or conference rooms cluster around these openings, each with a window and a view of the courtyard below.

OC: Another example of separation between some and others, where “some” signifies executives or employees meeting in a shared space and “others” are the employees that populate the cubicle mazes. For LDP participants, they aspire to move into an executive office within the Cubicle Farm. While the executive offices symbolize leadership status, the real prize is eventually moving into an office in the Executive Wing.

I quickly learned that navigating the cubicle mazes requires a strong sense of direction and local assistance. Employees provide landmarks along the cubicle walls, near open intersections that allow access to the actors assigned to the cubes, as symbols reflecting their personal style such as a favorite football team, a stuffed animal, a plant, or other unique prop to assist the novice actor through the maze. For example, I may locate a person with the following directions. “Go through the double doors, follow the North exterior wall until you get to the NFL mascot, turn sharply left, proceed for three cubicle rows until you locate a cardboard cutout of Crime Dog McGruff, and there you find my cubicle.”

About half of the backstage on the first floor is public space, including a cafeteria and informal workspaces. As you near the public area, music plays overhead sounding an international vibe, it is rhythmic, and you hasten your stride to the music, eager to reach the public space. A massive video screen portrays colorful, detailed views of animals, prairies, mountains, and sea, creating a calming yet creative energy, a clear contrast to the tired, uniform look and feel of the cubicle mazes.

OC: Here, in the public spaces some and others interact alongside one another. There is no detectable separation in the physical design. I imagine that while executives and employees comingle here, executives may huddle together in a common area of the expansive dining area or take their meal back to their office to maintain a sense of physical separation. While the entire dining section is very large, a series of nooks and crannies can accommodate this type of separation for elite leaders.
Several participants in my study reflected upon their initial front stage visit where they auditioned for the program. Program associates greeted the prospective actors when they arrived and ushered them to the Super Day auditions held in the fourth-floor presentation rooms along with lunch served in the executive dining center. This experience produced a positive impression of HC and the LDP. Inspired by their experiences, prospective actors felt they would be successful in the program and achieve their leadership goals.

Actors that join the program begin their career with an assigned seat in the Cubicle Farm as determined by their role and department. As they move into their second and third rotations, they will move to another cubicle in the Cubicle Farm. Eventually all actors seek a Cubicle Farm office as a symbol of their influence and power, which is considered a significant accomplishment as I will describe in the following scenes.

Summary

The above discussion involves what Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology terms HC’s front and back stages at the global headquarters. All prospective actors’ final auditions take place in the Executive Wing’s fourth floor front stage. At some point during the audition, actors will briefly tour the Cubicle Farm’s mazes and public spaces. The time spent in the Front Stage inspires actors’ future performances that will result in a return to this stage, first as a program actor and later as an executive leader. The audition space conveys the strategic nature of the program’s selection process by using the front stage for the auditions inspiring actors while forming powerful impressions. Actors that perform upon the front stage recognize the significance of these performances and their responsibility for impressing their audience.

Once actors enter the program, most of their future performances take place in the Cubicle Farm. On rare occasions, program actors receive a performance opportunity to return to the front stage. The chance to perform on the main stage reminds actors of their initial impression and inspires them to master their performance. Front stage performances are important news, shared amongst the theater group, where other actors reminisce upon their past performances and share tips in support of their peers. While
all performances are important, the stage selection symbolizes the actors’ leadership promise and the program’s influence upon the actors’ development beginning with their first rotation. For each of the four program rotations, I included HC’s descriptive label from their public website, for example “Foundational Leadership” (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019). Due to privacy concerns, I will cite this material using a generic entry that excludes the specific internet hyperlink.

Scene 2 – Rotation 1: Foundational Leadership

Each summer, a new LDP cohort arrives to begin their HC journey, where they enter as new actors, assigned to their first role. All associates begin as individual contributors, meaning they do not have direct reports, allowing them time to focus on their development and knowledge of the industry, organization, and culture. An opening ceremony greets the actors ahead of their debut, commonly known as Day One within HC, which marks the first day of external recruits’ professional reentry following graduate school. Much of the opening ceremony activities take place in one of the fourth floor Executive Wing presentation centers. Here they receive several props, such as a leather-bound notebook they will carry with them as a symbol of their participation in an elite training program.

The choreographed opening ceremony reflects the months of advanced planning by the LDP recruiting and onboarding committees to assure each new actor feels valued, recognized, and supported. Executives join the festivities, delivering scripted performances and occasionally engaging in improvisational group discussions. The ceremony includes guided tours of HC’s front and back stages, where new actors learn to use the Cubicle Farm’s visual navigation cues to locate their assigned desk. Opening ceremony festivities linger on past Day One as the new cohort settles into the organization and the program.

Much of the associate’s first month on the job is spent onboarding into the program and their assigned department. “Onboarding” is a term used throughout the corporate world referring to a set of activities designed to familiarize associates with the organization, its policies, and culture, while completing required training activities. In the early stages of onboarding, participants spend most of their time with their program cohort rather than their likely functional team, building a strong bond with their
program peers, with who they will develop strong bonds and potential alliances. This is different for other new entrants where much of their onboarding is technology-guided self-study with minimal interaction with other new actors. As the onboarding activities scale back, participants shift the balance of their time to their functional team forming a secondary bond with that group. There is an intentional design to the bonding process, as actors eventually rotate across multiple roles and departments while in the program, forming new teams as compared to the relatively static nature of the LDP team members.

These LDP actors begin their new careers set apart from other HC employees, preparing the actor for a series of dual experiences while in the program. Program and organizational expectations drive the dual experiences involving actors’ roles and performances. There is no grace period for actors to acclimate to these dual expectations as it begins on Day One. I begin with a discussion of the dual roles and performance expectations for the actors.

**The duality of roles and performances.** Being an actor in HC’s leadership program comes with a set of responsibilities for maintaining the program and performing a functional role. Both the program director and associates continuously reinforce this, which I noted during my second observation of the newest cohort at the end of week two. Early in the actors’ career, program responsibilities are administrative, which allows them to become familiar with the stage, scenery, and scripts. Some early program responsibilities include planning and organizing committees for community and internal events.

All of the participants described a series of tasks and responsibilities they experienced while active program associates. As participants gain experience, their program responsibilities shift from administrative to strategic tasks involving recruiting decisions, onboarding activities, and collaboration with other HC leadership programs. Since program activities are on top of the actors’ primary role, they may work additional hours to assure they fulfill their program responsibilities.

In addition to program responsibilities, cohorts impose expectations upon each other to maintain the program’s elite organizational status. Some cohorts develop rituals with stated expectations for each other as in Bill’s case as an actor in one of the more active groups in recent years. While all cohorts
structure standing meetings during their early years, Bill’s cohort referred to their standing meeting as huddles or accountability sessions.

We have a series of huddles or accountability sessions depending [upon our objective for that session.] We catch up on what we observe across the business, what we experience in day-to-day work, or what are the challenges we are seeing. Then when it is time to rotate, we are able to discuss the opportunities across the business and [know that] we are [not] in direct competition for [the same] roles, but we want to find the right fit so we can support each other (Bill, 2017).

Here, Bill is describing what Bourdieu refers to as HC’s habitus, the structured way individuals are predisposed to perceiving, or making sense of their surrounding social world, using their inherent mental and character qualities (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu contends people arrange themselves in social contexts with others sharing aspects of their dispositions. Drawn together, their experiences shape and socialize individuals to form a meaning-making habitus.

In Bill’s example, the cohort’s habitus reflects a deeper set of expectations holding each other accountable to higher standards of performance. The participants share candid and direct feedback with one another to strengthen their peers and the program. This was a point of deep, rich data collection as Bill described the process and his experiences.

The culture [of our cohort allows us] to step out of the good team space and have an honest, frank discussion with somebody. Understanding that none of it is personal and that we both want to provide each other critical feedback. Sharing our opinions and providing that frame of reference to [each other] (Bill, 2017).

I prompted Bill by asking if they hold back on the critical feedback, in consideration of their peers’ personal feelings. While he confirmed he applies some caution as to how he delivers the feedback, Bill’s response emphasizes the importance of direct and critical feedback to enhance each actor’s performance to enhance the perception of the LDP.

To some extent. You do try not to let personal annoyance seep into the comments. To some degree, there needs to be some level of professionalism, so we do hold back. As people, we can be emotional. We can have good days and we can have bad days. I am sure that you have experienced times that you felt like you wanted to say something, but you did not. You held back because it would not have been correct. So yes, we hold back.

Amongst my peers, we have built up enough trust that we have given each other honest feedback about what we should be doing and when (italics added) we need to be picking up the slack. [At
other times, it is about giving someone a pat on the back. [Telling them] that is what I was talking about the last time. That is awesome (Bill, 2017).

As promising leaders, cohorts take pride in representing the program, raising expectations for each other to assure the program’s organizational value remains high through strong functional role performances, which is the other part of the actors’ dual role.

All actors begin the program at the Band 4, (Career Professional) level as found in Table 2.4’s depiction of Helpful Corporation’s Career Architecture. Prior to Day One, actors learn of their starting assignments, or first rotation, determined by the program director and hiring managers, based upon the actors’ experience, area of interest, and skills. The actor remains in this first role between 12 and 24 months and must perform well against their functional peers.

Actors begin their moral career in their first rotation as they integrate into the total institution. The actor’s first role is not complex, but intended to acclimate the actor to the stages, scripts, and audience members. It is a time to develop foundational leadership skills, complete structured trainings, and assessments for enabling their functional role performance. Company literature describes the first rotation as a broad overview of HC designed to build organizational acumen and learn about the company’s profit levers (Helpful Corporation Strategic Program Materials, 2017).

The actors are set up for success in their first functional role to balance the demands placed upon them by the program, their cohort, and their functional manager. While contributions back to the program are important, role performance is the key driver for preparing actors for future rotations. While in their first rotation, the program’s brand carries the actors’ performances. Over time their personal brand develops, wherein the actor becomes less dependent on the program’s brand. In their first rotation, actors must execute performances to master their functional role and begin planning their search for their next role while completely dependent upon the program’s brand.

**The actor’s personal brand.** “Brand” (or “branding”) is a commonly used term in business, marketing, and advertising referring to a set of features, symbols, names, or terms that distinguishes an organization or product (Wood, 2000). A strong corporate brand conveys a message about a product or
service that triggers an emotional connection with the intended audience. In a professional setting, personal branding becomes a differentiator that involves a combination of skills and experiences associated with the individual. In a business professional setting, the actors’ brand reflects Goffman’s description of a moral career within a total institution. The actors’ brand becomes symbolic of their leadership styles, communication preferences, and their reputation of how they work with others. In their early career, the actors’ brand is an indicator of their future performances based upon their early audience impression management experiences. The concept of personal branding is an important part of the LDP.

One of the most powerful tools future executives must develop is their personal brand. As new actors enter the program, they assume the program’s brand, an elite high potential leader. I asked Rebecca, the LDP director, responsible for the development of general managers, to describe her program’s brand, to which she provided a scripted response, sounding as if she was recording a commercial to promote the development of HC general managers.

The LDP (pseudonym used) brand is an elite, high potential, high performing, best in class leadership development program. Our brand is to develop talent in our program to fill critical roles at Helpful Corporation (pseudonym used), whether open now or in the future.

Next Rebecca introduces a few characteristics of the LDP, such as the length of time required to develop promising leaders, emphasizing the program’s size and elite status.

It is a 5 to 7 year program. When you think of LDP, we want people to think top, elite, or best in class. We have historically been a rather small program [which has created this] elite, competitive feeling (Rebecca, 2018).

One of the early directives program actors receive is to form their own elevator speech, a quick, powerful professional introduction that should leave their audience impressed. Starting on Day One, the program director begins with the power of the brand and the actors’ responsibility to protect and enhance this brand. This is consistent with other HC leadership programs and confirmed by the other functional-based program director, Stephanie, who reminds her new actors that brand matters in corporate America and they need to be consciously aware of how their decisions affect their brand. Both program directors, Rebecca and Stephanie, acknowledge their programs are branding vehicles and participants “own” the responsibility of elevating their specific program’s brand.
A strong brand builds loyalty among consumers who form an emotional connection to a brand. Program directors emphasize the actors’ role in driving the brand, as Stephanie told me “My program’s reputation is only as good as the reputation of the individual members” (Stephanie, 2018). The data collected from the two different program directors suggests a consistent theme amongst all HC leadership development programs instructing their actors to be mindful of the brand they represent, which is consistent with participants’ data. LDP participants spoke openly about their responsibility for maintaining and improving the program’s brand, seeing themselves as brand champions, promoting positive leadership interactions, while delivering strong performances.

During the participants’ early years in the program, they experience first-hand the power of the program’s brand. They have access to executive leaders willing to train, mentor, or network with them. Actors learn how and when to drop the name of the program to gain attention or build influence. In their first rotation, actors learn to harvest the benefits of the program’s branding power when practicing their role for enhancing the brand.

LDP cohort actors augment the brand in several ways. First, they promote the elite aspects of the LDP and the value it returns to the organization, strengthening the emotional connection to the brand. Secondly, they promote themselves as leaders on an accelerated developmental trajectory. Lastly, actors model transferrable skills and talent as they move into new leadership roles across the organization. There is a sense of pride and responsibility for contributing to the program’s brand as explained by Bill.

Because [this] is a program that encourages people to work across the business, [it is common] knowledge that we are trying to collectively build the [program’s] brand. We want to make sure that the leaders across the business have good, positive experiences with LDP (pseudonym used) candidates (Bill, 2017).

Josh expands upon Bill’s perspective of being an LDP brand champion by articulating his full commitment to the brand, while recognizing the brand’s effect upon the actors’ network, or habitus.

Part of [our responsibility] includes building a brand for the program. [The LDP] is a small group, we all know each other, and our network is high functioning.

At any time if someone wants to be introduced [to members within my network, I ask myself if] I feel comfortable reaching out to them personally and saying [“I know a person who would like to
Being comfortable and being confident that the conversation is going to go well so that I can connect them and provide opportunities (Josh, 2017).

Josh provides another example of the program’s habitus and its influence upon program actors to honor and maintain the brand. Here, the habitus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, an expectation of the assets the LDP provides to HC by way of the social capital it confers. Adding new talent to the HC pipeline of valued leaders, capable of transitioning into new situations, and effectively taking ownership for their role and delivery of results.

**Summary**

Day One marks the start of external actors’ professional reentry, where they experience a grand ceremony along with a series of onboarding rituals. The actors’ initially bond with their cohort and program director embracing the program and its expectations, as part of their dual roles. Program immersion assures new actors will honor the rituals and hold themselves accountable to the ongoing success of the program in addition to their professional role-based success.

The actors’ experiences and skills influence the assignment of their first role, a decision made by the program director and hiring managers. New cohort actors are set apart from non-program actors, where they begin their moral career development as elite and promising leaders. Actors receive early notification that they must manage two sets of expectations, the first from the program and the second from their functional role. While program performance is important to the actors’ future stage opportunities, everyday functional role performance in HC has a greater impact upon their compensation and opportunity for future promotions.

I next introduce Figure 4.4, a graph that portrays the actors’ personal branding development while participating in the program. During the first rotation, the actor is fully dependent upon the program’s brand, which allows access to executive level leaders. Through subsequent rotations, actors are less dependent upon the program’s brand as they form their personal brand resulting from their performances. Upon program graduation, the actor is fully dependent upon their personal brand, no longer dependent upon the program’s brand. I will return to this chart throughout Chapters 4 and 5.
Interlude – Program Swag Bags

Actors who recently joined the leadership program receive a wide array of tools, or enablers, similar to a “swag bag” gift package designed for high profile individuals attending important events, such as the Academy Awards. These bags contain a variety of gifts as a way to acknowledge the individual’s status and promote specific products. HC offers a similar collection of tools as props to facilitate the promising program actors’ development. The program’s swag bags include ready-to-use tools, which can also be considered as program enablers for facilitating performance and development during early rotations, include an immediate network, fast-passes, which is a metaphor suggesting actors experience expediency in their developmental needs, specially designed learning curricula, and their own personal agent, in the form of a program director. Each tool is an LDP enabler used to facilitate actors’ incorporation of the habits and insights that will result in success as an HC Band 5 leader.

Day One tools. Upon the initial opening of the swag bag, actors discover a rich network of high performing actors and professional influence associated with their LDP status, with each tool essential for the actors’ social capital generation. This was a point of deep, rich data collection suggesting that networking and influence generate the greatest amount of social capital. The program actors are natural
networkers, Rebecca, the program director explained. They walk upon HC’s stage, ready to integrate with existing networks and build their own valuable personal network. Throughout all interviews, participants spoke about the value of their network and their role for developing, nurturing, and leveraging it to support their career goals.

Arriving at HC on Day One, participants described feeling immediately connected to the program’s habitus. The program’s widely distributed network allows actors to gain insight into the various HC business units, important to the “connector” attribute Natalie described when discussing leadership competencies. Jacob, a program graduate, believes he is effective in his current role because of his networks’ ability to feed him information to connect with other business units.

From an effectiveness perspective in my day job, I rely on the associates and the graduates, the community around the development program. It helps to be effective in my roles and [to model] organizational agility. [The ability to see beyond one’s business unit, to be a connector or integrator within the organization.]

I think it is about a network of experts in different areas, strong decision makers, and highly competent people. The [network of competent people provides the] ability to call on folks in a moment of need, a kind of phone-a-friend approach (Jacob, 2017).

Jacob speaks with authority and expresses a level of comfort for using his network to drive work and deliver meaningful contributions to the organization. The other ready-to-use prop actors’ find is the influence that comes with the program’s brand.

Effective leaders must demonstrate the ability to influence others through ideas, decisions, or shared objectives. Young actors recognize leadership influence as the ability to shape direction and inspire others to support their ideas. The program’s swag bag bestows an entry-level influence upon the actor used as a form of symbolic capital by the actor when needed. One example involves using the name of the program to produce a quick response or immediate attention. I experienced this first-hand when requesting Steering Committee interviews. I added the name of the program to my email subject line and promptly received positive responses from all three senior level leaders.

The power of influence is a consistent theme throughout this case study, beginning with the influence acquired within the actors’ swag bags and continuing throughout the actors’ rotations. Actors
quickly learn that acquiring influence is necessary and practiced at several levels including when the actor lacks formal authority, across managerial lines, or when competing for limited resources. Another swag bag enabler associates find are “fast-passes,” which provide easy access to important training and skill development opportunities.

**Fast-passes.** Helpful Corporation offers many types of training events for their employees throughout their career, but these events generally involve a waiting period of up to twelve months. This delay may negatively affect program actors’ pace of development, resulting in the program’s ability to grant “fast-passes” allowing them to bypass the wait list. Amusement parks commonly offer a fast-pass option for a fee; the pass ensures shorter wait times for popular attractions. In this case, the program’s brand, acts as a fast-pass, moving the actor into a shorter queue and eliminating their wait time. Participants spoke frequently about the wide variety of options available to them for their development and funded by their functional organization or the program. A second form of fast-pass access includes actors-only training sessions.

The HC LDP offers several, closed-door training sessions available to actors with fast passes. These sessions, referred to as “deep-dives,” create an environment for actor immersion into a business unit to acquire deep knowledge and critical insight into a business unit while interfacing with its leaders. Deep-dive sessions take place one to two times per year in different geographical locations, with one day dedicated to the business unit and the remaining time networking with their fellow actors.

Participants spoke highly about these sessions, recognizing this as an opportunity to understand the business, its leadership structure, and profit levers. Here they accrue important social and cultural capital through new networks, leadership facetime, insight into how the business operates, and how it generates revenue. Deep-dives provide LDP actors with an edge over non-LDP actors because of the social and cultural capital LDP actors accrue. This was a source of deep data collection amongst the participants, many recognizing the unique opportunity granted by their fast-pass. Alex, a program graduate, fondly recalled these events as valuable to his development and networking.
We held regular off-sites, which included deep-dive business reviews. [This experience] opened us up, not only to the information about those business units, but also contacts and people that we could reach out to explore further if a need or desire arose.

It helped me [with building my] network. Maybe 3 to 6 months later I would have a question and find the names of the people in those meetings. [This experience] opened up avenues that I would not have had otherwise (Alex, 2017).

I prompted Alex to provide another example of how these “deep-dives” benefitted him later, wondering how far the value of these events carried forward. Alex responded with a general example, suggesting the value is distributed, meaning that his network continues to grow resulting from the deep-dive experience.

[For example, recently] I had this topic [I needed to explore] and I generally knew which people I [could contact]. I then went back to some members of my peer group who had been at the offsite. I asked them “Who was the person that was talking about this subject?” [I was able to] trace it back through my network [and find the source of the information necessary for the specific topic] (Alex, 2017).

I captured his response in my notes, drawing a shape similar to a spider web, including a field note to explore this web-like organic nature of the deep-dive’s influence upon actor development. Figure 4.5 portrays the figure I sketched where the “A” indicates associate at the center of the web and “N’s” capture network relationships, using Alex as my model.

**Figure 4.5**  
*Visual Depiction of Associate Network Development Resulting from HC “Deep Dive” Sessions*

In this figure, the associate at the center established five direct sources of information as part of his network and his network added an additional six sources. As other participants’ spoke about their deep-
dive experiences, I showed them the spider web drawing asking if this was an accurate portrayal of their experience. All participants agreed with the visual graphic, with many nodding in response to the web-like organic visual as a representation of their network development.

This web-like network development is transferrable to all other forms of network development experienced by program associates. With each program-directed experience, associates continue to grow and expand their networking web of powerful leaders who have access to critical information that will become useful to the associates in their rotations. Another enabler in the swag bag includes ample training opportunities.

**Student/Teacher learning curricula.** The actors’ swag bag also includes a set of learning curricula as another example of enablers applicable to the actors’ development. While in the program, the curricula instruct associates’ as to the proper technique, which they will continue to use as leaders to maximize their performance. The curricula are tools that remain with the associate as props for building social and symbolic capital through mentoring, recruiting, and influencing, by which they first practice as a student and then teach as an instructor.

**Mentoring.** Early in the associates’ first rotation, they complete HC’s proprietary mentor matching inventory tool used to align executive leaders as mentors, to associates as mentees. An associate, while in his first rotation developed the mentor-matching tool, as an example of “giving back” to the LDP and a form of symbolic capital, which I will discuss further in this chapter. The mentor-matching inventory includes personal characteristics, backgrounds, and goals to assure a strong match between the teacher and student. These relationships last about one year, until the next round of mentor/mentee matching, eventually producing up to five executive level mentoring relationships.

Cohort participants are responsible for arranging sessions and assuring productive discussions with mentors. The program director coaches them regarding what to expect and how to facilitate conversations with their executive mentor, to assure the time invested by the senior level leader is productive and meaningful. This means that mentees must prepare for the mentoring session, knowing
what topics they want to cover and practice facilitating the discussion so both parties find the time productive.

Later in the first year, associates will assume a mentoring role as instructors to a “junior” group of HC leaders. This junior group includes members of an HC undergraduate leadership development program for Band 3 supervisors aspiring to become Band 4 leaders (Table 2.4). In a similar way, the junior group of aspiring leaders is “matched” with associates in HC’s LDP, who become their mentors. The purpose of this mentor/mentee relationship between undergraduate and graduate-level HC leaders is to build the mentoring skillset of LDP associates and facilitate the development of undergraduate HC supervisors.

While the design of this learning curriculum intends to build mentoring skills for the LDP associates, participants described an uneven first-mentoring experience. Many associates spoke of disappointing events where the junior mentee never contacted them or just stopped showing up. A few however reported valuable experiences in which they better understood the role from a mentor perspective and how to drive a deeper, more meaningful discussion. Alex found this experience beneficial regardless of its original mishaps because it gave him the chance to experience the mentor side of the mentoring relationship, he was undergoing with a seasoned HC leader.

Through this experience, associates develop cultural capital in learning the language of executive leaders. How to describe problems, work through ambiguity, test their mentor’s advice, and share feedback following their experiences. They observe how mentors tackle their own problems, what actions they take, and how they use their social capital to drive results. All valuable to the generation of their own capital. Observing and practicing skills also applies to the associates’ recruiting experience.

Recruiting. Recruiting is another learning curriculum for associates. Here, associates gain valuable experience for identifying and recruiting potential promising leaders. All participants described similar experiences with recruiting where associates learn how to assess talent from a group of promising leaders, a skill necessary as they advance in the organization. Associates first learn the skill participating in HC’s annual casting calls or recruiting processes.
While in their first year, associates collaborate with the program director, human resources, or senior associates as students learning the recruiting process starting with facilitation of information sessions, to assessing talent, and then judging performances. Participants used their own recruiting experiences as applied learning when returning to campus or reviewing headshots. Josh described his first recruiting experience as beneficial, immersing himself into the role so that the next year he returned as the lead recruiter, collaborating with a new associate, who would learn recruiting techniques from Josh.

