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**Demystifying Leadership Development:
Exploring Methods and Understanding Motivations
for Leadership Training among Middle Managers**



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A dissertation submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Durham University Business School

Durham University

Michaelmas Term 2024

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Abstract

As global industries become more competitive and uncertain, companies are spending more on leadership development for their employees. Despite this increasing trend, measuring the effectiveness of leadership training remains a challenge given its subjective and complex nature. Instead of forcing the quantification of the qualitative measurement of leadership training effectiveness, this study is interested in investigating and exploring how different methods of leadership training are received by a specific group of leaders, namely middle managers. The goal is to ascertain which methods work best for this demography while understanding their motivations for leadership development, so that companies can be more targeted and focused in investing on different group of employees in their respective organisations. To realise this research objective, a mixed-method study was conducted.

Firstly, 20 participants and five facilitators of a 12-week leadership training programme were interviewed for thematic analysis to be conducted on the gathered data. The participants were middle managers of a multinational based in Southeast Asia. Grounded theory was developed based on data from the interviews together with post-training feedback survey responses that were obtained from 587 participants between January to December 2023. Secondly, to compare findings from the qualitative analyses from a regional standpoint, a survey was conducted on 200 middle managers from companies and industries that are based in North America and Europe. Regression analysis was conducted on this data to understand how different methods of leadership training influence outcomes, as well as changes in perception and motivation before and after intervention. Thirdly, case studies were conducted on five global companies who approach leadership development differently across their workforce.

The outcomes of this study include theoretical contributions to adult learning and motivation theories. Specifically, the study provides empirical evidences that align with principles of experiential learning and how it can influence development of intrinsic motivation among middle managers to pursue professional development. In terms of practical contribution, the study highlights key considerations for organisation including prioritising high-engagement, applicability, and social learning in designing and delivering leadership training for the demography. The study has also highlighted further opportunities for future research potentially for a larger and diverse sample, as well as longitudinal analysis which can monitor and track how middle manager develop over time.

Statement of Copyright

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This dissertation is the author's original work and has been completed in accordance with the university's regulations. All sources of information, data, and ideas used in the preparation of this thesis have been properly acknowledged and cited. No other sources than those acknowledged have been used. This thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

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My parents are still unsure why I am doing this, but their trust in me is one that I cherish forever. My siblings consistently try to outdo each other in becoming my parents' favourite, so I hope this dissertation allows me to lead by some margin.

I began my first semester as a Durham DBA student in 2020, when the world is in lockdown. I owe it to Prof. Jackie Ford and the DBA team who onboarded us smoothly to the point of completing our coursework within the first two years of the programme.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my childhood friend, Jafni who has been my frontline supporter in this journey. He is also completing his PhD at Durham, but I hope I finish mine first!

For Orked and Dahlia

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Context

Between 2010 – 2020, the estimated annual global spend on corporate training grew approximately 32% to reach USD 358 billion worldwide (Training Industry, 2021). Out of this amount, about 10% (USD 3.5 billion) was estimated to be spent for leadership development. This observation of the past decade indicates the significant amount of money that companies invest on leadership development. This includes corporate training on business skills, leadership skills, and executive coaching that are delivered via classroom instruction, online learning, or hybrid and blended teaching. As at the end of 2023, and in the United States alone, the total spend on training which includes training budget, technology spending, salaries, external vendors and consulting professional fees, and customised content modules was estimated to be approximately USD 102 billion, growing steadily over a five year period (TrainingMag, 2023). These two snapshots of expenditures within the training sector indicate the steady growth and focus on the effort of developing leaders and employees before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating continuous investment on training even though the platforms where work and corporate training happens have changed i.e. from in-person to virtual or hybrid delivery.

As a subset of general corporate training as a whole, the emphasis on leadership development indicates a significant shift among organisations in prioritising building a pipeline of leaders for business sustenance and future growth (Lacerenza *et al.*, 2017; Kwok, Shen and Brown, 2020). This effort is potentially driven by the need to sustain performance, deliver results, and build a culture of innovation to win in the market as the landscape of global industries and markets become increasingly uncertain, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Mai, Do and Ho Nguyen, 2022; Ye, Liu and Tan, 2022). Leadership upskilling is seen as a means of equipping leaders with the capacity to be adaptable, demonstrate emotional intelligence, and adopt the desired level of flexibility required for organisations to survive and thrive in the long term. While the figures on corporate training and consequently leadership development have been on an increasing trend year-on-year, the returns on these investments have been largely unknown and remain as a consistent debate across industries and organisations (Day *et al.*, 2021; Samuel and Durning, 2022). As a subset of leadership research, leadership development can be considered as a topic for further exploration within the literature

(Avolio, Avey and Quisenberry, 2010a; Martinelli and Erzikova, 2017a; Subramony *et al.*, 2018; Roupnel, Rinfret and Grenier, 2019). Additionally, despite the growth of the leadership development sector, there has been relatively limited and rather inconclusive research on the impact and effectiveness of leadership development interventions (Yukl, 2012).

These observations present further opportunities for investigation and exploration on the effectiveness of leadership training. While anecdotal accounts and case studies may provide indicators on the benefits of leadership training, empirical analyses are essential to ascertain its influence and impact to both the individual and organisation. The lack of consensus within talent development practitioners on the most effective or efficient measure of leadership training calls for a more detailed exploration of the endeavour, potentially one that is contextualised to a specific demographic and sampling (Crawford and Kelder, 2019; Garavan *et al.*, 2019). In the context of learning and development, ‘effectiveness’ refers to the ability of a training programme to achieve its objectives specifically in improving the efficacy of the participants (Fisher, 2010; Onisk, 2024). One common tool that is used to determine training effectiveness is Kirkpatrick’s ‘Four Levels of Training Evaluation’ (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2016) which looks into reaction (i.e. learner satisfaction), learning (i.e. learner assessment), impact (i.e. behavioural improvement), and results (i.e. business achievement). Across these levels, the difficulty of assessment ascends as it shifts from immediate feedback to learning to a more longitudinal or long-term behavioural impact and value realisation at the organisational level. Measuring these elements also becomes increasingly more complex and indirect across the different levels of the evaluation model. While the Kirkpatrick method is widely used, some criticisms of it include its linear approach, and challenges associated with measuring higher level outcomes such as behavioural change and business impact (Cahapay, 2021a; Thistlethwaite, 2022). This view relates to the complexity of assessing human behaviours as well as fully ascertaining organisational performance improvement that can be attributed to training interventions. These include views that the Kirkpatrick model might oversimplify the complex process of learning and development, and might overlook how workplace ecosystem can impact a learner’s ability to put theory into practice (Bates, 2004; Visser *et al.*, 2013). In this regard, there are further calls for traditional evaluation methods to be supplemented with more contemporary approaches (e.g. data analytics) which take into account the dynamic nature of learning. Further, there is also growing emphasis on conditioning the organisation itself to boost organisational learning effectiveness, which

includes cultivating a culture of continuous learning and improvement across the workforce (Agarwal, Pande and Ahuja, 2019; Alsalamah and Callinan, 2021).

In addition to the opportunity for further research on leadership training and development, there appears to be a gap between the decision for investments in leadership development with the assessment of its outcomes. One view is that organisations still have much to learn when it comes to the science of transfer of learning (Saks and Belcourt, 2006), and what it means to define the true value of leadership development. A pertinent consideration given the potential value leakage resulting from the expenditures and staff hours spent on this effort (Couch and Citrin, 2018). At present, one common practice among organisations is to depend on post-programme training evaluation feedback as an indicator of learning effectiveness (Beer, Finnstrom and Schrader, 2016). While this measurement reflects on the positive or negative experience of the participant during the course of the programme, it provides only one dimension of the overall personal development journey and evolution. This reaction can also be influenced by the sense of positivity and achievement that can be strong upon the completion of a training programme, which might not sustain in the longer term. The immediate post-programme indicator lacks the long-term view of how the skills acquired from the learning process have been put into practice and contribute to business improvement (Griffith, Baur and Buckley, 2019). One reason for this limitation is that leadership development is inherently conceptual and subjective in nature. Thus, measuring effectiveness is complex as it is affected by factors such as workplace environment, supervisor leadership, and peer relationship (Liu *et al.*, 2021). While the design of leadership programmes might take into consideration these factors, the reality of the real-world situations at the workplace is beyond the control of any intervention. Based on this outlook, even the best leadership programmes can falter without the right environment to facilitate change (Blume *et al.*, 2010a; Schweiger, Muller and Guttel, 2020).

The assessment of leadership development outcomes is made more challenging by the complex and dynamic nature of leadership itself. Unlike technical skills which can be objectively measured and quantified through skills assessments or aptitude examinations, leadership competencies are subjective and context dependent. Other external factors that can influence leadership development effectiveness include workplace environment and individual self-efficacy in leading. Therefore, an evaluation method that is more direct but less detailed in nature might struggle to capture the full spectrum of learning transfer in a particular

programme, which can also lead to incomplete or skewed understanding (Puja Kesuma *et al.*, 2021; Riasudeen and Singh, 2021). There is a growing recognition for more sophisticated evaluation approaches to be explored but this continuous effort remains a complex and cumbersome endeavour. With the views that leadership development research is relatively immature and replete with research opportunities (Day *et al.*, 2014), this dissertation explores the different methods of conducting leadership training based on the experience of a leadership development programme for middle managers at a Fortune 500 company.

As an alternative to the long-standing challenge of assessing and proving returns on investment for leadership training, this dissertation is interested on how decisions for investments on leadership development could be better and more accurately made by improving our understanding of what works best for a specific demography of employees within the entire workforce. The aim is for the findings of this dissertation to provide practical and theoretical contribution to the literature of leadership development, and help organisations to better focus on methods that are truly relevant for their leaders. As the global business landscape evolves at an unprecedented pace, effective leadership becomes increasingly essential for organisations striving to navigate industry uncertainties, innovate new products, and remain competitive in the market (Shin, Picken and Dess, 2017; Anning-Dorson, 2018). While substantial financial resources are allocated to fund and support implementation of leadership training, the tangible impacts on organisational performance remain elusive (Katsaros, Tsirikas and Kosta, 2020; Panagiotakopoulos, 2020; CIPD, 2023). By narrowing the gap between investment decisions and outcomes, this dissertation is conducted with the potential of equipping organisations with the knowledge and insights needed to refine their leadership development strategies.

In identifying and developing a suitable theoretical framework for this dissertation, the literature review section explores the key aspects of leadership development as well as adjacent fields relevant to the subject. This includes distinguishing between leadership development and leader development, exploring leadership development theories and models and examining the methods and design principles used in leadership development programmes. There is also interest in understanding motivation factors for middle managers to participate in leadership training, and how behaviour change can be observed. The theoretical framework developed coming out of the literature review provides the required context for evaluating different leadership training methods and understanding the motivations driving individuals to undertake

the endeavour. With this context, data analysis and interpretation of findings were conducted in relation to existing knowledge within the field. This is the lens that was adopted in viewing this topic as well as the guidance utilised in exploring and interpreting findings throughout the dissertation.

In this dissertation, the first theoretical framework is based on the adult learning theory of Knowles (1968) which is also known as ‘andragogy’; a fundamental framework in understanding how adults learn and develop. While andragogy has significantly contributed to the field of adult education, there exist several areas where the theory could benefit from further development and refinement (Akintolu and Letseka, 2021; Henschke, 2021). The emphasis of this theory is the self-directed nature of adult learning, highlighting the importance of a learner’s autonomy, experience, and readiness to learn. The theory posits that adults learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process, while drawing upon their prior knowledge and experiences to construct new understanding (Knowles, 1968). While andragogy has been widely influential, it is essential to recognise that the theory was developed several decades ago and the landscape of adult learning has evolved since then (Grace, 1996; Illeris, 2018). This scenario presents an opportunity for this dissertation to build upon developments made on the theory over the years, complemented by new observations and findings. Some key criticisms on andragogy includes the assumption of universal characteristics of adult learners, overlooking the diversity and situational aspects among the demography in terms of motivations, backgrounds, and learning preferences (Taylor and Kroth, 2009; Clemson, 2019). There is also limited consideration of cultural factors that shape adult learning experiences such as social context, power dynamics, and digital technologies (Darbyshire, 1993; St. Clair, 2002; Hartree, 2006).

As motivation is also a central theme of this dissertation, the second theoretical framework is built on self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This theory illustrates how individuals are motivated to pursue activities that satisfy their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of adult learning, there is emphasis on the importance of creating supportive environments that promote learner’s autonomy in setting goals, developing skills, and making meaningful connections with others (Derrick and Carr, 2003; Chee Keng, 2015). Although self-determination theory has been significantly applied in educational settings, there remains opportunities for enhancing its relevance and effectiveness in the context of adult learning and corporate training (Forner *et al.*, 2020;

Kulkarni *et al.*, 2022). This is primarily driven by the limited consideration of contextual factors that influence adult learners' motivation and engagement (Gantt, 2022). Specifically, more focus could be given to the unique challenges and constraints that adult learners often face, such as work and family responsibilities, which may impact their ability to pursue learning goals autonomously. There is also critique on the theory's emphasis on intrinsic motivation at the expense of other forms of motivation such as extrinsic motivation which can also be equally as prevalent among adult learners (Vallerand, 2000).

Further to the theoretical framework relevant to this study, from a practical standpoint, there is opportunity to explore the dynamic relationship between leadership development and organisational outcomes (Curry *et al.*, 2020; Geerts, Goodall and Agius, 2020a; Alblooshi, Shamsuzzaman and Haridy, 2021). This includes investigating how leadership training can contribute to enhanced employee engagement, improved team performance, and ultimately, organisational success. This understanding is intended to pave the way to understand how leadership can foster innovation, manage change, and address business complexities. These elements are particularly pertinent as organisations need to adhere to more inclusive business policies and practices as the workforce becomes more diverse (Moon, 2018; Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez, 2018; Jadaun, 2023). The significance of this study can also relate across the broader scope of leadership development and organisational performance. With empirical evidences on training methods, the outcomes of this dissertation can potentially equip both businesses and government agencies with the knowledge to make informed strategic and tactical decisions on leadership development strategies and effective resource allocation. The findings hold the potential to build more resilient and agile leadership cultures across different organisations, resulting in enhanced business performance, market competitiveness, and innovation.

In addition to the organisational and business contexts, there is also potential for societal impact coming out of this research particularly in terms of economic growth and workforce development. By identifying effective leadership development methods, companies can develop a talent pool of skilled leaders capable of also addressing pressing societal challenges and driving positive change, in line with their respective organisational sustainability agenda (Seidle, Fernandez and Perry, 2016; Prommer, Tiberius and Kraus, 2020; Goldman *et al.*, 2021). In the context of government agencies, the study may contribute to developing leaders who are able to uphold more effective governance, policy implementation,

and public service delivery. The significance of this research has the potential to be relevant across different organisational boundaries. While the focus of this dissertation is leadership training from within the private sector, there is potential transferrable knowledge that is equally as applicable within the public sector. As leadership is a universal topic, any form of deep understanding of the dynamics between leaders and followers can be potentially adapted into different situations and scenarios.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

Given the wide range of influencing factors, complexity, and subjectivity involved, the effectiveness of leadership training is difficult to evaluate and measure (Lacerenza *et al.*, 2017; Dwyer, 2019a). Despite this uncertain scenario or grey area, organisations continue to channel a lot of investments into such initiatives without gaining much clarity on whether the large investments are worth the effort (Seidle, Fernandez and Perry, 2016; Mattingly and Kraiger, 2019a). This situation can potentially lead to value leakage and cost inefficiency if left unaddressed. Worse, it could become merely a box-checking exercise that is conducted to claim that people development is attended to in an organisation. At present, the practice of assessing the effectiveness of leadership development is limited primarily on post-programme evaluation (Orvis and Ratwani, 2010). This is often conducted via a questionnaire or survey given at the end of a programme, to gather input from participants on their satisfaction level. While this information can be helpful, organisations should have a better appreciation of how their leadership development efforts are returning long-term value through actual behavioural change and impactful business result (Geerts, Goodall and Agius, 2020a). Therefore, real and measurable level of learning transfer arising from training endeavours need to be maximised to make it more translatable to tangible value.

The challenges of measuring leadership development effectiveness can extend beyond the internal operations of a company. Organisations both in the private and public sectors are navigating through an increasingly complex challenge where agile and visionary leadership is a critical asset. As leadership development outcomes depend on various factors including workplace environment and leadership support, the true impact of investments on leadership training is generally not immediately or directly seen (Martin, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2020). This complication does not only pose concerns in assessing the efficacy, but also introduce potential misalignments between investment and desired outcomes relating to organisational goals. In

terms of evaluating programme effectiveness, organisations need to move beyond direct and simplistic, one-dimensional assessments, and strive for holistic, longitudinal perspectives that consider the lasting impact of leadership development on both individuals and the collective performance of the organisation. While the efforts on identifying the best measurement method is ongoing, there exists a parallel opportunity for organisations to improve on investing on the right leadership training intervention for the right demography or level of leadership. This dissertation takes on this challenge by offering insights on effective methods and approaches for leadership development, with the aim of transforming it from an uncertain investment into an important driver of organisational excellence.

As the debate on methods of ascertaining value from leadership development is taking place, the landscape remains open to discourse and debate. In this regard, this dissertation is proposing for a different focus in the situation, by targeting on the allocation of investment for leadership development into the most for effective methods or practices for different leadership demographics. Given that business deliverable needs, developmental requirements, and work expectations are different for leaders of different levels (i.e. junior leaders, middle managers, senior leaders), a practical outlook would be allocating budget for different approaches for different groups. It is pertinent to identify how organisations can ensure that they invest on what works best for specific groups of leaders within their workforce. A comprehensive understanding on this critical decision, backed by empirical evidence that has been tested on a certain sample, can potentially provide clarity and direction for talent development practitioners to advise top management. This involves advice on allocating the right amount for a specific group of employees, with heightened assurance that the investment is for a meaningful cause for the business in the long term.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This study explores how different methods of leadership training can impact and contribute to improvements in leadership effectiveness among middle managers and identify what are the key motivation factors that drive them to undertake and pursue continuous leadership development. Recognising that the common usage of training evaluation such as the Kirkpatrick model primarily assess short-term reactions and immediate learning outcomes, this study aims to extend the focus beyond these aspects. This is done by focusing on the factors of individual motivation which can enable a deeper understanding of how conditioning and

intervention before and after a training programme can have a more lasting impact on the overall leadership development of participants. By examining how preparatory conditioning (i.e. setting clear goals, aligning training with personal aspirations) and post-training interventions (i.e. ongoing mentorship, follow-up activities) contribute to lasting change, this study provides a more holistic view of leadership development. These insights highlight the potential of improving programme outcomes and also strategies for fostering sustained engagement among participants, which are essential for the effectiveness of leadership training over time. Through the examination of factors such as participant motivation, engagement, and the contextual suitability of each method, a nuanced understanding of how these approaches contribute to long-term leadership development is gained. To achieve this objective, mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Assessment and analysis were conducted on a leadership training programme for middle managers at a multinational corporation based in Southeast Asia. This programme constitutes of several components including classroom training, personalised executive coaching, and self-learning of online modules on subjects relevant to leadership development and also business deliverables. Further discussion on this programme is made in the chapter on research method and design. It needs to be noted that there are other methods applied in leadership training. The focus on the learning methods analysed in this study is driven by its application within the training programme analysed and also relevance to the target demography namely middle managers. In this regard, this dissertation also clarifies on the underlying mechanisms driving these effects. To achieve this goal, case studies were conducted on global companies that develop and implement effective leadership development approaches. In doing this, comparative analysis was conducted to gain better understanding on best practices among leading organisations.

By utilising mixed research methods, the dissertation analysed the way cognitive, emotional, and social processes within leadership training influence the adult learning processes of participants. This understanding of the behavioural, psychological, and interpersonal elements involved in leadership development can inform the design and implementation of future training programmes that are tailored to the specific needs of employees within an organisation. By understanding the factors that can contribute to successful leadership development methods, there is opportunity to build upon existing and create new theoretical frameworks and practical guidelines for designing and fostering sustainable leadership development strategies. Further to the qualitative analysis conducted on the leadership programme, quantitative analysis (i.e. descriptive statistics, regression analysis)

was also conducted from data gathered via a survey on middle managers in North America and Europe. This allowed for comparison and contrasting of the findings from different regions. Further, it is also acknowledged that this study does not measure financial returns on investment directly from training, but instead provides frameworks for understanding how behavioural and motivational shifts contribute to long-term leadership self-efficacy leading to both personal development and creation of organisational value. To facilitate the analysis within this dissertation, the activities involved in this study are guided by three research questions. These inquiries were intended to understand the diverse nature of leadership development methods, explore their relevance, practicality, and application, and shed light on the motivations that drive middle managers to participate in such programmes. The research questions that are addressed and analysed through this dissertation alongside the expected outcome of each question are presented in Table 1.

No.	Question	Expected Outcome
1	What leadership development methods can be considered as relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders in their respective roles?	An identification and assessment of how different methods used in leadership training affect the desired learning outcomes.
2	Why are the identified methods considered relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders who can realise the organisation's goals?	An understanding and analysis of how different methods can contribute to leadership behavioural change, and how they are prioritised in realising different outcomes.
3	What are the primary motivations that lead middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes? What explains changes in their motivation between signing up for the programme and after they have participated in the programme?	An understanding and appreciation on the main drivers for participants to participate in leadership training, and how their perception of maintain or change after undergoing a training programme.

Table 1: Research Questions

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review conducted for this dissertation covers the body of knowledge related to fields of leadership, leadership development, adult learning, and motivation research, among others. In this regard, the interest is on theories that inform the relationship between leaders and followers, as well as models that explain the different approaches to leadership development that are influenced by behavioural and motivational factors. The literature review explores relevant studies that clarify the factors that can influence and contribute to effective leadership development interventions, including elements such as learning design and delivery approach, coaching, and experiential learning. Focus will be also given to contemporary perspectives on the measurement and evaluation of transfer of learning within leadership training. This effort is aimed at shedding light on how newly acquired skills can be effectively integrated into real-world leadership practices. Further exploration on recent empirical research studies and case studies are included to provide practical insights into the implementation and impact of leadership training based on past efforts to investigate and explore the topic.

The literature review also focuses on emerging trends and innovative practices in leadership development, including the role of technology and digital platforms in enhancing accessibility, scalability, and personalisation of leadership training. With the advancement of digital tools (e.g. virtual reality simulations, artificial intelligence coaching platforms, mobile learning applications), organisations have unprecedented opportunities to design immersive and adaptive learning experiences. By synthesising insights from emerging research and industry best practices, this dissertation can provide a forward-looking perspective on the future of leadership development, with practical recommendations to create impactful and sustainable training initiatives for the consideration of organisations across public and private sectors.

The structure that outlines the focus areas, topics, and subject matters that are covered in this literature review is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Structure of Literature Review

At the end of each section, based on the literature review conducted, a summary of key findings, observed insights, and emerging trends across the literature are discussed. These are divided across each segment of the categories that have been outlined to structure this review. A synthesis of the literature will surface notable gaps, observable trends, or significant contradictions within existing research. This effort can pave the way for a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership development, the motivation factors surrounding it, and also effectiveness in terms of transfer of learning. These observations can help identify the implications for practice and provide recommendations for future research. Further, the findings and observations from the literature review serves as a foundation for the subsequent sections of this dissertation. By addressing identified gaps and opportunities for further analysis, the literature review builds on the effort of advancing understanding and practice of leadership development in contemporary academic and organisational contexts.

2.1 Leadership Development vs. Leader Development

A review on leadership development literature requires a discussion on the distinction between leadership development and leader development. While ‘leadership development’ is a more commonly used term in the fields of human resource management and talent development, Day (2000) initiated a long-standing debate over the need of establishing the difference between the two terms when discoursing over leadership development research and practice. Although exclusive in research, both terms are used almost interchangeably in day-to-day colloquial usage in practice. The key differences outlined by Day (2000) were derived from the interpersonal nature of leadership development and the intrapersonal nature of leader development. Leadership development is viewed through a relational model while leader development is viewed through an individual one. As such, the skills related to leadership development are socially oriented (e.g. empathy, team orientation, conflict management), while skills related to leader development are self-oriented (e.g. self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation) (Day *et al.*, 2014). Understanding these distinctions can inform the design of targeted interventions aimed at fostering both the interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies necessary for effective leadership. This appreciation is also critical to facilitate learning designs that are both instructional and experiential in nature to allow for acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills.

These suggestions have been further supported by more recent studies on the subject which were built upon the premise of this distinction (Dalakoura, 2010; Turner and Baker, 2018). In their attempt to build a typology surrounding the methods of leadership development, Turner and Baker (2018) defined leadership development in concurrence to (Day, 2000) prior to providing a commentary of the methods that they have inventoried from the literature. This framing provides a clear context on the social nature of leadership development, and enriches the understanding of the social dynamics inherent in leadership development processes. While subscribing to the distinction between leadership and leader development, Dalakoura (2010) acknowledged the need for convergence of co-existence of both in driving organisational success. It was further asserted that an integration between the two can be realised through alignment with organisational goals and strategy (Thomas and Carnall, 2008; Reichard and Johnson, 2011). This harmonisation can be attributed to when discussing the current phenomenon of how leader development and leadership development have grown to become interchangeable in describing the act of developing employees into effective leaders.

Recognising the symbiotic relationship between leadership and leader development, there is opportunity to leverage both approaches. Specifically, efforts can be put forth on the development of individuals as effective leaders while also developing a working environment that can facilitate the desired level of effectiveness, relating to organisational factors such as work processes, policies, and also systems that are put in place.

The interconnectedness between leader and leadership development has also been asserted by Roupnel et al. (2019) noting how one is required to complete the other. This observation is driven by the complexities surrounding the individuality of leadership development and how it directly influences the societal aspects of leadership development, if taken in their conventional definitions. Consequently, recent studies opt to closely link leader and leadership development as a singular reference (Dwyer, 2019b; Kirchner and Akdere, 2019; Firing, Thorkelsdóttir and Chemi, 2022). By acknowledging the interdependence of leader and leadership development, scholars are moving towards a more integrated approach that recognises the holistic nature of leadership development processes. For this dissertation, the term ‘leadership development’ is used in referring to the act of developing an employee into an effective leader, and the outcome of his or her leadership training to how relationships are built with the larger organisation. As the premise of this dissertation is based on the findings coming out of a leadership training programme after its completion, the results are influenced on what is gained by the individual participant in undertaking the learning journey as well as how it improves the person’s ability to lead others at the workplace. By adopting this contextualised definition of leadership development, there is opportunity to explore not only the individual outcomes of leadership training but also the broader organisational implications. There are also opportunities to identify interventions that can be introduced to upskill those who surround a specific leader including supervisors, peers, and direct reports, if the initiative can improve overall team productivity.

While interest in leadership development research is growing, critique on the act of leadership development is also attracting the attention of scholars. Although, most of the critiques aim to suggest further considerations to the subject instead of going outright against the practice. One view is that leadership is said to be something that cannot be taught, but can be learned (Allio, 2005). What this assertion is also purporting is that leadership behaviours are more relevant as an on-the-job development, instead of a personal gap that requires formal classroom intervention (Owen, 2015). These critiques highlight the evolving nature of

leadership development discourse and underscore the importance of adopting innovative approaches in developing leaders. Further critique has also been considered on the assessments that are commonly involved as part of leadership development, given that the process also involves how a leader is transformed in terms of behaviour or characteristic before and after an intervention (Afsar, F. Badir and Bin Saeed, 2014; Zulfqar *et al.*, 2021). There is said to be biases embedded within these assessments as they are based on assumptions that ignore the realities of the real-world context of the leaders being assessed (Barnes, 2021a). These potential uncertainties and inconsistencies surface a need for leadership development research to have better theoretical clarity and transparency (Mabey, 2013). Navigating the complexities of leadership development necessitates a deeper examination of the assumptions and biases inherent in assessment methodologies. This highlights the need for greater theoretical clarity and transparency in advancing the field. In practice, this can help designers of training programmes to be more aware of how learners might respond to their programme journey.

In summary, the literature on defining leadership development is characterised by a relational and interdependent focus encompassing of social or interpersonal skills, while defining leader development emphasises an individual focus involving personal or individual skills. This dissertation adopts the term ‘leadership development’ as the act of developing employees into effective leaders and examines the outcomes of a specific leadership training programme alongside survey data for comparison purposes. These elements collectively provide a foundation for the focus of this dissertation in exploring the practical methods involved in designing and implementing training for leaders.

2.2 Leadership Development Theories

The roots of leadership development theories that are applied in research and practice today are mostly stemmed from classical leadership theories that have existed over the past century. These include the foundational works on ‘transactional leadership’ that allude to the value of hierarchy to drive organisational effectiveness (Weber, 1947; Bass, 1981) as well as early works on ‘transformational leadership’ which highlights the role of an effective leader to rally and drive followers towards realising organisational goals (Downton, 1973; Burns, 1978). Further to these important works are the theories of contingency leadership which outlines the uniqueness and contextualised nature of each organisation’s leadership model, and how there is no one-size-fits-all solution (Fiedler, 1964). Also, the situational leadership model of Hersey

and Blanchard (1969) argues how the success of an organisation depends on the level of commitment and competency possessed by its workforce. These suggestions provide a grounding on how leadership development needs to be deployed differently due to the varying needs of different organisations.

At the individual level, the earliest work on leadership theory could be attributed to the works of Thomas Carlyle whose 'great man' theory (Carlyle, 1840) posited that leadership qualities are innate in nature and good leaders are born and not made. Over the years, the assertion has both been built upon and critiqued by providing further reconsiderations over its applicability in the modern-day organisational leadership (Hoffman *et al.*, 2011; Spector, 2016; Mouton, 2019). These perspectives aim to the question of whether good leaders are born and not developed or nurtured over time with the right interventions. These foundational theories continue to serve as pillars in the body of leadership development literature, informing contemporary approaches and interventions. However, amidst these enduring theories, there has been a growing recognition of the dynamics of leadership, prompting scholars to explore alternative perspectives that challenge traditional notions of leadership development. For instance, the emergence of relational leadership theories emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and shared influence in shaping effective leadership practices (McCauley and Palus, 2020; Maritsa *et al.*, 2022). These evolving patterns highlight the need for leadership development initiatives to adapt and evolve in response to changing organisational contexts and societal expectations, underscoring the importance of embracing diversity, inclusivity, and authenticity in leadership development practices (Avolio, Avey and Quisenberry, 2010b; Day *et al.*, 2014).

Developments on these organisational and individual leadership theories have culminated in the formation of a range of models across the literature on leadership. A prominent one is the social change model (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) which outlines three groups of values namely group, individual, and society. Through this model, leadership is viewed as a process and a leader is expected to take actions across these groups in achieving the desired goals defined for each group. The key requirement in this model is collaboration, ownership, and accountability. A limitation of the model, according to Harper and Kezar (2021) is its tendency to overlook certain factors such as the challenges of minority groups who might be marginalised within the system. Their expansion of the model has enabled a more inclusive approach whereby minority groups are also taken into consideration. Similar

efforts have also been done by other scholars to adapt the model into a more contemporary lens (French, 2017; Skendall *et al.*, 2017). These attempts mostly acknowledge the validity of the model while complementing it with further considerations. While the social change model takes into account the values across the groups within its framework, the relational leadership model, (Hollander and Julian, 1969) focuses on the significance of relationships that are built among the people from within an organisation. Specifically, the model's five main components namely inclusivity, empowerment, purpose, ethics, and process. These components are said to be enabling of an inclusive working environment where the collective thoughts and views of the many are taking into consideration (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Over the years, the relational leadership model has been further expanded especially as the relationships between employer and employees have also evolved. These expansions include adapting the model to the concepts of empathy at the workplace (Jian, 2022), synonymy of leadership and relationship (David, 2018), and agile leadership (Cleveland and Cleveland, 2020a). These recent references signal the relevance of the model in the modern-day workplace, even as the world shifts into the post-pandemic new normal. Under leadership identity development (Komives *et al.*, 2005), leadership identity is viewed as the outcome of a series of processes namely awareness, exploration, identification, differentiation, generativity, and integration. While leadership identity development is clear in outlining these stages, applying the model poses some challenges especially if the applicants are undergoing a developmental or transitional stage themselves (e.g. university students, graduate employees) (Komives *et al.*, 2009). This model provides a clear grounding on how leadership can be developed given the right process.

In addition to leadership identity development, emotionally intelligent leadership (Goleman, 1995) is an increasingly popular model as it culminates a range of leadership theories and supports the suggestion that leadership can be developed (Mattingly and Kraiger, 2019b). Built upon a leader's awareness of self and others, emotional intelligence has been attributed to as a factor that determines workplace efficiency and effectiveness while minimising risks of conflict and disharmony among colleagues (Wen, Huang and Hou, 2019; Soto-Rubio, Giménez-Espert and Prado-Gascó, 2020; Kundi and Badar, 2021). As much as it is lauded, emotionally intelligent leadership is not without its critique. Lindebaum (2009) argued against the suggestion of emotional intelligence development as an organisational endeavour, and instead proposed for the trait to be 'self-initiated' to be fully effective. In

concurrency, Murphy (2014) claimed that the inconsistencies of the subject is due to the vagueness of its definition and the overestimations of its benefits. Further, the measurement of emotional intelligence in leadership is said to be too varied (Conte, 2005a; Fambrough and Kaye Hart, 2008) with opportunities for further research include development of more reliable measures of emotional constructs, deeper research on negative emotions, and focus on levels-of-analysis issues (Gooty *et al.*, 2010).

The leadership development literature is characterised by a wide range of theories, models, and approaches that have evolved over time, reflecting the complexities of organisational and societal dynamics. From classical theories of transactional and transformational leadership to contemporary models such as the social change model and relational leadership model, scholars have continually sought to capture the essence of effective leadership and provide frameworks for its development (Day, 2000; Day *et al.*, 2014). While each model offers valuable insights and perspectives, they are not without limitations and critiques, underscoring the need for ongoing dialogue, adaptation, and refinement in the field of leadership development. As organisations navigate through the challenges of the modern workplace, embracing diverse perspectives, fostering inclusive environments, and nurturing authentic leadership practices will be essential for cultivating effective leaders who can thrive at the workplace (Randel *et al.*, 2018; H. Leroy *et al.*, 2022). Further, core leadership theories shape the foundation of theories that are referred to in conducting the analysis that forms this dissertation. Contingency theories underscore the contextualised nature of leadership models which signals that there is no one-size-fits-all model that can blanket all leadership situations (Oc, 2018). Organisational and individual theories have evolved into diverse models over the years, including the social change model which emphasise on collaboration, ownership, and accountability across groups (Peer and Webster, 2016). Despite criticisms over its applicability, emotionally intelligent leadership remains significant in fostering workplace efficiency and minimising conflicts (Hopkins and Yonker, 2015; Mishra, 2022). This development is becoming more apparent in a post-pandemic world of work where there is heightened desire for an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace environment.

2.3 Leadership Development Models

The primary framework that has shaped the evolution of leadership development is also the model that is referred to in learning and development which is the '70-20-10' model

(Eichinger and Lombardo, 1987). Within this model, corporate learning is said to happen 70% on the job via daily experiences and challenges, 20% from other people via coaching or mentoring, and the remaining 10% is via formal training courses. While clearly an estimation and non-prescriptive, these segmentations provide a guide on how organisations can allocate their focus accordingly. As influential as the 70-20-10 model has been over the years, its validity has also been strongly challenged, especially over the assertion of informal interactions playing a huge role in enabling workplace learning (Clardy, 2018a). Specifically, it has been suggested that the 70% estimation is not sufficiently backed. Therefore, it is advised for all forms of learning to be given focus and strategised accordingly, without leaning towards one more than the other as it might miss out on opportunities for development (Brown and Davis, 2015; Jennings, Overton and Dixon, 2016). Based on the 70-20-10 model, the focus of this dissertation is mainly on how the 10% (i.e. classroom learning) and 20% (i.e. coaching) can be effective in enabling and facilitating learning to take place in the 70% (i.e. on-the-job). The focus shall be on how formal interventions for leadership development shapes a leader to effectively take action and improve in terms of getting a team to work towards the desired goal. The interest is in the relevance of the content embedded within the classroom modules as well as the coaching methods applied in creating tangible change before and after a programme.

While the 70-20-10 model provides a consideration at the organisational level, there are also several models which frame the viewpoint of leadership development at the workforce and individual level. The 'leadership skills strataplex' (Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, 2007) provides a segmentation of different needs for leaders at different levels. Specifically, junior leaders require more cognitive skill development compared to interpersonal, business, and strategy while for senior leaders, the inverse is true. The mapping of skills to hierarchy takes into consideration the roles played at different levels. The suggestions made in the strataplex is in concurrence to the proposal of Edwards and Gill (2012) who identified that transactional leadership is more effective at the bottom of the hierarchy, while transformational leadership is more apt at the top of an organisation. As such, leadership development needs to be viewed in a longitudinal view, as its evolution and growth are highly dependent upon time and environment. The development of a person into becoming the desired leader should be taken over a sufficient time for personal maturity and growth (Gentry and Martineau, 2010). In alignment with the strataplex, the interest of this dissertation is the middle manager demography, whereby the requirement for cognitive, interpersonal, business, and strategy are almost equally distributed. In this regard, the leadership development training that is analysed

is also viewed across these four segments. Specifically, the interest is on how the training prepares the leader who undertakes the programme as participant to improve upon completion of the learning journey. This assumption is also based on middle manager role who needs to ‘manage up’ and ‘manage down’ at work, in balancing the demands of both upper management and also direct reports (Ren and Guo, 2011; Gjerde and Alvesson, 2020).

At the individual level, the ‘Assess, Challenge, and Support’ (ACS) model (Velsor, McCauley and Ruderman, 2010) is a continuous approach that evaluates a leader’s capacity and capability, puts the person into a role that provides opportunities to develop on areas for improvement, and provides sufficient support for the desired leadership qualities to be acquired along the way. A considerable extension to this model is an inclusion of values and morals which can enhance the development of ethical leaders who make decisions and take actions in an ethical manner (Brown et al., 2020). In this dissertation, ACS will not be immediately utilised, but key ACS activities are explored within the process and assessment made by the organisation under study, in selecting the right participants to undergo a leadership development programme. This assessment is to ensure that there is a desired range of similarity between the participants with regards to job dimension and complexity. To challenge the participants, they are put through a coaching approach that is not entirely familiar to everyone, enabling a scenario whereby leaders are taken out of their comfort zone and reflect deeper on their strengths and developmental areas. The reaction of these managers in these situations that are not necessarily inherent to them provides an interesting outlook of different reactions among the cohort to different methods, depending on their personal preferences.

