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An empirical (re)exploration of leadership in a nonprofit: Understanding leadership as a perspective and a practice

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An empirical (re)exploration of leadership in a nonprofit: Understanding leadership as a
perspective and a practice

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An Empirical (Re)Exploration of Leadership in a Nonprofit: Understanding Leadership as a
Perspective and a Practice

by

Carly Volkmer

This thesis is completed as a partial requirement for the degree: Master of Science in
Management Communication at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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Abstract

Leadership is a complex concept to define, understand and put into practice. This study first problematizes the concept of leadership as a trait or possession. The project then explores leadership as a dynamic communication process that is co-created through meaningful patterns of interaction. To this end, two conceptual themes about leadership as communication emerged through a synthesis of the literature: leadership as influence and leadership as cultural empowerment. Through qualitative methods, the research aims to investigate these themes as possible leadership symbolic interaction patterns at a nonprofit organization in the Pacific Northwest. This study found that there were three key aspects to conceptualizing where organizational communication starts and leadership communication begins: *setting the stage*, *belief in the system*, and *how to go on together*. The significance of these findings emerges in the nuance of how important routine organizing processes are in constructing inclusive cultural assumptions that then lead to constituting leadership as collective agency or collective ability to act, act for, and act with others toward a purpose. This thesis also illustrates how it is possible for leadership to be understood as both a perspective and a process.

Introduction

Communication is a captivating process. It is the process through which humans' thoughts, beliefs, and ideas come together to create understanding. Historically, the transmission model simplified communication as a message sent and received (McCornack, 2013). Today, communication is understood as a more complex, dynamic, meaning-making process that occurs through interpretation and interaction (Keyton, 2017). Just as communication is a complicated process, so too is leadership. Leadership is a concept with thousands of interpretations, understandings and definitions, from pop culture to academic literature (Pye, 2005); if one searches "leadership" on Google nearly 5,000,000,000 results emerge. If one searches Google Scholar, over four million results emerge. What is so compelling about leadership to garner so much popular and academic attention? A review of this literature from academic sources in both prescriptive research and descriptive research reveals several conflicting interpretations and perspectives on leadership (Grint, 2010; Keyton, 2017).

Dominant trends in prescriptive research emphasize leadership as a skill set that, if mastered, provides the means to be successful in a corporate setting (Hetland, Sandal & Johnsen, 2008; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Defined in this way, leadership is identified as a formulaic, linear, and objective process or as an individual possession or an inherent set of traits (Cain, 1997; Gabris & Ihrke 2007; Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006). In contrast, communication scholars argue that leadership is not an innate set of character traits, nor is leadership a formulaic set of skills (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Keyton, Beck, & Asbury 2010; Mumby, 2013; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Rather, leadership is a dynamic communication process through which people create meaningful and influential patterns of interaction (Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson, 2000). The root of leadership from a communication perspective is the human agent who communicates to

invite diversity, empower others, and inspire others to coordinate interaction in order to reach a future goal (Deetz et al., 2000). Power and influence emerges *only* through interaction *with* others.

Leadership is a process that continues to attract attention because there is something important and interesting regarding how a person influences others toward collective action (Mumby, 2013). In addition, leadership has the potential to be problematic as a process that can shift from influence to control based on cultural assumptions (Keyton et al., 2010). This study focuses on answering a simple conceptual question: what constitutes leadership communication? In addition, this study aims to differentiate leadership communication from communication that organizes collective interaction. By problematizing the leadership concept, the goal for this project is to open leadership up for further empirical investigation from the communication perspective. Specifically, this thesis explores leadership communication as intentional and agentic. Agency is the human capacity to act, act for, or act with others (Giddens, 1984). In other words, all human beings are agents. Instead of conceptualizing leadership as a trait or a possession, this thesis begins from the assumption that leadership is better understood as an advocated process that emerges when a human being enacts agency by acting *with* others in a way that influences coordination and collaborative action toward a goal (Barge, 1994).

This study investigates agentic leadership communication processes at a nonprofit organization in the Pacific Northwest through qualitative methods including participant observations and semi-structured interviews. This qualitative approach suits this study most because it provides an opportunity to experience and observe the emergent interactions of volunteers, employees, clients, and donors. In order to see how leadership emerges among several people, a nonprofit organization is an appropriate site for problematizing and exploring

leadership communication as an agentic, meaning-making process because nonprofits typically advocate for social causes and participants identify with these causes (Gilstrap, White, & Spradlin, 2015). Nonprofits often exist to work for the greater common good. In this way, this research aims to upset dominant assumptions about leadership as a pre-existing skill set that leads to a monetary outcome. Leadership is a process that cannot exist without intention and power (agency); the aim of leadership is to influence (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). However, this understanding of leadership only focuses on one side and has been a part of a westernized capitalistic measure of success, which solely focuses on the power of individual leading (Scott, 2011). While intention matters in leadership communication, this study challenges the conception of leadership as a means to influence people toward a more efficient and higher profit and argues that leadership is an agentic process that involves others and emerges in-between people as they negotiate intent, power, and meaning. Thus, by focusing this study on the culture of a nonprofit organization, the objective is to explore how human agency lends to the emergence of leadership as a culture-building communication process. Finally, this study offers a perspective on leadership as a communication process that is multidimensional and questions previous knowledge and assumptions regarding leadership within nonprofits.

Below, the essay first explores the complicated concept of leadership. The vast amount of research on leadership is synthesized into understanding the word “leadership” through both prescriptive literature and descriptive literature. Utilizing both bodies of literature provides a baseline for the philosophical meaning of leadership in context of this research project. This thesis will then highlight leadership as influential, which suggests that communication is a dynamic process where meaning is fostered. The literature review will also discuss how leadership works as cultural empowerment. Culture is co-produced through interaction and when

organizational members rely on these collective symbols, they impact the organizational culture. After the literature is reviewed, this work focuses on the details of qualitative research, data collection, data analysis. The thesis concludes with the findings and a discussion. This study found that there were three key aspects to conceptualizing where organizational communication starts and leadership communication begins: *setting the stage*, *belief in the system*, and *how to go on together*. *Setting the stage* encompasses participants' communication that organizes and creates order, which acts as a taken-for-granted backdrop that enables certain communication practices to stand out, such as gatekeeping, organizational boundaries, and unspoken and spoken agendas. *Belief in the system* suggests that participants trust the foundational communication practices, then communicate in such a way that co-creates collective understanding of cultural meanings through growth and purpose. The final component of *how to go on together* expresses how believing in the organizational cultural assumptions emerges in inviting plural voices into the organizing process such that as participants identify with the system "leadering" emerges as co-leading the organization; they cannot go on without collective agency.

The significance of these findings emerges in the nuance of how important routine organizing processes are in constructing inclusive cultural assumptions that then lead to constituting leadership as collective agency or collective ability to act, act for, and act with others toward a purpose. In other words, micro actions of leading such as inviting another's voice to become the focus in a meeting and lead the direction of organizational members toward a specific purpose was only made possible because of the identification participants had with the inclusive cultural assumptions. While other organizations may construct a different set of cultural assumptions in routine organizational communication that lead to different manifestations of "leadering," this thesis demonstrates the interdependent relationship between

routine communication practices, constructing organizational cultural assumptions, and leadership communication as agency. This thesis also illustrates how it is possible for leadership to be understood as both a perspective and a process.

Literature Review

This literature review examines two bodies of leadership research: prescriptive and descriptive. Synthesizing the prescriptive literature illustrates a philosophical perspective that ontologically, leadership is either an objective trait, skill set, or linear process that one can have possession of and control over (Cain, 1997). There is a skill set or a style of leadership that, if adopted or if innate, suggests that once people follow the correct steps, then they can earn their way to a leadership position and influence a corporation's success (Bryman, Gillingwater, McGuinness, 1996; Grint, 2010). For example,

“Business Leadership refers to CEO and C level management of a Business Corporate, since the performance of the entire organization is based on its leadership style defining its enduring characteristics towards vision, mission, core ideologies and goals; simultaneously turning great strategies into great performances” (Business Leadership, 2017).

This suggests that a person in a hierarchical position of power possesses the skills to determine the success of an organization by “turning great strategies into great performances.”

In contrast, descriptive research argues that leadership is a “co-created, performative, attributional, and contextual process where the ideas articulated in talk or action are recognized by others as progressing tasks that are important to them” (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008, p. 227). In other words, leadership communication facilitates collective action toward an important and shared goal. As Mumby (2013) argues, that leadership is an “everyday feature of organizational communication processes...we need to think of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon” (p. 256).

Prescriptive and descriptive literature philosophically differ on their interpretations of the concept of leadership and the process of leadership. However, there are two shared assumptions both bodies of literature share. First, both disciplines focus on leadership as influence for collective groups motivating how they work together toward future goals. Second, both disciplines recognize the role of agency, but conceptualize it differently. For prescriptive literature the predominant view is that the individual possesses agency and exerts it through skills onto a more passive group. For descriptive literature, agency is more complicated as everyone has the potential to embody and facilitate leadership behavior: agency is negotiated collectively (Giddens, 1984; Barge, 1994). The question for this research then, is what about leadership processes influence people's agency to yield some individual control and work collectively toward a goal.

Exploring literature with this question in mind, the next sections unpack how leadership can be understood simply as a communication process of influence that emerges in different contexts in multiple ways. This literature review does not aim to restate the different perspectives on leadership, from traits theory to transformational theory. Rather, the review below works to challenge and explore the nature and meaning of leadership by synthesizing and explaining two themes that emerge in both bodies of leadership literature: leadership as influence and leadership as empowerment. While these themes emerge in both prescriptive and descriptive research, this study comes from a communication perspective in an effort to extend an understanding of how influence and agency can be understood together as part of the leadership process.

Leadership as Influence

Leadership is a complicated communication process with little consensus on what skills one needs to be a "good leader" (Mumby, 2013). In 2005, management scholar Annie Pye noted

35,000 definitions in academic literature alone (p.32). Yet, since the early 1980s, management and communication scholars have developed some shared assumptions about leadership as influence. First, leadership has become conceptualized as symbolic action. For many management scholars, those in charge by title or pay grade influence the symbolic meanings that will guide a culture (Peters & Waters, 1982; Mumby, 2013). What became known as “transformational leadership” was a focus on the process through which the ideas and variables of someone in charge would actively promote the values that are important to the organization (Bryman et al., 1996). For communication scholars, the focus on symbolic action is also important, but they characterize the process differently; leadership is a socially constructed process and all organizational participants are agents who dynamically create what leadership means within the specific organization (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Keyton et al., 2010, p.281). In other words, symbolic action is a collective performance and leadership is dependent on the interpretations of participants. However, to take a deeper view here, there is a second shared assumption that leadership is a process (whether individual or collective) that influences the creation of symbolic meaning. The shared view is that leadership is an *influential* social construction process through which symbols are created (Barge, 1994).

One way to conceptualize these assumptions is to think of leadership as a communication process through which a form of macrocognition develops. Macrocognition can best be understood as, “an internalized and externalized high-level mental process employed by teams to create new knowledge during complex, one-of-a-kind-collaborative problem solving” (Keyton et al., 2010, p.273). This means that communicating consists of symbols that are produced, received and used within a context to create the most advanced levels of interaction. Where macrocognition and leadership meet is when workplace transformation occurs.

Communication acts as the most crucial part of this organizing process. Leadership communication is a dynamic process that is continuously co-produced and socially constructed (Mumby, 2013, p.270). It is no longer about leadership as a noun, but rather the action of “leadering” (Kerssen-Griep, personal communication, March 2019). The only avenue that “leadering” can come alive is through the intricate process of communication.

However, what does it mean to consider leadership communication as influential? It is through communication that social construction is activated, and a variety of processes come together to facilitate leadership. Specifically, communication fosters how people create meaning out of symbols, words, texts, stories, and metaphors (Keyton, 2017). Furthermore, text, stories, metaphors, and symbols are relational, meaning focused, and contextualized (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). These discursive mechanisms provide the means for communicators to create and interpret meaning, take cues for how to act, and when acted upon, re-construct and continue to develop the symbolic meanings. For example, Mumby (2013) references an interaction at IBM between an entry level security guard and IBM’s past CEO. When the CEO went to walk through the designated entrance, the female security guard stopped him from entering because he did not have the appropriate badge to be cleared, even knowing who he was and the power he held in the company (p.165). The idea is that the accountability in this story, others in IBM take up the symbolic meaning of how to act collectively as even the individual who embodies significant importance follows the rules that everyone else is expected to follow. This action and the story symbolize the idea of equality: the CEO by title alone embodies authority yet is an equal. In other words, through discursive tools like text, story, and metaphor, people create and interpret meanings that influence action.

Several researchers focus on the role language plays in influencing interpretations and actions (Tourish, 2007). The focus for these researchers is on action; language plays a key role in social construction by the receivers of communication; those who are interpreting and then act collectively (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p.373). Tourish (2007) suggests that language is something that does not just represent an organization but works as a filter for the social reality that is being explained. Recognizing that the language an organizational member chooses to use drives more than just word delivery and information, but rather works as a form of creation of the next version of reality dependent upon how receivers interpret the meaning of the language and act. For example, acronym usage is more than a shortening of words into an acronym. When used, acronyms create in-groups and out-groups based on those who recognize the acronym, identify with the meanings of the abbreviated words, and act based on the acronym usage. Acronyms, as a form of language, create a reality when interpreted and acted upon by a group.