I collaborated with the Talent Management representative during last year’s interviews. This year I am returning as the senior person and I am taking one of the new [associates] with me to the campus information session. This time I am running [the information session] and applying what I learned from my first session.

I think it is awesome that the leadership [team] and the steering committee trusts us enough to say, you are it (italics added) when it comes to assisting with the [leadership] pipeline (Josh, 2017).

The recruiting experience offers a point of deep, rich data collection uncovered when I prompted Josh to share how this experience enables his development. He responded by saying it is more than being a representative of the program, it is the skills he has developed for assessing future talent.

You do not have an opportunity [to recruit] when you are young in your career. It is unlikely you will hire people [of this caliber until later in your career].

It starts with this wide funnel of people showing up for your information session, after which you meet with them to discuss the program further.] I ask myself “How do you target people? What do you listen for? How do I evaluate whether this person expresses true passion for the industry, or the company? Are they just playing a game?”

That happens often at business school. Going into the interview, I wonder, “How do I conduct solid interviews where I can objectively measure their talent potential?” I received help from my program director and we collaborated with Human Resources. I have learned a lot that way (Josh, 2017).

The experience of starting as a student and progressing to instructor allows the actor to learn the method while guided by trained experts. The process positively reinforces the associates’ performance as conveyed in Josh’s example where he successfully recruited two associates for a recent cohort. The final student/instructor curriculum within the program’s swag bag involves influencing.
Influencing. One of the program requirements involves associates giving back to the program by participating on a variety of LDP committees; the third enabler curriculum in the actors’ swag bag. Committees involve a cross section of program associates, generally in their first or second rotation, since their roles are less demanding. Committees have different objectives such as improving the onboarding process for new program associates. While serving on committees, associates learn to apply influencing skills for strategic planning, project management, and negotiation skills.

The practice of serving on committees enables participants to find their leadership voice in a backstage setting with their peers. In these committees, they perform for each other, allowing them to alter their persona, experiment with influencing strategies, and volunteer for new assignments. New assignments stretch their acting abilities as they connect with different parts of the organization or reach out to other leaders. Ben described his experience working on high profile committees where he worked closely with senior level executives, performing a role requiring influencing skills.

I worked on the mentorship and recruiting committees including the Super Day [candidate selection committee, which is an] all-day [recruiting] session [for our top candidates]. I facilitated some of the evaluation meetings, where we decided [which candidates will receive] an offer. [This experience] gave me a different level of exposure [to high-level leaders], because we are choosing which candidates to interview based on their interest in the LDP (pseudonym used) (Ben, 2017).

As participants transition from student to instructor, they take on more important committee responsibilities demonstrating strategic skills, which are highly valued amongst HC’s executives. Role responsibilities progress from planning and executing to influencing and improving the program as in Josh’s example for improving the LDP’s business case, which Josh listed among his top five accomplishments while an associate at HC.

I have been able to make real significant improvements to an already good program. I have been on the recruiting committee for onsite or second round interviews. I led a team within the LDP (pseudonym used) to totally revamp the business case that we offer [to prospective candidates].

[This required] having conversations [influencing discussions] with people in HR, the LDP, and our steering committee, all senior level leaders. [Today,] we have this Helpful Corporation (pseudonym used) baseline business case [to attract candidates to the program.] [We need to
Josh used his committee role to create a strategy, work closer with an array of leaders, and influence them to improve the program’s business case.

While committee work may sometimes amount to little more than administrative support for the program director, the reality is that committee work also offers important backstage practice for the associate. Astute actors leverage their committee experience to gain social and symbolic capital, which is the purpose behind the swag bag’s contents. Exploring the developmental enablers, viewing them as tools and props as part of an actor’s performance, and transitioning into an instructor role is part of the program’s design for accelerated associate development, under the guidance and direction of the program director, who is also their personal agent.

**The Actors’ Personal Agent**

The program includes a dedicated leader, a member of HC’s Talent Management organization, whose role is to run the stage and develop the associates in preparation for joining HC’s talent pipeline. The program director role resembles that of an actors’ personal agent, providing direct assistance, as a consultant to the stars. Rebecca, the HC LDP director, described her function as a talent broker, circulating her clients’ headshots amongst senior leadership in addition to assisting her clients when they required assistance when looking for their next rotation.

I asked Rebecca how the program director acting as personal agent, markets her “clients,” as associates. She explained that her clients’ reputation is critical to the marketing process and favors associates possessing a moral career recognized as easy to work with and contributing to the organization’s goals.

[Marketing talent] is about, “Do other people want to work with these people?” It is great if we think that they are top talent, a leader with high potential, but I am not hiring them to work for me during their rotation. [Important note as the program director or personal agent does not hire or directly manage the associates.]
We have to broker them with senior leaders into a spot where they think this person could *really make a difference* (italics added). When that happens, it really validates everything.

The worst-case scenario is you get somebody in [the program] and nobody wants him or her in a rotation. [Meaning, a manager will not hire them.] Then I am thinking [this person is] not a top talent. They are not a future leader here if nobody wants them. We have not had that experience since I have been here (Rebecca, 2018).

It is apparent in Rebecca’s response that her reputation rides upon her clients, where their success is her success. Her ability to market her clients across the organization generates symbolic and social capital for the program and herself, as the actors’ personal agent.

**Summary**

This subsection has approximated an interlude, a pause in the play’s dramatic progressions to better understand and appreciate the strategic program design. To narrate the interlude, I applied a metaphor following Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis. The metaphor describes the package of program benefits, or enablers, in terms of a swag bag containing an array of ready-to-use and instructional props, where astute actors learn when to incorporate them into their performances.

Serious associates carefully examine the swag bag’s contents to familiarize themselves with the props, ready to incorporate them into their subsequent performances. Bourdieu’s forms of capital offer an insightful analysis of HC’s LDP props carefully chosen to generate the associates’ social, cultural, and symbolic capital for its subsequent conversion into influence and power necessary for reaching higher levels of HC leadership. I now return to the actor’s next scene, their transition into their second rotation.

**Scene 3 – Rotation 2: Personal Leadership and Global Mindset**

While the first rotation focuses upon foundational development, the second rotation marks the start of the associates’ real leadership journey. Starting with the second rotation, an associate must personally identify the next role in which to develop personal leadership and a global mindset (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019). Nearly all participants referred to this rotation experience as confusing and frustrating, not knowing how to go about finding the right role. For most, it resulted in the associates relying upon their network and the program’s brand assistance (See Figure 4.4).
The LDP network is instrumental to associates’ job search and audition preparation. This network provides in-depth information in the form of cultural capital that arms associates with valuable knowledge that they can incorporate during interviews in this context. Here the cultural capital concerns insight acquired regarding a business unit’s current trends, strategies, and “insider” terminology associates apply to their scripts and performances. Associates need this edge when competing for challenging roles on new performance stages that will increase their organizational visibility. Josh shared his example regarding how he used his network to locate a new job opening, in a desired field.

The only reason I was aware of [the open position] was through [a conversation] with Philip (pseudonym used), [an LDP graduate].

I was talking to Philip about his role [involving an] investment in a new company. I knew [his organization was involved in] this transaction [and asked him to explain his role to me]. The more he talked about [his role] the more I [thought, this is exactly what I want for my next role.] This is what I want to do.

I was candid with Philip and told him of my interest. “What you just described is what I dream about.” [To which Philip replied.] “Well that is good because we have a job opening right now.” I did not know [about this opening] at all.

[Philip said] “I will send you the link [electronic job link that describes the role and how to apply] when I get back to my desk.” He sent me the link. I read it and knew it was for me (Josh, 2017).

Josh applied for the position and after an extensive interviewing process, received an offer, which he accepted.

Another participant, Olivia, described the importance of using her network to generate “insider” cultural capital that she will use to her advantage when applying and interviewing for open roles.

It is particularly important when looking for new rotations within the organization in a couple of ways. One, you start to understand what is going on. Where to best utilize your strengths or weaknesses. It starts to let you know the important people in that area. The ones you should try to network with to get a role there.

[Second,] I am able to see how all the pieces of the organization fit together, which enables me to focus strategically in my current role and when planning my future roles. Knowing what I need to develop in order to be successful when changing roles (Olivia, 2018).

The associate’s use of their network is a big asset when searching for their second rotation in which they begin to develop their personal brand.
The actor’s brand. The data suggests that starting with rotation two, associates must actively build their personal brand relying less upon the program’s brand (Figure 4.4). Participants know that each rotation requires a change in their performance stage and may include newly constructed roles. New HC roles imply the creation of a new position to address a specific issue, need, or problem that a department is trying to solve. The hiring manager creates a description with the problem in mind, and then seeks an employee to fix the problem or issues.

There are several role “types” available to associates for their second rotation. These include some roles, which are brand new, recently created with a general job description including ambiguous expectations. Some roles, referred to as stretch roles overtly involve taking on a new set of responsibilities with little or no demonstrated experience. Both types of roles are important in the associates’ progression towards becoming a general manager. Participants describe their experiences as different from what they expected when entering the LDP. They find the position description ambiguous; almost to the point of hiding the true intent of the expected position’s goals and responsibilities.

LDP associates quickly realize they must develop their ability to respond to their audience expectations by demonstrating their value to HC’s overall performance. Several participants discussed their experiences with role ambiguity during their second rotation, in some cases finding the role not “at all” what they expected. Tom recalled turning the ambiguity into an opportunity for building his personal brand, by making his character’s role about driving overall division performance. Nick used his props, such as his network and mentor, to make sense of the role and figure out what he needed to do to deliver a strong performance. This is a common experience for associates in their second rotation and consistent with associates in a stretch role. In this case, “stretch role” refers to a jump in leadership, responsibility, or decision-making authority.

Associates seek stretch opportunities to generate their social capital because these roles demonstrate their willingness to take a risk, a characteristic common amongst Band 5 participants, such as Alex. During our first interview, I asked Alex to share three influences that shaped his leadership
development. He noted that stretch roles were instrumental to his career progression, providing several rotational examples where he moved into stretch roles.

I would say first and foremost is the roles that I have had. Everyone of them has stretched me and stretched me in new ways. They have been challenging. They pushed me. And candidly, probably were, a little bit beyond [my demonstrated skill set]. There are some roles that you earned and deserved and there are others you feel like people are taking a little bit of a risk on you. I felt each time, the organization was taking some risk, knowing that I had not proved [my ability to be successful in that role] (Alex, 2017).

As Alex discussed each example, he reflectively paused and seemed genuinely surprised that leaders took a risk on him, at one point suggesting he may not have deserved the role. Yet following each successful performance, Alex received another stretch role opportunity. Applying Jackall’s corporate moral leadership theory, Alex has evolved as an HC leader by tolerating ambiguity found in his new assignments. When selected by leaders for these assignments, they recognize Alex could comfortably navigate a high level of ambiguity to lead his division or unit successfully.

Associates quickly learn that their ability to take on challenging roles provides more than economic capital as such it increases their social capital in two ways. First, associates must demonstrate their ability to deliver meaningful performances in ambiguous situations. Second, associates must demonstrate the desire to take on challenging parts in the form of stretch roles. Both types of performances generate important social capital for the associate while enhancing their personal brand.

**Personal brand as social capital.** During the associate’s second rotation, they begin to establish and build their personal brand, becoming less dependent upon the program’s brand. As referenced in Figure 4.4, they become less dependent upon the program’s brand, and generate social and symbolic capital as part of building their personal brand. Stephanie, another program director, explained that her program’s reputation is fully dependent upon associates’ reputation or brand.

Most participants described themselves as brand champions, whose performances affect both the program and their personal brand. Participants proudly described their efforts for maintaining the quality of the program’s brand, that of an elite, high potential leadership program. Bill candidly admitted that
backstage conversations critically remind the associates of the sacred trust placed upon them to maintain the program’s image, working hard to assure a positive brand connection.

As LDP associates deliver exemplary performances, they generate positive social capital for themselves and the program, assuring that they become less dependent upon the program’s brand as depicted in Figure 4.4. During the second rotation, associates begin to reveal their personal style as they become more familiar with HC’s expectations involving the development of social capital. While in their roles, they create new tools that become part of the associate’s symbolic capital, an artifact attributed to their performance. Several participants described artifacts or tools they created in their second rotation that remained with the department after they moved into their next rotation. The artifacts remain valuable to the department and sometimes carry the name of the associate who developed the tool, such as “James’ Scale” (pseudonym), a nickname given to the artifact by the department referring to the value of the tool and the associate who created it. Such artifacts become symbols of the associates’ personal leadership and global mindset generating social currency associates will use as they prepare to move to their next rotation.

The first two rotations within HC’s LDP are somewhat prescriptive in nature, meaning associates follow a loosely defined path starting as an associate at the Low Band 4 level before locating their second rotational role at the High Band 4 level. Thus, the first two rotations pose significant, but manageable ambiguity for associates. The data suggests the last two rotations present difficult challenges for the associates, which I will discuss in Section 3.

Summary

Due to the rotational nature of the program, associates must plan and network to find their second rotation, assisted by their swag bag’s props. The purpose of the second rotation is for the associate to begin building their personal brand through the production of social and symbolic capital while enhancing their personal leadership and a global mindset. Initially all associates experienced a level of confusion and frustration regarding the process to find their second role and meet the program’s objectives. Once they win their desired role, they turn their attention to mastering their performance.
During the second rotation, nearly all associates remain individual contributors to focus on their personal growth and development. When they begin searching for their second role, their actions reflect a strategic understanding of the organization by seeking out ambiguous job descriptions or stretch roles. Successful selection and performance of their second role generates important social and symbolic capital that becomes part of their personal brand, in preparation for their third rotation.

**Section 3: From Scripted Drama to Improvisational Rite of Passage**

**Introduction**

Starting with the associates’ preparation for their third rotation, the data suggests programmatic issues begin to manifest ahead of this rotation, resulting in a failed rite of passage for some associates. During the associates’ first two rotations, their progression is prescriptive, in which associates advance to a High Band 4 position for their second rotation (See Table 2.4). All participants successfully achieved this goal.

The program’s rotational expectations dramatically increase as associates near the 18-month mark of their second rotation, as associates begin to look for their next rotation that requires significant stretch opportunities, such as departmental leadership roles and influencing other leaders. Those associates that do not locate advanced stretch roles for their third rotations will struggle to complete the program during their fourth rotation as an HC Band 5 director.

**Scene 4 - Rotation 3: Managing Others and Strategy Development**

The associate’s third rotation is significant as it takes on the appearance of a grand finishing school ahead of the fourth and final rotation. The term “finishing school” refers to the associates’ transformation into a strategic leader whose moral career reflects an HC executive. Generally, this is the longest rotational duration, lasting on average 24 – 30 months. For this rotation, associates look for people management roles to focus upon their strategic and influencing skill sets, both considered critical for an HC leader (Helpful Corporation Strategic Program Materials, 2017).

While program documentation indicates the third rotation is the next step in leadership development, the data demonstrates this rotation is much more than leading teams. Rather, strategic
development is a focal point for the associates, in addition to developing significant social, symbolic, and cultural capital. The program views this rotation as a springboard into the director’s chair; however, on balance it does not properly prepare associates to recognize the intention of this rotation.

**The significance of stretch roles and influence.** The program director instructs associates that their third rotation must be meaningful, where they need to locate a role that is both a stretch and involves direct management of people. This rotation intends to build influencing and connecting skills to accelerate the development of professional capital, with the stated objective to “Lead through influence. As you manage others and lead a team within the company, you will focus on managing through influence and motivating others” (Helpful Corporation Program Outline, 2019). The implication of these statements is that most of the associates’ efforts in looking for third rotation settings should target the optimal development and results of their eventual team. However, this requires nuanced information of many potential berths, which the program only cursorily provides.

Graduate participants emphasized the importance of stretch roles to demonstrate their aptitude in the development of strategy and ability to influence other leaders. The program intends for the third rotation to stretch associates, expanding their decision-making experience and aptitude for accepting ambiguity. Meanwhile, they develop their infrastructure of trusted advisors and influential peers.

However, for many participants the third rotation requires a highly nuanced role to meet these requirements; one that combines stretch assignments with a broad array of supportive contacts not yet established. Associates expressed surprise that their preparation for the third rotation did not match the program’s expectations. My findings identify tensions between the program and associates’ expectations, suggesting this is the most difficult rotation to master, which I discuss in Chapter 5. Here, I limit my discussion to those associates’ able to deliver successful performances as part of their third rotation.

**The purpose of stretch roles.** Graduate participants spoke more about the significance of taking on stretch roles as they progressed in the program. Much of their discussions centered on stretch roles during their third and fourth rotations, having experienced stretch assignments in their first or second
rotations. The distinction between stretch assignments and roles is important since both affect the associates’ career trajectory.

A stretch assignment involves a limited opportunity to take on a short-term responsibility in which the associate has little experience. Generally, this occurs when an issue arises within a business area that requires the attention of an individual or team. The business leader assigns the task to a member of their team, who they know can accept the new responsibilities and resolve the issue. This is common during associate’s first or second rotation, since the assignment is limited in scope and expectations. The associate can take on this new responsibility, produce a successful outcome, and return to their stated role. Each time an associate successfully completes a stretch assignment; their social and cultural capital grows within the organization and becomes part of their brand, their moral career that becomes part of the associates’ record of HC performance. This is important when they begin searching for their third rotation involving a stretch role, as this will determine whether associates will receive a future offer as a director.

Stretch roles involve a significant expansion of responsibility and are generally long term, lasting the duration of the associates’ time in that role. Stretch roles may involve associates who become department leaders, take on responsibility for a product line, or are responsible to solve a deeply rooted organizational issue. When participants spoke of stretch roles, they described the role as a “leap” in their responsibilities, which profoundly influenced their career. Ryan, a Band 5 program graduate, specifically credits stretch roles for his development and promotion to the Band 5 director level. Ryan described stretch roles as valuable and highly influential upon his HC leadership development.

[The second influence] would be stretch [roles]. [These are] jobs that I really did not deserve to get, on paper. [Meaning that the job requirements were beyond that of Ryan’s experience listed in his headshot or resume.]

Yet, because I was in this program and able to do some wheeling and dealing, I was able to [earn the] role. I would not have gotten [those roles] if I had come off the street [with the same set of experiences found on my resume] (Ryan, 2017).
I prompted Ryan to explain why he viewed stretch roles as influential for him, to which he replied that it pushed him to take a risk by taking on a difficult role. A role he may not have actively pursued if not for the “forces” of the program’s expectations.

I think it is just human nature. You need to be pushed beyond what you think your limits are and if you’re not doing that and there are no outside forces helping you do that then you will not achieve your full potential (Ryan, 2017).

Ryan’s reflection of meaningful influences upon his leadership development is consistent with Jackall’s corporate moral leadership findings. Organizations expect their rising leaders to step into new roles in unfamiliar business areas, on short notice. They must immerse themselves into a state of ambiguity as they discover their responsibilities and effectively lead to produce results that contribute to the organization’s success.

**Alliances and influence.** The art of leading requires the ability to influence people and build an alliance coalition that supports your vision and ideas at all levels within an organization. I use the term “alliances” referring to associates’ professional social network of advocates and sponsors. While in the third rotation, associates must build their own powerful network of advocates, such as their manager or the program’s director who “promote” the associates’ leadership skills using a variety of organizational communication channels. More importantly, associates must establish a sponsorship with one or more powerful leaders, generally several levels higher than the associate or their manager. It is during the third rotation in which the associates’ brand is less dependent upon their own work efforts than upon their social skills for influencing others and forming important sponsorships.

Collaborative leaders influence by building trust, articulating a sound vision, and producing a successful record of accomplishments. All participants confirmed the perspective that a leader’s ability to influence is highly valued at HC. At some point during each interview, all participants provided deep, rich data insights when asked if influence is important to be an HC leader. James, a program associate preparing to move into his third rotation spoke about the value of influence, recognizing this as a critical skill through his personal experience.
In this organization, influence is critical to success and one of the most important leadership qualities to get things done. Because we [the organization] are so matrixed, it increases the need to have influence.

James continues by explaining what he has learned about influence as an associate.

There are two objectives I have when I am influencing. [These include] buy-in [from the people I am working with] and [steering] the direction [of a decision] I want. I found the way to gain buy-in is to approach people early. By saying [to them], “I’m thinking about doing this. What do you think?” I collect their thoughts and incorporate them into my work.

It is critical to come to meetings with specific goals in mind. Specific things that you want to accomplish and very important to tell people, “No” (James, 2018)

In my field notes, I noted his reaction to hearing himself say “No.” James paused for an instant, reacting to his own statement and then clarifying his intent regarding his statement. He incorporates parts of the ideas and suggestions received into his work as long as it does not change what he intended to do.

You need to acknowledge the importance of [other people’s] suggestions and value [their input]. When I go to a meeting, I have a very defined set of goals, [such as] what I need to get out of [the meeting]. Usually those goals are somewhat malleable. [Meaning that he is willing to alter his goals in order to reach the required decision, he established before the meeting.]

If somebody says, “I want it to look a little bit different.” I am flexible in that area as long as it does not lead to something that we cannot develop in time. Just having flexibility in working with people, helps with influencing. If they see you are willing to change for them, [they are willing to work with you to reach a consensus] (James, 2018).

James response indicates he learned this from previous experiences. I prompted him to say more about how he formed his perspective.

Experience. I do not think I valued influence as much as I should have, [when I joined HC]. Looking back at it now [I recognize the significance of] influence. I am not sure if it is the most important skill to be successful at my level, but it is [an important skill] that I have learned in my current role (James, 2018).

To provide additional insight, James shared an example of a tool he developed that later became broadly adopted across his organization demonstrating his ability to influence business partners outside of his authority. His first attempt to build and promote a similar tool failed. When asked why, James explained that he did not secure the necessary buy-in of business partners, nor did he incorporate their ideas into his final product. This changed when building the second tool, knowing that he needed to
influence leaders in advance to gain their approval. Once he secured the necessary approvals, he successfully delivered the second tool, now fully supported by all the stakeholder leaders, resulting in significant symbolic and social currency for James, leading to a stretch role for his third rotation.

Leaders must have power to steer organizations and influence to expand their power and acquire social capital. Increasing power requires strategic planning and a series of actions, leading associates to the executive level moral career, by observing and modeling the required behavior during their third rotation. Olivia shared her observations while discussing professional goals when she spoke about building her personal brand through a series of solid performances, having the right level of exposure to influential leaders, forming alliances through personal drive, and luck. I asked Olivia what it takes a promising leader to move up the HC leadership ladder.

Experience, credentials, and performing well over time in your career. There is an element of personal ambition, to [earn] an [executive level] position. A little bit of luck and the need to be in visible roles [always helps].

Many people within the company have done good work for many years and just never get that kind of break to move up. There is a certain degree of personal agency. If you really (italics added) want to be in that sort of position, you can go out and make a decision to start pushing for something and build that brand for yourself (Olivia, 2018).

Olivia discusses personal ambition and agency, suggesting the necessity and value of alliance relationships for promising leaders. She recognizes other employees that have built a track record of success, yet do not rise to the higher level roles lacking the “personal agency” necessary. Promising leaders need the assistance of powerful leaders as sponsors.

Olivia also suggests that leaders can rise to executive level positions outside of the program. Four other participants stated this as well. These same participants spoke highly of the program’s value, yet were quick to point out that it is not the program leading associates to director chairs; rather, associates lead themselves into that role by building their personal brand, alliances, influence, and power within the organization.
Summary

For the third rotation, associates’ jump to a larger stage, involving a role change from individual contributor to people manager. Here, associates are far less dependent upon the program’s brand as they further establish their brand through influencing and motivating others (Figure 4.4). Associates that select the right role for this rotation must build their power base by influencing other leaders and forming alliances, such as advocates and sponsorships.

This rotation requires a stretch role to meet the programs audition requirements and establish critical sponsorships that will propel the associate into a director-level role for their fourth rotation. While the program material does not refer to the third rotation as a “director’s tryout”, this is the developmental intention for assessing the associates’ aptitude and readiness for the HC executive level moral career. Associates’ who successfully complete the director’s tryout find the fourth rotation a ceremonial ritual ahead of program graduation.

I now introduce Figure 4.6, as a visual representation of the participants’ perspective of the program enablers’ value as they mature through the rotations and demonstrated by the descending steps. During the associates’ first two rotations, the program enablers offer tremendous value to their development, as noted by the first two steps, Rotation 1 and Rotation 2. Early in the program, the participants described the program’s enablers as highly valuable for their development, while they learn to navigate HC’s organization.