The range of models and frameworks in leadership development highlight the complexity and of cultivating effective leadership skills. From the widely recognized 70-20-10 model to more specialised frameworks like the leadership skills strataplex and the ACS model, organisations have a wide range of tools at their disposal to guide their leadership development initiatives. However, each model presents its own set of challenges and considerations. By integrating insights from various models and leveraging a combination of formal training, coaching, and on-the-job experiences, organisations can create comprehensive workplace culture initiatives that foster continuous learning, growth, and effectiveness among their leaders.

2.4 Leadership Development Methods

Advancements in methods of developing leaders across organisations have evolved over the years and can be viewed across several lenses. One such view is the demarcation of methods based on the triggers or initiation of leadership development namely self-directed, management-prompted, and coaching (Gavin, 2018). Self-directed learning is internally motivated hence promises a greater probability of success, whereby management-prompted might have some pushback. Coaching, on the other hand, can be seen as an approach with good potential for effectiveness. While coaching has its merit, its application requires a high level of contextualisation (Milner, McCarthy and Milner, 2018). The situation and mindset in which a leader receives the coaching should be clear before the intervention is introduced, to avoid frictions over the course of the engagement. Over time, the relationship built between the coach and ‘coachee’ (i.e. the individual being coached) needs to be positively anchored, so that the amount of trust is strong (Boyce, Jeffrey Jackson and Neal, 2010a). At the organisational level, an appreciation of the concept by the workforce needs to exist as a prerequisite condition (McCarthy and Milner, 2013). These findings within the literature signal the relevance of coaching as an approach in leadership development, contingent upon deep understanding from the coachee on the process and its intended outcomes. Nurturing a coaching culture within the organisation is not easy, but with deliberate and strategic efforts to embed awareness pervasively can lead to transformational change (Carey, Philippon and Cummings, 2011). Coaching can also be a determinant over how prepared a leader is in being agile and adaptable across uncertainties that surrounds the organisation (Vogus *et al.*, 2014).

Another emerging and growing method of leadership development is ‘action learning’ which involves immediate application of the knowledge and skills acquired to the workplace. Action learning is said to be more focused and practical for the immediate application of theory or concept into practice (Skipton Leonard and Lang, 2010). The other case in support of action learning is its flexibility to embed several skills into the learner in one intervention (Megheirkouni and Mejheirkouni, 2020). These include decision-making, communication, and problem solving. With the opportunity to immediately apply what is learned, action learning is also said to have a higher impact on the fulfilment or satisfaction of the learner, in realising a sense of achievement (Yeadon-Lee, 2018). Given the broad spectrum of action learning, the field is also expanding and evolving with newer discoveries and practices in the field (Cho and Egan, 2022a). One example is ‘virtual action learning’ which has emerged coming out of the

increasingly popular practice of online delivery of leadership development programmes (Byrd, 2019a). For action learning to fully succeed, however, contextualisation and conditioning are highly important (Yeo and Marquardt, 2015). Alignment between a leader's job scope at work, with the action learning intervention at hand is also highly critical (Fenwick, 2003). Without clarity over the relevance of a learning process to the value gained, the motivation to undertake the endeavour will be limited. The success of action learning is dependent upon the instructor who facilitates the process in terms of experience and expertise (Maharaj and Mason, 2016).

As a tool to obtain a wholesome view of a leader's development, 360-degree feedback is a commonly used method. In this approach, a leader's assessment is done via survey or interview of the line manager as well as colleagues as peers and direct reports as team members. Over the years, perspectives and enhancements have taken place given the high level of interest on the method. The interest and focus on the 360 method is driven by the continuous opportunities that it surfaces alongside learning goals that it facilitates along the way (Drew, 2009). Advancements in the practice have also progressed significantly since its introduction in the 1970's whereby data from 360 feedback are also used for purposes other than leadership development (McCauley and Brutus, 2019). There is further evidence on the usage of the data for overall organisational development. At times, the 360 method has been seen as less effective than action learning or mentoring (Azam, 2020) which is why some proposals have been made to complement and enhance it via instruments such as personality assessment (Kaiser and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2019). Critique on the 360 method revolves around its dependency on the motivation of the leader being assessed (Dahling, Chau and O'Malley, 2012). Therefore, the tool should be use together with other tools that might be able to provide a more comprehensive view (Kibe and Muathe, 2018). Some scholars have also highlighted the limited evidence on the impact of the tool in creating sustainable change (Ashworth, De Champlain and Kain, 2021). Further, there have also been scholars who questioned the ethics of 360, citing the risk of the tool doing the opposite of what it's intended for (Wilson *et al.*, 2018, 2021).

The literature on leadership development methodologies covers a wide array of approaches, each with its own merits and considerations. Coaching, in particular, has emerged as a powerful method, albeit one that requires careful contextualisation (Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). Similarly, action learning offers immediate application of knowledge and skills, fostering a sense of achievement and satisfaction among

learners while also evolving to adapt to changing needs and technological advancements (Chalard, 2011; Perusso *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the 360-degree feedback method remains a widely used tool for obtaining comprehensive insights into a leader's development, although critiques regarding its efficacy and ethical considerations persist (Young, Gentry and Braddy, 2016; Church *et al.*, 2019). Ultimately, successful leadership will leverage a combination of methodologies tailored to the specific needs and contexts of both the organisation and the individual leader, fostering continuous growth and adaptation.

2.5 Leadership Development Design

In designing leadership training programmes, several instructional design methods and adult learning theories are referred to as guidance. The 'ADDIE' approach (Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate) (Branch, 2009) outlines a standard sequential model that is often practiced across the process of designing a learning journey. The strength of this model is in the alignment of organisational and individual learning needs with the adaptation of the right teaching methods to deliver the desired content as well as evaluation to measure success (Peterson, 2003). In recent years, the model has also been analysed in its usage to facilitate design of online and hybrid learning, as these modes become more prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic (Spatioti, Kazanidis and Pange, 2022). ADDIE has also been practical in the teaching of vocational skills (Yu *et al.*, 2021) as it is coupled with adoption of learning technologies to facilitate the process. The application of deep learning has also boosted ADDIE as a model especially in integration with data analytics and machine learning to enable a more immersive learning experience (Rahman and Duran, 2022). Within the instructional and learning design community, ADDIE is often referred to as a reference that is quite commonly known across the field (Branch, 2009; Spatioti, Kazanidis and Pange, 2022). The application of ADDIE is often differentiated based on the various organisational needs and also diverse learning styles of participants that undertake a specific programme.

Other than ADDIE, another emerging method is the 'Successive Approximation Method' (SAM) while integrates agile and design thinking into the conventional ADDIE approach (Jung *et al.*, 2019). Through this method, improvements are made across periodic iterations consequently enabling fast deployment and continuous improvement (Nazarova *et al.*, 2020). While suitable for leadership development, SAM might not be directly applicable for training modules on governance or safety, where standards and consistency are highly

required (Allen and Sites, 2012) and changes are not as frequent. SAM can also be viewed as an extension to ADDIE whereby the implementations of programmes are conducted with the conscious need to acknowledge, record, and take action upon any continuous improvement opportunities throughout the learning journey of participants (Ali, 2021) .

Across the literature related to adult learning theories, several concepts stand out in providing the framework for leadership development. One in particular is ‘andragogy’. In contrast to pedagogy which commonly refers to teaching in primary, secondary, and higher education, andragogy is the science related to the teaching of adults with four key assumptions namely self-directed, influenced by experience, readiness to learn, and ability to practice (Forrest and Peterson, 2006; Loeng, 2018). With these considerations of andragogy, the opportunity to conduct personalised and immersive learning is also present for better effectiveness (Wozniak, 2020). For the context of this dissertation, whereby adult learning observations are prevalent among the participants of the selected middle manager training programme, the key assumptions of andragogy are highly relevant. This is due to the blended nature of leadership training design, whereby opportunities for self-directed and experiential learning are vast across the activities involved such as classroom training, group discussions, and personalised coaching (Geng, Law and Niu, 2019; Waritsman, 2022).

Another theory that is closely relevant to leadership development is transformational learning, as it relates to direct change in the individual before and after undertaking the intervention (Debebe, 2009; Madsen, 2010). The key success factor for the desired transformation to happen, however, is a clear definition of the competencies that are expected to be acquired by the learners who take part in the programme (Elkins, 2003). Further, there exist risks of impact not being felt at organisational level if values embedded within the leadership training are not adopted by management (Megheirkouni and Roomi, 2017). One critique on the application of transformational learning into adult education or leadership development is the assumption of matured cognitive ability and its predominantly Western-centric perspective (Merriam, 2004; Merriam and Ntseane, 2008), which may limit its applicability across diverse cultural contexts. Other areas that are deemed to be further considered to validate the practical usage of the theory are the relational contexts of self-society, leaders-follower, and teacher-student (Wilson and Kiely, 2002; DeSapio, 2017). While popular in use, the effectiveness of the theory is contingent upon a wide range of factors such

as cultural norms, power distance, and also common business practices (Crede, Jong and Harms, 2019).

While transformational learning relates to the change of a leader before and after an intervention, self-directed learning describes the drive, motivation, and ownership of an individual learner in voluntarily undertaking personal development as an endeavour (Torrez and Rocco, 2015; Zia *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, self-drive is seen as a prerequisite to ensure the success of a leadership training programme as it is a deeply human-centred exercise (Anders, 2021a), and the onus is on the individual to shape and condition the respective workplace to make the desired leadership style work effectively (Dickson and Tholl, 2020). As self-directed learning is a highly personal pursuit, there is necessity to consider a social transformation approach instead as an alternative, as it relates to the effectiveness of the learner as a leader, and everyone surrounding the workplace environment (Servant-Miklos and Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2021a). This idea of the insufficiency of self-directedness alone is supported with evidences on how the strength of leader-follower relationship outweighs personal drive of the leader alone (Jarvis, 2009). There are too many layers that need attention in a leadership development endeavour (Zepke and Leach, 2002). It needs to be acknowledged, however, that self-drive is not inherent to all. In other words, some people might need an extra motivation to undertake independent and voluntary learning, in which some company introduce incentivised or gamified participation to encourage employee involvement.

In addition to transformational learning and self-directed learning, experiential learning is another theory often linked to the practice of leadership training design (Jiusto and DiBiasio, 2006; Breunig, 2017). The rationale is in the strength of ‘learning by doing’ as a means of acquiring skills and knowledge, as compared to classroom training (McCall, 2004). Further, the real challenges of the leadership role can only be felt most when the person is put into the situation as part of the overall experience (Cathcart, Greenspan and Quin, 2010). In trainings, this is often reflected via case study discussions and simulations (Buchanan, 2017a). Through these activities, learners are able to partake in an activity that enables them to put themselves in the shoes of those in situations where leadership qualities are demanded such as decision-making, clarity in communication, and also inspiring others. In recent years, however, there have been calls for the experiential learning model to be reviewed and revised given how the workplace environment and modes of learning have evolved over time (Morris, 2020; Efthymiou, Ktoridou and Epaminonda, 2021). For one, the base of the model’s empirical

evidences are largely North American based, presenting opportunities for contextualised applications in other regions (Morris, 2020). There are also claims of the costliness of the exercise as it poses risk if applied in the form of job attachment or be deemed expensive if done in the form of international immersion programmes (Huish, 2021).

In practice, leadership development programmes are commonly the culmination of various adult learning theories. In the selection of participants, for example, employees who self-register into training programmes are often deemed to be more driven compared to those who have been nominated or proposed by their employers, usually via the human resource management department (Helling, 1998; Burgard, 2012). Within the design of a programme, which consists of content development and delivery methods, transformational learning provides the shape in which modules are sequenced, and learning outcomes are defined and set as context at the beginning. The application of experiential learning in leadership development has varied significantly in practice. One example is the direct attachment or assignment of employees to certain roles, to test an employee's aptitude, capacity, and capability to stand up to the test. There are also experiential learning modes that are embedded within a training journey, whereby learners are given leadership roles to be simulated in a case that has been developed based on real-world situations (Kjærgaard and Meier, 2022; Bonesso, Cortellazzo and Gerli, 2024). Experiential learning is also at times interchangeably used with action learning whereby theory is put into practice.

In summary, leadership development design encompasses a wide range of methods and adult learning theories, each offering unique insights into how leaders can be effectively developed further (McCauley, Hammer and Hinojosa, 2017). The ADDIE approach provides a structured framework for designing and implementing learning interventions, while newer methods like SAM integrate agile and design thinking principles for enhancements and iterative improvements to be made progressively over time (Ali, 2021). Andragogy and transformational learning theories provide deep perspectives on adult learning, emphasising self-directedness and transformative change, although the practical application of these models requires careful consideration of contextual factors (Merriam and Ntseane, 2008; Papathanasiou, 2023). Experiential learning offers a practical means of acquiring skills and knowledge through hands-on experience, although challenges such as regional adaptation and cost-effectiveness must be addressed. Ultimately, successful leadership development programmes merge a blend of these theories and methods, tailored to the specific needs towards

delivering business goals and maximising individual potential. The practical application of these theories in training programmes involves the key considerations of participant selection, module sequencing, as well as integration of experiential learning within the overall learning journey (Stumpf, 1995; Seidle, Fernandez and Perry, 2016). The absence of a careful assessment of these aspects might lead to programmes that are deemed to be detached from learner needs and irrelevant to organisational requirements.

2.6 Evaluating Leadership Development

The foremost model for evaluating leadership development is also one that is commonly used for corporate training in general namely the Kirkpatrick ‘Four Levels of Training Evaluation’ model as illustrated in Figure 2 (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Through this model, the assessment on a programme’s effectiveness is conducted across four levels namely Reaction (i.e. Level 1 (Reaction): “Did the learners enjoy the training?”), Learning (i.e. Level 2 (Learning): “Did learning transfer occur?”), Impact (i.e. Level 3 (Impact): “Did the training change behaviour?”), Results (i.e. Level 4 (Results): “Did the training influence performance?”) (Bretz, 2018). For leadership development, the Kirkpatrick model enables linkage between a programme’s objective and whether its desired outcomes have been met (Miller, 2018). Often conducted via surveys or interviews of participants post-programme, the model can also ascertain the quality of a programme from the qualitative and quantitative data that it obtains (Sultan *et al.*, 2019). As the model is commonly run from the point of immediate completion to longer-term behavioural change, there is potential for the model to facilitate longitudinal assessment (Sowcik, Bengue and Niewoehner-Green, 2018). This makes the model a versatile and flexible choice in terms of choosing the right point of usage, but also prone to the risk of losing momentum of context over time if done over a long period or assessed by different personnel. While the Kirkpatrick model is popular in use, there have been some critique over its effectiveness. There is claim of its tendency in broadly categorising outcomes instead of detailing and explaining why findings are observed in a certain manner (Allen, Hay and Palermo, 2022). This observation relates to the manner in which information is obtained in the model, which might come from self-reporting surveys that are exposed to personal biases. Another view on the model is the immediacy of its assessment upon completion of a programme, which can be deemed as more short-termed in nature (Alhassan, 2022). Specifically, should the first level of assessment be used and no further evaluation is conducted, the finding might be superficial in nature as it reports only the

immediate participant satisfaction level which might not sustain over time. Further limitations on the model include the inclination among users to focus more on the lower levels of the model i.e. reaction instead of the higher ones i.e. impact, result (Cahapay, 2021b), especially as the other levels tend to become more cumbersome and complex to be conducted.

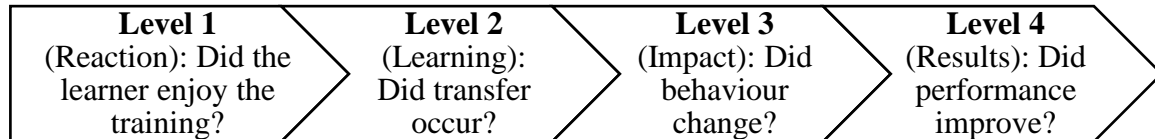


Figure 2: Kirkpatrick Four Levels of Training Evaluation Model

An extension to the Kirkpatrick model is Kaufman’s ‘Five Levels of Learning Evaluation’ (Kaufman and Keller, 1994) which adds the consideration of societal impact as an outcome of training. By ‘society’, this model refers to the broader community or social system that could be affected by the outcomes of the training, including economic, cultural, and ethical dimensions. Kaufman refines Kirkpatrick’s Level 1 by dividing it into ‘input’ and ‘process’. While Kaufman’s fifth level provides an extended consideration on the impact of a leadership development programme, there is a risk of the element of society being too far removed from the design of the interventions especially if it’s purely classroom-based (Deller, 2021). The question revolves around the wide variability of perceptions and definitions of what is constituted to be valuable for an organisation or society at large. Given the critique and limitations of the Kirkpatrick model, there have emerged several new approaches in evaluating leadership development over the years (Alsalamah and Callinan, 2021; Cahapay, 2021b). Brinkerhoff’s ‘Success Case Method’ provides a systems view of learning evaluation whereby an organisation’s ability to facilitate application of learning at the workplace is also considered (Brinkerhoff, 2005). With this method, the effectiveness of a learning intervention is evidenced with application of acquired skills to the workplace and overall ‘transfer of learning’ from an intervention (Averbeck, Gibson and Ziebert, 2020). This approach has the potential to be favoured among employers given its direct linkage to workplace application. Nevertheless, the task of attributing operational improvement to specific training programmes remains to not be a straightforward endeavour, given the other influencing factors i.e. workplace dynamics, work process implementation, systems requirements.

Another perspective on learning evaluation is to ascertain ‘transfer of learning’. In the context of adult education context, transfer of learning relates to the acquisition and retention of skills and knowledge from a learning experience, leading to application on the desired intent (Hajian, 2019). Within this science, the ‘Learning-Transfer Evaluation’ model (Thalheimer, 2018) outlines eight levels of learning transfer that are categorised into the aspects of ‘learning’ and ‘work’. Within a leadership development context, this can range from attendance to a programme all the way to participation level, and decision and task completion at work leading to attributable results. Interests in transfer of learning has also given birth to a field of its own, with a vast body of literature over the past century. This includes models that highlight key success factors that enable transfer of learning. For leadership development, Baldwin and Ford's (1988) model claims that transfer of learning is the result of programme design and workplace environment that enables application. Still, effective measurement of transfer of learning remains a challenge today as definitions and understanding diverge far and wide across the literature (Schoeb *et al.*, 2020). Deep contextualisation is required if organisations wish to fully maximise the capabilities of learning transfer models. This includes commitment for people involved across the workforce development process including line managers, human resource managers, and most importantly, the employees themselves.

In summary, the evaluation of leadership development can cover various models and approaches aimed at assessing overall effectiveness and business impact. The Kirkpatrick model provides a comprehensive framework for gauging immediate reactions, practical learning outcomes, observable behavioural changes, and meaningful performance improvements (Johnston, Coyer and Nash, 2018; Alsalamah and Callinan, 2021). While widely used, critiques suggest limitations in its categorisation of outcomes which might just touch the surface of learning impact and short-term focus which might miss out on meaningful lessons that can sustain over time. Kaufman’s model extends this evaluation to include societal impact, although challenges arise in defining and measuring this aspect (Watkins *et al.*, 1998). Brinkerhoff’s Success Case Method offers a systems view which emphasises on the transfer of learning to the workplace and overall application of skills (Manuti *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, the Learning-Transfer Evaluation model enables an analysis on the intricacies of learning transfer, highlighting the importance of programme design and workplace environment (Nafukho *et al.*, 2017; Renta Davids *et al.*, 2017). Despite the advancements made within the field over the years, measuring transfer of learning remains a complex endeavour, which provides opportunities for further exploration in assessment methods across different

industries, regions, and business cultures. These challenges also persist in view of the existence of diverse definitions and understandings across both academics and practitioners in the field.

2.7 Motivations for Leadership Development

In addition to identifying leadership development method that works best for middle managers, it is also important to explore and understand the key factors that can motivate middle managers to undertake leadership training. This exploration connects the core study on adult learning which is the focus of this dissertation, with motivational science which outlines the drivers that influence human behaviours and decision-making. Four motivational theories that can help inform this study are expectancy theory, goal-setting theory, self-determination theory, and social cognitive theory (Chaimongkonrojna and Steane, 2015; Chipunza and Matsumunyane, 2018). These theories were selected upon screening the literature on motivational science and narrowing the scope further into the context of leadership development. These theories are also pertinent to the needs and wants of employees which can cut across both intrinsic motivations (i.e. self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, ambition) and also extrinsic motivations (i.e. salary increase, promotion, recognition).

Through the expectancy theory, Vroom (1964) outlined the expectations of reward that employees have when they put in efforts that result in performance. In the context of leadership development, the expectations that middle managers have in participating in training is a significant consideration (Khoreva and Vaiman, 2015; Aldulaimi, 2018), specifically as it can influence the effectiveness and level of participation within the programme. This consideration is reflected within the design of a programme itself (Mehboob and Othman, 2020; Greeley, 2022) whereby the values gained from training participation are often outlined at the beginning and reminded throughout the learning journey. While expectancy theory proposes a seemingly direct link to how participants of leadership training perceive its reward as an outcome, it is not without criticism. There are views that allude the theory to be inaccurate in measuring its construct or too calculative in reflecting human decision-making (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003; Mair, 2015). There is also the risk of expectations not being met by participants either in the way a programme does not meet their immediate needs, or the applicability of new knowledge and skills is not able to be tested at the workplace due to prevailing work culture or processes. With these limitations in mind, it is worth balancing the frame in which we view

leadership development to also consider other motivation theories at the same time for a more wholesome perspective to be formed.

In a similar vein to the expectancy theory, the goal-setting theory is also predictive and forward-looking in nature. It asserts that setting out challenging and specific goals can drive motivation for goal realisation (Latham, 2012). With leadership development being a long-term endeavour, there is immediate applicability of the theory to this study (Kaufman, Israel and Rudd, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Xu, Wang and Wen, 2019). Goal setting is seen as a natural fit to the overall end-to-end leadership development process (Ladyshevsky, 2007; Olivares, 2008). The goals in reference could be personal in nature such as immediate upskilling of a new skill or knowledge. This can also come in the organisational context whereby team productivity improvements can be immediately felt, leading to potential positive impact to overall company performance. That being said, several limitations have been highlighted by researchers who framed their studies on goal-setting. For one, Pryor and Bright (2013) highlighted that goal achievement is not as straightforward as the theory might suggest. A long-standing view is that the theory is mostly more applicable for simpler tasks that are also hands-on where the link between productivity and performance is more direct (Evans, 2020). Leadership is one such case where the topic is highly dynamic that it makes it challenging to pinpoint any specific upskilling as the main reason for any improvement recorded or observed. There is also the influence of employees' inclination to only focus on what is rewarded and not so much on what is not (Thompson, 2008). In other words, level of engagement and participation in a leadership training programme can be highly contingent upon any immediate reward that can be gained such as promotion or salary increase.

Self-determination theory provides three categories of psychological needs among human beings namely autonomy (i.e. control), competence (i.e. capability), and relatedness (i.e. meaning) (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Given the relevance of these elements to an individual, there have been suggestions that posit that leadership development and employee wellness can be effective when viewed from frame of this theory (Fowler, 2018; Rigby and Ryan, 2018). These include design of training programmes, and development of human resource policies and process, among others. In other words, a workplace ecosystem that enables the desired level of autonomy, opportunities for acquisition and upskilling of competencies, and alignment between individual and organisational values, can facilitate employees to perform at their best through innate motivation and self-drive. One criticism of the self-determination theory,

however, is that it is seen to be more Western-centric which limits its applicability to a more universal grounding (Hartnett, 2016). Within this view, the theory is observed to be more practical in a society where individualistic values are higher (Bown-Anderson, 2019). This provides an opportunity for this theory to be considered as the theoretical framework of this dissertation as it can give an Asian context of its application, given that the focus is on a sample from a multinational company that is based in an Asian setting, with a workforce that is largely regional.

While self-expectancy, goal-setting and self-determination theories are innate in nature, the social cognitive theory holds an outside-in view (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). Through this theory, Bandura (2001) asserts that human development is not only a function of personal experiences, but also observations of others. In the context of a leadership development study, there is relevance for this theory given that leadership is not an aptitude that can simply be acquired through formal learning, and requires tacit knowledge acquisition from observations and interactions (Dominick, Squires and Cervone, 2010; Mason, Griffin and Parker, 2014). In other words, there is a question whether leadership development is actually an individual journey or an organisational journey. An individual might go through the best learning programme out there, but without organisational support or the right workplace setting, applicability might be limited which can also lead to frustration. Similar to goal-setting theory, social cognitive theory has also faced criticism for limited contextualisation (i.e. geographical, demographical) when put to practice (Halpern and Perry-Jenkins, 2016). This can come in the forms of the different cultural contexts that can come into play either in the East or in the West, which can't necessarily be taken as a universal truth. Further criticism on the theory also includes its reliance on perception and translation of observation into reality (Guerrero, 2020; Wray, 2016). The basis of this perspective is potentially the varied lenses that are adopted by different individuals in seeing each situation, which might lead to a single phenomenon leading to various takeaways and lessons from the observer standpoint.

In summary, from the review conducted above on the relevance of expectancy, goal-setting, self-determination, and social cognitive theories to leadership development, we are provided with a range of considerations that can explain how the underlying motivations of middle managers can influence the effectiveness of their participation in leadership training (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Eccles and Wigfield, 2020). The expectancy and goal-setting theories illustrate how gaining new skills and knowledge from a leadership programme can help middle

managers to fully commit to a training programme to achieve his or her career goal. Through the self-determination theory, there is potential need for leadership training design to align to the aspirations and desires of middle managers in pursuing and furthering their career. In this regard, there is a consideration among learning designers to leverage on this motivation to ensure that participants make the most of their involvement in a particular programme. As for social cognitive theory, there is also a design consideration for the inclusion of observation as part of a programme delivery, which can be conducted via engagement with leaders, for example.

While these theories offer vast opportunities to view leadership development as a subject, it is also important to not ignore their limitations. There have been views of how the goal-setting and expectancy theories, for example, could potentially oversimplify the complex nature of leadership and the stakeholders involved. There have also been observations on how these theories tend to ignore cultural differences across demographics. These boundaries are critical consideration throughout the progress of the research conducted in this dissertation. In addition to identifying effective leadership development methods for middle managers, understanding the motivating factors behind their participation in training programmes is crucial. This exploration involves integrating core studies on adult learning with motivational science to identify the driving factors that influence decision-making.

2.8 Existing Research on Leadership Training Effectiveness

Given the large investments that organisations make in leadership development, both in time and money, there have been a wide range of attempts among scholars and practitioners in the field of leadership development to link corporate training interventions with overall organisational and leadership effectiveness. At the same time, there has also been extensive research to challenge the causality claimed by most studies. One perspective that refutes causality of leadership development is factored by the set of issues that disable causality including control conditions, sampling, and randomisation (Martin *et al.*, 2021a). To discuss this phenomenon, the following paragraphs are segmented across different themes from existing studies that have been conducted with similar objectives as this dissertation. The intent is to facilitate a more streamlined analysis of the subject.

Success Factors of Leadership Training

As this dissertation analyses and investigates different methods of developing leaders, similar studies that can be compared to the objectives of this study are mostly attempts to identify factors that can contribute to effective transfer of learning over the course of one or several leadership programmes. In their meta-analysis, Lacerenza et al. (2017) acknowledged the effectiveness of leadership development in improving performance and identified key success factors to include pre-intervention needs analysis, post-intervention feedback, and in-person delivery. While this dissertation is interested in the design approach and delivery method factors of a leadership training programme, there have also been efforts to investigate behavioural, emotional, and biological factors that can influence effectiveness. Based on self-determination theory, Tafvelin and Stenling (2021a) observed a link between pre-intervention self-motivation in enabling positive influence of autonomous motivation to programme effectiveness. This observation relates to the pre-existing interest that a learning experience might have prior to engaging in the training programme.

There is also interest in the medium to long-term learning transfer for participants. Anchoring on the factor of gender, An and Meier (2021) examined data from 478 managers across three organisations to identify their response over the completion of a leadership training over the period of a year. During this process, it was concluded that female managers benefit and experience improvement more from the training, although their leadership behaviours were deemed to be more effective during the pre-programme assessment. This finding illustrates an interesting outlook on how gender can also reflect on the desire for improvement in undergoing an intervention. In a comparable study, Holt et al., (2018) surveyed 273 employees of a pharmaceutical sales division to identify the required competencies of a leader that are highly desired from the employee perspective. From this exercise, respondents highlighted competencies such as communication, motivating others, and rallying teamwork as desired components expected of a leader, and therefore are essential in any leadership training. This dimension can complement existing organisational and individual views that are always considered in designing programmes.

Incorporating Coaching and Other Upskilling Methods into Training

One key component of the leadership training programme that is analysed in this dissertation is coaching. As a method, coaching is highly synonymous with the act of developing leaders and the workforce at large, and it requires clear definition to everyone involved, in comparison to other activities such as mentoring and advising (Hastings and Kane, 2018). Coaching and mentoring are similar in the way that they are one-to-one and structured, while advising is more holistic than it is specific. Over time, coaching has evolved from driving performance to nurturing potential (Bono *et al.*, 2009). The utilisation of coaching in leadership development is analysed extensively across the literature. Within the past five years, interest has grown especially in the sectors of corporate, higher education, and healthcare. Coaching has been claimed to be effective in building compassion, empowering leaders with confidence, and changing the way leaders engage with their subordinates over time (Le Comte and McClelland, 2017a; Wasylyshyn and Masterpasqua, 2018; Boon, 2021). This is mainly attributed to the way coaching address specific challenges that the leaders face, which can be deemed as highly valuable as it helps to attend to an immediate or prioritised concern that is close to the receiver of the coaching experience.

In addition to coaching, this dissertation is also interested in other methods of nurturing business skills within leadership training. These include classroom teaching of functional business competencies (e.g. stakeholder management, strategy, communication) as well as activities that encourage practical application of theories and concepts acquired during a programme (e.g. case study, simulation, assignment). As such, this literature review is also keen on exploring how these methods are evaluated across other programmes analysed to date. An emerging method in leadership development is game-based learning, which combines simulation and learning technology into a form of experiential learning. In their exploratory analysis of the literature, Sousa and Rocha (2019) highlighted the success of this method in enabling positive outcomes such as improvements in motivating staff, coaching others, and changing mindset to align with organisational goals and needs. Infusion of games into leadership development is also said to impart positive psychology and spark better creativity and learning flow among leaders (Buzady, 2017a). In healthcare, where transition from practice to leadership is critical for nurses, this practical method is considered as highly effective (Bleich *et al.*, 2018a; Brown and Rode, 2018a; Strickland and Welch, 2019; Howard, Barber and Kardong-Edgren, 2020). For practical simulation to work, however, several factors need

to come into play. These include facilitator expertise, adherence to standards, and buy-in from participants (Howard, Barber and Kardong-Edgren, 2020). When conducted as part of peer-learning, the process is said to facilitate confidence building, self-reflection, and role modelling (Brown and Rode, 2018a).

Assessment of Transfer of Learning

Given the interest of this dissertation in exploring and analysing training methods, one key indicator to reflect effectiveness is learning transfer which can include the influencing factors of a training programme. In this regard, this literature review is encompassing studies that have been conducted within this area of relevance. In one survey by Soerensen (2016) involving 127 managers in a two-year leadership programme, factors that can improve learning transfer include supervisor support, self-motivation, opportunity to use, job evaluation, and evaluation frequency. In the study of Geerts et al. (2020), the positive impact of leadership development intervention is validated via analysis of a systematic literature review. Through this study, the identified methods that can enable effective transfer include feedback, coaching, action learning, and mentoring. From the assessment, however, it was noted that needs analysis was not sufficiently done across most programmes, although its significance is considerably high in determining effective learning transfer. Another key factor is clarity on the expected outcome of the intervention conducted. Similar studies have also been conducted via post-programme completion interviews with participants. In the study of Soderhjelm et al. (2020), a thematic analysis was done over qualitative data obtained two years upon completion. From this exercise, personalised feedback and opportunity to apply new knowledge were surfaced as key reasons that enabled learning transfer. Similarly, Hall et al., (2018) conducted impact assessment five months upon completion and identified strong impact by way of positive organisational culture shift.

In summary, the above review on existing research that are similar to this dissertation illustrate a growing interest in identifying conditions that enable effective transfer of learning in terms of a participant's motivation (e.g. behaviour, personality, characteristic), programme design and delivery (e.g. coaching, simulation, case study), as well as applicability (e.g. workplace environment, opportunity to practice). With the observations and perspectives gained from this review, a comprehensive pool of references can be formed to build the structure and foundation for this dissertation. As organisations invest substantial resources in

leadership development, scholars have made concerted efforts to link training interventions with overall leadership effectiveness. However, challenges to establish causality persist, including issues with control conditions, sampling selection, and randomisation process. Nevertheless, studies focusing on the factors facilitating effective transfer of learning during leadership programmes have emerged to be significant. Some meta-analyses have underscored the importance of pre-intervention needs analysis, post-intervention feedback, and in-person delivery for enhancing leadership training effectiveness.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

Based on the key insights and findings from the literature review, Table 2 outlines the range of theories that were referred to in guiding the development of this dissertation, comprising key concepts and models as well as implications on leadership development. From this extensive list of theoretical perspectives, the theoretical framework that served as a guidance for this dissertation are based on two primary theories namely adult learning theory and self-determination theory, as underlined in Table 2 (Ryan and Deci, 2020; David and Amey, 2021). The theoretical framework is the starting point where the analysis within this dissertation was framed upon, while providing a lens for empirical data assessment towards drawing meaningful conclusions. The theoretical framework is intended to facilitate the integration of academic perspectives, enrich the discussion relevant to this dissertation, and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of different leadership training methods. The two selected theories in shaping the theoretical framework for this dissertation were also based upon the research questions of this dissertation, pertaining to identifying effective leadership training methods as well as exploring factors motivating middle managers to undertake learning interventions. This linkage is important to ensure that the scope of the analysis conducted throughout this dissertation is focused and targeted.

Theoretical Perspective	Key Concept / Model	Implication on Leadership Development
Leadership Development Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency Theories • Social Change Model • Emotionally Intelligent Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual nature of leadership • Collective leadership • Emotional intelligence in post-pandemic work
Leadership Development Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70:20:10 Model • Leadership Skills Strataplex Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a balanced approach across learning methods • Cognitive, interpersonal, business, and strategic skills are crucial for middle managers
Leadership Development Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed Learning • Coaching • Action Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of aligning organisational and individual learning needs • Need to foster a coaching culture • Value of experiential learning for effective development
Leadership Development Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Adult Learning Theory</u> • Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate (ADDIE) Approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed, experiential, and transformative learning within the design of leadership development (Andragogy) • Consideration for participant selection, module sequencing, and integration of learning.
Evaluating Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider objectives, societal impact, and organisational

		application, beyond immediate feedback of participants
Motivational Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectancy Theory, Goal-setting Theory, <u>Self-determination Theory</u>, Social Cognitive Theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse motivational factors influencing middle managers' participation • Need for deeper understanding and recognition of cultural variations

Table 2: Theoretical Perspectives and Implication to Leadership Development

Theoretical Framework 1: Adult Learning Theory

As an important element within the field of corporate training and leadership development, adult learning theory is an area that has ample opportunities that could benefit from further development and research (Allen, Rosch and Riggio, 2022; Kliewer, 2023). As the theory was developed several decades ago, and the landscape of adult learning and corporate training have evolved since then, there is potential where the findings of this dissertation can build upon. Nonetheless, one critique on the theory is how its assumptions might deny the diverse range of individual motivation factors and backgrounds of participants, as well as their respective learning preferences (Clapper, 2010; Merriam, 2018). Adult learning theory has also been queried for its limited consideration of social and cultural factors such as workplace environment and technological adoption, which can significantly influence learning impact. In the context of leadership development, this theoretical framework is explored further in this dissertation through the investigation of how different methods of leadership training relate to the components of the theory such as self-directed learning, experiential modules, and transformative learning.

Theoretical Framework 2: Self-determination Theory

The selection of self-determination theory as a theoretical framework is based on how it provides valuable insights into the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering

motivation for leadership development (Ryan and Deci, 2020; C Meany, 2023). There is a case for further exploration on the implication of this theory in relation to adult learners' engagement and persistence in learning activities. Based on the assertion that individuals are inherently motivated to pursue activities that satisfy their basic psychological needs, self-determination theory highlights the importance of creating supportive environments for learners, which might include aspects such as workplace environment and interpersonal professional relationships (Chee Keng, 2015; Nunez and León, 2015). In the context of this dissertation, the training programme analysed is a learning journey that is designed based on cohorts whereby elements such as interpersonal communication, decision making, and workplace collaboration are important. This selection is also based on the opportunity to further enhance elements of the theory based on its relevance to adult learning, which is also an opportunity to focus the findings of this study to adult learners and delineate itself from human education as a whole i.e. primary and higher education. Further, self-determination theory can enable a better understanding of how learners get engaged in their learning experiences when there are work and family responsibilities which demands them to prioritise accordingly (Van Den Broeck *et al.*, 2016). The framework can also enable better appreciation of the dynamic nature of leadership development and the importance of prior and current experiences in fostering motivation and drive among participants who take part in leadership training. This entails integrating principles of experiential learning and competency-based, and self-driven learning into the framework, whereby adult learners are empowered to take ownership of their learning process.

The identified theoretical framework provides a workable structure for analysing and interpreting empirical data in subsequent sections of this dissertation. By incorporating key concepts, models, and implications derived from the literature review, this framework based on adult learning theory and self-determination theory can offer a comprehensive perspective on leadership development for middle managers (Manz and Manz, 1991; Solansky, 2015). This will guide the assessment of practical methods and strategies employed not just in the training programme analysed in this dissertation, but also other practical needs in the future such as development of senior leaders or similar programmes in the public sector. Through this lens, the dissertation addresses some of the identified gaps in the literature that are discussed in the next section.

2.10 Identified Gaps in the Literature

From the literature review conducted, several groups of identified gaps within the literature are observed. The list below outlines these gaps and highlights how this dissertation can potentially address some of the gaps from different angles and perspectives. By identifying these gaps, this dissertation contributes to ongoing discussions on leadership development with complementing insights to the literature. The exploration of these gaps will not only enrich theoretical understanding, but also inform practical strategies for enhancing leadership training. A discussion on the value of exploring these gaps is also discussed respectively in the following sub-sections.

