

**LEARNING THROUGH FAILURE:
A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF LEADER BEHAVIOR**

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

In memory of Judith Edgar, 1946-2004.

*Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray,
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.
(Christina Rossetti, 1842)*

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“Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love” (Reinhold Niebuhr).

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God, you have given me so many gifts, although I'm not always grateful, I have tried to create something of value here. If even one person gathers wisdom in reading this, it is a masterpiece. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Due to the increased cost of employee turnover, learning from failure is becoming more important as organizations seek to differentiate among themselves in the economic marketplace. Leadership developers, consultants, executives, educators, trainers and coaches should be versed in the skills and behaviors necessary to address the development of learning from failure. Yet current literature does not clearly show the actual behaviors that leaders use to learn from failure in their organizational settings.

This study provides in-depth research into the behaviors of leaders through an examination of vignettes which detail the behaviors leaders use to learn from their own failures, behaviors they use to teach others to learn from failure and the organizational effects of that learning. The conceptual framework for this study is based on various levels of analysis with a qualitative inquiry using a phenomenological success case study approach.

Nine findings frame the results of the research. First, leaders learn from their own failures through the behaviors of reflection, internal locus of control, continual learning and using failure as opportunity. Leaders teach others in their organizations to learn from failure by acting with an internal locus of control, modeling behavior and institutionalizing learning practices. Positive organizational effects resulting from this learning include: increased profit and productivity, enhanced communication and improved organizational climate. Negative effects include: decreased profit, productivity, and communication, hindered organizational climate and in one case, death.

The recommendations for use of this research emerge from two areas. The first is areas for future research and the second is areas for practical application of these findings in the fields of leadership development, employee training, adult and child education, and consulting. Leadership research, both qualitative and quantitative, particularly in learning organizations, needs to be continued to expand the work that began in the early 1990's. The best methods of developing the leadership skills and behaviors of reflection, role modeling and learning needs further study. Consultants, coaches and educators need to add learning from failure to their methods, practices and curriculums, in order to develop this important skill in all learners.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

*“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time” (T.S. Eliot).*

Jim Burke, one-time CEO of Johnson & Johnson, told of his experience with a failure: “I once developed a new product that failed badly, and the owner of the company, General Johnson, called me in, and I was sure he was going to fire me. I had just come in late when his secretary called, and he was always in the office early. I remember walking to his office, and I was not that upset. I was kind of excited. Johnson said to me, “I understand you lost over a million dollars.” I can’t remember the exact amount. It seemed like a lot then. And I said, “Yes sir. That’s correct.” So he stood up and held out his hand. He said, “I just want to congratulate you. All business is making decisions. If you make that same decision wrong again, I’ll fire you. But I hope you’ll make a lot of others, and that you’ll understand there are going to be more failures than successes” (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997, p.78).

Failures in organizations can be costly learning opportunities, but most learning opportunities in life and business have a cost attached to them. Contrast the above experience of learning from failure with this story from an executive, Ann C.:

I worked in a retail company with several different locations. As chief financial officer, I began to dig deeper into financials that weren’t making sense. There was fraud going on in more than one area, embezzlement, check kiting. When I showed this to the owners, their response was, “Ann, you are wrong.” I tried to

fix it myself, by working seventy to eighty hours a week. But I couldn't fix it-it was a management failure; but it was also my failure in being unable to present the data in a way that they could see it. It was more than I could handle, so I quit, but not before my marriage was ruined. I paid for that failure in pain, money, and morale. It was the worst experience in my work life. I can be loyal, hardworking and ethical for a company, but if an employer is asking me to invest that much of myself and then doesn't believe in me, I have to question whether or not that is where I need to be. I asked them to hire a human resources officer, and eventually the embezzler was terminated, but it cost so much of me psychologically. I left the company soon after that (Personal interview, March, 2002).

In the first narrative, Burke's leader knew of his failure, but framed it as a learning experience, allowed Burke to recover, save face, learn and move forward. In Ann's case, her bosses put her in the corporate role of watchdog or Chief Financial Officer, then told her she was in the wrong for spotlighting illegal activities and in fact, did nothing to support her. Her concluding statement, "...if an employer was asking me to invest that much of myself and then didn't believe me, I had to question whether or not that was where I needed to be," demonstrates that personal learning had occurred for Ann, but at the negative cost of her marriage, self-esteem and career. Her organization failed to enhance or encourage her to learn from her experiences while working for them.

This research explored learning from failures and this first chapter is organized as follows: the statement of the problem and purpose of this study and its significance, a

definition of terms, and the study's limitations and assumptions. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Statement of the Problem

*"We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves
after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us..."
(Marcel Proust).*

Historically, humans have tried and failed continuously. Invention, creation and the scientific method were all built on the cornerstone of trial and error. Learning has been critical to organizational survival, effectiveness, adaptability and flexibility. Knowledge creation and organizational learning may be the only source of sustainable competitive advantage in the future (Day, 1994; deGeus, 2002; Garvin, 2000; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Senge, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1995). However, all too often in organizations, failures can cost a career, a promotion, reputation or a livelihood. Important data resulting from organizational failures tended to disappear when these same organizations attended solely to information from their successful endeavors. This means that data from failure experiences was harder to come by (and use for learning) because organizations publicized their successes and covered up their failures. Information about unsuccessful strategies was scarce when compared to success stories, which contributed to a variety of false beliefs about what comprised effective management and success (Denrell, 2003). But for innovation and creativity to occur, risk taking and failure still were essential. In interviews with thousands of leaders conducted by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner (2002), leaders related how important failures were to their successes. "Success does not breed success. It breeds failure. It is failure which breeds success" (Maidique, 1985, p. 300). Current literature on the topic of leadership,

creativity and innovation nearly always contained several pages on the value of learning from failures (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). One modern leadership theorist, Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, (2001) believed that leaders should not be measured by accomplishments, but by how they responded to failure and set-backs. He cited anthropologist Joseph Campbell who in 1949, studied folk-hero leaders across religions and myths, when he related that one of the passages of a folk hero's journey to leadership or greatness was a self-realization of their super talent, followed by a series of continual and profound setbacks that are met with resilience and eventual triumph. Learning from failure then, was, and continues to be, part of the learning necessary to become a leader.

Leadership may not be the single most important determinant of an organization's success, but Day and Lord (1988) cited that leadership explained up to forty-five percent of an organization's performance. They report that leaders often had indirect, long-term effects on an organization that occurred through a variety of internal or external social systems. Causality lay in a confluence of systems factors, not in the traits or behaviors of a single individual (Lord & Smith, 1999; Zaccaro & Klimoski, eds.; Lord 2001). A more critical force in organizational effectiveness was the leader's cognitive abilities "because executive leadership occurs in response to nonroutine and ill-defined events, involves the anticipation of environments many years in the future, and requires the construction of abstract systems that shape both internal and external processes" (Lord, 2001, p. 415). These cognitive abilities included, "interpreting and modeling environmental events for organizational members, determining the nature of problems to be solved, and engaging in long-term strategic thinking" (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001, p.10). All of these cognitive abilities were fundamental elements of learning. Yet leadership was and continues to be

one of the most observed and least understood phenomenon on earth (Burns, 1978). Bennis (1988), in his forward to *The Lessons of Experience* by McCall, Lombardo and Morrison reminded us that leadership is more art than science; superior leaders were made, not born and for the most part, self-made. Several thousand empirical studies have been conducted on leader traits, behaviors, power and situational variables as predictors of leadership effectiveness, but most of the results of this research were contradictory and inconclusive (Yukl, 1998; Fiedler, 1995; Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1999; Mathieu in Zaccaro & Klimoski (Eds.), 2001).

In a learning culture, the key priority was that individual, team and organizational learning was a necessary part of the work of the organization. (Tracy, Tannebaum & Kavanaugh, 1995; Wilson, McCauley, & Kelly-Radford, 1998; McCauley, 2001). Researchers who have undertaken the study of leaders who were effective learners (Bunker & Webb, 1992; Dechant, 1990; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Noer, 1996; McCall, 1997; Spreitzer, McCall & Mahoney, 1997; McCauley & Brutus, 1998), found several common behaviors that described these leader-learners:

- Learning orientation--these leaders saw life as a series of ongoing learning experiences.
- Proactive stance toward problems and opportunities--leaders with a bias toward action, initiative and self-direction.
- Critical reflection--leaders who critique their assumptions, premises and schemata (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).
- Openness--these leaders were open to their environment, opinions and criticism (McCauley, 2001).

“As research has shown, the recognition and acceptance of limitations, followed by an effort to redirect oneself, are characteristic of successful people in general” (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1988, p. 89). But specifically how do leaders learn from failures? How do they transmit this type of learning to their followers and their organizations? Does this learning have an effect on the organization? Despite the interest in both learning and leadership, researchers have said little about the specific role of leaders in implementing organizational learning in their organizations (Vera & Crossan, 2004).

Although there is an implicit assumption that strategic leaders are the guiding force behind organizational learning, researchers have not delineated the specific behaviors and mechanisms through which leaders impact learning. While large budgets are being expended on training, databases and new learning departments, CEO's and top executives lack guidance on how their actions facilitate or hinder learning (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 222).

Leadership and management are concepts used to describe the behaviors, attitudes and values of those we might readily follow. In research, the operational definition of leadership depends to a great extent on the purpose of the researcher (Campbell, 1977). Since this researcher's purpose was to understand what leaders did to learn from failure and why they were effective, a single definition may be too limiting. Broadly defined, leadership is the ability to marshal and use resources, usually for the purpose of completing a goal or objective (Moss Kanter, 1977). Specifically for this study, leadership is viewed broadly as a process of social influence and a specialized role (Yukl, 1998). Leadership is the process wherein an individual member of a group influences

events, the choice of strategies, relationships, skills and support to accomplish certain objectives (Yukl, 1998). It is the social process of influence and interaction that occurs between leaders and followers, which is two way and multi-useful. The outcomes of leadership are achievement of goals, commitment, cohesion, reinforcement or changing of organizational culture (Garvin, 2000).

The terms leader and manager were used interchangeably throughout this research study, although no one would proposed that leading and managing were equivalent activities, the degree of overlap has been a point of sharp disagreement (Yukl, 1998). “The essence of the argument seems to be that managers are oriented toward more stability and leaders are oriented toward innovation; managers get people to do things more efficiently, whereas leaders get people to agree about what things should be done” (Yukl, 1998, p. 4). However, both roles can and do perform the functions of efficient performance and a strategic focus. Managers can be leaders and leaders can be or may have been managers. Leadership writers Bass (1990), Hickman (1990), and Kotter (1988), see leading and managing as distinct processes, but do not view leaders and managers as distinctly different types of people. Making a sharp distinction between the titles of leader and manager, both so ubiquitously used to describe people and occupations, only further confounds the already broad process of influence.

But when marshalling influence and utilizing resources goes awry, how do leaders themselves learn from failures? How do leaders and managers help their followers learn when those in the organization fail? How do leaders create a culture of learning quickly from failures? Does this type of learning culture provide benefits or outcomes for the organization?