During the first rotation, associates leverage “everything the program can offer” as one participant explained to me. As they move into their second rotation, associates heavily rely upon the program’s structure and enablers to build their information pipeline and network, leading to their next role. The red line in Figure 4.6 symbolizes the diminishing returns experienced by the associates. There is a dramatic decline in the program’s structure and enablers as associates begin their third rotation, which I will discuss in Chapter 5 by presenting a redesigned version of program enablers throughout the associates program participation.
The third rotation serves as the associates audition for future director roles. Here the program offers little if any support to actors whose tryout criteria includes improvisational technique, adlibbing scripts through idea generation and decision-making, and building critical alliances as part of their power acquisition. After the second rotation, associates derive less value in return for their program participation and by the time they graduate, there is little, if any further value extracted. Next, I will discuss the LDP’s final rotation.

**Scene 5 - Rotation 4: Enhancing the Business**

While the program refers to this role as the associate’s fourth rotation, generally, associates graduate prior to the completion of this rotation. For successful associates, they begin the fourth rotation in their new role as a Band 5 director. Associates earn their seat as a director upon successful completion of their audition while in their third rotation, building a strong HC moral career, and leveraging their network of advocates and sponsors, where they acquired significant social and cultural capital necessary for the director’s level role.
Nearing the end of their third rotation, associates work with their alliances to identify opportunities for director-level positions and promote their readiness for an executive level role, by interviewing for director positions during the third rotation. Elevation to the director role marks the start of this final rotation and as a Band 5 director, entering the HC executive performance stage, the marker of success. Symbolically, this is a big step for the associates as they move from a cubicle to an office within the Cubicle Farm backstage.

**Ceremonial marker.** The fourth rotation is, then more of a ceremonial marker, complete with rituals and symbols celebrating associates’ success for attaining a director position. Once the associate reaches the Band 5 level, the program director initiates a discussion with the associate to discuss program graduation, which is generally the case, since newly installed directors no longer have time to support the program. Over time as the value of the program’s enablers diminishes, program associates are less involved in the program, finding it difficult to balance the program’s demands with their increasing responsibilities (Figure 4.6).

Graduate participants shared their experiences, expressing a sense of freedom when “released” from all program responsibilities. At this point in their HC career, these directors have matured as HC corporate moral leaders, finding minimal value in campus recruiting, program committee participation, and in the program director’s ability to broker their talent, since they now outrank them, a tension I discuss in Chapter 5. Their continued rise as leaders is now fully dependent upon their moral career, their influence and power necessary for “trading favors,” which is their ability to monetize their social and cultural capital, in order to build new pathways for leadership power.

**The final rotation.** At the start of the associates’ journey, the program director reminds each new cohort that HC’s LDP consists of four rotations. No two associates will experience the same journey, nor should they compare themselves in their progression. These messages reinforced throughout the associates program participation. HC LDP program materials state the objective of the fourth rotation is to “Drive dynamic change. As you give back to the organization in your capstone rotation, you will
enhance the business and leave a legacy as you improve your segment or business function while demonstrating your management and leadership” (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019).

This fourth rotation program description contradicts the data on the experience somewhat. It describes this rotation as a capstone, implying that an associate remains active in the program while in this rotation, generally 12 to 24 months, or until ready to rotate to another executive leadership position. This is not actually true, since only a subset of LDP associates whom begun the rotation as Band 5 directors virtually ever reach this point. In effect, this scenario produces a dilemma for the program regarding its definition of graduation and what, the data, suggests about the program’s success.

**Graduation as program closure.** Despite the above discussion of the implications for associates by making it to a Band 5 director position, the criteria for graduating from HC’s LDP is actually vaguer, even described as “soft” by nearly all participants and the program director, Rebecca. Though the program has experienced several leadership changes, the criteria for graduation remain the same. LDP material suggests that associates complete four rotations and develop their personal brand, no longer dependent upon the program’s brand (Figure 4.4). The program’s director identifies associates meeting these criteria and initiates a conversation regarding their readiness for graduation.

However, Rebecca admits that graduation criteria involve subjectivity, stating it is not a “one size fits all” readiness assessment that associates’ complete (Rebecca, 2018). When I asked participants if their goal was to graduate as a director, all confirmed this was their goal when joining the program. Yet, the data strongly suggest that not all associates will reach this goal. The topic of graduating as a Band 5 director was a source of deep, rich data collection when I asked Rebecca to discuss program graduation. She described an array of associates’ perspectives on the topic of graduation. Broadly stated opinions on the definition of graduation range from those that agree to graduate at the Band 4 level, to those no longer interested in participating, to a few fast trackers who accelerate through the program ahead of schedule. Rebecca begins by noting that some associates altered their original goal settling for personal satisfaction as opposed to professional drive.
Some people find their niche. They are exactly where they want to be in their career, a business area that makes them happy, where they are contributing and fulfilled.

Rebecca pauses slightly, before returning to the topic of associates that remain committed to their original goal, achieving a Band 5 director position.

There are [current associates] who say, “I am ready to graduate” because they are at a point in their life where they can no longer commit to the program. They are ready to take that next course in their career. We have others who have been in the program more than the 5-7 years, [but] who are not yet at [at the Band 5 director level]. They do not want to exit the program and they [still] want sponsorship from a senior leader. We have others who [have moved to the High Band 4 level] within the first year of the program, who may be ready to move into a Director level position in 2-3 years.

We have a vast array of all different career paths and I tell the members to stay in your own lane. Your career path is not going to look the same as anybody else’s. You have to accept that and you have to honor it (Rebecca, 2018).

Rebecca’s response suggests tensions surrounding the complexity of managing a diverse group of high potential associates, where each associate’s career path is their own. I explore these tensions further in Chapter 5.

Spartan program graduation. The program’s ceremonial graduation includes senior executives, associates, and graduates of the program, performing several rituals. The graduate receives a framed certificate as a prop to hang upon their wall. During the interviews, most graduates pointed to their certificate proudly displayed in their office, one of many symbols demonstrating their powerful roles within HC.

While the program documentation and participants refer to the ceremony as a “graduation,” the descriptions of the event appear to match a celebratory “release” party. Usually the term “graduation” conjures up an image of gowns, graduation caps with tassels, or honor cords to name a few items. Graduation ceremonies are formal affairs, well attended by family, friends, academic notables, and organizational staff. The graduation committee lines up high-profile speakers to deliver a memorable and meaningful message to the audience, celebrating the educational institution and individuals’ achievement through the presentation of diplomas, important symbolic artifacts.
By contrast, an LDP graduation is a rather small event that generally includes a few powerful executives willing to commit the time to attend these events and one or two graduates. There are no caps or gowns. Attendees are HC employees, leaders, and executives, and rarely include a family member in attendance. Graduates select their speakers, generally choosing an influential leader such as their manager, sponsor, or mentor. The speaker prepares a script that acknowledges the associates’ contributions and predicts their future HC organizational value as executive leaders. The ceremony includes a shared meal, a celebratory cake, and pictures to mark the special occasion. However, as I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, the LDP does not always connote the successful conclusion of a full-fledged leadership ritual.

Summary

For successful associates graduating from the program as directors, the fourth rotation is primarily symbolic since they complete this rotation following graduation. As directors, they are trusted to fulfill the rotation’s objectives to enhance the business as executive leaders. The associate has formed their personal brand, their leadership reputation, no longer dependent upon the program’s brand to supplement their leadership identity (Figure 4.4). They no longer require assistance to locate roles or access to influential leaders. While some graduates may continue to support the program, their official responsibilities are complete, and they are free to focus solely on their career (Figure 4.6).

The closing ceremony involves far less pomp and ceremony then the associates’ experienced on Day One. They have completed the program’s requirements and those that reach the role of directors demonstrate the fully developed executive level moral career. Inside and outside the organization, the associates fully evolved moral career is always “on”, knowing that all interactions with HC leaders remain part of their performance and repertoire.

End Scene - Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed the data to uncover the actors’ journey to the director’s chair by using three sections to differentiate three themes. First, there is the actors’ preparatory work, then their developmental experience while in the first two rotations, and finally their formal audition and graduation
from the program. The data suggests manifestations of barriers that may impede their leadership development beginning near the end of the second rotation, ahead of their third rotation, which will become the actors’ directorial audition, which I explore further in Chapter 5.

Using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, I demonstrated how promising actors prepare years in advance for an opportunity to audition for a role as part of HC’s LDP. Participants revealed their early interests in leadership, recognizing their professional gaps preventing them from becoming executive leaders. All the participants closed this gap by pursuing their MBA. Seventeen of the nineteen participants completed their MBAs as full-time students; of this group, twelve attended an elite MBA program. Most of the associates in the study attended on-campus casting calls at elite and local universities, one participant entered the program through an open casting call, and two as internal employees after discovering the existence of this program, suggesting some tension in the associates’ origins and their relationship to the program and fellow associates.

To understand the associates’ journey from recruitment through graduation, I applied Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis in addition to his total institution and moral career concepts. First, I applied dramaturgical analysis throughout the process starting with prospective associates, then upon entering the program as associates and throughout their four rotations. Next, I applied Goffman’s concepts to show how the total institution influences associates’ role selections and leadership norms expected within the walls of the organization. While in the program, the associates begin to model the observed traits commonly portrayed as part of the HC executives’ moral career, referring to this as their professional brand.

I applied Bourdieu’s theory of capital by discussing how associates generate various forms of capital and then use it to influence decision-making, access to open roles, and later to build alliances or power coalitions in order to master each rotation’s objectives. I provided many examples of the various forms of capital demonstrating that associates’ use their cultural capital for auditions, their social capital for leadership influence, and their symbolic capital as a legacy gift to the business unit they will leave for their next rotation.
I described the performance stages found at HC’s global headquarters, the pantheon Executive Wing Front Stage and the Cubicle Farm Back Stage. Most of the associates perform in a variety of Cubicle Farm back stages, with limited return engagements to the Executive Wing front stage. Actors find their dressing rooms or desk space, amongst the maze of cubicles, and change their dressing room locations when moving to new rotations. In the end, the objective is to graduate the program as a Band 5 director, earning a larger personal dressing room, or office in the Cubicle Farm.

Using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, I looked carefully at the contents of the actor’s swag bag, a set of program enablers presented to the associates on Day One. The swag bag contains a series of props or tools associates learn to use during their first and second rotation. The program director acts as the associates’ personal agent and talent broker, who is committed to their success. Associates learn to master the use of their props during their early performances, gaining experience for handling the props and applying them to future performances that will generate social and symbolic capital that becomes part of the associates’ personal brand, or moral career.

Using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, I looked deeply into Rotations 3 and 4 as the data suggested that those participants reaching these rotations experienced significant challenges, finding limited program support available to guide them in their closing journey. Further, the program’s poorly documented developmental objectives for these rotations do not accurately portray its expectations that the third rotation is the actors’ directorial audition. Program documentation states the fourth rotation is the program’s capstone, suggesting it serves as the actors’ final audition as an HC executive leader (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019).

Rotations 3 and 4 are the most significant part of associates’ leadership developmental journey. While the objectives use simple terminology to guide associates, the terms mask the underlying developmental intentions leading to program completion, marked by an understated graduation ceremony. The third rotation’s description states associates will learn to lead through influence, yet the intention is that associates influence through their ability to build a strong alliance structure and acquisition of HC
power. To begin this process, associates must find stretch roles that place them in the spotlight of powerful leaders.

The fourth rotation involves a symbolic promotion, where successful associates move to the executive leader stage, which signals their graduation readiness. The program director initiates the graduation process with a conversation to confirm associates’ readiness for completing HC’s LDP. Generally, associates remain in the program for a short duration while in their fourth rotation. Yet, only a few recent LDP graduates who have met these criteria, further signaling the manifestations of program barriers.

Throughout this chapter, I applied Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis starting with the actors’ process for receiving an offer to participate in HC’s leadership development program and throughout their four rotations to expressly represent the actors’ experiences and the program’s critical objectives. I have demonstrated that as associates build their personal brand, they become less dependent upon the program’s brand and derive far less value from the program’s structure and enablers in the third and fourth rotation (Figures 4.4 and 4.6 respectively). The data demonstrates that not all associates achieve their goal to become an HC Band 5 director. In Chapter 5, I will discuss why associates fail to achieve their leadership objectives, finding some associates stall in their role progression and others lack sponsorships, specifically not applying Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis to analyze HC’s LDP shortfalls. These program tensions involve the program director’s role, the lack of program support for the actors’ third rotation audition, and critical gaps with the program’s pedagogy.
Chapter 5: Barriers That Impede LDP Associates’ Progression to HC Executive Leadership Roles

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss three underlying issues that complicate the advancement of HC promising leaders’ and prevent them from reaching the Band 5 director level, using language different than the preceding chapter. While Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis is meaningful to the discussion surrounding actors’ experiences in Chapter 4, I will now focus upon the challenges experienced by associates participating in HC’s LDP. While some associates experienced a streamlined advancement process, promoted to the entry-level executive role on time or in some cases, ahead of schedule, some associates experienced barriers delaying their progression, and others graduated short of their goal, remaining at the Band 4 level. Participants in the latter two groups search for reasons why, as promising leaders, they struggled to achieve their goals. Before proceeding with the discussion of the underlying issues, I begin this chapter by introducing two important data findings.

The first finding I will introduce is a visual depiction of HC’s Organizational Power Tree to convey the essence of executive level leadership power, necessary to remain viable as an HC executive. These leaders require finely honed skill sets to “influence and connect” across HC’s large matrixed organization. In this chapter, I will show the two dimensions of leadership power, depth and breadth, which combined I describe as their “power fields.” “Depth” refers to the power attributed to leaders’ roles within HC’s hierarchy, while breadth refers to the power leaders hold outside of their direct organizations, across other departments.

The second important finding I will introduce is a table of participant classifications. In Chapter 2, I introduced three descriptive terms to classify participants, which I will apply to this discussion. These terms represent extrapolated data I produced from the interviews and longitudinal tracking of study participants recruited before and after 2013 (See Tables 2.8 and 2.9). The extrapolated data involves leadership “markers” collected from steering committee members, program directors, and LDP participants that describe HC executive level leadership competencies. I begin with a visible depiction of HC leadership power.
HC’s Organizational Power Tree

On the right side of Figure 5.1, I developed a visual depiction of HC’s role-based power distribution applying the seven architectural career bands to the tree’s vertical trunk, which are color coded to accentuate increasing power associated with higher-level roles (see Figure 2.4). Employees, with roles aligned to HC’s career bands 1 through Low Band 4, have nominal power, which increases slightly as they rise within this structure. I refer to this as the “depth” of leaders’ power; further enhanced using the color-coding to convey the perspective of a “heat map,” where red signifies hot or high and blue signifies cold or low. The gradual transition of color from deep blue, found at the bottom of the tree, to deep red, at the top of the tree, signifies increasing power based upon hierarchical roles.

For example, entry-level employees that start as the Low Band 1 level, have virtually no power, as indicated by the deep blue shade. Employees that move into a High Band 1 level hold slightly more power when compared to their Low Band 1 counterparts, indicated by the less intense shade of blue. This continues up the tree trunk through the Low Band 4 level where employees hold an increased amount of power, as portrayed by the light red shading, yet, their power fields remain small. Program associates entering HC’s LDP begin their moral career development at this level.

Figure 5.1
Visual Depiction of HC’s Organizational Power Tree and Steps to Acquire Power

![Diagram of HC’s Organizational Power Tree](image)
The second dimension of leadership power in this figure is the “tree’s canopy,” which portrays the breadth of leaders’ power fields, starting at the High Band 4 role. This is the first role in which decision-making authority begins to influence organizational direction, as demonstrated by the differing shades of red that form the canopy. As leaders rise in the organization, their authority increases, expanding their power fields, depicted by the horizontal bars that make up the tree’s canopy. The leaders’ breadth of power continues to expand the higher they rise in the organization, since they now influence other leaders and HC’s strategic direction.

On the left side of Figure 5.1, there are three steps, information, influence, and innovation, which are the building blocks to HC leaders’ power fields and produce important social and cultural capital. Initially, employees in the lower bands acquire “information” used to perform their role’s responsibilities and position them for future promotions. For example, as employees learn the organization’s language, they begin to express their “value” in terms of contributions and ideas. The second step, influence, begins near the High Band 3 level as employees begin to influence their peers and in some cases HC leaders. As discussed in Chapter 4 and later in this chapter, influence is a required critical skill all HC leaders must hold. The final step, innovation, refers to a leader’s creative ability to generate new forms of revenue for the organization.

Innovation is meaningful to organizations, as they must find new ways for engaging their customers and competing in their industry. Innovation creates new products, opens new markets, and assures the organization remains competitively relevant in the dynamic environment. Innovation also assists leaders in their expansion of their power fields by enhancing, or “monetizing” their social and cultural capital.

Monetization is a commonly used HC term and refers to converting a process or service into some form of revenue generation. For example, as a health care organization, HC may want to offer a new service, such as a personal contact for a client’s HR department. HC may test if this service provides increased client satisfaction, measured by retaining a client’s business. Over time, HC finds the service is a success, but the client is not paying for this extra service. HC decides they need to monetize the service,
Playing to win

by finding a way to generate revenue for this service. In this sense, leaders “monetize” their social and cultural capital through innovation leading to additional organizational power, or an expansion of their power fields.

The growth of power fields may follow a similar path, when leaders find new ways of influencing their peers or connecting meaningful activities from across the organization, both of which monetize power as a new source of social capital. By monetizing their professional power, their moral career takes on an added dimension, differentiating them from other leaders, since they are able to find new ways of generating power, as opposed to taking power away from others. While participants recognized the need to develop the kinds of power fields that initiate such innovation across units, the program offers little, if any instruction for acquiring power, depicted by the steps in Figure 5.1, leaving some participants unaware of “how” to establish and grow the two dimensions of their power fields, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Next, I present a second finding resulting from extrapolated participant data.

The Presence of Leadership Markers: Naturals, Potentials, and Contributors

I developed three terms describing the developmental potential of promising leaders. “Naturals” indicate high potentials whose organizational progression confirms this status. “Potentials,” indicate high potentials whose organizational progression suggests their ability to remain on track for becoming a Band 5 director. “Contributors” indicate participants who may remain high potentials although their organizational progression has stalled. While the latter group remains employees in good standing, they have not yet demonstrated the leadership markers required for further advancement. I will refer to these classifications throughout this chapter when analyzing the data.

In Table 5.1, I introduce the classification of participants based upon these descriptions. The table header includes four classifications, three I previously introduced, “naturals, potentials,” and “contributors,” and another classification, “termed,” to capture participants that left HC. Using the year in which the cohort started, I segmented the data to differentiate participants who began their HC LDP journey prior to 2013 and those that started after 2013. I will discuss this data segmentation factor in detail later in this chapter. Each segment is then separated by the type of MBA program participants
completed, elite or non-elite, where elite indicates a nationally ranked, top 20 MBA program according to US News Best Business Schools Ranked in 2018 (US News, 2018)

Similar to the data I presented in Chapter 2, the type of MBA program is not a strong indicator of individual leadership developmental aptitude (See Tables 2.8 and 2.9). There are 12 participants representing elite MBA programs, 6, or 50%, classified as naturals, with the other 6, or 50%, classified as potentials, contributors, or termed. The trend is somewhat different for non-elite participants, with only one, 14%, classified as a natural, with the remaining 86% classified as potentials, contributors, or termed. While there is an indication that participants from elite MBA programs remain on a fast track towards executive leadership, it is clear, not all elite participants will succeed. However, it does appear that non-elite participants may be successful in advancing to an executive level over time.

Table 5.1
Developmental Classification of HC Associates and Graduates as of January 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Year</th>
<th>MBA Program</th>
<th>Naturals</th>
<th>Potentials</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>Termed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to 2013</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Hannah Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-elite</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2013</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Bill Olivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-elite</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I classified seven participants as “naturals,” representing elite and non-elite MBA programs. There are four LDP graduates, Jacob, Luke, Ryan, and Alex, all successfully promoted to a Band 5 director position at the start of their fourth rotation and recruited prior to 2013. Ben, James, Josh, are associates currently in their second or third rotations, recruited after 2013, who demonstrate HC leadership characteristics consistent with “markers” found in HC’s executives, with Ben recently
promoted to a Band 5 director position for his third rotation. I will return to these classifications throughout this chapter while discussing HC’s executive level leadership markers.

Under the “potentials” classification, there are four participants; including Isabel, an internal recruit prior to 2013, promoted to a Band 5 director position for her fourth rotation, approximately nine years earlier. As of January 2019, Isabel remains at the Low Band 5 level, completing several lateral role changes since graduation. Bill, Olivia, and Emily, recruited after 2013, moved into their second rotations at the High Band 4 level following program guidelines. While they demonstrate some of the leadership markers common amongst HC leaders, it is too early to determine if they will develop the robust moral career required of an HC executive.

There are five participants I classified as “contributors,” with 80% recruited prior to 2013 and one recruited after 2013. Jack and Nick, recruited prior to 2013 are associates, originally recruited by Robert, classified as active LDP associates, each taking a second role as part of their third rotation (See Table 2.8). They remain potential promising leaders, if they eventually complete their third rotation with a promotion to a Band 5 director position for their fourth rotation. Hannah and Michael are LDP graduates at the High Band 4 level, and currently remain at that level, with Michael remaining committed to his goal for reaching the Band 5 director role. Tom, recruited after 2013, stalled in his first rotation, staying in his role for 24 months before recently moving into his second rotation at the High Band 4 level. It is too early to determine if Tom will continue a pattern of delayed rotations that lags behind program guidelines.

There are three “termed” participants, Mandy recruited after 2013, who left the program and HC nearing the end of her first rotation. Two participants left the program after completing their interviews, the first is Nathan, recruited prior to 2013, and the other is Emma, recruited after 2013. Nathan was a graduate, who did achieve a Band 5 director position for his fourth rotation. Emma left near the end of her second rotation. While Emma was an active participant during the interview process, there were some indications of her dissatisfaction, which I will discuss later.

While HC’s LDP appears to be prescriptive in structure, comprised of four rotations that last between 12 and 24 months, the role progression is much more complex in practice. Some associates can
“decode” the process for moving from a High Band 4 to Low Band 5 director position, which I describe as “naturals.” Some associates, (those classified as “potentials”), benefit from elder insight, alliances, and luck, following a trail of breadcrumbs, leading them through the organizational maze. Still others, “contributors,” struggle to “decode” the process that separates High Band 4 leaders from Low Band 5 directors, unable to develop the leadership markers or secure the “right” alliances to cross the threshold that separates these roles.

As associates enter HC’s total institution, they join a program designed to build leadership skillsets, anticipating the benefit of a program tractor beam that pulls them forward into desirable leadership roles at a Fortune 100 health service organization. Nearly all participants spoke about the program’s habitus as a family, a community of like-minded individuals who are recognized and supported as promising leaders. However, the data suggests dysfunction within this “family” structure not evident to the associates.

This dysfunction takes the form of tensions revealed through careful analysis of the rich data collected from participants. There are three areas of developmental tension including: 1) the program’s contradictory and ambiguous pedagogy, 2) the program’s director role, and 3) the incomplete rite of passage experiences. Associates expect somewhere within the program’s curriculum, there is an invisible force that pulls them through the barriers they encounter. Instead, associates must “create their own adventures” and figure out how to get around these barriers.

Summary

Before proceeding directly into the issues with the program’s pedagogy, I presented two important data findings, the first demonstrates how leaders acquire and expand their HC power, and the second finding portrays the developmental potential of the study’s participants. The first data finding, HC’s Organizational Power Tree offers a visual depiction of the depth and breadth of HC leadership power (Figure 5.1). The tree’s trunk aligns with HC’s career architecture illustrating that power depth, is a function of hierarchical role and responsibility. Starting at the High Band 4 level, the tree’s canopy illustrates increasing breadth of leadership power, resulting from leaders’ ability to influence other
leaders. I color-coded the tree, transitioning from a deep blue to a deep red as an additional detail, where blue represents little power and red the greatest concentration of organizational power. The steps in the diagram illustrate the acquisition of power, first through access to information that converts to cultural capital, then to influence that converts to social capital, and finally to innovation that monetizes a leader’s social and cultural capital and converted to HC power.

The second data finding is a developmental classifications table I developed from extrapolated data (Table 5.1). Here, I used the terms “naturals, potentials,” and “contributors,” to classify the developmental potential of participants based upon the longitudinal data presented in Tables 2.8 and 2.9, in addition to the interview data, which I will present next. While each promising leader is responsible to “choose their own adventure”, the variation in developmental classifications suggests that the program’s pedagogical actions overlook the role of power in participant’s development. I begin this discussion with the tensions surrounding the program’s pedagogy, which fails to complete the transformational development of leadership markers for promising leaders.