Those who recognize, interpret and practice this symbolic creation of reality begin to exercise authority. Individuals exercise authority *with* others. Power has a place here but is defined not as a possession or as control, but as agency or the capacity to act (Giddens, 1984). Individuals who understand the dynamic of communication and the language within a context have the potential to take up the collective power and emerge as an authoritative figure guiding the group's practices (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). This kind of specialization of meaning is what enables people to organize within a variety of circumstances. Therefore, as meaning is crafted together through discursive mechanisms of communication such as language, the process of organizing is initiated as people then act collectively toward a goal. Language is not just an instrument to translate messages, but rather it is the process by which the “. . . meanings are generated through social interaction, constantly emergent, and consistently in flux” (McClellan,

2011, p.467). Thus, organizations cannot exist without communication. However, anyone can emerge to help facilitate and guide influence. All organizational members have the potential to take up the symbolic meanings created by language and empower the symbolic organizing processes that coordinate groups. Leadership, as influence, takes up the possible meanings in a context to engage others to create outcomes.

Leadership can only emerge through a dynamic communication process. If leadership emerges when people engage the potential meanings in a context to influence action, then leadership skills are dependent upon the context and not universal or objective. The constant is the potential for influence. Mumby (2013) identifies this dynamic approach when he states,

Perhaps the optimal approach to leadership is to recognize that one can manage meaning and empower people to a certain degree but that, ultimately, as meaning-making creatures, humans will always create a version of reality that fits with their own individual and collective experience (p.279).

In other words, leadership emerges when any individual interprets and manages the meanings in a context in a way that motivates collective action. This is what makes leadership interesting, however, because if individuals have agency, they can always act in a manner that “fits with their own individual” experiences. In other words, humans are unpredictable and leadership is an emergent symbolic process with many possible outcomes. Communication, then, is a process that creates the *potential* for leadership communication, as influence, to emerge (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Mumby, 2013; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007; Keyton et al., 2010). Whether influence occurs depends on the interpretations and the actions of collective others. Thus, leadership is co-produced. Influencing and empowering collective action then, is powerful and interesting because it is the process of engaging agents’ potential interpretations of language, text, and metaphor in similar enough ways to then work together toward a collective end. This study aims to extend understanding of leadership as influencing collective meaning making that

dynamically emerges through interaction in more depth by asking the following research questions:

RQ1: What aspects of communication influence groups to organize collectively?

RQ2: What meanings do participants construct for communication practices that influence collective organizing?

Leadership as Cultural Empowerment

If leadership emerges within a specific organizational context as the influential management of meaning, then the meanings that are managed involve the organizational culture. The potential to lead is always present because everyone operates with agency. Therefore, the potential to create and lead organizational members will occur in a local organizational culture. This section explores how understanding organizational culture aids in unpacking leadership as influencing shared empowerment or collective agency.

Similar to the concept of leadership, culture is not something that an organization has or possesses, rather, this project comes from the perspective that participants in organizations continuously construct culture through interaction (Keyton, 2017). In other words, an organization emerges as a culture through communication. Organizational culture as a theory is important to understand because it highlights how leadership is conceptualized within an organization. Context is what matters here. Organizational culture is an abstraction of meanings that members draw upon and re-create that influences how people understand, think and enact leadership within an organization (Keyton, 2017). How one makes sense of someone or something is in reference to their historical experiences as a member of both society and the organization. It is through these experiences and the meanings abstracted from these experiences that a person can be understood as influential within a cultural context. Every time an individual

or group draws upon and enacts these ideological expectations, these beliefs are not challenged, the meanings for what it means to embody a leader is and should become instilled (Mumby, 2013).

Culture does not exist; culture is co-produced with symbolic interactionism. When individuals interpret the actions and interactions of others in context in a similar way and act upon these interpretations, they co-create shared, cultural meanings. This emergent production of meaning, when shared, creates an organizational system or patterns of interaction that emerge regularly across time and space (Giddens, 1984). Authors, Brady and Haley (2013) suggests that storytelling is a prominent way to develop cultural meanings that systematically emerge. They argue that “stories define the culture, and the culture defines the organization” (Brady & Haley, 2013, p.43). Storytelling, text, language, and metaphor are mechanisms that create the culture *and* create cultural meanings for descriptive leadership standards. When an organizational member draws upon these discursive tools, they not only manage meaning to create influence to move toward a collective goal, they influence and co-create the culture.

Everyone within the organization, regardless of position, manages and creates meanings. Yet, an individual emerges with facilitating variables when s/he takes up the potential of the cultural meanings in order to create influence. Brady and Haley (2013) argue, cultural storytelling is a collective process and builds trust and reassurance when individuals see how they contribute to the story creation. They argue it is crucial to personally evaluate and understand why adding one’s story is valuable. Castro and Holvino (2016) clarify and posit that “by acknowledging the influence of both culture and individual agency, where ‘scripts’ are non-deterministic and not universal, but can help us identify common interpretive backgrounds . . .” (p.331). Being able to identify the importance in one’s story helps every member to co-create

what their organizational culture encompasses and how to act with others. In other words, empirically understanding organizational culture aids in understanding ideological assumptions about leadership in context as members enact or respond to meanings that motivate collective agency *and* co-create a shared story. Moreover, empirically understanding organizational culture draws attention to how members enact individual agency to support or resist dominant assumptions of leadership in a cultural context.

It is important to explicate that the literature focuses on the benefits of leadership as enacting shared, cultural assumptions (Routhieaux, 2015; Rowe, 2014; Schnurr & Chan, 2011). When an individual takes up the cultural beliefs and manages meanings in a way that influences a collective to work together toward a goal, leadership emerges *between* people as a shared and empowering experience. The essence of shared leadership moves the concept of leadership away from the individual. Instead, shared leadership is a collaborative creation of collective capacity and mutual trust that everyone will make decisions that best benefit the organization. Routhieaux (2015) and Rowe (2014) both explain that when leadership is shared, members experience organization cohesion. Schnurr & Chan (2011) found that shared leadership not only challenges the assumption that leadership is tied to position and is top to bottom, but also the assumption that leadership is a static formula of skills. They argue that shared leadership is empowered and emergent; shared leadership enables organizational members to be fluid within their position and lead when a situation calls for their expertise and other members actively recognize and encourage others to lead when a situation requires different expertise. How people encourage others to lead and how expert influence emerges as leadership is a symbolic communicative exchange.

Shared leadership, as cultural leadership, keeps members intrigued and passionate about not only what they do, but what their peers are doing too (Scott, 2011). If organizational members share assumptions about leadership as emergent and dependent on context, then they are more likely to feel empowered and supported to lead. Scott's (2011) study explores how shared leadership empowers members and creates room for collective learning; organizing in this way becomes joyful (p.62). From this perspective leadership emerges by engaging and empowering diverse perspectives (Bouler & Bouler, 2012). Inviting, encouraging, and facilitating different people to lead depends on expertise, empowers others to share who leads and creates a dynamic working environment where one has access to diverse human talent (Rowe, 2014, p.86).

Ironically, conceptualizing leadership as shared highlights that when organizational members interact in a way that invites the influence of others in pursuit of a collective goal, they share in the leadership process and co-create an organizational culture. Yet, conceptualizing leadership as shared influence and empowerment also suggests that inviting diversity would also offer the potential to create (and/or silence) different cultural assumptions about leadership. This study aims to understand how organizational members encourage (or not) shared leadership practices by asking the following research question:

RQ3: How do participants create communication practices that facilitate shared leadership?

The overabundance of leadership literature would, on the surface, suggest that there is no need for another study. Another interpretation is that the plethora of literature indicates that leadership is a complex concept not yet understood. This study does not aim to produce a formulaic list of leadership skills. Rather, the study begins with the question regarding the nature

of leadership. Specifically, what communication processes influence people's choice (agency) to yield some individual control and work collectively toward a goal? Exploring literature with this focus in mind, the literature review unpacked how leadership could be understood as a symbolic communication process of influence that emerges in different cultural contexts in multiple ways. The review synthesized and explicated two themes that emerged in both prescriptive and descriptive leadership literature (from a communication perspective) in order to explore the nature of leadership: leadership as influence and leadership as cultural empowerment. Having developed the complexity of leadership, the goal for this empirical research is to explore leadership as a communication co-created cultural perspective that consistently emerges in various "leadering" interactions that symbolize a trust in agency of others.

Literature Summary

Leadership is a compelling term that holds several conflicting interpretations and perspectives (Grint, 2010; Keyton, 2017). After the review on leadership from both the prescriptive and descriptive perspectives, the baseline of the philosophical meaning of leadership has been analyzed. This literature argues and suggests that above all else, leadership is a form or process of influence. This study explores the driving question: what constitutes leadership communication? Unpacking the leadership concept allows for this paper to open leadership up for empirical investigation from the communication perspective. Specifically, this thesis explores leadership communication as agentic. As will be explored below, this study investigates agentic leadership communication processes at a nonprofit organization in the Pacific Northwest through qualitative methods including participant observations, semi-structured interviews, short-answer email interviews, and document collection.

Methods

This qualitative study empirically explored the nature of leadership as it emerged in a nonprofit organization in the US Pacific Northwest. The study was a grounded, emic project that aimed to garner the insights and expertise from the organizational members in context (Tracy 2013). As Tracy (2013) suggests, “qualitative researchers purposefully examine and make note of small cues in order to decide how to behave, as well as to make sense of the context and build larger knowledge claims about the culture” (p.3). Researchers Christians and Carey (1989) also explain that the best form of qualitative research is naturalistic observation through which the researcher identifies meanings that resonate poetically with participants’ interpretations. Through a combination of immersion in the research site as a participant observer and through semi-structured interviews, I explored how participants enact communication practices that engage leadership as influence, create (or transform) organizational assumptions, and create (or transform) organizational culture as a shared process.

Case Study

This study took place over a four-month period at a national nonprofit organization involved in fostering community, hope and affordable housing. This nonprofit (HFH) primarily focuses on building plain, adequate, and affordable housing that are typically surrounded by low-income areas. The owners who receive these homes, go through an extensive application process, where they agree to spend time building their home, provide a down payment and continue to pay interest-free payments. In addition, these homes are sold to the owners at no profit. Furthermore, in order to sustain these projects, this organization supports and receives from their local restore shops, that essentially receive free donated items and in return sell them for profit. This profit covers the cost of the restore itself and then is plugged right back into the fund for

building homes. This nonprofit organization has a standard hierarchical organization structure, such as a CEO, COO, managerial positions and so on.

During my data collection period, HFH began to alter its method of organizing from a traditional organizational hierarchy to a more flattened organizational structure. They had begun to question whether or not the hierarchy was how they wanted to conduct leadership. HFH provided a rich opportunity to deepen understandings of leadership as an agentic process as they navigated this transition. This nonprofit specifically identified and challenged how leadership is executed in their organizational space. They sought out ways to communicate their new understanding of leadership and how to facilitate leadership throughout the organization. Their change in conceptualizing leadership stimulated a company-wide organizational change for implementing new leadership processes. HFH overtly focused on diversification, empowerment, and inclusion in order to encourage under-utilized ideas in the organization. These change processes created a phenomenal space for immersive research and meaning making.

Data Collection

Gaining access to the research site began with a connection that I had with a classmate who worked for the particular research site. This connection allowed me to gain access to the organization through a direct introduction to the chief operating officer (COO). After two scheduled meetings with the COO of this organization, I was approved to conduct the project, sought IRB approval, and received IRB approval. In addition, before commencing the project, the COO was informed of the rights that every participant has as a member of this research project. These rights were communicated to all organizational members by both the COO to organizational members as well as by me with individual participants.

HFH has an ongoing enrollment for volunteer work, therefore, getting onsite to participate with the organization as a volunteer was also established. The data collection process occurred over a four-month period in 2019. First, I participated and observed on ten separate occasions in several different locations including a West Coast board meeting, manager meeting, home giving event, on site home building, in store customer/employee interaction, warehouse operation, and general main office work processes. Each observation lasted for at least one hour, occasionally two, for an approximate total of 15 hours of total observations. Observations were an essential form of data collection because this method aided in understanding symbolic communication patterns that exist within the organizational culture. As Tracy (2013) argues, “a more worthwhile way to consider one’s participation in the scene is in the terms of a ‘continuum of enmeshment’ and of a potpourri of overlapping roles” (p.106). Through multiple hours of observation in various locations I began piecing together common behaviors, actions, language, stories, metaphors, texts, and so on. In this same way, spending multiple hours observing provided me the opportunity to identify outliers or pieces of the organizational culture that may not be known.

The locations of the observations were brainstormed between the COO and me. This brainstorm was strategically thought through when considering workplace purpose, population involvement and all spaces of the organization being represented. Throughout the observations, I took detailed scratch notes. Scratch notes, also referred to as raw records are “. . . first, unprocessed notations of the field” (Tracy, 2013, p.114). These scratch notes included short, mindful notes that represented the actions or conversations of the observation. From there, I developed my scratch notes into descriptive and intricate fieldnotes of what was observed within 12 to 18 hours after the actual observation in order to capture the details accurately. Fieldnotes

are thick descriptions that provide the researcher with the opportunity to re-enter the context and (re)present the information (Tracy, 2013, p.117). This study produced a total of 52 pages of fieldnotes.