Failure is defined by human perception and perceptions are strongly influenced by social and cultural norms (Mezirow, 1991). Failure included triggers, surprises, errors and unmet expectations (Marsick & Watkins, 1990) as well as missteps, faulty judgment, faulty or missing information and lapses (Center for Creative Leadership, 1998). One example of the strength of an organization's cultural norms might be the unspoken organizational assumption that all failures were bad and will surely land the failure maker in 'corporate Siberia'. These perceptions about failure constrained organizational results, which then inhibited the organization's review of those results. This review of results was what comprises organizational meaning as certain cognitive constructs were used repetitively to solve organizational problems. Marsick and Watkins (1990) believed that organizational learning from failure usually occurred outside the training classroom and was termed incidental or informal learning. Informal and incidental learning was defined as:

- Based on experience
- Embedded in the context of the organization
- Oriented toward action
- Governed by non-routine conditions
- Concerned with making tacit meaning explicit
- Delimited by task, problem framing, individual work
- Enhanced by productivity, critical reflection and creativity (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

Informal and incidental learning was imperative for organizations because of the fast changing nature of the business environment, especially in the last twenty years.

Such velocity of conditions called for generative learning (Miner & Mezias, 1996). Today's employee, the knowledge worker, solves problems using the rational scientific method, which puzzle like and non-linear, is trial and error learning. Too frequently, failures and set backs, when not used for generative learning, become negative cultural artifacts of the organization, such as scapegoating, control games, avoidance of control, systematic patterns of deception, cover-up of intentions, and maintenance of taboos that keep issues undiscussable (Argyris, 1991).

Purpose of the Study

"I don't remember my successes. It is the failures that I learned from" (John McCoy).

Throughout history, organizations and individuals have been successful or destroyed as a result of their response to internal and external learning opportunities that we call failures. When profit and loss were at stake, organizational failures were often viewed with shame, embarrassment, ridicule or cover-ups. Since failures are a type of organizational skeleton in the closet, this study attempted to explore important leader behaviors associated with failure. Specifically, this study explored how leaders and managers learned from their own failures and how these leaders influenced others in the organization to learn from their failures. Finally, the study described the organizational effects of learning from failure.

The definition of 'failures' depends greatly on the context of the situation and the mental model of those involved in the failure event. Marsick and Watkins (1990) used the work of Dewey, Lewin and Argyris to define failures as triggers, surprises, errors and unmet expectations. The Center for Creative Leadership (1992) defined failures as

missteps, faulty judgment, faulty or missing information and lapses. Few of us enjoy failing; and for some, failure has been traumatic and life changing. Yet failures continue to be powerful tools for learning, change, and innovation. At the Center for Creative Leadership (1988), researchers found that leaders themselves cited failures among their most insightful experiences.

...Where executives said they gained insight into themselves and their strengths and weaknesses was not typically through counseling sessions. The lessons of humility were more often generated from their failures, confrontations with problem subordinates, traumatic events and career setbacks (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1988, p. 13).

The questions guiding this research study were:

- 1) How do leaders learn from their failures?
- 2) How do leaders transmit this learning to subordinates and peers within the leader's organization?
- 3) What is the impact on the organization of learning from failures?

To answer these questions, 50 individuals were selected from both profit and not-for-profit organizations located in the United States, with employee populations from 5 to 100,000 employees. Each of the individual subjects was nominated by others through word of mouth and their reputation as a leader/manager who learns from failures and encourages others to learn from failures. These learning leaders were nominated through the researcher's client contacts. Subjects were asked to relate success stories concerning their own learning from failures. The researcher used content analysis and a thematic

approach to analyze the data. Findings and conclusions as well as recommendations for leadership practice and development were then offered in the final chapters.

Significance of the Study

“Everyone wants to learn, but no one wants to be wrong” (Roger Schank).

When failure occurred and learning did not, organizations were doomed to repeat the failure until they learned or collapsed from lack of insight and understanding (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). This ability to learn became the organization’s competitive advantage in the global economy (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). “The capacity to mine ideas for improvement and innovation from each and every experience is a critical component of resource leverage” (p.165).

When organizations’ create their financial statements, failure can be characterized as several different terms: restructuring expense, lost clients, bad debt, discontinued operations. These terms are accounting euphemism for errors, bad judgment, uncollected accounts or failed attempts. In one company, this bad debt figure was estimated at approximately half of the organization’s profit figure. Since mid and top level employees who fail tended to leave organizations, either voluntarily or involuntarily, employee turnover is not even accounted for in profit and loss statements. In 1999, the consulting firm of Kepner-Tregoe studied the costs associated with losing just one employee and hiring a replacement at such firms as Corning, Hallmark Cards and Johnson and Johnson. Their examples included \$134,000 to exit and replace a human resources manager in the auto industry, \$103,000 for a machinist at a machine works company and \$132,000 for a information systems project leader (Kepner-Tregoe, 1999).

Failures cost plenty, but the more pervasive and wasteful cost to organizations has been the destruction of individual careers and aspirations when people and organizations cannot or will not learn from failures. The estimated cost of careers and dashed hopes has been more difficult to quantify and does not reside in any figures on a financial statement. When learning does not occur after failure, long-term recovery from the failure was more difficult and lengthy (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). This is true in human work, relationships and in individual lives. Some believe that failures are only clouds with silver linings. Failure teaches us what we value, who to trust, and the depth of our own character (Sonnenfeld, 2001). For some organizations, failure could be viewed as just another unfamiliar challenge along the journey of growth. But how important is failure in an organization's journey toward accomplishing its objectives?

The significance of failure is important and can be told through numbers, charts and financial statements, but the true importance is revealed when leaders relate their stories about failure, subsequent learning and organizational outcomes. However, there remains a difficult challenge for leaders who wish to transform their organizations into learning systems. These learning leaders must come to terms with their own lack of expertise and their inability to have ready answers for every organizational situation. The only way to build a culture that values learning from failures is for leaders themselves to realize that they do not know much and need to be constantly learning. In addition, leaders must teach others to accept that they do not know. This is a difficult realization for those in power positions and for those who follow them. Learning is a task in which all organizational members share the responsibility (Schein, 1992).

The discipline of working with mental models starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on learningful conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others (Senge, 1990, p.9).

The leader is that person most responsible for organizational learning (Senge, 1990) and a balance of success and failure experiences are necessary for learning to occur (Finklestein, 2001). In their research on learning from experience, McCall, Lombardo and Morrison (1988) reminded us that the impact of ‘on the job’ experience and its leadership development potential has been virtually unexplored. “Our knowledge of what experiences matter, why they matter and what people get out of them is skimpy at best” (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison. 1988, p. 2). Multiply this paucity of knowledge and understanding about developing leaders by the ten to twenty years it takes to develop a leader/manager (Kotter, 1982) and the organizational costs to develop leaders’ skyrocket.

Another reason to study learning from failure is the tendency of organizations to use only successful experiences for learning examples and to under utilize failure experiences (Denrell, 2003). Case studies, management books, and stories in the popular press are often based on successful firms and tend to ignore less successful companies even if information about them would be available (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Collins & Porras, 1994; Zook & Allen, 2001 in Denrell, 2003, p.229) “... Organizations promote high-performing managers while low-performing managers may have to leave. As a

result, the sample of managers within a firm includes few failures. Such undersampling of failure may give aspiring managers the impression that risky career strategies are optimal. After all, top managers will have had to be successful risk takers” (March, 1994 in Denrell, 2003, p.239). Of course, managers with the worst performance will also be risk takers, risk takers who did not succeed. However, if they leave the organization, or if they gradually fall into oblivion, the aspiring manager will only observe the successful risk takers (Denrell, 2003).

Sitkin (1992) listed the positive outcomes of learning from failure in organizations: variety, risk tolerance, information searching, problem recognition, deeper level of information processing, and the motivation to adapt. However, no empirical research exists to substantiate these positive outcomes. Since learning from failure is an integral part of organizational leadership and organizational learning (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Marsick and Watkins, 1990), examining leaders who fail, subsequently learn and teach their organizations to do likewise adds to the growing understanding of what comprises the success of the learning leader and the learning organization.

This study’s findings have implications for various functional areas within organizations, since all organizations are affected by the high costs of sourcing, hiring, retaining, training and terminating employees. The way employees are treated by an organization’s management is one reason they decide to stay or leave. The treatment of employees is just one facet of the organization’s culture; another facet is how the organization deals with success and failure incidents of its employees. Shaping both of these aspects of organizational culture rests with the organization’s leadership.

Definition of Terms

*“Good decisions come from wisdom, knowledge and experience.
Wisdom, knowledge and experience come from bad decisions”
(Unknown).*

The following terms are frequently found in the academic and popular literature on the topics of leadership, management, organizations, learning, failure and failures. The terms are listed here to provide readers with a proper context for how the terms were defined and used throughout this study.

Critical thinking: Behaviors that call into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways of thinking and acting and then thinking and acting differently on the basis of this questioning (Brookfield, 1987).

Double loop learning: Behaviors of identifying, questioning, and changing assumptions underlying the organization and patterns of interaction within it (Argyris, 1991). Double loop learning is that which occurs when espoused theory is examined against theory in use, in individuals or organizations.

External locus of control: External locus of control orientation is the belief that the outcomes of our actions are contingent upon events outside of our personal control (Zimbardo, 1985).

Failure: Want of success; lack of satisfactory performance or effect (Gove, P.B. (Ed.). 1993).

Incidental learning: Learning that occurs as the by-product of some other activity, such as work or personal interactions or trial and error experimentation. It is never planned or intentional (Marsick & Watkins, 1991).

Informal learning: Learning that is predominantly experiential, not classroom based and non-institutional. It is the learning that occurs through everyday planned and intentional activities and interactions (Marsick & Watkins, 1991).

Internal locus of control: Internal locus of control orientation is the belief that the outcomes of our actions are contingent upon what we do (Zimbardo, 1985).

Leadership/Management: In research, the operational definition of definition of leadership will depend to a great extent on the purpose of the researcher (Campbell, 1977). Since this researcher's purpose is to understand what leaders do to learn from failure and why they are effective, a single definition may be too limiting. In this study, leadership is viewed broadly as a process of social influence and a specialized role (Yukl, 1998). Leadership is the process wherein an individual member of a group influences events, the choice of strategies, relationships, skills and support to accomplish certain objectives (Yukl, 1998). It is the social process of influence and interaction that occurs between leaders and followers, which is two way and multi-useful. The outcomes of leadership are achievement of goals, commitment, cohesion, reinforcement or changing of organizational culture (Garvin, 2000).