I. The Largely Silent Program Pedagogy: Incomplete Development for the HC Way of Executive Leadership

HC’s LDP pedagogy ostensibly involves structure, enablers, and access to executive leaders, seemingly the perfect criteria for developing promising leaders who willingly subscribe to the LDP’s educational transformation. Yet, within the construct of the program’s pedagogy, some promising leaders quickly rise, reaching the Band 5 executive level, while other promising leaders stumble in their progression, specifically during their third rotation. While HC’s LDP curriculum is seemingly transparent, the program’s pedagogical actions do not adequately develop the common leadership markers present in successful HC executive leaders.

HC’s LDP models an educational institution, designed to produce successful executive leaders by linking knowledge, power, socialization, and education in the program’s curriculum. It is an elite program, attracting promising leaders, often from elite MBA programs with the following stated objectives:
Provide a series of opportunities and challenges that create a foundation for a long-term HC (pseudonym) career where leaders must transcend functional silos, share accountability, manage through influence, lead autonomous business segments, drive change, and apply broad organizational learning to fill current and future leadership roles (Helpful Corporation Strategic Program Materials, 2017.)

Yet, the program has struggled to graduate successful actors as Band 5 directors. Assembling a cohort of elite, promising leaders guided through a program’s curriculum should produce the stated objective of the program. Yet, the data suggests missing pedagogical actions necessary for a “democratization” of HC leadership education to assure all elite promising leaders fully develop the common and necessary cultural competencies of HC executive leaders.

**HC leadership markers.** The markers of an HC executive are difficult to detect to the untrained eye and challenging to describe. Even senior level HC leaders offer vague and codified terms when discussing executive level leadership markers, which was apparent during my interview with Nicole, a high-ranking executive and steering committee member. I asked Nicole if there were a set of competencies commonly found amongst successful HC leaders; based upon her quick response, this is likely a common question from aspiring leaders. While her response intends to outline insightful critical markers, it is vague, lacking descriptive details creating a sense of ambiguity involving the traits of successful HC leaders.

Agility, [by that I mean] flexibility. Collaboration is *really important* (italics added), because our industry is complex and nobody knows everything, [which is why] collaboration [is important]. The [other competency is the] ability to take some risk (Nicole, 2017).

I prompted Nicole to expand upon these competencies and compare this list to other industries. Here, she separates collaboration from the other traits, explaining it is specific to the health care industry because of the many stakeholders involved.

The collaboration piece [is unique to the health care industry because] there is a greater need for it than in other industries, since there are so many stakeholders involved, [such as] employers, consumers, producers, the broker community, providers, the physician community, and the regulatory community.

It is very complicated with all these considerations to generate value. [Nicole uses the term value generically to demonstrate that each stakeholder group holds a different perception of value.] To be good at each one of those things and to understand [the stakeholders’ needs] requires many people around the table making decisions (Nicole, 2017).
Initially it appears that Nicole contradicted herself, outlining three key HC leadership competencies and then quickly pointing out this is a complicated and complex industry, suggesting that no one person is capable of driving success. Rather, it involves a team of people, sitting around a table making decisions that drive HC’s success. Instead, her point is that highly skilled collaborative leaders who remain flexible and amendable to risk taking work together to lead HC in a very complex industry.

To understand the steering committee’s perspective on the program, I asked Nicole to speak about the program’s objective. Her response emphasized identification of promising leaders and their developmental acceleration.

The objective of the program is to identify high potential individuals that we can engage (italics added) in our organization to accelerate their exposure to the industry and our company. Accelerate their path to leadership positions where they are able to contribute back to the organization in a broader way. Accelerate [associates] faster than other employees outside the program (Nicole, 2017).

Nearly all participants used the term “accelerated development” to describe the program, yet I did note Nicole’s phrase “we can engage” when referring to herself as a representative of HC’s organization. This terminology suggests that participants experience the transformative expectations of the program conforming to HC’s standards and norms in practice. While this is a leadership development program, the emphasis for change is upon promising leaders who must adopt and model the common HC executive traits, such as agility, collaboration, and risk taking, all missing from the program’s swag bag, materials, and subsequently from the program’s pedagogy (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019).

To analyze the pedagogical tensions, I will apply Jackall’s corporate moral leadership theory to illuminate how the program’s developmental structure fails to transform “high potential individuals” into capable HC executives, “able to contribute back to the organization in a broader way (Nicole, 2017).” Jackall found that Weber’s bureaucracy theory did not adequately apply to American corporate organizations, due to their complex and westernized structure. This resulted in Jackall turning Weber’s bureaucratic theory on its head to produce a bureaucratic theory applicable to corporate leaders (Jackall, 1988). HC’s largely silent LDP pedagogy does not adequately prepare promising leaders to acquire the bureaucratic leadership characteristics common amongst powerful HC executives. Prior to presenting the
pedagogical gaps found in this study, I will first introduce an exemplar or model HC executive who displays the required leadership markers, followed by a discussion of participants who left the program.

The moral career of an HC executive. HC’s leadership program intends to transform promising associates into model executive leaders by “accelerating their leadership trajectory.” The associates’ transformation should produce the presence of important leadership markers, such as agility, collaboration, or risk taking, which are consistent with Jackall’s findings involving decision-making, teamwork, alliances, stretch roles, and luck. Each of these markers enables the growth of leadership power, where “power” is the differentiator between a good leader and a successful leader.

While the program provides the developmental framework necessary for the first two rotations, it lacks the framework for acquiring the HC leadership markers required to build and sustain leadership power. Because the markers are absent in the pedagogy, associates struggle to fully develop the tools necessary to maintain and grow their leadership power, which is a foundational requirement for executive level leaders starting at the Band 5 director level. The pedagogical silence leaves associates dependent upon their mentors, the program directors, or program graduates to teach them how to become influential and powerful leaders.

Even a highly articulate program graduate, such as Jacob, struggled to find the words that describe the process regarding HC leaders’ acquisition of power. During my second interview with Jacob, I asked him to describe an influential HC executive. He responded with his own example, using consensus building as a mechanism for influencing, where the ability to influence others is a sign of leadership power and subsequently reflected as part of their personal record of success.

[I see influence often in] meetings, I lead, where I look for a [specific] decision or a certain type of outcome. If you are able to get that decision, you are able to influence the outcome and accomplish your goal.

Sometimes we make decisions by consensus, gaining consensus can be difficult, yet an influential leader is able to gain consensus. Compare this to someone who is disorganized, not influential, and not familiar with the local politics. They will be unable to achieve their goal.

If you step back and say this leader is influential, you start to look at it in terms of accomplishments. Can the person get things done? Do others consider them successful? Why have they been successful (Jacob, 2017)?
Here, Jacob paused, which is unusual since he was very composed throughout the interviews. When I transcribed this interview, his pause dramatically stood out, suggesting he was wrestling with a thought, questioning whether he should share the following example of Britney, a powerful HC executive leader.

There is a recently promoted leader, Britney (pseudonym used). She has an amazing ability (italics added) to get [support] for accomplishing her goals. Britney gets people to help. [People] who have no direct reason to help her. Her ability to influence the organization has resulted in success for her. Britney accomplishes what she sets out to accomplish. She also accomplishes things that benefit others, within her leadership structure (Jacob, 2017).

I prompted Jacob to say more about his observations, asking why he thinks this leader is able to accomplish what she wants. Jacob has thoughtfully studied this HC executive, discussing his analysis with other trusted leaders, leading him to wonder if Britney’s ability to influence others will result in some kind of cost or consequences to those that get in her way.

I have discussed this with other people. [Britney has a] way that she goes about her leadership, her own style. She is an interesting study. On a scale of passive to assertive to aggressive, Britney would be very assertive, maybe even more than that. I wonder if there is a cost for accomplishing what she accomplishes. Britney has gotten things done that she wanted to do. [When I spoke to others about her] we discussed her style, observed how she works, finding it becomes a blend of tactics, relationships, and her personal style, some of which I think is worth emulating and some of it I would probably approach in a different way (Jacob, 2017).

Jacob’s example portrays an effective and high functioning HC executive whose power continues to grow, built upon a record of accomplishments driven by her influence and connections. What is not clear in this example is whether Britney’s increasing power comes at the expense of other leaders, which may signal the “cost” Jacob questioned. Jacob’s analysis of Britney confirms the presence of critical leadership markers, suggesting agility, collaboration, and risk taking in addition to her aptitude for “playing the game” of leadership power acquisition, a game not everyone is comfortable playing.

Playing the long game. I refer to development of leadership markers as “playing the long game,” since the acquisition and growth of power requires time, strategy, commitment, and personal fortitude. This latter attribute became apparent to Mandy, a former LDP associate who found she did not like “the game,” and chose to leave the organization, near the end of her first rotation. When I asked Mandy her
reason for leaving the LDP, she explained that she realized early that the general manager role, the stated objective of the program, was not a role she wanted because of the social requirements. Instead, Mandy wanted to use her skills to help others develop, as opposed to the competitive self-promotion necessary to succeed.

To be frank, I had a feeling that something was not quite right in everything I was doing. I did not enjoy the work [required by the LDP program] yet [remained in the program] because it was the easy thing to do. I was very skilled in [my role, which] was a good fit, but there was just something missing.

I started having conversations with people to see if there was something at HC [meaningful to me, where I could work closer with] people. [Meaning that helping other employees develop was more important than focusing upon her own accelerated career trajectory.] I realized I really loved helping people.

That is why I made the decision to leave, because the type of role I wanted was not available in that corporate environment. I felt like I had to take a leap and try [something different] because I was not happy and needed to find a better fit (Mandy, 2017).

Early on, Mandy recognized that as part of the LDP, future roles would focus less upon helping others develop and more upon her development. Initially she thought she would stay with the program since it was prestigious and provided a path to a successful career, yet realized it would not make her happy and chose to leave HC and the LDP.

Later in the interview, Mandy returned to the topic of her HC LDP dissatisfaction, stating she was uncomfortable with the constant pressure required to manage the dual expectations of her role and the program. This pressure is an early indicator of the requirements necessary to establish HC’s leadership markers through continuous self-promotion and power acquisition. Associates must remain passionate and committed towards their goal of being an executive level leader, remaining patient when playing the long game required for developing their HC leadership power.

A second participant in the study, Emma, left the program during her second rotation. During our interviews, Emma was an enthusiastic participant, proud of her accomplishments, such as entering the program as one of two internal HC recruits. Initially, I was surprised to learn Emma left the program, but upon further analysis of the interview data, I found several instances where Emma discussed the pressure
of participating in the program and the critical expectations of her cohort members for promoting the LDP’s brand as described in Chapter 4.

As promising leaders, both Mandy and Emma met the threshold criteria expected of LDP participants, yet as program insiders, found the path towards leadership outside of their comfort zone, choosing to look for other opportunities outside of HC. To play the long game, promising leaders must affirm their commitment to the transformational process of HC leadership development leading to organizational power. The process is further complicated due to the ambiguity surrounding critical leadership markers and the program’s pedagogical inability to articulate and guide promising actors’ executive level leadership development, which I discuss next.

**Pedagogical gaps.** While the data collected from steering committee members, described a list of leadership markers, the program itself does little to develop these critical competencies. When I asked Natalie, an LDP steering committee member and HR executive, about the common attributes present in successful HC leaders, she responded with a crisp list, similar to Nicole’s list. Natalie listed the following characteristics: 1) collaboration, 2) insightful decision-making, 3) the ability to manage change, inspire others, and navigate ambiguity. Natalie explained she produced this list from her own study of several hundred HC leadership surveys.

HC’s LDP publicly available materials suggest glimpses of these characteristics using terms such as “managing through influence, motivating others, build upon your established organizational credibility, enhance the business, leave a legacy, and demonstrate your leadership” (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019). Yet, the ambiguity of these characteristics and the program descriptors does not clearly describe the synergistic attribute that is organizational power. As an elite educational and development program, that carefully and deliberately screens its actors, this elite program should produce the best of the best promising leaders pursuing an accelerated trajectory into the leadership pipeline. The program’s curriculum should embody and transparently develop the critical leadership markers as opposed to looking more like a “hidden ball” game, where only the astute and visually adept players are able to discern under which “cup” the ball sits.
These characteristics underscore how leaders acquire power through the manifestation of being a team player, positioned amongst a powerful alliance structure, skilled in the practice of influencing others building a “track record” of good decisions. These markers are not found amongst the program’s curriculum or pedagogy, indicating gaps resulting in tensions between program participants’ and the program’s curriculum (Helpful Corporation LDP Outline, 2019). Next, I will describe each of these markers to show how the structure of HC’s leadership program intends to produce leaders with these attributes yet is ineffective because of the pedagogical gaps. I begin with collaboration, sited as a critical HC leadership marker by members of the program’s steering committee.

**Collaboration: Sponsors and advocates.** The term “collaboration” suggests one leader’s ability to work with another leader to accomplish a shared goal, suggesting a “give and take” approach to reaching a consensus for how to move forward. The reality of organizational life involves competition between leaders, driven to demonstrate their organizational value in order to advance their power. Within HC’s organization, the term “collaboration” instructs powerful leaders to work together at the same time they compete for power. Those that succeed in the “power competition” receive special honors, such as coveted stretch roles and elevated organizational status, in addition to support from their social networks of sponsors and advocates.

“Sponsor” refers to the role executives play to advance the careers of other leaders. These are professional relationships between executives and their protégées in order to leapfrog the bureaucratic promotional structure found in large organizations. In many cases, these executives are now sponsors, who previously benefitted from their own network of sponsors enabling their organizational elevation and access to executive level roles.

The second form of organizational social relationships is “advocacy,” another important professional relationship between leaders. Advocates are important in the early stages of HC leadership development acting as guides for promising leaders, assisting them through organizational matrixes, broadening their networks, and championing their work. “Advocates” are not sponsors, as they do not hold the organizational power to bypass bureaucratic architecture.
For example, using HC’s career architecture, a Low Band 4 LDP associate’s social connections may include a High Band 4 advocate and a Low Band 6 sponsor (See Table 2.4). While the advocate can help the LDP associate navigate the organizational matrix, they have little power to influence future promotional opportunities for the associate who is seeking a Low Band 5 director role. On the other hand, the associate’s sponsor has the power to influence hiring decisions for many Low Band 5 director roles.

While sponsors and advocates are both social arrangements, there are important distinctions between the two. Advocate relationships are easier to develop, and support associates’ professional goals and objectives. Sponsorships are difficult to form and require strategic actions and planning since these leaders hold more organizational power. The data suggests that participants who nurture and develop sponsor relationships is a key differentiator between promising leaders seeking a promotion into a Band 5 role and demonstrated when comparing Josh, a “natural,” to Isabel, a “potential” (Table 5.1). Josh laid the groundwork for sponsorship on Day One, when he had the opportunity to introduce himself to a powerful HC executive, William (pseudonym), who spoke at Josh’s cohort orientation. After the presentation, William joined the cohort for lunch and Josh “networked” with William by arranging a mentoring session, which eventually led to a sponsorship relationship.

Josh seized an opportunity on his first day in the HC LDP to begin building a sponsorship with a powerful HC executive, reminiscent of Jackall’s reference to “luck” due to the coincidence of William joining the cohort for lunch. I asked Josh why he acted so quickly upon building this relationship with William and how did he know this was a good opportunity. While Josh acknowledged his elite MBA education taught him to look for these opportunities, he was cautious in his approach referring to it as a mentoring session knowing that sponsorships require trust and a record of performance. At the least, Josh explained, he could gain important cultural capital by meeting with William.

I wanted to learn more about his role, [using these sessions to] talk about what [he does] and [to use this information] for [my] future rotations, as I prepared for [my next rotation] (Josh, 2017).
I asked Josh how he prepared for these mentoring sessions. He explained that being prepared is critical, as he understands the need to leave a favorable impression, asking intelligent questions, and leading the conversation. I asked Josh to describe these sessions and whether he considers the time is an investment in his development. Josh responded by commenting on his perception of William’s engagement, which suggests that in addition to acquiring cultural capital, Josh observed this executive’s demeanor and behavior as a role model.

I can tell he is really thinking about what he is saying, [which is meaningful, since] he has helped me a lot in my career. It is that opportunity [to meet with him face-to-face,] which is one of the most important things for me because of the network aspect (Josh, 2017).

Josh’s example of his Day One approach to sponsorship left impressed me, so I began looking for other examples where participants recognized the value of sponsorships early in their careers. While many participants spoke of the need to form sponsorships, none began their LDP career with this as an early goal. This differentiated Josh from his peers, suggesting that the program does not adequately “teach” associates about this important leadership marker until later in the program, which is a pedagogical gap since sponsor relationships take time to build trust and respect.

Three months later, during our second interview, I returned to the topic of sponsorship, asking Josh if he characterized his relationship with William as a mentor or sponsor. Before responding to the question, Josh discussed the difficulty when moving from a Band 4 role to a Band 5 director role. In Chapter 4, I referred to this as a presence of an invisible tractor beam, where associates seek assistance that can “pull” them across the threshold separating Band 4 and Band 5 roles. Josh described it as a “leap,” a jump in status that is not automatically granted but earned by associates who model the HC executive moral career.

I feel like the leap between a manager level and a director level is [more than] increasing [your] technical skills. The leap from a manager to a Band 5 director is the amount of sponsorship and relationships that you have, in addition to your track record as a leader.

I know that there are gaps in my leadership ability. That is what is at the top of my mind [in my current role], because I am exposed to all these leaders. In one of my first meetings with William (pseudonym), I asked him, “How can I become a director? What sorts of experiences [do I
need? What type of things do I need to deliver?” This became part of [my] plan, an *intentional* (italics added) part of [my] plan (Josh, 2017).

From the start of his HC career, Josh demonstrates the strategic planning commonly found amongst HC executives and consistent with the “naturals’” experience who graduated the program as Band 5 directors. Josh saw an opportunity to build an alliance with a powerful leader, starting as a mentor and eventually forming a sponsorship. He nurtured this relationship, earning William’s trust by candidly stating his goals and establishing his commitment to excel as a promising leader. Early on, Josh recognized that HC executive leadership markers do not involve mastery of technical skills; they involve the soft skills for influencing and connecting with others.

Isabel, an internal HC LDP recruit, I classified as a “potential” shared her experience for securing a director’s role during her sixth year in the program. Unlike other participants, when I asked Isabel to share her rotational experiences, she started with her promotion into a Band 5 director position, as compared to other participants who listed their rotational experiences in historical order. This is meaningful, as Isabel’s response details her seemingly slow progression to a Band 5 director role in her sixth year, which required two years of networking.

I will be honest; I was ready [to move into my next rotation] at year 4, which is when I started my networking process. It took me 2 years [before receiving a Band 5 offer]. It *really did* (italics added) take me a while.

Isabel continues explaining she remained in this role for 4 years, before moving into another Band 5 director position.

This was my first band 5 director role. As you progress in the company there are definitely less opportunities out there at the [Band] 5 versus the [Band] 4 [level]. I remained in that position for 4 years.

We went through a model shift in the first 2 years [large-scale organizational change]. The second 2 years were just kind of watching the dust settle, with people easing into the new operating model. Four years seems like a lot, when I think of it [referring to the 4 years she remained in her first Band 5 director role] (Isabel, 2017).

Isabel never mentions advocacy or sponsorship throughout the interview. When I asked Isabel about influences upon her leadership development, her response centered on her personal network, access
to information, and career accountability. While Isabel achieved her goal of becoming a Band 5 director, she remains at this level. In the absence of a sponsor, it appears her progression stalled.

Sponsorships are clearly valued as an HC leadership marker as confirmed by Nicole and Natalie and consistent with the attributes found amongst the “naturals” (Table 5.1). Rebecca, the program director, disclosed that she received sponsorship requests from a few associates requesting the “program’s assistance.” Her tone conveyed a sense of surprise regarding these requests and her response expressed dismay that tenured associates requested the program director’s assistance in forming sponsorships.

We have [a few associates] who have been in the program more than 5-7 years who are not yet at a Band 5 director level. They do not want to exit the program yet and want sponsorship from a senior leader. They have asked for my assistance with this. [These associates] want to have that [powerful] support to get to that [next] level, because they are not satisfied where they are currently (Rebecca, 2018).

This request demonstrates the pedagogical program gap involving collaboration, a critical HC leadership marker demonstrated through the presence of sponsorships. Another important leadership marker is one’s professional record of HC accomplishments.

**Decision-Making: Track record of HC performance.** According to HC’s HR materials, individuals that reach the Band 5 director position lead through strategic thought and action, recognized as such when the leader enhances a business, “leaving a legacy” for others to follow (Helpful Corporations Strategic Program Materials, 2017). A business legacy requires leaders known for their decision-making prowess producing a record of accomplishments benefiting the organization. Several participants refer to this as a leader’s “track record,” a term I will use throughout this section. Nicole used the term “decision-making agility” suggesting flexibility and creativity, and describing an executive competency to formulate smart decisions, which then become part of their track record.

The process of decision-making generally involves delegation, with “parts” of a decision distributed amongst different units and leaders. The quality of decisions, then evaluated by other organizational leaders who consider the context and results. For example, if HC identifies a need for a new health care product, decision-making for that product involves many different areas of the organization some of which include the Legal and Pricing departments. The Legal department’s decision-
making considers only the legal ramifications based upon laws and policies in effect for the geographical market. The Pricing department’s decision-making considers only factors involving how to price the product for HC to realize a profit. The quality of the overall decision reflects the decision’s components such that the track records of the respective leaders responsible for Legal or Pricing results reflect their role in the decision.

Leadership decision making is a consistent theme throughout the data collected and an important marker of leaders’ track records. For this discussion, I will compare data collected from Ryan, a “natural,” with that of Emma, who I would have classified as a “contributor” prior to her decision to leave HC near the end of her first rotation (Table 5.1). For instance, I asked Ryan, a Band 5 program graduate to describe what types of decisions he makes in his role, to which he discussed the significance of strategic decisions since they involve uncertainty, suggesting leaders must be agile in their ability to think through meaningful consequences.

When you are an [executive] leader, the decisions you make are in spaces where there is a lot of uncertainty. [For example,] going into a new business area that we have never been in before is different from [making a decision] about closing an office.

I view leadership as setting the direction in these new spaces. Decision-making happens in many different flavors in terms of its complexity. When those decisions get more complicated, ambiguous, or risky is where real leadership comes into play (Ryan, 2018).

I prompted Ryan to say more about his own organizational decision-making experiences by asking how he allocates time between tactical and strategic decision-making. As an executive leader, Ryan spends an equal amount of time managing tactical and strategic decisions, yet disagrees with this ratio, finding that strategic decisions should consume a greater amount of his time.

[My current ratio] is not the right split. It should be 80/20 with 80 [percent of my time spent on] strategic decision-making. The more you think about the future and plan for it, the more it helps you downstream [reducing] tactical fire drills to address [strategic decisions]. Many of the tactical fire drills are a symptom of not spending enough time on strategy and planning (Ryan, 2018).

Ryan’s response suggests that leaders must possess mental agility as strategic thought leaders, yet in his role, he spends too much time on tactical decision-making.
During our interviews, Emma, an internal HC recruit, returned frequently to the topic of leadership decision-making, noting the different levels of decision-making between a manager and a director, where managerial decisions typically involve tactical leadership and director level decisions involve strategic leadership. When asked about her role in decision-making, Emma shared her experience regarding a tactical decision involving the addition of new staff to her team.

I requested that we bring on two new employees. [I did this by] showing if we do not receive approval for the resources, there would be consequences [for our department] following that decision and would affect [our image.] I [knew that I] could not go in [to my boss’s office] and state, “This is what I want.” I would need to [demonstrate the impact of not hiring two new employees.]

You have to say, “This is what I want and this is the expected outcome if I [get what I need as opposed] to the outcomes [if we do not hire.]” That way the person making the decision can know what success or failure looks like. I think that is the best way to influence the outcome that you want (Emma, 2017).

I prompted Emma to see if she could provide an example of strategic decision-making. Her response described a chance encounter with a high-ranking executive in the cafeteria, who recognized her as an LDP associate. Rather than providing an example of her strategic decision-making, Emma referred to an interaction with a very senior level HC leader. Emma refers to this experience as “having a conversation,” a ubiquitous HC term used to describe scheduled or sporadic interactions. Here, she focused upon the hierarchical nature of HC’s organizational structure and the need to demonstrate respect for a high-ranking HC leader.

You have to keep the person, their influence, their power, their position in mind whenever you have these conversations. You want to be respectful of who they are [when having] an organic conversation.

When I run into people organically like that, I keep who they are in mind. If it is somebody who is equal to me, the conversation will be very different than if it is somebody above me. It will be more respectful, [cautious to not appear] too friendly, because they may not be expecting it. You do not want to [catch them off guard] since they expect people to behave in a certain way (Emma, 2017).