Second, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews that lasted between 30-60 minutes for a total of six hours of in-person interviewing. Semi-structured interview questions offered the ability to engage in a more conversational form of interviewing allowing for participants to provide insights I could not have anticipated. Tracy (2013) suggests, “Such questions relinquish control to the respondents for the pace and exact topic of the answer” (p.147). When semi-structured questions were asked, it allowed for the participant to express areas of interest and experiences and for the researcher to gain a better understanding. In addition, this style of interviewing offered room for an organic and flexible conversation to take place and for the interviewee to have more control over the type of answer they provide (Tracy, 2013, p.156).

The semi-structured questions were created as open-ended questions that asked participants for a story or a narrative as well as questions that asked for accounts about leadership. This style of question asking guided the participant to recall their personal experiences and narratives. This was useful because when individuals told stories, they brought light to ideas, concepts, patterns, behaviors, meanings and more that they may not have been able to articulate in any other way (Tracy, 2013). Narrative questions also offer the opportunity for individuals to explain their stories around leadership to allow for symbolic meaning to be discovered more naturally. For example, “Tell me about a time where you overcame a great challenge?” All in person interviews were recorded after the participants provided their consent. All interviews were transcribed resulting in 63 pages of transcription.

Third, I also conducted short-answer email “interviews” with 10 additional participants (these participants were different participants from the six face-to-face interviewees). The responses that I received with this method were more straightforward as it can be easier to talk about detail, but more time consuming to type out detail. However, a few responses that were more narrative based included personal stories, genuine emotion and specific impact. I sent four interview questions via password protected email, that consisted of the same narrative format as the in-person interview questions. I felt that it was important to keep my questions consistent because I was researching the same content, just through a different medium. While the in-person interviews allowed for a more fluid conversation to occur where rich data emerged through the participant thinking through the question, email interviews provided an opportunity to participate on a full schedule and to contemplate their responses with more time. By applying a narrative frame on the questions, I allowed the participants to express details of a personal story, such as asking specifically about how a situation has made them feel, how they started their position and asking for specific examples. All short-answer email “interviews” resulted in 19 total pages of transcriptions.

The choice in interview participants came from the organizational role that individuals held. Thus, the participants for this research project included both those who are part of the HFH “leadership team,” directors and managers for this organization, in addition to HFH members or those not in top hierarchical roles. Because of the nature of observations, I had the opportunity to witness interaction between all levels of hierarchical team members.

Finally, I collected various documents from my observations that offered meaning and intention from the organization. These documents included brochures with information in regard to “Building Connection,” and other ways to get involved with HFH. These brochures and

documents are also available on the HFH website, where the Portland Metro area in particular goes into greater detail about purpose, involvement, donation, and question answering, that their brochures simply cover. Tracy (2013) argues that, “documents furnish background on the group’s history, information about rules, policies, or requirements for members, and the group’s basic facts and figures (p.83). In addition, I also received a document from the Pacific Northwest board meeting that I was a part of. This document included the meeting agenda, focused guidelines and names of those who attended the meeting. Collecting these documents during my observations was crucial for another form of data collection because it provided a contextual understanding of HFH.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through an iterative grounded theory analysis (Tracy, 2013). As Tracy (2013) explains, “An iterative analysis alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories” (p.184). This style of analysis enabled me to not only understand the data, but to reflect upon it in reference to theories, literature, motivations and more (p.184).

To begin, I executed multiple rounds of primary cycle coding, which resulted in nearly 37 hours of primary coding. This is the most basic level of coding, where I became familiar with my data set and identified distinct concepts that existed across all of the data (Tracy, 2013). First level coding can be best understood as the space where the researcher breaks apart the data as a whole, into smaller individual pieces or codes. In addition, this is where I began to identify common codes. Codes can be compared to the value of numbers in a quantitative study. Saldaña (2009) describes a code within a qualitative context as, “. . . a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a

portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). Codes in a qualitative study are the stability and credibility of a research project.

Next, I enacted secondary level coding or axial coding (Tracy, 2013). Primary coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report. Primary coding fractured the data into codes and through secondary coding I began to create connections between the codes. Secondary coding moved from labeling to linking (Saldaña, 2009, p.8). This is when I began to weave together what I initially broke apart in order to understand how individual codes are alike and categorize the codes into similar groups. I was able to move around and organize the codes in order to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the research. This step of coding resulted in approximately 23 hours of analysis and interpretation.

Once the codes were categorized, I performed the final phase, advanced thematic coding (Tracy, 2013). The final step of the coding process is to strategically organize data themes. Creating themes for one’s data sets, illustrates the symbolic meanings of the categories. More specifically, this moment of coding is crucial for the researcher to be open minded as Tracy argues that, “. . . the researcher alternates between considering existing theories and research interests on the one hand, emergent qualitative data on the other” (2013, p.8). This stage in coding helped me to articulate a comprehensive and meaningful data set for the research project. These themes then acted as the structure of the project and reinforced the theory.

In order to effectively communicate the backbone of the research project, I created a systematic way to visualize the data. This is what can be referred to as a codebook. A codebook includes the original pieces of data from a fieldnote or interview narrative, codes, categories and themes. Organizing the data this way is practical in qualitative data because it allowed space for every unique piece of information to be carefully analyzed and represented visually. In this

project, I created two codebooks, one codebook that broke down each research question and one that included a comprehensive explanation of the data set.

This qualitative study navigated the process of leadership as it transpired in a nonprofit organization in the US Pacific Northwest. The study was rooted in an emic approach, which acquires the understandings and knowledge from the organizational members within this context (Tracy, 2013). As the researcher, I spent time analyzing and interpreting the behaviors, patterns and experiences that occurred within the context of this nonprofit. This was completed as a participant observer and through semi-structured interviews. Through my interpretations, I sought to make sense of these observations and construct informational claims about this organizational context. The exploration of these communication practices and leadership interactions, guided me to understand the dynamic process of “leadering,” which facilitated three major themes.

Findings

This study examines leadership communication within a nonprofit organization in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). After collecting and analyzing the data, I found that there were three main themes that illustrated leadership communication as a dynamic process that fosters shared agency. These main themes included *setting the stage*, *belief in the system*, and *how do you go on together*. *Setting the stage* is the foundation of the findings illustrating how participants’ communication created order at HFH and answered the first research question: What aspects of communication influence groups to work/organize collectively? These findings established the communication practices that were similar, but not the same as leadership communication practices. Second, the theme *belief in the system* demonstrates the findings that answer research question two: What meanings do participants construct for communication practices that

influence collective organizing? These findings demonstrated that when participants trusted and took-for-granted the foundational communication processes, they communicated in ways that created a collective understanding of cultural meanings through growth and purpose. Finally, *how do you go on together* illustrates how, through a collective identification with the organizational culture assumptions, leadership emerges as collective agency. Below, the rich data from the research site will be explicated for each theme.

Setting the Stage

The first theme that will be discussed in this finding section is *setting the stage*. This theme is particularly crucial to work through first because it explains the basic norms and communication practices that are taken-for-granted and create foundational order and organizing within HFH. This theme name, *setting the stage* aims to highlight the way that the communication patterns and norms participants performed created a taken-for-granted backdrop that then enabled other communication performances to stand out. The basic norms included in this theme constituted the organizational order at HFH. This theme is supported by three key dimensions including *gatekeeping*, *organizational boundaries*, and *unspoken and spoken agendas*. All three of these dimensions touch on different aspects of *setting the stage*. However, all of the communication practices that perform these dimensions create an anchoring rhythm for HFH.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping, within this research project is best conceptualized as someone, regardless of title, pay or any other hierarchical codes, who interacts on behalf of the organization.

Gatekeeping is a form of *setting the stage* because it performs and projects a certain standard for HFH and eliminates segregation by title. In other words, participants who perform gatekeeping

can include anyone in the organization as they act on behalf of the organization to keep the organizing flowing as normal. For example, the following three excerpts illustrate a consistent example of gatekeeping by individuals who hold different organizational positions in hierarchy.

(This was my first time at the HFH main office as a researcher) As I was sitting there, Gretchen (I saw her name on a nameplate at her desk, I assumed it was her) came around the corner and asked ‘how can I help you?’ In addition, she followed with a few other questions, such as who I was there to see, if my meeting was scheduled and what brought me to HFH. I followed with my answer, that I was there to see BC, and we had a meeting scheduled at 11. She then phoned him with their landline phone system and said that his 11 o’clock [researcher from the University] was there waiting downstairs (their office is in a house that they built), then we followed with small talk. This small talk consisted of common topics such as, the weather that the local area was having and springtime. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day after a long stretch of rain. Everyone was excited to see the flowers and sunshine.

In this particular context, Gretchen was the gatekeeper for BC. When I arrived to research, employees did not initially know who I was or why I was there that day. In order to make sense of my presence and to continue with the flow of everyday organizational work, Gretchen chose to speak on behalf of the organization and ask why I was there rather than just letting me sit and wait. This practice initiated my participation in the organization and by making the decision to pick up the phone and call BC, I was invited into the organization.

A micro-moment of interaction, this act of gatekeeping created order for all parties involved: Gretchen, BC, and for me as the researcher. Micro-moments of communication like this can be easily taken for granted but were crucial for organizing to continue seamlessly when I entered as a newcomer and researcher. These examples were numerous and performed by several members of the organization at different hierarchical levels. For example, the next piece of evidence expresses the order of gatekeeping in a different context with a different participant in a different hierarchical role. I was scheduled for a meeting and then there was a miscommunication on meeting days. It was suggested that I attend a meeting that occurred every

other week, but it happened to change weeks that particular week I showed up to observe. As with my first encounter, this miscommunication required participants to make sense of my presence in order to continue on organizing in their normal rhythm. In the example below I was waiting near the front door in the two comfortable chairs that they had close to the front desk. As I sat there for around two minutes an individual approached me from my right side and prompted a conversation.

“Oh, hi! Can I help you with something?” After explaining that I was there to see JC and observe a meeting that was scheduled. I asked where the meeting was being held and if he knew if I was in the right location? However, he didn’t have the answers to my questions. He responded with, “JC isn’t here yet, but she will be soon. Make yourself comfortable as you hang out.”

In this case, I later found out that the gentleman who was acting as the gatekeeper was another individual with a position at the top of the hierarchy who tried to help me but could not and instead invited me to make myself comfortable in this home that is now their office. In both of these excerpts (and in several others in the findings) participants acknowledged me as a newcomer and acted as gatekeeper by inviting me into the organization in a welcoming manner. While I was an obvious newcomer, this kind of direct interaction is common in the nonprofit that needs to make sense of several newcomers on a regular basis including volunteers and customers. What I did not know at this stage, was that the practice of acknowledging and directing newcomers to the correct organizational people was a gatekeeping norm that kept HFH organizing. Gatekeeping was not dependent on title or position but required of everyone’s job to keep order.

Next, the third piece of evidence that suggests HFH is consistent with how they organize in gatekeeping occurred during an observation, where the store manager was not present for the observation and store employees were not informed. Again, this is a situation of a newcomer in a

different context with different organizational participants who work to acknowledge my presence and grant me permission to continue in a welcoming manner.

Then as I looked a little lost, Ray Ray (the floor supervisor, I found out later), came up to me and asked, “how can I help?” I explained to her, I was just here to hang out for about an hour or so and observe. She said, ‘no problem,’ and to ‘let her know if I had any questions or needed anything.’

Throughout the observation I noted that Ray Ray became more than the floor supervisor directing her employees to the correct space, she illustrated a pattern of interaction similar to my encounter with her above: she would acknowledge customers and then guide them to the employees or locations. After analysis, it became clear that because newcomers are regularly entering the organization, gatekeeping was a role performed by all organizational members that involved warmly acknowledging the newcomer and choosing where and to whom the newcomer should go to seek what they needed. There was a sense of responsibility that all participants embodied as they worked to assist newcomers in order for HFH to continue to organize seamlessly. Rather than assuming someone else who’s “supposed” to do that will do it because of title or rules, HFH employees all engage in gatekeeping as a means of *setting the stage* for order.

Organizational Boundaries

The second category or dimension that anchors the rhythmic patterns of organizing at HFH are those communication practices that create organizational boundaries. In particular, organizational boundaries were created through the nonverbal and verbal practices that constituted the HFH brand. Through both verbal and nonverbal platforms, participants recognized where HFH starts and stops and occurred across different HFH organizational locations. In other words, organizational boundaries could not be simplified as a physical space

alone. Rather, boundaries emerged symbolically as participants interpreted nonverbal and verbal communication as part of (or not part of) HFH.

The first three pieces of data emphasize organizational boundaries as emergent from interpretation of nonverbal communication, specifically through the use of color. HFH, as is common practice for any organization, has chosen specific company colors. All marketing messages from HFH include their color scheme. Their color scheme consists of bright blue as their primary color with lime green and white as their secondary colors. Three primary pieces of evidence that articulate this kind of order come from three different field observations that I participated in.

I was quickly relieved as I navigated my way through the business park and noticed a box truck labeled in HFH information. It was a white truck, with the bright blue and green HFH lettering on it.

There is a huge HFH Restore sign that uses the official organization colors.

In both circumstances above, the HFH organizational colors stand out before any other information and quickly lead to the interpretation of the organization. These colors alone act as a nonverbal way of organizing because they not only delineate where HFH organizing begins, but also communicates the meanings affiliated with HFH. The use of colors occurs with the locally situated HFH locations as well as the national and international locations creates a coherence regarding where the organization emerges *and* provides the first step in identifying with the organization and its purpose.