The terms leader and manager will be used interchangeably throughout this research study, although no one would propose that leading and managing are equivalent activities, but the degree of overlap is a point of sharp disagreement (Yukl, 1998). "The essence of the argument seems to be that managers are oriented toward more stability and leaders are oriented toward innovation; managers get people to do things more efficiently, whereas leaders get people to agree about what things should be done" (Yukl, 1998, p. 4). However, both roles can and do perform the functions of efficient

performance and a strategic focus. Managers can be leaders and leaders can be or may have been managers. Leadership writers Bass (1990), Hickman (1990), and Kotter (1988), see leading and managing as distinct processes, but do not view leaders and managers as distinctly different types of people. The title, manager, has been so ubiquitously used to describe people and occupations that making much ado about the distinction between managers and leaders may only further confound the already broad process of influence.

Learning: Process of acquisition and extinction of modifications in existing knowledge, skills, habits or action tendencies in a motivated organism through experience, practice or exercise (Marquardt, 1996).

Learning organization: An organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring and retaining knowledge and at purposefully modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Failures: The definition of failures depends greatly on the context of the situation and the mental model of the persons involved in the failure event. Marsick and Watkins (1990) use the work of Dewey, Lewin and Argyris to define failures as triggers, surprises, errors and unmet expectations. The Center for Creative Leadership (1992) defines failures as missteps, faulty judgment, faulty or missing information and lapses.

Organizational learning: “When individuals inquire into a problematic situation on behalf of the organization....” (Argyris & Schon, 1996, p. 16) and “...retain, crystallize or embed new practices and understandings....” (Watkins, 1996, pg. 90), the organization learns. This learning is fueled....”by organization members’ intellectual capital, memories, experiences, knowledge, routines and competencies” (Gephart, Marsick, Van

Buren, & Spiro, 1996 in Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 42-43). Organizational learning is the changed organizational capacity for doing something new. An organization has learned when it:

- develops better systems for error detection and correction,
- uses failures as opportunities for learning and not blame,
- changes organizational memory, encoding and mental models,
- extracts knowledge latent in experience and translates that into products and services, and
- develops cultures of inquiry and generativity (Marsick & Watkins, 1997).

Organizational culture: Learned behaviors and assumptions characterizing the total way of life of members of an organization (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1999).

Resilience: The process of struggling with hardship by accumulating small successes, failures, setbacks and disappointments (Retrieved March 10, 2004, from <http://ProjectResilience.com>). Another definition is the ability to quickly recover from change or misfortune (Conner, 1995).

Role ambiguity: Lack of clarity about role expectations (House, Schuler & Levanoni, 1983).

Strategic learning: Failure in small doses, experienced through experimentation, which provides information about unknown processes and unforeseen events, resulting in a more adaptive orientation (Sitkin, 1992).

Trigger event: An unexpected happening that prompts a sense of inner discomfort, fear and perplexity (Brookfield, 1987).

Vicarious learning: Learning that occurs through observation of others (Marsick & Watkins, 1997).

Study Limitations and Assumptions

“Most lives include few pure successes—or failures. That’s why people who appear successful seldom feel successful. They know that what others perceive as their success is more of a mixed bag and to some extent, undeserved” (Farson & Keyes, 2002).

There were several assumptions inherent in this research study.

- (1) The term leader and manager were used interchangeably.
- (2) The purposively selected nominators were the best individuals from their organizations to nominate leaders.
- (3) Leaders nominated were the best individuals to supply critical success incidents on their own failures and learning.
- (4) Learning from failure was beneficial to the individual and the organization.
- (5) Leader learning from failure was an influential factor on an organization’s culture.
- (6) Subjects spoke truthfully about their failure experiences.

There are several limitations in this research study.

- (1) The purposive and convenient sample selection limited external validity.
- (2) Subjects were limited to the United States of America.
- (3) Recall and memory were subjective and tended to be positively skewed.

This relativism may affect reliability.

Summary

“A person’s life is interesting primarily when he has failed, for it is a sign that he tried to surpass himself” (Georges Clemenceau).

This study explored the topic of learning from failure through interviews with leaders/managers working in a variety of for profit and not-for-profit organizations. The problem statement, and the context and purpose of the study have been presented in this section as well as definitions of terms and study limitations. A review of relevant literature on the topic and a description of the study’s research design and methods follow in Chapters II and III.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

*“There is no experience from which you can't learn something....The experience can have meaning only if you understand it. You can understand only if you have arrived at some knowledge of yourself”
(Eleanor Roosevelt).*

This study examined the behaviors that leaders and managers used in organizational settings to learn from their own failures. In addition the study examined how these leader behaviors transferred to others in the organization and influenced them to learn from their failures. This chapter explored what is known in the current literature and illustrated the research and literature gaps that exist on leader and organizational learning from failure. This chapter demonstrates how this study partially fills that gap in the body of research on learning from failure.

The University of New Mexico Library ELIBRARY and the LIBROS systems were used to conduct computer searches of these databases: UNM collection, The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ABI Inform, Dissertation Abstracts On-line, Psychological Abstracts and the World-Wide Web through Google and Yahoo search engines. Key words used to focus the searches on these databases were: leadership, leadership and learning, leadership and failure, leadership, learning and failure, leadership, learning and failures, leadership and organizational learning, the single word leader with the above phrases, trial and error learning and incidental learning, resiliency and learned optimism. Books, journals, research studies, popular literature and doctoral dissertations were employed to conduct this research.

This chapter contained a review of the literature in three research areas germane to the ways in which leaders and organizations learn. The first area focused on leaders and managers, defining these terms and providing historical and modern perspectives. The second area was a review of the organizational learning literature which points to leadership behavior as a significant factor in that learning. The third area of literature investigation concerned the actual behaviors leaders used when learning from failures and how those behaviors transferred into the organization's routines in order to enhance individual and organizational learning. The researcher identified gaps in the current knowledge base about failure, organizational learning, and leadership behavior. Finally, the researcher summarized the themes from the literature review and discussed how this research study contributed to the existing literature and leadership practices.

Leadership and Management

*"I've missed more than nine thousand shots in my career.
I've lost almost three hundred games....I've failed over
and over again in my life.
And that is why I succeed " (Michael Jordan).*

Like the concepts of love, art or pornography, leadership has been defined in many ways throughout human history. Histories, biographies, textbooks and self-help books are full of anecdotes on leadership or its lack. Leaders have fascinated and inspired us through the centuries. But what is leadership, especially in the sense of learning and organizations?

There is no single correct definition for the word leader or leadership (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1999). The great variety of meanings for the word provide a sense of the complexity and multi-faceted context of leadership. "Leadership has been defined in

terms of individual traits, behavior, influence over other people, interaction patterns, role relationships, occupation of an administrative position, and perception by others regarding legitimacy of influence” (Yukl, 1998, p.2). Despite the many definitions and perceptions of leadership, the researcher has chosen to use the behavioral definition of leadership in this study for two reasons. The first reason came out of the researcher’s personal observations of leaders within organizations and the second reason derived from the extensive use of the term ‘behavior’ inside organizations. The researcher found that defining and categorizing leadership by personality traits rather than behaviors was random and inconsistent for the more precise language of business.

In research, the operational definition of leadership depends to a great extent on the purpose of the researcher (Campbell, 1977). Since this researcher’s purpose was to understand what leaders did when they learned from failure and why they were effective, a single definition was too limiting. In this study, leadership was viewed broadly as a process of social influence and a specialized role (Yukl, 1998). Leadership was the process wherein an individual member of a group influences events, the choice of strategies, relationships, skills and support to accomplish certain objectives (Yukl, 1998). It was the social process of influence and interaction occurring between leaders and followers, which was two way and multi-useful. The outcomes of leadership were achievement of goals, commitment, cohesion, reinforcement or changing of organizational culture (Garvin, 2000).

The terms leader and manager were used interchangeably throughout this research study. Although no one would propose that leading and managing were equivalent activities, the degree of overlap was a point of sharp disagreement (Yukl, 1998). “The

essence of the argument seems to be that managers are oriented toward more stability and leaders are oriented toward innovation; managers get people to do things more efficiently, whereas leaders get people to agree about what things should be done” (Yukl, 1998, p. 4). However, both roles performed the functions of efficient performance and a strategic focus. In his seminal book on leadership, Yukl (1998) used the terms manager and leader interchangeably, and like this researcher, other scholars defined the words according to their research needs.

Historical Perspectives on Leadership

The term leadership was a relatively new addition to our language, being only two hundred years old (Yukl, 1998). But the root word leader first appeared as early as 1300 A.D. (Stogdill, 1974). Historically, research on leadership has taken primarily four approaches to its definition and explanation: 1) power-influence approach, which concerned use of power and follower perceptions, 2) behavioral approach, which emphasized what leaders do, 3) trait approach, which touched on personal attributes of leaders, and, 4) situational, which emphasized factors of follower and situation contexts (Yukl). Since this researcher used the behavioral definition of leadership, the study’s methods of data collection and analysis were behavioral in nature. Yukl reports that previous empirical research about leadership consisted mostly of behavioral data collected from interviews, observations, case studies and critical incident anecdotes.

Until the twentieth century, leaders were thought to be those individuals who ruled or influenced the public in some way, and included Popes, Kings, Queens, warriors and prominent authors of the time. This was known as the ‘Great Man (or Woman) Theory of Leadership.’ These great men and women were born, not shaped, into

greatness. Leadership was their destiny and birthright. Since then, and especially in the last fifty years, use of the words leadership and leader has expanded to include individuals with the ability to influence others.

Modern Perspectives on Leadership

The earliest leadership data gathered was based on studies that focused on leadership personality traits (Hughes, et al., 1999). But then a shift occurred in the mid twentieth century from trait-based definitions to behavioral based definitions. This shift toward more behavioral leadership definitions and theories began with research by Stogdill in 1948, (Stogdill, 1974) in which he found that possession of particular personality traits was not related to leadership success. This finding of Stogdill's began a movement to search for other explanations of leadership beyond trait theory. An especially popular psychological theory, behaviorism, was used to explain many phenomena at the time, including leadership. Thus leadership research in the 40's and 50's shifted toward study and theory building on behaviors, not traits (Hughes, et al., 1999). Taking these behavioral explanations of leadership and combining them with the rapidly changing and particular environments inside organizations, leading researchers then examined the role of situation or context in defining leadership.

This newest and popular behavioral leadership concept, situational leadership, was the theory that leadership behavior was dependent upon the situation or context with each leader-follower situation calling for a different repertoire of leader behaviors. Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1977, 1982) depicted situational leadership behaviors on two contextual dimensions: relationship and task. A matrix model was then used as a more effective way of explaining leadership behavior in a contextual framework. The

researchers believed that certain combinations of task and relationship behaviors might be more effective depending upon the context. Therefore, leaders who varied their leadership behaviors in relation to the particular context could be considered more effective leaders.