As one of the two internal employees that entered this program, Emma’s focus on hierarchy and tactical decision-making suggests that, her pre-LDP experience imprinted these decision-making “rules” upon her
to the point she could not erase the framework of hierarchical decision-making, limiting her ability to become a strategic and powerful thought leader, able to influence other leaders.

**Influence: The cornerstone of organizational power.** Organizational power is a limited resource, requiring HC leaders to be alert, finding new ways to expand their power fields. Leaders must be willing to work together for a common cause yet maintain their power. In Chapter 4, I presented data from Natalie, an LDP steering committee member, able to discern recruits’ MBA programs based upon their demonstrated cultural capital, which also opens the door to leadership development programs.

Natalie pointed out that leaders must ask each other “for favors” by “connecting and influencing” one another, suggesting the need for leaders to work closely together, building relationships, expanding their power fields, and developing sponsorships in which to barter their social and cultural capital. For example, a leader may have an innovative idea to address a client’s request but lacks the resources to test that idea. This leader must find another leader who has the resources to support the work and then influence that leader to allocate the necessary resources for testing the idea.

Associate participants’ spoke frequently about the importance of being able to influence others, aware that influence is a sign of power. I compared associate data to graduate data finding the latter spoke frequently about their roles as influencers and connectors. While this may appear similar, it becomes an important distinction for achieving success.

Whereas associates spoke of the ability to influence as a skill, graduates spoke of influence as a function of their role, demonstrating another gap in the program’s pedagogy. In Goffman’s terms, viewing their role as influencers rather than influence as an acquired skill should be a key part of their moral career development in the early years of the LDP. Using Bourdieu’s terms, the role of influencer requires social and cultural capital as opposed to influencing skills resulting in the acquisition of social and cultural capital. Acquiring social and cultural capital is necessary, yet the more important aspect involves knowing how to barter or trade this capital for organizational power.

For example, three associates spoke about acquiring influence, such as Emma who described organizational power as a leader’s ability to influence other people’s decisions. Josh used the terms
authority and influence to describe organizational power, finding that influence is more important than authority. Ben, a more seasoned associate discussed his strategy for acquiring credible influence by working with senior leaders, who later treated him as a quasi-peer when consulting with him.

This is different from graduate Band 5 participants, who discussed influence in terms of their roles. These participants spoke about assembling their power structures in advance of their promotions to Band 5 director positions, suggesting that power structures are living organisms requiring continual nourishment. Here, the relevant nourishment occurs through ideas and actions that become part of the leaders’ moral career, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Executive leaders must guide and steer their divisions, innovating products, and ideas. This was a point of rich data collection during my interview with Ryan, a “natural,” now a High Band 5 leader, who discussed organizational power and the significance of innovation. I asked Ryan what actions he takes to maintain and expand his power, finding that he views innovation as the key to his success.

Being innovative resonates well within HC (pseudonym). I do not mean creating something shiny that has no purpose; instead, I mean a new way of doing something. If you combine a new way of doing something that drives value in the market that differentiates us, people believe your business case, [and you] get the required buy-in [or support of other leaders] (Ryan, 2018).

I probed this comment by asking how one gains buy-in from other leaders. Ryan responded with what appears to be a common HC example involving proactive actions to assure consensus during meetings, which then becomes more or less ceremonial activity to collect the needed support. His example suggests the actual meeting is symbolic, a ritualistic gathering of power players who come together only to illuminate their power fields amongst their peers.

[In order to gain consensus for an idea] I need to meet with 50 people at different levels of the organization, to get them in my corner, [and support my idea]. I do this prior (italics added) to going into the meeting [where we will decide whether to move forward or not]. At this point, the meeting is more of a formality. It is the [actions I took] leading up to the meeting, where a lot of the critical influence is done (Ryan, 2018).

This an important point Ryan makes about influence. Influence is not generally a moment-in-time action or response that happens during a meeting. Rather it requires the subtle work of connecting with the right people, pitching ideas in a way that compels other leaders to support each other’s decisions.
As associates become more experienced, practicing the markers of executive leaders, they build relationships with leaders whose power fields are strong. In this way, the associates’ relationship with power players allows them to establish their power fields, which become a conduit for promoting their ideas and practicing their backstage influencing techniques while learning to navigate ambiguity.

**Ambiguity: Making sense of the white space.** One of my data sources for this study included a PowerPoint deck, developed by the program director, Rebecca in preparation for an upcoming strategy discussion with the LDP’s steering committee. The materials included content previously developed by the previous program director, Barbara, now edited by Rebecca to establish her moral career as the LDP director. The materials describe the philosophy of the program and its focus upon developing 10 critical competencies to produce competent general managers. The first competency is the ability to manage and embrace ambiguity describing it as the ability to “thrive within white space,” by making good decisions with limited resources (Helpful Corporation Strategic Program Materials, 2017). It is telling that the program’s priority is to produce leaders comfortable within a state of ambiguity, suggesting a tacit desire to factor in “white space” within the program’s rituals.

In chapter 4, I discussed associates’ role selections, finding that ambiguous or stretch roles enhance the associates’ brand. Associates that demonstrate tolerance for white space, learn to make meaning from their roles, positively managing the impressions of their audience, and later awarded new stretch assignments with increased responsibilities, leading to further promotions. This was the case for Alex, a “natural” who successfully mastered each new stretch assignment, opening new doors leading to the director’s chair by his fourth rotation.

Early in the interview process, I met with Alex a highly successful LDP graduate, whose moral career continues to propel him forward in terms of HC roles. I asked Alex to describe his program experience to which he candidly spoke about his experiences and strategy for seeking stretch roles, being careful to select roles that involved ambiguity, yet allowed him to make sense of the “white space.”

I found the [LDP] to be a “choose your own adventure” [experience, where] you get out of it, what you put into it. I look at career development as experiential [where I begin by asking myself,] “What competencies and experiences am I looking for?”
I have taken every role based upon experiences, starting with my second role, since I did not have a lot of say in my first role. Beginning with Rotation 2, I had complete (italics added) control (Alex, 2017).

Alex is referring to the program’s practice of assigning new associates to their first role based upon their skills and experiences. While the data suggests some tensions with the assignment of the first role, Alex’s response suggest his decision to view this as an opportunity that he now controls leading him to be more selective with his career progression. He continues discussing his program experience and types of experience he felt were important for each rotation.

I was looking for people and vendor management, plus some change management. I looked at the experiences I was seeking and my second role checked all the boxes. When I was looking for my next role, I really needed to get a broader enterprise-wide experience, so I took [a role] as the face of a portfolio process that [reported to a senior level leader.] [I viewed this role as influential since the portfolio process] delivers all the capabilities [such as tools and systems, and new ways of servicing customers] (Alex, 2017).

There are important aspects hidden beneath Alex’s role selection as the face of the portfolio process that are not obvious from his description. As the “face” of the portfolio process, he is on the cutting edge of making decisions that impact other leaders. He has power over resource allocations and determines which projects receive HC support, and when the work will be completed. He is exposed to a wide array of leaders who are dependent upon him to support their requests, which generates a lot of social capital he can later use when selecting his next role.

I took my next role because of the external facing experience. I am very involved with external distribution which added a couple new [experiential] check marks (Alex, 2017).

Throughout this discussion, Alex used the term “check” frequently to convey an image of a checklist he keeps to track of his experiences completed or still on his to-do list. Each time he gains the needed experience, he “checks” it off his list. With each role change, Alex challenged himself to seek new experiences involving a “new adventure,” entering a new business area, immersed in ambiguity. He strategically enhances his influence and power by navigating the “white space” surrounding his new experiences.
This is consistent with the extrapolated data presented earlier in this chapter (see Table 5.1). For example, I classified Alex, Jacob, Luke, and Ryan as “naturals,” since they spoke openly about the need to take career risks through challenging stretch roles. By comparison, I classified Nick and Jack as “contributors,” since they expressed frustration with the program, feeling the program provided little guidance for identifying and selecting rotations. While both were critical about this issue, Nick poignantly stated the program director misled him with false promises involving development and professional support. When I asked Nick to describe his HC LDP experience, his response became quite expressive, emphasizing specific words.

It was sold to me as a [program that included] a lot of development leading up to each rotation. I used the words “sold to me” because when I first [joined the LDP,] there was really [no development in place] (italics added).

Later in my career, [the program was] led by a different director, and I saw the LDP evolve. It certainly was not always there. It fluctuates at times, how much [development and support] actually exists within the program (Nick, 2017).

Earlier in the interview, Nick stated he chose HC’s LDP offer, declining a different offer from another health care organization. After weighing his options, he chose HC’s offer since the rotations were longer in nature, allowing him to learn more about a business unit before moving to another role. At this point, I wondered if Nick regretted his decision to join HC, because his experience did not match the development and support described by the program director, a critical role for the development of promising leaders, which I will return to later in this chapter.

The comparison of the two groups finds that the “naturals” believe it to be their responsibility for securing stretch roles by “learning the ropes” whereas the “contributors” faulted the program for not teaching them how to leverage rotations for advancement. What is consistent is that all participants experienced an immersion into ambiguity when changing roles, yet, the “naturals” developed their own “coping mechanisms” to thrive in white space completing their “adventures,” and earning their Band 5 director roles.
Summary

In this section, I discussed how the HC’s LDP program is pedagogically silent upon development of critical HC leadership markers required for establishing and growing promising leaders’ power fields. I introduced Britney a powerful HC leader, who holds an impressive leadership record; she is well known and deeply connected within the organization. Britney’s moral career described as a leader who “gets things done,” is a model HC executive. Yet, some leaders, such as Jacob questioned her methods for growing her power field, wondering if there is an intrinsic cost incurred by others. Britney’s leadership style models all the HC leadership power markers such as forming sponsorships, presenting a distinguished decision-making record, being an influencer, and a risk taker, all required for crossing the threshold between the Band 4 and Band 5 director positions.

I discussed each leadership marker starting with sponsorship, then decision-making, influence, and finally the ability to tolerate ambiguity demonstrating why these markers are valued at the HC executive leadership level. I showed that the program’s pedagogical actions are largely silent for developing the leadership markers, where only astute participants, such as the “naturals” decipher the “code” for unlocking the development of these markers. “Potentials,” are able to discern some of these markers, but in absence of the program’s pedagogy, they will struggle to acquire all of the necessary HC leadership markers. The scenario worsens for “contributors” who may acquire one or more of these markers, without realizing the interwoven value of all markers. Throughout this section, I frequently compared the data collected from “naturals” to “contributors” and “potentials” to illustrate the pedagogical silence.

As presented earlier in this chapter the program’s stated objective is to create a foundation for leaders to overcome “functional silos, share accountability, influence others, drive change, and apply their learnings” as general managers. Yet, the pedagogy that guides the curriculum and promising leaders’ development produces a significant variation in these leadership outputs from the “naturals” to the “contributors.” As an elite program, the pedagogy should drive the curriculum to deliver a consistent set
of leadership outputs within a defined period, or in Bourdieu’s terms, reproduce the desired social leadership class by reinforcing the cultural competencies required for model HC leaders.

There remains a great deal of mystery surrounding associates’ progression to an executive level leadership role. While some associates seem to discover the HC leadership markers missing from the program’s pedagogy, other associates do not detect the need to integrate these markers into their social and cultural capital. As Olivia found, it is not enough to do “good work,” promising leaders must be perceptive, able to identify all the required markers for acquiring and expanding HC executive level power, this is not how an elite program that recruits top-tier promising leaders from elite MBA programs should work. I will now discuss the second barrier that impedes LDP development, the role of the program director.

II. The Confused Role of Program Director: Churn, Turn, and Burn

The HC’s LDP program director role is responsible for playing two parts in the scripted drama, the first as a personal agent and the second as an aspiring actor. The first role responsible for the development of program associates, acting as their “personal agent,” a person dedicated to securing and promoting the best interests of their clients. The second role is that of an HC employee who enters the organization at the Low Band 4 level and holds his or her own professional advancement goals. I will use the terms “personal agent” and “program director” interchangeably throughout this section, as such the theatrical or organizational context allows.

The program director’s role oversees HC’s LDP operations, strategy, and associates’ development. As the associates’ personal agent, the director oversees the set design and scripts, ensuring that influential audiences attend these LDP performances. Personal agents hold challenging roles due to the number of actors they represent and the variability of their clients’ performances, which reflects upon the program director’s moral career. If actors perform well, they elevate the program’s brand and their agent’s moral career. If actors struggle, this reflects poorly on the program’s brand and their agent’s moral career.
In recent years, new program directors began their HC career as Band 4 Career Professionals; the same as the associates they direct (Table 2.4). The difference here is with the personal agent’s alignment to the Talent Management organization, whose career paths generally remain within the field of Human Resources, as opposed to their clients’ whose roles align with general manager roles. For individuals interested in the field of Talent Management, leading the LDP offers a promising career, since they can demonstrate their aptitude for talent development while leading the program. In this section, I will show three factors that produce tensions resulting from the director’s role that influences associates’ development. These factors include program director turnover, changing strategic directions, and the unbalanced demands placed upon the program director.

Program director turnover. One of the challenges for program directors is the length of time associates remain in this program, an average of five to seven years. While the program structure has remained consistent over time, there have been many personal agent changes as shown in Table 5.2. Starting with Robert, who led the program for approximately seven years (2006-2013), his tenure produced significant turmoil, followed by four more leadership changes over the next five years, from 2013 through 2018.

For some associates recruited by Robert, such as Jack and Nick, they experienced five different program directors while active associates. Each program director change resulted in shifting strategic directions affecting the program’s culture. Participants spoke frequently about these leadership changes, some using the term “revolving door” to describe the constant stream of new program leadership.

Table 5.2
*HC LDP Program Directors’ Tenure and Reason for Leaving the Role*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Director</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Reason for Leaving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
<td>Terminated from HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Interim Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>Promoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>13 months*</td>
<td>Lateral Move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne (current)</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>12+months</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Rebecca’s tenure includes a leave of absence, effectively reducing her time in role*
Included in Table 5.2 are pseudonyms for the Personal Agents and the reason why they left the role, or in Robert’s case, the organization. Robert was an active recruiter known for his ability to “sell” the program, yet was not committed to associate development, which resulted in his termination. Participants recruited by Robert spoke highly of his recruiting skills but were critical of his ability for developing associates. Jennifer, a Human Resources executive, removed Robert, stepped in as the interim leader, and recruited Robert’s replacement. Participants referred to this period as “cleaning house,” since Jennifer evaluated all participants recruited by Robert to determine whether they should remain HC promising leaders. Alex, who was a participant at this time, recalls that some associates left the program, while other associates left HC.

Jennifer’s objective as the interim leader was to recruit a program director able to direct the program and develop the talent. Barbara met Jennifer’s criteria with extensive knowledge and experience in Talent Management and Organizational Development. All participants spoke highly of Barbara’s leadership noting her focus upon talent development, (the stated objective of the LDP). I first approached Barbara in the fall of 2016 regarding the possibility of conducting a case study of HC’s LDP. I found Barbara an enthusiastic supporter of the dissertation process and the opportunity for promising leaders to practice their reflective leadership.

Within two years as the LDP program director, Barbara became impressive enough to cause her elevation to a Band 5 director role, resulting in another change in program directors. Barbara’s successor, Rebecca, was in many ways similar to Barbara. Rebecca’s background included experience in Talent Management, specifically leadership development. At the time of data collection, LDP participants were not able to provide much insight into Rebecca’s leadership since they did not have enough experience working with her to assess her aptitude as a personal agent.

However, in November 2018, Rebecca informed me she was moving to a different Talent Management role outside of the program. Following Rebecca’s departure, another director, Suzanne, stepped in to fill the role. From my research on LinkedIn, it appears Suzanne’s experience includes...
leading an HC undergraduate leadership development program prior to taking over HC’s LDP at the High
Band 4 level, suggesting this was a promotional opportunity for Suzanne.

Since 2006, only Jennifer and Barbara eventually reached the Band 5 director roles. Jennifer
already held this role when she stepped in as the interim director, with Barbara accomplishing this step
upon her promotion to a Band 5 director role. However, both Jennifer and Barbara stepped away from the
program, as Band 5 leaders, when Jennifer returned to her HR role and Barbara to her new leadership
role, in effect it meant they left the program director role just when they had attained the status of an HC
elder and able to offer extremely valuable insight for associates. Instead, Jennifer and Barbara positioned
themselves further away from the program, and the subsequent program directors (Rebecca and Suzanne)
began their HC careers. In programmatic terms, the departure of Band 5 directors affected the LDP’s
ability to function as an executive leadership development program, which I will discuss further in this
chapter.

*The personal agents’ revolving door.* When starting the interview process, I focused upon the
associates’ developmental experiences, with no questions involving the role of their program director.
Early in the process, I noted a theme surfacing during program graduates’ interviews that concerned the
program’s leadership, so I began to look deeper at this issue. The issue first appeared during my second
interview when I asked Alex about feedback he received while in the program. I classified Alex as a
“natural” since he graduated at the Band 5 director role during his fourth rotation, subsequently moving
into a higher-level leadership position. Alex viewed professional feedback critical to his development
and responded to my question by referring to Robert, Jennifer, and Barbara in sequential order.

Starting with Robert, he received no feedback on his performance in the program. That changed
after Robert’s termination and Jennifer’s turn as the personal agent. Jennifer’s first order of business
involved assessing the LDP talent. Once she completed her assessment, she provided meaningful
feedback to all associates. In some cases, the feedback directed the associate to leave the program and, in
some cases, leave HC. Alex continued by reflecting on Barbara’s leadership, noting that the feedback he
received further improved.
During this interview, I noted Alex’s subconscious physical gestures whenever he mentioned Robert’s name. He flashed a subtle smile, followed with a slight shake of his head, as if to suggest Robert’s inaptitude as the program director. Alex summarized his program experience by stating he was fortunate to have received a lot of feedback resulting from the leadership changes, and that the feedback was meaningful to his development.

Later in the interview, Alex returned to the topic of Robert when responding to my final question regarding the program’s culture. To answer this question, Alex again focused on the program leadership, its changes, and impact upon the program’s culture, describing it as fractured.

[The last cohort recruited by Robert] abhorred [him as] the program director. They felt they were misled by him. He filled their heads full of these lofty expectations that were never going to be realized. They felt he was inept.

I think the reality with Robert was that he was a really, really (italics added) good recruiter. That was his career background and core abilities. Once he got you in the door, he was not focused on or adept at the development of individuals (Alex, 2017).

Alex paused briefly, shifting his focus away from the program director role per se, to the LDP participants’ responsibility for driving their own success.

For me, I feel that it is everyone’s responsibility [to manage their career]. It’s not Robert’s problem that you are not having a good time in your first rotation. [Field notes comment: Alex’s voice projects sarcasm, with notable changes to his facial expressions and hand gestures, indicating frustration with associates who look to the program director to resolve their unhappiness.] That’s your (italics added) problem. But they blamed him for it. A fair number of them tag-teamed and got him fired. They went to his boss, Jennifer (pseudonym) and made life very uncomfortable and he ended up not being here anymore.

That created what I saw as a schism in the program. I do not think there were any Robert loyalists by any stretch, but there were a number [of associates] who felt that situation was handled unprofessionally, causing us to be pretty fractured.

Then we went through this period with Jennifer, who cleaned house. Several [associates] were underperforming and are no longer with [HC]. A couple of people that were struggling left the program, but stayed at HC. I personally feel like that needed to happen. And then Barbara (pseudonym) came in and started to rebuild the program (Alex, 2017).

By most accounts, most associates interviewed spoke highly of Robert’s ability to recruit, but that is where the compliments end. As Alex found, subsequent leadership changes solved issues with Robert’s inability to develop talent, yet left the culture fractured and broke the trust amongst the
associates. Other associates included in Robert’s final recruiting class, such as Nick felt that Robert sold him a “bag of crap” since the program did not resemble what Robert promised. Nick expected a personalized development plan created by Robert, but instead found a revolving door of program directors.

Jennifer, already an HR executive, considered it her responsibility to look at the associates recruited by Robert to validate if they measured up to HC’s leadership criteria. Her successor, Barbara, also a person with strong professional Talent Management experience, focused upon the professional development Robert had ignored and rebuilt the fractured culture, which she accomplished, according to all participants. The result was a cohesive and trusting culture; but that also proved temporary, when Barbara, and then her successor Rebecca left following a brief period directing HC’s LDP.

The HC LDP program director revolving door has been actively swinging since 2013. While Robert’s tenure as program director was the longest, the data suggests his leadership did little to build the program’s brand and reputation within HC, resulting in the data segmentation based upon cohort years as prior to 2013 and after 2013 (See Tables 2.8 and 2.9). Upon Robert’s termination, HC’s program strategy indicates a definite commitment to the program’s developmental investment, shifting the focus away from exclusively recruiting promising leaders, to recruiting and developing promising leaders. I will return throughout this chapter to this important theme.

**Shifting strategic directions and managing expectations.** Participants in the study offered deep, rich details surrounding the program’s direction under each agent’s leadership. Robert’s strategic vision was to recruit associates, get them in the door, and let them figure out their development. Jennifer picked up the broken promises and accompanying disillusionment from Robert’s tenure, bringing in a new leader with a sound vision. Barbara’s vision centered on development, going deep into the Talent Management playbook by adding a series of professional assessments, introduced by trained consultants, able to offer personalized insight and guidance to the actors as a result of their developmental needs. These consultants were certified experts covering a range of tools such as StrengthsFinders, Hogan Assessment, or 360 Assessment, to name a few. In this way, associates received personalized development based upon
their assessment results. Barbara’s protégée, Rebecca, planned to continue this trend by adding new assessments. However, she was not in the position long enough to make these changes.

HC’s LDP grew significantly under Barbara’s leadership; adding 17 promising leaders to the associate pool (see Tables 2.5a and 2.5b). Thus, Rebecca took over a much larger program, involving multiple cohorts, with some associates entering their sixth year of program participation with no clear path to graduation. Rebecca’s strategy was to emphasize associate development while limiting program growth, which she explained to me when I asked her about her biggest barrier for leading the program.

I will be honest with you, for me the size of the new class, the 11. This is going to be tough, because they are going to be very proactive since they are all aspiring leaders. In July, the majority of them will hit their one-year mark. I know they are going to be looking for rotations.

I think managing their expectations that developmentally [some roles] might not make the most sense [is a big barrier.] Locating those rotations that are developmentally appropriate for their next rotation [will be challenging.] The size of this [cohort] is the biggest challenge for me in 2018. [Meaning that much of her time required working across HC to locate good roles, advocate for the associates, and coach them on locating their next roles (Rebecca, 2018).]

Rebecca continued discussing the need to scale back future cohort sizes in order to facilitate the development of current associates. She realized this might be a risky decision; one that LDP participants may not agree is the right step. Reducing cohort size results in less recruiting opportunities, which is an important program enabler, viewed positively by all associates in their first two rotations.

[Then, the next] challenge is to figure out [the right] size [of the] program. The barrier might be [with associates and graduates uncomfortable] with scaling back [the program’s size]. [I want them to] enjoy the program for what it is and slow down the recruiting. That might feel unnatural, it might be a barrier for moving forward (Rebecca, 2018).

Rebecca points to cohort size as her biggest challenge as program director. This is telling, since her biggest challenge was Barbara’s accomplishment to grow the program. The program’s rapid growth becomes Rebecca’s most pressing issue since she must assure associates have the support they need to locate meaningful challenges for their next rotations. This is certainly an important aspect since associates need stretch assignments, assisted by a network of mentors interested in their development. Without the proper support, associates may get lost in the organization, unable to secure the right sponsors or unable to leverage the program’s enablers.
Another objective Rebecca shared involved preparing some associates for graduation, as a way to reduce the number of active LDP participants. In a follow-up conversation near the end of 2018, when she informed me she was stepping down from her program director role, I inquired if any associates graduated from the program in 2018, to which she responded “No.” With recent changes in Rebecca’s position, it appears that the challenges she inherited were too much for her to handle.

While the program places expectations upon the associates, the associates in turn place expectations upon their “agent.” Several participants spoke about the pressures associates placed upon the director. When I asked Jacob about unexpected barriers or surprises he experienced as a program associate, he discussed the difficulty inherent in the program director’s role and the need to manage associates’ expectations.

I think that managing expectations is a challenge that we will always be dealing with in this kind of program. Over the course of my time as an associate, there were periods where the associates wanted to change elements of the program. We got distracted, coming together as program associates behind the scenes and developing ideas to promote program changes.

There was a period where there was dissatisfaction with the prior program director [Robert]. Part of what we were doing was trying to increase the pressure on that individual to change their approach, to change the role, to change the program [sic]. It became a distraction for us from our day jobs. It was a disruptive period for all of us (Jacob, 2017).

In Jacob’s experience, the associates took it upon themselves to manage their own expectations by changing the program and creating a new vision, one they felt was lacking under Robert’s leadership. In doing so, the associates were distracted from their professional roles at HC, which likely affected their role performances.