In addition, HFH uses their branding to create organizational boundaries through special events. The two examples above are directly related to a specific location that HFH operates out of, one being the Restore office and one being a restore, however another piece of evidence is

related to a home giving ceremony that illustrates not only that HFH organizing is occurring, but the process of identifying with and being a part of the purpose of HFH.

As I was walking up to the home giving ceremony, I could see from far away on a cloudy Portland day, the big, bright blue and white letters, “HFH.”

This consistency in organizational boundaries is important here because the big, bright blue and white letters not only distinguish a place where people are gathering, but also a place of celebration. The letters in that moment were monumental, as it was not in relation to buying a shirt at the restore to send money to a project, this was **the project**, and a completed project that would be turned over to a family in need. Another example that captured organizational boundaries at the ceremony site was when there was an ingroup and outgroup participation that was celebratory. During the ceremony, as HFH employees were sharing their excitement and commitment to this location, they began to express their gratitude to the community members that took personal time to participate in this project. They provided an opportunity for recognition for those who participated through raising money, donating money, volunteering at any of the HFH locations and even working with the families on a more emotional level. They asked those who had volunteered to raise their hands amongst the crowd. It felt as though every individual there had their hand raised, but there were a few individuals who did not. This act of public sharing acts as an ingroup and outgroup because it draws those who volunteered into a more family-like moment. As hands were going up, people’s eyes were scanning the space and in awe of the support that came from the community. There becomes a greater sense of commitment and identification when individuals have been recognized. This continued by the speaker continuously repeating ‘thank you,’ as more hands continued to surface. Participating in the process of creating this project and living in this community in which the project would stand for years, designated who was an inner circle member because by participating in the process of

creating the project—and the artifact of the project—held symbolic meaning for in-group members. In this way, my initial noticing of the HFH letters and colors nonverbally communicated much more than the organization itself, but rather the boundary of who they are, what they do for others, and why they pursue this mission.

To continue, I found that there were also more verbal organizational boundaries that existed in a form of branding. These two examples follow the idea that HFH as a brand is more than just a logo or marketing stamp that projects sales, but rather a place that holds meaning. This is illustrated in artifacts that promote an organizational boundary as inclusive and grateful. For example, in an HFH Restore a sign that welcomes newcomers with “Welcome to the Restore” followed by a second sign that states “HFH Store Heroes,” includes their photos and the year they started volunteering at HFH. The first example of “Welcome to the Restore!” is a consistent sign included at all of the restore locations around the city and has the interesting impact of inviting anyone to the Restore. This directly creates an open boundary and encourages newcomers to join. Encouraging new people to step across the boundary invites new volunteers and relates to the practice of regular gatekeeping as both welcoming and directional.

Welcome signs and hero signs like these hung outside for all visitors or customers to see before entering into their space. Included signage like this also offers recognition of their volunteers. There are a few different aspects to include in this, but one of the crucial aspects is that HFH is naming their volunteers as “Heroes.” Developing this name provides a boundary in which customers or those who are coming into this space have an immediate understanding of what volunteers mean to the organization. This outward declaration leaves very little room to decipher any other explanation and emphasize a declaration of inclusivity and gratitude.

In addition to the nonverbal and verbal artifacts that delineate the boundary of where and when HFH starts, participants see their own identity performance as creation of an organizational boundary. For example, during an interview an employee of HFH stated, “I take that very seriously, as a steward of our brand, and everything that I do, and how it reflects on what people think of HFH.” This particular quote is important to consider when understanding organizational boundaries because he suggests that HFH is more than a brand and more than words and colors printed on artifacts. Rather, HFH is delineated by the individuals who identify as stewards of HFH. Being part of HFH means being recognizable through different practices and performances as a steward. It is for this reason that anyone can be a gatekeeper and perform stewardship of inclusivity and direct participants where they need to go to keep HFH going. A steward of HFH also performs actions of inclusivity, and gratitude by participating in the process of acknowledging, and welcoming newcomers, and by honoring those who do the work of building projects as heroes. Being a steward in this way creates the “set” and acknowledges the actors who will participate in organizing.

Unspoken and Spoken Agendas

Third, *setting the stage* involves organizational members developing scripts that are common patterns for organizing and ordering HFH. These scripts are best understood as the unspoken and spoken agendas that occurred through interaction within an organizational context but draw upon larger societal ideological meanings. In context of this study, an unspoken agenda emerged in the data as a societal interaction that is co-created and facilitates a set of expectations for participants to perform. These unspoken agendas act as expectations for how to organize in different organizational contexts through relational tasks. For example, during my first informational meeting with the CCO of HFH, the conversation took quite a bit of time to begin,

because we were talking through information that was unrelated, but impactful for the relationship. At the time I did not understand the unspoken agenda and expectations that were relational norms required for HFH participants.

BC initiated the conversation by stating ‘I am so excited that we could finally meet in person.’ I expressed my gratitude as well and told him that I really enjoyed the space that we were in. He responded with a quick, “Well, it’s super old and we’re just trying to do our best with it.” He then proceeded to explain ‘we’re growing really fast’ and we have very ‘little space. We have started to cut offices into two so that more people have a space to work.’ He then expressed again with concern with how fast they are growing and noted how they are ‘trying to figure out other options.’ BC suggested that it wouldn’t be ‘sustainable for us to consistently break up the office spaces and shove more people into one room.’

This example expresses how at the beginning of the conversation, there was an unspoken agenda for both parties to extend their gratitude for the opportunity and then follow up with a conversation that would provide relational connection. When I was in the space (one of their early projects), I was drawing on a societal norm for politely creating a positive environment for their interaction. However, once BC continued speaking about it, it became a script about space (a common discussion with participants). Given that creating spaces is the focal point for this organization, this was an expected conversation but also highlighted a specific organizational concern related to how fast they are growing. In other words, societal expectations for politeness created an unspoken agenda or set of expectations for how to initiate the conversation which then led to a specific and explicit organizational agenda or script related to the need to create new spaces to accommodate others.

Other examples include unspoken social agendas for how to create relational and informal connections between groups. During a restore meeting with the restore managers and C-level participants, everyone was sitting around the table and enjoying free chatter. For example, it was not uncommon for informal social chatter to occur at meetings. In one meeting I overheard

a conversation about the Blazers playoff game last night that started between two people and eventually escalated to the entire group. As more and more people entered the conversation, the volume grew louder the participants shared their opinions with excitement discussing key players, moves and personal stories of their fan experience. Another participant compliments some shoes with a response of ‘thank you, I just recently got them.’ While in the opposite corner of the room I could even hear someone talking about avocado toast and in a self-deprecating response she joked ‘I am such a millennial for eating it.’ In this meeting, these side conversations seem random and lack purpose, however they play an important role in the rhythm of the meeting and establishing social connections and establishing order with the group. Each meeting side conversations, while not officially scheduled as part of the meeting, allowed for their employees to communicate socially and reinforced the unspoken agenda and expectation that participants socialize. This socializing time was not awkward or forced but expected and encouraged a positive environment. This group is following an unspoken agenda of personal connection without even thinking twice because they are co-created norms.

During a board meeting with nearly 20 people in attendance this societal order was established in a different manner. There were nearly 20 people in attendance at this meeting and were asking participants to attend despite the large amount of responsibilities and other meetings to which they needed to attend. Therefore, this meeting had a stricter timeline that was expected to be followed. However, even during this meeting, there was the expectation for an unspoken agenda of informal and relational connection to occur.

The vibe of the room was extremely welcoming and kind. Everyone was talking to one another with coffee in hand and goodies in their mouth. There was a little bit of small talk that existed at first. . . The meeting started with SM, the CEO welcoming everyone to the table and double checking who they had on the conference call. . . After this moment, the man who I wasn’t sure of his position began by leading a story of the latest El Salvador trip that he had experienced. He read off of a piece of paper, word for word. The story

was impactful, I remember a line that he said “We get to see people stand with smiles and tears. Smiles of happiness and tears of joy as they receive the keys to their new home.” This was an impactful statement, that he utilized his voice to emphasize. Rather than rushing through this moment, he chose to slow down, articulate what he said, pause and embrace the good that building homes for people brings. People sat there, intrigued and stared with eye contact. As he stated this sentence, everyone in the room smiled and some nodded.

This example provides importance to an unspoken agenda that creates order because although it is not written as essential, allowing time to mingle and then bond over a touching story facilitates connection even when time is sparse and there is a sense of urgency to complete a meeting.

Each example of unspoken agendas are acts that have been socially constructed in society (such as participating in banter before a meeting) but emerge in a specific way in the organization as a set of expectations for how to organize and connect relationally. In this way, if any three of these interactions were to have occurred without this unspoken agenda of informal communication, it could come across as rude, arrogant, needy or demanding. Breaking the norm would establish who is not a member of the organization. In other words, unspoken agenda setting is imperative for an organization to create order and understanding for how to engage with one another.

Along with unspoken agendas, follows the format of spoken agendas. Spoken agendas in the context of this study highlights a designated and outwardly understood list of tasks or talking points that should be discussed in the context of a planned meeting or interaction. Spoken agendas are a form of order because they provide expectations and boundaries around interactions. Also, if these agendas are created in cadence to a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly meeting, individuals involved can become familiar and anticipate this way of organizing. The first example of spoken agenda occurred in hopes of creating order over the course of five years. Within an interview, it was stated, “This strategic plan was to address diversity, equity, and

inclusion, organizationally in a really thoughtful, measured, managed way . . . it was my job to lead the organization through something that makes it work for the strategic plan.” There are a few insightful words, such as , “ . . . thoughtful, measured, and managed . . .” that are important to consider when discussing spoken agendas because they provide an outline of expectations for how this agenda was created with purpose.

Another example of spoken agenda came from a restore managers meeting where two particular individuals who were in charge of the meeting spent time creating an agenda for their employees to follow and would help to facilitate the list of items as the time went on. Creating a task list provides the opportunity to create order within their meeting because it is helpful for everyone to know what to expect, be familiar with the contexts and understand the facilitation. JC and CW might have been leading the transitions to be cognizant of time, but everyone was given space to talk and discuss on behalf of their associated tasks.

A final example of spoken agendas occurred within restore locations where the back wall of the counter included a variety of chalk boards that consisted of different messages specific to the location. They had notes about deals, sales, and a total count of how many active volunteers that they had in 2018: 18,500. Providing this information for the public to see is a way of setting the agenda for all parties involved, including the customers, community members, volunteers and employees. They are creating order by suggesting what their local restores include and what they offer to the community and vice versa. By creating a spoken agenda, HFH is expressing how they organize as an entire organization, but also as individual locations. Employees, volunteers and community members have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the order that HFH has co-created for their organization.

Summary of Setting the Stage

Considering the metaphor of putting on a play, *setting the stage* provides the foundation for how HFH uses communication to co-create order and organize in their spaces of work. In particular, as discussed above, the anchored rhythm of HFH occurs through gatekeeping, organizational boundary setting through branding, and through the performance of unspoken and spoken agendas of expectations. The routine of gatekeeping is not subject to a specific title or pay grade, but rather a space where HFH employees embody consistency, and act to acknowledge, and direct newcomers for the organization. Second, the creation of organizational boundaries through verbal and nonverbal communication creates artifacts and practices that symbolize membership and invites others to cross the boundary and become a member. Finally, the use of unspoken and spoken agendas in context of interactions or meetings are important ways of creating order because they establish an expected relational rhythm for employees, volunteers and community members. *Setting the stage* or co-creating order at HFH establishes and re-establishes the foundational norms that then allow members to project their behaviors and actions within the community and create belief in the system.

Belief in the System

The second theme that emerged in the data analysis highlights how members believe and perform several HFH cultural assumptions. Members of HFH make manifest these cultural assumptions through their organizing practices including those described above in *setting the stage*. The data illustrated high levels of coherence and consistency of these symbolic performances which created the character and culture of HFH *and* demonstrated a system of beliefs with which members identify and trust as the “right” way to organize. What stands out as interesting in these findings, however, is that the HFH cultural assumptions not only emerge in organizing practices but facilitate or motivate leadership as a shared and relational set of

activities. The three core aspects to *belief in the system* are *transformation in collectiveness (not in the individual)*, *expectancy for growth*, and *meaningful work*.

Transformation in Collectiveness, not in the Individual

In order to fully grasp the importance of this theme, it is crucial to clarify why transformation is a component of the findings during this study. As noted earlier, during the time of this project, HFH was going through an organization-wide shift, with an intentional focus to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I). Therefore, transformation in HFH was something that was in the midst of happening and involved not only changing everyday practices, but also addressing the underlying beliefs that motivated these practices. The D.E.I. initiative was created in order to create a more collectivistic atmosphere for employees, volunteers and, community members. I first learned about the D.E.I. focus during my initial informational meeting with BC who shared the foundation and vision for D.E.I. as well as the intended audience. However, I was not informed on how it came to be shared with HFH employees, volunteers, and community members. HFH is a space that both literally and figuratively builds off of foundations with a belief in the necessity of collectively helping others. However, organizational members decided that it would be best to continue to build off of their foundation and develop a different organizational framework that emphasized not only working collectively toward a shared goal, but working better with a multicultural population toward these goals. Thus, the challenge was how to engage current members and co-create a shared belief system that questioned old beliefs about who leads and how so that more people could participate in their community.