Every year, new books on leadership, primarily anecdotal in content, crowd the bookshelves. One recent research based leadership 'self-help' book is Kouzes and Posner's *The Leadership Challenge* (2002). Findings from *The Leadership Challenge*, now in its third edition, were based upon interviews conducted since the 1980s with over three hundred leaders from public and private organizations worldwide. These leaders were asked to talk about their personal best leadership behaviors. The authors then distilled these personal bests into five practices of leadership behavior: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Leader Behaviors in the Learning Organization

In the 1950 and 60s, first time leadership research was gathered through questionnaire surveys at The Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. The key assumption underlying both the Ohio and Michigan studies was that certain behaviors are universally associated with leadership success. These behaviors, defined as observable functions, skills and competencies, arose from human intelligence, personality, preferences, values, motives, goals, knowledge and experience (Ginnett, et al., 1999). What both programs found, however, was that behaviors leading to leadership success depended upon the situation, the task and the people involved (Ginnett, et al., 1999) and so, were contextually variable. For the past quarter of a century, researchers

have used multi-rater feedback instruments, behavioral taxonomies, competency models, job descriptions and descriptive methods such as direct observation, diaries and interviews to discover what successful managers do and how they spend their time (Yukl, 1989). The challenge for leaders is to assimilate new learning and to use what has been learned already, managing that tension and drain on resources (Vera & Crossan, 2004).

Research has also helped to identify factors that can cause high-potential managers to fail (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). All the research, the instruments, the interviews and the observations of leaders have produced only one sure fact: the best leader behavior depends on the context of the situation. Nevertheless, the best reason for studying leader behaviors, as opposed to personality traits, values or motivations, was the ease of observation and adaptation. A behavior was more easily seen and changed than a personality trait.

Leadership Influence in Shaping Learning Culture

The most critical responsibility of every leader is the task of shaping and influencing the culture of their organization and positioning organizational learning as a fundamental strategic process (Vera & Crossan, 2004). This is what is meant by shaping the culture of an organization. These tasks are of such importance that culture and leadership are described as two sides of the same coin by Schein (1992). The interconnectedness of leadership and culture should not be underestimated. "...if a culture is to be modified, leadership cannot be an interested observer, because it is both an artifact of and a prime shaper of the culture" (Ott, 1989, p.195). Leaders are the sole individuals responsible for setting an organization's culture-including that of a learning culture (Schein, 1992; Bennis, 1997; Senge, 1990; Slater & Narvin, 1994; Watkins &

Marsick, 1993). In education, psychologists found that when teachers focus on the personal development of their students and use errors as opportunities for improvement, they encourage a learning orientation versus an achievement orientation (Garvin, 2000). Garvin then drew an analogy between teaching and management behavior when he pointed to the important role leaders take as teachers and learners themselves. “ Such prominent CEOs as Roger Enrico of PepsiCo, Jacques Nasser of Ford and Andy Grove of Intel have taken up this challenge, spending weeks of time in face-to-face meetings with direct reports and other high potential managers. There, they tell war stories, describe their personal philosophies, and teach others to use their favorite tools and techniques” (p. 188). Garvin saw three primary tasks for leaders when shaping a learning culture; 1) creating opportunities for learning, 2) cultivating the right atmosphere for learning and, 3) leading the learning processes themselves through their actions (p.190). “In a learning culture, the key mindset is that individual, team and organizational learning is a necessary part of the work of the organization” (Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanaugh, 1995; Wilson, McCauley & Kelly-Radford, 1998 in Zaccaro & Klimoski (Eds.), 2001. p.374).

While previous research has suggested organizational learning as an important responsibility of strategic leadership, most of this work is prescriptive in nature and says little about leadership styles or specific practices through which CEO's and top management teams contribute to learning. For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Srivastva (1983) locate organizational learning squarely in the camp of leadership, and they argue that, in order to be able to respond to tomorrow's challenges and opportunities, strategic leaders must initiate a process

that enhances day-by-day learning. However, there is no discussion of the underlying leadership processes (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 226).

Schein (1999) defined organizational culture as the shared tacit assumptions a group has learned in coping with internal and external problems and relationships. Certainly, the assumptions learned about failures, their value, the information and learning they contain, the part they play in innovation, were not only a part of the organization's culture, but under the direct influence of its leadership. "As a responsible leader, you must be aware of these assumptions and manage them, or they will manage you" (Schein, 1999, p.186). But how do leaders manage and influence those assumptions? What actions do they specifically take?

Learning Organization and Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is the process by which organizations change. An organization has learned when it: develops better systems for error detection and correction (Argyris & Schon, 1996), uses failures as opportunities for learning and not blame, changes its organizational memory and its mental models, and develops cultures of inquiry and generativity (Marsick & Watkins, 1997). Such learning is critical to organizational survival, effectiveness, adaptation and flexibility (Garvin, 2000). But organizations must be taught and led to learn and that is the leader's responsibility (Senge, 1990; Argyris & Schon, 1996). Most definitions of organizational learning used terms concerning learning processes and derived some of their meanings from the roots of social and cognitive psychology (Lipshitz, 2000). These learning processes were defined as single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978) which Senge (1990) called adaptive and generative learning (Sun & Scott, 2003). Argyris and Schon

built on John Dewey's interpretation of learning as a response to error. Single loop learning was that learning which changes the current norms and assumptions of an organization while double loop learning both *questions* and changes the organizational norms and assumptions (Sun & Scott, 2003).

Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf. They experience a surprising mismatch between expected results of action and respond to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of organizational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line, thereby changing organizational theory-in-use. In order to become organizational, the learning that results from this organizational inquiry must become embedded in the images of organization held in its members' minds and/or in the epistemological artifacts (the maps, memories, and programs) embedded in the organizational environment (Argyris & Schon, 1996, p.16).

Two learning products that result from the above process were 1) interpretations of past experiences of failure and success and 2) inferences of the causal connections between actions and outcomes and their implications for future action (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Both of these products were also the fruits of learning from failure. Another name for this type of learning was trial and error learning, which Miner and Mezias (1996) called behavioral learning, and identified as one of the four types of organizational learning.

Learning organizations are those organizations where learning actually changed the behavior of the organization itself (Reynolds & Ablett, 1998; Garvin, 2000; Senge, 1990). Some of the learning processes that changed organizational behavior were double loop learning, root cause analysis and correction, triple loop learning, (where an organization's culture, mission and values were held to examination) and deuterio double loop learning, where the organization continued to learn how to learn (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Organizational learning research and practice has been divided into three perspectives: the normative, developmental and capability perspectives (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). The capability perspective, which presumed that learning was integral to all organizations and accomplished in many ways, fits closely with the learning processes of incidental and trial and error learning.

All organizations are seen as having learning capabilities that embody distinctive styles or patterns of learning; the focal point is understanding what those learning processes are—how, where, and what gets learned....Do employees learn from failures or defective merchandise to avoid making them in the future, or do they learn how to avoid letting someone know that a failure was made in the first place? (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p.13).

Organizational learning occurred then when individuals within an organization experience a problem situation and then inquired into the situation on the organization's behalf (Argyris & Schon, 1978). These individuals experienced a mismatch between the results they expected and the results they actually got. That mismatch, for purposes of this study, is labeled as failure. Learning leaders responded to the mismatch through a

process of thought, decision and action. These thought, decision and action processes led the organization to modify its image of itself and its phenomena, restructure its activities to bring outcomes and expectations together. This is the essence of organizational learning from failures (adapted from Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Research on Learning from Failures

Some of the earliest empirical research on leadership and learning from failures came out of data collected by the Center for Creative Leadership. Researchers McCall, Lombardo and Morrison (1988) teamed up to understand how leaders learned from experience. The foundational question of their study was to ask leaders and managers to recall their most significant and insightful developmental opportunities that rose out of an experience. Four separate studies were conducted with 191 successful executives from six major corporations. These subjects were asked to identify at least three key events that occurred in their careers that impacted the way in which they managed currently. They were asked to explain what occurred and what they learned from it. The collected data yielded 616 events from which came 1,547 lessons. The researchers then began to sort the lessons into five major categories: setting and implementing agendas, handling relationships, basic values, executive temperament and personal awareness. But more importantly, they analyzed the events into experiences that shaped leadership development. Most significant to this researcher is the category of development experiences known as hardship events. These hardship events are defined as personal trauma, career setbacks, changing jobs, subordinate performance problems and business failures.

“Where executives said they gained insight into themselves and their strengths and weaknesses was...generated from their failures, confrontations with subordinates, traumatic events and career setbacks” (McCall, et al., 1988, p.13). “When faced with their own failure, executives who learned from it did not reflect only on externalities. Instead, they turned inward and took a hard look at themselves” (McCall, p.87). The researchers had expected these business failures to be due to lack of knowledge or bad business judgment, but found instead that the leading cause of business failures was inappropriate dealings with other people.

So externally caused (or perceived) failures created lessons that were cynical or involved learning to endure, or both, depending on the circumstances. In contrast, failures that managers saw themselves as being responsible for triggered an opposite response—intensely internal, harshly self-critical....There seem to be three general conditions that set the stage for learning from one’s failures: ...the event must be very, very specific with the cause and effect relationship clear...the cards must be on the table (all facts known)...and the organization’s position on failures must be delineated (McCall, et al., 1988, p. 108-109).

These business failures were important for learning since they enabled the leaders 1) to recognize the ways their bosses and organizations reacted to failures and 2) to learn something equally crucial about themselves (McCall, et al., 1988).

In his 1993 unpublished dissertation, Bales used this research from the Center for Creative Leadership on private sector executives to compare the critical career incidents of Texas state executives working in learning organizations. Bales found that incidental learning events and lessons were more often experienced and assimilated by those

leader's who possessed learning organization skills, such as reflectivity and creativity (Bales, 1993). In another dissertation study in 1997 by Ellinger on leaders as facilitators of learning, the author interviewed leaders and managers from learning organizations in a descriptive qualitative study. Ellinger collected critical incidents of leaders facilitating employee learning and found that these leaders considered their roles as manager and facilitator as distinct and on a continuum. Triggers for learning were found to be high consequence issues (such as failures) and developmental opportunities. In addition, Ellinger developed behaviorally grounded facilitator dimensions and identified individual and organizational outcomes for such behavior (Ellinger, 1997). Neither of these dissertation studies discussed learning from failure behaviors specifically, nor how these behaviors transferred into the organization's processes and systems.

Several years earlier, Sitkin (1992), wrote an article arguing that failure is an essential prerequisite for organizational learning and adaptation. Sitkin cited empirical studies from the 1980's when he examined the ways in which failure enhances learning, adaptation and resilience. He differentiated which types of failure produce learning and advocated 'intelligent failure' as a way to advance innovative thinking, safety behavior and merger and acquisition success. Failing fueled an 'unfreezing' process where current assumptions were shaken and new ways of thinking recognized. This resulted in 'intelligent failure.' This type of failure was characterized by 1) thoughtfully planned actions 2) uncertain outcomes 3) modest scale 4) speedy action cycles and 5) domain relevance (Sitkin, 1992). Four organizational conditions fostered intelligent failure and learning: process focus, failure legitimation, organizational design and failure management systems. Of these four, failure legitimation and organizational design fall

well within a leader's influence. Leaders' legitimate failure in three ways: by stressing the importance of their own failure, by providing evidence of the neutral or positive effect of failure on careers and rewards and lastly by publicizing intelligent failure. Leaders influence organizational culture and design in the ways in which employees are trained and socialized, the resources they commit to experimentation and failure, the ways in which they monitor and reward failure and the commitment to solving problems through trial and error (Sitkin, 1992). Sitkin's article was an excellent discussion and summary of the issues in learning from failure, but the work lacks empirical or descriptive research methods to substantiate it.