Long-Term Impact and Sustainability

Many studies concentrate on short-term outcomes of leadership development programmes, such as immediate changes in behaviour or performance instead of spending more time to monitor and track how middle managers grow within their role or beyond. This is understandably so given the time limitation of research allocations such as the finite period of a grant award or doctoral study. This scenario presents an opportunity to ascertain long-term impact and sustainability of these interventions. Understanding how leadership skills are acquired through development programmes and influence career trajectories over an extended period is essential for organisations in planning sustainable leadership development initiatives. Extending beyond immediate outcomes, an investigation into the long-term impact of leadership development programmes can also provide insights into long-term sustainability and organisational impact. Further to assessing immediate behaviours or performance changes immediately upon programme completion, long-term follow-through of participants can shed light on the durability of the leadership skills acquired. This outlook can also help organisations in determining patterns of skill retention, knowledge transferability, and application back in the workplace. As for enterprise talent management as a whole, this effort can enable a deeper understanding of how leadership development contributes to talent retention and succession planning across the workforce. There are also observable gaps in the application of evidence-based practices in leadership development, which can help in ascertaining long-term effectiveness; these are driven by factors such as lack of resources, competing priorities, and insufficient external monitoring (Leroy *et al.*, 2022).

Motivations for Participation

The literature review touched upon several theories on motivation such as expectancy theory, goal-setting theory, self-determination theory, and social cognitive theory (Eccles and Wigfield, 2020; Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). Given that motivation can vary widely at the individual level, there is opportunity to extensively surface the specific motivations that drive middle managers to actively participate in leadership training, at least within the sample of this research. Understanding these motivations, including personal and career aspirations, can aid in designing more targeted and engaging leadership development as part of continuous improvement. In this regard, to fully harness the potential of motivation as a driver for individual participation and commitment, there are opportunities to analyse the unique motivations between middle managers. In this dissertation, there is also opportunity to explore both personal and career aspirations, as well as the perceived benefits and barriers associated with participation in leadership training. In practice, this aspect relates closely to adopting a growth mindset at the individual level and nurturing a strong learning culture at the organisational level. There is interest on how motivation might evolve over time i.e. before and after a leadership training, and if the perceived value on leadership training shifts after undergoing and reflecting on a participative experience.

Diversity of Contexts

The literature predominantly focuses on leadership development within Western organisational contexts, as observed from the location of most scholars who are interested in this topic. Limited attention is given to cultural context and the impact of diverse backgrounds on leadership effectiveness of other parts of the world, or if these factors do actually influence into training effectiveness at all. Future research can explore how leadership development methods may be tailored to suit the diverse cultural and contextual needs of multinational organisations, considering the unique challenges faced by leaders in different regions. In the case of this dissertation, the multinational company where the data will be collected from is based in Southeast Asia. There is an interesting outlook to observe how leadership development methods can be adequately adapted to multinational organisations. Further, there is opportunity for the findings of this dissertation to offer actionable insights for designing contextually relevant leadership training for other organisations in the region. By broadening the scope of

investigation to cover wider cultural perspectives, there is opportunity for future research to be more inclusive and culturally relevant to a wider target audience.

The existing literature on leadership training lacks the comprehensive examination of how factors like gender, race, and other dimensions of diversity might influence leadership development outcomes. Future research can consider to explore unique challenges faced by individuals with intersectional identities and how leadership programmes can be designed to be more inclusive and equitable. For the purpose of this dissertation, there is no specific focus on gender or race, but there is interest in middle management which generally does come from a specific range of age groups and years of working experience. By acknowledging diversity of identities, organisations can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive environment that enables all middle managers to thrive and succeed. Further, by engaging with participants from diverse backgrounds, researchers can gain insights into the wide-ranging factors that shape the perceptions, aspirations, and challenges related to leadership development.

Evaluation Beyond Traditional Models

The literature predominantly discusses traditional evaluation models such as the Kirkpatrick ‘Four Levels of Training Evaluation’. There is a need for exploration into alternative and innovative evaluation methods that go beyond immediate reactions, learning transfer, and behaviour change. Research could explore holistic models that consider societal impact, organisational culture, and the complex relationships of various factors influencing leadership training effectiveness. In this regard, future research can potentially explore the development and application of holistic evaluation frameworks that draw inspiration from interdisciplinary fields such as organisational psychology, sociology, and systems thinking. By adopting a systemic perspective, researchers can explore the longer-term effects of leadership development initiatives across different levels of analysis, from individual behaviour change to organisational culture transformation. On paper, these endeavours may be more challenging to execute than conceptualised. By engaging with stakeholders involved, researchers can gain insights into some underlying insights that may not be captured by traditional evaluation methods alone. Further, through qualitative inquiries such as interviews of focused group discussions, tangible data can be obtained on subjective experiences, unanticipated outcomes, or emergent patterns from the learning experience.

Further Integration of Technology

The literature review mentions the incorporation of online and hybrid learning methods into leadership training programmes, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the rapid advancement of learning technologies, there are opportunities to explore the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, or machine learning into leadership development solutions. Investigating the effectiveness of these advanced technologies offers insights into their potential contribution to personalised and immersive learning experiences. From the scope of this dissertation, input on this item can be expected from suggestions provided by participants of the leadership programmes. One consideration for future research is to engage with participants to solicit feedback and suggestions regarding the integration of technology into learning experiences. The integration of artificial intelligence can potentially enhance the personalisation of learning experience through the analyses of big data to identify patterns, trends, and individual learning trajectories. Experimentations and piloting are crucial in the context of adopting technology into learning, both from the design phase and execution or evaluation stage of a learning intervention. There exists the risk of deploying technologies just for the sake of it, which might garner interest on how learners react to different new innovations, but miss out on the core of what the original learning objectives are within a programme.

Based on the theoretical framework and identified gaps in literature, several potential links are developed with the research questions. These connections can provide further focus and context to enable a targeted analysis for this dissertation. Given the broad range of potential research gaps arising from the literature review, there is a requirement for a more specific focus that the findings and analysis are bounded upon. Apart from providing focus, this parameter can also avoid any redundancy in terms of efforts in conducting analysis. This alignment between research gaps and research questions are presented in Table 3, which also outlines how the two theories that make up the theoretical framework relate to the key objectives of this study. This structure provides the guidance and focus of the analysis conducted throughout the dissertation.

Research Question	Gap in Literature	Theoretical Framework
<p>1. What leadership development methods can be considered as relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders in their respective roles?</p> <p>2. Why are the identified methods considered relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders who can realise the organisation's goals?</p>	<p>Methods that contribute to long-term impact and sustainability: Understanding how leadership skills acquired through development programmes can effectively persist and influence self-efficacy in the longer-term, for personal and professional development.</p>	<p>Adult learning theory i.e. experiential, transformative, self-directed learning</p> <p>Rationale: This theory provides a frame to identify how level of engagement, behavioural change, and motivation encourage level of participation.</p>
<p>3. What are the primary motivations that lead middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes? What explains changes in their motivation between signing up for the programme and after they have participated in the programme?</p>	<p>Motivations for participation: Understanding motivations for leadership development including personal and career aspirations.</p>	<p>Self-determination theory</p> <p>Rationale: This theory provides focus on learner's autonomy in setting goals, developing skills, and making meaningful connections.</p>

Table 3: Alignment Between Research Questions and Research Gaps

Chapter 3: Research Method and Design

In this chapter, the focus is on the selected methods and design application that builds the foundation for analysis and assessment conducted in this dissertation. Several sections are outlined to categorise the methods adopted to ensure depth in the research activities involved. The rationale behind choosing each research method is also discussed, in alignment with the study's research questions, objectives, and theoretical framework, providing a guidance for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In the data gathering section, the process of identifying and curating the acquired information are outlined and clarified in ensuring sufficient coverage and relevance of the dataset. This includes development of interview questions used in gathering data, selection of interviewees who were engaged, and selection of sampled population for the surveys conducted. These efforts are aimed to facilitate the identification of patterns, themes, and implications that contribute to a deep understanding on the topic at hand i.e. effectiveness of different leadership training methods, as well as motivation and perception of middle managers on leadership training.

3.1 Method Selection

Given that the objective of this dissertation is to explore and understand the different methods of leadership training and to identify the most effective approach for middle managers to develop into impactful leaders, as well as their motivation and perception on leadership training, four methods were chosen. These include three qualitative methods (i.e. thematic analysis, grounded theory, case study analysis), and one quantitative method (i.e. regression analysis), making the research design of this dissertation to be mixed method. With these qualitative and quantitative approaches, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and insights of individuals involved within the selected leadership training programme under focus, alongside comparison with a sampled demography of middle managers. The quantitative analysis done via a survey was conducted to complement and also challenge assumptions that arose from the qualitative analysis done on the sampled group who were interviewed.

Qualitative methods are suitable for exploring the complex subject of leadership development as it allows for a deeper exploration of diverse perspectives among the sampled demography. While the existing post-programme feedback from the training programme

contains written input from the participants, most responses from the existing method applied would only capture the data at the surface level. In other words, the input is not rich enough to form a strong grounding. By engaging in one-on-one conversations, the underlying factors that influence the learning experience of the participants can be potentially unearthed. Further, the quantitative regression analysis utilised in this dissertation is useful to validate and further understand any specific similarity or contrast between the findings surfaced from the qualitative analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected as a primary method for data analysis because this approach enables the identification and interpretation of patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data, providing deeper insights into the diverse impact of different leadership training methods (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Lochmiller, 2021; Wiltshire and Ronkainen, 2021). The goal is to conduct a systematic and structured analysis of interview transcripts and survey feedback to facilitate identification of recurring themes and exploration of perceptions and experiences of middle managers in undertaking leadership training. The framework referred to in conducting the thematic analysis is by Braun and Clarke (2021) which was chosen given its wide usage, and shall be further discussed in the data analysis section. The main feature of this framework is in its focus on enabling flexibility in conducting thematic analysis, thus enabling the desired level of rigour at doctorate level research.

To ensure comprehensiveness of coverage, several series of interviews were conducted to investigate the narratives of both programme participants (20 interviewees), as well as facilitators and coaches (five interviewees). This shall allow for an understanding of the strengths and limitations of different training approaches. Thematic analysis is also deemed appropriate for addressing the three research questions that have been outlined for this dissertation. In addition to the systematic analysis of interview data with participants and facilitators and coaches, there is also opportunity to complement the data with survey feedback from participants across the period of a year, between January and December 2023. This approach is suitable in exploring the complexities of leadership training, given the considerations that influence the experience. This includes evolution of motivation before and after training, perceptions on the value of leadership training over time, and leadership

behaviours that participants have before, during, and after the programme. This can facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and insights of participants and facilitators, ultimately informing further recommendations for enhancing leadership development practices.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is chosen as a complementary method to thematic analysis to provide understanding of the underlying factors that influence leadership training effectiveness, complemented by an alternate set of data (Khan, 2014; Chapman, Hadfield and Chapman, 2015; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). Grounded theory is particularly appropriate for exploring complex observations where existing theories may be limited, allowing for the development of new theoretical frameworks grounded in empirical data. In the context of this dissertation, grounded theory offers an opportunity to explore the interactions and relationships between various factors that impact the effectiveness of leadership training, which can be obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the 20 participants sampled from the programme, together with existing complementing data from the post-programme survey undertaken by 587 participants over the period of one year i.e. from January to December 2023. In addition to thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying pre-existing themes within the data, grounded theory can generate new theoretical insights that emerge directly from the data itself. Through a process of constant comparison, which in this case relates to the emerging themes from the interviews alongside the appreciative and constructive feedback received for the programme survey, grounded theory allows for the identification of key concepts, relationships, and patterns that can contribute to the research. By iteratively refining and validating emerging theoretical constructs, grounded theory enables the development of contextually grounded theories that capture the depths of the topic.

Grounded theory also provides a flexible and iterative approach to theory development, allowing for the exploration of multiple perspectives and dimensions within the data. For this dissertation, the grounded theory framework is in reference to the model introduced by Glaser and Strauss (2017) whereby the key activities include theoretical sampling (i.e. interview, survey), comparative analysis, ascertaining theoretical sensitivities, and coding, prior to forming identified themes. Given the focus of this dissertation, this effort facilitates the exploration of diverse experiences and viewpoints (e.g. participant experiences), ensuring that

the resulting theoretical framework remains closely aligned with the empirical realities of the research context. Grounded theory also offers the flexibility to adapt to the three research questions and emerging insights, to explore unexpected findings and novel concepts that may arise during the analysis process. Through inductive reasoning and theory building, grounded theory offers a systematic approach to the qualitative methods adopted in this dissertation.

Regression Analysis

Given that the objectives of this research, and to complement the qualitative methods chosen, a quantitative approach is also adopted which is capable of identifying relationships and quantifying the impact of various training methods on leadership effectiveness. In this regard, regression analysis is particularly suited for such purposes due to its ability to model the relationships between dependent and independent variables and to provide insights into the strength and significance of these relationships (Vetter and Schober, 2018). The data for this study were collected through a structured survey administered to 200 middle managers across North America and Europe, as a measure of comparison to the sampled middle managers who were interviewed for qualitative analysis. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative components. For the quantitative analysis, the survey captured ratings of the overall effectiveness of leadership training (i.e. dependent variable), ratings of the effectiveness of specific training methods such as classroom training, executive coaching, online learning, case study, group project, simulation, role playing, and leadership workshop (i.e. independent variables). Regression analysis is deemed to be effective for handling this type of data where the dependent variable is continuous, and the independent variables are a mix of categorical and continuous data. It allows for the inclusion of multiple predictors and enables a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing leadership training effectiveness.

Regression analysis offers several analytical capabilities that align well with the objectives of this dissertation namely how different approaches compare for the same objective. It provides estimates of the relationships between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables. This is essential for identifying which training methods have the most significant impact on leadership effectiveness. Further, this technique allows for hypothesis testing to determine whether the observed relationships are statistically significant. This helps in confirming or refuting the hypothesised effects of different training methods that can be influenced by past experiences or inherent assumptions held by the researcher. Beyond

identifying relationships, regression analysis can be used for further predictive purposes. The model can predict the expected effectiveness of leadership training based on different combinations of training methods. The choice of regression analysis is consistent with the overall research design. The structured nature of the survey data and the focus on quantifiable outcomes make regression analysis an appropriate and robust method, especially as the demography for the sampled group is sizeable enough to provide further credibility on the gathered data.

Case Study

To conduct in-depth and thorough comparison, benchmarking, and exploration of leadership development approaches and programmes within different organisations, a set of case studies of five companies were conducted. The goal is to provide rich insights into the strategies, practices, and outcomes of the initiatives and programmes adopted by different organisations towards understanding the effectiveness of different leadership development practices based on their respective cultural, industrial, and regional contexts. The method of case study that is adopted is as suggested by Yin (2018) due to its ability to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of complex issues embedded within the companies of interest. This selection of method is also guided by the aim of capturing a diverse range of influencing factors on various leadership training methods. The selected companies were chosen based on their reputation for implementing innovative and successful leadership development initiatives, as well as their relevance to the research objectives. By exploring and understanding a variety of organisations, the expectation is to identify common themes, best practices, and lessons learned that could inform leadership development practices more extensively. In designing the case study, the company selection was made based on reputation for innovative or successful leadership development initiatives, diversity of industry sectors, geographical location, organisational size, and accessibility to stakeholders for data collection purposes. Specifically, three countries are based in North America and Europe (i.e. GE, IBM, Google) while two companies are based in Asia (i.e. Toyota, DBS), to provide diversity of perspectives and potential contrasting views on how leadership development is approached around the world.

Data collection methods for the case studies include document analysis of publicly available information (i.e. to provide additional context), semi-structured interviews with

relevant stakeholders (i.e. recorded with transcribed verbatim), and observation of activities where possible. Interviews were referred to from recorded conversations with business executives and human resource leaders of the organisations. Documents such as programme materials, reports, and publications were analysed to provide additional context and insight into the leadership development initiatives at organisational level. The analytical approach used to analyse the case study data is thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns, themes, and findings within the data, to extract key points relevant to this dissertation. Data from interviews, document analysis, and observations were coded and categorised to identify key themes and insights related to leadership development practices, outcomes, and challenges. Concurrently, it is important to acknowledge several limitations associated with the case study research conducted in this study. First, the selection of case study organisations may not be fully representative of all industry contexts, limiting the ability to generalise of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews and documents may introduce biases in the data. Finally, the scope of the case study research may be limited by resource constraints, access boundaries, and time limitations, potentially impacting the depth and breadth of the analysis.

3.2 Data Selection and Gathering

Data Sets 1, 2, and 3: Interview with Middle Managers who Participated in a Leadership Training Programme, Facilitators and Coaches of the Programme, and Post-programme Feedback Survey

Based on the research questions and objectives, the qualitative data that was analysed for this dissertation were sampled from a leadership training programme that was conducted for middle managers at a Fortune 500 multinational company. The organisation is based in Southeast Asia and operates primarily in the energy sector. It has been in existence for about 50 years and is currently operating in over 30 countries across the value chain with 50,000 employees worldwide. Out of this number, the demography of middle managers comprises of approximately 2,500 global staff members. In this organisation, a 12-week leadership development programme for middle managers has been designed with the objective of preparing middle managers to effectively play their role as the bridge between management and the operating level workforce. The learning outcomes from this programme include equipping leaders with the tools for them to ‘lead self’ and ‘lead others’ effectively through

identification of personal strengths and areas and development, as well as methods of effectively building trust and empowering or delegating tasks to the team. Participants are also provided with an executive coach each who will be with them along the way to address specific challenges that they face at the workplace or beyond.

The components of this programme include personality assessment, virtual instructor-led training, in-person classroom workshops, executive coaching, self-driven online learning, face-to-face simulation, and role playing. These variety of delivery modes (i.e. online, in-person, hybrid) qualifies the programme to be categorised as a ‘blended’ learning journey. This design is based on the diverse work commitments of the participants who undertake this programme on a part-time basis, while they are still delivering their full-time work tasks and deliverables. Based on the learning outcomes of the programme, the modules that make up the content of the syllabus include personal leadership skills (e.g. communication, decision making, conflict resolution) and business leadership skills (e.g. strategy, innovation, sustainability). These modules were included based on the leadership framework that the organisation subscribes to which looks into harnessing interpersonal communication, decision quality, strategic growth, and focused execution. The content sequencing is also based on the organisational goals of the company which include strengthening cash flow, accelerating innovation, and upholding sustainability commitments, including targeting for net carbon zero emission within the next 30 years. The high-level design of this programme is illustrated in Figure 2.

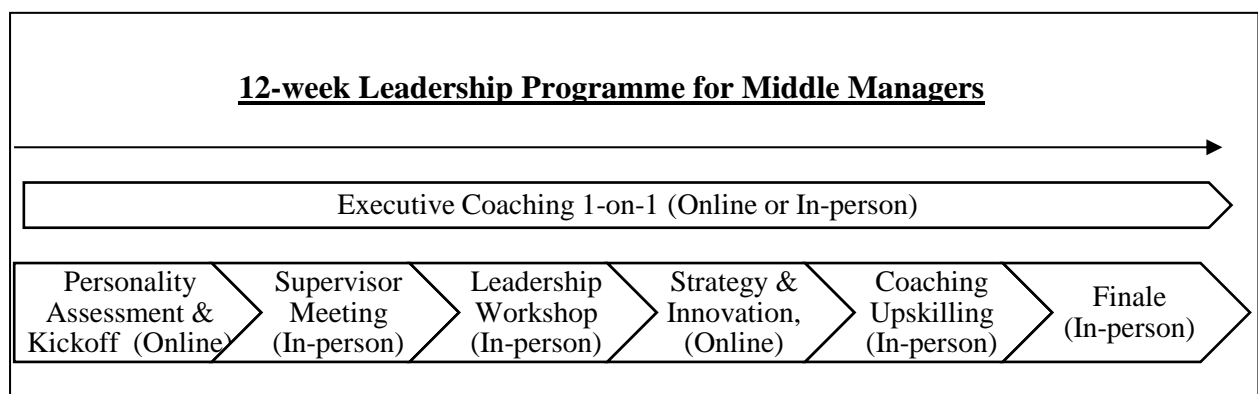


Figure 3: High-level Design Leadership Programme for Middle Managers

The participants of this programme are middle managers with approximately 10 to 20 years of work experience. The sampled participants who were interviewed for this research are

participants of the programme across 10 cohorts between January to December 2023, with the programme running at approximately 50 participants per cohort. The sampled participants comprise of both male and female staff members, with ages ranging from 30 to 45. As the organisation is a multinational company, the ethnicities of the participants are diverse from various backgrounds and nationalities. In terms of roles, the middle managers sampled work in various functions from both technical (e.g. engineering) and non-technical lines (e.g. planning). As the organisation is a global conglomerate, the participants come from a wide array of industries, presented. The details of the sampled participants are outlined in Table 4.

Age	30 – 45
Gender	Male and Female
Years of Experience	10 – 20
Job Functions	Engineering, Finance, Business Planning, Procurement, Project Management
Industry	Energy, Manufacturing, Professional Services
Education Level	Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree
Location	Worldwide

Table 4: Overview of Leadership Programme Participants

The first set of data for this analysis were collected through the sampling of 20 participants from the population of managers who have completed the programme. These participants were interviewed in a semi-structured manner and recorded for approximately 45 – 60 minutes online via a preferred platform (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams). The questions of the interview revolved around their applications of lessons from the programme after six months or more of completion. They were also asked on the impact of the participation on their leadership behaviour change or business result gained. The second set of data come from a series of interviews that were run with the facilitators and coaches of the programme. These are learning and development professionals who were also part of the design team that developed the programme, and later facilitated certain blocks of the programme where they

might be subject matter experts. In this role, they curate and facilitate both in-person and virtual classrooms and workshops with the participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with them with the aim of obtaining their input on the perspectives of how participants engage in the content of the programme, and how they evolved throughout the course of the programme before, during, and after completing their learning journey. The third set of data were from the post-programme survey that was responded to by every participant of the programme over the course of the January to December 2023 period that have been determined for this research. In total, there were 587 participants and the two sets of responses that will be analysed are from the questions that sought the appreciative and constructive feedback of the participants on their overall experience in undertaking the programme. A grounded theory was formed from the analysis of this data alongside data gathered from the sampled interviewees, which also allows for comparing and contrasting of findings from the first two sets of data.

To obtain both primary and secondary data, the training department of the organisation in the study was approached. Through this engagement, the list of past participants was obtained alongside data on the performance of the programme including programme rating, net promoter score, and indicative performance improvement from training intervention. This engagement is positioned as a collaboration whereby the findings of the study will also be shared back to the organisation, for their continuous improvement. Further, consent from the organisation was also sought in initiating contact with their programme participants, to uphold governance and research ethics as per best practice. Participants profiles have also been anonymised for the purpose of this dissertation. Several challenges were faced in gathering both primary and secondary data. One challenge was in obtaining time of the interviewees given that most of them might have grown into bigger responsibilities in roles with larger accountabilities. Another challenge is in obtaining objective input relating to the behavioural change or business result gained from being part of the programme. As the information are considered self-reported as part of the interview, there might have been some biases towards shining a more positive light to the interviewee's individual performance. To mitigate these limitations, the contexts of the participants' experiences were tightly controlled during the interview and analysis phases through effective questioning.

Given the objectives and intended outcomes of the data gathering process, the design of the interview is anchored on the participants' perspectives in mind. The goal is to unearth and surface specific experiences from the learning experience that has been significantly useful

for them in terms of either personal or professional development. This relates to the subjects of self-efficacy, team dynamics, and organisational effectiveness. In this regard, the questions that have been drafted are also intended to curate a conversation that is exploratory in nature. From the 45 to 60 minutes allocated for the interview, a gradual process of going deeper on experiences was conducted with the aim of surfacing actual thoughts and feelings of the participants. The interview questions were designed to further obtain detailed responses that capture the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding their initial responses, adaptation, and influence or impact in undergoing the different training methods. By employing open-ended questions and prompts, the aim was to encourage participants to reflect deeply on their learning journey and articulate their insights in their own words. This approach facilitated an exploration of experiences in an anecdotal manner, allowing for the identification of underlying themes and patterns that may not be immediately apparent either from the post-programme survey feedback data, which might only cover the surface. The exploratory nature of the conversations was aimed at enabling participants to share diverse views from their various backgrounds, contributing to a comprehensive coverage of the areas that the research questions aimed to address. The interview questions for the first and second sets are presented in Appendices A and B.

Data Set 4: Survey of Middle Managers

In addition to the qualitative analysis done on the data obtained from the interviews with participants, facilitators, and coaches, as well as the post-programme feedback survey, a survey was conducted on 200 middle managers from North America and Europe. The goal of this endeavour was to ascertain the perception and motivation of middle managers before and after undertaking leadership training, based on the methods that they have undertaken. The survey was also conducted to gain understanding on the preferred activities that are deemed useful and practical from the leadership training that they have gone through. The survey design was structured to align with the research objectives, ensuring that each section captured specific aspects of motivation, perception, and effectiveness of different training methods. Questions were developed based on shortlisted training methods outlined in the interview and qualitative analysis for comparison. Additionally, the reference for the questions includes the review of existing leadership development literature as well as by the theoretical frameworks of adult learning and self-determination theories to ensure relevance and validity.

This study is a mirror of the approach done on the interviews with middle managers in the company assessed in this dissertation, which is based in Southeast Asia. From this exercise, an opportunity is presented for findings and insights to be compared and contrasted given the difference in regional location. The element of business culture and working policies, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, can give an interesting comparison between the practice of leadership training across these regions. It is important to highlight that these insights are primarily high-level, and indicative in nature; which are not intended to be a direct comparison, given that the sample covers a wider range of training programmes, and not necessarily the same programme undertaken by the middle managers interviewed for the qualitative analysis.

The goals of the survey are outlined as follows:

- To identify the most effective methods of leadership training for middle managers.
- To understand why these methods are effective.
- To explore middle managers' motivations and perceptions on leadership training before and after undergoing the programme.
- To understand middle managers' assessment of their own leadership after undergoing the training.
- To zoom into middle managers in North America and Europe to assess if there is any difference from the sampled qualitative analysis which was done in a company in Southeast Asia.

The dependent variables in the study are measures of training effectiveness and changes in perceptions and motivation on leadership training, while the independent variables include types of training namely classroom training, executive coaching, online learning, case study discussion, group project, simulation, role play, and leadership workshop. To filter the participants accordingly, participants are required to meet the parameters determined to qualify as survey respondents, as follows:

- Job level: Middle managers
- Age: 30 – 45; Years of working: 10 – 20
- Industry: Any (Private sector, public sector)

- Location: Europe, North America
- Gender: Male, Female
- Sample size: 200

The survey was implemented using the online data provider platform Prolific, which facilitated targeted sampling and ensured respondent anonymity. The platform allowed for specific filters to be applied to match the pre-determined participant parameters, enhancing the reliability of the data collected. Additionally, the online provider's built-in data quality controls helped ensure that responses were complete and met all survey requirements. The questionnaire utilised for the survey is presented in Appendix C.

Data Set 5: Public Information on Benchmarked Companies for Case Study Discussion

Five companies were studied in terms of leadership development strategy, leadership training design and execution, and measurement of leadership training effectiveness. The companies were chosen based on the diversity of the industries that they are in, hence providing different workforce reaction to training, and also reputation for leadership development among the human resource sector. These data are identified via official sources i.e. company websites and also academic or industrial commentaries which provide other insights and synthesis of how these companies change over time in terms of leadership training approaches. Relevant observations were also made in terms of how economic or technological changes (e.g. pandemic, digitalisation) affect how leadership training is done across these organisations.

Research Ethics and Integrity Considerations

In conducting this study, several research principles and integrity considerations were observed in each stage of the study to ensure the protection of participants and the reliability of the findings. The study adhered to key ethical principles, including respect for persons namely interviewees and survey respondents. Via a consent form, each interviewee received clear, comprehensive information about the study's purpose, methodology, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions, ensuring that participation was both fully informed and consensual. Additionally, all responses were kept strictly confidential, and any identifying

information was removed to maintain participant anonymity. For the leadership training programme under study, the researcher is a member of the organisation where the data was collected. Throughout the study, the researcher adopted a neutral stance, minimising any influence over participants' responses. Data collection processes, including the survey and interviews, were conducted through independent or anonymized means where possible, and interactions with participants were structured to maintain a professional distance, reducing the likelihood of bias. All data collected from the survey and interviews were securely stored, with access limited to authorised personnel only. To further protect participant confidentiality, interview data was anonymised during analysis. Prior to data collection, the study received the appropriate approval from the university's ethics review board.

An overview of all five sets of data gathered for this dissertation are presented in Table 5.

No.	Data Set	Data Type	Remarks
1	Interviews with Programme Participants	Qualitative, Primary	Twenty participants from the leadership programme were selected to undergo a semi-structured interview ranging approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The participants were middle managers with 15 – 20 years of working experience, both male and female, and from across different functions in the organisation such as engineering, finance, and legal.
2	Interview with Facilitators and Coaches of the Programme	Qualitative, Primary	Five facilitators and coaches of the programme were interviewed to obtain input on their pertinent observations of the participants across the course of the programme. The goal was to obtain the instructor's view of the classroom dynamics and social learning.
3	Post-programme Completion Survey	Qualitative, Secondary	Upon the completion of each cohort of the programme, a post-programme feedback survey was sent out. From the period of January to December 2023, a total 587 responses were received on the appreciative and constructive feedback on the learning experience in this programme, providing opportunity for further analysis and formation of grounded theory, in complementing data from the interviews.
4	Survey of Global Middle Managers	Quantitative, Primary	A survey was sent to 200 middle managers working in North America and Europe for quantitative analysis to be conducted (e.g. regression, correlation) to compare and contrast

			findings that might be similar or different to qualitative analysis done from the interviews on middle managers based in Southeast Asia.
5	Publicly Available Information on Case Study Companies	Qualitative, Secondary	Analysis and assessment were conducted on existing information and insights on best practices and theoretical observations made on five companies that were chosen as case study organisations to be benchmarked with findings of the company under study in this dissertation.

Table 5: Overview of Data Sets Gathered for this Dissertation

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis on Data Sets 1 (Interview with Participants) and Data Set 2 (Interview with Facilitators and Coaches)

In conducting thematic analysis on the data gathered for this dissertation, the framework by Braun and Clarke (2021) was referred to, given its wide citation across academic literature related to leadership research. Further, through its six phases. This model emphasises on flexibility and creativity in applying thematic analysis. This would allow an adaptation of the framework to the specific needs and context of this research. In addition to its clarity, the framework is also flexible in the way that it maintains the level of rigour that is expected of research at doctorate level. An overview of the six phases required in this framework of thematic analysis is outlined in Table 6.

No.	Phase	Activities
1	Familiarisation with Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immersion with data through reading and re-reading of interview transcripts as sources of qualitative data.• Recording of notes and annotation of data to identify initial thoughts, ideas, or patterns.
2	Initial Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Systematic coding of data by identifying meaningful segments or units of information.
3	Generation of Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grouping of related codes together to form preliminary themes.• Identification of patterns or connections across different codes and data segments.
4	Review and Definition of Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and refinement of themes by ensuring they capture coherent patterns of meaning within the data.• Definition of each theme as concise descriptions that capture its essence.

5	Description of Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of themes and meaningful names that reflect content and relevance to the research question. • Provision of illustrative examples from data to support each theme.
6	Write-up Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of identified themes into a coherent narrative that tells a story. • Framing of an overview for each theme, including relevance to the research questions.

Table 6: Overview of Braun and Clarke (2021) Thematic Analysis Approach

The specific activities that were applied in conducting the thematic analysis for Data Sets 1 and 2 are outlined in the following sub-sections.

Thematic Analysis Phase 1: Familiarisation with Data

Upon the completion of each of the 20 interviews conducted, familiarisation with the data collected was done as the first step of the entire thematic analysis exercise (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This includes listening and re-listening to the recording of each interview, and reading and re-reading of the transcripts obtained, specifically from the generation of texts that are auto-populated by the tools used i.e. Microsoft Teams, Zoom. In this effort, the goal was to be closely familiar while being sufficiently guided by the research questions that have been defined to ensure focus and targeted analysis within the research boundaries. To ensure the familiarity of data is fresh and not lost in context, most of the familiarisation process took place immediately upon completion of each interview phase. This is also done as a means of validating the notes that were taken during the conversations with the participants. Active listening was adopted to ensure that the context and essence of each input provided by the participants were accurately captured. This familiarisation is mainly done on Microsoft Word and Excel, with NVivo software being used for text import and organisation which provided an overview of the content and context of the data obtained.

Given that the goal of familiarisation was to identify initial thoughts, ideas, and patterns, the notes that were recorded primarily consisted of preliminary ideas that were prominent from the conversations that were conducted (Lochmiller, 2021). These were not empirical evidences, but instead were perceptions that were surfaced and can be gauged from the conversations that were conducted. From each of the interview notes, and gradually building upon the other notes that followed through, the points or inputs that re-appear across different participant began to emerge. In the context of this dissertation, some of the prominent thoughts that were immediately visible included preference for in-person learning engagement versus online learning, the reference to the ‘multiplier’ leadership model as an immediately applicable model, and the appreciation for cohort-based learning which enabled exchange of ideas among managers with similar challenges at the workplace. From this early observation, the framing of thoughts leading to the further analysis that was conducted in the dissertation was formed. Some pertinent notes obtained are outlined in Table 7 with the intent of outlining the insights and ideas that were apparent from the beginning of the analysis phase of the dissertation. This table is also an indication of the prevailing thoughts that were shared across the participants as a common denominator.

No.	Note
1	<i>“Participants were clear in outlining in-person facilitated session to be the most valued. However, this was not denying the realities of work commitments that might not enable them to take a full learning journey to be fully online.”</i>
2	<i>“The ‘multiplier’ effect of leadership is cited many times as an effective tool to help them to be sensitive and aware at the workplace. It is also an instrument to help identify blind spots at the workplace.”</i>
3	<i>“Participants indicated that they wanted to join the programme since before the nomination from the HR departments. They indicated that the nomination was appreciated and their motivation level going into the training was high.”</i>
4	<i>“Participants value assessment done on them which enabled to identify the leadership traits that were suitable for their personalities. The Strengths Finder</i>

	<i>tool is one that is easy to undertake and understand, at least for this group of managers.”</i>
5	<i>“The online modules are deemed to be relevant but work and family commitments do not make them engage as much. This is not from lack of interest, but more of limitation of time. Some did engage actively, in making time for learning that are self-driven.”</i>
6	<i>“Since the interviews were run at least three months upon completion of programme, they are indications of participants actively going into self-driven improvement for leadership i.e. coaching, training, online courses.”</i>
7	<i>“There were participants who indicated that the presence of classmates from other businesses were appreciated as it enabled exchange of thoughts on problem solving, workplace challenges, and also tips on addressing team dynamics.”</i>

Table 7: Extract of Preliminary Notes Recorded from Interviews

Thematic Analysis Phase 2: Initial Coding

Upon better familiarisation with the data obtained to be at a satisfactory level, initial coding was done to obtain description groupings that can potentially categorise the identified patterns and trends from the qualitative information recorded and observed (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Lochmiller, 2021). The challenge in this phase was describing the initial coded to be succinct and concise, without losing the true meaning and context of the coding at hand. At this stage, the coding process was mainly done manually whereby each transcript was analysed and studied thoroughly for the specific items to be then highlighted and marked as reference. The items that were pre-identified as potential codes from this initial exercise are then highlighted to indicate the group to which that they belong. This exercise was done primarily in Microsoft Word, given that the application was the main platform to which each transcript was generated.

Within the Microsoft Word application, each code was marked and recorded on the side as ‘comments’ for each annotation and reference for later steps of the overall analysis. The

advantage of this method is in its wholesome and thorough assessment of input provided by the participants (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2021). In other words, any points made by the interviewees are not missed as this effort involves screening the transcript line-by-line to then scrutinise and identify the potential codes. The challenge, however, is in having codes that might be similar in nature but still not immediately overlapping in terms of context and meaning. This effort proved to be overwhelming at one point as the emergence of the growing number of codes indicated the challenge that might come ahead in developing themes later, from the analyses of the codes. Given the scale of the dissertation, an optimal number of themes is required. To assist with this exercise, Excel and NVivo are also used for systematic coding to further label and categorise data segments across the transcripts.

The primary factor in identifying which item of the data gathered to be coded depends on its relevance to the research objectives, and research questions (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). This repeated iteration has enabled better familiarisation of the trends that are seen throughout the interviews conducted. For example, the preference for in-person learning appeared across various different interpretations including specific mentions on the value of in-person learning to provide focus and attention to the lessons at hand, the distractions that come about from online learning that might come from the workplace or at home, and the value of exchanging thoughts and ideas in-person with colleagues who are in the same cohort. These thoughts either allude to the value of in-person engagement versus online, and also highlighted the drawbacks of online learning that might hinder full participation or maximum level of attention. The identification of these codes began to form a converging line of thought that link to the theme of 'engagement' which shall be discussed in a later section.

The iterative process of coding was also helpful in further distinctions of how the different thoughts of participants could be further clarified given the context of each interviewee (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Braun and Clarke, 2021). For example, in an earlier interview, one participant indicated that the appreciation for topics relevant to the workplace is driven by the immediate applicability of the topic. During a later interview, another participant indicated that the same model is highly relevant to the workplace. However, there appears to be a real challenge of putting it into practice given the prevailing working culture that was in existence. Therefore, the application of the model is not immediately felt. These two contrasting situations indicated how the same concept on leadership was equally appreciated. However, the application of theory of practice was different in both cases. The appreciation of

the topic relevance remained a code despite the two differing applicability levels. Some examples of codes extracted from interviews are outlined in Table 8.

Participant No.	Interview Excerpt	Initial Code
1	<i>“The coaching was very beneficial, especially in addressing a specific pain point I was experiencing at the time.”</i>	Coaching is highly relevant to immediate needs of learners.
4	<i>“The self-paced learning resonates with me. Group activities and facilitated sessions helped, especially the discussions. Key concepts like the multiplier effect and being aware of diminishing traits stayed with me.”</i>	Self-paced learning and social learning aspects both contribute to positive experience.
7	<i>“While I enjoyed the face-to-face sessions, the impact of online lessons and leader sharing sessions could be enhanced by having at least one session done face-to-face. This would provide a different outcome and impact.”</i>	Preference for in-person over online experience is strong.
10	<i>“My motivation to join the leadership programme was driven by a desire for self-improvement. I’ve been in a managerial position for about three to four years, and I wanted to identify areas where I could enhance my skills.”</i>	Intrinsic motivation to join the programme was present prior to registration.
14	<i>“I had this startling realisation that a lot of the leadership contributions to the team go unnoticed. It doesn’t appear in my result scorecard though.”</i>	Self-awareness is experienced from the learning process.