During an interview with an HFH employee, s/he stated, “. . . everybody gets to have a voice in how those things go down . . . we just have a ton of opportunities here to experiment and

it's just new and fresh .” The context of this quote was in discussion about the most recent organizational D.E.I. initiative. This individual felt as though they were not only able to have a voice, but they were able to use their voice to participate, co-create and be part of this transformation. Others stated, “You always have a seat at the table, when you work for HFH, you know?” This quote continues to explain how HFH as an organization operates in such a way where inclusion is practiced and understood. This central understanding of “having a seat at the table” is a belief that individuals have bought into; they identify with this belief and they trust it to be true for all members of the organization.

Employees, volunteers, and community members who associate with HFH not only verbally account for how their voice matters as a chorus at HFH, they also believe that they need to be a part of and engage with the communities they work with and build in. The belief here is that one does not understand the needs of those they serve unless they serve with them. In order to transform a problem in society, like houselessness, it is required to be a part of the community that needs transformation. This is not because the community is weak, but because members at HFH believe in the assumption that transformation only happens through collective understanding of different perspectives and working together toward a better society. In order to be consistent in these beliefs, the practices of those who work with HFH requires shared and pluralistic organizing.

For example, HFH’s physical location is a home they built in a community they serve. As one employee stated, “HFH’s physical location has helped me to understand that everyone deserves a durable, energy efficient home...The need for affordable housing is very clear to me as you walk around the different neighborhoods we build in.” The recognition that this HFH employee shared is a recognition and comment that was seen in various other interviews,

conversations and observations. Others stated, “having our offices located in the C neighborhood allows us to be a central meeting place for families we serve in the community.” Another example of this partnership between HFH and the local community came from an observation that took place at the home giving ceremony, “Towards the end of the ceremony, the diverse families who were receiving their new homes, were able to have an opportunity to speak. They were able to express their experience, gratitude and commitment to the community.” A few of these quotes consisted of, “HFH keeps families from struggling,” “what a legacy HFH is creating,” “generations will experience the impact that we’ve made today,” “we’ve learned and grown together,” and “HFH let me have a chance.” Furthermore, during an observation at the construction site there was an entire staff from a for-profit organization that was volunteering with HFH. HFH works hand-in-hand with other organizations to get their employees to step outside of their organization and volunteer as community members. This partnership with other organizations expresses their desire and drive to share the importance of community involvement. This kind of recognition expresses how HFH organizes as a unit because they are needed within the community, but it is more than just work. Members act as participant-observers working in and with the communities they serve in an effort to understand the experiences and meanings for community members. In other words, as an organizational culture, members have adopted the belief that they cannot simply help and walk away, they need to share in the community experience, work, life, and so on in order to try to understand from the perspective of others and work as allies. This is the essence of understanding for members, that at the heart of transformation, collective action and dedication rests. This is not an individual endeavor, but a collective and community effort.

Expectancy for Growth

The second category that best represents *belief in the system*, is expectancy for growth that HFH has intertwined in their cultural assumptions. Expectancy for growth comes around the idea that HFH is a place to learn, adapt, be flexible, educate, and challenge. All five of these characteristics are aspects that are valued and reinforced at HFH. HFH is clear through their interactions and communication, that professional growth is not something that could happen, but rather something that is inevitable. For example, in an interview with an HFH employee, they state that, “As we grow it gets more complex and we adjust, not without struggle, but it is all part of it.” This is because there are always new circumstances that HFH as an organization are learning to navigate and work through. In the example above, HFH is hopeful for the opportunity to equip and encourage their employees and volunteers to accept growth as a learning opportunity. Additionally, this perspective on growth compliments their beliefs of transformation through collectiveness. Transformation cannot occur without change and change cannot occur without the ability to adapt collectively.

Another example of HFH employees and volunteers understanding the cultural assumption of expectancy for growth comes from an individual who stated, “It’s not all easy, there are spaces and times for tension and stress. They have to be flexible; we have to be flexible.” In this context, the individual speaking refers to “they” being the volunteers and “us” being the HFH employees. This quote is helpful to understand how employees are realistic of their situations and working spaces. They partner with HFH in their beliefs that with transformation comes spaces of “tension and stress,” however rather than shying away from it, they address it head on. This particular employee provides the belief of collectivism at HFH by understanding that it is not only about one party. Both the employees and the volunteers need to

be flexible and thoughtful in times of tension in order for the greatest amount of success to transpire.

Another example of the cultural belief in the expectancy for growth came from an interview with the COO of the organization where he specifically addresses the diversity, equity and inclusion (D.E.I.) meeting that he was in charge of fostering. The context of this meeting was to bring all employees to the meeting in order to address how they could become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. This was a transformational focus for everyone in the organization and the organization itself. He expresses how it was crucial for him to consider all the areas that would be impacted by the decision to call this meeting.

This raw material for this cultural compact came out of an all-employee meeting. Because that was really fruitful and helpful and expensive. I mean, this is one of the things that I think about. In a leadership role, I just habitually, when I go into meetings with large groups of people, I have this mental idea. You know those old bedside alarm clocks with the things that flip over? I think about that, but like racking up the dollars. Like every minute that goes by, it's more expensive. You know? The hourly rate of all the people in the room. What does that add up to? And so, this meeting was that important. That meeting was everybody in our organization. We shut down all of our locations, and we all went to one place for an entire day and, a full eight-hour day. I didn't finish doing the calculation, I just talked about. Two thousand dollars an hour. It's like, this is what it costs for us to stop everything, and that doesn't address the loss of sales at the ReStore. So, it was really expensive, but it's really important. That's how important it is. You know?

This is an important quote to consider when discussing belief in the system because this individual works to clarify that the all-hands meeting to address cultural transformation was worth the financial cost it took to get every voice at the table. He notes that the ideas that would come from the multiple voices and perspectives at the meeting had more weight than what they were losing monetarily. The total cost of \$16,000 in paychecks, the loss of sales, the pushed back checklists, and timelines this D.E.I. meeting cost, it was a symbolic and necessary feeling of tension for him as COO and he still chose to say yes because the transformation was really

important for the organizational culture and purpose of HFH. This kind of commitment to D.E.I. is the epitome of what it means to be expectant of growth as part of the HFH culture. HFH saw the need and importance to educate, challenge and discuss how they can incorporate, and centralize themselves around diversity, equity, and inclusion in their day-to-day tasks as an entire organization. Having everyone present in the meeting was also a visible form of symbolic commitment that co-created a sense of trust and belief in HFH. HFH desired to involve each and every employee in this process because they were dependent on their employees believing in this transformational process; if there was not a collective understanding, HFH could not resume organizing to ensure they grew as pluralistic and inclusive.

Meaningful Work

The final category that illustrates *belief in the system* is meaningful work. It was present in every observation, interview or conversation, that being involved with HFH at any capacity was far greater than just receiving a paycheck every month, getting volunteer hours or giving money to a nonprofit. Rather, it had a much more rooted purpose. Collectively, affiliates of all positions for HFH agreed upon the idea that involvement with HFH was meaningful work. The first reference of evidence where the drive for meaningful work was demonstrated was in an interview where an HFH affiliate stated, “Working for HFH in any capacity means being part of something meaningful and helping those less fortunate.” As individuals they feel as though belonging to HFH means being part of something that is far greater than themselves. In return, this focus towards the community helps to foster a sense of collective purpose amongst their local society.

The second piece of evidence that helps to articulate meaningful work comes from the CEO of the organization, where he describes the need for a collective belief in the work as

meaningful and necessary in order to make lasting change in the local communities HFH serves. The context of the interview was in discussion about HFH and their community. He states, “We really need to change ...the way we think and the way we act and the way we vote and who we support.” The first aspect of this quote that is crucial to highlight is the choice of “we.” With “we” the CEO highlights that everyone affiliated with HFH, from the CEO to those living in the communities, need to think, and believe in the purpose of the work in order to create systemic change. In other words, the work they do needs to be more than a band aid on a larger societal problem. If “we” all believe in the work that HFH does as meaningful and necessary, this supports the other cultural beliefs that everyone contributes to the change and that growth and transformation can be uncomfortable but necessary. This belief then translates into action, including how “we” vote and “who we support.” In addition, through the word choice of “we,” he articulates a call to action for the community. This call to action includes various levels of involvement for change, such as influencing the community, our personal thoughts, our actions, our political considerations and our local comradery. This broad call to action provides people with various abilities or disabilities ample opportunity to find meaning in what they are doing and to make a difference in different types of action that create lasting change. For example, when the CEO declares this statement, he is empowering a community member who shops at an HFH restore to become mindful that buying in this store supports housing needs for their local community. This task could seem more attainable or realistic than maybe getting involved with a regular volunteer position. Believing in the cultural assumptions that support HFH might also manifest for community members in their voting practices. This is a very powerful statement because he is pronouncing that HFH can have a greater impact than what they are doing in their own operations. He is stating that HFH as an organization, desires to expand their meaningful

work outside of building homes. In addition to building affordable homes, they want to be involved in the conversation around affordable housing as an issue of governance. Their hope for meaningful work does not stop at the C neighborhood, but could expand into other neighborhoods, communities and generations. This level of commitment towards meaningful work collectively develops belief in the system not only throughout HFH, but in the individual lives united.

Making a systemic difference through meaningful and collective work then, also starts with engaging young community members as volunteers. At HFH, they partner with at-risk youth programs and schools to provide students with exposure to hands-on volunteering and community involvement. These kids can be anywhere from 12 to 18 and are typically categorized as “at-risk youth” because of personal delinquent behavior or extreme family circumstances that have the ability to disrupt a normal educational path. Therefore, these kids are enrolled at a local alternative school that provides various programs for alternative learning. In this case, HFH acts as a partner with this program to provide a safe space of alternative learning at their construction sites. Thus, they have a group of students who are consistent volunteers that work diligently on the homes for their community members. During one observation, one of the youth volunteers wrote on the wood structure of the home, “Enjoy your new home! I enjoyed helping build it ☺” The partnership between HFH and kids who have been categorized culturally as “at-risk youth” aims to empower these young adults through involvement with their local community as they give back and find meaning in their work. As regular volunteers these teens are supervised and instructed by a licensed professional in both education and construction while they all come together to build affordable homes for their local community members. In addition to their physical tasks, these teens are experiencing a variety of empowering skills as well. For

some, they are experiencing teamwork, healthy communication, collective organizing, challenges and more for the first time in a safe environment. This exposure to helping others, is a chance where HFH is able to impact their lives and share the experience of meaningful work. The opportunity for empowerment and support that these kids receive socializes them into the understanding of the core purpose of HFH as an organization: to be a space where work is meaningful and generationally impactful. Furthermore, when the student wrote, “Enjoy your new home! I enjoyed helping build it 😊” puts the message in order to make an impact on the homeowner’s life. By stating that he wanted them to enjoy their new home, he was understanding what he was part of, creating something that was bigger than himself and those around him. He was helping to build a home for someone that he did not actually know. Both parts of his statement demonstrate how he identifies his work as doing something that mattered and was deeply purposeful to both the family and himself. Finally, this particular quote was written in permanent Sharpie on the side of the home on the wooden structure. This suggests that this empowerment and sense of responsibility to take part in meaningful work is embedded into the structure of that home. It is through partnership between at-risk youth and HFH, that there is not only an organizational identity of purpose and meaningful work that is co-created, but that there is extreme value in this framework.

Summary of Belief in the System

Developing an understanding for *belief in the system* is a vital function for connecting how HFH chooses to organize and the cultural assumptions that are associated. The ways in which individuals begin to place their trust in the values and beliefs of HFH are a testament to how HFH organizationally co-creates a culture. Therefore, it is through communication that transformation as collective, not individualistic, expectancy for growth, and meaningful work are

braided together to facilitate shared leadership within an organizational space. The motivation behind transformation being about collectivism comes from the space that individuals are empowered to have a voice and feel represented. Secondly, expectancy for growth is imperative to *belief in the system* because it provokes the idea that HFH is a learning environment that encourages the ability to create a stronger foundation. Finally, meaningful work articulates *belief in the system* because it signifies the heart of the organization that meaningful work is valued and prioritized within this organization.

How do you go on Together?

In order to understand leadership as it emerged at HFH, the first two themes set the stage for the basic organizing practices to sustain HFH *and* established the meaning and beliefs that motivate the actors to continue acting. The third and final theme that will be discussed in this findings section focuses on how to go on and lead? To “go” on involves the participants knowing their lines and the meanings their lines and actions will convey. Stepping on stage over and over performs these meanings and actions for others as well who may decide they too would like to join and perform. In other words, going on as an individual in this organization involves identification with the larger belief system, but requires other people to *inter-act* and perform. This metaphor demonstrates a collective form of agency that emerged in the data. This is where affiliates of HFH move from just believing in the system to actually identifying with the system and co-leading the organization through transformation. The two central categories to “going on” involve *creating a baseline of equity* and *collective agency and sharing the stage*. These two aspects provide insight towards how individuals share the lead roles on stage at different times in pursuit of a purpose with which they identify.

Creating a Baseline of Equity

At HFH there is a consciousness that in order to go on, every human being regardless of race, gender, social class or socioeconomic status deserves an equal role in society, free from prejudice. As one participant notes, “everybody’s born naked and afraid. Just do the stuff. But then when you start to realize the benefits and privileges that you get as a male, and as particularly, a white male. Surreal. It’s humbling. It’s humbling and it’s eye-opener.” In this example, rather than not recognizing white and male privilege, in order to “go on” he chooses to be aware of the privilege he has by being a white male and this awareness highlights it is his job as an individual to not take his privilege for granted, but rather humble himself and create a place of equity. This awareness acts as the first mechanism to foster collective agency.