Two other empirical studies by Edmunson (1996) and Tamuz (1987) demonstrate actual organizational effects from incidental learning. In her study of hospital drug administration errors, Edmunson found that there were actually higher reported error rates in units managed by more open and sympathetic managers. In less supportive, more punitive units where making errors led to blame and discipline, errors were more likely to be hidden (Edmunson, 1996). The last place an error should be hidden is in a hospital, when remedial action can save a life. Tamuz (1987) related the practice at the Federal Aviation Administration where pilots had a ten-day grace period to file confidential safety reports about 'incidents' or 'near misses'. Reporting these incidents within the grace period insures the pilot's partial immunity from sanctions. These two studies used qualitative and quantitative data to strengthen their arguments, but neither directly addressed how a leader transfers her own learning from failure into the organization's routines.

In 1990, Marsick and Watkins authored *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*. This short book examined adult workplace learning that occurred through informal and incidental means rather than through formalized workshops, classes and seminars. Both informal and incidental learning takes place in everyday life, without formal structures or processes. Incidental learning, a subset of informal learning, included learning through experimentation, trial and error, failures and was often only understood later upon reflection. Relating back to the foundational work of Argyris and Schon (1978), Marsick and Watkins describe similarities between double loop, informal and incidental learning. All took place within non-routine situations (surprise, failures or triggers) that required attention, experimentation, problem solving and most importantly critical reflection to uncover and examine assumptions underlying behavior (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). They found three conditions which increased the effectiveness of informal and incidental learning: proactivity or readiness to take initiative, critical reflectivity or “bringing one’s assumptions, premises, criteria and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them,” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 25) and creativity. Marsick and Watkins (1991) used case study examples from the Swedish Management Institute, community learning initiatives, workplace adult education and therapeutic group sessions with adult children of alcoholics as evidence in incidental and informal learning. From these case studies, they hypothesized about the function of managers in incidental and informal learning situations: the more non-routine the learning situation, the more non-routine will be the functioning of management; the role of the leader or figurehead is important, including role definition, but leadership turnover may not be a critical factor in learning success. They emphasized the importance of a public setting

for incidental learning in order to overcome the human tendency toward rationalization and hiding when failures were made.

Our proclivities for retrospective rationalization and for holding ourselves blameless for our actions make it especially necessary that this learning occur in a group or in a public setting where others will help us deal with what really happened. Learners will more easily take the risk needed for unfreezing when they have free and informed choice, mutual control of the learning process, and mutual responsibility for the learning outcomes. Learners are more effective when they see themselves as active agents responsible for their learning and when they see failures and errors as raw material for learning rather than sources of embarrassment. In order to reflect on these experiences, learners must make their reasoning public so that the private understandings and meanings that they assigned to the events and statements can be critically examined by others from many viewpoints (Marsick & Watkins, 1991, p. 177-178).

When proposing implications for the practice of learning from incidental experiences, Marsick and Watkins quoted Brookfield saying that “challenge is central to helping people think critically....Challenge prompts self-scrutiny, consideration of alternatives and the taking of action” (Brookfield, 1987, p.90). Learning in an organization occurs when the challenge, the evaluation, the directly observable data and the mutual inquiry about assumptions exists (Marsick & Watkins, 1991). Their understanding was comparable to Argyris and Schon (1978) who defined organizational learning as:

Members of the organization act as learning agents for the organization, responding to changes in the internal and external environments of the organization by detecting and correcting errors in organizational theory-in-use, and embedding the results of their inquiry in private images and shared maps of organization (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p.29).

However, Marsick and Watkins failed to specifically point out the leader behaviors that enhance organizational learning from failure experiences and to examine how these behaviors transferred into organizational routines.

In three more recent studies on failure in organizations (Denrell, 2003; Miner, Kim, Holzinger & Haunschild, 1999; Kim, 2000) the authors discussed population-level learning from failure. Miner and Haunschild (1995) defined population-level learning as the systematic change in the nature and mix of routines, strategies or practices enacted in a population of organizations and having risen from experience. Kim (2000) in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, examined failure in the banking industry and the resulting population level learning. All five authors warned against the tendency of organizations to learn only from success cases and thereby under sample the learning from failure situations that can often teach so much more. These more recent studies failed to delineate leader behaviors or transfer activities, other than to prescribe that leaders pay more careful attention to failure in their industry groups and their own organizations.

In a 2001 analysis of failure in the Internet startup industry, Finkelstein (2001) autopsied the failures and spending waste of the dot.com world. With a contrarian view on the benefits of failure, Finkelstein argued that failures often don't result in learning

and that what was learned may be unable to solve organizational problems. Leaders needed to learn from the right balance of both successful and unsuccessful outcomes, but Finkelstein failed to describe leader behavior or organizational learning.

Leader Behavior in Learning Organizations

Many writers have prescribed appropriate leader behavior in a learning organizations, but few have given empirical evidence to support their prescriptions other than the studies cited above and below by Edmunson and Ellinger. Derived from many leadership and learning authors, Table 1 lists the leaders behaviors likely to promote organizational learning.

Table 1

Leadership Behaviors Likely to Promote Organizational Learning

Theorist	Leadership Behavior Prescribed
Bass & Avolio, (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage commitment of employees in context of shared vision and values • Influence • Individual consideration • Intellectual stimulation • Inspiration • Leaders as change agents • Courage • Believe in people • Inspired by strong values

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue lifelong learning themselves • Failures are learning opportunities • Cope with uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity • Visionaries
Schein (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote assumption questioning by helping organization to achieve degree of insight and motivation to change • Assess adequacy of culture, detect dysfunction • Prepare for organizational transformation • Perception and insight • Emotional strength • Create involvement • Participation • Learn
Sitkin (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have right structure for organization to learn • Keep failure small
Block (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader as steward • Designer • Teacher who causes creative tension between vision and reality.
Heifetz (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help organization face problems rather than solve the problems for them • Make problems clear • Contain resulting stress

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on key issues, not attacks • Give responsibility as the rate employees can handle • Protect those who lead and protest • Willingly have assumptions held to public scrutiny
Collins & Porras (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction and influence between leader and follower • Leadership as adaptation
Moss Kanter (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and diffuse power and leadership • See across boundaries • Extremely learning oriented • Embrace their partners
Senge (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designer • Teacher • Steward • At all levels in the organization
Marsick & Gephart (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide systems to encourage learning • Enable employee development through rotations • Promote inquiry, dialogue, risk-taking and experimentation • Allow failures to be shared, viewed and rewarded as learning opportunities • Value the well being of employees
Edmunson (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to discuss failures • No punishment or retaliation for errors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to collaborate • Highly supportive
Bennis & Goldsmith (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self knowledge • Candid self assessment • Openness to learning
Ellinger (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding back answers • Question framing • Shifting responsibility to employees • Removing obstacles and being a resource • Creating a learning environment • Broadening employee perspectives • Seeing through their perspective • Using scenarios, examples, analogies • Setting and communicating expectations • Working the problem out together • Engaging others to facilitate learning • Providing and soliciting feedback
DiBella & Nevis (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define learning agenda • Be open to discordant info • Avoid repeated failures • Keep critical skills inside organization • Take organizational action on what it knows

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a place for learning to happen
Gardner (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candid self-assessment • Accurate and realistic situational analysis • Capacity to reframe past setbacks into future successes
Preskill & Torres (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value diversity and pluralistic understanding • Develop and maintain processes that encourage employee learning • Develop and maintain processes to capture learning and make it available to all • Servant leader mindset • Value internal and external information • Involve employees in learning vision • Communicate learning vision • Translate vision into achievable goals and objectives • Model and champion ongoing learning
Kouzes & Posner (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the process • Inspire a shared vision • Enable others to act • Model the way • Encourage the heart
Garvin (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities • Cultivate proper tone • Foster desired norms, behaviors and rules of engagement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personally lead process of discussion, frame debates, pose questions, listen, provide feedback, after action reviews, work outs, reflection and action, open boundaries • Sponsor learning events • Awareness of personal biases • Humility
Raelin (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build communities of practice

The leadership behaviors of resiliency, learning from experience, critical reflection, reframing and publicly admitting failures have been described as helpful for learning so often that they bear further discussion here.

Resiliency

One leadership behavior that appears often in the literature, although it is called by different names is the behavior of resiliency. It has been called hardiness, psychological hardiness or the survivor mindset. Resiliency is the ability to quickly recover from change or misfortune to take on new challenges (Conner, 1995). From their fifteen year long study of leader's personal best case studies, Kouzes and Posner (2002) reports that hardy leaders believe that whatever happens has value and learning in it, whether successful or not. Kouzes and Posner (2002) cited over 650 references to hardiness in the literature, including psychological studies that reported hardiness as a more important resistor to stress than personal constitution, health practices or social support. Hardiness has been found to be one of the most effective protectors of health (Kobasa, Maddi, Puccetti & Zola, 1985). In a twelve year longitudinal study of

executives at Illinois Bell Telephone during the time of the company breakup, a group of executives reported low illness and a sense of well being; yet reported high stress scores during the study. Researchers found that these executives made certain assumptions about their interactions with the events of their world. They believed they could find some value in whatever they were doing. They were curious about what was going on around them and found people and situations meaningful. They believed that personal improvement and fulfillment came through *learning from both positive and negative experiences*. Thus, they believed in learning from events surrounding them, whether good or bad (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Learning from Experience

Another key leadership behavior was the ability to learn from experience (McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1988; Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 1999). Researchers Lindsey, McCall and Homes (1987), at the Center for Creative Leadership, defined learning experiences as "...Ideas that didn't fly, conflicts that got out of hand, deals that fell through and failures to make the most of opportunities.... these events were united by two themes: the outcomes were unsatisfactory to the person involved and they stemmed from failures in dealing with key people" (p.52). An important ingredient in learning from experience was the cognitive processing that occurs after the experience, which Brookfield calls critical reflection (Brookfield, 1987). Critical reflection was often set off by a trigger event, such as divorce, death, job loss or a failure experience. In critical thinkers, a period of self-scrutiny and appraisal followed the trigger event. This was the time when the leader engages in self-examination. Argyris (1991) echoed this finding in his work on double loop learning (making tacit thought assumptions explicit).

Assumptions are mental screens, which expand or constrain our thinking possibilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Dissecting and questioning assumptions is the primary task of critical thinking and one that leaders use to learn from failure (Brookfield, 1987).