Table 8: Example of Initial Coding Done on Extracts of the Interviews

Thematic Analysis Phase 3: Generation of Themes

The generation of themes was conducted upon the completion of the coding exercise across the interview transcripts. In this effort, the goal is to form the rightful themes that are capable of informing or converging the thoughts covered by the codes that were identified (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Braun and Clarke, 2021). This includes codes that may be alluding to different connotations, but might have similarities in terms of underlying meanings or views. There were also instances of a code that might belong to several potential themes. An example are the codes that referred to level of engagement and also amount of interactive activity of in-classroom learning. While one is focusing on the amount of attention given to each individual learner and the other points to the types of learning process that took place, both could contribute and complement each other. Therefore, the identification of which theme each code belonged to, proved to be a decision that required further consideration. This might also signal the potential relationship between the two codes or adjacent themes, once formed.

While there is no set rule on the number codes and themes to be formed, in order to make coherent research analysis, the perspective adopted for this dissertation was to be practical and robust enough in ensuring the optimal number of themes for substantial analysis are generated. As such, in the coding process, the identification of codes was guided by references made to the research questions. Further, the generation of themes was done also in alignment with the research questions. Across this exercise, Excel and NVivo were used via the text search and word frequency queries to identify recurring themes within the data; with some visualisation used i.e. word cloud, chart aid. further, additional information was also recorded and references for coding, including additional information provided by the interviewees, following through the primary questions from the conversations that took place. For example, one participant indicated how the role play simulation that took place in the classroom was beneficial for him to fully experience and empathise on the role of an effective manager, having put himself in the shoes of a staff under work stress situation. Following through from this anecdotal sharing, the participant further expressed how he appreciated the element of the psychological safe environment of the learning environment helped for him to fully immerse in the learning experience. These two codes, although branching out from the same question, led to the identification of two key themes namely ‘interactive learning activity’ and ‘social learning’, both of which will be discussed in a later section. Figure 4 presents the

draft of a thematic map which indicates the formation of the first three themes arising from the codes developed and potential relationships between themes.

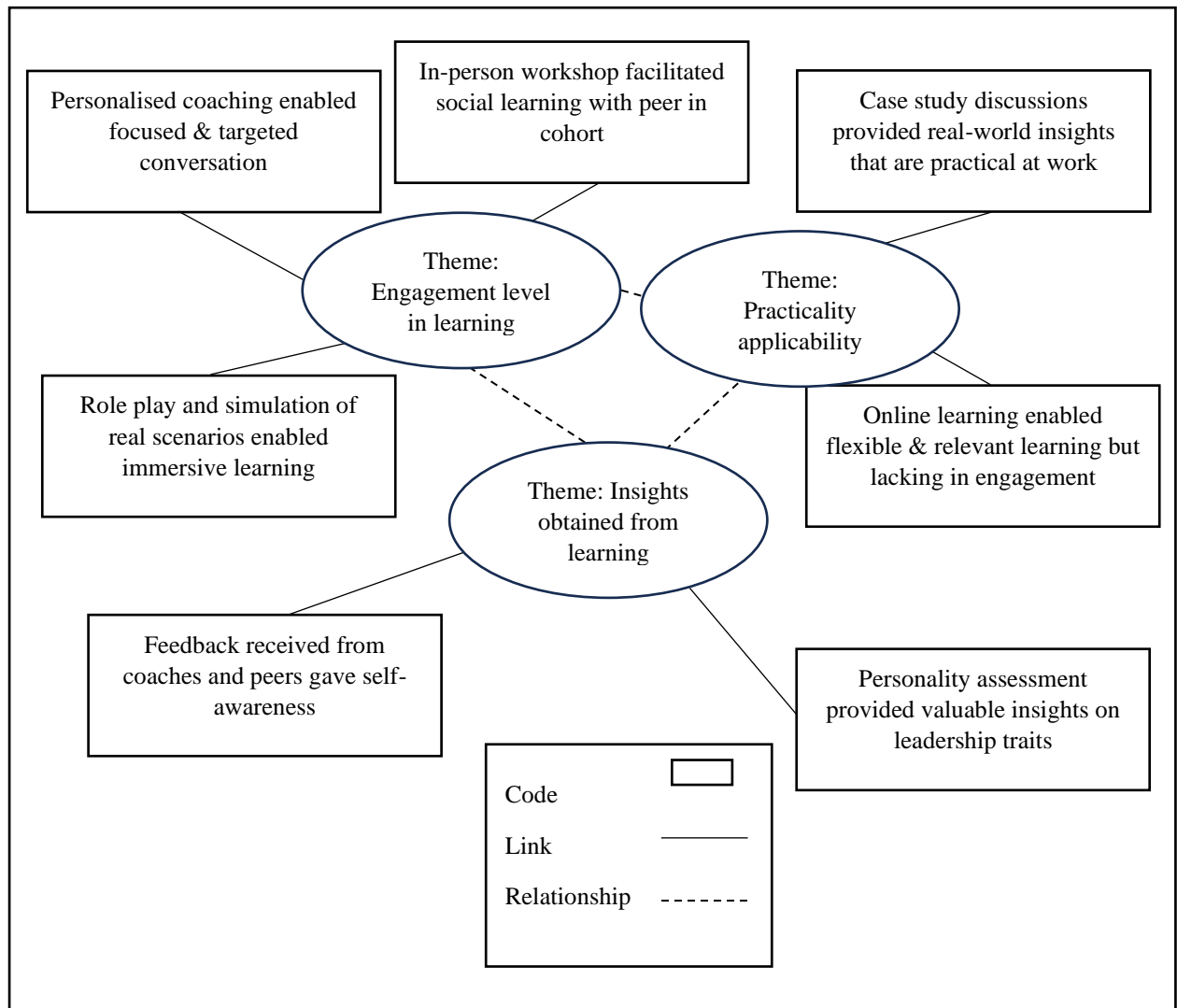


Figure 4: Preliminary Draft of Thematic Map Indicating Linkage between Codes and Themes

Thematic Analysis Phase 4: Review and Definition of Themes

Based upon the potential themes that have been developed arising from the coding process, a review of the potential themes was conducted to refine and further clarify on how the themes can best inform and address the research questions (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Braun and Clarke, 2021). With reference to the selected framework of thematic analysis, this process involved a range of key consideration to fully ascertain the legitimacy of each theme identified. The first consideration was an assessment of whether a theme is actually a theme or could be a code. For example, the feedback on personalised coaching as an activity from the leadership programme was prominent as a preferred mode of learning, with potential to be a theme in itself. Through further investigation, however, there was an opportunity for it to be categorised in a bigger theme namely ‘engagement from learning’. The second consideration was in determining the quality of a defined theme. For example, personality assessment as part of the activities that took place in the leadership programme was an experience that was highly appreciated by the participants as it provided insights on areas that they might not realise such as leadership traits and behaviours. To stand as a theme in itself, however, would require a larger category that would be able to bundle assessment alongside other codes that might be an assessment in nature. Therefore, this element remained as a code, as it was bundled together with feedback from coaches that make up the theme of ‘personal insights’ obtained by participants.

Consideration was also made on the boundaries of the themes. As the interviews took part with participants coming from various businesses in the organisation, there were anecdotal evidences that were related during the conversations that took place with them. These heavily contextualised anecdotes would require a more specific range of research objective to be further researched, thus leading to the consideration to not be included as part of the coding or theme development exercise. For example, the input received from engineers who were working at the plant had examples that related on the implementation of leadership traits in ensuring strict process adherence. At the same time, the input received from a manager in strategic planning linked to the challenge in applying leadership concepts in an environment where creativity and innovation is desired. These two contrasting was helpful in ascertaining how applicable leadership concepts are depending on the working environment, but the specificity of these scenarios were too narrow to be deemed as a code or to an extent, a theme by themselves.

Thematic Analysis Phase 5: Description of Themes

In this process of the thematic analysis, the description of the themes is made based on the research questions that have been outlined, as well as the chosen theoretical framework (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Braun and Clarke, 2021). In the context of this dissertation, each research question provided an anchor on how the themes could be formed in addressing the questions at hand. As an example, Research Question 1 focuses on the identification of leadership training methods that are relevant and useful in developing middle managers into effective leaders. Therefore, the description of the themes in response to this question are also outlined to be in correlation to the question of ‘what’ or specifically, describing a type of method that is possessing of the qualities outlined in the question. As such, the description of the three themes for the first research question relates to three nouns that are sufficiently descriptive of the codes that fall under them, namely ‘engagement’, ‘applicability’, and ‘personal insights’. These themes are broad enough to cover the general meaning that they carry in the context of adult learning, while maintaining a narrow focus that are to be described and explained further through discussion of the codes that they contain. These are further deliberated in the sections on analysis and discussion.

In relation to the theoretical framework, this dissertation is interested on two specific theories namely adult learning (i.e. how managers acquire leadership knowledge and skills as adult learners) and self-determination theory (i.e. how managers react in terms of motivation and drive before, during, and after learning intervention). In this regard, the formation of the themes was heavily influenced by areas that will be beneficial in addressing the enquiries that the questions have. For example, for Research Question 3, the interest is in understanding the primary motivations that lead participants to register into the leadership training programme, and how their motivation evolved across the learning process. Consequently, the development of the themes that were developed to address this question were mainly revolving around elements related to motivation science i.e. ‘proactiveness’, ‘extrinsic / intrinsic motivation’, ‘continuous improvement’. As the aspect of motivation was closely related to the primary queries of this dissertation i.e. learning methods, there were also feedback received that were related to motivation although the primary question was closer to the aspects of learning methods. For example, participants indicated how completing an assigned task as part of the programme was a prime motivator that was also a driver for them to achieve more and do better as a leader both in the programme as well as in the workplace. This element of motivation

which was indirectly queried, but in consequence of a question on learning process, was coded to be categorised together with input received on questions that were directly related to motivation itself. The full themes and codes related to motivation are outlined in the next chapter.

Thematic Analysis Phase 6: Write-up Analysis

Upon completion of the coding and theme development processes, the write-up of the analysis is covered in the findings and discussions chapters of this dissertation. The goal in writing was to integrate the identified themes into a coherent narrative in telling the overall story covered in this dissertation. To ensure clarity and coherence, the presentation of the themes and codes are done in tables that are formed in relation to each of the three research questions. Through this effort, it is easier to outline how the codes relate to the themes developed, and how they address each of the research questions. This is more effective and readable to the audience as compared to the formal drafting through paragraphs and sub-sections. The write-up of the analysis is also framed through the context of each theme, and how they are broken down further across the sections. This is done to provide the audience with the big idea or overarching concept that governs each theme, before delving deeper into the rationale of the codes in relation to the research questions as well as the theoretical framework.

Grounded Theory on Data Set 1 (Interview with Programme Participants) Combined with Data Set 3 (Written Feedback from Post-programme Survey)

In addition to thematic analysis conducted on the interviews with participants and facilitators, grounded theory was also developed by converging insights from the analysis conducted on data obtained from the post-programme feedback survey from the participants. The data that was analysed for this purpose was the qualitative responses written i.e. verbatim feedback from 587 participants across 10 cohorts that were conducted between January to December 2023. This data was gathered from a post-programme feedback survey that was sent out upon the completion of each cohort to obtain both quantitative rating of learning experiences and qualitative responses on how the programme was performing in terms of appreciate and contrastive feedback. This information mostly comprised of participants reflection of their journey in the programme, upon completion, specifically on how the

programme has been beneficial or relevant to their workplace challenges, how the structure and sequencing of the programme was complementing their work commitments or otherwise, and also how the content of the programme was mainly relevant to their work requirements, or not. The intent of the survey was originally for the programme design team to do continuous improvement on the following cohort should there were opportunities to amend elements that can be done in an immediate manner, including programme sequencing, module selection, or facilitation method.

For the purpose of this dissertation, this survey was utilised as a secondary data and empirical evidence for a grounded theory to be formed. In doing this, a systematic and iterative process and framework referred to for this process was by Glaser and Strauss (2017) given its wide usage across disciplines other than management research, including psychology and sociology. The specific processes within this approach of grounded theory are outlined in Table 9 and the specific activities that took place shall be discussed following the descriptions below.

No.	Phase	Activities
1	Open Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of data line by line, to identify concepts, categories, and patterns, with each concept assigned to a code as representation.
2	Axial Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections are made between the identified codes, through examination of relationships between categories and organisation of data to identify core categories and concepts.
3	Selective Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central category that explains the main phenomenon under study. • The core category emerges from data and supported by other categories that were identified earlier. Systematic relationship building is done to build a coherent theory.
4	Theoretical Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of new data to develop and refine emerging theory. This exercise is intended to help explore and validate concepts, to ensure theory remains grounded.

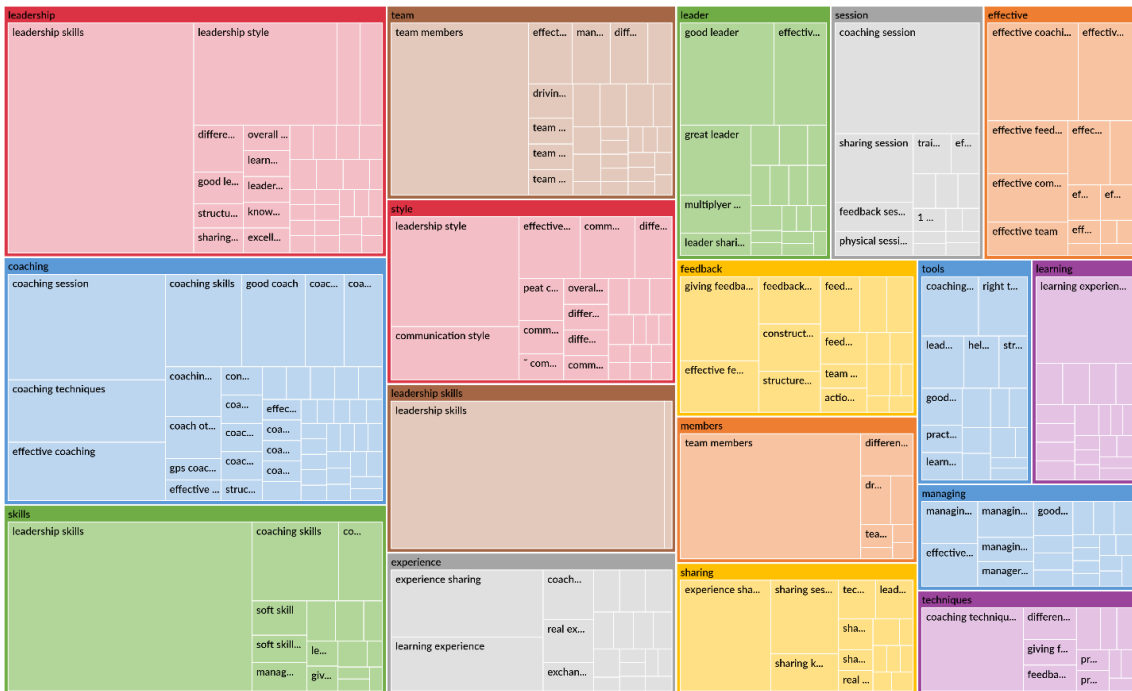
5	Constant Comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of data within and across cases to identify similarities, differences, and patterns.
6	Memo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of thoughts, ideas, and insights via memos, serving as a record for reflection, interpretation, and insights.
7	Theoretical Saturation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A level that is reached when no new data or insights are emerging from the analysis, indicating that the theory has adequately explained the phenomenon under study.
8	Theory Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A grounded theory is developed to explain the phenomenon under study. This primarily based on the concepts and relationships identified by the data.

Table 9: Overview of Grounded Theory Method of Glaser and Strauss (2017)

Based on the processes above, the first exercise involved a familiarisation phase of the data obtained from the survey conducted. In this activity, a thorough review was done on the survey responses to gain insights on the perspectives provided from the participants, both appreciative and constructive. Given the large size of the data, NVivo was used whereby the survey responses were imported into the software. This enabled easy access and organisation of data which were then annotated to obtain key points and have a preliminary sense of the data. Using NVivo's coding function, systematic coding was done where nodes for each concept, theme, and idea identified from the data were categorised by colour and description. This was also done directly to the text segments, to make the process more efficient and organised. To help understand the types of data observed, visualisation was also used whereby the word cloud and hierarchy charts functions were used to generate graphical perspectives of key words that were higher in frequency in usage. Some omissions had to be done to ensure that the context and essence were intact. The visualisations for both appreciative and constructive feedbacks are presented in Figures 5 and 6.



Word Cloud – Appreciative Feedback (587 Respondents)



Hierarchy Chart – Appreciative Feedback (587 Respondents)

Figure 5: Word Cloud and Hierarchy Chart from Appreciative Feedback Received

While the visualisation data might not give specific and precise context of the line items of feedback received from the survey, it sufficiently provided a high-level overview of the more prominent inputs provided by the participants. This activity also served as a validation to the first-level familiarisation process which was done manually to screen through the survey feedback and have an initial feel of what could potentially be the codes and themes. This was also done taking into consideration the interviews that were conducted with participants from the analysis of Data Sets 1 and 2. As an example, as seen from the word cloud for appreciative feedback, some terms can be observed as prominent key words that correlate with codes and themes that were developed from Data Sets 1 and 2. Specifically, ‘coaching’ as a form of learning that was highly preferred for its high level of engagement, ‘multiplier’ as a leadership concept that was actively discussed and popular among participants, and also ‘feedback’ which alludes to the input received by each participant either from the personality assessment, executive coach, or facilitators and classmates in their classroom interactions. Similarly, from the constructive feedback word cloud, there is glaring reference to key words such as ‘physical’, ‘experience’, and ‘real’ which allude to the preference for in-person learning experiences.

Further to the open coding that was conducted, axial coding was done to explore relationships between the codes that were shortlisted. NVivo’s query tools enabled this process as it enabled queries to identify connections and patterns among the coded segments. From this exercise, selective coding was conducted whereby the core categories or central themes were identified whereby related codes were related together to form broader themes and categories. One example is the group of codes related to appreciation among participants on the opportunities for personal development through the programme, appreciation for opportunity to be exposed to different leadership models, and appreciation for the immediate applications of what they gather from the learning experience back to the workplace. These forms of acknowledgements and appreciations were grouped together as ‘comprehensive personal growth’ as a potential theme that play a role as a key driver for managers for partaking into the training programme. Another example is the range of survey feedbacks on advocacy for practical learning, application-oriented activities, and preference for active workshops as modes of learning from the programme. These potential codes culminated into a potential theme that was drafted as, ‘emphasis on practical learning and immediate application’. The specific themes that have been grouped comprehensively from the potential codes into potential theories are outlined as three examples in Figure 7.

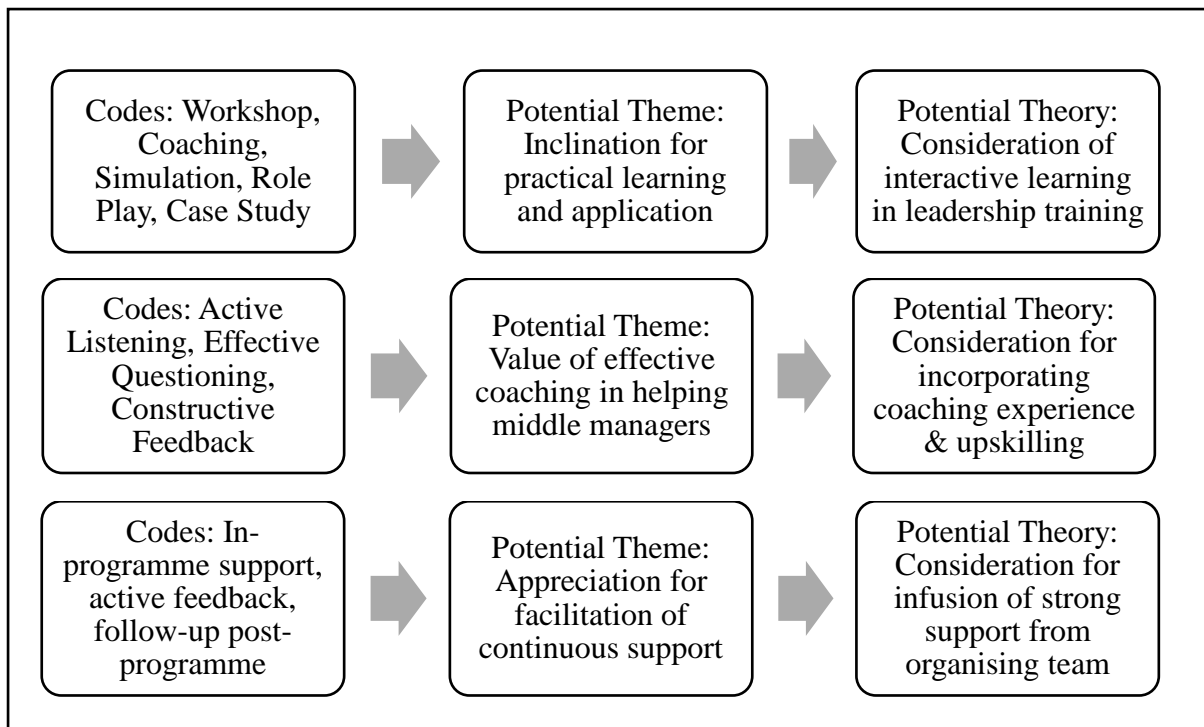


Figure 7: Development of Codes to Potential Themes and Theories based on Survey Feedback

For theoretical sampling, the survey responses were revisited and any potential additional data was identified for further analysis. The search and query tools on NVivo were used to identify and select data segments that can contribute to the development of theory. As an iterative process, constant comparison was conducted to continuously compare new and existing data while building emerging concepts. These comparisons were documented and reflected upon as part of the memo activity. In other words, the different aspects of the potential theory were developed from the themes have been surfaced. To differentiate the components of the potential theory, the themes were further analysed for potential for refinement, synthesis, or synergy. As an example, in one iteration, two different potential themes were developed namely ‘emphasis on practical learning and application’ and ‘engaging and interactive learning experience’. While the codes of these two drafted themes were distinct, there were elements that were similar in nature as they both point to the value of incorporating learning processes that get the participants highly involved and participative, which consequently boost focus and commitment to in-class modules.

The resulting grounded theory that was developed arising from the above exercise is a set of considerations to ensure effective and efficient leadership training (Glaser and Strauss,

2017), based on the empirical evidence grounded upon the survey results received from the thematic analysis of the interviews, as well as the data of the 587 participants in 2023. Briefly, the aspects that build this grounded theory are anchored on the elements of motivation for professional development among middle managers, value of practical learning, infusion of coaching components, access to sufficient support for learners of training programme, inclusive and representation across the demography, and optimisation of programme duration and structure to ensure efficiency of learning i.e. taking note of the work and life commitments that the participants already have. These are further discussed in the following chapters on findings and discussions.

Quantitative Analysis on Survey Questionnaire Data (Regression Analysis)

From the data obtained from the survey conducted on 200 middle managers in North America and Europe, quantitative analyses were conducted across several approaches. As outlined in the survey questionnaire design, the questions of interest include rating on the different training methods, as well as motivation level and perception on value before and after leadership training. Within the survey instrument, the information gathered also include open-ended questions on motivation changes, perceptions of training value, and suggestions for improvement. For questions that require rating, selection was made across the Likert scale between 1 to 5. Prior to analysis, the data gathered were cleaned to ensure accuracy and completeness, including activities such as removing incomplete responses, checking for outliers, and ensuring all data were correctly coded and formatted for processing in Excel. Rows with missing values in critical variables were identified and removed to maintain the integrity of the analysis. In Excel, this was done using the filter and delete functions. Further, all responses were checked to be within the expected range (e.g. ratings between 1 and 5 for training effectiveness) by using conditional formatting to highlight any values beyond the desired range.

Given that the focus of this dissertation is looking at multiple training methods and how they are rated across Likert scale, a multiple linear regression analysis is conducted to identify which is the most effective, depending upon the ratings provided by the participants of the survey. Before performing the regression analysis, descriptive statistics were computed to summarise the basic features of the data. This included means and standard deviations, and also frequency distributions. The regression model was specified to quantify the relationship

between the independent variables (training methods) and the dependent variable (overall training effectiveness). In conducting the analysis, data was arranged to ensure all relevant data are organised in columns with dependent variable in one column and independent variables in other columns. The regression tool within Excel was used which would automate significance testing and also provide p-values for each coefficient in the regression output. Variables with p-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant. In interpreting the results of the regression analysis, the sign and magnitude of the coefficients indicated the direction and strength of the relationship between each training method and overall effectiveness. The significance levels helped identify which training methods had a statistically significant impact on overall effectiveness.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the qualitative methods (i.e. thematic analysis, grounded theory development, case study analysis) and quantitative methods (i.e. regression analysis) are presented in detail. These analyses across the main data sets refer to interviews with programme participants, interviews with facilitators, post-programme feedback survey that was sent to all participants, and survey on North American and European middle managers. Also included is a set of case studies conducted on companies that implement best practices in leadership training. This chapter provides a synthesis of the key themes and insights derived from the analysis of these data sets, presenting insights into responses received from the interviewees particularly their experiences throughout the programme, any change in their behaviour or perception of the process, and the evolution of their motivation before and after completing the learning journey. These findings were also compared against findings from the surveyed middle managers. Insights were also obtained from the facilitators' standpoint with regards to their key observations of the participants, and the survey responses in terms of appreciative and constructive feedback received.

In presenting these findings, reference is made to the three research questions that have been developed for this research, which are outlined in each of the following sections. The intent is to provide a structured presentation of the findings in alignment to how the research design and methods were set up. By anchoring on the research questions, the discussion on the themes and codes that were observed for this research can be facilitated. This effort is also conducted to maintain the focus of the discussion to the original intent of the research. Further, the research questions are also intended to draw boundaries upon which this study is conducted to ensure clarity and efficiency. The aim is to provide clarity in framing and categorising how the findings relate to the structure of the dissertation as a whole. This chapter also presents insights relevant to the iterative nature of data interpreted in this research. This includes refinement and revision of themes and codes as the analysis progressed. The research acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research and reflects on the approach of the analysis made, including any biases that may influence the interpretation of the data. As such, constant comparisons were employed to validate emerging themes and uphold the integrity of the findings.

4.1 Data Set 1: Interview with Leadership Training Participants

Between June 2023 to January 2024, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 participants of the leadership training programme being researched. Through these interviews, participants shared their perspectives, experiences, and reflections on the training programme, including its strengths, challenges, and perceived impact on their leadership development journey. Each of the conversations were transcribed accordingly to ensure integrity and capture the depth of each participant's responses, views, and opinions. While diverse in age, gender, and background, the common denominator among the participants is their seniority level in the organisation namely middle management with direct reports that make up their respective teams as well as senior management whom they report to. As the participants hailed from different functions and businesses of the organisation, some unique insights were obtained across how their experiences can be similar within the classroom context while also be diverse when it comes to application back to the workplace.

To begin the presentation on the findings from the data analysis, the first two research questions are referred to as follows:

Research Question 1: What leadership development methods can be considered as relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders in their respective roles?

Research Question 2: Why are the identified methods considered relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders who can realise the organisation's goals?

Based on the two research questions above, thematic analysis was conducted from the transcriptions of the interviews made with the 20 participants of the programme. From this analysis, several codes were identified from the responses received from the participants. These mostly relate to the components of the programme that were deemed most useful to them in improving their overall leadership performance at the workplace. Some of the most prominent codes include personalised coaching, in-person workshop, case study, online module,

simulation, personality assessment, and social learning. From the coding exercise that was conducted, three themes have been developed namely engagement, applicability, and insights, which shall be discussed in the following sections. These themes were developed from iterative comparison across the data obtained, which involves multiple reviews and revisions of how the information gathered were similar or dissimilar across the sampled group of middle managers. Table 10 and 14 outline the codes and themes that are categorised in alignment with the research questions that will be explored throughout this chapter.

<p>Research Question 1: What leadership development methods can be considered as relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders in their respective roles?</p> <p>Research Question 2: Why are the identified methods considered relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders who can realise the organisation’s goals?</p>	
Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised coaching • In-person workshop • Case study • Online learning • Simulation • Personality assessment • Social learning • Interactive learning • Feedback • Self-improvement 	<p>Theme 1: Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants cited methods that have high level of engagement to be the most impactful and useful in their leadership development e.g. personal coaching, in-person workshop, case study discussion. • Conversely, participants refer to methods that have low level of engagement to not be as impactful e.g. self-driven online modules, virtual instructor-led training session. • Participants value interactive sessions e.g. live discussions which include opportunities for dialogue, and increased level of engagement.

	<p>Theme 2: Applicability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants actively applied programme insights into their roles, showcasing practical relevance of content to day-to-day practice. • Participants referred to introduction to leadership models and frameworks introduced to them throughout the course to be useful in applying back to the workplace especially the ‘Multiplier / Diminisher’ model (Wiseman, 2010) which is repeatedly cited as applicable at the workplace with heightened level of awareness. <p>Theme 3: Personal Insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants referred to sessions that provide them feedback and insights to be beneficial e.g. personality assessment, social learning with colleagues. • Participants provide constructive feedback for improvement, indicating a collaborative mindset toward programme improvement. Suggestions include a focus on diversity, deeper discussions, and improved content delivery.
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Table 10: Codes and Themes from Research Questions 1 and 2 (Participant Interview)

Research Question 3: What are the primary motivations that lead middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes? What explains changes in their motivation between signing up for the programme and after they have participated in the programme?

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated • Driven • Intrinsic • Voluntary • Personal interest • Initiative • Application 	<p>Theme 4: Proactiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of participants were highly motivated to pursue leadership development at the beginning of the programme, driven by the desire to understand leadership, improve managerial skills, and address challenges. The participations are generally willing and voluntary, with early initiatives to actively pursue and express interest to management and human resources, to be nominated into the programme. <p>Theme 5: Extrinsic / Intrinsic Motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participants began with an extrinsic motivation as they were mostly nominated by human resources. Over time, participants developed a view on the programme with intrinsic motivation to learn and develop leadership skills. A combination of personal interest, career progression, and addressing managerial challenges make up the drivers for their participation in the programme. <p>Theme 6: Continuous Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants indicated continued effort to improve as a leader upon completion of programme to enhance on coaching skills, improve communication, and applying leadership concepts acquired via training.

Table 11: Codes and Themes from Research Question 3 (Participant Interview)

Theme 1: Engagement

Participants largely indicated preference for components from the programme that contain high levels of engagement. These include sessions that were interactive in nature and involved a lot of in-person activities such as the personal coaching that are provided one-on-one throughout the course of the programme, in-person workshops that happens on campus alongside other colleagues from the same cohort, and case study discussions that are conducted face-to-face as part of the workshop. These sessions are described to be engaging, impactful, and transformational in the way that they facilitate immersive and experiential learning for the participants. This preference is also driven by the diverse commitments of the participants whereby their work and life commitments are already overlapping and busy as is, thus any other new addition to their schedule would require full attention; which is why high level of focus and engagement is desired. This preference is further felt as the online modules from the programme were also undertaken at the same time. Participants indicated that they felt disengaged and not as involved when the sessions were conducted online, in the virtual instructor-led training mode either via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. They highlighted that undergoing these sessions while being in office or at home were cumbersome as distractions were present and significant either from work commitment matters or family members at home. As a result, they were not able to focus fully during the sessions, and this applies to the self-driven online learning modules that they are expected to complete. The motivation for them to begin and continue completing the online modules was not high as the immediate need for the upskilling to happen to address an immediate concern was not prevalent, as compared to other interventions that are more personalised in nature such as coaching.

Participants also provided commentary on the structure, sequence, and scheduling of the programme. Specifically, comparisons were made on the in-person, online, and hybrid delivery modes which makes up the overall blended design of the programme. There is an appreciation of how the blended delivery of the programme, which combines virtual and face-to-face sessions, were able to cater to the diverse learning styles and working schedules of the participants, as the programme is done 'part-time' on top of their full-time jobs. Participants were highly appreciative of how they were able to focus fully during the in-person sessions, while also infuse learning in between work commitments through the flexible online learning modules. Moreover, the blended design did not only satisfy logistical and scheduling needs but also served as a testament to the adaptability of advancements in leadership training today.

Several participants expressed that this design mirrored the real-world work environment, where leaders are increasingly required to manage both virtual and physical team interactions effectively. The participants' ability to switch and alter between these modes and engage actively suggests an experiential learning process as the participants balance between work and study concurrently.

“There are pros and cons of both. While I like the flexibility of the virtual classroom, the in-person sessions ensured that everyone is in the same place together. They are with you. Nobody goes out and about apart from the breakout groups. There is a better sense of learning together.”

(Participant 5, 2024)

The flexible learning option to navigate and alter between online and offline sessions was also appreciated by participants for its adaptability and flexibility as a learning journey. This is seen as being customer-centric as well by the participants, given that they are committed to many other aspects of life including work and family. Given how not all of them are accustomed to learning on top of their work commitments, this flexibility has worked in allowing participants to tailor their learning experiences to their schedules and preferences. This is also a result of the interviews done with potential participants, prior to the programme implementation and conducted as part of the design process. The desire for flexibility is an indicator of how adult learners learn differently across diverse range of preferences, signalling the need for learning designers to cater their design to as many learners as possible, although it is acknowledged that catering to everyone is impossible. This level of flexibility in learning can be seen as a reflection of the contemporary work environment that emphasises autonomy. Participants indicated that they felt empowered to take charge of their learning. This setup accommodates the immediate needs of the learners but also serves as a platform to hone self-discipline and time-management skills. Several participants acknowledged the importance self-directed learning in the context of developing further their leadership competencies, where the ability to balance multiple commitments and adapt to ever-changing scenarios becomes increasingly important. Organisations can also assess this ability as a form of learning agility as it reflects the capability and capacity of employees to undertake several tasks at once while excelling at each one of them given the right amount of focus and dedication.

“I found it incredibly convenient to switch between the online sessions and physical meet-ups. It allowed me to maintain a balance, especially when work or personal commitments became demanding.”

(Participant 16, 2024)

Participants also repeatedly highlighted the value of the personalised coaching accorded to them, in terms of how it enabled them to immediately address specific challenges that they were facing at the workplace, ranging from meeting expectations from management to managing motivation of team members who are also direct reports. The personalised focus that this engagement provides to the participants is deemed to be much appreciated in the way that any new skill or knowledge acquired was immediately beneficial for their self-improvement at the workplace. For example, conflicts that occur at the workplace can immediately be discussed at a coaching session which can facilitate potential actionable way forward. This is deeply appreciated by the participant as it addresses an immediate concern that is hampering a workplace harmony situation that they might value highly. That said, while the coaching experience was highly favourable among participants, the concept of executive coaching seems to be quite new to many of the participants. They were not immediately receptive to the approach. The majority of them were more familiar with the concept of mentoring which is often paired at their respective workplace by human resources department, as a means of providing guidance from a more senior staff. This familiarity of one over the other has led to some participants leaning favourably towards mentoring over coaching. While this is the case, there is still a strong interest among participants to work on their own coaching capability from the experience. As the programme progressed, there was a shift in perception among the participants. The initial preference towards mentoring began to be supplemented with a growing appreciation for the unique attributes of coaching. Unlike the directive nature of mentoring, coaching emphasises asking probing questions while fostering an environment for self-discovery. Participants began to realise the transformative potential of this approach. Additionally, coaching skill appeared to resonate as a valuable tool for these middle managers in nurturing their direct reports in maximising their potential while delivering team goals.

“The coaching method was new to me as I was familiar with mentorship. So, I do have my comments on the coaching method. Ultimately, I think it depends on your mindset going into the conversation. You have to be open methods you are not familiar with.”

(Participant 12, 2024)

In addition to the personalised coaching experience, participants were highly appreciative of the in-person workshops that were done across three days, together with other colleagues in the cohort. They find the experience of engaging in knowledge exchange and also anecdotes sharing from colleagues of similar level to be meaningful. This is coming from the context of how their challenges and problems at the workplace are largely similar, ranging from issues in meeting management expectation and rallying their teams towards a common goal. Participants also find similarities in the need for them to adapt to the organisational culture that was prevailing, in the new role as a manager as compared to their previous role as associates or officers. Participants described the classroom setting to be a 'safe space' for them to be more vulnerable and genuine in expressing themselves. This is in contrast to the experience in the workplace where they are more guarded and careful in the way they conduct themselves, in fear of any negative perception or long-term consequences. The participants felt freer and more liberated in the classroom setting, illustrating some examples of how they felt truly themselves in engaging with the activities in the sessions such as role play and simulations. They also indicated that this has helped them build a strong bond with other colleagues for the long term.

As the participants are middle managers who converged from different sectors and roles, they actively contributed unique perspectives and problem-solving approaches. This real-time exchange of experiences became a dynamic sharing of knowledge. These interactions also underscored the significance of collaborative leadership, where leaders don't just lead based on learned theories but draw upon the collective intelligence and experiences of peers. This observation confirms the high value of relevance to participants of leadership training. Beyond theoretical knowledge, participants spoke of their improved capabilities in leading teams effectively, driving business outcomes, and fostering positive work environments. This positive development is largely attributed to not only the instructional learning that happens in the classroom and online learning content, but also from the social learning that takes place between the participants in the classroom, given that they are mostly from different businesses and functions with a variety of challenges. Further to this connection with other participants, there was also appreciation over the conversations that take place in the classroom, mainly on case study discussions, leader engagement sessions, and simulations of leadership concepts and models. For the case study, participants indicated that the relevance of the case study to their current work scope was helpful for them to understand how the newly acquired lessons and skills can be applied at their respective workplace. Through the leader engagement sessions, senior leaders are brought into the classroom to have experience sharing slots with the

participants to inspire them. Participants find the sharing from the senior leaders, especially in terms of how they remained resilience amidst challenges, humanised their persona further rather than being seen as ‘perfect’ leaders. This observation indicates how real-world examples are highly appreciated to provide grounding to conversations in the cohort.

“One session that truly resonated with me was the session with the vice president. He was so candid and honest in his sharing and I appreciate that this was not a side of him that we are familiar with. Truly eye-opening and inspiring and I wished the session could last longer.”

(Participant 6, 2024)

Theme 2: Applicability

The real-world applicability of theoretical modules was a recurrent theme from the interviews. This is especially important given that the relevance of topic in the classroom to the daily lives of the participants ranks highly into the consideration of the modules that go into the content of the course. It answers the question, “What’s in it for me?” Participants appreciated when they could directly apply learned concepts into their daily leadership roles, especially in managing relationships with internal and external stakeholders, as well as meeting target deliverables set as their annual key performance indicators. This emphasis on practical application among the participants underscores the importance of shifting from knowledge acquisition to actionable skills. This preference shift towards application-driven learning resonates deeply with the participants, who are often at the frontlines of operations. By facilitating immediate application, the training also reinforced the internalisation of the learned concepts. Participants reported a heightened sense of confidence when they could visibly see the positive outcomes of implementing new knowledge, as compared to merely discussing over theories and concepts over fictional case studies. The immediate application of what they learn seems to build credibility over what happens in the classroom in terms of real-world application and also practicality in the prevailing business culture. Middle managers appreciate the immediacy of theory to practice applications.