As another participant notes, “just working in a place that is passionate about home rights, living rights for people, has just made me think about it even more so and becoming more aware of my own privilege even though I’m at a spot in my life where it’s like I don’t think I would ever be able to afford a home in Portland either even coming from a place of privilege.” This highlights that the awareness comes from working with others passionate about living rights for others. During this statement, this individual acknowledges his privilege and notes that the housing crisis is a human problem that affects everyone. Embedded in both of these statements is the norm that acknowledging privilege works to then create a sense of urgency for everyone to participate in creating a solution to a human problem.

Acknowledging privilege acts as a means to create a baseline of trust and equity in everyone collaboratively “going on” to work toward a solution to the housing crisis. For community members, HFH as an organization, is an organization to trust because of the trust that HFH has placed in the community and in return received from the community. Trust is an aspect to relationships that provides respect, therefore, the involvement that HFH has within the

community helps to foster this sense of collective identification. It was stated that, “. . . the fact that we’ve been here for 30 years or something and been in the same office, people know us. I think they/we trust in them and they have trust in us in this neighborhood. Half of the families we built for initially were in this neighborhood. And they still walk to the office and say hi.” This deep understanding of trust is the foundation of creating a place of equity. Those who have been helped through HFH do not feel as though they owe anything, or are less than anyone because they received help, but rather that they are a community that sticks together. In return, HFH chooses to treat their home receivers with respect, trusting that they are continuing to feed into their local community as well. This is a way that both HFH and home receivers identify with the greater work of HFH, that all people are deserving of affordable housing.

Acknowledgement of privilege creates a baseline of equity through trust that everyone is working together toward a human problem. However, this baseline of equity also emerges in micro-moments when members acknowledge the expertise of another regardless of organizational position. For example, during an HFH board meeting with nearly 20 people, all of different organizational roles, there was a conversation that turned to an unexpected topic. Someone in the room brought up a surprising topic and the CEO began to respond, but then he stopped himself. He paused and said, “Nancy has a better understanding of this information, so I am going to let her speak about it. Would that be okay with you?” Participants in the organization do not lead individually but share equity in organizing by co-creating a collective agency. Acknowledging a lack of expertise in this situation is similar to acknowledging privilege because it creates a collective and equity agency with the entire group. By stating that he did not have all the information on a point of discussion, could arguably appear to be embarrassing if the CEO is expected, due to hierarchical position, to have all of the answers and lead the discussion.

However, due to the belief system in the organization, he chose to acknowledge his lack of expertise and engage someone else who would be better at leading in that moment. In this example, the CEO's invitation to another to lead creates a space for equity and facilitates shared or collective leadership by asking the assistant to speak on the subject as she was more competent. Moreover, by the assistant agreeing, the CEO places his trust in her that she will deliver the information correctly and competently. This interaction exemplifies how organizational participants "go on" collectively as they perform a mutual understanding of trust and illustrates that leading is *not* an individual act, but a collective one at HFH.

Collective Agency and Sharing the Stage

Collective agency emerged at HFH in several interactions as the ability to facilitate shared understanding and shared leadership on a micro-level between two or more people. In this regard, it was found in this data that HFH members engaged shared or collective leadership through several communication strategies such as question asking, inviting perspectives, and referencing history.

To begin, the use of question asking was a large contributor to understanding how individuals created collective agency. In one example of a meeting where the focus was intentional collaboration around a specific issue. The group fell silent for a few minutes without awkwardness. After letting the silence sit, an individual used silence as an opportunity to ask, "Well, SM, I would like to know what your opinion is?" In this moment, silence became an opportunity to ask a question and include a different perspective. By seeking a different perspective, this is an open invitation to others to "go on" together and co-create next steps. Rather than individuals taking the initiative by taking over a conversation, participants at HFH

have a pattern of sharing the stage in order to accomplish a goal and develop a collective path forward.

Other examples include restore managers from different locations asking questions and encouraging members to bounce ideas off of one another in order to generate the ‘best restore product they can’ for all locations. This is a move away from restores competing with one another, to collectively engaging perspectives through questions in order to facilitate collective and shared agency. Participants did this again and again. When one assistant spoke up during a meeting and asked if they could create discussion around a certain topic to the manager facilitating the meeting, the manager responded, “Thank you Lanie for always keeping my head on straight for me and making sure that all things run smoothly!” During other meetings when participants disagreed on an issue, managers and others asked questions and chose to listen so that everyone was respectfully heard. This style of disagreement problem solving was led by the managerial individual, as she provided a space for exploration for individuals to push back. In return, they felt like it was not only allowed to push back, but also valued. This kind open understanding generated an honest and receptive space of communication amongst employees. Curiosity was something that helped this team to consider all options and in the end make a more thoughtful decision as a group. This allegiance to curiosity, even during a testing time is what stimulates a shared leadership identification amongst one another.

Through asking questions and inviting perspectives the norm for how to interact at HFH is to share the stage and collectively lead. It is through communication actions like asking questions or inviting perspectives that leadership happens between people. For example, inviting perspective or voice is another micro-interaction practice that facilitates or initiates shared leadership. These examples particularly came from interactions where individuals were invited

into the HFH environment with gratitude and purpose. Therefore, the first example was in reference to an interview that I had with an individual that transferred from a smaller nonprofit organization to HFH which is on a much larger scale. He stated outright, “You always have a seat at the table.” For this individual they feel as though they are heard and valued regardless of title. They are continuously invited into conversations, tasks, projects and more. In return, the consistency of invitation is a component to HFH that begins to foster shared agency. By this man stating that there is “always” a seat, he is reinforcing the idea that he believes that he belongs and is welcome to offer a perspective at this table.

The next two examples that discuss an invitation of perspective occur through pictures, phrases, and words in several spaces that invite people to share the stage and identify with belonging and sharing purpose. On all of these materials, HFH had various individuals, stories, experiences and backgrounds represented in one area. These documents included representation of different races, marriages, socioeconomic statuses, family circumstances and more. these documents are located directly in the front entryway. Placing this set up here shares a message with visiting community members that there is an open invitation for all people to join them at HFH. This invitation gives permission for people to experience a sense of belonging and shared agency because they are not being turned away but accepted in and is a message that continues to consistently emerge in other micro practices in the organization.

Moreover, the same call for equitable and shared agency was noted during the home giving ceremony and the acknowledgements of the efforts that were put towards the project by all members, volunteers, and community members. It was noted that the completion of homes for this community resulted in 60 individuals receiving a safe, affordable, and energy efficient home. Through acknowledging privilege, question asking, and invitation to equitable and shared

leading collective agency emerges and a form of identification occurs because everyone sees themselves sharing in the symbolic artifact and outcome of bringing a home to people.

The final component for understanding collective agency is rooted in referencing history. As noted earlier, HFH is an international organization that has been sharing their mission of “Seeking to put God’s love into action, HFH brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.” More specifically, the HFH location in the PNW has been partnering with their community since 1981 to develop a space where everyone has a decent place to live. With this begin said, HFH has historical roots within their community that provide them with the opportunity to develop a trusted presence and an organizational culture with their members and with the community. Therefore, as it has been stated before, the location of HFH headquarters in this community is a large factor in the historical roots that have been planted for this organization. It was noted that, “HFH headquarters on K street has a very grass roots feel. Having our offices located in the C neighborhood allows us to be a central meeting place for the families that we serve.” Being that HFH has been in this community since 1981, they have experienced life with these families. They have experienced the highs and the lows, watching kids grow up and graduate as an HFH kid and the economic crash of 2008. During an observation, I overheard a community member that came into an HFH location and knew all of the HFH volunteers and employees by name, and in return, they knew hers. This personal and intentional relationship that was co-created by both parties helps to grasp how being physically present can help to foster a stronger culture. Participants do not simply engage for a short time; they engage and share the stage for the long-term. HFH is more than just an organization that takes up space in their neighborhood, but rather an active member of their community culture. As much as the community members identify with HFH, HFH identifies with their community. It

is through this historical reference that HFH has co-created, that they are as impactful as they are. The stage has historically been set, and now members can trust that HFH will continue to “go on” serving their community and addressing a human need for the long term. Moreover, as stated above, it is recognized by employees, volunteers, and community members that HFH still holds fast to their roots of Christianity without the pressure to convert to this particular faith in order to receive help or partnership. It was stated, “. . . I appreciate the roots in an active Christian and social justice perspective – not one based on dogmatic or intolerance which too often seems to characterize what Christians are seen as today.” These Christian roots that are being referenced as historical context include beliefs such as helping your neighbor, loving your neighbor, and welcoming your neighbor. In return, the organizational values, which are ‘diversity and inclusiveness, homeownership, partnership, volunteerism, stewardship and collaboration are those that replicate those three aspects.’

Furthermore, referencing history facilitates shared leadership through stories coming full circle. During one of the interviews, it came apparent that an HFH employee had once experienced what it was like to experience the desperate need for a safe, decent and affordable home. She stated, “. . . my own experiences growing up in subsidized, section eight housing as a child.” In this individual, it was her personal roots that provided her the desire and opportunity to find purpose in helping others that are currently living in a world she once knew. What she experienced shaped what she believes and by working for HFH, she was able to weave together her personal identity with that of the organization. Her experience as a form of referenced history emerged as a mechanism to participate as a co-leader in pursuing the mission to help others. She had lived expertise and therefore understands both why to help and how. This particular woman

has a perspective and understanding that many of her employees do not have and is something that she shares and uses to co-create a stronger organization for their community.

Referencing personal history and organizational history are communication actions that help to co-craft an identity that is shared and generationally impactful. It was stated that, “An [HFH] home can help children grow up in an environment that fosters the feeling of security and their success rate in graduating high school and/or college is far better than what would have been had their family not been in the HFH family.” This reference argues that the individual, child or family who joins the HFH family is impacted on a much deeper level than just immediate needs. Rather, they experience this life change for years and, as the data above demonstrates, they continue to co-participate in the organization as equal voices, with a seat at the table, and a history of expertise to contribute to continuing in the collaborative practice of transforming communities. Each example, whether it’s through an inviting perspective or referencing history, demonstrates the micro moments that exemplify shared leadership as having a collective momentum. The consistency of these micro moments occur when others are invited to participate one after another, and when they do participate, they add a plural voice and a collective momentum to pursuing the HFH vision of equitable housing.

Summary of how you go on together

In order to “go on” at HFH, all members of the organization share the stage creating a collective agency or shared form of leadership. Leadership emerges between participants through several communication practices. As participants acknowledge privilege, they work to engage equally with all participants. As participants question and invite perspectives, they continue to engage plural views and support that they trust one another as co-leaders. Finally, as participants reference history (personal and organizational) they establish and re-establish expertise that has

long had a seat at the table, belongs, and continues to work with others toward an important goal: housing for all.

In order to go on, there needs to be a dependency of *belief in the system*, which was exemplified through creating a baseline of equity and collective agency. Creating a baseline of equity consisted of self-reflection of privilege and trust. Furthermore, this particular data set, helped to negotiate the importance shared leadership has on both individuals and communities. When individuals are given the opportunity to participate in these micro moments and accept the invitation, they add a plural voice in addition to a collective momentum to the HFH vision of equitable housing. This behavior was explained through the use of question asking, invitation of involvement and referencing history to foster collective agency. Going on therefore, looks like weaving together personal beliefs with those of HFH and co-creating a cultured identity.

Findings Summary

In conclusion for the findings of this study, it is vital to gather together the general purpose of how HFH as an organization co-creates a space of shared leadership that is intentional from the ground up. The three main themes that were discussed throughout this section were *setting the stage*, *belief in the system*, and *how do you go on together?* Each theme provided insight into how HFH is an organization that welcomes and creates a company culture of inclusion, collectiveness, and community partnering. Theme one of *setting the stage*, acts as the foundation of how HFH communicates order and organizing across their stores, locations, offices and more. The second theme that was discussed was *belief in the system*. *Belief in the system* at its core shared how participants trusted the foundational elements of order and organizing that HFH had co-created and chose to move into a collective understanding, where transformation occurred, and meaningful work was established within the organization. Theme two can best be

understood by the quote, “We partner with families, they’re full partners in this as well.” This is the idea that HFH cannot exist as an organization without communication and collaboration amongst their people. They ‘don’t just build things, but they empower their community to make homeownership possible and expand the mission outside of themselves.’ The final theme of *how you go on together* illustrated the idea that HFH has the potential to flourish as another community member when a shared understanding of equity is established, and collective agency is represented. HFH is in the business of co-creating and sharing what is referred to as, “Theology of the Hammer,” a family that strives for everyone to experience having a decent place to live, while stewarding their local community. The metaphor of the hammer in this context is one that emphasizes the impact a *collective* can have when individuals have similar and deeply held cultural assumptions (organizational, not theological in this study). In particular, this metaphor captures the idea that when people identify with the deeply held assumptions of the organization it is like a theology. Through these micro moments of inviting plural perspectives, a collective agency develops that has an impact like that of a hammer; this is shared leadership.