Professionals need to reflect critically on their own behavior, identify the ways they often inadvertently contribute to the organization's problems and then change how they act (Preskill & Torres, 1999). This is especially true when much of an organization's activities are routine in nature, which results in patterned behaviors and assumptions (Sitkin, 1992). The key to using failures experiences as learning appeared not to be the failing event itself, but the thought and actions that occurred after the experience. These actions included the public or private reflection on what occurred, the framing of the failure as an opportunity for change and learning, and finally the cognitive process and behavior changes that occurred after the reflection. "Failures are potent tools for learning, in part, because individuals so often feel brittle about making them. Hence, people were more likely to reflect on failures to determine their causes and prevent their repetition" (Watkins & Marsick, 1992, p.3). Futurists White, Hodgson and Crainer, (1996) declared that learning fast from failure will be one of the several keys to success in the 21st century.

Critical Reflection

So not only was resiliency and learning from experience important for leaders/managers, but so was the skill of critical thinking, which Brookfield (1987) also calls critical reflection. Brookfield defined critical thinking or reflection as the process of identifying and challenging assumptions, understanding the importance of context, and imagining and exploring alternatives which lead to reflective skepticism (what appears to

be so may not be so). Critical reflection is a tool that helps us to find the lessons inside of our failures. A learning leader/manager that pays attention to a diverse set of learning triggers, such as pain, transitions, and contrasts, oddball occurrences, unsolicited feedback, or crises, tends to think of all experiences in terms of the lessons that can be learned. "Failures and mistakes, while not programmable, can be critical events for a developing (a leader), particularly one with a history of successes. These jolts (failures and mistakes) can open a door to learning that may have been closed by overconfidence" (Lindsay, Homes, & McCall, 1987, p.50). These learning leaders ask questions of themselves such as, 'What am I attending to?' 'What am I ignoring or avoiding?' 'Have I made this failure before?' These questions are part of cognitive and critical reflection (Bunker, 1989).

Public Admission of Failures

The ability to admit failure publicly, when necessary, was another behavior found in effective leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This action became even more significant the higher one was or the more power one wielded in an organizational structure (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). Leaders who admitted failures and learning in a public forum, acted as role models for others in the organization (Argyris, 1991). Their behavior displayed to the organization that it is culturally acceptable to fail, learn and recover. This modeling behavior encouraged others to act in similar ways because the leader demonstrated that such behavior does not result in organizational suicide.

Reframing: Mental Models of Failure and Success

When failures occur, we use our past perceptions, assumptions, values and experiences to make the failure meaningful to us. The implicit code of American culture

is that failure is embarrassing, shameful, a sign of weakness or stupidity, to be hidden at all costs (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). Marquardt (1996) held that learning occurred when employees tried new things and were curious about how things worked. This curiosity resulted in problems, errors and lessons that were shared, not hidden.

Leadership theorists (Argyris, 1991; Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2002) challenged those who aspire to leadership to reframe the ways in which they viewed failures. These authors questioned what the organizational consequences might be if failures were celebrated as important learning events, discussed for their instructional value, used as organizational examples, framed as a success break through or used as a springboard to new and better ideas. This reframing of failures presents a challenge to organizational systems in which the norm is to hide failures and offer ridicule when they are revealed. Recasting failures as opportunities is also a challenge to professionals who are almost always successful at what they do and rarely experience public failure (Argyris, 1991).

The challenging aspect in preparing the literature review on these topics is the number of sources who have written about the concepts of learning, leadership, failure or learning from experience. Many authors have opinions and terrific stories, but unfortunately few had conducted either qualitative or quantitative research studies with organizational leaders which concentrated specifically on how people behaved in order to learn from the failure experience and how that behavior is transmitted through the organization. Consequently, the findings and conclusions drawn from the literature were not uniform, plentiful, nor were they the result of carefully implemented research studies. Slater and Narvin (1994) cited a lack of a theoretically grounded argument for the

management practices that facilitate organizational learning. Definitions for management practice constructs and research on appropriate areas for management attention in a learning organization were missing from the literature of leadership research.

Previous studies do not reflect the research rigor necessary for empirical findings or do not focus on failures, and error exclusively, but discuss all types of learning and experience. The prior studies do not answer the research questions posed here, which are: How do leaders learn from failure? How do they transfer or teach others to learn from failure? What are the organizational effects of learning from failure? To summarize the topic of leader behavior in learning organizations, Schein (1992) captured the essence of the problem best when he said that the toughest problem in building organizational learning capacity is for leaders to come to terms with their own lack of expertise.

Behavior Transfer in Learning Organizations

The transfer of learning from the learning event itself or from the classroom setting into the routine behaviors of organizational members is a critical issue in adult learning theory and curriculum development. Leaders themselves may have learned from their failures, but how do they teach this skill to others? How is a behavior, such as hardiness, learned throughout the organization? In his foundational writing on leadership and culture, Schein (1992) discussed this learning transfer in terms of the leader's role as a shaper of organizational culture. He believed that leaders themselves are the source of the organizational beliefs and values that get a group motivated to deal with its internal and external problems. If the leader's assumption about the problem works and continues to work, this assumption gradually becomes the shared assumption of the organization.

Schein went on to say that once these shared basic assumptions were formed by the learning process, the assumption function as a cognitive tool and as a defense mechanism for individuals and the group. Individuals and groups seek stability and meaning in their daily routines. Once this stability was achieved it was easier to deny, defend, project and rationalize a belief than it was to change the basic assumptions underlying the beliefs. This transfer of behavior, in the sense of changing basic assumptions, was difficult, time intensive and anxiety producing for everyone in the organization and was of utmost importance for leaders to understand and use as a learning tool. The leader's strong convictions and assumptions, so helpful at the beginning of problem solving, were an insurmountable obstacle if learning, assumption examination and critical reflection did not occur at all levels of the organization.

A leader's role is culture creation and the products of the organization's past successes and failures are contained within its cultural assumptions. When the environment changes and is recognized by the leader, she must decide what needs to be done for the organization to remain adaptive. Schein (1992) reminded us that too often leadership's job was understood as primarily vision setting behavior and not enough of listening and learning, absorbing, searching the environment for change and building the capacity for the organization to learn behaviors. If the tasks of a learning leader are to accurately perceive the environment, create anxiety for change, provide safety through vision or capacity, acknowledge uncertainty, and embrace errors in learning as inevitable and desirable, what action or beliefs of the part of the leader cause the entire organization to adopt these behaviors?

Effects of Incidental Learning on Learning Organizations

The last question this study examined were the effects of learning from failures upon the organization. The inability to learn from failures caused an increase in dysfunctional organizational behavior such as scapegoating, turf battles and control games, as well as avoidance of control, systematic patterns of deception, cover-ups of intentions and the maintenance of taboos that kept issues undiscussable (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Organizations that did not learn from failure restricted their information gathering, were adverse to risk and suffered the effects of complacency and homogeneity (Sitkin, 1991). Learning from small failure experiences produced the organizational benefits of variety, risk tolerance, deeper information searching and processing, problem recognition, and the motivation to adapt (Sitkin, 1991). Preskill and Torres (1999) listed the beneficial outcomes for individuals, teams and the organizations from the organizational learning practice of evaluative inquiry. They defined evaluative inquiry as "...a social and communal activity in which...organizational issues...are subjected to ...reconsideration and examination through a dialogic process, using data to inform learning and action (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p.2). Evaluative inquiry could be readily used as a technique to debrief failures or conduct post mortems on projects. The benefits of evaluative inquiry are listed in Table 2.

Table 2***Benefits of Evaluative Inquiry***

Individual and Team Benefits	Organizational Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of how actions affect others • Tendency to ask questions rather than solutions • Develop greater personal accountability and responsibility for organizational outcomes • More self directed learners • Take more and higher risks • More consultative and coaching behavior • More likely to ask for help • More effective listeners • Use information to act • Develop creative solutions • Share the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new products and services • Increase productivity • Higher morale, improved work climate • Less turnover • Less waste/sabotage/error • Improved financial performance • Increased efficiency • Decreased redundancy • More effective service to customers • More adaptable

(Adapted from Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 190)

Of the three studies cited above, only Preskill and Torres offered empirical data to argue the benefits of organizational inquiry into failure occurrences.

Summary

“Failure is information, too” (Richard Fairbank).

Outside of organizational research and development, other disciplines have written extensively about the necessity of failure and death in the evolution of the species. This is referred to as genetic variation. The course of adaptation for every species is evidence of the failure or success in the race for survival. Science tells us that some type of irregularity exists in each of our bodily systems, from an irregular heart beat rhythms to nerve impulses. Perhaps organizations have yet to tap into the incalculable benefits of variation. So much is yet to be learned about how the organisms called organizations learn and thrive. More empirical research, qualitative and quantitative is needed in the domain of organizational learning and leadership development. The notion of an organization using failures to actively learn is relatively new, and there is still much important research needed to answer the deeper questions of shaping individual behavior as well as an organization’s culture through learning and failures.

The primary themes that emerged in the literature review on learning from failures and leadership were: 1) leadership was best defined by a set of contextual behaviors and 2) the most often mentioned leadership behaviors that promote learning from failures were hardiness, learning from experience, candid self-assessment, critical reflection, situational analysis and reframing. This research study contributes to the field of organizational learning research as well as the field of leadership development by:

- analyzing leader behavior as it applies to making failures and learning from failures,
- analyzing how this type of learning is transferred into the organization,

- listing the organizational effects of such practices,
- capturing the stories of leaders who are actively learning, and,
- adding to the body of empirical research on leader behavior and leadership development.

Organizations are now effected by our global economy and the computerization of information and communication. The overwhelming amount of information assaulting us hourly is just one manifestation of the quickly evolving culture in which we live. To survive in this chaotic and accelerating time of change, leaders must realize that they do not know everything and must teach others to accept that they do not know everything. This paradox is the essence of the leader's role in organizational learning.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

“Blessed are the skilled questioners, for they shall be given mountains of words to ascend. Blessed are the wise questioners for they shall unlock hidden corridors of knowledge. Blessed are the listening questioners, for they shall gain perspective” (Patton, 2002).

Leadership scholar Bennis (1988) called leadership more of an art than a science. Psychometrician Cronbach (1982) made that same observation about designing a research study, calling it an “exercise of the dramatic imagination” (p. 239). This researcher selected qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data on learning from failure. This approach was chosen because of the benefits provided by qualitative research methods. The most beneficial aspect of qualitative methodology was the depth and detail in which the issue being studied was able to be examined (Patton, 2002). Since there is no such thing as an average leader or an average learner from failure, the researcher sought individual cases and success stories in order to understand what learning from failure and leadership meant on an individual level. The researcher desired a study method that, like the subject matter of leadership and learning, was open to adaptation and the discovery of patterns. Guba (1978) described a discovery oriented approach to research where the investigator did not manipulate the study setting and placed no constraints on the outcomes of the research, calling this qualitative method naturalistic inquiry. Each leader and learner has a story to tell, which Patton (2002) called the “unique case orientation” (p. 41) of qualitative research methods. Like leadership, qualitative research takes place in natural settings, is open to adaptation, is information rich, yields deep description and personal experience, demands empathy and

mindfulness, is dynamic, unique, emergent, holistic, highly contextualized and reflexive (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research methodology fit well with the research subject of leadership and learning. “When inquiry within organizations is aimed at learning, improvement and development....these problem solving and learning oriented processes often use qualitative inquiry and case study approaches to help a group of people reflect on ways of improving what they are doing or understand it in new ways” (Patton, 2002, p. 177-179). These research methods have been used by Argyris and Schon, 1978; Watkins and Marsick, 1990; Preskill and Torres, 1999 and Patton, 2002, to name just a few.