In the end, the associates were successful in “overthrowing” Robert as the program director, eventually leading to two successors who viewed the program as an HC asset that required attention and direction. The first of these, Barbara, expanded the program by increasing the number of associates. However, nearly all the participants referenced the size of the 2017 cohort, citing it as a program risk, because it nearly doubled the previous year’s cohort. It also greatly expanded the level of support needed from Barbara’s successor Rebecca if the number of viable roles required for subsequent rotations was possible.
Unbalanced demands. While the role of LDP program director is prestigious in Talent Management circles, the role comes with inherent conflicts that challenge the agent’s ability to produce talent assets and manage program perceptions within HC. The program director role “brokers” conversations with other leaders, shaping perceptions, promoting the program, and assisting associates with their job searches. Because the program requires role changes every 12-24 months, HC managers have a perception that associates are “temporary” employees or costly short-term investments, since the manager will need to fill that role in the near future. The director is responsible to change this perception, convincing managers that associates will add value that remains after they move to their next rotation. The director’s multifaceted role requires a delicate balance between promoter, supporter, and broker necessary to shape the program’s narrative and brand.

I found graduates empathizing with the program director’s role, as they reflected upon their program experiences, recognizing the inherent challenge involved for managing LDP stakeholder expectations, such as associates, hiring managers, and the program’s steering committee. At one point, Alex spoke about the challenge of being the program director and the difficulty of “serving multiple masters,” suggesting a precarious balance when satisfying these stakeholders. As he spoke about this topic, he wondered how the director could juggle these demands with the current number of participants in the program.

When I asked Jacob about program barriers, he responded by discussing the role of the program director, speaking about the ambiguity surrounding the role and the inherent challenges. Jacob, a program graduate and Band 5 director, is a reflective and insightful leader, whose responses consistently described important HC leadership markers, which is why I classify Jacob as a “natural.” His initial response addressed the program director’s role, ending with a critical commentary upon the associates’ role and their dependency upon their agent.

I bring to light that there is always a question [about the role of the program] leader, who is also viewed as a champion for the program associates. It can be challenging to be that champion to all people, all the time. There is an expectation [of this role as the associates’ champion], a proven part of what [others believe] this person does. [Jacob implies that associates expect the program director’s role is to focus solely on their development and career progression.]
I think the leader in that role, feels a bit differently. The [program] leader has different incentives and goals (Jacob, 2017).

Jacob points out a gap in expectations between associates and the program director, where associates believe the program director role should center on their needs, yet the program director believes their role is to center on the organization’s needs. To emphasize this point that the program director is a champion of the program and not so much the individual associates, Jacob uses a series of rhetorical questions, to portray the different perspectives of the director’s role.

Is the leader there to serve [HC] leadership and [connect potential] leadership to talent when they need it? [Is their role to] be a conduit and (italics added) a connector? Is the leader there to serve the associates in the program, endorse them, and push them to accept bigger roles than they would find otherwise? There are different [perspectives of] the leader’s [role] (Jacob, 2017).

Then Jacob returns to his experience as a program associate and his conviction that associates, including himself, are responsible for their own development. This sense of personal accountability he conveys is another HC leadership marker, that of “owning” your results.

At times, it became clear that we [program associates] are the primary champions of our own career, regardless of the support of the program. That is the point I am making. When you come in [to the LDP] and say this program has centralized support and built-in champions surrounding me to become successful, that is true.

The [program director] opens doors, they create structure, force focus, and set priorities, which is helpful. There are times when they will not be our champions and we need to be own champion, pushing the organization, pushing ourselves, and pushing others if we want to make a case for progress, opportunity, or candidacy (Jacob, 2017).

Jacob understands the program director’s imbalanced demands, which include developing promising leaders, managing organizational perceptions, and addressing different sets of expectations. Yet, Jacob specifically calls out the need for associates to be personally accountable for their results. This was a consistent theme across those program graduates I classified as “naturals”, those recruited prior to 2013. This suggests these participants were successful because of their professional aptitude for decoding the process and developing the moral career of HC Band 5 leaders. Not all program associates shared this perspective; rather they view the program director as their enabler, tasked with helping them achieve their goals. While in the program, associates expect their agent to represent them, treating them as their most
important client, helping them secure the right roles, and positioning the audience to capture strong performances, resulting in standing ovations.

Summary

In this section, I discussed the role of the program director, also referred to as the “personal agent,” starting with the many leadership changes affecting the program’s vision and strategy. I looked at the program’s strategic shift, starting with recruiting classes after 2013, when the program transitioned from a recruiting only emphasis to a developmental focus. Since 2013, the program has maintained its developmental focus, yet has experienced four leadership changes, resulting in changing leadership directions, further complicating the LDP associates’ experiences. I completed this discussion by looking at the role of the program director and the inherent difficulty for “serving multiple masters,” and managing associates’ expectations. I will now discuss the tensions surrounding the program’s attributes preventing the completion of the rite of passage from promising leader to Band 5 director.

III: A Spoiled Rite of Passage

HC’s LDP develops promising leaders as general managers, a role that drives change across an array of business segments and developing enterprise strategy (Helpful Corporation Strategic Program Materials, 2017). These are versatile leaders able to step into the spotlight on short notice, direct a variety of scenes, and then move to another part of the business when needed. General Managers must remain undaunted by challenging, complex, or ambiguous situations; their moral career reflects a take-charge, go-to leader that others rely upon to get the job done. They are considered the “it” leader who can handle anything.

The leadership markers of HC general managers require a blend of skills to meet the demands for stepping into new roles, quickly learning the business, then driving improved results, the type of experience associated with Jackall’s stretch roles. A general manager’s playbook includes knowledge acquired from an MBA program and accrued stretch experiences. While the LDP provides developmental leadership guidance to the associates towards becoming a general manager, the program
does not explain “how” associates complete the program ritual, in this case, moving from a Band 4 manager to a Band 5 director, often leading to an extended state of actor liminality.

This section will analyze LDP tensions in anthropological terms, as an example of a flawed rite of passage. As noted in Chapter 1, liminality is an anthropological term referring to an individual positioned between two classifications, inferring a state of ambiguity (Turner, 1969). Generally, liminality refers to the ambiguous space between beginning and concluding important rituals, such as when an aspiring driver may have taken and completed a driver education course, but failed to pass the written exam or driving test, meaning they are not legally able to drive. This person is in a liminal state between the preparation ritual and attainment of its purpose.

In these terms, associates entering the program experience the ceremonial welcoming rituals that convey a message of importance to this group of promising leaders. Graduation includes an ending ceremony that announces the associates’ ritual closing upon program completion. The space in between these rituals filled by roles and rotations, training and development, building and bartering social capital within the framework of HC’s total institution, depicted in the LDP materials. However, the data manifests that the actual process for completing the rite of passage is much more complicated; indeed sometimes only concludes in an ersatz manner.

Turner (1969) discusses the liminal phenomena as a blend of low status and comradeship (96), where liminal figures come together through a social bond that is neither structured nor unstructured, a unique position in which they defer to the authority of their elders. Program participants experience this same phenomenon, frequently discussing their frustration with not knowing when or how they will achieve their goal of reaching a Band 5 director position. They bond together as a group of like-minded, promising leaders, guided by the program director, an adept, who only recently, fitfully performed these duties.

Limitations of HC’s elders and adepts. Rites of passage manifest a consistent set of markers, such as rituals and ceremonies, an important role of elders and adepts, and a period of ambiguity for individuals in a liminal state. Elders and adepts play critical roles, guiding individuals through the
completion of their liminal phase (Turner, 1969). HC’s culture supports these rites of passage requirements by instilling mentors as the equivalent of HC cultural guides. Here, program directors would figure to play a key role as ritual guides or elders able to draw on personal experiences for becoming an acknowledged generalist leader, able to assist struggling associates. Many participants unknowingly spoke about the elder and adept roles, providing a source of rich data as to how if only partially, they operated in the LDP. While most participants recognized “something” was missing from their program experiences, some directly stated they received no guidance from the program director, while others described personal workarounds to help them through their state of ambiguity.

When I asked Olivia about influences upon her HC leadership development, she provided an example demonstrating what she refers to as “personal agency” or one’s responsibility for their destiny. Here, Olivia echoed Jacob’s sentiments that associates need to “be their own champions” (Jacob, 2017). Yet, Olivia expands upon the personal champion role, speaking about influence and advocacy, areas she worked on with her mentor. She credits her mentor for pushing her to become strategic with her career planning, not giving her the answers, instead providing a process to dig deep and plan her professional destiny over the next five to ten years.

I received a good mentor assignment through the LDP (pseudonym). He has helped me think (italics added) about my career; where I want to be in 5-10 years, specifically in terms of the building blocks I need to get there. I have never been that purposeful about my career before. [Rather, I have] been [focused upon] doing good work and taking opportunities that present themselves. This is more about how to go after (italics added) the opportunities I want (Olivia, 2017).

Olivia then compares her current “good” mentor to previous mentoring relationships since she joined the LDP, finding that her early mentors from within the LDP were adequate for learning how to navigate the organization, yet her current mentor focused upon her strategic career development plan and actions. In this case, Olivia’s “career-focused” mentor acts as an elder, someone who has achieved an HC executive level role, now willing to impart his wisdom upon her through a coaching activity that requires her to take ownership of her career.

I had two previous mentors, the first from within the program and the second a graduate of the program. Those relationships were great in terms of when I first joined [HC and was trying to]
figure out the company and my current role. With this particular mentoring relationship [her current mentor, concentrating on her career development strategy.] I am really figuring out where I want to go and what I want to do. He was the first person to recognize the areas where I had weaknesses, yet he said that was fine, since those are not the jobs [that will lead to advancement.] Instead, [he said,] “Let us work on your strengths” (Olivia, 2017).

Olivia admits this took a lot of work, deep thinking, research, and planning to understand the moral career of an HC leader and the necessary steps she would need to take to get there.

By doing this, she formed a strong bond with her mentor, who acted as both her elder and adept. This experience shaped Olivia’s ability to recognize the leadership markers required within HC’s structure. She learned how players fit together in the corporate puzzle and how the puzzle changes with the entry and exit of new leaders, which she conveyed during our second interview.

[By strategically addressing my career planning,] I can see how all the pieces of the organization fit together, which enables me to focus strategically, on my current role, and plan my future roles. Knowing which parts of myself I need to develop to be successful in the changing organization (Olivia, 2018).

Olivia speaks confidently about her career planning, a noted change since our first interview in which she rarely made eye contact with me and appeared uncomfortable participating in the interview.

I classified Olivia as a “potential,” since she moved into her second rotation on schedule. At the time of our first interview, I may have classified Olivia as a “contributor” as she did not display the markers of a leader (Table 5.1). This had changed, however when we met for our second interview.

Here, Olivia took charge of the interview process, actively selecting her seat, maintaining eye contact, and speaking confidently about her role, career planning, and goals. Olivia has the potential to become a “natural,” if she continues developing the HC leadership markers, guided by her elder, her current mentor.

While the program’s structure includes assignment of executive level mentors for the associates’ development, the output of these mentoring sessions varies widely. Here, Olivia was fortunate to align with a mentor that acted as both an elder and adept, challenging Olivia to do the hard work of critically thinking about her pathway to a Band 5 director position. Olivia’s mentor acting as a program adept helped her to recognize necessary actions to set her up for success with the make-or-break third rotation.
At no point during our interviews did Olivia reference working with the program director as her adept when planning her rotations within the program’s structure.

**The trouble with anti-structure.** Social beings embrace structure because of its meaning-making processes. Structure helps to define and guide individual interpretation surrounding important decisions, learning new material, or acclimating to new social settings. Liminality is a phase of social being uniquely experienced by the individual surrounded by others in similar states of transition, encompassed within a state described as “anti-structure” (Turner, 1969). However, what the LDP is supposed to do is to transport associates from one structural identity - that of an aspiring HC leader – to another, executive level HC leader. What occurs in the middle of the process is ambiguous to associates, who depend upon the LDP and its directors to help them bridge the gap. This is the space of LDP associates’ liminality.

Embracing liminality is difficult however as individuals push their past away in order to move towards their new state. On average, HC program associates experience a liminal state for five to seven years, changing roles in accordance with rotational requirements. This is a very long time to sustain such a state. During recruitment, prospective associates repeatedly ask, “What will I be at the end of the program?” The fact is there are no guarantees, no promises what the ending ritual reveals for associates, only optimistic statements encouraging associates to keep moving towards the director’s chair.

Participants spoke of added pressure when moving from their second to third rotations. In a model program, the associates’ third rotation transitions them from an individual contributor to a people manager, where the spotlight shines directly on the associates’ ability to influence and motivate others. Their ability to produce results and execute their vision allows them to generate large-scale social and cultural capital, opening pathways to the director’s chair for their fourth rotation. However, within the program’s structure, the associates’ strategic selection of their third rotation seems to hold a critical importance. Unfortunately, it often results in a crucial misstep extending the already daunting period of liminality.
I will now introduce Figure 5.2, a visual depiction of the required program support necessary to complete the ritual process. Similar to Figure 4.6 introduced in Chapter 4, which demonstrated the diminishing returns of the program’s enablers throughout the four rotations, Figure 5.2 demonstrates the missing program support required by participants during their second and third rotations. In Figure 4.6, the value of the program enablers decreases over time starting with the second rotation, as opposed to Figure 5.2, which demonstrates the need for increased program support starting with the second rotation.

The vertical axis in Figure 5.2 reflects Program Enablers, with the horizontal axis portraying all four associate rotational statuses in addition to program graduation. The difference between Figures 4.6 and 5.2 demonstrates the missing support critical to associates’ success for reaching an executive level position. During the latter half of their second rotation, associates require the support of program elders and adepts, guiding them to strategic stretch roles in order to develop the required markers found amongst HC executive leaders and missing from the program’s pedagogy. The third rotation is associates’ make-or-break role, their “audition” for a director’s role. While in the third rotation, associates’ require continued support and guidance of their elders and adepts to hone their HC leadership markers in preparation for ritual completion, which I will describe next.

**Figure 5.2**

*HC LDP Visual Depiction of Required Program Support throughout Program Participation*
Third rotation as unintended barrier. Several participants spoke candidly about the personal challenges involved with their third rotation strategy. This is a time when elders and adepts play an important role for the associates by helping them find stretch roles that fill the spotlight. Often, these roles are not readily available, which delays the start of associates’ third rotation. Other associates found the role they selected did not showcase their skills as planned and they needed to find a different role for the spotlight to shine on them. Each of these situations extends the associates’ program timeline. Some participants shared that program graduates acting as adepts “tipped them off,” offering valuable insight into the role selection process, such as having direct exposure to influential senior level executives.

During my first interview with James, he was nearing the 24-month mark of his second rotation, when I inquired if he had begun his search for his next role; he told me he was “trying to figure out” his next step. While he was not actively interviewing, he was actively seeking insight on important business areas on which to narrow his focus. Four months later, during our second interview, I asked James if he was actively seeking his third rotation. This time, he responded positively, that he had moved from thinking to seeking. Here, he conveyed his inner liminal state surrounding his process for moving from his current role to the important third role.

I have not found a rotation yet or officially applied for positions, though [I did receive] a couple of unofficial offers. I declined those offers since I did not see those as the right fit.

I have been networking with a variety of individuals, finding different levels of success with each prospect, and potential new jobs. A lot of my focus is on whether this is going to be a good fit for me. Is this going to give me a challenge? Does this fit my skill set? It takes a while to find the right role (James, 2018).

James paused here, lingering on the last sentence to reinforce his point that the right role is more important than the rotational timeline.

I am not in a rush, but I feel that I am at the point where if I found a new role I would leave as soon as it opened. I recall when we talked last time; I was not ready to leave [my current role]. At this point, I am ready to leave if I found a role (James, 2018).

James indicates a liminal state of indecision at the time of our first interview. Since our first interview, he turned to his network for support and guidance, and was eventually able to develop a strategic plan for locating the important third rotation. He notes receiving offers for other roles that he
declined, knowing that those roles would not provide the type of stretch necessary for the third rotation. I classify James as a “natural” because of his careful and strategic approach for selecting his third role, another HC leadership marker, where leaders are constantly thinking about their next step to remain relevant as leaders within HC’s changing environment (Table 5.1). James knows his third rotation can make or break his rise to the Band 5 director level.

James ended up remaining in his second role for approximately 30 months while searching for the right third rotation. He felt it important to extend his program liminal state knowing that the third rotation required a good fit, a role that displays his leadership aptitude, and opens a pathway to the director’s chair. Yet, he did not mention the program director having a key role in his planning. This is worth noting, because rather than an adept – a committed and “hands on” program director providing crucial assistance - he relied upon his associates’ community as “adepts.” This is not the way rites’ of passages works. Fellow associates, also in the liminal state are necessarily and only provisionally reliable.

Participants spoke of other factors impeding their career progression noting that they chose the wrong role for their third rotation; the role did not offer enough executive exposure or that the performance stage too narrow with limited responsibilities that did not generate the necessary social capital. While I do not have program level statistics, my data indicates approximately one-third of the participants that reached their third rotation ended up changing roles leading to an extension of their liminal state, which indicates the inability of the program’s elders and adepts to guide associates through the ritual passage. Another risk for associates is the temptation of rituals outside the program.

*The lure of alternative rituals.* The data suggests the effect of an unintended consequence associated with the third rotation, resulting in a program associates’ conundrum created by HC’s review and compensation system. I will now introduce Figure 5.2 as a visual representation of the program’s unintended effect upon associates due to HC’s compensation cycles. These cycles run on an annual basis and include both merit increases and bonuses. Compensation decisions are a point-in-time review of the associates’ performance in their “roles” for that year. Any LDP program contributions do not factor into compensation decisions.
At the time of the first compensation cycle, illustrated with a red line at the end of the fourth quarter, associates have been in their current role for six months. This puts them at a disadvantage when compared to all other similar employees who have been in their roles for a longer period. Program associates appear to contribute less value than their peers do at the time of compensation decisions, in contrast to HC’s policy of providing richer economic rewards to more valued performers overall. A program associate, who remains in role for the next compensation cycle, however, will usually outperform unit peers and receive greater economic rewards.

Figure 5.3
*Visual Representation of Associate’s Performance in Rotation and HC’s Compensation Cycles*

![Graph showing associate performance in rotation and compensation cycles](image)

Associates new to their roles require a minimum of nine to twelve months experience in order to deliver peak performances, where HC’s policy is to award greater allocations of economic capital to their top performers. As associates begin to look for the second rotation around the 18 to 24-month mark, they begin a new role ahead of the next compensation cycle. Again, the associate’s timing is off, and their performance falls short of their competition affecting their compensation award, resulting in another issue with the timing of rotations for associates. In this way, program associates experience healthy economic rewards every other year as opposed to consistently year over year as a promising leader might expect.
Generally, these associates learn their new role quickly, adding value to their business units, and leaving some form of symbolic capital when exiting their performance stages. With each role change, associates begin fresh, and need to prove their value amongst their new peer group. Importantly, however, this cycle for mastering one’s LDP moral career does not align with HC’s compensation cycles and by the third rotation, associates are acutely aware of this timing defect.

Several participants alluded to this issue of misaligned timing with HC’s compensation and the LDP’s rotation cycles. Ryan initially referenced this issue during our first interview, referring to it as “insider” information. When I asked Ryan, “What drew him to HC’s LDP,” his response focused on the charismatic nature of the recruiting team, which caused him to take a deeper look into HC and their leadership development program.

It became clear that what the [LDP] had to offer was really aligned to what I was looking for, [such as a] rotational program, the caliber of the people I met, the recruiting process, and the types of jobs and rotations were robust and interesting. All those factors combined, made it very easy to end up coming to [HC]. Even through, to be frank, the money was not the highest I had been offered (Ryan, 2017).

I prompted Ryan to say more about the compensation piece, to understand if HC’s compensation awards eventually make up for the starting shortfall in comparative wages between this LDP and other offers he received. His response focused upon the lack of elder and adept guidance, finding he needed to create his own network of elders who coached him upon choosing the timing of this next rotation to bypass the unintended consequences of the program’s third rotation.

There were no paths identified, there were no requirements you had to [complete]. It was “choose your own adventure.” It seemed like everyone in the program, took their own path for getting their next job. There was not a standard path and there was no standard guidance [for choosing] what path to take. That surprised me. I ended up taking ownership, driving my early career strongly.

I spoke with [program graduates,] to help me figure out what type of role I should pursue for my next rotation. These [graduates, offered insight] into the timing of my next rotation, noting the timing of [HC’s] compensation cycles (Ryan, 2017).

I classified Ryan as a “natural,” since he displays all the important HC leadership markers such as personal accountability, seeking out makeshift elders and adepts for guidance through liminality, and strategically selecting his third rotation that ended with an offer for a director level position for his fourth
rotation (Table 5.1). During our second interview, Ryan again refers to the value of “insider” program information, pointing out that new cohorts should have access to these learnings, rather than figuring this out on their own.

At some point during the associates’ second rotation; they begin to recognize the need to time their role changes in line with compensation cycles in order to avoid suboptimal performance reviews. By using the timing of compensation cycles as an alternative ritual, however, associates delay role changes, expanding their liminal program state. Several participants admitted to “learning the ropes” from their predecessors and delaying role changes to assure their peak performances were recognized at the time of compensation decisions. This practice, however, can easily result in prolonged rotations that can impede the likelihood of a successful program conclusion.

Another alternative ritual involves associates remaining too long in a comfortable rotation, within the same business unit for multiple compensation cycles. As highly skilled actors delivering strong performances, associates may experience a deep sense of appreciation from their business unit leaders, who incentivize them with economic rewards and a status as an accomplished leader. This status, recognized within the business unit, does not necessarily transfer to HC’s total institution, but ends up conveying a sense of ritual completion due to the recognition and accolades bestowed upon the actor.

While rewarding to the associates, the program’s director discourages this practice, as associates must remain fluid, able to perform upon any stage where needed. When associates become too comfortable playing for a stagnant audience on the same stage, they no longer follow the program’s strategic framework, lured by rituals outside of the program. Associates that have chosen this path find it difficult to rejoin their acting group for the chance to graduate with honors as a director.

**Graduation as amorphous ritual structure.** The topic of graduation was a consistent problematic theme across all participants and graduates. I explored graduation in Chapter 4 by discussing graduation based upon time in program, personal brand formation, and promotion to a director level role. The program’s lack of graduation criteria and frequent leadership changes adds a great deal of complexity and ambiguity to the experience.
A “conversation” between the program director and the associate signals the start of the graduation process, Rebecca, the program director explained to me. The term “conversation” is a generic word, used commonly by participants and HC leaders, implying an informal information exchange. This term masks the HC implications for the term “conversation,” which signifies meetings involving participants with unequal levels of organizational power, to exchange information. For example, an associate that wants to learn more about a business unit in preparation for an interview may have a “conversation” with the unit’s manager.

As a prelude to LDP graduation, the program director sets up a meeting with an associate who has attained a Band 5 status to determine the associate’s perspective upon leaving the program. Yet, in many cases, such newly christened Band 5 executives now hold more power than the program director (who is a Band 4 manager). This is problematic as the Band 5 executive should recognize the power differentials and request to complete the program as opposed to the Director initiating the graduation ritual. In recent practice, the program director and the identified potential graduate hold a similar level of power at the High Band 4 level, yet the program director determines which associates may be ready to complete the program. Rebecca felt it to be her responsibility to “graduate associates, since no one graduated from the program in the last three years” (Rebecca, 2018). This was one of her goals when she took over the leadership role but was unable to convince any associates they were ready to graduate.

The program director’s push towards the graduation ritual suggests the appearance of a stagnant program, unable to develop leaders for HC’s pipeline. Rebecca shared that the steering committee and other senior leaders began to raise questions regarding the program’s developmental aspect since it was unable to produce Band 5 directors in the last three years. The lack of structure in the graduation criteria leaves associates uncertain as to what actions they must take since many have not experienced a graduation ritual in over four years, and the program director frustrated when she is unable to convince associates they are ready to leave the program.

The anti-structure of the program’s graduation criteria leaves many associates suspended in a liminal state, with associates cautious to change roles or feeling the program owes them more support,
demonstrated by the refusal to graduate. This is evident by the depth of the rich data collected on the topic of graduation and conveyed by James when I ask him if he knows what it takes to graduate from the program.

I think the [LDP] has not done the best job defining what graduation looks like. Sometimes they [program directors] said that graduation is being in a Band 5 role. Other people are (italics added) currently in the program that are already a Band 5 [director] and they have not graduated. I do not believe that is the correct definition [of graduation as] other people have graduated, not at the Band 5 level (James, 2017).

James reflected further upon his experiences with program graduates, expressing his thoughts upon graduation by considering associates’ dependency upon the program.