While applicability of leadership frameworks and models was a highlight for the participants, they also indicated concerns over the reality of the existing business culture at their respective workplace. The impending practices at the workplace related to psychological

safety, trust, and collaboration, for example, are not as ideal as what was discussed in the classroom. As such, they were some scepticisms over how much was acquired could be transferred to the office. The concerns were gradually allayed over time as participants learned a bit more on how other colleagues put theory to practice in their respective situations. There were participants who highlighted that while they appreciated what was taught in the classroom, and deemed the content to be relevant to them in becoming better leaders, they are sceptical about how it is accepted by the wider organisation especially their upper management. Some even cited how they had hoped that the programme is attended by their superiors at work as well for them to become better leaders themselves.

“The beauty of this programme was that I could take what I learned in the in-person or virtual classrooms and directly implement it into my leadership style. It was more than just theories -- it was about actual results on the ground.”

(Participant 18, 2024)

Theme 3: Personal Insights

Prior to the beginning of the programme, each individual participant from the leadership training is given an online personality assessment test which categorises different traits and archetypes for the reflection of the participants as middle managers. This reflection process is either done with their coach, supervisor or peer. In this personality assessment, the instrument will provide the participants with ‘leadership domains’ that describe their strengths as a leader. Specifically, this looks into the categorisations of executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking as key traits desired of a leader. This insight from the personality assessment tool provided a new dimension to their leadership strength, according to a number of participants. This is mainly because previously, they never had a specific description of observations or considerations that they have made on leadership styles or traits. In this regard, the personality assessment report provided them with a new reference point to guide them in managing the dynamics of their respective teams. Some participants also cited subscribing to the assessment tool to be deployed within their team members, for them to ascertain how they could be best tested and appointed in different tasks that they have to delivery in realising organisational goals.

“The assessment tool was particularly useful for me. I find that the report resonated well with me, and I am now able to play to my strength better at the workplace. It’s a tool I am now also using with my direct reports.”

(Participant 20, 2024)

A transformative undertone was evident in the data gathered from the interviews whereby many participants reflected on their evolved self-awareness, becoming more attuned to their strengths, weaknesses, and overall leadership styles. This observation correlates with the intent of the course which is to unearth the hidden potentials, capabilities, and areas of improvements among the participants. The objective is for this process to enable the shaping of their leadership to become more effective at work. This can come in the form of strengthened professional relationship, improved work performance, as well as conducive overall working environment. Further, participants noted that they were able to embark on a journey of self-discovery that went beyond the confines of traditional leadership training. Some felt that they were sufficiently equipped with a more thorough understanding of themselves, a crucial tool in the dynamic field of leadership and management. This experience seems to empower them to strategically align their innate strengths with organisational needs while addressing their areas of improvement. Some expressed that they also felt more capable of fostering genuine connections with their teams. Participants attribute to the personalised coaching experience in helping them improve as well, given that the goal of each coaching conversation is to arrive at self-awareness.

“I’ve recognised some aspects about my leadership approach that I wasn't even aware of before.”

(Participant 4, 2024)

“Before this, I never truly reflected on my leadership style. But after some of the modules, I started identifying areas I excel in and others that need development.”

(Participant 2, 2024)

To continue this chapter on the findings from the analysis conducted, reference shall be made to the third research question, as follows.

Research Question 3: What are the primary motivations that lead middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes? What explains changes in their motivation between signing up for the programme and after they have participated in the programme?

In answering Research Question 3, participants were enquired on their levels of motivation before, during, and after the learning process. From these enquiries, participants mostly illustrated positive drive towards partaking in the programme, although not all of them were voluntary learners. The participants were largely middle managers who were already keen on addressing workplace challenges and improving self-efficacy in leading teams and to a point, business results. From the questions on motivations, three themes were formed namely proactiveness, extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, and continuous improvement.

Theme 4: Proactiveness

In understanding the motivation and perception of participants on leadership training prior to the programme, they were asked on their motivation for registering into the programme, and how that might change after undertaking the course. A majority of the participants responded that their participation was driven by nomination by management or by human resources. This is a part of the overall enterprise talent development strategy of the organisation. There was a smaller portion of the interviewees who registered by way of self-driven curiosity. This is a part of their overall pursuit of knowledge and a deeper desire to bolster their leadership capabilities. Exploring the pre-programme motivations further, it is evident that organisational dynamics and individual aspirations influenced the participants' enrolment decisions. Those nominated by management or human resources reflect the organisation's proactive approach in nurturing potential leaders. On the other hand, the self-driven individuals highlight a proactive mindset towards personal growth. Such a mix of externally-motivated and intrinsically-driven participants had likely created a diverse cohort of learners, which can be validated and observed through the analysis.

From the interviews, it was prevalent how many of the participants were already proactive and keen on taking part in the programme prior to the initiation of their cohort, either if they were nominated into the programme or self-registered. This appears to be a bit contrasting to an assumption that only voluntary learners would be keen to be a part of the

programme, as compared to involuntary learners. The need to close the gap on competency development areas in terms of leadership and addressing immediate pain points at the workplace are common drivers that encouraged the participants in their positive outlook of becoming a part of the programme. This observation can also be a signal that the middle management demography of the organisation's workforce is commonly quite driven in nature. It is also a potential indicator of how prevailing organisational culture can shape how the managers view professional development. A result-driven culture, for example, can create an inherently competitive environment across the workforce which would then push and drive employees to continuously improve and aspire to push for better performance over time.

“I was registered by human resources at the beginning, upon advice from my superior, but I think upon taking part into the programme, I am clearer of the intent of their suggestion and I am now able to see why I was nominated.”

(Participant 1, 2024)

Theme 5: Extrinsic to Intrinsic Motivation

After completing the programme, beginning from the extrinsic motivation of complying and adhering to enterprise talent development process at the onset, there seemed to be a shift towards intrinsic motivation as the participants complete their respective learning journey. The interviews reveal how participants were more appreciative of the value of leadership training, upon internalising the new frameworks, concepts, and theories that they were exposed to during the programme. This was further validated when they were able to put the lessons into practice when they return to their respective working environments. Upon further reflection over a period of at least three months upon programme completion, the participants' experiences painted a landscape of transformation and newfound appreciation. Many echoed sentiments of enlightenment, speaking to the practicality and relevance of the skills and knowledge they acquired. The bridge between theory and application became evident as they integrated their learnings into their daily tasks and leadership roles. This concurrence of experiential learning, starting with extrinsic motivations but culminating in intrinsic value realisation, underscores the significant impact that leadership training can have in reshaping an individual's professional development.

“The theories were helpful, of course, but I am keen to apply what I have learned into practice now. And I can see now how leadership training can open your eyes to these new things.”

(Participant 5, 2024)

Theme 6: Continuous Improvement

Responding to the question on motivation, participants indicated that they were keen on continuing to improve as a leader upon completing the programme. Having gone through the learning experience within the programme and encountering significant changes on behaviours, perceptions, and outlooks, participants highlighted a heightened sense of confidence and desire to improve as a leader. In doing this, several approaches have been referred to as their main attempts at continuously improving after the programme. Among the efforts include application of the concepts and theories from the programme into the workplace. There were also participants who transferred their own coaching experiences from the programme in becoming better coaches to their team members as well, in addition to being their line manager or supervisor. Some participants also pursued further online learning on topics that they were deeply interested in such as influencing, decision making, and innovation. These were topics that had been first introduced to them formally in the form of the online learning or case study that was used in the course of the programme. This desire to continuously improve is an indicator of how the initial motivation level that they felt before the programme has evolved to grow and become more integrated into their overall personal development journey. Participants harnessed their intent to undertake other improvement opportunities after experiencing the modules and blended delivery methods of the programme. A number of participants highlighted that prior to undertaking the training, they did not prioritise leadership development as a focus, as compared to completing tasks, administrating teams, and attending technical or functional training relevant to their roles. This development should be welcomed by organisations as it can shape into a healthy workforce learning culture.

“There were several moments during the course where I felt like I needed to do more. I am now keen on being more deliberate in my leadership development. Further, I am intending to become a better coach at the workplace as well.”

(Participant 6, 2024)

Over the course of interviews with the participants, their feedback for programme improvements were also enquired upon, based on their recent completion of the programme. The intent is to obtain insights on how the programme can be further improved in terms of overall learner experience, transfer of learning, and applicability back to the workplace. Participants were enquired of this input in the post-programme survey of their experience as part of the training programme implementation, but most input received on this end lacked context and depth, given that they were mostly short answers. This part of the interview has managed to obtain a bit more depth on the feedback received from the survey.

A notable suggestion centred on refining the flow of the programme. This suggestion is proposed towards ensuring a seamless progression from pre-training to post-training phases, which could heighten the learning experience. Specifically, participants highlighted their expectations for the programme management team to link closer to their respective business challenges, which can bridge the gap between theory and application which most of them aim to do throughout the duration of the programme. This can provide better clarity in terms of how the facilitation and programme management to be aligned closer to the specific business or management situations of the participants. This is not easy to achieve, but with a bit more understanding of the participants as ‘customers’ of the learning experience, this ideal state is not impossible. This observation signals a demand among participants for an environment of collaborative problem-solving. With closer alignment to real-world scenarios, participants can directly engage with content that mirrors day-to-day operations while enhancing the applicability of lessons learned. Participants seem to not prefer abstract concepts. They instead lean towards practical, actionable strategies tailored to distinct business contexts. It is also an indicator that they are looking for tools that can be immediately applied at the workplace. The need for more actionable lessons over theoretical content is potentially driven by the keenness to immediately apply what is learned, similar to how learning happens at the workplace.

“The inclusion of international participants who couldn’t attend in-person sessions, to dial in virtually, seemed to reduce the effectiveness of group discussions for those individuals. I felt that in-person discussions were where genuine learning and sharing occurred, so missing out on that could be a disadvantage.”

(Participant 14, 2024)

There was also input for the programme designers to embrace a wider mix of learning mediums. At present, the programme is already including case studies and real-life simulations. There is also an ask for experiential tasks such as study groups or focused group discussions on specific topics. These diverse models are seen to be interventions that can be made to make the curriculum even more enriching. This is also a call for technology and innovation to be deployed as part of the overall learning experience. New learning methods are often experimented by learning and development practitioners, and this opportunity is also seen here. Nevertheless, just as any innovative learning methods, there is a duration before its adoption can be fully embraced by a learning cohort. To address this challenge, some learning designers do pilot specific learning method to a smaller group to see how it is adopted and practiced prior to scaling up. Further, new methods of learning are also an area of interest among adult learning researchers as it provides an avenue for prediction testing and experimentation based on set assumptions relevant to different demography.

“Both virtual classrooms and online modules were valuable. I appreciate having a mix of both, stating that having the human touch in virtual classrooms balanced with self-paced online learning was advantageous.”

(Participant 7, 2024)

The themes identified above which were recurring throughout the interview transcripts, capture the core sentiments of the participants towards the leadership training programme. This chapter highlights the diverse experiences of participants, shedding light on their perceptions, challenges, and learnings from the leadership training experience that they had undergone. Their motivation levels on the training experience, before, during, and after were also captured, which can provide a perspective on how their motivations and behaviours might have evolved throughout the course of the programme. Their feedback, coupled with the trends and patterns identified are further covered as discussions, interpretations, and recommendations in subsequent chapters.

4.2 Data Set 2: Interview with Training Facilitators and Coaches

In order to complement the findings that have been garnered from information obtained via interviews with the participants, a series of interviews were conducted with five of the facilitators and coaches of the programme. The goal is to obtain their perspective and observation in terms of how the motivation level of the participants was before the programme, their participation level during learning journey, and any noticeable transformations observed from the process. In facilitating this process, one-hour interviews were conducted with each of them over Zoom, with the relevant questions outlined. The codes and themes identified from the interviews are outlined in Table 12.

<p>Research Question 1: What leadership development methods can be considered as relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders in their respective roles?</p>	
<p>Research Question 2: Why are the identified methods considered relevant, practical, and applicable in developing middle managers into effective leaders who can realise the organisation's goals?</p>	
<p>Research Question 3: What are the primary motivations that lead middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes? What explains changes in their motivation between signing up for the programme and after they have participated in the programme?</p>	
Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised coaching • In-person workshop • Case study • Online learning • Simulation • Personality assessment 	<p>Theme 7: Safe Space</p> <p>Participants prefer in-person experience that allows face-to-face engagement with peers within a safe space to discuss and debate concepts for practical application at workplace.</p> <p>They enjoy interaction, simulation, activities with cohort fellows. Online self-learning is less preferred.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social learning • Interaction • Feedback • Improvement 	<p>Theme 8: Social learning</p> <p>Classroom dynamics shifted through heightened level of inclusion between classmates over time i.e. collaborative communication and inclusive towards ‘quieter’ participants. Participants learn significantly from each other, emphasising the importance of social learning. They openly shared challenges like managing younger generations, psychological safety, and delegation. They also shared problem-solving experiences boost confidence and encourage participants to try out solutions.</p> <p>Theme 9: Coaching vs. Mentoring</p> <p>Participants demonstrated renewed appreciation of coaching as compared to mentorship, both in personal leadership development and in managing teams. They took some to get accustomed to the approach, as coaching asks questions towards self-awareness, as compared to mentorship which provides direct guidance.</p>
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Table 12: Codes and Themes from Research Questions 1 to 3 (Facilitator Interview)

Theme 7: Safe Space

Throughout the course of the programme, there is a sense that participants identified the learning experience as a ‘safe space’ that enabled them to be themselves more than they are at the workplace. The absence of work supervisors or peers seemed to provide them a bit more freedom to express themselves more freely, without the fear of consequences or any change in perception. This observation can be seen throughout the before, during, and after programme phases, as they demonstrated high levels of motivation and keenness to be a part of the programme. From the lens of facilitators and coaches, upon breaking the ice during the introductory parts of the programme, participants became more comfortable in build network and connections via the programme. From the level of early participation during the pre-programme kick-off, which was conducted online, all interviewed facilitators indicated that the

majority of participants were energised, excited, and keen on starting the programme. These were also indicated by way of their range of questions on the key components of the programme such as deadlines and processes. Additionally, some of the questions were also ranging on action items to address any potential blockers that can hamper their involvement and contribution to the programme, such as managing time and logistics around their full-time work, given that this participation is still on a part-time basis on top of their work and life commitments.

Prior to the programme, participants were asked to complete a personality assessment survey. The goal is for participants to identify how their management and leadership style is also categorised within this instrument. Further, they were also asked to established learning goals before and after the programme with their respective supervisors. These activities were potential indicators that can signal how effective the programme can be in the personal and professional development of the participants as managers and eventually leaders in the organisation. The facilitators indicated that the majority of participants were deeply involved in these activities. Another factor for excitement among the participants was the opportunity to collaborate and network with participants from other parts of the organisations. This is in view of the company being an integrated energy firm, which comprise several different business units namely upstream, downstream, and mid-stream, among others. The participants highlighted their keenness on exchanging diverse experiences with their peers, who might face similar challenges at the workplace given that they are from the same level of leadership. Collectively, the facilitators also indicated how the participants were deeply appreciative and grateful for the investment that has been put on them as leaders. The focus given in this organisation, specifically, can be considered to be more than peer companies within the industry. This comparison is cited by some participants.

While there was a high level of drive among the participants, they indicated concerns about the potential for the programme to be too theoretical. Being professionals in their line, who might have been out of the higher education system for a while, there was a craving for the concepts and theories from the programme to be highly relevant to the workplace challenges that they face. This requirement is especially prevalent, given that they are primarily middle managers who are new to transitioning from being doers at the workplace to directors in their respective teams. From the perspective of the facilitators, these indicators from the participants outlined several signals for the programme to address. These include the need for

content to align with specific needs of the organisation. Clarity in communication is also another area of importance indicated by the facilitators, alongside opportunities for networking among the participants. With these signals of what matters to the participants, the facilitators were in unison on the importance of customer-centricity in learning design in general, which is more significant for adult learners where the demography of this programme belongs to.

The primary question asked to the facilitators is on the method which resonates the most with the participants, from their lens in the facilitator's seat. From this query, there seemed to be consistent feedback from them that the adaptation of the content to the diverse levels of maturity on the interest of the participants is of paramount importance. Specifically, there was an indication from them that there is an important need not only to align the content closely to the audience, but also to illustrate application to real situations, encourage open debates, and appreciate diverse opinions. The facilitators alluded that prior to identifying the most effective method, it is important to firstly set the tone and context of the learning environment to enable the optimal transfer of learning. This set-up is especially important on subjects that can be rather emotionally charged, such as 'psychological safety'. One facilitator cited the strategy of starting with easy and simple questions that can build trust and generate interest from across the group. From this exercise, he was able to calibrate understanding level in the room, before moving towards deeper sharing of successes and challenges from across the group.

Theme 8: Social Learning

In the end-to-end delivery of the programme journey, there is a blend of several modes of learning including facilitated in-person learning, self-driven online learning, and coaching. Across these various deliveries, feedback from the facilitators seem to resonate with the view from the participants in their corresponding interviews that in-person delivery is preferred. This is mainly cited for the workshops and coaching sessions as they involve conversation practice and role-playing which require reading of facial reactions and receiving instant feedback. Further, virtual sessions were hampered by work priorities which had impacted the overall positive experience desired by the participants.

From the workshops that were run by the facilitators, many participants indicated their leaning towards sessions that were interactive in nature. One example is the simulation exercise which mimics the real-world working situations, for the learners to envision and practice in

terms of the desired reaction for effective leadership. Facilitators also highlighted that the debrief post the simulation or immersive learning experience is critical. This is where the process of linking the learning with the lessons takes place. This is also the clarification point where participants are able to identify how the classroom subjects can be applicable back to the workplace. There was also a significant view collectively from the participants that the practice sessions and the experience sharing exchange that took place with other participants, to be of high value. Specifically, this was a platform for them to ‘road-test’ the new tools that they have been equipped with before taking them back to the workplace. Peer-to-peer dialogues on specific topics were recognised to be effective in fostering reflection, sharing challenges, and also meaningful anecdotes from peers. The facilitators were also asked about any specific content from the modules delivered that seemed to be more prominent among the participants as compared to the others. From this query, one consistent answer is the ‘multiplier’ concept which illustrates the role of a leader in multiplying the impact that they impart on the team and organisation at large in the way that they lead. In contrast, the ‘diminisher’ concept is related to leaders who diminishes the overall spirit and energy of the working team by putting down ideas, deflating energy, and also limiting growth. What is generally feared by the participants is the act of being ‘accidental diminishers’ when their good intentions are not executed in a manner that can garner trust, but instead does the opposite.

Another content that gained interest among the participants was ‘feedback’. Specifically, the art of providing and receiving feedback. This is mainly driven by the challenge that they face in leading people for the first time, while managing upwards when they are required to. As such, the skill of communicating and relaying their feedback to others clearly come into play. ‘Psychological safety’ was also deemed powerful by the participants, although applying it to practice was surfaced to be challenging by the majority of them. One facilitator highlighted that some participants admitted that it was their first time in listening to such a concept, therefore fully grasping the philosophy behind it proved to be a hurdle. Further, facilitators also indicated similar expression of frustration or dissatisfaction among participants on how the existing working culture at their respective offices were not enabling of fully high performing managers. Specifically, the misalignment between the learned concepts and the prevailing culture across the workplace has hindered practical application. The difficulty is more glaring in situations that require interpersonal reaction such as feedback giving. Participants also expressed that some concepts were not immediately applicable at the

workplace, such as 'leaders as coach' concept which requires another dedicated course on overall concept of coaching at work.

The final question asked to the facilitator is the impact of group activities on the learning experience of the participants. The interest is on how social learning among participants take place and evolve over the course of the programme. One facilitator highlighted how the group he was attending to was not performing as well as the others in terms of collaboration and level of participation within classroom activities. Over time, however, it was this same group that was able to gel closely with each other, driven by the value that they begin to gain as they progress in the programme. This was especially relevant when they gained better awareness on the importance of objective decision-making and cohesive teamwork. Voluntary sharing and constructive feedback were also prevalent across the group activities. In this exercise, more outspoken participants demonstrated how they are more open in sharing constructive comments when they identify potential for improvement within the teams. One facilitator indicated how this was also the behaviour displayed when a teammate is seen to be struggling with management issues at the workplace. Such an observation, and level of relation, was able to be achieved as the participants grew to appreciate how common their workplace challenges were. Some team members encourage quieter members to speak up, take on responsibilities, and contribute more to discussions.

One facilitator experimented with unfacilitated group learning whereby teams were left to conduct activities and identify action items on their own. This experiment, according to the facilitator was effective in creating an environment of peer learning while bringing the group members closer. This situation was not achieved immediately, however, as most teams struggled to progress on their own, citing challenges in identifying a lead, agreeing on activities, and also managing time. Another challenge is on the logistics as some group works are done outside of the in-person workshops which would then require teams to come together at a dedicated time, which is not easy for participants who are working at different locations across the country. Another impact of positive group dynamics is the continued post-programme interaction between the participants from the same cohort and groups. As the facilitators were also included in the group chat room that the facilitator had developed, they were able to also observe how the nature of the conversation among the participants evolved over time. This includes sharing on coaching approaches or managing challenges that they face beyond the programme and in the workplace. One facilitator observed how certain groups with

more open communication among members tended to evolve deeper relationships at the end of the programme. From an organisational perspective, the bonding created within the programme environment can be beneficial as it fosters better teamwork and collaboration groupwide. In future instances, any collaborative needs within the organisation can be achieved when middle managers have networked better across the group.

Theme 9: Coaching vs. Mentoring

In terms of the coaching experience, the facilitators indicated that from their conversations with the participants, there is a significant interest among participants in the coaching exercise that they undertake in the programme. For each participant, a certified executive coach is provided for them to be able to identify their strengths and identify effective measures of addressing significant challenges that they are facing. One facilitator shared feedback from one participant who considered coaching to be a powerful experience, although the concept was foreign to him at the onset. This is mainly in view of the concept of ‘mentorship’ that is more prevalent across the organisation, as compared to coaching. This situation has led some participants to struggle in adapting to the concept at the beginning, but provided their full buy-in and participation once they began to see the value of the experience.

While the experience between the facilitators and the participants is limited to the pre-programme and programme delivery phases, there is opportunity for them to observe any marked differences between the early and end stage of the learning journey. This is specifically because the programme itself is a 12-week journey, which enables opportunities for observation and comparison from the lens of the facilitators. One example is the early struggle among participants in engaging with coaching in the context of executive coaching, as compared to the mentorship relationship that they are used to. As such, there were moments of discomfort when coaches asked questions towards self-awareness, versus the common experience of mentors who would commonly provide the answers directly to them. Over time, facilitators indicated how participants grew more confident and comfortable with the concept of coaching, and how it brings value to them.

The facilitators interviewed described how participants largely exhibited a shift in their leadership style from the way they interacted with their classmates. One example is how the participants became more open to allow space for others to speak up during their conversations.

There were also instances of initially dominant participants becoming more inclusive towards quieter participants. This has fostered a more collaborative and inclusive environment within the learning environment. This observation is also believed to be a part of the level of acceptance that the participants have developed. Some participants were seen by the facilitators to indicate pushback at the beginning of the programme. This is believed to stem from their mindset that certain concepts or tools from the programme may not work or be directly applicable for their respective teams in the organisation. These mindsets seem to gradually change over the course of the programme, specifically as participants began to better appreciate and understand how the concepts can be applicable to them, even if it is not all the theories taught in the course. Another prediction by facilitators is how increased self-awareness can contribute to this development. Participants began to have a better realisation of how their personal behaviours affect others, while also recognising how personal change is a prerequisite for influencing change. Facilitators also indicated that participants were largely more aware of how the leadership development experience can help them in the long-term. This contrasts with the current role that they play as a manager. Specifically, the mindset shift that they had undergone throughout the learning journey has been beneficial for them in building a longer-term perspective. This transformation is especially through as they gain better appreciation on the multifaceted nature of leadership and the dimensions that is involved. Facilitators highlighted how this level of self-awareness is the hardest to attain as it requires deep belief and conviction on the newly acquired knowledge and lessons from the programme.

4.3 Data Set 3: Post-training Feedback Survey

Between January to December 2023, 10 cohorts of the leadership training programme that was studied for this research were held. Across these 10 cohorts, 587 participants took part over the course of the year. At the end of each learning block within the programme, participants are asked about their learning experience in the programme. The primary goal of this survey, that is run by the organising programme team, is to obtain feedback from the participants and gain understanding on the elements of the programme that are beneficial to them, and areas of development for the design as part of continuous improvement. The availability of this data provided an opportunity for further thematic analysis, given the large data point encompassing the 10 cohorts of 587 participants from the year. The two questions that were asked in this post-programme survey were, “What about this learning experience was most valuable to you?” and “How can we make this learning experience more valuable to you?”. These questions were designed to unearth the specific components from the learning journey that was particularly meaningful to the participant given that the programme comprised of various learning methods. The intent is also to surface any particular parts of the programme that can be improved upon, not did not realise the desired experience.

From this data, with comparison with findings from interviews conducted with the 20 sampled participants, thematic analysis can be conducted to form grounded theory (Khan, 2014; Glaser and Strauss, 2017). This method is particularly suited for this exploratory research where the aim can be to develop theories or explanations based on data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019). The three research questions seek to understand leadership development methods, their perceived relevance, and the motivations of middle managers. Grounded theory can derive insights directly from the participants’ responses of the survey, without imposing preconceived categories or frameworks. This effort can also emphasise the systematic analysis of survey data to identify concepts, relationships, and patterns that emerge. This aligns well with the research questions and can allow themes and theories to emerge from the data. Grounded theory can capture the complexity and depth of participants’ experiences (Chapman, Hadfield and Chapman, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Grounded theory also offers a flexible and iterative approach to data analysis. This can complement the analyses done on the other two sets of data, while continuously refining understanding of the phenomena of leadership training. By analysing the survey responses, we can iteratively compare, categorise, and conceptualise the data to develop theoretical insights; complemented with comparative insights identified from

interview data. This iterative process shall explore different angles and dimensions of the three research questions, enhancing the depth and richness of analysis, while paving the way for potential development of theories or conceptual frameworks. This theoretical grounding can potentially contribute to the advancement of knowledge or best practice in the field.

In building grounded theory out of this data, the method of Anselm and Glaser (1967) is referred to. This method emphasises a systematic approach to theory development through constant comparison of data, theoretical sampling, and the generation of concepts and categories grounded in empirical evidence. The method encourages an openness to emergent patterns and theoretical insights. The key principles of this approach include theoretical sensitivity (i.e. recognising and conceptualising patterns and relationships), constant comparison (i.e. continuous comparison of new data with previously coded data, theoretical sampling (i.e. analysis of additional data based on emerging theories), and conceptualisation (i.e. explanation of the phenomena observed from data analysis).

Based on the thematic analysis done, the codes and themes identified from Data Set 3 are outlined in Table 13.

Question 1: What about this learning experience was most valuable to you?	
Codes	Themes
Self-awareness and self-discovery, Understanding strengths and weaknesses, Leadership styles and tendencies, Multiplier / Diminisher leadership, Communication styles and techniques, Tools for leadership enhancement	Self-Improvement and Leadership Development
Coaching techniques and methodologies, Coaching conversation continuum, Active listening and effective questioning, Providing constructive feedback, Using coaching tools	Coaching Skills
Interactive learning experiences, Group discussions and sharing of experiences, Engagement with facilitators and participants, Structured approach to learning, Diverse perspectives and insights,	Overall Learning Experience

Practical tools and methodologies, Value of networking and building connections	
Value of training for professional growth, Applying learning to daily work, Realisations and ‘aha’ moments, Importance of continuous learning, Enhancing leadership capabilities, Impact on personal development	Professional Growth and Development
Importance of feedback in leadership development, Reflection on past experiences and behaviours, Learning from mistakes and successes, Appreciation for feedback received during the programme, Integration of feedback into personal growth journey	Feedback and Reflection
Building relationships and connections, Learning from peers and colleagues, Sharing of knowledge and experiences, Appreciation for diversity of perspectives. Collaborative learning environment	Networking and Collaboration:

Question 2: How can we make this learning experience more valuable to you?	
Codes	Themes
Programme Length, Virtual Sessions, Physical Sessions	Programme Duration, Structure
Social Events, Icebreakers	Engagement and Participation
Prayer Break, Session Venue, Session Timing	Venue and Logistics
Programme Applicability, Diversity	Inclusivity and Representation
Post-Programme Check-ins, Guest Speakers, Similar Programmes	Continuous Support and Follow-up
Leadership Sessions, Dynamic Leadership	Leadership Development

Activities, Business Cases, Physical Workshops	Practical Learning and Application
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Table 13: Codes and Themes from Data Set 3 (Post-programme Survey)

Based on the codes and themes observed, a grounded theory that captures the essence of participants' experiences and suggestions for improving the learning experience of the programme can be developed. These observations are then compared and contrasted with findings earlier obtained from the thematic interview of interviews, to ensure richness of data which the grounded theory is based upon. By synthesising these themes, the grounded theory provides insights into enhancing the effectiveness and transfer of learning from the programme. This theory emphasises the importance of comprehensive self-improvement, effective coaching skills development, engaging and interactive learning experiences, promoting professional growth and development, facilitating continuous support and follow-up, ensuring inclusivity and representation, optimising programme duration and structure, and emphasising practical learning and application. An explanation of this grounded theory is presented in Table 14 and illustrated in Figure 8 as six considerations for leadership training enhancement.

Grounded Theory: Six Considerations to Enhance Leadership Training		
Focus Area	Rationale	Remarks
Transformation: Incorporate self-discovery and transformative experience for engagement	Participants value opportunities for self-awareness, self-discovery, and understanding of strengths and weaknesses. They appreciate learning about leadership styles and its value for professional growth.	The focus on personal growth and development goes beyond skill acquisition and knowledge transfer

<p>Active Learning: Integrate practical learning to enable immediate application</p>	<p>Participants advocate for practical learning experiences and application-oriented activities. Suggestions include incorporating activities, business cases, and physical workshops that enable participants to collaborate in learning activities, towards applying learning back to the workplace.</p>	<p>This aligns with contemporary trends in adult education theory while highlighting the importance of hands-on learning and real-world application</p>
<p>Coaching: Incorporate upskilling on coaching competencies</p>	<p>Participants recognise the significance of acquiring coaching techniques and methodologies, including active listening, effective questioning, and providing constructive feedback. There is emphasis on the role of coaching skills in facilitating professional growth and fostering a supportive learning environment.</p>	<p>While coaching is increasingly recognised as a valuable tool in leadership development, this theory integrates coaching competencies into the training model.</p>
<p>Continuity: Facilitate post-programme continuous engagement and follow-up</p>	<p>Participants expressed a desire for ongoing support, feedback, and follow-up sessions after completing the programme. Suggestions include implementing post-programme check-ins, inviting guest speakers for</p>	<p>This emphasis on continuous engagement goes beyond focusing solely on the delivery of content within a limited timeframe.</p>

	mentorship, and offering similar programmes to their team members.	
Inclusion: Ensure diversity and inclusivity	Participants emphasise the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and representation within the programme (i.e. participation, content, activities). There is appreciation of networking and collaboration opportunities, learning from peers and colleagues, and appreciating diversity of perspectives.	This focus on inclusivity recognises the importance of diversity in driving innovation and organisational performance.
Timing: Consider optimal timing for module and content sequencing	Participants provide feedback on programme logistics, duration, and structure. Considerations include as offering virtual and physical sessions, incorporating social events and icebreakers, and accommodating diverse needs such as prayer breaks.	This attention to detail in programme design does not overlook programme logistics in facilitating learning and engagement.

Table 14: Formation of Grounded Theory on Considerations for Leadership Training Enhancement



Figure 8: Six Considerations for Leadership Training Enhancement

Supporting Data

Further to the analysis above, the post-programme survey data that are sent to all participants of the programme upon completion, have also indicated quantitative figures relating to the ratings given by participants on the learning blocks that they have experienced. These ratings are based on a scale of five (1 – 5) and are run using the ‘Metrics that Matter’ tool which is benchmarked across different corporate training providers worldwide. Through this survey, the responses obtained from the participants relate to several factors including learning environment, instructor effectiveness, job impact, and learning effectiveness. The questions that are asked in this survey are outlined in Table 15.

No.	Question
1	Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The classroom environment was appropriate for learning.
2	Instructor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor helped me understand how to apply the material.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructor kept me engaged. • The instructor was knowledgeable about the subject.
3	Learning Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I gained new knowledge/skills.
4	Perceived Value: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This learning experience was a worthwhile investment of my time.
5	Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My manager and I discussed my goals for attending this learning experience.

Table 15: Questions Rated by Participants in the Post-programme Survey

The ratings indicated by participants across the 10 cohorts are outlined in Table 16 and are visualised in the bar chart in Figure 9 where the means of the seven rated items are ranked from highest to lowest.

Rating / Cohort	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Avg.	Std. Dev.
Programme Rating	4.48	4.52	4.58	4.56	4.42	4.44	4.6	4.68	4.59	4.55	4.54	0.07
Facilitator	4.54	4.53	4.66	4.65	4.4	4.47	4.7	4.67	4.63	4.66	4.59	0.1
Online Delivery	3.87	3.98	3.8	3.76	3.8	3.99	3.57	3.98	3.78	3.89	3.84	0.13
Learning Gain	4.57	4.65	4.75	4.64	4.52	4.49	4.61	4.68	4.56	4.63	4.61	0.07
Content	4.58	4.56	4.64	4.65	4.53	4.54	4.68	4.88	4.7	4.67	4.64	0.1
Development Conversation	4.3	4.3	4.22	4.22	4.24	4.29	4.34	4.41	4.33	4.19	4.28	0.07
Worthwhile Investment	4.55	4.63	4.77	4.64	4.52	4.43	4.58	4.76	4.7	4.57	4.62	0.11

Table 16: Ratings Given by Participants within the Scale

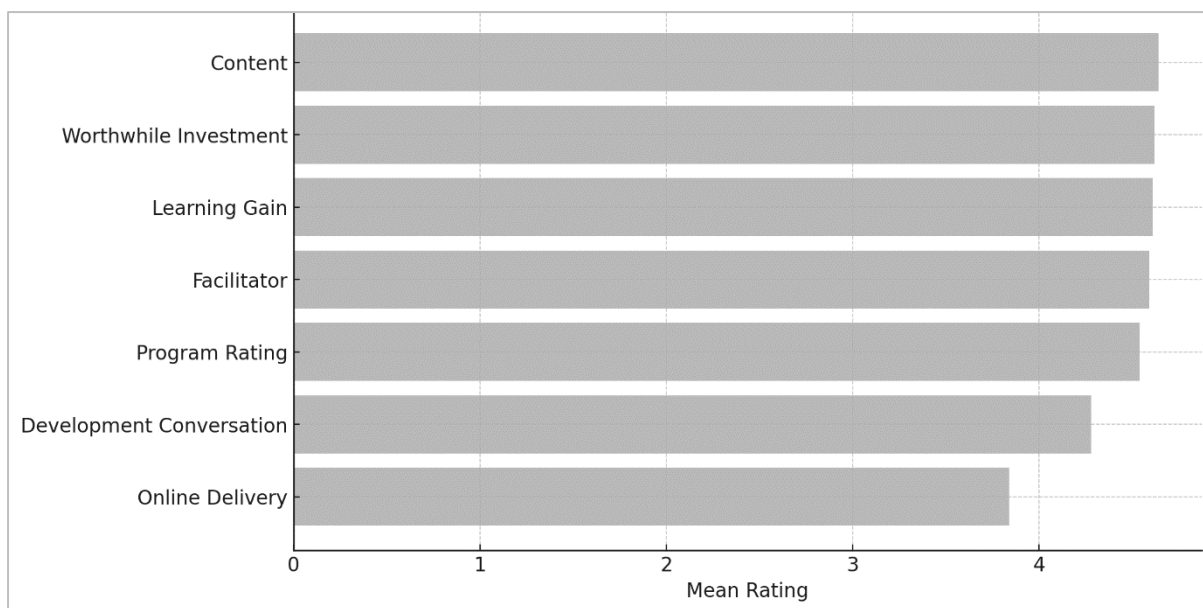


Figure 9: Means of the Rated Items Across the 10 Cohorts

From the quantitative data presented above, it can be observed how there is a significant difference between the rating obtained by the online delivery component of the programme. This feedback is relating to a one-day coaching upskilling programme that was conducted by the facilitators in a virtual instructor led model. Within this experience, participants are taught and equipped with coaching tools such as active listening, trust building, and goal setting. From the written feedback received, doing this highly interactive exercise within an online environment is not effective in terms of learning transfer, given the logistical and technological challenges. This finding is in alignment with observations made in the analysis conducted prior, relating to the written appreciative and constructive feedback that was obtained from the same survey. The findings of the analysis done on the interviews and post-programme survey provides an interesting platform for further comparison with data and insights obtained from the qualitative analysis done in this dissertation. Specifically, based on the literature gap of geographical context in leadership development, there is opportunity to compare findings in Southeast Asia compared to that in North America and Europe, primarily on preferred learning method, content, and delivery mode.

4.4 Data Set 4: Survey of Middle Managers

As the focus on the qualitative analysis of this study is based on the interviews conducted on middle managers in Southeast Asia, there is interest to see how the data compares with that of other regions. This is to obtain indications if there is any influence of regional business cultures or practices on the effectiveness of different methods of leadership training, as well as levels of motivations and perceptions on the activity. As such, a survey was conducted on 200 middle managers who are based in North America and Europe to obtain directional indicators on how these elements are perceived by people of the same employee group but functioning in a different region. In this section, the findings from the survey are discussed across several sub-sections to deliberate on the perceived effectiveness of different methods as well as the elements of perception and motivation. Prior to these discussions, the control variables that were collected were analysed to understand the demographic and experiential composition of the survey participants. The control variables include age, gender, and years of experience as a middle manager. The control variables were collected from 200 participants. The data were categorised into five age groups, two gender categories, and four experience levels, as outlined in the tables below. These insights are essential for interpreting the regression analysis results that shall be discussed in the following section, and for understanding the broader context of the study.

Age Distribution: The age distribution of the participants is shown in Table 17. The majority of the participants fall within the age range of 31 to 40 years, indicating a relatively young to middle-aged managerial workforce. The age distribution demonstrates that the sample includes a diverse range of ages, although the most common age groups are 31 to 35 and 36 to 40.

Age Group	Count
< 30	14
31 to 35	60
36 to 40	70
41 to 45	33

> 45	23
Total	200

Table 17: Distribution of Age across the Surveyed Sample

Gender Distribution: The gender distribution of the participants is presented in Table 18. There are more male participants than female participants, with males comprising about two-thirds of the sample. This distribution highlights a gender imbalance within the sample, which may reflect broader trends in middle management demographics.