This study explored the behaviors of leaders and managers in organizational settings as they learn from their own failures. In addition, the study examined how these leaders directly or indirectly influenced other organizational members to learn from their failures as well. The key questions guiding this study were:

- How did leaders learn from their own failures?
- How did leaders transfer the processes of learning from failures into their organization’s behavioral routines?
- What were the organizational effects of learning from failures?

This chapter described the research design and data collection methods used to study the questions above. The chapter was organized into nine sections which included: the introduction, the pilot study, qualitative inquiry, phenomenological perspectives, research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Pilot Study

“We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets” (Bill Wilson).

In 2002-2003, a pilot study on the topic of learning from failure was conducted by the researcher. This pilot study was conducted for three purposes: 1) to fulfill the requirements of a research course in analyzing qualitative data; 2) to provide the researcher with experience in the use of human subjects protocol at the University of New Mexico; and 3) to field test the research purpose, study questions and interviewing techniques in preparation for the dissertation research. The stated purpose of the pilot study was to describe how leaders and managers in an organizational setting learned from their own failures and how they influenced others in the organization to do the same.

The researcher fulfilled the University of New Mexico human subjects' requirements and conducted the pilot study under the guidance of Dr. Carolyn Wood. The participants for the pilot study were selected through purposive sampling and nomination, based on the researcher's contacts with a variety of professionals employed by New Mexico organizations. From fifteen nominated subjects, five men and five women were contacted and agreed to participate in the pilot study. The participants were characterized by their nominators as leaders who learned from their own failures and encouraged others in their organizations to learn from failure. Subjects were not asked if they considered themselves leaders, failures, learners or learners from failure, nor did the researcher collect any demographic data on the subjects or use follow-up interviews. The pilot interviews, using a semi-structured format, took place in New Mexico at the subject's respective offices or conference rooms, and in one case, at the subject's home.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, participant confidentiality was crucial to the pilot study. All ten of the interviewees were audio taped, with their consent, and the tapes were transcribed. The researcher took handwritten notes during all of the interviews. However, these notes were not helpful and in fact distracted during the interview and were difficult to decipher during analysis.

The resulting data were coded and analyzed for content and themes. The behaviors that leaders used to learn from failure experiences were grouped according to the following themes: the importance of an experimental mindset, the use of critical reflection to understand and contextualize the failure event, the importance of personal knowledge in self assessment, the willingness to admit missteps publicly and the leader's mental models of success and failure. The research asked no probing questions about learning during the pilot study and later realized how insightful this information would have been in understanding the leader's experience of failure. Questions about how and when learning occurred were added to the dissertation research interview questions.

During the pilot study interviews, the researcher was touched by the deep emotional reactions that the subjects expressed about their failure experiences, whether these failures took place recently or years ago. These emotional reactions were expressed physically by nine out of the ten subjects, demonstrated by eyes welled with tears, reddened faces, frowning, nervous gestures, rapid breathing and speech. No matter how traumatic the memory of the failure event, all the pilot subjects understood, after a period of critical reflection and regrouping, that the experience contained powerful self-learning for them. None publicly admitted the failure. Furthermore, several of the interviewees from the pilot study expressed that the interview itself was a valuable experience for

them, as it allowed them to clarify their role apart from their organization's role in the failure event and to reflect critically to an objective third party what they learned.

The pilot study was extremely helpful to the researcher, in each phase of the research. As a result of learning (from her missteps or failures) in the pilot study, the researcher was able to:

- Focus and narrow the purpose of the study
- Refine the interview questions and techniques
- Develop a nomination process for subject selection
- Continue to experiment with a process for synthesizing copious amounts of data
- Strive for clarity in each phase of the research design
- Become familiar with the University's requirements for human subject research
- Easily explain her research purpose to subjects prior to the interview to secure their agreement
- Experiment with several different methods of data analysis.
- Practice thinking creatively about the emergent data patterns and themes
- Practice organizing themes into interesting written material
- Develop deeper understanding and empathy for the topic, the subjects and the researcher's own learning process.

Research Design

“You learn something new everyday. Actually, you learn something old everyday. Just because you learned it, doesn't make it new. Other people already knew it. Columbus is a good example” (George Carlin, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to explore how leaders and managers learned from their own failures. In addition, the study examined how this learning was communicated to the organization, influencing others to learn from their failures. Finally, the study described the organizational effects of learning from failure. The research used the Success Case Method (Brinkerhoff, 2003) to collect the data by semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for content and themes by the researcher.

The research design for this study was qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right that crosscuts disciplines, fields and subject matters. It uses its own language, traditions, concepts and assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research approaches the world with an interpretive, naturalistic and descriptive lens. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative inquiry as “...studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of it, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.3). Qualitative inquiry employs many different forms, from stories to film to cultural texts, as the “...choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context” (Nelson, et al., 1992, p. 2 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.4). This context dependency is comparable to the concept of both leadership and failures, where the right behavior is only right in the right situation, dependent upon and defined within the eye of

the beholder. The research approach of qualitative inquiry lent itself to studying leadership, failure and learning because of its inherent advantages. One advantage is the depth and detail that qualitative methods provide, known as thick description (Patton 2002). This description "...open(s) up a world to the reader through rich, detailed and concrete descriptions of people and places...in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance" (p.438).

Another advantage of qualitative inquiry is the emergent nature of the analysis, which is determined once the data is gathered. This advantage allows the researcher to enter "...fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis" (Patton, 2002, p.14). The desire of this researcher was not to derive a broad, generalizable set of findings from the data, but to compile a "wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases....to increase the depth of understanding...." (p.14). Past qualitative research conducted on leadership and organizational learning issues has been done by Ellinger (1997), Edmunson (1996), Bales (1993), Damme (1995), Brinkerhoff (2003), Harback (2000), Preskill and Torres (1999) and Sitkin (1992). Using Patton's (2002) seven focusing questions helped this researcher in determining the appropriate methodology for this study: who is the intended recipient, reader and user of the research; what is the kind of information that is needed and how will it be used; what is the study purpose; when is the data needed and what resources are available to the researcher. From the answers to these questions, the researcher could have chosen several approaches to the study. However, the approach of phenomenology provided the best course to follow.

Patton (2002) defined phenomenology as a research approach that explores “...how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning...how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p.104). It is a research framework that describes not only what people experience, but also how they experience what they experience. As such, the assumption underlying this research approach is that “...there is an essence or essences to shared experience” (p.106). Determining the essence of learning from failure was the focus of this research; leaders being the fundamental creators of that learning essence inside organizations.

The phenomenological approach and framework requires four skills or behaviors from the researcher (Patton, 2002, p.486). These skills are: epoche, or the ability to refrain from judgment or ordinary perception, phenomenological data reduction and imaginative variation in coding and analysis and finally an ability to synthesize the data back into an understandable structure for reporting purposes (p. 486).

Research Methods

*“If I have an art form to leadership,
it is to make as many failures
as quickly as I can in order
to learn”
(Interviewee as told to Warren Bennis).*

The Success Case Method (Brinkerhoff, 2003) is a qualitative data collection method that has elements from several research traditions: storytelling, naturalistic inquiry, and case study. The power of its method is in locating the individual who has been the best or the most successful at some endeavor. Locating individuals who were

the most successful in some behavior or process is the researcher's first task in using the Success Case Method. In this research, the process was learning from failures. One way the Success Case Method developer, Robert Brinkerhoff (2003), suggested that these successful individuals be located within an organization was "...simply by asking people tapping into the information grapevine of the organization" (p. 16). The researcher used her grapevine of business contacts to nominate leaders for the research study.

Once these subjects were located and agreed to be interviewed, the second part of a Success Case study method (Brinkerhoff, 2003) is to conduct interviews with these successful subjects. This is necessary in order to understand the methods, behaviors and processes they use to be successful. In this research, the purpose of the inquiry was to identify the behaviors leaders use when they learned from their failures. These interviews with successful leaders who learned from their failures provided vignettes about learning and the effects of that learning on the organization. In addition, Brinkerhoff (2003) recommended gathering some instances of nonsuccess during the interviews, as these incidents were useful by way of contrast and comparison to the successful stories. The researcher used these recommendations in her design of the research study.

Similar qualitative case study approaches were used in research by Stake (1995), Guba and Lincoln, (1985), and Kibel (1999), in Brinkerhoff (2003). The data collection methods of the Success Case Method (a variation of the Critical Incident Technique) can be "...especially useful in exploratory research designed to examine very specific, situationally relevant aspects of managerial behavior" (Yukl, 1998, p.88). Critical Incident Technique has been widely used in educational research (Copas, 1984; Leles,

1968; Ellinger, 1997), and in research on management behaviors (Campbell, Dunnette & Lawler, 1970; Weick, 1970; Yukl, 1989, in Ellinger, 1997).

The interview questions used for data collection were semi-structured around topics and open ended with follow-up probing questions. The sequence and wording of the questions was determined in advance and all respondents answered the same questions (See Appendix A, the Interview Guide). The settings for the interview were based on convenience to the interviewees. Due to the high cost of airline travel, most of the interviews were conducted by telephone and tape-recorded. Tools used were a cassette tape recorder with microphone, transcription device and a telephone jack that allowed phone recording.

Research Sample

“Success represents the one percent of your work that results from the ninety-nine percent that is called failure” (Soichiro Honda)

The subjects for this research study were limited to a population selected from both profit and not for profit organizations located in the United States, with employee populations from five to one hundred thousand employees. Working individuals within organizations with whom the researcher was familiar were asked to nominate a person they characterized as: 1) a leader, 2) someone who learns from failure and, 3) one who helps others to learn from failure. These subjects were drawn from people at all levels of the organization, who were characterized as leaders (See Appendix B, Nomination Correspondence). Stories of failures or failures that occurred in these business settings were gathered by purposive sampling, defined as selecting for study those subjects with “...information rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of

central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p.230). Subjects were selected by the intensity and success of their experience with learning from failure. Patton further advised the researcher to “...select cases that manifest sufficient intensity to illuminate the nature of success or failure, but not at the extreme” (p.234). Subjects were interviewed either in person or by telephone. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Most of the subjects selected for interview had employees reporting to them, and they in turn reported to a higher manager/leader or Board of Directors.