I would say graduation involves not needing the program anymore. You have been in the program long enough that you do not need to be there anymore. You are not really getting the benefits out of it. You are not as active as you once were (James, 2017).

Here, James paused for a few seconds, capturing his thoughts. He now considers both current and past LDP associates, reaching the conclusion that each person’s experience is their own, confirming Rebecca’s guidance that associates “stay in their own lane.”

I know some people that have had four roles in 5 years. Other people are 5 years in [the program], and are in the middle of their third rotation, [while others] completed four roles, but one of their roles [did not work out]. Which is unusual, but not unusual (italics added) (James, 2017).

Here, James refers to the longitudinal development of promising leaders who enter the program fully dependent upon the program’s brand and enablers (See Figures 4.4 and 4.6 respectively). He recognizes the variance of role duration and in some cases, associates who needed to locate another role to complete the rotational requirements, summing this up as “unusual, but not unusual” reflecting the ambiguity surrounding graduation criteria.

While it appears James’ insight is contradictory, it is telling in the ambiguity of the messaging surrounding the ending ritual, graduation. James finds some associates earning a seat in the director’s chair while still in the program while other associates have “graduated’ and have yet to attain this goal. For James, he believes liminality ends when the ritual is complete when associates are no longer
dependent upon the program to support them as a leader. Culmination of the associates’ liminal state remains subjective and a barrier to the associate’s progression.

**Summary**

In this section, I used Turner’s theory of liminality to analyze factors that impede the associates’ development and program completion (Turner, 1969). Program associates experience two significant ceremonial rituals, one at the start of their acting career, referred to as Day One, and the other when they graduate from the program, with a liminal space in between, lasting five to seven years. New associates find the opening ritual specific and clear. They accept their transition to a liminal state in anticipation of the ending ritual, a seat in the director’s chair. The first two rotations are sequential and logical, clearly presented in HC literature, instilling the perception that the third rotation involves a comparable increase in responsibility and decision-making.

The data shows the third rotation often becomes a make-or-break event, where some associates, guided by adepts or elders receive “insider” information or sage advice for the types of developmental roles that generally lead to the director’s chair. Other associates follow their own path, with limited guidance from elders and adepts, finding barriers that impede progression. Without clear structure, associates grow anxious in their liminal state, finding comfort in alternative rituals that will delay or prevent fulfilling their rites of passage.

The overwhelming challenge of the third rotation causes associates to pause, knowing that a poor role decision affects their progression to a Band 5 director role for their fourth rotation. For some associates, they find their chosen roles do not fill the spotlight, or their scripts inadequate, causing them to take a second role as part of their third rotation. In Figure 5.2, I showed how associates extend their liminal period, specifically leading up to and during their third rotation by delaying role changes to better align with compensation cycles. Some associates, lured by alternative rituals, indefinitely delay their next rotation, choosing to stay within a business unit beyond 24 months.

The final challenge rests with the program’s inability to articulate the true meaning and translation of the graduation ritual. Every participant in this study questioned the program’s graduation
criteria, calling it soft, ambiguous, or even conflicting. Those that completed the graduation ritual expressed a sense of relief for reaching the ceremonial classification, LDP graduate.

**Burnishing HC’s Executive Brand.** Starting at the HC Band 5 level, a finely honed set of skills are required to influence and connect amongst HC’s large matrixed organization, where leaders establish and expand their power fields (Figure 5.1). HC leaders maintain their power through control and authority, knowing that a bad decision or a wrong move weakens their power fields. As leaders rise in hierarchy, such as reaching a Band 6 level, their peer pool becomes smaller, with power concentrated amongst fewer leaders, resulting in some leaders “wrestling” with each other in order to prevent their peers from taking some of their power.

HC’s LDP pedagogy and curriculum is deliberately silent on the topic of top executive leadership power. While it may appear as a curriculum oversight, there is a strategic reason behind the absence of power formation in the program documentation. If the overt curriculum included lessons regarding power acquisition, it would create a perception of cutthroat competition, suggesting only the strong survive and the weak perish. This would be counter-intuitive to building a collaborative culture that encourages leaders to share resources, united by a common mission. Yet as discussed above and in this section, knowing how to accumulate the forms of power common within the top HC bands should be included in the program’s pedagogy.

The program’s pedagogy educates associates on the basics of power acquisition through their roles, network, and influence, rather than in terms of power per se. I found the topic of leadership power a source of deep, rich data collection, where all participants discussed the need to acquire power, noting differences between associates and graduates. For example, associates were able to recognize powerful leaders and describe their own actions to acquire power as part of their moral career. Band 5 graduates spoke of power as a function of their current roles and moral careers, describing actions taken to grow their power fields.

During follow-up interviews, I specifically asked associates to define what executive organizational power meant to them and how to describe their understanding of power as an HC
leadership necessity. The data suggests all participants understand the need to establish and expand their power regardless of the pedagogy’s only tacit reference to it. Thus, associates generally translated their understanding of leadership power in terms of HC executive modeling.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I looked at the curricular gaps involving HC’s LDP program and the affect upon associates’ experiences, using Jackall’s corporate moral leadership theory and Bourdieu’s forms of capital. I began the discussion by introducing Figure 5.1, HC’s Organizational Power Tree demonstrating the two dimensions of HC leadership power, where depth of power refers to hierarchical power and breadth is the power to influence other leaders. I included the three steps necessary to establish and grow leadership power through the accumulation of social and cultural capital, starting with acquisition of organizational information. This includes knowing how to discern valuable contributions and the type of behaviors recognized and rewarded. The accumulation of information leads to influence as leaders begin to influence other leaders and eventually HC’s strategic direction. Innovation follows influence, where innovation “monetizes” the leaders’ social and cultural capital, converting it to leadership power and expanded through fresh ideas or new ways of doing things. Next, I introduced a table of extrapolated data to describe participants’ developmental classifications.

I introduced Table 5.1 using extrapolated data from participants’ interviews and longitudinal data tracking to present three developmental classifications, “naturals, potentials,” and “contributors,” based upon the presence of critical HC leadership markers. I classified all study participants finding that 37% align to my definition of “naturals,” including three associates that demonstrate a robust set of the required HC leadership markers, in addition to four graduates who demonstrate all the HC leadership markers required for a Band 5 director role.

The next classification, “potentials” includes 21% of the participants, including three associates that demonstrate some of the required HC leadership markers, suggesting further development may lead to a Band 5 director position prior to program graduation. There is one graduate in this classification, who remains at the Low Band 5 level. The third classification labeled, “contributors” includes 26% of the
participants, of which three are associates that demonstrate some HC leadership markers, yet have 
experienced extended rotational cycles suggesting they may not graduate as Band 5 directors. Included 
here are two graduates who remain at the Band 4 level, well beyond their program graduation. The table 
shows 16% classified as “termed,” since they are no longer with HC. Next, I introduced my findings that 
demonstrate barriers to success for LDP participants, starting with the program’s pedagogical silence for 
developing the critical markers of HC leaders.

To understand the impact of the program’s largely silent and missing pedagogical requirements 
for developing HC executives, I introduced Britney a model HC executive, described by an HC LDP 
graduate and Band 5 Director, Jacob. Jacob, first spoke of Britney during our second interview, at first 
hesitant to share this example. He presented his “case study” of a successful HC executive, who 
outranked him as a High Band 5 leader, known throughout the organization for “getting things done.” 
Britney models all the critical leadership markers to thrive amongst other powerful HC leaders, such as 
sponsorship, a solid professional track record, influence, and risk taking. These are the markers necessary 
to compete in the HC’s leadership game, which requires practice, experience, and results. I closed this 
section noting that some participants’ do not thrive in this setting, such as Mandy and Emma, who left the 
program and HC prior to their third rotation.

To present the data supporting the failure of this elite program’s pedagogy to develop promising 
leaders with critical markers necessary to become successful HC executive leaders, I discussed the 
missing elements by analyzing the development classification characteristics. While the program’s 
pedagogy is silent on HC leadership markers, some promising leaders find ways to fill in the blanks, such 
as the “naturals,” who teach themselves or find support through mentors. “Potentials” demonstrate they 
may be able to fill in the pedagogical gaps through experience, blindly finding their way, and occasionally 
supported by mentors. “Contributors” remain unaware of the full suite of HC leadership markers, 
generally graduating prior to reaching the director’s chair. This is not how to train elite promising 
leaders. Rather, the program should provide scripts, adjust the lighting, and set the scenery to allow elite 
actors to shine in their natural elements and prepare them for the director’s audition scheduled for their
third rotation. Next, I looked at the challenges for being the LDP program director, noting the steady stream of new program directors.

The HC LDP program director role is difficult to balance the demands of the organization, program associates, and their own professional career development. I looked at each of the program directors starting with Robert who proved to be an excellent recruiter, but inept with talent development. Jennifer stepped in as the interim director to “clean house” and re-established the program’s role for developing promising leaders. Next came Barbara, who proved to be a skilled talent development leader; yet her subsequent promotion removed her from program oversight when hiring a new program director. Rebecca, replaced Barbara, yet her short tenure suggest she was unable to lead the program, replaced by Suzanne (See Table 5.2). Each change creates a revolving door of program leadership, altering the program’s strategic direction. Next, I looked at the program’s inability to guide liminal associates through to completion for this rite of passage.

Associates entering HC’s LDP begin a long period of liminality that starts with the ceremonial opening ritual involving fanfare and gifts. Elders and adepts should play important roles throughout the associates’ development, yet are largely absent from performing their roles, requiring associates to fill this void. The associates’ liminal phase remains throughout their time in the program, resolved only when they graduate, yet, the graduation criteria are cryptic, leaving liminal associates in a state of ambiguity knowing what actions they must take. Because no associates have graduated from the program over the last four years, this suggests a developmental or structural problem.

I introduced Figure 5.2, which portrays a visual depiction of the required program support required throughout the promising leaders LDP participation. This figure demonstrates the need to “invest” in program support during the second rotation to facilitate the associates’ ability to locate and secure stretch roles for their third rotation, or their audition for a Band 5 director role. Often actors struggle with choosing their third rotation, by selecting “dead end” roles, as opposed to the type of stretch roles necessary to overcome the barriers that spoil this rite of passage. Sometimes associates become distracted by alternative rituals that offer economic rewards and prestige, extending their program
liminality or in some cases, violating the sanctity of the program’s limited structure. I introduced Figure 5.3 to demonstrate the unintended consequences of the program’s structure, where associates delay rotations due to the timing of HC’s compensation cycles. I closed this chapter with a discussion regarding the necessity for an HC leader to “burnish” their executive brand.

Executive level leaders within HC’s habitus must “match wits” with other leaders, competing for organizational power as a critical resource. Leaders develop their power fields, initially through hierarchical roles and then vertically through influence and innovation. Leaders “play the game” involving organizational power and influence, knowing that there are no breaks or time-outs. They must continuously drive innovation by staying ahead of their industry’s competitors. This is the tacit set of knowledge absent from the program’s pedagogy, fueled by frequent LDP program director changes, and inadequate program support resulting in a spoiled rite of passage for program associates. Next, I discuss a summary of my findings and implications surrounding HC’s LDP.
Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

Background

I began the study preparation process thinking I would focus upon Millennial’s experiences as part of an organization’s leadership development program. There is a proliferation of research conducted upon the millennial generation, how they think and act, and why organizations need to change their practices to engage this burgeoning group of workers. My personal observations made me question their professional expectations, and then question my own, believing that this “upstart” generation would play meaningfully into my study. I quickly learned leadership development is not a function of a generation’s characteristics, but of the total institution’s habitus.

I had an understanding of what to expect at the start of the study, following an established structure applying a methodology and analytical theories, then sampling a variety of HC populations, such as LDP associates, graduates, program directors, and steering committee members. As the researcher, I was careful not to assume where my findings would lead, rather sit back, and allow the data to present itself, and apply important research practices for coding and analyzing the data. At the end of this process, my findings present a narrative and insight I did not anticipate at the start.

Study Summary

My interest in leadership development guided my progression towards my final topic. In Chapter 1, I began this narrative by discussing research on organizational leadership development programs, wondering how organizations measure the value of their investments into these programs. To my surprise, I found a near void of research studies on this topic. I also looked for research to determine if millennials’ generational characteristics influenced changes to organizations’ leadership development programs, finding none on this topic, yet, an abundance of studies regarding millennials’ influences upon organizations’ policies. These initial findings indicated that my scholarly inquiry into this topic could benefit from further research to address the organizational leadership development programs gap. Next, I developed an analytical framework from which to study my findings.
I anticipated that Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis and Bourdieu’s social structuration theory would play key roles in this qualitative study (See Figure 1.1). Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis aligned nicely with the construct of the program and the experiences of promising leaders acting out their professional goals. Bourdieu’s forms of capital theory shone a spotlight upon the need to build requisite levels of social and cultural capital, which then surfaced the significant role of power in this study. Later, when analyzing the tensions uncovered by the data, Bourdieu’s educational institutions and symbolic violence theories led to the discovery of missing pedagogical actions creating barriers for completing the HC transformational process from promising leader to Band 5 director.

My data indicated other factors hidden beneath the program’s surface, which required expanding my analytical framework to include Turner’s liminality theory and Jackall’s corporate moral leadership theory. Turner’s theory was instrumental in analyzing the program in terms of an extended rite of passage that lacked a consistent set of rituals, ceremonies, elders, and adepts, spoiling the rite of passage experience for many participants. Jackall’s theory led to the discovery of HC’s leadership markers necessary for the formation and expansion of executive level power fields. Both played a critical role in the narration of this study.

I secured approval from HC to conduct this case study of their LDP, which made me wonder if the limited research involving organizational leadership programs suggested access challenges in which to study these programs. I was fortunate, securing permission to look deeper into HC’s program, participants, and leaders, which then began my journey.

Chapter 2 described my methods and introduced the 23 participants who produced the deep, rich, qualitative data. I conducted 34 interviews representing three generational cohorts, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. Based upon their career histories, I estimate participant representation spans roughly 30 years reflecting diverse thought, opinion, and experiences, assuring a wide breadth and depth of data. I was impressed with the caliber of professional aptitude, knowledge, and insight found amongst this group. I appreciated the participants’ willingness to open themselves to the process of qualitative data collection, which required thoughtful reflection, candor, and personal learnings.
I applied a normative case study, using grounded theory tactics to code, triangulate, and study the data collected, following all practices to protect participants’ privacy and assure the integrity of my findings (See Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). I presented an overview of HC’s LDP and career architecture (See Table 2.4). Using two data summaries, I introduced participants, including current or former associates and graduates, two program directors, Rebecca representing the LDP and Stephanie, representing a start-up graduate level program intending to mirror LDP, and two steering committee members (See Tables 2.5a, 2.5b, 2.6, and 2.7). I presented longitudinal data tracking of the LDP’s graduates, associates, and former associates to portray the trajectory of promising leaders at three different points in time (See Tables 2.8 and 2.9).

I did not realize that my personal experience would mirror the participants’ experiences I found unfolding before my eyes. As I began to dig deeper into the coding process, personal associations would enter my mind. I initially tried to push these away to prevent any sort of bias from influencing my analysis, but eventually, I pieced the data together and recognized many similarities with my own professional narrative. In Chapter 3, I presented my personal organizational leadership development experiences, finding many similarities between HC participants in the formal development program and my haphazard leadership development trajectory before presenting the deep, rich data collected from the study’s participants.

In Chapter 4, I presented a detailed discussion of HC’s LDP starting with the actors’ preparations for “landing” a program audition. These preparations began when actors recognized a need to enhance their headshot, or resume by pursuing an MBA degree to secure a program audition. I discussed the different types of recruiting processes, referring to these as casting calls, which include on-campus elite and non-elite MBA programs, open calls through HC’s job portal, and internal calls for existing employees who most commonly “accidently” discovered this program.

Next, I presented HC’s LDP using the metaphor of a leadership workshop production using five scenes and an interlude. In Scene 1, I presented my descriptive field notes of HC’s global headquarters and its performance stages, The Executive Wing and Cubical Farm (See Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3).
Scenes 2 through 5 involved each of the four program rotations with an interlude discussing the program’s enablers. In each rotational scene, I provided the program’s core objective, starting with Rotation 1, the building block for foundational leadership, Rotation 2, developing personal leadership and global mindset, Rotation 3, managing others and strategy development, and Rotation 4, enhancing the business. During the first two rotations, the curriculum’s objectives emphasize brand development for the program and associates. Early on, associates are fully dependent upon the program’s brand, which lessens with each rotation (See Figure 4.4). In the latter two rotations, the curriculum takes a dramatic shift from supportive development to improvisational acting, a difficult and confusing transition for many associates. The third rotation silently signals an audition for a Band 5 director’s position and the fourth rotation a ceremonial step ahead of program graduation. Starting in the second rotation, the program fails to develop all its talent assets for entry into HC’s leadership pipeline.

During the production’s interlude, I discussed the LDP’s swag bags, which are developmental enablers actors received on Day One, the official starting point of their LDP journey. These “bags” contain several tools and activities that open access to executive leaders, “teaching” actors how to build social and cultural capital, along with a dedicated program director mistakenly classified as their “personal agent.” I showed how the enablers offer rich opportunities to network and gain deep insights into selected business operations early in the associates’ development yet diminish in value starting in Rotation 2 (See Figures 4.5 and 4.6). I closed Chapter 4 with a discussion of the lackluster and rarely used program graduation ceremony, suggesting barriers within the program and its inability to produce Band 5 directors.

In Chapter 5, I identified the three barriers commonly experienced by program actors, starting with the program’s pedagogical silence, then the ambiguous role of the program’s director, and finally the program’s structural defect preventing the closure of this rite of passage. To appreciate the significant effects of these barriers I presented two data findings, the first, HC’s Organizational Power Tree that depicts the depth and breadth of HC leadership power (See Figure 5.1). Depth refers to the hierarchical nature of power aligned to HC’s architectural structure, portrayed by the color-coded trunk and breadth
refers to influential leadership power requiring social and cultural capital, portrayed by the tree’s expansive canopy. As leaders rise hierarchically, they begin to “monetize” their social and cultural capital, creating power fields reflecting their span of HC power. The three steps to the left of the Tree portrays the acquisition of power, first through information that produces cultural capital, next is influence that produces social capital, and last is innovation that exponentially enhances leaders social and cultural power.

Using extrapolated data, I presented another data finding involving the developmental potential of HC associates and graduates using commonly found characteristics amongst three common classifications, “naturals, potentials,” and “contributors.” “Naturals,” are those that model an accelerated trajectory, “potentials,” are those that may potentially achieve their goal of becoming Band 5 directors, and “contributors,” those whose progression is seriously stalled (See Table 5.1). The extrapolated data produced a set of common HC leadership markers, common amongst model HC executives, such as Britney described by Jacob, an LDP graduate.

I found these HC leadership markers are ambiguous and not clearly understood by associates, graduates, or program directors, producing the first and most significant program barrier, its pedagogical silence. I showed that the program is deficient in providing a new set of enablers during the second rotation that speak to the four HC leadership markers absent in the program’s pedagogical actions (See Figure 5.2). These markers are not easy to describe and only highly astute or well-connected actors can articulate the meaning, presence, and modeling of these markers, leaving most actors uncertain as to what actions they must take to complete their director’s audition in Rotation 3, resulting in their frustration often directed towards the program’s director.

The second barrier is the role of the program director, a role that has experienced significant turnover resulting in changing strategic directions, exacerbated by the pivotal nature of managing stakeholder expectations from actors, peers, and the organization (See Table 5.2). Leading a program to develop elite and promising leaders would suggest an equally competent and experienced leader holding this position; instead, the LDP director assumes this role at the same HC hierarchical level as the
associates entering the program on Day One. The status of the LDP director’s role then factors into the third finding, a spoiled rite of passage.

The third barrier impeding successful development finds the program fails to offer the required structure to complete this important rite of passage. Associates begin an extended rite of passage period by willingly separating from their former identity with the expectation of forming their new identity, an executive level leader. Missing from this rite of passage are strong archetypal elder and adept roles, further muddied by ambiguous program graduation criteria, and unintended consequences resulting from the program’s structure extending liminal status or in some cases, an incomplete rite of passage (See Figure 5.3). Lacking the necessary structure, some associates experience disorientation in their progression, tempted by alternative rituals that stall their rotational progression. Other actors recognize the timing discrepancy of compensation and rotational cycles choosing to delay the start of their next rotation.

I closed Chapter 5 with a discussion of HC executive leadership power and reason why leaders must continuously burnish their power fields. I entered this study with an open mind as to what I would find. Overall, I learned that while the program’s purpose is to accelerate HC leadership development by channeling promising leaders through a series of rotations, it is only partially successful. While its promotional materials are appealing, the program’s structure and pedagogy suffers from some serious shortcomings.

**Findings and Conclusions**

If I had attempted to predict these findings prior to starting this study, I am confident my predictions would not match the following findings. At one point, I thought my research question involved, “How can an organization measure the success of their LDP,” thinking that the economic measurement of leadership development expressed in terms of value would fill the void in the literature. As I moved closer to the start, I realized that what I needed to study was how an organization’s program prepares promising leaders, since the measurement of value is subjective, influenced by environmental factors, inside and outside the organization.
This study produced three findings that require programmatic action in order to accomplish its stated objective, accelerated leadership development producing model HC executives characterized by a set of leadership markers for acquiring and monetizing critical social and cultural capital necessary to develop, grow, and sustain HC executives’ power fields. First, the program’s pedagogy must reveal the critical leadership markers expected of HC executive leaders, necessary for the formation of a leader’s power field. These markers include sponsorship, a track record of success or HC brand, acting as an “influencer and connector,” and being a risk taker.

The second finding involves the role of the program director, responsible for leading associates through their development and fulfilling their role as personal agent. This does not imply that a program director must assure all associates’ graduate as directors, rather, the LDP director must assure that the program, and its design allows all participants the opportunity to fulfil the program’s stated objective. Third, the program must add enablers, such as program elders and adepts for associates starting in the second rotation and throughout the associates’ third rotation, or directorial audition to assure a completed rite of passage. I begin this discussion with my recommendation involving HC’s pedagogical gaps.

**Program Pedagogy: The “Power” of Education**

Based upon the program’s inability to graduate promising leaders and issues found during the third rotation, I found the program’s pedagogy ineffective in the development of promising HC leaders. The program’s pedagogy is surprisingly deficient in its developmental instruction of associates’ leadership markers commonly found in the moral careers of powerful HC executives. While the first rotation nurtures associates with the support of a personal agent and a swag bag of enablers, the environment changes quickly and with limited foresight offered to associates in advance of their second and third rotations.

This finding speaks directly to the acquisition and development of professional power by HC leaders. Executive level leaders must generate and expand their power to remain relevant, continuously burnishing their brand within HC’s leadership structure. Associates understand the two dimensions of
power within the organization, where depth involves hierarchical status, yet do not clearly understand the second dimension, breadth, involving power acquired “across” the organization.

**Hobbled development.** HC’s LDP pedagogy is clearly missing the required development of HC leadership markers, since only the steering committee members, Natalie and Nicole, offered insight into the expected executive leadership markers of sponsorship, branding, risk taking, and influencer roles while performing in a constant state of ambiguity. Rebecca, the program director readily stated the program’s ideal brand is that of an “elite, high potential, high performing, best in class, leadership development program” (Rebecca, 2018), yet does not explain how this is possible. While the program director, Rebecca placed a heavy dependency upon the program’s rotational curriculum, unaware of the critical aspects necessary to develop the HC executive moral career.

Active program participants identified HC executives’ traits including the value of sponsorship, a well-developed personal brand, and that leaders must influence others, yet did not understand how these markers manifest in a fully evolved executive leader. Successful graduate participants, those promoted to a Band 5 director role prior to graduation, described these characteristics through their own professional examples that enhanced their organizational power, yet no one specifically named these markers. Unsuccessful graduate participants fared poorly since they continue to seek the HC “formula” for promotion, as “graduates” of an elite leadership development program. In Chapter 5, I referred to this as a “hidden ball” game to demonstrate that pedagogical silence that impedes development of promising leaders. An elite leadership development program’s pedagogy should not be a game where only a few promising leaders, find the hidden ball to “win” the game. Instead, the program’s design should teach and train the actors, preparing them for the desired role of HC executive.

**Missing enablers.** HC’s LDP includes a set of enablers handed to associates on Day One alongside a curriculum for training them in the proper technique for using these enablers as tools during their early career development while developing their professional brand. Associates recognized with each rotation they become more skilled in the use of these enablers, gradually leading to the point of diminishing returns, where they no longer required the support of the program or the program’s brand...
(See Figures 4.6 and 4.4 respectively). The pedagogical lapse does not recognize the need to inject a new set of process-based enablers starting in Rotation 2 for developing the critical soft skills necessary for the formation of promising leaders’ power fields (See Figure 5.2).