Gender	Count
Male	137
Female	63
Total	200

Table 18: Distribution Of Gender Across the Surveyed Sample

Years of Experience: The distribution of years of experience among participants is shown in Table 19. Most participants have between 4 to 6 years of experience, with a significant number also having more than 10 years of experience. This distribution indicates that the sample includes a wide range of experience levels, with the largest group having moderate experience (4 to 6 years).

Age Group	Count
1 to 3 years	46
4 to 6 years	85
7 to 10 years	35
More than 10 years	34
Total	200

Table 19: Distribution of Years of Experience across the Surveyed Sample

Perceived Effectiveness of Different Leadership Training Methods Among Middle Managers

Regression analysis (ordinary least squares) was conducted on the responses received from the survey of 200 middle managers, each of whom rated the effectiveness of different leadership training methods on a scale from 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (highly effective). The dependent variable, ‘Effectiveness of Leadership Training’, was derived from the rating provided by each respondent on their perceived value on leadership training upon completion of a programme. This selection is based on the possible representation on the input provided to this question as an indicator of how effective middle managers find leadership training to be as a whole. In conjunction with this definition, the independent variables included for this research, which are based upon key training activities in leadership training programmes in general, are outlined as follows:

- Classroom Training
- Executive Coaching
- Online Learning
- Case Study
- Group Project
- Simulation
- Role Playing
- Leadership Workshop

The regression results are summarised in Table 20.

Variable	Ordinary	Std. Error	t-Statistic	P-Value	95% Confidence Int.
Constant	0.0693	0.285	0.243	0.808	[-0.493, 0.631]
Classroom Training	0.0509	0.061	0.835	0.405	[-0.069, 0.171]
Executive Coaching	0.2225	0.062	3.588	0.000	[0.100, 0.345]
Online Learning	0.1544	0.054	2.856	0.005	[0.048, 0.261]
Case Study	0.0152	0.064	0.238	0.812	[-0.111, 0.141]
Group Project	0.1833	0.059	3.128	0.002	[0.068, 0.299]
Simulation	0.0768	0.069	1.107	0.270	[-0.060, 0.214]
Role Playing	0.1077	0.056	1.939	0.054	[-0.002, 0.217]
Leadership Workshop	0.2476	0.072	3.433	0.001	[0.105, 0.390]
R ²	0.75				
Adjusted R ²	0.73				

Note: The R² and Adjusted R² values indicate that the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables of the model.

Table 20: Regression Coefficients for Leadership Training Effectiveness

In addition to the regression analysis, Table 21 outlines the mean and standard deviation for each variable across the data set.

Training Method	Mean	Standard Deviation
Classroom Training	3.55	1.14
Executive Coaching	3.70	1.15
Online Learning	3.15	1.14
Case Study	3.44	1.15
Group Project	3.49	1.15
Simulation	3.53	1.16
Role Playing	3.55	1.17
Leadership Workshop	3.73	1.12

Table 21: Mean and Standard Deviation of Independent Variables

Table 22 outlines the Pearson correlation between each pair of variables.

	Class	Coaching	Online	Case	Group	Sim	Role	Workshop
Class	1.00							
Coaching	0.46*	1.00						
Online	0.40*	0.23*	1.00					
Case	0.41*	0.34*	0.36*	1.00				
Group	0.35*	0.38*	0.31*	0.36*	1.00			
Sim	0.28*	0.23*	0.25*	0.34*	0.30*	1.00		
Role	0.33*	0.23*	0.29*	0.35*	0.32*	0.58*	1.00	
Workshop	0.44*	0.40*	0.28*	0.30*	0.47*	0.45*	0.43*	1.00

Note:

1. All values marked with an asterisk (*) are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.
2. Based on the correlation matrix, there are no correlation coefficients that exceed 0.7 or 0.8. Therefore, there are no high correlations among the variables. This suggests that multicollinearity is not significant.

Table 22: Pearson Correlation Between Each Pair of Independent Variables

Table 23 outlines the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) score of the variables whereby all VIF values are below 5, indicating no severe multicollinearity within the model. The variables are moderately correlated with one another, thus enabling for the variables to be used as part of the regression analysis.

Variable	VIF
Classroom Training	1.47
Executive Coaching	1.31
Online Learning	1.26
Case Study	1.36
Group Project	1.38
Simulation	1.62
Role Playing	1.76
Leadership Workshop	1.83

Table 23: VIF Scores of the Variables

The regression analysis reveals several significant findings, as follows:

- Leadership Workshop:** Leadership workshop had the highest coefficient among significant predictors (0.2476, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its comprehensive and interactive nature, which likely contributes to the perceived effectiveness. This finding is consistent with the observations made from the feedback from middle managers who were interviewed in this dissertation whereby the experience of social learning, exchange of knowledge, and a sense of similar problem-solving situations appealed to the demography. This is potentially driven by element of validation that takes place when the challenges that are faced individually are also observed at a larger scale.
- Executive Coaching:** With a coefficient of 0.2225 ($p < 0.001$), executive coaching is observed to significantly enhance the perceived effectiveness of leadership training among the sampled middle managers. This finding suggests that personalised, one-on-one coaching is highly valued by middle managers, which is likely due to its tailored approach and direct applicability to individual leadership challenges. This finding is

consistent with the finding of the interviews conducted with middle managers who are based in Southeast Asia. This indicates the potential wide acceptance or preference of executive coaching as a leadership training method given its attention to personal needs and immediate opportunities and challenges.

- **Group Project:** The group project method showed a significant positive impact (coefficient = 0.1833, $p < 0.002$). This method likely fosters collaboration and practical application of leadership skills in a team setting, which are critical components of effective leadership. Further, group project provides the opportunity for the exploration and analysis of existing challenges at the workplace which can be collaboratively addressed to the benefit of the individuals both in the capacity of learners as well as middle managers.
- **Online Learning:** Online learning emerged as a significant predictor with a coefficient of 0.1544 ($p < 0.005$). This indicates that middle managers find value in the flexibility and accessibility of online platforms, which allow them to balance training with their professional responsibilities. This is a finding that is not similar to that of the interviews conducted in this dissertation. The preference for in-person delivery of leadership programme was significant among the middle managers interviewed. This might signal how remote working might be more prevalent in North America and Europe compared to the Asian region, thus influencing how employees prefer learning to happen as well i.e. remotely against physical attendance for synchronous learning.

Methods such as classroom training, case study, simulation, and role playing did not show significant effects at the 5% significance level. This is an interesting finding when compared to that of the outcome of the interviews conducted with the sampled middle managers. Given how classroom session, case study discussion, simulation raining, and role playing can be highly interactive in nature, it is quite surprising to see that these are less preferred compared to online learning. This might also be influenced by the differing interpretations that might be held by respondents of the survey, in terms of what each of the definition constitutes. As this demographic survey is done as a high-level comparison for the qualitative analysis done prior, this indication should be taken as a directional input and not a direct comparison to the other sampled data. This is especially important to avoid any inaccurate suggestions. Nevertheless,

the observation remains interesting given the glaring preference for in-person engagement from the interviewed sample.

Further to the quantitative analysis conducted above, qualitative analysis was also conducted via two open-ended questions that were asked in the survey, as follows:

- What aspects of leadership training did you find most beneficial?
- What aspects of leadership training did you find least beneficial?

Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes and patterns within the responses. This process involved coding the responses from across the demography, categorising similar codes into themes that can categorise the codes accurately, and interpreting the significance of these themes in the context of leadership training.

In terms of beneficial aspects, several themes emerged, as follows:

- **Practical application and real-world scenarios:** Many respondents highlighted the value of practical advice, real-life scenarios, and role-playing exercises that mimic actual workplace situations. This is deemed to be useful in preparing them better for actual situations where they would be responding in a manner that can be beneficial to them as middle managers. For example, one respondent noted, “The role plays I've been involved in with professional actors as part of the training were really beneficial.”
- **Interactive and group-based learning:** Interactive methods such as group projects, discussions, and workshops were frequently mentioned. This appears to be aligned with the findings from the interviewed sample where social learning is favoured. A respondent mentioned, “The group work involved scenarios as well as learning about work plans. I found that highly relevant to the day-to-day work of a leader.”
- **Personalised feedback and coaching:** Executive coaching and personalised feedback were seen as highly effective. This can be due to the immediacy and practicality of knowledge and skills acquired from the process. One participant stated, “Executive coaching significantly enhanced my effectiveness as a leader after the training.”

- **Communication skills:** Training focused on improving communication skills was also valued. This observation is due to the need for interpersonal interaction among middle managers within their working environment. Respondents emphasised the importance of learning how to effectively communicate with their teams.
- **Self-awareness and personal development:** Leadership training that fostered self-awareness and personal growth was frequently cited as beneficial. This signals the discovery process that is favoured among middle managers through leadership training as similar experiences might not be prevalent in the day-to-day working routine. One participant noted, “It has given me self-awareness, and allowed me to identify what I am weak and strong at.”

In terms of least beneficial aspects, several themes emerged, as follows:

- **Overly theoretical content:** Respondents often found theoretical content to be less useful, preferring practical and actionable training. This can be predicted to stem from the academic nature of some leadership concepts which might work in theory but not immediately in practice. As one respondent mentioned, “The least beneficial aspect was the theoretical lectures, which felt too abstract compared to practical exercises.”
- **Generic and irrelevant material:** Some training sessions were criticised for being too generic or not relevant to the participants’ specific contexts. This finding seems to correlate with the desire for personalised learning among middle managers. A respondent noted, “The content was fairly generic and overly reliant on lectures which don’t give hands-on experience.”
- **Time-consuming sessions:** Lengthy and time-consuming training sessions were also highlighted as less beneficial. As noted in the interviewed sample, middle managers are focusing on their work commitment and already busy schedules. One participant pointed out, “The session was long and time-consuming.”

Table 24 outlines selected responses from the open-ended questions that depict the overall nature of the responses received.

Most Beneficial Aspect	Least Beneficial Aspect
<i>“Practical advice on managing people were useful for me to apply.”</i>	<i>“The session was long and time-consuming, it felt draggy.”</i>
<i>“Role-playing exercises with professional actors enabled me to feel the experience.”</i>	<i>“Dry PowerPoint presentations did not engage me well.”</i>
<i>“Executive coaching and personalised feedback focused on my specific needs.”</i>	<i>“Theoretical lectures were not helpful because it’s not practical.”</i>
<i>“Group work with real-life scenarios enabled me to learn from others.”</i>	<i>“Generic online modules did not provide specific challenging situations.”</i>
<i>“Self-awareness and conflict resolution training were immediately applicable.”</i>	<i>“Some simulation group activities felt artificial.”</i>

Table 24: Selected responses from open-ended questions

The qualitative analysis reveals a preference for leadership training that is practical, interactive, and personalised. Methods that involve real-world applications, group interactions, and tailored feedback are highly valued. Conversely, overly theoretical content, generic materials, and time-consuming sessions detract from the perceived effectiveness of leadership training. While the rating on online learning was higher in terms of correlation to effective leadership training, the observation of online being less engaging in the open-ended questions is more consistent with the findings from the interviews conducted. While online learning received mixed perception among respondents, it remains critical for learning experiences to feature online learning content that are still highly relevant and applicable to the workplace.

Participants were also asked on suggestions they might have via an open-ended question which read, “Do you have any suggestions for improving leadership training programmes in general?” from the input received to this question. Thematic analysis was conducted on this data and responses were categorised and interpreted accordingly via

coding suggestions, grouping similar codes into themes, and providing insights based on the themes. The key themes that have emerged are outlined as follows:

- **Practical application and real-world scenarios:** Many respondents emphasised the importance of incorporating more real-life situations and practical examples into the training programmes. For example, one suggestion was, “More real-life examples, role-play, outcome-based training, and rewards and recognition in the end would be good.” Another respondent mentioned, “Giving practical and on-the-job training as much as possible for seamless learning.”
- **Interactive and hands-on learning:** There was a strong preference for interactive and hands-on training methods. Respondents suggested more role-playing, group work, and interactive workshops. One participant stated, “Incorporating more hands-on exercises and real-world scenarios would make the training more practical and relevant.” Another comment highlighted, “Short snappy sessions rather than long activities and sessions.”
- **Tailored and personalised training:** Tailoring the training content to the specific needs of the participants and their job roles was a recurring theme. For instance, one suggestion was, “Make them tailored to what participants report as pain points and express that they want to get out of it.” Another respondent emphasised the need for personalised feedback and follow-up sessions to reinforce learning.
- **Frequent and continuous learning:** Respondents recommended that leadership training should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. One comment stated, “I would say it should happen often, probably at least once a month.” Continuous learning through follow-up support and ongoing access to training materials was also suggested.
- **Combining different learning methods:** A combination of various learning techniques, including videos, role plays, case studies, and discussions, was seen as beneficial. One participant suggested, “I think ensuring that a good mixture of

different learning techniques involving a combination of role play, videos, teaching of leadership and management models etc.”

To illustrate the themes above, Table 25 outlines selected responses from the respondents.

Theme	Sample Response
Practical application	<i>“More practical and real-world applications.”</i>
Interactive and hands-on learning	<i>“Incorporating more hands-on exercises and real-world scenarios would make the training more practical.”</i>
Tailored and personalised training	<i>“Tailor the programmes to specific job roles.”</i>
Frequent and continuous learning	<i>“I would say it should happen often, probably at least once a month.”</i>
Combining different learning methods	<i>“I think ensuring that a good mixture of different learning techniques involving a combination of role play, videos, teaching of leadership and management models etc.”</i>

Table 25: Sample Responses from Open-Ended Question on Suggestions for Improvement

The suggestions provided by the sampled middle managers highlight the need for practical knowledge and skill acquisition, interactive learning, and personalised leadership training experience. Further, respondents value training that is closely aligned with real-world applications and allows for active participation and hands-on learning. As such, tailoring the content to the specific needs and roles of the participants can significantly enhance the relevance and impact of the training. Furthermore, the quality of trainers and the materials used in the training are crucial to its success. Based on these suggestions, it can be observed how the key feedback is along the line of learner experience and also how the learning complement their work commitments.

Motivation of Middle Managers Before and After Leadership Training

In the survey conducted, the sampled middle managers were asked to rate their level of motivation before and after undergoing leadership training based on the programme that they have attended which was asked about in the same questionnaire. This was intended to gauge their drive and keenness in investing time and energy into a leadership training programme. From the sampled data of 200 middle managers, the average motivation level to undertake leadership training prior to participation among participants is relatively high (mean = 3.62), within a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with the motivation level on one's leadership effectiveness level post-training being even higher (mean = 3.97). This suggests that their motivation level in undertaking leadership training either maintained or increased after participating in a programme. This increase suggests how leadership training programmes can be effective in enhancing participants' overall motivation to improve as leaders, especially with the opportunity to put new knowledge and skills into practice towards improvements at the workplace and also professional working relationships, depending on the specific focus of the training that they undertake.

Further, from the correlation analysis conducted, a strong positive correlation (0.712) was observed between before and after training participation, indicating that participants who were motivated to undertake the programme tend to maintain or increase motivation to apply the acquired knowledge and skills after completing the training. This relationship indicates the potential relevance and influence of initial motivation in shaping the perceived outcomes of training programmes. Table 26 summarises the key descriptive statistics for the motivation to undertake leadership training and how it increases after participation. The mean motivation scores indicate a high level of motivation both before and after the training, with a slight increase post-training, while the standard deviations suggest that there is some variability in responses. Overall, the sampled participants indicated a consistent level of motivation throughout their participation.

Statistic	Motivation Before	Motivation After
Mean (1 – 5)	3.62	3.97
Standard Deviation	1.08	0.92
Correlation	0.712	-

Statistic	Value
t-statistic	-3.64
Degrees of freedom	434
p-value	< 0.001

Note: Given that the p-value is less than 0.05, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean motivation levels before and after the leadership training programme

Table 26: Motivation Levels Before and After Leadership Training

In addition to the quantitative analysis above, qualitative thematic analysis was also conducted on a relevant open-ended question that was asked to the respondents which read, “Please describe any changes in your motivation levels after completing the leadership training.” From this analysis, several key themes emerged from the data, as follows:

- Increased Motivation and Enthusiasm
 - Many participants reported an increase in their motivation levels after completing the leadership training that they had undergone. They generally felt more keen, enthusiastic, and equipped with new skills and knowledge to apply in their roles.
 - Example responses:
 - *“I felt more motivated to do better after the training.”*

- *“After completing the leadership training, my motivation levels significantly improved as I felt more equipped to handle complex challenges.”*
- Enhanced confidence
 - A significant number of respondents indicated that their confidence levels improved, which in turn boosted their motivation. They felt more capable and ready to tackle leadership challenges. This can imply an emotional impact of experiencing leadership training.
 - Example responses:
 - *“The training boosted my confidence in leading my team and increased my motivation.”*
 - *“I felt more confident to be more motivated around my team.”*
- Desire to apply new skills
 - Participants expressed a stronger desire to implement the new techniques and strategies they had acquired and learned during the training. This eagerness to apply their new knowledge might have also contributed to their increased motivation, indicating higher confidence to put theory into practice. It is also an indicator of wanting to improve which might be inherent to most new managers.
 - Example responses:
 - *“I was more motivated to try out the techniques I had learned.”*
 - *“I feel more motivated as wanted to put what I learnt into practice.”*
- Temporary increase in motivation
 - Some participants experienced a temporary boost in motivation immediately following the training, but noted that this increase was not sustained over time. This might be an impact of the overall feeling of completing a course, without a certainty of longevity in terms of content relevance in the longer term. This temporary boost remains a challenge within most leadership training programmes.
 - Example responses:

- *“I felt more motivated immediately after the training which declined shortly after.”*
 - *“Increased levels of motivation in the weeks after the training.”*
- No significant change
 - A smaller portion of respondents reported no significant change in their motivation levels. These participants often cited that the training did not provide new insights or was not directly applicable to their roles. This signals a concern over the gained value over the time and energy spent on attending and completing leadership training.
 - Example responses:
 - *“I felt no changes in motivation.”*
 - *“I actually felt pretty much the same because it didn't give me very much new insight.”*
- Negative impact
 - Interestingly, a few participants mentioned a decrease in motivation or a negative impact on their motivation levels. This was often due to a mismatch between their expectations and the actual content of the training. This observation highlights the critical importance of aligning learning content with immediate learner needs. This scenario might also arise from situational aspects of specific individual learners, given external factors such as workplace environment and relationship with line managers.
 - Example responses:
 - *“I felt slightly demotivated after receiving mentoring from my line manager as I think our personalities clash.”*
 - *“The material in the training was not near as useful as I had thought it would be, which is why my motivation dropped.”*

The thematic analysis provides an indication of how leadership training can impact motivation levels among the middle managers surveyed. The majority of participants reported positive changes, including increased motivation to become a better leader, enhanced confidence in leading teams, and a desire to apply new skills into the workplace. These findings

suggest that leadership training can be an effective tool for boosting motivation when it provides relevant content to the immediate needs of the learner and practical skills that can be immediately felt. However, the temporary nature of the motivation boost for some participants indicates that ongoing support from employers and reinforcement of learning gains over time, post-programme completion, may be necessary to sustain these gains. Additionally, the lack of significant change in motivation for some respondents highlights the importance of aligning training content with participants' needs and expectations. This also highlights a concern over the time and energy spent on training.

These findings highlight several practical implications for the design and delivery of leadership training. In terms of design, activities that boost initial motivation can indicatively facilitate higher level of engagement in participation. Some potential efforts include clear communication on learning benefits and potential impact of the training on personal and professional development. Further, initiatives to engage participants before the training starts, such as introductory sessions or motivational workshops, could also enhance their motivation and subsequently their engagement with the training content. In the longer term, continuous and regular assessment of participants' motivation level throughout the training period can help organisers make real-time adjustments and ensure the training remains relevant and valuable. On the topic of motivation for leadership training, future research can consider factors that can influence post-training motivation such as the type of training activities, facilitator effectiveness, or organisational culture.

Perception on Leadership Training Before and After Undertaking a Programme

From the survey conducted, each respondent from the pool of 200 middle managers surveyed was asked on the perception that they had on leadership training before undertaking a programme. This is relating to the value that they put on the training itself in being helpful and useful to them, to be rated between a rating of 'not valuable at all' (1) to 'highly valuable' (5). The goal is to obtain an understanding on how a learning intervention might change or maintain their perception of leadership training as an investment of their time and commitment. The average perception of the value of leadership training among participants is relatively high both before (mean = 3.79) and after the training (mean = 3.85). This suggests how respondents put a generally fair to high value on leadership training, which increases slightly upon completion of the respective programmes that they had experienced. From the t-test conducted,

it can be observed how there no significant difference in change of perception before and after training. The positive correlation between before and after valuation on training (0.752), indicates that participants who start with a high perception of the value of leadership training tend to maintain or improve this perception after completing the training. Table 27 summarises the key descriptive statistics on the perception of value on leadership training among the sampled group.

Statistic	Perception Before	Perception After
Mean (1 – 5)	3.79	3.85
Standard Deviation	1.13	1.06
Correlation	0.752	-

Statistic	Value
t-statistic	-0.572
Degrees of freedom	434
p-value	0.568

Note: Given that the p-value is greater 0.05, there is no statistically significant difference in the mean perception levels before and after the leadership training programme.

Table 27: Perception of Value on Leadership Training Before and After Participation

In addition to the quantitative analysis above, qualitative analysis was also conducted on an open-ended question that was provided for the respondents which read, “Please describe any changes in your perception of the value of leadership training after completing the programme.” From this analysis, several findings and insights are observed, as follows:

- Increased appreciation for leadership training

- Many participants reported a heightened appreciation for leadership training, recognising its value in developing essential leadership skills. This might derive from the discovery of new knowledge or the acquisition of new skills that are relevant to improving the way they lead at the workplace.
- Example responses:
 - *“My perception of the value of leadership training has greatly improved. I now see it as an essential investment in personal and professional development.”*
 - *“I find more value in training now I have completed it. I did not see the need beforehand, but do now.”*
- Enhanced confidence and skills
 - A significant number of respondents indicated that their confidence levels and leadership skills improved, which in turn boosted their perception of the training’s value. This might be contributed to the engagements that they had undergone from the leadership training, as participants generally indicated inclination towards interactive and experiential learning as key experiences that matter to them.
 - Example responses:
 - *“The training provided practical tools and strategies that are directly applicable to real-world leadership challenges.”*
 - *“I felt more confident in dealing with situations.”*
- Minimal change of value perception
 - A portion of respondents reported minimal change in their perception of the leadership training’s perceived value. These participants cited that the training did not provide new insights or was not directly applicable to their roles, which highlights the recurring theme of relevance as a key success factor for effective leadership training.
 - Example responses:
 - *“I actually felt pretty much the same because it didn't give me very much new insight.”*
 - *“No changes in perception.”*

The majority of participants reported positive change in their perception of value in leadership training, including increased appreciation of the experience, enhanced self-confidence, and improved leadership skills. These findings suggest that leadership training can be effective in for boosting participants' overall self-confidence and desire to improve when it provides relevant and practical skills. However, the minimal change in perception of value cited by some respondents highlights the importance of aligning training module selection with participants' immediate needs and expectations, which are crucial aspects for long-term sustainability of newly acquired competencies. As an organisational initiative that involves high investment, there needs to be a consistent drive to attain high level of relevance, engagement, and applicability to ensure the budget allocated for leadership training does bear fruit in the form of meaningful competency, capability, and capacity improvements.

Similar to the previous discussion on the motivation of middle managers in partaking in leadership training, programme designers can consider including learning components that emphasise the value and benefits of leadership training from the outset of a learning journey. Leadership training is an endeavour that is undertaken on top of existing work commitments, thus it needs to have clear, impactful, and direct meaning for middle managers to fully engage and provide buy-in. Clear communication of specific skill or knowledge that can be gained from a learning experience can help validate, influence, or enhance participants' early perception of a programme as the journey progresses from one learning block to another. This promise does need to be commiserated with actual experience that meets the expectation of adult learners. Pre-training engagements such as informational sessions or testimonials from past participants can also enhance initial perception and set a positive tone for the training. This is especially critical as leadership training, just as any professional development effort, is not naturally inherent to all. It needs to also be acknowledged how workplace environment also plays a critical role in how middle managers rate the value of leadership training to them. Any process of new discoveries made on their leadership competency will not be rendered to be as useful if they are not able to showcase and apply at the workplace. this is a function of both top-down guidance from management, as well as full buy-in, support, and adherence from the working level direct reports.

4.5 Date Set 5: Case Study

In this section, the focus is on leadership development strategies and initiatives through the lens of global organisations across various industries. Adopting the case study methodology of Yin (2018), this chapter will present findings from analysis and exploration of the selected organisations that are prominent for their innovative and successful approaches to leadership development. Through the exploration and analysis of the strategies, practices, and outcomes of these organisations, the aim is to gain a better understanding on effective leadership training and development practices while offering valuable lessons for organisational practitioners and scholars alike (Hadfield and Jopling, 2018). The purpose of incorporating case studies within this dissertation is twofold. Firstly, it offers an opportunity to contextualise the findings derived from the qualitative and quantitative analyses conducted in preceding sections (i.e. thematic analysis, grounded theory, regression analysis) (Houghton *et al.*, 2015; Hayes, 2022). This effort can enable the development of deeper insights into the practical implications of leadership development initiatives and the factors that contribute to their success or failure in reality. Secondly, case studies enable a comparative analysis within the context of leadership training across organisations, highlighting variations in approaches and outcomes and identifying common themes and best practices beyond organisational boundaries or differences (Hadfield and Jopling, 2018).

The organisations selected for inclusion in these case studies were chosen based on their reputation for excellence in leadership development and their relevance to the research objectives of identifying effective methods while ascertaining the underlying reasons. Each case study presents a unique organisational situation while covering diverse industry sectors, geographical locations, and cultural backgrounds (Houghton *et al.*, 2015; Hayes, 2022). Through these diverse perspectives, the aim is to capture the depths and complexity of leadership development practices across different organisations and explore the factors that shape their effectiveness. For this purpose, five companies have been chosen specifically three from the western world i.e. GE, IBM, Google and two from the eastern region i.e. Toyota, DBS. Other than geographical locations, these global companies have also been chosen due to their presence in diverse industries namely technology, automotive, and banking, among others. Further, these companies were also founded across different time periods, which can provide a more varied outlook on how company age or maturity can influence best practices in leadership development.

Table 28 outlines the key information about the companies that are analysed in this case study section.

Company	Workforce	Founded	Industry	Headquarters	Revenue (USD bil)
GE	168,000	1892	Aerospace, Energy, Healthcare	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	74.2
IBM	288,300	1911	Information Technology	Armonk, New York, USA	57.4
Google	190,234	1998	Technology	Mountain View, California, USA	257.6
Toyota	366,283	1937	Automotive	Toyota City, Aichi, Japan	275.4
DBS	33,000	1968	Banking	Singapore	14.8

Note: Data obtained from official company reports and websites.

Table 28: Overview of Companies Analysed as Case Study

The intent of exploring companies across these diverse industries and regions is also to observe if there is any glaring indicator in terms of learning approach and strategy in addressing the immediate business challenges that they aim to address. Further, expanding the case study scope into these companies can also clarify on what works best for them, and how the best practices in these companies are not immediately transferrable, depending on industry dynamics and workforce culture. Therefore, the goal is for the case study to provide an expansive view of what is being done, what is deemed to be working, and how they can potentially be adapted within other organisational contexts (Movsisyan *et al.*, 2019). In each section, the company background and leadership development approach shall be discussed, before moving on to a comparative analysis with the company and programme that are being

analysed in this dissertation. This chapter is closed with a summary discussion of the observations made across the case study companies, against that of the company being researched in this dissertation. One limitation that is acknowledged in this case study analysis is that the information is public. Therefore, context and also real on-the-ground observation might not be able to be assessed (Yin, 2018), which can also be a consideration for future research.

Case Study 1: General Electric (GE) – Transitioning from Physical to Digital Learning

Background: GE is a multinational conglomerate founded in the USA in 1892 and has evolved to grow into many different forms over the years. At present, GE is divided into three main business namely GE Aerospace, GE Vernova (Energy), and GE Healthcare (GE.com, 2024). GE is seen to be one of the pioneering organisations in pushing forward the case for leadership development (Kim and Jin, 2008; Waters, 2009). This was most prevalent under the leadership of one of its most prominent chief executives, Jack Welch. Over the years, GE's best practices in leadership development have been emulated by organisations around the world (Groves, 2007; Leskiw and Singh, 2007; Henson, 2016; Frederick, 2020). This includes their approach in organising and structuring development across all levels of leadership. In this approach, different method, content, and delivery mode is adopted for each group, depending on their learning needs and also immediate competency gap areas (Waters, 2009). More recently, GE has shifted away from its in-person delivery of leadership programmes to going mostly online in terms of programme curation (Cappelli, 2022). GE is chosen as a company for case study purpose in this research in view of its long-standing reputation as a keen proponent of leadership development, as well as how it has evolved to adopt technology over time (Onatolu, 2012). In the context of this dissertation, there will also be comparison to the managerial development approach that is utilised by GE.

GE's main leadership programmes were initially driven by the GE Crotonville centre, their corporate university located in New York, USA. Founded in 1956, the centre was positioned as a leadership institute to push for the endeavours of innovation, ideas, and learning across the organisation (Tichy, 1989). In addition to the physical campus in New York, GE also ran leadership and functional learning programmes across their global learning centres based on local offices worldwide. Over the years, Crotonville has hosted various leaders from

across the organisation to engage with both internal leaders as well as external leaders from partnering organisations as well as client companies, for them to host structured courses, seminars, and workshops (Waters, 2009). In terms of initial founding aspiration, the Crotonville Centre was seen by its founders as GE to provide an experience comparable to what the MBA can provide to leaders (Ben Hur, Jaworski and Gray, 2012). At the beginning, programmes conducted at the centre were only for high performing managers and potential executives. Classroom trainings were done in settings that are similar to business schools as well.

During the leadership of one of GE's more renowned leaders, Jack Welch, the Crotonville centre was at its highest utilisation, with a learning budget that is said to have reached USD 1 billion (Cappelli, 2022). Beyond management training, and as the first corporate university in the world, Crotonville also became the place where the organisational culture is nurtured by way of conditioning leaders with the company's long and short term goals, as well as immediate challenges, for them to bring back to their respective business or functional divisions (Tichy, 1989; Ben Hur, Jaworski and Gray, 2012). In terms of leadership philosophy and development approach, the framework adopted by GE dates back to the time of one of its most prominent leaders, Jack Welch (Tsai, 2023). Under his leadership, GE focused on transformation and innovation for the company to success and thrive in an increasingly challenging market. Through his 'work out' and 'best practices' programmes, GE went on an effort to promote a culture of speed, simplicity, and self-confidence across the workforce. In doing this, they have also overhauled the compensation packages and relevant policies to align with strategic targets towards nurturing visionary and courageous leaders. The leadership style aspired through this endeavour was one that emphasised leading over controlling, while advocating for proactive change, and prioritising autonomy over excessive control (Rice *et al.*, 2023). This philosophy was also encouraging of continuous development across the professionals in the organisation that requires leaders to adapt to changing circumstances. The four types of leaders desired by GE are described as Type 1 (i.e. high performers who share corporate values), Type 2 (i.e. low performers who don't share corporate values nor create value), Type 3 (i.e. low performers who share corporate values but miss the numbers), and Type 4 (i.e. high performers who don't share corporate values but deliver the numbers) (Tsai, 2023).

The successor to Jack Welch, Jeffrey Immelt, brought about a new programme called the 'Leadership, Innovation, and Growth' (LIG) programme with the objective of embedding a culture of growth in the company (Prokesch, 2009). Through this programme, senior management from various businesses are brought together at Crotonville for a four-day session. The initiative focused on team training, addressing both hard and soft barriers to change, balancing short-term and long-term goals, creating a common vocabulary for change, and emphasising action-oriented plans. This was aimed at shifting the responsibility and mindset towards growth to the departments leading GE's businesses. In terms of structure, the programme involved updating business strategies, conducting 360 reviews for team members, assessing the innovative climate within teams, and featuring a combination of external and internal speakers to provide insights and examples. While the LIG programme was successful in initiating change, it also posed challenges related to delegation of power, cultural adjustments, and translating lessons into action (Prokesch, 2009). Some teams struggled to fully implement the lessons learned from the programme. One of the factors of this situation was the pressure on GE to focus on core businesses during economic downturns while remaining committed to investing in innovation and growth.

Leadership Development Approach: Specific to leadership development, GE conduct a range of programmes for different levels of leadership namely Professional, Lead Professional, Senior Professional, Executive Band, Senior Executive Band, and Corporate Officer. For leaders from the working level of the organisation, a one-week long programme is carried out. In an interview with Susan Peters, GE's former Chief Learning Officer (Wharton School, 2010), GE's leadership learning follows a stair-step approach, including on-demand courses, essential skills offerings, cornerstone courses, executive-level courses, and team-based learning programmes (Waters, 2009). GE also leverage their global research centres in locations such as Shanghai, Munich, and Bangalore to deliver leadership training worldwide, adapting content to local cultural contexts. While face-to-face learning is valued, GE also integrates technology into its training efforts, offering on-demand materials, and virtual collaboration tools (Cappelli, 2022). While GE believes in the inherent payback of investing in learning, it focuses more on qualitative outcomes such as business growth and employee development rather than specific financial metrics such as returns on investment (Walters, 2015). With the entry of younger professionals into the workforce, GE is evolving its learning approach by incorporating their perspectives, redesigning courses based on their input, and

updating learning environments to align with their expectations and preferences (Walters, 2015).

The element of leadership development at GE is embedded within its operational value chain. The company's HR system is purposefully designed to develop talents that fit the mould that the leadership intends to shape, which cuts across the various activities of recruitment, coaching, mentoring, training, mobility, assessment, and total rewards. While the leadership development process is deemed expensive, the pool of leaders coming out of GE has also been leaders in other organisations globally (Walters, 2015). This extensive HR system is seen as a competitive advantage for the company. For specific functions within the company, GE conduct leadership programmes across different disciplines, as part of their two-year rotations for new hires. Across these programmes in commercial, digital, engineering, finance, human resource, and operations management, GE offer rotational assignments for diverse range of exposures, assignment on job tasks that surface significant business impact, offerings across both technical or functional and leadership learning, peer learning community, active coaching platforms, and engagements with leaders of various levels. These range of development initiatives are seen as the effort to build a strong foundation within each individual staff before they progress further in the organisation. By exposing employees to the wide range of competencies and capabilities within the organisation, there can be better appreciation of what each outfit is capable of as well as the goals and challenges that are abound. This can make of better collaboration and synergy across the workforce (Wharton School, 2010).

Today, GE's leadership programmes are run via their 'BrilliantYOU' programme which is an entirely digital learning platform (Walters, 2015). Launched in 2014, the platform has taken over the in-person delivery of training programmes across the organisation. Through this platform, employees are provided access to personalised learning experience which is adapted through machine learning. Further, the algorithm embedded within the platform is also intended to accelerate discovery of learning content by employees worldwide. As such, there is opportunity for multimodal learning environment including social and individual as well as formal and informal learning (Cheng, 2024). As the online learning platform gained momentum across GE operations worldwide, the sale of the Crotonville centre was explored especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the sale of the facility was announced in early 2024, signalling a shift away from owning physical facility to deliver in-person leadership programmes and distributing the operations to localised regional facilities. This move has also

seen similar efforts taken by other global companies such as 3M and Boeing in moving away from ownership of actual corporate university campuses (Cheng, 2024). This move is also said to be reflective upon GE's current corporate structure which is based on the three distinct businesses i.e. Aerospace, Healthcare and Vernova whereby the workforce development needs of each subsidiary is different. This is also an indicator of the movement towards a more flexible and multi-use model of facilities that is utilised on an on-need basis, providing opportunity for wider usage (Gupta, 2024). An indicator of how companies are growing to be conscious and potentially de-prioritising training, to an extent.

Comparative Analysis: The most glaring point on the GE story is the sale of the Crotonville centre. From a pioneering entity that has paved the way and inspired other organisations to undertake and invest seriously into leadership development, GE became the first to 'sacrifice' its landmark facility in the Crotonville centre. Many angles could be read from this situation, among them is the purported shorter tenures of executives or the rise of offerings of executive education programmes in the market (Gupta, 2024). To a further extent, this is also read as an indicator of how corporate culture is less centralised as it was before, whereby regional contextualisation is required especially in developing leaders. The drastic development that has taken place is also an indicator of how pervasive and receptive digital learning has become as the decision to move away from in-person delivery came alongside the restructuring of the corporate structure and also the growth of the online learning platform, especially as it gained momentum post-pandemic (Byrd, 2019b).

The development at GE over the years points to an interesting comparison to the organisation studied in this dissertation, whereby blended learning was adopted in the design of the leadership training programme for middle managers (Waritsman, 2022). From the feedback received in the post-programme survey as well as the theme observed from the thematic analysis, it is significant how level of engagement is prioritised among adult learners in their leadership training endeavours (Cho and Egan, 2022b). In this regard, a shift to the model adopted by GE of today, one that fully subscribes to online learning, might not be fully favourable by this organisation under research. Further, the movement towards fully online delivery was tested during the pandemic lockdown and the decision by the organisation to shift to blended learning was a strategic one. In essence, the combination of online and in-person learning deliveries can be considered as a convergence of what works best from the virtual and

physical world, packaged in a form that is predicted to work best for the workforce (Bown-Anderson, 2019; Waritsman, 2022).

As the transition is on-going at GE, from centralised to distributed learning delivery, there is potential for future research in studying how the workforce receives the change in model. One effort that seemed to prepare the workforce could be the move to shape the delivery of leadership training to be coupled with functional training as well as rotational assignments to roles. This might have prepared the workforce to be more accustomed to how leadership takes place at the workplace, depending on the roles that they played at work (Buzady, 2017b). In this regard, the outlook of a functional, regional, and industrial centric delivery of leadership programme and how effective it can be is intriguing research coming out of this development at GE (Lacerenza *et al.*, 2017). The GE case study remains a strong indicator of how leadership development adapts to how organisations evolve over time (Guerrero, 2020). This is also a signal of how there is no one-size-fits-all solution to leadership training and how it is situational and highly dependent upon where an organisation is going strategically and tactically (Eccles and Wigfield, 2020).