Discussion

Leadership is a concept that garners a lot of attention in both academic and popular press literature. This concept presents an opportunity to influence or impact others in an organization, hence researchers want to identify what aspects enable this ability to impact others and how participants cultivate these aspects in order to drive or guide people toward a successful outcome (Keyton & Smith, 2009; Keyton et al., 2010; Mumby, 2019; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). This research project also entered the scholastic conversation concerning leadership with the intent to understand leadership as a communication process, and more

importantly as a shared or emergent process that influences others to organize toward an envisioned future. In particular, this research project aimed to understand leadership as “leadering.” (Kerssen-Griep, personal communication, March 2019). “Leadering” communication can be practiced in situations, circumstances, relationships, and organizations of all contexts. However, studying leadership as a dynamic and influential process of “leadering” at a nonprofit organization presented a fundamental difficulty: what is the difference between the communication processes that organize and create order with others and the communication processes that influence or lead others? In other words, if communication practices influence others to organize routinely, where does routine organizational communication start and leadership communication begin? Differentiating this moment with empirical examples felt crucial for understanding leadership and “leadering” more deeply and presented a challenge that motivated the development of three research questions. The following three research questions aimed to investigate and differentiate those communication processes that constitute organizing from other communication processes that lead:

RQ1: What aspects of communication influence groups to organize collectively?

RQ2: What meanings do participants construct for communication practices that influence collective organizing?

RQ3: How do participants create communication practices that facilitate shared leadership?

The goal in asking these three research questions was to explore where symbolic communication processes constitute organizing and where communication processes constitute leadership. In the end, this project demonstrated the relationship and interdependent nature of these processes.

This study found three main themes that highlight the understanding of the research questions stated above. These themes include *setting the stage*, *belief in the system*, and *how to go on together*. As explained in further detail above, *setting the stage* highlights how communication creates the routines and foundation for order and organizing within HFH; communication sets the stage for “leadering.” *Belief in the system* findings developed how communication practices construct deeply held cultural assumptions. For HFH communication practices that reconstructed cultural meanings of inclusion and respect for plural perspectives, also constituted a collective trust between members. These cultural assumptions were *transformation in collectiveness (not the individual)*, *expectancy for growth*, and *meaningful work*. The cultural assumptions that value people as agents whose experiences matter and contribute to the overall mission of the organization fostered an identification between members that they were collectively part of something important. This identification also fostered a collective trust that everyone’s experiences provided important and valued knowledge.

In order to understand leadership, the first two themes found that organizational members construct deeply held, basic assumptions about people, knowledge, ethics, and purpose and they perpetuate these assumptions in their normal, daily routines. These are not new findings overall, but necessary to unpack first before understanding how HFH extends knowledge about leadership. Specifically, the third theme, *how to go on together* illustrates that leadership is a perspective that includes socially constructed assumptions that comprise an organization’s cultural perspective including how an organization values others perspectives and their capabilities. Based on the analysis of data and findings for all three research questions, I argue that leadership is a problematic word because *leader* is a noun that assumes a person and *ship* denotes a position thus *leadership* denotes a person in a position that directs or influences others.

The word itself assumes an individual in a position will exert influence through several different behaviors (directive, facilitative). This word shifts researcher's and practitioner's gaze toward understanding people and how they behave from a particular position. In *how to go on together*, the findings demonstrated that leading or "leadering" emerged at HFH through various communication practices by various people in different hierarchical positions in different contexts that required different expertise. In other words, in order for people to guide the direction of work toward a particular outcome, HFH demonstrated that people co-lead *because* of their identification with cultural assumptions. Leadership is not a person or a position, it is a cultural perspective that emerges in different "leadering" *interactions* that symbolize a trust in the agency of others. At HFH, "leadering" is the act of inviting others to engage, another taking up this invitation, and collectively pursuing a goal together. What makes leading different from organizing is simply the *inter-act* between invite and accept, or initiate and agree, which then leads or progresses to collectively "sharing the stage" and "going on together" toward the goal and this occurs over time and space. At HFH these interactions take place because there are cultural assumptions however, that members identify with and because other routine practices support and set the stage for this to happen.

This is the argument that I unpack below including how this argument is theoretically significant, heuristically significant, and practically significant. Guided by the research questions that aimed to investigate the difference between communication that organizes and communication that leads, the focus of the findings was nuanced and there were overlaps in the findings which I would argue demonstrates that leadership is an organizing process that emerges regularly. I would argue that the difficulty in de-coupling leadership from other communication practices occurs because, as this study found, leadership communication is an ongoing, regular,

daily interaction. The addition that I make is that researchers and practitioners interested in leadership need to shift the focus. Instead of working to understand, capture, and cultivate leadership skills sets and harness influence as separate from communication, the findings suggest that the focus should be upon how to cultivate organizing processes that are inclusive and incorporate plural expertise and perspectives daily. “Leadering” involves micro-communication patterns that invite others to become the focused voice, when others yield to this voice then everyone *shares* the labor of organizing and working toward a goal.

Theoretical Significance

The vast amount of literature on leadership would indicate that the concept has been fully developed and would not require additional research. Yet, research continues to be done to create new knowledge about leadership. As noted earlier in the literature review, two broad categories of research focus on leadership from two different approaches: prescriptive approaches and descriptive approaches. As a review, prescriptive leadership research comes from the perspective that a leader is an individual in a position to behave with a set of skills that influences others to follow in order to be successful in reaching a goal (Cain, 1997; Gabris & Ihrke 2007; Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006). Researchers aim to discover and prescribe the most effective skills for people and organizations who wish to cultivate better leadership practices and successful outcomes (Cain, 1997).

On the other hand, descriptive approaches assume leadership is a dynamic communication process that is meaningful and influential (Barge, 1994; Deetz et al., 2000). From descriptive approaches, how leadership looks depends on the people present. Hence, researchers aim to describe qualitatively what leadership means in different organizational cultures and how leadership practices emerge in different contexts (Deetz et al., 2000). While

these two very large categories of leadership research tend toward prescriptive or descriptive views on leadership, there is a common assumption from both paradigms that leadership influences others to coordinate their interactions toward some collective goal. This project began with the same intent: to extend or deepen knowledge around leadership as a communication process by observing how this process emerged within a nonprofit organization going through an organizational change. This project aims to extend the understanding of leadership as a concept and a process of influence from the descriptive approach.

Embedded in the study on leadership from the descriptive and communication perspective, there is a focus on leadership as a dynamic communication process that involves how a leader might understand the cultural meanings for organizational members and then frame messages in ways that best facilitate coordination of others (Mumby 2019; Schnurr & Chan, 2011). Underlying this argument is a tension between agency and control. For example, when leaders (as a person) frame a message drawing consciously on the cultural assumptions meaningful for a group, members may yield some of their agency to work with others toward a goal (Mumby, 2013). At the same time that people yield some personal agency they grant others control of the direction of work and possibly the manner of work (Deetz et al., 2000; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Within this particular conceptualization of leadership, there is a transaction of agency. Agency here is conceptualized as power, but power does not mean hierarchical or positional power. Power is understood as agency or the capacity to act (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, according to Mumby (2013) and others (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007) when power, as personal agency, is yielded leadership emerges. However, this study challenges the idea that there is a transaction of agency between leader and follower. Rather, this study offers a different perspective and demonstrates how “leadering” is a negotiation of

collective agency. Rather than assume that leadership requires someone to yield agency, this study demonstrates moments where people decide to invite another voice, people choose to listen to this voice as the focus, and then people interact to initiate collective agency and the co-development of leadership as collective momentum toward a future vision.

For example, going back to the example when the CEO invited his admin, Nancy to lead within a meeting. Once SM decided to initiate the topic of conversation towards Nancy, he communicated in a manner that shifts the focus to Nancy's voice, he does not yield agency. Rather, SM agentically decides to engage Nancy. Collective agency emerges as the group at HFH co-develops the capacity to act *with* other members in order to *act for* others in a mission to create equitable housing and solve a social problem of houselessness.

In addition, at HFH there is more to understanding how the communication process co-creates leadership. Within the data set it was noted that routines, rhythmic norms, and boundaries are key aspects to co-create a space of order within an organization. Anchored rhythms and boundaries consistently and systematically set the stage for collective leadership to emerge. Anchored rhythms, as noted in the findings are spaces where HFH participated in gatekeeping and unspoken and spoken agendas or scripts, which created norms and expectations and directed the flow of action. These two categories are useful to creating significance because they are rhythmic behaviors that can occur within any given context within the organization and are constantly being co-produced by those involved in the organization. Furthermore, this helps to facilitate leadership because individuals are able to rely on these patterned aspects when organizing. Similar to anchored rhythms, nonverbal and verbal communicative practices provide a reference for when organizational boundaries begin so that participants understand when to engage as participants with the patterns that are consistent and rhythmically a part of HFH. In

other words, when participants interpret an HFH sign, they begin to organize with others as part of HFH using the anchoring communication norms and routines. This may take place in a community context or in the office.

The second meaningful insight from this data set that extends the conversation around leadership in organizations comes from the descriptive perspective that leadership influences the co-creation of symbolic meaning. This statement suggests that leadership is not only a dynamic communication process, but it is a process that is influential in the production of meaningful experiences. Previous literature argues that leadership can best be understood as influence (Castro & Holvino, 2016), however, this data set would like to extend that conversation by agreeing and differentiating. The findings above suggests that leadership must be co-created to be influential. For example, there was a piece of data where an individual wrote a statement of encouragement on the wooden frame of a home. If another individual were to have followed suit and wrote another message on the wooden frame of the home, this action would have been influence, not leadership because the influence would have been one-to-one and tied to the specific context. In order for influence to become “leadering” there needs to be a collective agency and movement toward a vision over time and space. For example, if writing messages on all of the frames of all homes became a patterned and collective practice, then the invitation to use one’s voice to offer a message to the homeowner, the act of doing it regularly, and collective practice in doing this, then “leadering” would emerge in each context when this set of patterns occurs.

In essence, the differentiation I argue occurs when “leadering” emerges at micro-levels as individuals commit to collective agency for community growth and meaningful work. This could be created through sharing and inviting others to experience the power of writing an encouraging

message on the wooden frame of someone's home. This is an important distinction to capture because it highlights how "leadering" has a greater capacity for commitment to collective agency for growth and meaningful work than simply influencing. Furthermore, this particular significance towards growth and meaningful work is rooted in the context of HFH. HFH is a nonprofit organization that exists to give back, more specifically give back to their local community. Therefore, a large majority of individuals that were interviewed for this particular data set identified with the idea that organizing at HFH means organizing at a space where their work is valued and meaningful. Interview after interview, individuals stated how they were passionate about participating as an employee at HFH because they were passionate about giving back and helping their community. In such a way, their work is for something greater than themselves. These individuals are committed to this collective agency because they are part of a unique sector, where the goal is not to raise the most money for the benefit of the organization, but rather for the benefit for their community. These individuals are co-creating their commitment not just to be influential to those around them, but to see a mission through in the unique contexts of a nonprofit space.

The final useful idea that came from this data collection that enhances previous research is in relation to the co-creation of organizational culture. Researchers interested in leadership from a descriptive perspective argue the necessity of understanding the meanings or deeply held assumptions participants create that motivate how and why they work as they do (Deetz et al., 2000; Keyton, 2017). Yet, these researchers note that culture is not singular; an organization does not *have* a culture. Rather, individuals tap into their previous interactions, historical references, stories, ideological assumptions and expectations that they have experienced throughout life to interpret the practices of others around them. Organizational members may

create shared interpretations and cultural beliefs with others in the organization called an integrated view of culture (Martin, 2003, as cited by Keyton, 2017). Organizational members may work in different groups or teams that co-create differentiated cultural beliefs and there will likely be contradictions and plural understandings of the organization based on individuals' experiences (Martin, 2003, as cited in Keyton, 2017). In other words, organizational culture will have aspects of shared cultural assumptions and plural or diversified cultural assumptions because the organization is composed of different people.

This is important for the findings from HFH because participants demonstrated that constructing an integrated assumption that all people and their experiences are valuable simultaneously created room for inclusion, diversity, and openness to the inevitability of different perspectives and expertise to contribute to how HFH organizes. For example, in the data set, there were plenty of spaces that involved individuals from a variety of backgrounds such as race, gender, occupation, and historical experiences. Throughout the data collection experience these individuals worked to share pieces of their own culture in order to co-create an integrated culture and celebrate these differences. In addition to this, I found that HFH specifically believed in the assumption that all people have important experience and capabilities therefore all people should participate equitably. Assumptions that embrace collective agency and equity, therefore, are what weaves together individual cultures to co-create an organizational culture through shared leadership.

This cultural perspective emerged from a conscious organizational mission and a team they had internally created called the D.E.I. (diversity, equity and inclusion) team. This team was created to include and emphasize the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as to highlight the strengths that this brings to shared "leadering." Members of HFH communication

practices such as acknowledgement of privilege, collaboration, and trust empowered and facilitate the *interactions* of “leadering.”

This data helps to extend the conversation around the fact that interactions, historical references, stories and ideological expectations and assumptions are foundational and can be strengthened through the focus of equity. Furthermore, this element of equity is essential in the context of HFH as a nonprofit because their heartbeat advocates for those that come from all stories and backgrounds. To their core, they value diversity and inclusiveness, HFH creates transformation with their community because they are willing to identify and implement that equity comes first.