The data demonstrates that successful associates form a good understanding as to the acquisition of power; yet, the program lacks the curriculum for instructing associates “how” to put the pieces together to form their power fields. Hierarchical power alone will not produce the types of power fields necessary to become executive level leaders. Instead, organizational power is a function of HC leaders’ ability to acquire power across the organization by connecting and influencing other leaders.

All participants spoke of power during our interviews. Some of the interviews explored this topic in depth, as these participants realized that career progression depends upon their ability to establish and grow their power fields. The data captured common mechanisms used by leaders to expand power fields, such as hierarchical role changes or promotions, “power grabs” or practices where one leader takes control of another leader’s department, or innovation, practices where leaders create something “new,” converting their thought leadership into social capital, then into organizational power. The program’s pedagogy offers no instruction beyond hierarchical role changes to “teach” promising leaders how to build and advance their power fields.

Advancing the LDP’s curriculum. There are a number of pedagogical “fixes” required to advance the program’s executive level developmental objective involving curricular enhancements of HC leadership markers. These fixes coupled with expanding the LDP’s executive networking of fast-rising leaders will improve associates’ experiences, leading to the program’s stated objective, an accelerated leadership trajectory. Due to HC’s size, there is a vast array of executive leadership styles from across all functional areas, able to serve as model HC leaders or “case studies” that demonstrate executive “markers-in-practice.”

I introduced Britney, an example of a “model” HC executive, described by Jacob a successful LDP graduate, whom I classified as a “natural.” He observed the manifestation of the combined leadership markers, which enhanced Britney’s moral career, that some would describe as a fast rising star.
Yet, it appears Britney has limited involvement with the LDP; suggesting there is a need to expand the
typical executives that commonly interact with the program. Since all associates’ MBA backgrounds
involved case study experiences, HC’s LDP should treat the program as an extended case study, in which
leaders such as Britney serve as a model case study bridging the LDP’s pedagogical gap for developing
HC leadership markers, such as sponsorship, branding, influencer, and risk taking.

**Sponsorship.** The first critical leadership marker is sponsorship, an organizationally based social
relationship between junior and senior level leaders, in this case program associates and executive level
leaders. The data suggest that sponsorship is the invisible force or “tractor beam” that pulls associates
forward across the threshold separating Band 4 and Band 5 roles (See Table 2.4). Participants used the
terms “leap” and “jump” when referring to a promotion into the Band 5 director role, noting that
sponsorship was required for these promotions.

The significance of this marker and the timeline to build sponsorship, produces my
recommendation to further develop the program’s curriculum by embedding sponsorship as early as Day
One and as part of associates’ “strategic” development plans. While the program does instruct associates
to establish and maintain a development plan, it does little to emphasize the strategic and long-term
purpose behind these plans, which Olivia discovered through her mentor. These plans should remain
active throughout the associates’ time in the LDP and used as an “accountability record,” open to critical
feedback from peers, program directors, and mentors, where the feedback serves to emphasize the
strategic nature of the planning process, specifically for developing the critical component of sponsorship
and requires the development of the associates’ professional HC brand.

**Branding.** The second pedagogical gap requires earlier separation between the program and
associates’ brand. As Olivia (2018) explained, many employees “have done good work for years,” yet
lack the “personal agency” to “start pushing for something and build that brand” for themselves, or what
is commonly referred to as HC’s requisite “track record” of organizational accomplishments. While a
leader’s resume, or headshot, captures high-level accomplishments, much of their HC accomplishments
become part of the organization’s folk lore. The LDP’s developmental objective clearly focuses on
building one’s brand, yet the pedagogical miss requires public self-promotion of the associates’ brand including their contributions to the LDP.

While associates described their roles as brand champions, I recommend they separate themselves from the program’s brand sooner in order to begin building their personal brand rather than “contributing” back to the program’s brand. Knowing how to separate their accomplishments from the program allows associates to begin the formation of their moral career sooner, rather than solely depending upon the program’s reputation. In this way, associates begin “tracking” their HC legacy earlier, creating additional social capital.

**Influencer.** Throughout this study, I found the word “influence” consistently used by all participants. It is no secret that leaders must influence one another to be successful within HC’s matrixed organization. The pedagogical gap involves “how” actors or associates understand the difference between influencing and influencer, where influencing describes a set of tacit actions and influencer describes a leader known to affect the outcome and direction of the organization. As the third pedagogical gap, this is the most critical one since the ability to act as an influencer effects all other HC leadership markers including sponsorship, branding, and risk taking. Here, my recommendation requires the indoctrination of the “influencer role” starting Day One, with some very important considerations to prevent missteps on the part of new associates.

While the curriculum must groom associates as influencers, there is a caution with “how” and “when” the organization is ready to recognize the individual as an influencer. A new associate starting at a Low Band 4 role, has some influence as discussed in Chapter 4, but they lack organization power as depicted in HC’s Organizational Power Tree (see Figure 5.1). Associates require coaching and grooming in order to represent their influencer role within the HC’s habitus expectations for Low Band 4 roles (see Table 2.4). Simply stated, new associates must “earn” the organization’s respect prior to being recognized as an influencer. Over time, associates will take calculated risks, which will factor into their HC brand, allowing them to model their influencer role that will lead to stretch roles.
Risk taking. The fourth HC leadership marker involves risk taking, where the term “risk” implies an action with unknown consequences. Here, organizational risk taking involves decision-making, actions, and results. Promising leaders describe risk taking, using their experiences with stretch assignments or time bound changes in responsibilities. These temporary assignments differ from stretch roles, which involve significant and lasting changes in authority levels. Stretch assignments provide associates with experience working with organizational ambiguity and later provide opportunities leading to stretch roles.

The pedagogical gap of this fourth leadership marker involves curricular development during the first and second rotation, preparing associates to recognize the third rotation as their audition for a director’s role that will require a meaningful stretch role. While the program’s curriculum encourages a “choose your own adventure” approach alongside programmatic guidance stating the expectation of each rotation, the overt messaging does little to reinforce the needed risk taking required for this developmental milestone. My recommendation to close this gap requires the program to establish an exemplar model or expected path for promising leaders to follow on their journey to become an HC executive.

Summary

Addressing the pedagogical issues with HC’s LDP corrects a significant issue found in this study and experienced by each cohort of promising leaders. In this setting, LDP associates jump-start the process of capital formation upon entering HC’s LDP at the Low Band 4 level. Removing the pedagogical gaps early assures associates understand the need to begin building their brand, become influencers, develop necessary sponsorships, and take risks by locating and taking highly visible stretch roles. This finding also recognizes that executive level leaders must establish, grow, and sustain their power fields through innovation, which monetizes their social and cultural capital. Next, I will discuss my second finding involving the confusing role of LDP program director.

Program Leadership Role Requirements: Churn, Turn, and Learn

Missing from HC’s LDP is a visibly present and defined leadership role with the power and experience necessary to guide the lengthy developmental process of promising leaders. The program’s
revolving door pattern for the director’s role signals issues and challenges with the construct of the current role (See Table 5.2). The director must manage several sets of expectations such as the organization, which expects this role to produce budding executives for HC’s leadership pipeline, peers who expect the director to produce talented assets that will remain in role for extended periods, and associates who expect their director to serve as their personal agent, responsible for their career trajectory.

Each change in program leadership results in changing program strategies, such as Barbara’s accomplishment for growing the program that became Rebecca’s challenge for brokering its talent. Associates experience these strategic changes, while undergoing their own developmental changes, finding little if any career guidance for identifying and selecting their next rotation. The continuous stream of new program directors results in a program led by a low or high Band 4 manager, with limited practice or insight into HC’s way of executive leadership.

In a few cases, such as Jennifer and Barbara, who became Band 5 directors, they removed themselves from program leadership at a time they could optimally guide and instruct associates towards the “inside track” for promotion. These were leaders capable of taking the framework and filling in the missing pieces yet brought in their replacements to “figure out” what was missing and develop their own strategy for improving the program’s results. Rather, there should be an established long-term program strategy in place to mitigate changes in the program director’s role causing minimal disruption for associates.

**Options for “fixing” the Program Director’s role.** I provide two options to solve for the inevitable change in the LDP’s director role while associates remain in the program for a period of five to seven years. Any change in program leadership requires a seamless transition to manage associates and organizational program expectations. The first option is to change the structure of the program’s leadership. Rather than a single, accountable role aligned only to this program, establish a program owner, preferably a former associate, as an elder and adept, who oversees the program’s tenets and associates’ progression. This “owner” then needs to establish the boundaries of their role as personal
agent, assuring that associates recognize them as an adept, or elder and not as the person responsible for their success or failure.

In this way, rather than changing program directors every one to three years, the program owner experiences a longitudinal stretch responsibility alongside other executive leadership responsibilities. This drives consistency across the program through the voice of experience. The program owner would delegate tactical responsibilities to a support staff, while owning the strategic direction and quality of the program’s assets, the promising leaders,

The other alternative is to have the steering committee take a much more active role in managing the program director and the program’s outputs. HC’s steering committee is comprised of powerful leaders, who guide the program’s direction and assure full alignment with HC’s enterprise strategy. While the committee currently “steers” the program, this recommendation involves a much more active role, establishing specific metrics as markers of success and holding the program director accountable for their results. While this option is feasible, the simpler option is to place the responsibility for the program in the hands of a person with a stake in its outcome, an elder, who can speak from experience, knows HC’s habitus, and whose power field is strong enough to symbolize the power of the HC LDP brand.

**Summary**

This second finding requires HC to consider its actions regarding the future direction of this program. The program director’s revolving door is a clear signal of a program in trouble. The only LDP director with an extended tenure was Robert, whose inability to develop talent “flew under the radar” for a lengthy period until it was discovered that he was an expert recruiter, not an expert developer. Since that time, the program experienced four different leaders with tenures lasting less than 18 months (See Table 5.2). A high turnover rate in any organization is a red flag, signaling something is not right with the role’s design or its expectations. The program requires its own leadership stability in order to effect the changes required to deliver upon its brand promise of best in class development program. Next, I discuss my third program finding related to completion of this rite of passage.
Program Structure: Required Infrastructure for an Unspoiled Rite of Passage

The third important finding requires program structure to assure associates complete this rite of passage by transitioning from promising leaders to HC executives at the Low Band 5 director level. The program involves an extended period of liminality, generally five to seven years. This is an uncomfortably long period of time in which associates have no guarantee of “what they will be” if or when they graduate. Rites of passage are common experiences for all individuals as they transition from one state to the next. Yet, prior to undergoing a rite of passage, individuals are generally aware of the process and the ending desired state before willingly subscribing to the event.

The design of HC’s LDP models a rite of passage yet lacks the critical markers to perform and complete the intended event. The first two LDP rotations prepare associates to navigate the organization, industry, and HC’s habitus. They set associates up to be “players” in the game of competitive development, which begins in the program’s third rotation. Often the program poorly prepares associates for these events, causing them to stall in their progression, spoiling this rite of passage. The cause of this spotty development includes the lack of the stated program boundaries, limited availability of elders and adepts, and distractions that extend the liminal process.

Liminal boundaries. While liminality is a time of ambiguity with individuals undergoing a transition between two states, all rites of passages must clearly state the expected outcome, establishing a firm boundary between the states of “associate” and “graduate.” Starting with the desired outcome enables the program director to establish clear guidance to liminal associates for remaining on track, within program’s rotational guidelines.

Associates and the program’s director, Rebecca, consistently questioned the lack of explicit graduation criteria. This is not a good sign when the program’s director is unable to articulate the necessary actions required for completing this lengthy program. Further, Rebecca discusses the start of the graduation process as “initiating a conversation,” which is a very ambiguous statement that suggests a one-to-one interaction that will discuss “readiness” for program completion.
The term “graduation” usually signals a set of tacit actions required in order to earn the title of “graduate.” Here, the LDP states completion of four rotations over five to seven years, yet does not explicitly state what types of roles are required or qualify associates for a promotion to the director’s chair by their fourth rotation. My recommendation requires the program to establish explicit requirements, involving clearly defined roles, and a defined period establishing the start and end of the liminal process. While a defined structure will enable completion of this rite of passage, another critical piece missing is the role of elders and adepts.

**The missing roles of elders and adepts.** As a Fortune 100 organization, HC has a full cadre of executive level leaders, many that have risen from within the organization. As practiced and tenured leaders, they have learned the HC executive way and model it every day, yet have limited interactions in the development of the LDP’s successor pool of promising leaders. I found it telling that this rite of passage lacks the important roles of elders and adepts, where only rarely do associates’ networks include mentoring relationships involving an HC elder. The program’s design should explicitly include these missing roles during associates’ first rotation to assure completion of this rite of passage.

I previously discussed the confusing role of the program’s director, a role that should serve as both an elder and adept with first-hand experience of the “leap” from a Band 4 to Band 5 director role. This is especially important for associates preparing for third rotations, where “insider information” is critical. The program’s failure to define and designate the elder role, limits associates’ access to elder and adept insights and wisdom. Although after 2013, the program brought in a set of Talent Management adepts as program directors, which does not appear to improve associates’ experiences as they rarely spoke of using these adepts to guide them through their rite of passage. My recommendation requires the addition of designated elders and adepts, who have been through the program or through HC’s leadership rite of passage moving from a Band 4 to Band 5 director role.

**Distractions resulting in liminal extensions.** There are several “distractions” that tempt or lure associates to make decisions or take actions that extent their liminal state, which is not surprising due to the already extended period of liminality and the lack of specific graduation criteria. These distractions
include a conflicting rotational and compensation schedules, alternative rituals, and the program’s failure to produce an annual graduation ceremony.

Because the LDP rotation timing does not match HC’s review and compensation cycles, associates are initially at a structural disadvantage when compared to non-program peers during their first rotation (See Figure 5.3). Yet, they get little advice on how to interpret this experience prior to choosing their second rotation, which will follow a similar mismatch between individual performance and compensation decision. Gradually, associates discover the need to time their third rotation aligned with HC’s compensation cycle, resulting in an extended liminal period.

Another distraction involves the temptation of alternative rituals where associates remain in their role beyond 12-24 months tempted by “incentives” offered by their business unit, such as raises, promotions, or expanded responsibilities. The program does not consider these changes part of the associate’s next rotation and views this as “breaking,” unstated LDP rules. In these cases, the program’s director must work with the promising leader to determine if they are choosing to exit the program or if they will return to the program’s rotational structure, further extending their liminal period.

Another common distraction involves a poor role selection for the third rotation. Since many associates do not recognize the third rotation as an audition, they “miss” in their identification and selection of this role, many times needing to secure a second or possibly a third role that qualifies as a tryout for a director’s position. Each of these role changes further extends the liminal process and often reflects poorly on the associate’s HC brand. My recommendation requires the program to better align rotational cycles with HC’s compensation cycles, since the latter cycle does not allow for changes. This will eliminate associates delaying their third rotation, the temptation to remain in a business unit beyond the program’s rotational guidelines or finding the need to secure another role that meets the qualifications of a director’s audition.

Summary

This third finding discusses three issues that spoil promising leaders’ rites of passage experiences; these include the lack of clearly defined liminal boundaries, missing elder and adept roles, and the
unintended consequences of the program’s structure that extends the liminal period. Each of these issues must be resolved in order for the program to skillfully develop promising leaders and complete this rite of passage. I recommend direct actions for addressing each issue, such as clearly defined graduation requirements, installing named elders and adepts accessible to all associates, and adjusting rotational cycles to align with HC’s annual compensation cycle. None of these actions requires a significant investment in HC capital, rather all accomplished with a few simple actions.

**Implications of this Research for the Leadership Development Program**

**Implications for the LDP**

This case study looked at the practice of promising leaders willingly entering a leadership development program, to experience a transformation through symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). While participants demonstrate a strategic approach, requiring years of preparation to produce a meaningful headshot, often they were surprised that the program differed from their expectations. This is not due to a lack of research on their part, since all participants demonstrated a methodical approach to finding a “good” organizational fit. This suggests that the program descriptors and representatives do not accurately portray the practical experiences within HC’s LDP.

While HC’s LDP incorporates the traits produced by Downs’ (2015) Talent Management research on high potentials, such as mentoring, coaching, assessments, formal and experiential learning, special events, and communications, the program does not direct associates “how” to convert these “enablers” into higher level forms of social and cultural capital, leading to several implications for HC’s LDP. The program provides “early career” enablers, yet overlooks the need to provide another set of sophisticated tools starting in the second rotation, resulting in a suboptimal program experience for associates and the organization that depends upon this program to produce talent ready for HC’s leadership pipeline. There are several implications for the program that result from these issues.

**Retention.** The first study implication requires greater transparency of HC’s program and expectations for associates, leading to an enhanced “matching” process to assure that associates enter the program fully informed and committed to the “long game” preventing retention risks. While the program
does not formally track retention, I noted two of the 18 associates or graduates, or 11% left HC within 18 months from when I began my data collection process. Due to the tremendous economic and intellectual investment in promising leaders’ development, HC should monitor the reasons why LDP associates or graduates left the organization.

**Curriculum.** Next, the program’s pedagogy requires a critical evaluation by representatives of Talent Management, the steering committee, and exemplar HC leaders who are otherwise not closely engaged in the LDP. This action requires closure of developmental gaps for associates to acquire the necessary leadership markers common in the competitive world of HC executive leaders. The implications of this action further require a curriculum overhaul by the program director who should collaborate with the program’s steering committee to establish program and program director success measures.

**Third Rotation.** Another implication affects the program’s third rotation, or in fact, the associates’ audition for the director’s chair. The leap between the HC’s Career Bands 4 and 5 are significant and not well understood by program associates, or in some cases, program graduates. Associates that do not understand the magnitude of this step, remain suspended in their liminal state, taking on new roles, choosing alternative rituals, or finding unintended consequences influencing their professional decisions. The program director, as the associates’ personal agent should recognize this barrier and take action to remedy the situation.

Most surprising is that the program fails to “tell” the associate to treat their third rotation as a director’s chair audition. Instead the program blurs this fact behind its objective statement, “Managing others and strategy development.” Some astute actors identify the real intention of this rotation and strategically search for an optimal role that spotlights their burgeoning executive leadership abilities. This is not how an elite leadership development program should work. All actors should be prepared and cognizant of the third rotations’ purpose, where they either rise to the challenge or discover their shortcomings that will prevent them from securing a director level role.
**Program director.** The next program implication requires a clarification of the confused program director role and its own defined markers necessary to lead and develop several cohorts of promising leaders at varying points in their professional development. The program director must be an elder, one who can guide associates based upon his or her experience and influence organizational leaders to take “risks” by offering stretch roles to qualified associates, suggesting a set of “markers” specifically for the role of program director. These program director “markers” should include the ability manage broad sets of stakeholder expectations, such as the LDP’s steering committee, associates, and other functional and matrix leaders.

The study produced several examples of program directors’ shortfalls, starting with Robert, a skilled recruiter and an inept developer of elite talent. Jennifer filled the temporary void and could have acted as an elder, yet “cleaned house” through a series of tactical steps to “reset” the program. One of her tasks was to hire Barbara, an experienced Talent Management leader, practiced in developing leadership talent. Once Jennifer completed her set of tasks, she turned the program over to Barbara, who invigorated the program’s curriculum with a new set of developmental activities.

Participants complimented Barbara’s developmental expertise, yet as Barbara transitioned into a Band 5 director position, she hired a new program director. Rather than remaining close to the program and acting as an elder, Barbara brought in her successor, Rebecca to further Barbara’s developmental legacy, clearly missing the pedagogical gap for developing the required HC leadership markers. Rebecca arrived as the LDP’s program director ready to initiate her own legacy, but for reasons not clearly defined, stepped down after 18 months in her role replaced by Suzanne.

It is evident that a program with high turnover in its leadership role will struggle to execute upon its stated purpose to develop HC leaders following an accelerated trajectory. For associates in the program, watching the revolving door of program director’s does not match the branding message received during their onboarding process. Here they told the LDP’s brand should conjure up images of “top, elite, or best in class” (Rebecca, 2018). If this were the case, than the program’s director should remain in place, possibly through the duration of one cohort’s liminal phase.
HC policy. The final implication requires HC to close the “gaps” amongst their policies, such as timing of cohort start dates related to rotation and compensation cycle dates. Other policies involve associates’ evaluation, or in essence, their unpaid work performed as part of the LDP. If this unpaid work generates real value to the organization and program, then these contributions should be included in their overall performance evaluation and part of the associates’ HC brand, not that of the programs. HC intends that the LDP shine as an exemplar, an elite developmental program producing executive level leaders in an accelerated timeline. Yet, their policies interfere with its desires, further eroding the potential value of this program. These five implications produced by this case study are necessary to remove barriers that impede the development of promising leaders and offer a few implications for future research.

Implications for Future Research

While the objective of this study was to research an active leadership development program, focusing upon the participants and graduates, it is telling that HC was not able to produce a list of former associates. While I understand that HC would not invest resources upon tracking former associates and compiling exit interview feedback data, this raises several questions, such as, “How many associates and graduates have left HC and why? At what point in their career did these former associates leave? Would the addition of their data produce a new set of findings for this study?”

There are several implications for future research that follow from this research. Four of these include: 1) Conduct a qualitative case study of one organization’s leadership development program, by equally sampling current and past associates. The purpose of this research may illuminate improved recruiting and “matching” processes to cultural alignment between the institution’s habitus and promising leaders. 2) Conduct a study internationally to determine if there are similar patterns found amongst other organizations and industries. The purpose of this research may detect universal patterns common amongst leadership development programs. 3) Conduct a study that samples only program directors to collect their data and insights to understand how role perception applies to the findings. The purpose of this research may reveal the depth of the program leader’s influence upon associate development and
identify critical markers required for program directors. 4) Conduct a study that further examines the effects of historical and life stage effects upon promising leaders’ development. The purpose of this research may produce characteristics of “exemplar” promising leaders, pinpointing a set of traits or life stage effects that act as milestones necessary to complete this rite of passage. I will now close this study with a few final thoughts.

Closing Words

I began this study based upon my curiosity surrounding organizational leadership development programs and frustration with the ebbs and flows of my career. Because of my reaction to the public expectations voiced by members of the millennial generation, I began looking for literature regarding millennial influences upon organizational leadership development programs yet found none. These programs require a significant investment of limited resources, generally redirected from other Talent Management initiatives; I wanted to learn more about how these programs develop promising leaders into organizational executive level assets.

From this study, I had the privilege of interviewing intelligent, thoughtful, and constructive individuals, who shared a similar curiosity surrounding leadership and career development. The participants I met demonstrated an intuitive and strategic drive, where they continuously reflected upon their goals, shortcomings, and strengths. Of the 23 participants, all were gracious with their time and each conducted this interview as if they were my peer, rather than an aspiring or accomplished executive leader of a Fortune 100 organization.

I remained impressed with the caliber of HC talent present in this study and believe they are not outliers, but reflective of the organization’s population. As a doctoral student, preparing to undertake a research study, I was reminded several times to choose a topic “you will remain passionate about.” From start to finish, I remained passionate about this topic, energized by each writing session, and opportunity to discuss leaders, development, findings, and conclusions.

Though early on I altered my question and discovered that generational characteristics had little bearing upon my findings, I remained close to my original intent, conducting a research study upon “How
does an organizational leadership development program prepare promising leaders for executive level positions?" In the end, I feel a sense of accomplishment, not for completing the dissertation requirements of my doctoral program, but for the practice of digging deep, immersing myself into this study, and producing a small amount of knowledge to fill the large gap involving organizational leadership development programs.
References


Helpful Corporation LDP Outline. (2019). Retrieved from https://www. This link suppressed due to confidentiality and participants’ privacy reasons. It is available from the study’s author upon written request.


Appendix A
Request to Participate in the Study

Dear Recipient,

As outlined in Rebecca’s (pseudonym used) email, I am recruiting individuals to participate in a research study. This study is designed to understand how an organization can measure the success of their leadership development program.

You are receiving this email because you are a participant/graduate of Helpful Corporation’s (pseudonym used) Leadership Program. I am requesting your participation in this study to further the research involving measurement of success for leadership development programs. Participation in this study includes two (2) face-to-face, recorded interviews. The first interview will be scheduled for 60 minutes; the follow-up interview will be scheduled for 30 minutes approximately 2 - 4 months following the first interview.

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. Interviews will be conducted at a location of your choice that may include your corporate office or an external location that meets the requirements of your schedule. All records of this study will be kept confidential. I appreciate your consideration for participation in this research activity.

To participate, please contact me via email at (email address 1) or (email address 2) or by phone at (phone number 1) or (phone number 2). I will follow-up within five (5) business days to discuss any questions you may have. I look forward to your response.

Thank you,
Caroline Woitas