Case Study 2: Google – Research-based Personalised Leadership Development

Background: As a company that began as a search engine in 1998, Google has grown to become one of the biggest companies in the world (Cusumano, Yoffie and Gawer, 2020). As a subsidiary of Alphabet Inc. today, Google is an influential technology company that has expanded to a wide array of tools and solutions that have become integral to work and life (Voronkova, Andriukaitiene and Oleksenko, 2022). These include widely-used applications such as Gmail, Google Maps, and YouTube (Google.com, 2024). Headquartered at the ‘Googleplex’ in Mountain View, California, the campus illustrates the company culture that is subscribed by the workforce (Zulfan *et al.*, 2020). One that infuses creativity, innovation, and continuous learning. The working environment includes provisions of inclusive and expansive amenities for employees including on-site fitness centres, free cafeterias, and open spaces for collaboration (Zulfan *et al.*, 2020). This emphasis on work-life balance has enabled the company to garner multiple plaudits as among the ‘best places to work’ in the world’ (Kim, 2020). As a progressive organisation, research and development is central to the growth and evolution of Google over the years (Garvin, 2013). This philosophy is reflected in the

organisational structure of the company which operates within flatter hierarchy, with open communication across the workforce, and idea-sharing across all levels. The culture is also anchored on data-driven decision-making, which is also reflected in the way managers are developed into leaders across the organisation (Kim, 2020).

Leadership Development Approach: As a largely technical organisation that anchors on engineering and innovation, Google as a company was not an immediate subscriber to the concept of leadership development. Therefore, the organisational structure began as a flat and least hierarchical model that does not utilise the presence of a manager until 2002 (Steiber and Alänge, 2013). While this structure appeared to be workable in nurturing innovation, it was not immediately clear in terms of how communication can be clearly relayed across the workforce, signalling the need for managers to be present (Garvin, 2013). This scenario led to the initiation of ‘Project Oxygen’ in 2009, which utilises data to identify key traits, behaviours, and qualities that can enable managers to contribute effectively to productivity, performance, and overall employee happiness (Garvin, Berkley and Kind, 2013). The goal was to improve managerial effectiveness through the analysis of data points such as performance appraisal, survey on feedback from employees, and nomination of awards for performance as managers (Bryant, 2011). Arising for this effort, the project has led to the identification of several behaviours of effective managers that are to be adopted and subscribed to by their own leaders at all levels (Garvin, 2013).

Outlined by Project Oxygen, Google claimed eight key behaviours critical for the development of effective managers (Garvin, Berkley and Kind, 2013). These elements include effective coaching, empowerment without micromanagement, committing focus on team success, driving productivity and result, clear communication, support of career development, clarity of vision and strategy, and finally, possession of key technical skills. Coming out of these findings, a personalised leadership development programme for managers was deployed. In this initiative, a needs assessment process took place for so that the identified training interventions are truly relevant and meaningful to individual managers (Garvin, 2013). Further, various learning methods were also offered to suit different styles of the managers, as well as continuous coaching provision, self-directed learning opportunities, and also follow-ups from designated teams from human resources to monitor and track implementation and reception from the workforce (Zulfan *et al.*, 2020).

The personalisation of leadership training at Google has enabled it to also be flexible in the way that programmes and curation of learning are tweaked from time to time (Tran, 2017). This comes to the extent of tailoring training to specific project needs. This brings about a high level of meaning to participants, with minimal ‘scrap learning’ or upskilling experience that is deemed to be less meaningful or relevant to the learner (Manimala and Poornima, 2013). Therefore, the rate of transfer of learning and applicability to the workplace is rather high. While these are positive outcomes from the learning intervention, there are potential drawbacks. One being the narrow view of a particular leader in only seeing what is truly relevant to his or her function in the company, arising from the function-focused training that provided to them (Garvin, 2013). Further, there are also risks of inconsistency in development as the experiences that each individual go through might be different depending on the varying needs that they have both in terms of capability and also capacity (Garvin et al., 2013). In this regard, development might happen on pre-existing management skills only without identifying further improvement that can be accorded to other areas of a manager as a leader.

One prominent programme within the Google training portfolio is the Googler-to-Googler (G2G) programme which is a peer-to-peer approach to learning (Balinda, 2023; Pearson and Sadacharam, 2023). In this solution, employees can nominate themselves to take up training on any topic including leadership, technical, and functional. This mode of social learning has enabled employees to explore platforms for them to extend their knowledge and skills to others within the organisation (Petrie, 2017). Within the context of leadership development, topics of discussion can include communication, empowerment, and collaboration. Further, employees are equipped with training upskilling for them to teach their skills within a classroom setting. A learning management system is also installed to enable learning on-the-go via mobile devices and also exchange of ideas virtually. This mode of learning has extended to communities of practices including leadership roundtables that brings together leaders to discuss topics relevant to leading better at work (Trisca, 2024).

Comparative Analysis: Just as it is with their other solutions as a technology company, Google’s approach to leadership development depends heavily on data that indicates the personality, behaviour, and trait of an individual (Trisca, 2024). Therefore, the probability of a leadership development intervention in improving and enhancing the leadership competency of a leader is higher (Trisca, 2024). In this regard, the approach to personalising each leader with tools and techniques that are relevant to their work scope, learning preference, and also

work schedule commitments is an expected consequence. While this approach is highly relevant for the leader, the cost on the organisation can be on the higher side, given that the resources required to attend to the needs of one leader while incur more cost (Tran, 2017). This is unless if many of the components of learning are automated or based on self-learning efforts (Tran, 2017; Zulfan *et al.*, 2020). When this is the case, the need for the organisation to invest on specific solutions such as enrolment into executive education or executive coaching provision is not as significant.

Compared to the programme researched in this dissertation, there are several contrasting approaches that Google undertake. While Google take on the personalised approach, the programme under study in this dissertation is conducted based on cohorts of leaders of the same seniority level and potentially similar workplace challenges. There is, however, convergence in terms of similarity of preferences among leaders under focus i.e. middle managers. The ‘G2G’ model of Google is akin to the social learning aspect that has emerged a theme in this dissertation (Belfield *et al.*, 2015; Heinerman *et al.*, 2017). There is an inclination towards learning from others as a mode of development given the relevance, sense of community, and level of inclusiveness felt among participants (Tran, 2017). Further, this is also a platform where leaders can share insights and anecdotes from their real experiences at the workplace to illustrate how specific challenges are addressed at the workplace (Zulfan *et al.*, 2020; Voronkova, Andriukaitiene and Oleksenko, 2022; Pearson and Sadacharam, 2023; Trisca, 2024).

Case Study 3: IBM – Transformational Leadership as a Competitive Edge

Background: As one of the biggest technology companies in the world, International Business Machines (IBM) was founded in 1911 is based in New York with over 300,000 employees worldwide. At present, the company’s global products and services portfolio include computer hardware, software, and cloud-based solutions, as well as consulting services (IBM.com, 2024). Their main solution is the mainframe computing which makes the main structure of enterprise computing while also spearheading several specific industry areas such as cloud computing, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence; prominently through its well-known platform Watson. In terms of workforce culture, given its global presence, IBM place a strong emphasis on collaboration and inclusivity at the workplace, in the pursuit of spurring innovation (Cortada, 2018, 2021). There are several diversity and inclusion efforts that are in

place including gender equity and support for underrepresented groups. The company's long-standing tenure as a global powerhouse has also hinged on its leadership development strategy which also encourages continuous learning (Cortada, 2018, 2021).

As the key enabler for effective leadership succession, the IBM leadership focus areas are transformation, tradition, and transition (King, 2019). Through these elements, the company provides a basic guiding principle that is to be subscribed and adopted at each regional operations, for contextualisation to specific regional business cultures and best practices (MacLachlan, 2023). As a result, while there is a push to innovate and remain competitive within the industry, there is also the element of tradition that upholds key values that have brought the company to be where they are today (Cortada, 2021). With the strengths of these two fundamental agendas, the company push for seamless transition for change at all levels of leadership which provides balance between future-focused growth while maintaining key cash generators from traditional and more stable businesses (Cortada, 2018).

Leadership Development Approach: Within the 'transformational leadership' model of IBM, leadership development programmes are developed based on the desired competencies (e.g. embracing challenges, partnering clients, collaborate globally, build trust, influence with expertise, continuously transform, communicate with impact, act with systemic perspective) that the company expect from the employees (Gitsham, 2012). In this regard, the competencies are deliberately embedded within the design of the programme specifically on the modules that staff will undertake. Further, the involvement of senior leaders is also significant across the delivery of the programme as role models, mentors, and coaches. C-suite leaders also play a role in sponsoring projects within the programmes that are run across IBM, which are related to key enterprise initiatives (Cortada, 2018). As a result, this intervention has led to a better orchestrated and structured training implementation for leaders at all levels (Lombardo, 2011). There are also observable indicators of leaders integrating and collaborating better to realise key transformation efforts. These developments have been indicated as key success factors that have enabled IBM to realise their goals over the years (King, 2019). As an example, the IBM Consulting arm highlights result-oriented leadership as a preferred style through the emphasis on inclusivity and authenticity; with the goal of ensuring employees are clear on their purpose and role in contributing to the bigger goals of the company (Kader and Bernabo, 2022).

The leadership development approach of IBM is streamlined closely with the overall organisational development efforts (Gitsham, 2012; King, 2019; MacLachlan, 2023). This includes the definition of roles across all functions in the organisations, leading to ‘unique roles’ replacing job descriptions across the groups, with specific ‘success profiles’ determining the levels expected of leaders who occupy a specific role in the organisation (Krot and Lewicka, 2011). With these rulers and indicators in place, employees are then able to identify critical competency gap areas for them to work on, in agreement with supervisors or line managers. The presence of the system is also complemented by regular evaluation of where an employee stands across the success profile defined for the role (King, 2019). As a result, the potential of a leader can also be ascertained moving forward, to see how they can be potential succession for leadership roles based on data that are readily available for decision makers to make informed decisions. Further, the system also enables the development of personalised development plans for each employee that is tagged to specific intervention plans to close competency gaps (Gitsham, 2012). As a whole, the leadership development strategy is implemented against the bigger talent management strategy which looks into organisational needs for specific manpower competency, sizing of resources needed to deliver business goals, and ultimately interventions to be carried out to accelerate organisational readiness to deliver the company targets (Cortada, 2018).

The leadership framework that has been subscribed by IBM distributes the different levels of management into four main groups mainly emerging leaders, first-line leaders, up-line leaders, and executive leaders (Bieberstein *et al.*, 2005; Vayghan *et al.*, 2007). Across these levels, the components that are consistently embedded within their respective leadership development initiatives include leadership competencies and also IBM values that have been inherent within the workforce over the years. Across these levels, several assessments are conducted to gain better understanding of the demography as well as the individuals involved, including personality assessment, survey feedback on learning, survey on application, and also coaching report on leadership progress (Vayghan *et al.*, 2007; Krot and Lewicka, 2011). These varying components of the workforce development effort culminates into a clear continuum of development needs across the organisation. Further, the transparency of the model also provides clarity for employees across the workforce to gain a better picture on what needs to be done (Cortada, 2018; King, 2019). The information on what constitutes effective leaders and competency gap identification allows leaders to take ownership and plan their development.

The analysis on IBM reveals a robust, holistic, and comprehensive talent management strategy for the company. From hiring to development to retention, IBM is deliberate, strategic, and purposeful in the way that they identify, develop, and mobilise talent across the organisation. This is further alluded by their former CEO, Ginni Rometty who stressed the importance of reinvention for success at the organisational level, which begins from hiring, all the way to the growth of talents in the company (MacLachlan, 2023). One manifestation of this philosophy is the IBM 'iX Next Generation Leader' programme which was launched in 2018 whereby employees showing potential and interest in leadership roles are given opportunity to equip themselves with the necessary skills to upskill, reskill, and pivot from functional to leadership roles (Johl and Kraus, 2023). From this approach, two paths were introduced namely expert leadership (i.e. manage subjects in depth, consult on clients' projects, support peer development) and people leadership (i.e. team management, professional development of team members). Under the motto, 'know and design yourself', this programme emphasises on self-discovery and personal development through learning modules and also networking efforts. As an outcome, participants are expected to acquire tools and network that are relevant to their growth. Selections are mostly done based on sponsorship and nomination, while diversity is a key consideration to ensure an inclusive selection procedure (Johl and Kraus, 2023).

Comparative Analysis: Among the organisations analysed across these case study assessments, IBM closely resembles the company in discussion in this dissertation. The similarities cut across various aspect including definition of competency areas for each leadership level, grouping cohorts of leadership training groups based on seniority level and roles in the company, and also streamlining leadership training as part of overall succession strategy within the organisation (Vayghan *et al.*, 2007; Krot and Lewicka, 2011; Leavy, 2023). In this regard, the close resemblance of IBM and the research is also a validation of how the model can work within a sizeable organisation. The example of IBM, being one of the oldest and biggest technology firms in the world, is a testament of how the model can be centralised in terms of strategy, but distributed by region or industry when it comes to implementation (Gitsham, 2012). In the long run, the consistency of application can reflect the promise of how the best practices in this dissertation as demonstrated by IBM, can be emulated by other organisations.

One key success factor that is consistent in this example, upon analysis, is the involvement of senior leaders in the development of the other leaders across the group (King,

2019). Real and anecdotal evidences from leaders who have gone through the rigours of personal and professional development appear to work well in the model that is adopted by both organisations. One component that is not clearly prevalent in the IBM example, however, is the application of social learning as a tool to enable learning between peers. While the overarching principles that govern the development of leaders in the company is strong, the literature does not seem to contain specific examples of how peer-to-peer learning applies within IBM (Vayghan *et al.*, 2007). Further, there is limited commentary on how artificial intelligence is used across IBM to help accelerate the development process e.g. automated coaching, self-learning modules, learning technologies for flexible application. There could be more coverage on this area, given that the position of IBM as a leader in the industry. The prediction is that there are various transferrable technologies that apply to technology as a whole that can be adapted and applied to talent management as a corporate agenda.

Case Study 4: Toyota – Leadership by Example

Background: Founded in 1937, Toyota is a global automotive manufacturer based in Toyota City, Japan. Known for their pursuit of efficiency, quality, and innovation, they have grown into one of the largest manufacturers in the automotive industry with products ranging from compact cars to sizeable trucks for industry use (Toyota.com, 2024). One of its landmark products is the Prius which is a testament for their hybrid production line, in meeting the market for sustainable mobility. The success of Toyota is anchored on its famed ‘Toyota Way’, a philosophy focused on continuous improvement, mutual respect among colleagues, and long-term approach to business decision-making over short-term profits (Coetzee, Van Der Merwe and Van Dyk, 2016). Among the key elements of the Toyota Way is the efficient and effective Toyota Production System that is hinged on the principle of just-in-time manufacturing which is lean and also productive in the way that every second is measured and accounted for (Gao and Low, 2014). With presence in over 170 countries, Toyota’s workforce cuts across the entire value chain of manufacturing, sales, and customer service. At the heart of this vast network is the Toyota leadership and talent development strategy. Over the years, the company has cultivated strong leadership development strategies and interventions that are closely aligned with their core values and operational principles (Shim and Steers, 2012). In this effort, the focus of their leadership model is on nurturing leaders who are able to sustain their long-

standing culture and tradition of excellence, to enable baseline operational excellence while driving innovation (Shim and Steers, 2012).

Leadership Development Approach: While the Toyota Way has become a widely-read reference among global companies, emulating the philosophies is not as easy (Gao and Low, 2014). Many failed in trying to implement what Toyota have done in their organisation. This is primarily in view of the operating principles that integrate work and continuous learning and improvement; which cannot be replicated overnight, and requires time and patience for implementation (Spear, 2004). While discipline and standards are rigorously implemented across their operations, Toyota are also positive in enabling experimentation and empowerment in the organisation (Ehni and Kersten, 2015). In this regard, managers are encouraged to consistently experiment and learn along the way, as long as it is in the spirit of continuous improvement. One mode of leadership development that Toyota subscribes to is through exposure, whereby leaders at all levels, be it in sales or management, are exposed to the operational aspects of the manufacturing process (Shim and Steers, 2012). There is strong focus on understanding what goes on the ground at the shop floor to enable clear understanding and decision-making at higher levels of the organisation. In this context, managers are expected to also act as coaches whereby employees are not necessarily given all the answers and expectations, but also asked to explore on how problems can be solved with autonomy. This is deemed to be the success factor that has pushed for a groupwide understanding of how problem solving and product development could be done in a more innovative manner (Gao and Low, 2014; Coetzee, Van Der Merwe and Van Dyk, 2016).

As a subset of the Toyota Way, the company's leadership development approach can be segmented into three parts namely wisdom (i.e. mentorship, knowledge transfer, sustaining organisational culture), communication (i.e. strategic discussion, building interpersonal relationship), and constant change (i.e. adapting to continuous change, collaboration) (Ghasabeh, 2024). To facilitate this process, the company employs an internal psychologist to support ongoing communication and help future leaders within the succession pipeline to be more prepared to undertake bigger roles in the future (Marksberry, 2011; Matsuo, 2015). The aim is to also relieve stress from across the workforce and scale up leadership development to a larger population. As a result of these key elements of the Toyota leadership development approach, leaders are empowered to focus on their own self-development while also develop others in the process, especially those within their respective working ecosystems (Liker and

Hoseus, 2010; Marksberry, 2011). These developments are tracked rigorously across the enterprise, and are also seen as a measure to cascade down the ‘kaizen’ philosophy of continuous improvement across the leadership levels (Iwao, 2017). Taking into consideration all the activities assessed above, Toyota’s leadership philosophy can be rooted into the concept of empathy. Within this belief, there is a strong push for leadership to inspire and engage the workforce (Toyota, 2024). This framework is outlined or illustrated into the shape of an iceberg whereby the visible attributes are tools, technology, and process while the invisible elements are strategy, alignment, and leadership engagement (Ghasabeh, 2024).

Comparative Analysis: It is clear from the Toyota analysis how there are no specific formal interventions introduced across the workforce with regards to leadership training. In contrast, the training of leaders is expected to happen at the workplace, through day-to-day engagement between supervisors or line managers with the employees are large (Ehni and Kersten, 2015; Matsuo, 2015). This can be viewed as a distributed approach to leadership development where each leader is expected to take responsibility and ownership towards the growth, development, and progress of the team members under their supervision. In comparison to the programme that is analysed in this dissertation, there is no direct parameter for assessment (Shim and Steers, 2012; Matsuo, 2015). The only potential similarity is the presence of mentorship and coaching at work, which is expected of the managers who lead the middle managers who undertake the programme that is being studied (Shim and Steers, 2012; Iwao, 2017). The high level of empowered entrusted on the leaders to undertake people development on their own should be applauded. Nevertheless, the risk factor of inconsistencies across the workforce is real, but this is where the strength of the company culture comes into play; the belief is widespread and strong enough to withstand inconsistencies.

Case Study 5: DBS Bank – Spearheading Digital Leadership

Background: The Development Bank of Singapore or better known as DBS was established by the Singaporean government in 1986 to undertake industrial financing activities in the country (Siddiqui, 2016). Over the years, DBS has grown into a leading financial service provider in the region (Chang, 2019). The company is also instrumental in driving economic development of the country, one of the most powerful in the region and the world (Liow, 2012). At present, DBS have expanded their presence into China, Southeast Asia, and South Asia

(Birch, 2023). Its key business driver at the moment is digital transformation in banking, specifically focusing on leveraging on technology to enhance customer experience and spur operational efficiency and productivity (DBS.com, 2024). At present, DBS employs 30,000 people around the world who are expected to subscribe to the key values of innovation and collaboration. In hiring talents, DBS anchors on the philosophy of doing talent acquisition like a technology startup (Kiron and Spindel, 2019). In doing this model of recruitment, the organisation believes in setting up a workplace environment that mirrors that of a startup ecosystem as a value proposition to attract talents (McKinsey, 2024). Further, there is also a deliberate effort to eliminate silos and distribute focus across different functions to inculcate strong collaboration in the company (HROnline, 2023). To strengthen these efforts, data and artificial intelligence are leveraged fully given that the end-game is to serve the customers with the best service possible (HROnline, 2015).

In a 2015 interview, the CEO of DBS Piyush Gupta emphasised the criticality of undertaking digital transformation given the disruptions that were happening in the banking sector (HROnline, 2015). In spearheading this effort, the leadership pushed for agile and innovation, taking cue from the successes of technology firms in the West. In line with this effort to move from traditional to digital, DBS took deliberate steps in immersing their leaders into the world of technology and digitalisation (HROnline, 2015). To bridge the gap between generations at the workplace, the company launched several ‘hackatons’ to give a platform for younger employees to solve problems in groups that are sponsored by senior leaders (Ratanjee, 2013). Through this effort, young talents are able to showcase their digital proficiency through result-driven projects while senior management are also exposed to the power of technology in driving the business further. A similar interview was conducted with Lim Him Chuan, Head of Strategy, Transformation, Analytics & Research in 2023 whereby ‘reverse mentoring’ was discussed as a mode of leadership development at DBS (HROnline, 2023). In this approach, the goal is to equip employees with both functional and soft skills as a means of future-proofing the workforce. In addition, sustainability leadership is also prominent in the DBS agenda with initiatives including reporting decarbonisation efforts, realising carbon neutrality goal, and also efforts to support social enterprises that are close to the community (Birch, 2023).

Leadership Development Approach: DBS’ focus on digital transformation as a strategic business agenda has also been adapted to talent management practices such as performance management (Kusnadi, Zaky and Markonah, 2024). In this effort to innovate,

advanced analytics and machine learning are applied to track deliverables and monitor results in real-time with high precision (HROnline, 2015). In this effort, collaboration is facilitated through co-creation of key performance indicators among employees so that clarity of roles are determined while high-level of performance is aspired for through collective efforts across different functions (Kiron and Spindel, 2019). Continuous learning features prominently in the DBS leadership development strategy, which is embedded through a growth model described as ‘education, exposure, and evaluation’ (Ratanjee, 2013). To facilitate this process, a platform called ‘iGrow’ was developed as an internal career development platform for talents to drive and curate their own personal and professional growth journey (HROnline, 2023). At the back-end of this system is a machine learning facility which can recommend employees with suitable learning programmes relevant to their specific competency gaps or functional needs. In addition to this platform, there is also a centralised platform for both customised and competency-based programmes for employees to undertake (HROnline, 2023).

In addition to the online learning management system, DBS has also launched their Transformational Leadership Programme which goes on several years for each leader to be equipped with the skills necessary for them to effectively carry out tasks and deliver goals (Kiron and Spindel, 2019). Within this approach, several provisions are provided to leaders including a managerial role framework, soft skills upskilling opportunities, and also values to be subscribed by all employees. Paramount to the DBS approach is employee wellness. This philosophy has influenced several policies and practices in the company including work-from-home flexibilities, as well as confidential call lines for employees to reach out in case there is a need for mental health support (HROnline, 2023). These efforts culminate into the role of the human resources function at DBS as a strategic partner to the business (Kusnadi, Zaky and Markonah, 2024). All across the organisation, and stretching against the many functions of the workforce, two elements feature prominently i.e. digital transformation and customer centricity; both deeply ingrained in the design and delivery of people policies including leadership development programmes (HROnline, 2015). At the highest level, key leadership roles are often coupled with detailed leadership training approaches that takes into consideration best practices from globally prominent banks from around the world. This includes building personality and behavioural traits that can enable them to adapt to the business and cultural nuances of the regions that they operate in, to better understand the customer (Ratanjee, 2013).

Comparative Analysis: The DBS case study is an illustration of how business strategy closely influences other functional efforts in the organisation. In this case, the two key corporate agenda of digital transformation and customer service have certainly influenced how other activities in the organisation are carried out (Woo, 2023). From this effort, the other activities are similar to the organisation under research in this dissertation i.e. online learning platform, flexible self-driven learning, mentorship. One similarity between DBS and the company under study is the presence of an academy to undertake all design and delivery activities of learning and development programme, both leadership and functional in nature. To an extent, one consistent observation across the companies analysed in these case study efforts are indicating the link between company values and also mission into the design and delivery of leadership development programmes. While there are no specific indicators within the literature on DBS' specific leadership training programme, there are signals of how technology is heavily used, thus illustrating an empowered and self-driven learning culture across the company (HROnline, 2015). The DBS case study is a clear example of how business strategy is translated into tactics and parameters to measure business performance, that are then embedded to be a part of an employee's day-to-day target both in the pursuit of professional development and also realising business goals.

Summary of Case Studies

From the analysis conducted on the companies selected in this case study section, an extensive range of insights can be obtained in terms of best practices of leadership development. Specifically, observations can be made in terms of how companies develop leadership development strategies, link them to company vision and mission, design programmes so that learning happens in a timely and meaningful manner, and also how policies and practices are influenced resulting from the focus to develop the types of leaders required to deliver the specific business goals across these companies. Insights are also gained from how leaders respond to these learning interventions, mainly in terms of how organisational goals are realised or otherwise coming from these interventions; these are signals of how effective or ineffective leadership training can actually be. These case studies have also provided some indicators of the challenges that employees might face when they are put in the shoes of learners who are undertaking organisation-led learning initiatives. An overview of how the companies

approach leadership development based on their respective focus areas is outlined in Table 29. The table is also indicating the specific insights relevant to the company under study.

Company	Focus Area	Approach	Programmes	Key Insights
Company Researched in this Dissertation	Energy transition, upstream, downstream	Tailored to specific leadership level needs	Cohort-based programmes focusing on specific competencies and leadership levels, blending in-person and online elements, emphasising engagement and practical applicability	Highly orchestrated based on defined competencies, combination of virtual and physical learning environments enhances engagement, adaptable to different leadership levels
General Electric (GE)	Clean energy, healthcare, aerospace	Functional leadership shift from physical to online	Programmes for various leadership levels including Professional, Senior Professional, Executive Band, with focus on digital learning platforms like 'BrilliantYOU', complemented by global research centres for regional adaptation	Transition to digital learning platforms post-pandemic, decentralisation of leadership training reflecting corporate restructuring, blending functional and leadership training for comprehensive development

Company	Focus Area	Approach	Programmes	Key Insights
Google	Technology, knowledge management	Personalised, self-driven, empowered	‘Project Oxygen’ for identifying effective manager behaviours, personalised training based on data-driven insights, Googler-to-Googler (G2G) peer-to-peer learning programme	Deeply personalised and data-backed training, high relevance and applicability of learning, cost-intensive but effective, peer learning and mentorship foster inclusive and community-based learning environment
IBM	Transformative leadership	Level-based cohort delivery, competency-focused	Transformational leadership model with competencies embedded in training, ‘iX Next Generation Leader’ programme for self-discovery, senior leaders as mentors, personalised development plans based on role-specific success profiles	Systematic and structured leadership development aligned with overall talent management strategy, emphasis on inclusivity and authenticity, senior leader involvement crucial for effective mentorship and coaching

Company	Focus Area	Approach	Programmes	Key Insights
Toyota	Continuous improvement	On-the-job, empowered to managers	Leadership development embedded in day-to-day operations, mentorship and coaching, exposure to operational aspects for holistic understanding, internal psychologists for ongoing support	Distributed leadership development with high empowerment at the manager level, strong corporate culture mitigates risk of inconsistency, focus on operational immersion and empathy-driven leadership
DBS Bank	Digital transformation, customer service	Online via learning management system	‘iGrow’ platform for personalised career development, Transformational Leadership Programme, reverse mentoring, digital tools for performance management, focus on sustainability leadership	Integration of digital and customer-centric strategies in leadership development, self-driven learning environment, emphasis on employee wellness and sustainability as leadership attributes

Table 29: Overview of Case Study Companies’ Approach to Leadership Development

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, the findings that were identified in the previous sections are discussed. The intent is to provide commentary and observations on the findings in terms of how they were developed and what it means to the theory and practice aspects related to this research. The sections that are discussed in this chapter include interpretation of findings, comparison with existing research, theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and considerations for future research. The aim is to expand on the analysed findings in the preceding chapter, while taking into consideration the wider aspects that constitute the overall dimensions of this study.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

This dissertation was set out to address the critical issue of leadership development among middle managers within global organisational practice, basing upon a sampled interview done in Southeast Asia and also survey analysis of middle managers in North America and Europe. This initiative is specifically focusing on practical methods and motivational factors that contribute to their effectiveness as leaders at middle management level. The core research problem was to identify and evaluate the relevance and applicability of various leadership development methods in enhancing the leadership capabilities of middle managers, while assessing how the motivation and perceived value of training are influenced and impacted. In this regard, the objectives of the research can be viewed across three lenses. First, to identify practical and applicable leadership development methods for middle managers. Second, to understand why these methods are considered effective in helping middle managers achieve organisational goals, and third, to explore the primary motivations driving middle managers to participate in leadership development programmes and how these motivations evolve throughout the programmes alongside their perceived value of leadership development as a whole.

Leadership Training Methods

The key findings arising from the research are on the elements of engagement and applicability in leadership training methods. The study found that methods with a high level of engagement such as personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and case studies were

perceived as most effective by middle managers who participated in leadership training. These methods fostered interactive and practical learning experiences, which participants found directly applicable to their day-to-day roles (Chalard, 2011; Byrd, 2019b; Cho and Egan, 2022b). Conversely, methods with lower levels of engagement such as online learning were less favoured (Hartnett, 2016; Samuel and Durning, 2022). This is seen to stem from the self-drive required for learners to partake in the learning experience, as well as the perceived value gained from the effort which is not immediately felt or experienced (Rigby and Ryan, 2018; Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021a). The findings also highlighted the safe space that a learning environment provides for the participants (Belfield *et al.*, 2015; Heinerman *et al.*, 2017). As opposed to the workplace, participants are less guarded when brought into the training environment alongside peers who are of similar seniority level and exposure to workplace opportunities and challenges. This facilitates social learning among participants which involves exchange of knowledge and experiential anecdotes that are relatable among peers (Heinerman *et al.*, 2017; Servant-Miklos and Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2021b). Another glaring view from the participants is how their perception and openness towards coaching was developed in the course of the programme, although they were not directly receptive at the beginning as they were also more accustomed to mentoring as compared to coaching (Le Comte and McClelland, 2017b; Hastings and Kane, 2018; Boon, 2021).

There is a mix of expected and unexpected findings from the themes identified. As leadership training is more behavioural in nature as compared to functional or skills training, it can be expected that higher levels of engagement is required (Breunig, 2017; Buchanan, 2017b; Samuel and Durning, 2022). Given that leadership concepts and theories can be scientific, it is important for the presentation of these ideas to be more practical when relayed to the learners who in this case are professional middle managers who might prefer a more immediate and direct application to their work (Agarwal, Pande and Ahuja, 2019; C Meany, 2023). As such, the theme of applicability and relevance of content can also be expected to grab and sustain the attention of learners throughout any module delivery method or learning content chosen in the programme (Buzady, 2017b). Other themes that resonate with this observation are the preference for social learning, appreciation for the safe space in a learning environment, and increased appreciation on coaching as a one-on-one interaction. In addition to engagement and applicability, the keenness to obtain insights among the participants via peer feedback is not an immediate expectation of the research. This is because these elements are elements that are indirect features within the wider approach to learning. The inclination

among participants to experiences within the programme that can reflect upon themselves is an interesting observation. These insights come either in the forms feedback from both facilitator coaches as well as fellow participants coming out of their various interactions during in-person sessions, as well as instrument used as personality assessment. This finding further supports the preference for in-person delivery of the programme as opposed to online or virtual sessions that make up the blended learning experience overall.

The findings above are consistent with the discussion surrounding the 70:20:10 model that alludes experiential learning to be more prominent and effective in corporate training in general (Clardy, 2018b). While this model suggests that on-the-job learning is most impactful, the increased level of engagement as learning shifts from classroom to social and workplace learning is consistent with the preference of participants interviewed for this research. Further, this observation is also reflective of the leadership development strataplex (Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, 2007) which outlines the content relevant for middle managers (i.e. strategic, business, interpersonal, cognitive) that needs to be accordingly infused in trainings that are relevant to them. Adapting content for middle managers who are addressing both organisational and team challenges are critical to ensure content relevance and also long-term sustainable impact.

Motivation for Leadership Training

In terms of motivational drivers, it was observed from the sampled middle managers interviewed that initially, their participation in leadership programmes was primarily driven by extrinsic factors such as employer nominations and career advancement opportunities. However, as the programme progressed, intrinsic motivations such as personal growth, self-efficacy, and skill development became more prominent and central to the reason for leadership development. This shift indicates a deeper level of awareness, engagement, and commitment to the leadership development that seems to stem from high level of motivation at the onset of training. This is a rather unexpected observation given that most of the participants were nominated into the programme by their employers as opposed to voluntary self-registration. In other words, most participants joined the programme involuntarily. While this was the case, from the interviews conducted, it was learned that participants were highly motivated in starting the programme upon learning about their enrolment. Facilitators who were interviewed also highlighted how involved and immersed the participants were, largely, throughout the

course of the programme indicating their drive to gain the most from the learning experience. Elaborating further on motivation, and from a learning design perspective, it can be encouraging to learn how the participants' extrinsic motivation evolved into intrinsic motivation towards the end of the programme. This signals a deeper influence on the individual learners on the impact of the programme and how they valued it as part of long-term self-efficacy. This self-awareness leads up to the continuous improvement that they had indicated post-programme towards consistently improving as a leader. The positive motivation of participants before, during, and after the programme as an intervention of leadership development signals an interesting outlook on whether middle managers are inherently keen to improve as a leader on top of delivering their tasks as employees.

The question on motivation presents a vast opportunity for further investigation in terms of theories relevant to the findings above. As outlined in the expectancy theory, the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation among participants throughout the programme reflect upon expectations that they might have as value gained from committing to the learning experience (Greeley, 2022). This observation also aligns with self-determination theory in terms of the way that participants indicate their desire to improve in the long-term, given the promise of better control of their actions, increased competency, and stronger bond with their teams at the workplace (Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021a).

Regional Considerations

From the survey conducted of the middle managers in North America and Europe, in terms of learning activities, personalised coaching, leadership workshops, and group projects emerged as the most effective methods for leadership development. These methods provided tailored feedback and fostered a collaborative learning environment which were crucial for practical application at the workplace and sustainable personal growth. As for asynchronous learning or virtual delivery, when compared across the data gathered, the preference for in-person learning over online modules was particularly stronger among participants from Southeast Asia who were interviewed compared to their peers in the West who were surveyed. This highlights observable regional differences in learning preferences. This finding also suggests how leadership development programmes need to be tailored to the cultural and contextual needs of different regions. This assumption can be refined by also looking at business cultural practices, as demonstrated by the case study conducted across the companies

analysed in this research. While companies like IBM and GE are more centralised in their learning endeavours, there are those that are more distributed such as Google and Toyota.

5.2 Comparison with Existing Research

From the analysis conducted, the findings from this dissertation can be seen to align with and extend the existing body of research on leadership development as discussed in the Literature Review chapter. This assertion is particularly significant in the areas of engagement on leadership training for middle managers, practical application at the workplace, and motivation levels before and after undergoing leadership training. A thorough review of the literature that has been conducted provides a framework for understanding these results in the context of established theories and empirical studies arising from past research that have been carried out on similar topics or demography across different industries or regional focus. This comparison is important to ascertain how the findings are similar or different, given the parameters and also variations involved across the literature. The existence of this study, alongside prior studies, can also facilitate future studies on the topic of leadership development.

In the study by Lacerenza et al. (2017), a meta-analysis identifying key success factors for effective leadership development was conducted, including pre-intervention needs analysis, post-intervention feedback, and in-person delivery. This dissertation corroborates with these findings, emphasising that methods such as personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and case studies are highly effective due to their interactive nature and practical relevance. Participants sampled in this dissertation valued these methods for their ability to engage learners actively and facilitate the direct application of skills to workplace scenarios. The findings of Le Comte and McClelland (2017b) and Martin et al. (2021b) also highlighted the importance of interactive sessions specifically in the methods of coaching and in-person classroom sessions. In terms of applicability, there was similar emphasis on the practical relevance and application of leadership models and frameworks back to the workplace (Holt, Hall and Gilley, 2018; Geerts, Goodall and Agius, 2020b). Alignment was also noticed in the appreciation among participants of feedback and reflections that they obtain from an intervention either by way of personality assessment or correspondence with colleagues in the same cohort (Soderhjelm *et al.*, 2020; Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021b).

This study similarly found that interactive and practical methods including simulations and group projects, were highly effective in engaging participants and facilitating the application of leadership concepts (Clapper, 2010; Bleich *et al.*, 2018b; Brown and Rode, 2018b). Similar observations were noted in this dissertation whereby experiential modes of learning such as simulations, case studies, and role playing, which require the learner to put themselves into the shoes of others appear to be favoured across the sampled demography (Breunig, 2017; Buchanan, 2017b; Samuel and Durning, 2022). While this method of learning can be uncomfortable to some, the majority of sampled middle managers seem to favour the value of how it improves their knowledge acquisition and retention. Moreover, the significance of behavioural, emotional, and biological factors in influencing the effectiveness of leadership interventions, as highlighted by Tafvelin and Stenling (2021b) is supported by the shift observed in this study from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation among middle managers in participating in the leadership training analysed. This shift underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation in enhancing the effectiveness of leadership training, aligning with self-determination theory (Vallerand, 2000; Rigby and Ryan, 2018; Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021a).

Several contrasting observations were also made in this research, compared to existing works. While there is strong preference among participants from this researched programme for in-person classroom delivery, existing findings seem to lean towards the growing interest in online and virtual learning formats of leadership development within recent years (Sousa and Rocha, 2019; Boon, 2021). The inclination among participants to continuously improve the leadership programme also appear to be different from existing findings on the need for continuous reinforcement to nudge middle managers to pursue personal development (Hall, Petrossian and Spackman, 2018b; Geerts, Goodall and Agius, 2020a). These existing research suggestions emphasised on the importance of continuous feedback, coaching, and action learning in promoting effective learning transfer (Alimo-Metcalf, 1998; Hastings and Kane, 2018; Cho and Egan, 2022b). The shift from preferring coaching over mentoring of the course of programme analysed in this research also indicate another difference from existing research where coaching is seen as more of a complement than a competition to mentoring (Bono *et al.*, 2009; Hastings and Kane, 2018). From these observations, one takeaway is the role of leadership training intervention as the turning point for some middle managers in opening their perspective and willingness towards continuous professional development. This can also indicate how a learning experience can spur growth mindset and also lifelong learning within these individuals. Potentially, the desire to want to pursue further learning even upon

programme completion indicate how these middle managers view personal development as an ongoing process instead of a once-off touchpoint that resides within the classroom learning environment only.