Heuristic Significance

The second form of significance that will be discussed in this discussion section is heuristic significance. Heuristic significance highlights how this project prompts curiosity and transferability into future research projects in understanding around leadership. Heuristic significance also emphasizes how this concept could be applied to different contexts. Taking time to identify heuristic significance is valuable to this study because of the breadth that encompasses the concept leadership. As it was noted earlier, a vast overview of leadership could be understood as prescriptive and descriptive, however, there are hundreds if not thousands of ways to interpret the meaning of leadership (Pye, 2005). In addition, the concept is one that is understood through a contextual basis. For instance, in this study, leadership is conceptualized through a descriptive perspective that it is a dynamic communication process within a nonprofit organization. However, leadership could also very well be understood as a process that alone comes from negotiation of power. Leadership is a robust concept because it is transferable to all people, in all spaces, experiences and contexts. Moreover, I found this research project to be

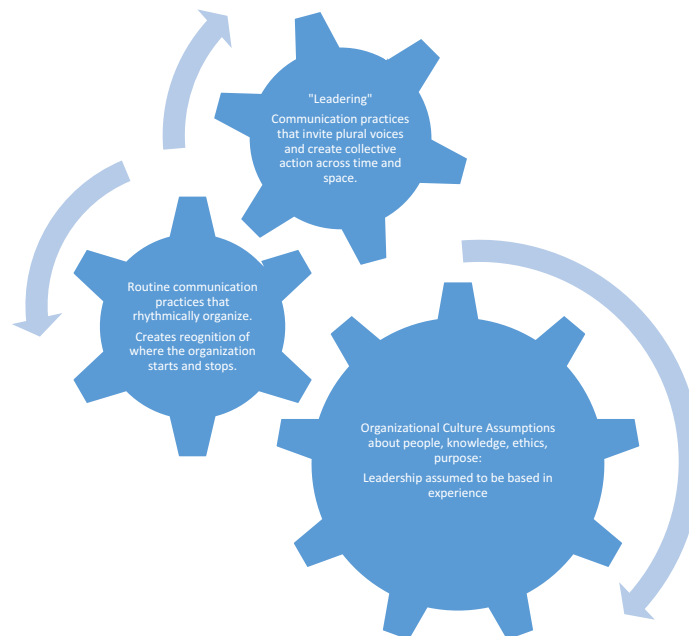
valuable to the curiosity of others because when leadership is interpreted through the lens of a co-created process of “leadering,” the transferability is endless.

The transferability is helpful to understand because this particular study analyzed how the co-established action of leading exists in a place that was nonprofit. However, this nonprofit works specifically with and for the local community. Working for the betterment of the local community is how the majority of nonprofits operate, however values, mission, and purpose of each nonprofit differ. In this case, this style of research could be transferred into other nonprofits to see how nonprofits organize differently or similarly. In addition, because of the relevancy of leadership amongst organizations, this could also be transferred into understanding how “leadering” exists within a for-profit organization. This could be impactful to the current body of knowledge because it would allow a different group of individuals and organizations to be represented in this idea of “leadering.” An altered context could provide new insight to this idea that may not have been likely to be discovered before. Furthermore, this form of research also has the ability to reach various forms of non-organized engagements such as relationships, family dynamics, community groups and more. In all spaces of interaction, there is a dynamic communication process that occurs. It is how individuals on a micro-level chose to co-create their space that develop insightful information about the action of “leadering” that could create collective patterned interaction across time and space in a family, community, or for-profit.

Practical Significance

The final form of significance that is crucial to discuss is the practical significance. Practical significance identifies how this study in particular has transformed the reader’s understanding of this research problem forward from where the literature review ended. In addition, practical significance argues why this study was impactful and helpful to HFH as the

organizational site. Therefore, the theoretically informed, helpful insights that emerged from this data set agreed with previous literature and lengthened the conversation by adding new ideas. In the findings of this research project, it was noted that there were three main themes, *setting the stage*, *belief in the system* and *how to go on together*. In each of these three themes, there were insightful aspects that could be used as guidance for what else is included in “leadering.” As explained earlier, the three themes acknowledged were themes that had been included before, however it was the depth that the categories brought to the theme that applied a new way of thinking. For instance, before this project, these three themes were grounded on more of a building block system, where *setting the stage* helped to build *belief in the system* and *belief in the system* ultimately helped to move things forward as a culture, but it stopped there. Through this data set, it suggested that it works more as a cycle, as one thing sets another in motion as a continuing cycle of collective organizing. For example,



As the model demonstrates, rhythms such as gatekeeping, expectancy for growth, and creating a baseline of equity that set one thing to another in motion. Considering these processes alone

could help facilitate the development of patterned and rhythmic communication practices that set-in motion “leadering” interactions that motivate collective agency across time and space. Organizations might also develop teams to help unpack, understand, and cultivate organizational cultural practices that embrace the benefit of plural voices as a reality in order to then engage these voices in collective agency and “leadering” interactions.

Furthermore, this study offers insights for HFH as an organization because it provides reassurance, awareness and opportunity for growth. When I first decided to participate at HFH, I was surprised to figure out that they were jump starting a part of their organization where they focused on diversity, inclusion and equity (D.E.I). This was first initiated by a companywide training that emphasized on acts of D.E.I. In order for this to be possible, they chose to shut down all facilities across their entire region and bring everyone under the same roof to learn, ask questions, expand their thinking and understand the desire for D.E.I. at HFH. This was a strong move to make, but one that was the beginning of a transformational process at HFH. By the time data was collected, HFH was nearing the final moments of the creation of a D.E.I. team, that acted as a checks and balances system for HFH. The emphasis on D.E.I. was a process that they wanted to continually encourage and implement in the daily tasks for employees and volunteers of HFH. This was an organization transformation for the long haul. That being said, an organization that was willing to participate in self-reflection in regard to inclusion in the workspace, already had a more well-rounded understanding of an alternative style of leadership than what could be expected of an established organization. Therefore, by allowing a researcher to enter into their organization, they were willing to expose themselves authentically and willing to receive insight on their behaviors.

This research was helpful in identifying reassurance because a lot of what HFH was already attempting was based on more traditionally descriptive understandings and explanations of leadership to begin with. This study reassures HFH that their way of organizing is focused on the community, rooted in their written values and mission, and not only respected, but reciprocated by their employees and volunteers. Being focused on the community was reassured through this data set because within the 18 interviews that were participated in, 17 of the interviewees discussed to some degree how the motivation behind what they do, comes from the desire to serve their local community. This is a substantial observation to note because it bolsters that HFH as an organization and the individuals that co-create this organization operate around the success of their mission of serving their local community. Secondly, this data set helped to bring awareness to HFH as an organization that participates in patterns of “leadering” because it emphasized taken-for-granted areas that HFH already operates from without realizing it. Although, these patterns and behaviors are helpful and effective, drawing them out for the organization could help by confirming that what they are doing works.

There are two distinct examples that come to mind when drawing awareness to this organization, location and matters of order. Location is impactful to HFH because they exist within a neighborhood that through years of historical context and relationship building is dependent on them. Therefore, when the location of their main office or restores was brought up in conversation or through observation, some individuals thought twice, while some did not. Some participants stated that their buildings were there just because that is where they were built, while others grasped that their buildings were located in the middle of their commitment to serve. Thus, my drawing a greater awareness of the impact that location can have on an organization’s way of shared leadership, will encourage individuals to be reminded of their

mission. Their location is a constant reminder and developmental piece to the people they serve and their equity-based guidelines.

The second example that comes to mind is through the platform of order at HFH. The ways in which HFH sets their stage is through habits and patterns that are generally unspoken. Although these patterns are effective without being noticed, it is important to take the time to understand them and consider them. For example, processes such as gatekeeping and creating organizational boundaries are practices that are consistent throughout the organization, but never spoken about outwardly. By co-creating an awareness or spoken expectation for both gatekeeping and organizational boundaries, HFH could establish that these practices are not just something that happens but are elements that are woven into their way of organizing. Taking away the element of assumption on behalf of their employees or volunteers would provide them with a more concrete way of establishing this rhythm as effective. By establishing this, positive behaviors and practices that they were participating in before, become an essential part of engaging with D.E.I. focuses and encourages their community both internally and externally.

The third way that this data set can provide insightful information to HFH is through the opportunity for growth. As noted earlier in findings, HFH is an organization that places emphasis on the expectation to grow both individually, professionally and organizationally. Therefore, by allowing a researcher to participate at HFH, they provided themselves with the opportunity to learn more about what they do from an outsider's perspective and to grow from that information. Being part of their organizational transformation towards D.E.I. provoked the opportunity to experience the learning curve and implementation of this team. Therefore, this data set provides ample opportunity to learn about the HFH employees and understand where they sit during the organizational transition. For example, considering diversity, equity and inclusion, comes with

self-reflection. However, during the interview process, there were only two to three individuals who directly acknowledged and discussed their own privilege in relation to D.E.I. This is valuable information because it is not saying that their employees are not considerate, but rather that considering privilege is not a common knowledge practice. Whereas, the purpose of D.E.I. is to acknowledge one's privilege and then to move forward by acknowledging and respecting others. By sharing this particular example, HFH has the opportunity to process this information to continue to grow as a collective unit and transform their organization through collectiveness. The practical significance that came from this data set included areas that provided organizational encouragement, highlighted awareness and accessibility for organizational growth.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study was strategically thought through there were four limitations that occurred through the process of this study. With each limitation presented, I gathered together suggestions for future research to be completed. The four limitations that were expressed throughout this study were the exclusion of a certain style of organization, timing of data collection, participant access, and interview processes.

The first limitation that will be discussed is that this data was collected solely at a nonprofit organization. Although the choice to conduct the research at a nonprofit organization was intentional and insightful, it also eliminates the for-profit organization population that this study could be applied to as well. As noted earlier, leadership is a topic that can be applied to a vast amount of different spaces, experiences and intentions. For future research, it would be interesting to apply this study to a for-profit business where the main mission is to capitalize on

profit. Moreover, it would be intriguing to compare and contrast the two studies and see how these differing organizations are both similar in their processes of organizing and different.

The second limitation that was highlighted through this study was the timing of data collection. The choice to collect the data was strategic because it allowed me to be involved during an organizational transformation. Giving enough time, it would have been interesting to continue to study this organization after the transformation and to observe how different areas of conscious focus by the D.E.I. team emerged (or not) as patterned.

The third limitation that was identified through this study was the access that I had to specific participants for the study. During this project, I was given permission to directly interact with employees of HFH through semi-structured interviews and those of whom they'd come in contact with through observations. Though these individuals were valued as participants, I found that access to more volunteers, children with the at-risk youth program and HFH homeowners would have been insightful participants to include in their data set. Thus, with the involvement of these three participant groups in the data set, this project could have had a well-rounded perspective of how HFH organizes and facilitates shared "leadering" within their local community.

The final limitation that was expressed through this study was the choice of interview processes. Going into the site, I was aware of the time and energy it would take for their participants to be involved in a research project. Therefore, early on in conversation with the gatekeeper for HFH, I made clear that they would provide the opportunity to contribute as a participant through both in person interviews as well as email interviews. The goal in providing an option was to promote the opportunity to interview more people that may have otherwise declined because interviewing in person was not convenient with their already busy schedules.

Additionally, by providing the option for emailed interviews, participants would have more time to think through their answers and contribute more honestly. After the data was collected there were a total of eighteen semi-structured interviews, ten of which were through email and eight of which were in person. Although this was purposeful and thought through, I felt as though they were not able to gain as detailed and significant insight with the email interviews as they did with the in-person interview. Therefore, if this study were to be completed again in a similar context, I suggest that all interviews be completed through in-person formats, without the option of email. Although this would be more time consuming and more difficult to navigate with working schedules, it would be more beneficial to the project later on. I argue that in-person interviews will provide more authentic, natural and rich data to interpret and experience.

Summary of Discussion

The ambition behind this project spurred from the curiosity that I have with leadership. Leadership, as a concept, is filtered through thousands of different perspectives that are important. However, I wondered why there were so many understandings and what was the difference between communication that organized and communication that leads. Thus, narrowing down the concept of leadership to a dynamic communication process that is constantly being co-created was a factor in this project that specified my perspective going into this site. Admittedly, this was a difficult project because it aimed to unpack nuances of communication practices that are intimately related. However, this study offers not only insights into communication practices that organize and communication practices that lead, but also how they are connected through organizational enculturation. Various practices of communication that influence groups to organize collectively and in this case included gatekeeping, creating organizational boundaries, and earning acceptance of spoken and unspoken agendas.

Furthermore, meaningful patterns such as collectivism, expectancy for growth and meaningful work are all constructs that participants shared in that influenced collective organizing. Finally, it was through the co- expectation for equity, desire for collective agency and sharing the stage that participants at HFH facilitated shared leadership. This study expanded the concept of leadership. Leadership is part of a cultural perspective that emerges in different “leadering” *interactions* that symbolize a trust in agency of others. At HFH, “leadering” is the act of inviting others to engage, another taking up this invitation, and together with others collectively pursuing a goal across space and time. What makes leading different from organizing is the *inter-act* between people which then leads to collectively “going on” toward the goal.

This topic and the discussion around leadership is something that is transferable and can provide insight to an array of different stakeholders that organize. While this is another addition to the vast leadership conversation, it is with great hopes that this study highlights how leadership and “leadering” together can work to create inclusive, diverse, and equitable organizations through communication practices that invite and engage others in meaningful ways.

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Appendix A

Name:

Position:

Company: Habitat for Humanity

Company Location: Portland, OR

Time at Company:

Time in Position:

1. Tell me about what jump started your journey to work for Habitat for Humanity?
2. How do you feel like Habitat for Humanity has either shaped or challenged your professional identity? Values and beliefs?
3. In what ways does Habitat for Humanity's physical location and setting shape or challenge your professional validity in the company?
4. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about working for Habitat?