A notable divergence from previous research is the preference for in-person learning over online modules among participants from Southeast Asia, as compared to middle management peers in the West (Hartnett, 2016; Samuel and Durning, 2022). While online learning is often highlighted for its flexibility and accessibility, this study found that face-to-face interactions were significantly preferred in certain cultural contexts. This finding aligns with the need for culturally sensitive approaches to leadership development, as regional differences can influence learning preferences and effectiveness (Cleveland and Cleveland, 2020b). The cultural specificity observed in this study suggests that a hybrid approach, combining online and in-person elements, may be necessary to cater to diverse regional needs. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that this suggestion is directional in nature given that the two groups that were sampled did not go through the same learning programme specifically. The impact of gender on leadership development outcomes has been explored in existing research within the literature, with studies such as An and Meier (2021b) finding that female managers often benefit more from leadership training. This dissertation did not specifically focus on gender differences, but the overall emphasis on personalised and practical learning methods suggests that these approaches may be universally effective across different demographics.

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing the importance of engagement, practical applicability, and intrinsic motivation in leadership development (Agarwal, Pande and Ahuja, 2019; Ryan and Deci, 2020). It supports the established success factors identified in meta-analyses and empirical studies while also highlighting the need for continuous support and culturally sensitive programme learning journey design (Blume *et al.*, 2010b; Lacerenza *et al.*, 2017; Crede, Jong and Harms, 2019). The findings challenge the one-size-fits-all approach assumed in some leadership development approaches (Crede, Jong and Harms, 2019), advocating for a more contextualised understanding of how different methods can be tailored to meet the specific needs of diverse participant groups. This dissertation aligns with and extends existing research by emphasising the critical role of personalised learning methods in effective leadership development (Wozniak, 2020). It highlights the importance of surfacing and sustaining motivation and providing continuous support while highlighting the

need for and assessment of how culture influence learning expectations of middle managers. These contributions can provide insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to design and implement effective leadership development programmes that are meaningful to the participants.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

By integrating principles from both adult learning theory and self-determination theory, this dissertation proposes a comprehensive recommendation for effective leadership development. From adult learning theory, the concepts of self-driven and experiential learning (Clapper, 2010) are evident from the findings, as observed from the way participants from the leadership training took charge of their growth post-programme and the way they appreciate social learning from the sharing of experiences from peers. From self-determination theory, the concept of autonomy is prevalent (Rigby and Ryan, 2018) on the preference of coaching as a method of learning, given that this engagement empowers leaders through self-conviction and self-belief. This integrated approach highlights the need for practical and experiential learning opportunities that are tailored to the individual's motivational drivers. It also highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment that fosters intrinsic motivation through continuous engagement and personalised feedback. In summary, the findings from this study provide several indicators of how a sense of empowerment and control over self-development can drive employees to pursue leadership development beyond the context of a training intervention that they are invested on by employers. These findings strengthen some of the theoretical views on adult learning and motivational theories. The theoretical implications discussed in this section are outlined in Table 30.

Theory	Key Finding	Implication
Adult Learning Theory	Emphasis on self-directed learning, experiential modules, and transformative learning	Findings align with principles of experiential learning i.e. adults learn effectively through direct, hands-on experiences
	Highlight the importance of engagement and practical applicability in leadership development programmes	Personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and case studies are highly effective for middle manager development
	Address critiques by considering diverse motivational factors and sociocultural influences	Empirical evidence supports a more tailored approach considering cultural and contextual variables
Self-Determination Theory	Emphasis on the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation	Creating supportive environments enhances motivation and engagement among middle managers
	Supports the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation observed in participants	Participants develop deeper, intrinsic motivation for personal growth and professional development
	Stresses continuous support and follow-up to sustain motivation and engagement	Ongoing mentorship and follow-up sessions are crucial for maintaining benefits

Table 30: Overview of Theoretical Implications

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, which emphasises self-directed learning, experiential modules, and transformative learning (Wilson and Kiely, 2002; Wozniak, 2020) serves as a foundational

framework for this dissertation. From the interviews conducted with the participants of leadership training, it was observed how methods with high levels of engagement, applicability of learning, and social learning experiences, are deemed to be effective in enabling impactful change in their leadership. These findings support and extend the theory by highlighting the importance of engagement and practical applicability in leadership development programmes (Clapper, 2010; Henschke, 2021). The strong preference for personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and case studies observed among participants aligns with the principles of experiential learning, suggesting that adults learn most effectively through direct, hands-on experiences that are immediately applicable to their work contexts. Further, the grounded theory that was developed in the previous chapter indicated how transformative experiences can influence leadership training outcomes. This expectation among participants includes the expectations of self-awareness, self-discovery, and understanding of strengths and weaknesses coming out of a training programme. Further, in the survey conducted of 200 middle managers in North America and Europe, the top three ranked leadership training methods are leadership workshop, executive coaching, and group project; all of which are in alignment to the key components of adult learning theory (Merriam, 2018; Allen, Rosch and Riggio, 2022).

The findings from this study further strengthen the significance of engagement and involvement to ensure leadership training effectiveness, in alignment with adult learning theory (An and Meier, 2021b; Douglas *et al.*, 2022). This observation challenges the emergence of digital and online learning as a mode of learning that is being more popularly adopted today (Hartnett, 2016; Samuel and Durning, 2022) in terms of how adaptable it is to the subject of leadership development. As leadership is deeply behavioural, enhancing or improving the element as a human trait is also equally as challenging (Conte, 2005b; Afsar, F. Badir and Bin Saeed, 2014). This presents an opportunity to consider how adult learning theory is applied in the context of virtual or online learning environment. Further, this study provides an alternate view to the conventions of adult learning theory, which is often deemed to be western-centric (Merriam, 2018; Henschke, 2021). The strong preference for in-person learning from the interviewed sample (from Southeast Asia), versus the considerably positive reception of online learning from the surveyed sample (from North America and Europe) paints how business and socio-cultural differences can impact learning experience (Crede, Jong and Harms, 2019; Cleveland and Cleveland, 2020b).

This study also addresses emerging critiques of adult learning theory, particularly its limited consideration of diverse motivational factors and sociocultural influences (Wilson and Kiely, 2002; Clemson, 2019). By examining how different leadership development methods cater to various learning preferences and motivational drivers, this dissertation provides empirical evidence that supports a more contextualised and inclusive approach to adult learning. The regional differences in learning preferences, with Southeast Asian participants significantly favouring in-person interactions, and North American and European middle managers being more open to online learning, underscore the need for cultural adaptations of adult learning principles. This finding challenges the one-size-fits-all assumption of some traditional adult learning models and advocates for a more tailored approach that considers cultural and contextual variables. It needs to also be acknowledged, however, that customisation and contextualisation in the training delivery aspect would require more resources and investments of time, money, and energy (Belfield *et al.*, 2015).

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory emphasises the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation for personal leadership development (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021b; C Meany, 2023). The shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation observed in this study's participants underscores the theory's relevance in the context of leadership development (Rigby and Ryan, 2018; Ryan and Deci, 2020). Initially driven by external factors such as company nominations, participants gradually developed a deeper, intrinsic motivation to engage with the leadership training journey, driven by personal growth and professional development aspirations. This finding supports the theory's assertion that creating supportive environments that fulfil individuals' psychological needs enhances motivation and engagement (Tafvelin and Stenling, 2021a). The personalised nature of coaching and the collaborative aspects of workshops and group projects cater to these needs by fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as they provide empowerment to participants to take charge of their learning, and also contextualise every activity to their respective workplace challenges. This study extends self-determination theory by demonstrating how these elements can be effectively integrated into leadership development programmes to sustain long-term engagement and motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Douglas *et al.*, 2022). This can be observed in the way that the participants who were interviewed continued to pursue personal initiatives to improve their leadership after completion of their

training. Moreover, the emphasis on continuous support and follow-up aligns with the theory's focus on providing an environment that supports ongoing motivation (Chee Keng, 2015). Participants' desire for post-programme engagement through mentorship and follow-up sessions highlights the importance of sustained support in maintaining the benefits of leadership training. This finding suggests that leadership development programmes should incorporate ongoing elements that reinforce learning and provide continuous opportunities for growth and development.

From the survey conducted of 200 middle managers in this study, it was observed how the change on motivation towards leadership development is statistically significant before and after undertaking leadership training. This finding is consistent with the interviewed sample, albeit being in different geographical locations, signalling a potential universality on the impact of leadership training in driving the motivation of middle managers in developing further as leaders. In the context of self-determination theory, this finding indicates how leadership training satisfies the three desires of the theory namely autonomy (i.e. being in control of self-behaviours), competence (i.e. feeling effective and capable), and relatedness (i.e. feeling connected to others) (Ryan and Deci, 2020). These dimensions culminate into the common design of leadership training whereby self-empowerment, upskilling, and social learning are offered, except for online asynchronous learning experiences whereby learning is done individually with minimal engagement with others within the cohort.

5.4 Practical Implications

As an enabler to the application of findings from this research into practice, institutional factors such as organisational structure, leadership style, and human resource policies can shape the effectiveness and uptake of leadership development as a whole. Therefore, there needs to be an alignment and prioritisation between existing institutional practices and strategic objectives, with the recommendations made in this research where suitable. This is to facilitate seamless integration across the end-to-end learning experience of a middle manager. Organisations can further leverage the findings of this research towards cultivating new generations of effective leaders capable of potentially driving positive change innovation across the workforce. An overview of the practical implications of this dissertation is outlined in Table 31.

Practical Implication	Considerations
Prioritise high engagement and practical applicability methods	Organisations should focus on activities like personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and group projects to foster engagement and practical application.
Adopt hybrid learning approach	Combining flexibility of online learning with engagement of in-person methods to cater to diverse regional needs.
Design programmes to nurture intrinsic motivation	Programmes should align with participants' personal growth aspirations and provide opportunities for self-directed learning and personalised feedback.
Align with organisational culture and context	Consider the influence of organisational culture, learning environment, and task characteristics in programme design.
Provide continuous support and follow-up	Implement follow-up sessions, mentorship opportunities, and post-programme check-ins to sustain momentum.
Enhance long-term commitment to leadership development	Fostering intrinsic motivation can lead to deeper engagement and long-term commitment to leadership development.
Nurture a learning culture across the workforce	Instil a growth mindset and lifelong learning across the organisation to promote continuous development.
Leverage existing data for programme design	Use organisational culture surveys and personality assessments to design relevant and effective programmes.
Adapt findings to different industries and cultural contexts	Tailor leadership development strategies to suit the unique requirements and objectives of different sectors and cultures

Table 31: Overview of Practical Implication and Consideration

The practical implications of this study are significant for organisations seeking to develop effective leadership programmes for middle managers, while referring to empirical

findings. In terms of programme design and implementation, organisations should prioritise leadership development methods that offer high levels engagement and practical applicability, as demonstrated in this research via the findings on personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and group projects. These methods not only enhance leadership skills but also foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment, which is a crucial element for companies looking to utilise leadership training a means of harnessing closer cohesiveness and teamwork across divisions or departments (Jiusto and DiBiasio, 2006; Efthymiou, Ktoridou and Epaminonda, 2021). While this is the case, there is also a case for hybrid learning delivery, arising from findings in this dissertation. Specifically, the regional differences in learning preferences that are observed among samples in the East and the West. In this regard, organisations should consider adopting a hybrid approach that combines the flexibility of online learning with the engagement of in-person methods in selected modules that are relevant and suitable. This approach can cater to the diverse needs of middle managers across different regions and ensure the effectiveness of leadership development programmes. For instructional designers, these insights underscore the value of designing programmes that prioritise participatory elements, either virtually or in-person, which can facilitate meaningful dialogues among participants, and sustain active engagement in the course of a programme.

Building on the point on applicability, participants valued significantly the relevance of new knowledge, skillsets, and insights gained from a programme to their day-to-day roles at the workplace. This observation highlights the practical significance of programme content and its direct translation into job or functional practice (Agarwal, Pande and Ahuja, 2019; C Meany, 2023). Organisations can leverage on these insights to develop leadership programmes that embed action learning tools that allow immediate application once the participant has acquired a specific skill. The ability to readily apply leadership theory and concepts into the professional context of participants appear to excite and motivate them positively while building stronger belief in them towards the value of leadership development training. From the in-programme personality assessments and social learning activities, participants valued the feedback and personal insights that they gain. They expressed their appreciation of the value gained from collaborative activities within the programme that provided constructive feedback to their ongoing personal development. From the lens of the programme designer or facilitator, this energy from interactive engagements that are enjoyed by the participants can be a data point or sounding board for them to also obtain insights on avenues for improvement in the design or delivery of the programme. This underscores the value of soliciting ongoing feedback and

iterating on the programme design on a continuous manner to ensure long-term effectiveness for current and future participants (St. Clair, 2002).

Based on the findings related to motivational factors and perception on leadership training, there is a case for leadership development programmes to be designed to nurture intrinsic motivation. This can potentially be done by aligning with participants' personal growth aspirations with specific components of the course. This can be done by developing a persona that depicts the generic participant traits, to ensure the programme content and delivery are aligned to their immediate needs and learning styles respectively. This includes understanding their immediate pain points and developmental needs as a leader. Ultimately, the desire for participants to be involved and commit to the learning process depends heavily on what it means to them both professionally and also personally. This can also be achieved by providing opportunities for self-directed learning, personalised feedback, and reflective practice throughout a leadership training journey. Practical strategies may also include providing opportunities fostering supportive relationships among peers and aligning programme objectives with participants' personal and professional goals.

Further, the acknowledgment of the influence of contextual factors on motivation signals the need for programme designers to consider the organisational culture, learning environment, and task characteristics when designing leadership interventions. From the findings of this study, it is observed how the reception for online learning for leadership training differs across the two geographical areas where the samples were selected. This indicates a consideration for learning designers to consider the learning preferences of the target group prior to deploying a training solution. By adapting programme structures and activities to fit the specific context and needs of participants, practitioners can enhance motivation and promote meaningful learning experiences. The adoption of a longitudinal perspective highlights the importance of ongoing support and reinforcement to sustain motivation and facilitate long-term behaviour change. Practical implications may include incorporating periodic check-ins, follow-up sessions, and opportunities for reflection and goal setting to promote continued growth and development. By supporting the intrinsic motivations of middle managers, organisations can foster deeper engagement and long-term commitment to leadership development. One best practice that can be considered is the reference on existing data both at organisational and individual level. An example could be organisational culture survey as an indicator of the immediate capability development needs of a specific team (Crede,

Jong and Harms, 2019; Cleveland and Cleveland, 2020b). Further, psychometric or personality assessment tests could be done prior to learning engagement, to ensure that the content and delivery method are truly relevant to the audience (Evans, 2020; Barnes, 2021b).

It was observable how middle managers expressed a desire for ongoing support and continuous engagement after completing the leadership programmes that they attend. In this regard, organisations should implement follow-up sessions, mentorship opportunities, and post-programme check-ins to sustain the momentum of learning and development. Continuous engagement not only reinforces the skills and knowledge acquired during the programme but also provides ongoing support for participants as they apply their learning in real-world situations. This bigger challenge for organisations is in nurturing a learning culture across the workforce. This involves instilling growth mindset and lifelong learning across the group, which is not an easy endeavour given how it is deeply behavioural. Nevertheless, the consideration is for leaders to set the tone and advocate for learning mindset to be central to organisational growth and workforce wellbeing. A balance between these two elements is critical to ensure a welcoming workplace that is also progressive and productive in nature. Therefore, alignment between learning and development functions of organisations need to align with that of change management as a whole.

The practical implications derived from this research offers significant guidance for organisations and practitioners in designing and implementing effective leadership training. The considerations for programme design, which is based on empirical evidence can also further facilitate decision-making in determining budget for learning, which can be done with better awareness in terms of effectiveness. Beyond organisations, the learning and development industry in itself can also benefit from the findings of this research, as it narrows down the workable interventions for middle managers, among the widest and most diverse groups of leaders in any organisation. The findings of this research can also help inform people policies and guiding principles that can be adopted by human resource practitioners in shaping and executing their talent development strategies. Specifically, the prioritisation on experiential learning and balance between organisational and individual needs can be criteria that informs the scope of work of any learning engagement adopted by an organisation from learning providers from the market. The bidding process of learning partner procurement can also be specified further through the frameworks introduced in this research, to be one that is focused on the desired level of engagement, applicability, and also personalisation to the diverse needs

of middle managers as learners; these make up the expectations that most client can outline for their learning and development needs.

While the organisation studied in this research is an energy firm based in Southeast Asia, there is also applicability to organisations operating in other industries as well, such as healthcare, finance, education, or technology. Given the universality of leadership development, the narrow focus of this study on the effectiveness of methods and opportunities arising from participant motivation can be tailored to suit the unique requirements and objectives of different sectors. One example is the adoption of personalised coaching aimed at developing empathetic and adaptive leaders in the healthcare sector. Further, technology firms might prioritise workshops focused on innovation and agility which converges effective learning methodology with highly relevant subject modules. While the findings of this research are versatile in terms of applicability, it is still essential to recognise the influence of cultural, institutional, and contextual factors on the applicability of the findings and results from this study. Leadership development may vary significantly across different cultural contexts, which necessitates a detailed approach to programme design and implementation. One example is the adoption of one leadership model in one community might not be immediately transferrable in other communities, given the different cultural settings that might occur; case in hand is the distinct preference differences for online learning between Eastern and Western companies as highlighted in this dissertation. In this regard, organisations must consider local norms, values, and preferences when adopting the findings of this study to different settings.

5.5 Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

In designing this mixed-method research, the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, surveys, and case studies, was intended to provide a comprehensive and deep understanding of leadership development methods and their effectiveness. The inclusion of participants from different regions had allowed for a comparative analysis of leadership training preferences and motivation factors, highlighting important cultural differences that should be taken note of. The combination of qualitative and quantitative had data provided sufficient grounding for a robust analysis, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings discussed earlier. While these aspects strengthened the foundation of this study, several limitations need to be acknowledged.

In terms of sample size, the number of middle managers interviewed (20) and surveyed (200) can be further expanded. The current size of the sample might limit the generalisability potential of the findings, although the depth of the interviews has provided the necessary data required for thematic analysis and grounded theory analysis to be conducted. Further expansion of the sample sizing can be considered in future research to either confirm or extend the findings discussed in this dissertation. As the research and analysis were done upon a specific organisational context, the applicability of putting the recommendations into practice for other industries beyond energy, or other starkly different organisational setting, might be limited. The sampled participants that were interviewed in this research were largely aligned to the common corporate employee archetype, but there are still nuanced and unique characteristics of the workforce across different organisational culture that still need to be taken into consideration. This might influence the individual perspective or experience, thus affecting the transferability of the findings of this research to the broader population.

In addition to sample size, the reliance on self-reported data in both the interview and survey might introduce the potential for response bias as participants may provide socially desirable answers (Todorov, 2003; Brenner and DeLamater, 2016). From the interviews, the responses received are generally positive in nature, barring constructive feedback received when prompted specifically on ineffective learning activities as well as input for areas of improvement. In this regard, validating self-reported data with objective measures of leadership performance would strengthen the findings in future research (Dussault, Frenette and Fernet, 2013). It is not impossible that some participants might have been inclined to provide socially desirable answers or overestimate the effectiveness of certain experiences as they reflect on their exposure to the different methods within the programme that they had gone through. It is acknowledged that this might influence the interpretation of findings that were surfaced from the analysis conducted. Further, as the research primarily focused on the experiences of middle managers, it is also essential to recognise the potential limitations of their individual viewpoints. Further research could benefit from incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives including senior or emerging leaders, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding at the enterprise level of an organisation or industry.

Further, the study focused on middle managers within a specific organisational context, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other organisational and regional settings or leadership levels. Future research should explore the effectiveness of leadership

development methods across different organisational contexts and leadership levels. This is especially useful if the constant elements of the study are maintained such as programme design, module inclusion, and also learning delivery methods. This can facilitate a more varied outlook on how the dynamics of the participant reception change when the learner group changes while the design elements are retained.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research are proposed, as follows:

- **Larger and More Diverse Samples:** Future research can include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Including participants from different industries, organisational contexts, and leadership levels could provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective leadership development methods.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Longitudinal studies can examine the long-term impact of leadership development programmes on participants' leadership behaviours, motivation for development, and organisational performance. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability of the effects observed in this study.
- **Objective Measures of Leadership Performance:** Incorporating objective measures of leadership performance, such as 360-degree feedback or performance evaluations, would provide a more accurate assessment of the effectiveness of leadership development methods. This would complement self-reported data and provide a more holistic view of the impact of these programmes.
- **Exploring Further Regional Differences:** Further research can further explore the cultural and contextual factors that influence learning preferences and effectiveness in leadership development. Understanding these differences would help in designing more culturally sensitive and adaptable leadership development programmes.
- **The Role of Technology:** Investigating the role of technology in leadership development, particularly the use of online and hybrid learning platforms, would provide valuable insights into how digital tools can enhance or hinder leadership

development. Future research should consider regional differences in the adoption and effectiveness of technology-based learning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore and analyse the process of leadership development for middle managers by identifying practical training methods and understanding the motivational factors that contribute to their effectiveness as leaders. The main driver of this effort is to ascertain how investments on leadership training can be made in a more strategic and focused manner so that the value gained for middle managers are relevant and sustainable. Through a mixed method research approach including qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, and case studies, this research is hoped to have provided a comprehensive analysis of the key components that constitute successful leadership development programmes, throughout the learning journey of a middle manager before, during, and after the training intervention. To guide the research process, the study specifically focused on three primary research questions: the identification of relevant leadership development methods, the reasons behind their applicability, and the primary motivations driving middle managers to participate in such programmes.

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of engagement and practical applicability in leadership development methods. This observation aligns with theories surrounding adult learning in general but given the critical role that middle managers play in managing senior leaders and the operational direct reports, it is crucial for investments on leadership training that are made for middle managers to be done in a strategic manner. Learning activities such as personalised coaching, in-person workshops, and case studies emerged as the most effective methods as they provide middle managers with interactive and active learning experiences that are directly applicable to their work challenges and opportunities. Other than allowing middle managers to immerse themselves in personal development engagements, the experience is also seen to be of high value to them as it allows for social learning with other middle managers, exchange of ideas and thoughts on addressing immediate challenges, as well as an appreciation of the safe space that they are able to be in when learning together with peers. These methods align with the models surrounding adult learning initiatives, which emphasises on experiential learning (Clapper, 2010; Allen, Rosch and Riggio, 2022). This also highlights the need for leadership development programmes to move beyond theoretical instruction to practical, action-oriented training (Chalard, 2011; Byrd, 2019b; Cho and Egan, 2022b). This scenario surfaces the notion of how leadership is a subject that can't be taught, but can be learned (Aldulaimi, 2018; Anders, 2021b).

One contribution of this research to the body of literature on motivational science is the observation of a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation among participants. Specifically, the sampled middle managers who were originally entering a training journey through employer nomination demonstrated significant change on the motivation that drive them to be fully engaged and committed in the learning process. This evolution of motivation level provides an interesting platform for future research as it signifies how learning intervention can influence and impact perception (Boyce, Jeffrey Jackson and Neal, 2010b; Balinda, 2023), especially after personally undergoing the process. This finding supports self-determination theory, as part of the theoretical framework, which posits that creating supportive environments that fulfil the employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances motivation and engagement (Gantt, 2022; C Meany, 2023). The study highlights the importance of designing leadership programmes with the holistic view of the organisation and also the learner. This remains a challenge as business needs often require immediate results, while personal development might take longer to be conditioned and developed within individual employees. It raises the question of managing organisational expectations while nurturing staff capabilities.

In addition to findings related to training methods and motivations, the study also revealed notable regional differences. While the interviewed sample indicated a dislike of online learning, the preference of their counterparts in the West indicates otherwise. This observation provides an interesting opportunity for further research to unearth the potential underlying factors. It could be driven by the culture of work itself where remote working is more prevalent in Western countries, as compared to Asia (Martin *et al.*, 2021b). As such, the way corporate training happens is influenced as well. This finding raises the consideration for cultural aspects to be incorporated in the process of training design and delivery (Martinelli and Erzikova, 2017b; Cleveland and Cleveland, 2020b). This adaptation not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the training programmes, but also respects and leverages the cultural diversity within organisations.

In terms of theoretical implication, this dissertation makes contributions to both adult learning theory (Clapper, 2010; Allen, Rosch and Riggio, 2022) and self-determination theory (Gantt, 2022; C Meany, 2023) which make up the theoretical framework of this study. The findings support the assertion that experiential, hands-on learning and the creation of supportive environments are crucial for fostering motivation and sustained engagement for

learning among middle managers (Breunig, 2017; Bonesso, Cortellazzo and Gerli, 2024). The practical implications of this research are hoped to be relevant for organisations seeking to develop effective leadership programmes. The recommendations made in the Discussion chapter include incorporation of experiential learning, fostering motivation for leadership development, adapting to cultural contexts, and provision of continuous support during and after learning interventions.

This dissertation provides a comprehensive exploration of the methods and motivations underlying effective leadership development for middle managers. By integrating theoretical insights with practical recommendations, it offers a robust framework for enhancing leadership development at the individual, divisional, and organisational levels. This initiative is becoming increasingly important in developing effective leaders who can navigate the complexities of today's globalised business environment. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on leadership development by challenging traditional approaches and advocating for more nuanced and contextually adapted strategies. It is hoped that these insights will inform future leadership development initiatives and support the growth of capable, motivated, and culturally competent leaders who can drive organisational success in an increasingly diverse and dynamic world.

Glossary

70:20:10 Model

A framework for workplace learning, which suggests that 70% of learning comes from on-the-job experiences, 20% from interactions with others, and 10% from formal education or training programmes.

Active Learning

A process in which learners actively engage in activities such as discussions, problem-solving, and hands-on tasks to enhance their learning and understanding, as opposed to passively receiving information.

Active Listening

An essential leadership and communication skill where individuals fully concentrate, understand, and respond to what is being said, fostering better interpersonal connections and problem-solving.

Action Learning

An approach to problem-solving and leadership development where participants work on real-world issues in groups, reflect on their actions, and learn from the outcomes to improve performance.

Adult Learning Theory

A set of principles that explain how adults learn differently than children, emphasising self-direction, practical application, and the integration of life experiences into learning processes.

Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate (ADDIE) Approach

A systematic instructional design framework used to develop educational and training programmes. The process involves analysing needs, designing content, developing materials, implementing solutions, and evaluating outcomes.

Andragogy

The method and practice of teaching adult learners, focusing on strategies that emphasise self-direction, experiential learning, and the practical application of knowledge. Andragogy is based on the assumption that adults bring prior experiences to the learning environment and are motivated by internal factors like personal or professional development.

Applicability of Learning

The degree to which knowledge or skills acquired through education or training can be applied to practical, real-world scenarios within a professional context.

Asynchronous Learning

A flexible learning model that allows students to access course materials, lectures, and assignments at their own pace, without real-time interaction. Participants can engage with content through pre-recorded lectures, discussion boards, and digital resources.

Blended Learning

A learning approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online educational activities. Both physical classroom experiences and digital resources are integrated to enhance learning flexibility and effectiveness; balancing in-person interactions and self-paced digital engagement, fostering a more comprehensive learning environment.

Case Study Method

A qualitative research method involving an in-depth, contextual analysis of a single or small number of cases to explore complex issues in real-life settings.

Classroom Training

A traditional learning format where instruction is delivered in a physical classroom setting, often involving lectures, group discussions, and interactive activities.

Coaching

A developmental approach aimed at enhancing an individual's performance and self-directed growth through guided reflection, feedback, and goal-setting, typically led by a coach.

Continuous Improvement

An ongoing effort to enhance products, services, or processes through incremental improvements over time, often linked to learning and adaptation in organisations.

Contingency Theories

Leadership theories that posit the effectiveness of a leader is contingent on factors such as the situation, the followers, and the leader's specific behaviours or traits.

Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

A leadership style that emphasises the ability to understand, manage, and leverage one's own emotions and the emotions of others to enhance interpersonal relationships, decision-making, and team dynamics.

Experiential Learning

A process where individuals gain knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences, often through activities that simulate real-world tasks or challenges.

Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation driven by external rewards, such as recognition, money, or promotions, rather than internal satisfaction.

Goal-Setting Theory

A motivational theory that posits that specific, measurable, and challenging goals lead to higher levels of performance, as individuals are driven by clear targets and progress tracking.

Grounded Theory

A qualitative research methodology that develops theories grounded in systematically collected and analysed data, often through iterative cycles of data collection and refinement.

Group Project

A collaborative learning activity in which individuals work together to complete a task or solve a problem, promoting teamwork and shared responsibility.

Hybrid Learning

A specific form of blended learning where students engage in both in-person and online sessions simultaneously, with some learners attending class physically while others participate virtually in real-time, allowing synchronous delivery across multiple formats.

Immersive Learning

A learning technique that engages participants deeply by immersing them in a simulated or virtual environment that replicates real-world scenarios, fostering practical skill development.

In-person Workshop

A structured, interactive learning session held in a physical location, typically involving hands-on activities, discussions, and direct engagement with facilitators and peers.

Intrinsic Motivation

The drive to engage in activities for their inherent satisfaction or enjoyment, rather than for some external reward or pressure.

Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation

A model used to evaluate training effectiveness across four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results, to assess both immediate and long-term impacts of training programs.

Leader Development

A personal development process focused on enhancing an individual's capabilities, self-awareness, and skills in leadership roles, focusing on personal attributes such as emotional intelligence, decision-making abilities, and interpersonal communication; often through training, coaching, and mentoring aimed at preparing individuals for leadership responsibilities.

Leadership Development

A broader, organisational process aimed at cultivating leadership capacity within a group or system, focusing not only on individual growth but also on fostering collective leadership competencies, including the development of strategic thinking, influence, and organisational change management.

Leadership Skills Strataplex Model

A model that categorises leadership skills into four strata: cognitive, interpersonal, business, and strategic; emphasising the complexity and level of leadership required at different organisational levels.

Learning Engagement

The degree of attention, curiosity, and active participation an individual demonstrates during a learning activity, contributing to better retention and application of knowledge.

Mentoring

A developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual (mentor) provides guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced individual (mentee), fostering both professional and personal growth.

Middle Managers

Individuals who manage and oversee teams or departments within an organisation, typically acting as a bridge between upper management and frontline employees.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

A metric used to measure customer or employee loyalty by asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend the company, product, or service to others.

Networking

The process of building professional relationships to exchange information, support career development, and create opportunities within an industry or community.

Online Learning

A mode of education where learners engage with content and instructors via the internet, often through video lectures, discussion forums, and virtual activities.

Pedagogy

The art and science of teaching children and young learners, as well other learners to an extent, typically involving a more structured and directive approach. It emphasises the role of the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, guiding the learning process.

Personal Development

The process of improving one's skills, knowledge, and abilities for personal growth and self-improvement, often outside the formal scope of professional requirements.

Personal Feedback

Individualised responses or evaluations provided to a person, typically focused on performance, behaviours, or areas for improvement, often used in learning or developmental contexts.

Personality Assessment

A tool used to evaluate an individual's personality traits and characteristics, often employed in professional development, leadership training, or recruitment.

Proactiveness

The quality of anticipating challenges or opportunities and taking initiative to address them before they occur, often regarded as a key leadership trait.

Professional Development

The process of enhancing one's professional skills and knowledge through education, training, and experience to advance in one's career.

Psychological Safety

A shared belief within a team that members can express themselves, take risks, and make mistakes without fear of negative consequences, fostering an open and collaborative environment.

Regression Analysis

A statistical method used to identify and measure relationships between dependent and independent variables, often used to predict outcomes or understand influencing factors in research.

Role Playing

An active learning technique where individuals assume specific roles in simulated scenarios to practice behaviours, improve skills, and enhance understanding.

Safe Space

An environment in which individuals feel secure enough to express themselves openly without fear of judgment, criticism, or harm, often encouraged in learning or team settings.

Self-Directed Learning

A process where individuals take the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, set goals, find resources, and assess their progress, typically in an autonomous and self-motivated manner.

Self-Determination Theory

A psychological theory that explains motivation based on individuals' intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, highlighting the importance of self-motivation in personal development.

Simulation

An instructional method that replicates real-world processes or environments, allowing learners to practice skills and make decisions in a controlled, risk-free setting.

Social Change Model

A framework for leadership development that emphasizes collective action and community engagement, encouraging individuals to lead with a focus on positive societal impact.

Social Cognitive Theory

A theory that explains human behaviour in terms of a dynamic interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors, emphasising observational learning and self-efficacy.

Social Learning

A learning process that occurs through observing others' behaviours, attitudes, and outcomes, often facilitated by social interactions within a community or organisation.

Synchronous Learning

A learning model in which instruction and engagement occur in real-time, typically involving live lectures, discussions, or workshops, taking place either in-person or online through video conferencing platforms, allowing learners to interact with instructors and peers simultaneously.

Thematic Analysis

A method used in qualitative research to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within data, providing insights into recurring concepts or ideas.

Transformational Learning

A deep, structural shift in an individual's perspective and worldview that results from critical reflection and meaningful learning experiences.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Participants

No.	Question Set 1 – Interview with Participants on In-person Modules
1	In the programme that you have completed, there were several main blocks of learning namely Classroom Facilitation, Online Self-learning, and Personalised Coaching. The classroom facilitation includes modules on Strategy, Change Management, and Diversity & Inclusion, among others. Which module did you find most useful? Why?
2	What aspects of the classroom modules were a positive experience for you? Why?
3	What aspects of the classroom modules were a negative experience for you? Why?
4	What aspects of the classroom modules motivated you to make changes when you got back to work? Why?
5	What changes did you make and how successful were they?
6	In your role as a middle manager, how has the modules helped you to improve in your day-to-day tasks of leading your team, managing upper management, and ensuring goals are delivered on time?
7	Can you give an example of how the classroom modules has helped you to realise your goals at the workplace?
No.	Question Set 1 – Interview with Participants on Online Modules
1	The online learning modules include subjects like Sustainability, Digital Transformation, and Commercial Excellence. Which module did you find most useful? Why?
2	Which online module did you find most useful? Why?
3	What aspects of the online modules were a positive experience for you? Why?

4	What aspects of the online modules were a negative experience for you? Why?
5	What aspects of the online modules motivated you to make changes when you got back to work? Why?
6	What changes did you make and how successful were they?
7	The online modules were intended to enable you to undertake flexible learning anytime, anywhere. Can you share how this mode of learning fits your schedule and what do you like or dislike about it?
8	Can you give an example of how the online modules has helped you to realise your goals at the workplace?
No.	Question Set 1 – Interview with Participants on Executive Coaching
1	In the personalised coaching experience, you were provided with a coach to work together with you over the 12-week period, as well as a facilitated module to upskill yourself as a coach. How would you describe your experience in this coaching and upskilling experience?
2	What aspects of the personalised coaching were a positive experience for you? Why?
3	What aspects of the personalised coaching were a negative experience for you? Why?
4	Can you share how this coaching experience has enabled you to change as a leader?
5	What aspects of the coaching upskilling engagement were a positive experience for you? Why?
6	What aspects of the coaching upskilling were a negative experience for you? Why?
7	Can you share your how this coaching upskilling has enabled you to coach others in your team?

No.	Question Set 1 – Interview with Participants on Motivation for Learning
1	What was your main driver in registering for this course?
2	The primary routes to this programme are commonly either by self-registration or nomination from human resources. Which one was yours?
3	After undergoing the programme, has your motivation for leadership training remained the same or changed? If it has changed, how?
No.	Closing
1	Reflecting back on your overall experience in the programme, what suggestions do you have for the programme to be improved?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Facilitators and Coaches

No.	Question Set 2 – Interview with Facilitators and Coaches
1	Initial Impressions: Can you describe your observations regarding how participants typically respond or react when they start the leadership training programme? In your experience, what are the common expectations or concerns expressed by participants at the beginning of the programme?
2	Reaction to Training Methods: As facilitators, what methods or approaches have you found to be particularly effective in engaging participants during the training sessions? Have you noticed any patterns in how participants respond to different types of training methods e.g in-person workshop, online self-learning, coaching.
3	Transformation: From your perspective, what are the key indicators or behavioural changes you observe in participants as they progress through the leadership training? Can you share specific instances where you've witnessed notable transformations in participants' leadership skills or mindset by the end of the programme?
4	Content: How do participants generally adapt to the content provided in the programme? Are there specific modules or concepts that resonate more strongly with them? Have you noticed any challenges participants commonly face in applying theory or concept to their real-world leadership roles, and how do they overcome these challenges?
5	Group Dynamics: Could you share your observations on how group dynamics evolve throughout the programme? Are there common challenges or benefits associated with collaborative or social learning among participants?

Appendix C: Design of Questionnaire Sent as part of Survey

No.	Questions for Survey of North American & European Middle Managers
<i>Section 1: Demographic Information</i>	
1	What is your age? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • < 30 • 31 – 35 • 36 – 40 • 41 – 45 • > 45
2	What is your sex? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female
3	How many years of experience do you as a middle manager? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than a year • 1 – 3 years • 4 – 6 years • 7 – 10 years • More than 10 years
4	What industry do you work in? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing • Technology • Healthcare • Finance • Other (please specify)
5	In which region do you work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North America • Europe

Section 2: Participation in Leadership Training & Motivation and Perception Pre-Training

6	<p>What type of leadership training have you participated in within the past 12 months? (Select all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Training • Executive Coaching • Online Learning • Case Study Discussion • Group Project • Simulation • Role Play • Leadership Workshop • Other (please specify)
7	<p>Before undertaking the leadership training, how motivated were you to participate in the programme?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not motivated at all 2. Slightly not motivated 3. Neutral 4. Slightly motivated 5. Highly motivated
8	<p>Before undertaking the leadership training, how valuable do you perceive leadership training to be for your personal and professional development and growth?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not valuable at all 2. Slightly not valuable 3. Neutral 4. Slightly valuable 5. Highly valuable

Section 3: Effectiveness of Training Methods

9 – 16	<p>For each of the methods that you have experienced, please rate its effectiveness level on a scale of 1 to 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classroom Training• Executive Coaching• Online Learning• Case Study Discussion• Group Project• Simulation• Role Play• Leadership Workshop
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Section 4: Motivation & Perception Post-Training

17	<p>After undertaking the leadership training, how motivated are you as a leader and participant in applying the knowledge and skills that you might have acquired?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Not motivated at all2. Slightly not motivated3. Neutral4. Slightly motivated5. Highly motivated
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18	<p>After completing the leadership training, how valuable do you perceive leadership training to be for your personal and professional development and growth?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Not valuable at all2. Slightly not valuable3. Neutral4. Slightly valuable5. Highly valuable
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19	Please describe any changes in your motivation levels after completing the leadership training. (Open-ended response)
20	Please describe any changes in your perception of the value of leadership training after completing the programme. (Open-ended response)
21	What aspects of leadership training did you find most beneficial? (Open-ended response)
22	What aspects of leadership training did you find least beneficial? (Open-ended response)
23	Do you have any suggestions for improving leadership training programmes in general? (Open-ended response)