The researcher has worked with over twenty-five organizations in the United States as an organizational consultant. She used the contacts made in these organizations to secure subjects for the data collection portion of this study. The researcher asked the nominator to provide the name, address, phone, fax and email address for each nominee. By asking people to nominate others, the researcher hoped to access the informal sources of the organization’s information links or the ‘grapevine’ of the organization. Organizations included in the sample were selected by convenience and researcher familiarity, with half of the sample from for profit organizations and half from not for profit or government organizations. The sampling was not intended to be representative of learning organizations or leadership, but to be comprised of individuals who were the best examples of the ability to learn from failure, as nominated by others.

Brinkerhoff (2003) recommended contacting seventy-five subjects in order to secure fifty useable interview transcripts. He also recommended that fifty subjects was a typical number for a success case study project. Therefore, the researcher gathered nominations for 100 leaders in hopes of securing from forty to fifty useable interviews for data analysis. Forty three subjects were used for the research study. The subjects were of

any age and the researcher sought a nearly equal number of male and female interviewees. Brinkerhoff (2003) further suggested that the researcher select interviewees who met defined criteria of success. In this study, those defined criteria were: a) the subject's leadership position in the organization as defined by the research design, b) their experience of learning from failure and, c) their attempts to influence others to learn from failure. No monetary compensation was offered or given to the participants.

Data Collection Procedures

"I have no fear of failure whatsoever, because often out of that uncertainty something is salvaged, something that is worthwhile comes about. There is no progress without failure. and each failure is a lesson learned" (David Bowie).

The researcher contacted nominees by telephone or email to explain the nature of the research and to ask for their participation in the study. The researcher faxed or mailed a formal letter to the subjects that described the study's purpose, data collection procedures and what was required of them by participating in the research. Once they agreed to participate and signed the consent forms, a personal interview time was then scheduled and confirmed in writing. An informational packet was emailed to each participant. This packet contained the study's description, a consent form, an overview of the success case method, interview guidelines and a copy of the background demographic questions that would be asked. These were sent to prepare the subject for the interview. After the initial interview, the subjects were contacted again within sixty

days after the main interview to answer brief, follow-up questions about their interview experience.

The researcher began data collection by asking subjects for five items of demographic information: name, contact information, age, gender and number of subordinates. After using a sensitizing concept about leadership (See Interview Guide, Appendix A), the researcher began the interview, based on the questions guiding this research study:

- 1) How did leaders learn from their failures?
- 2) How has this learning transmitted to subordinates and peers within the leader's organization?
- 3) What were the organizational effects of learning from failures?

During responses to the interview questions, the researcher solicited additional information through probing questions such as:

- Please tell me more about....
- What do you mean by this?
- Can you please explain this?
- What happened when this occurred?
- What do you feel you learned from this?
- Why is that?

After the data were collected, the researcher contacted the subjects again by email within sixty days of their interview. The purpose of this contact was to ask the subjects follow-up questions concerning their reactions to the interview, such as:

- How did the interview affect you?
- Please tell me about any emotional reactions or insights or learning you experienced before, during or after the interview.

There were several purposes for collecting the follow-up data within sixty days of the initial interview. The first was to understand how verbally recounting learning from failures affected the subjects. In the pilot study, subjects remarked that they were emotionally affected or that a new insight occurred to them as a result of the interview process. A follow up interview gave subjects the opportunity to relate any emotional reactions they may have had. The second purpose was to provide an opportunity for interviewees to add to or ask questions about their initial interview. This follow up data was intended to add to the understanding of learning from failures. However, the data from the follow-up questions was not as rich as the main interview data.

The individual interviews ranged in length from forty-five minutes to two hours. The duration of the interview was determined by the interviewee's willingness to continue speaking with the researcher. Once collected by tape recorder and field notes, the data was transcribed by the researcher and read twice by the researcher to verify the accuracy of transcription and tape recording.

Demographic data were also collected by asking the subjects for several items of information, specifically their age, occupation, number of employees reporting to them, the title of who they reported to, gender and marital status (See Appendix D). These data were collected for purposes of comparison and categorization. The researcher also collected data through writing field notes. After each interview, the researcher noted her impressions, concerns, reflections and insights about the interview and/or the subject.

These notes were not used during data analysis. The data generated from the interviews and the follow-up interviews provided two sources of information to begin the data analysis.

Subject Demographics

*“Thank goodness you’re a perfectly equipped failure-it’s why I so distinguish you!
Anything else today is too hideous. Look about you-look at successes.
Would you be one, on your honor?”*

Maria Gostrey, character in Henry James’s The Ambassadors

The subjects for this study were chosen from approximately 100 nominations provided to the researcher by her business, academic and professional contacts and were selected according to two groupings: gender and organization type. The researcher sought a nearly equal number of men and women from profit and not-for-profit organizations. Twenty-one of the 43 subjects were female and 22 were male (See Appendix D). Six of the female and four of the male subjects were from the researcher’s home state of New Mexico; the remainder were from other areas of the United States. Twenty-three subjects were associated with not-for-profit or government organizations and 20 with for profit organizations, although many of the subjects reported that they had worked in both profit and not-for-profit environments at some time in their careers. The number of people reporting to the study subjects ranged from four of the subjects having no one currently reporting to them to a subject who oversees a quasi-military training academy in a large metropolitan area, having approximately 4,000 direct and indirect reports. A female executive vice president for a large metropolitan financial institution was indirectly responsible for 2,000 employees. The other subjects’ direct and indirect reports ranged between 4 and 2,000 (See Appendix D).

Nine of the 43 subjects gave their titles as Chief Executive Officer, President or Business Owner and 19 reported their titles as one of a high level senior corporate executive (titles such as Executive Vice-President, Senior Vice President, Group Vice President.) (See Appendix D). Six held the title of Executive Director (not-for-profits) and seven reported their title as mid-level management, (Manager, Consultant). Two subjects functioned as academics and administrators, one a professor, the other a physician. Over half of the subjects reported to a board of directors, a CEO, a President, or investors and described themselves as having multiple roles/responsibilities in their work, for example, as a Minister-Therapist-Executive Director, or a Chief Medical Officer-Physician-Administrator. One subject was independently wealthy from prior business ownership, currently investing in real estate development.

The subjects ranged in age from 33 to 72, with an average age of 50. Twenty-two of the subjects were between the ages of 41 and 50, 17 subjects between the ages of 51 and 60 and 2 subjects were between 61 and 70. Thirty-seven of the 43 subjects were married; three were single, one divorced and two cohabiting (See Appendix D).

Data Analysis

*“The road to wisdom? Well, it’s plain and simple to express:
Err and err and err again but less and less and less” (Piet Hein).*

Methods of analyzing the data collected depended on the qualitative tradition that the research springs from, the research purpose and the intended audience. Since this study’s data collection method was the Success Case (Brinkerhoff, 2003), a variation of the critical incident technique, the incidents themselves, which were call vignettes, were used as units of analysis. Other analysis methods that were considered for use were those

methods that described processes, issues or concepts. The research questions themselves provided the major framework for analyzing the data. Ryan and Bernard in Denzen and Lincoln, (Eds.) (2000) offered analysis types, such as lists, sorts, counts and comparisons as ways of analyzing components, taxonomies or mental maps. Since the specific research purpose was to describe, explain and understand the phenomenon of learning from failures, the researcher attempted to build theory rather than test already established theory. The process of building theory from data is called grounded theory. "Grounded theory is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more 'grounded' in the data and develops increasing richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works" (p.783). Strauss and Corbin (1998) offered several analytical processes specific to grounded theory: microanalysis, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, range of variability, open coding, axial coding and relational statements. This researcher used open coding in the data analysis.

Patton (2002) advised the qualitative researcher that ideas about content analysis will occur to them during the fieldwork period of data collection. These ideas constituted the beginning of analysis but should be balanced with "...alternative explanations and patterns that would invalidate the initial insights" (p. 437). Brinkerhoff (2003) suggested six frameworks may be useful in analyzing the data collected in interviews. These frameworks were: 1) the identification and description of the process or program, 2) the identification of the process or program parts that are more successful than others, 3) the identification of factors contributing to or eroding success, 4) the depth and breadth of the successful effects of the process or program, 5) the return on investment caused by the successful process or program and, 5) the additional unestimated values that may be

provided by the process or program success. The researcher kept these analysis frameworks in mind when she attempted to balance the analysis and interpretation of the data with the description provided by the subjects, with "...gaps and unresolved ambiguities (are) noted as part of the final report" (Patton, 2002, p. 437). The researcher coded all data by hand.

The process the researcher used for the open coding of the data was iterative. Strauss and Corbin (1998) tell us that the purpose of open coding is "...to discover, name and categorize phenomena according to their properties and dimensions...." (pg. 206). After rereading the transcripts several times, the researcher selected three different color codes for each of the three research questions. The researcher then began rereading the transcripts with the first research question in mind, listing, numbering and counting the interviewee responses to the first question. With the color codes, the researcher again re-read the texts and used key phrases and terms in the subject's own words, to code the data for each of the three research questions. These key phrases and terms were then put into behavior codes and the data was read again and re-coded. There were originally 1,005 data items for the three research questions, put into 60 behavior codes, condensed later into 45 categories (See Table 4, Chapter V). The researcher repeated this process three times in order to verify the initial coding. The researcher sorted the data items by gender, but decided later that information was beyond the scope of the study.

The researcher then took each interview and began cutting and pasting the relevant sections of data into a new category document, using Microsoft Word. In Chapter V, The Findings, she blended these data into a narrative about the category.

Demographic and vignette data were simply counted and categorized. All data were recounted several times to ensure accuracy.

Ensuring the Data's Trustworthiness

"Success is little more than delayed failure" (Graham Greene).

All research demands that issues of data validity and reliability be addressed. Internal validity asks an important question in qualitative research; are we observing and measuring what we think we are observing and measuring (Merriam, 2002)? With the qualitative approach validity and reliability are referred to as trustworthiness, consistency and transferability. This researcher had planned to use two methods to ensure internal validity through triangulation: member checking and peer review, but did not do so because of the large amount of data that resulted from the interviews.

Reliability, or consistency of the data, was ensured by using the written field notes from each interview during the data collection process, although these were not helpful in coding the data. The researcher used verbatim subject comments whenever possible, interpreted the data, but still allowed the reader to draw their own conclusions from the subject's comments. This enhanced the external validity or generalizability of the study. However, qualitative methods rely upon the reader to establish trustworthiness and generalizability for themselves. Validity and reliability dependent upon the researcher's competency in using qualitative methods and rigor during fieldwork. As the primary instrument of the study, the researcher attempted to bring flexibility, insight and tacit knowledge to the work. (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). The reader must decide whether the researcher met the objectives of trustworthiness, consistency and transferability.

Ethical Considerations

*“Failure is an integral part of an interesting life”
(Farson & Keyes, 2002).*

To ensure anonymity, all interviewees were assigned pseudonyms and code numbers, which were used exclusively in the stages of interview, data analysis and reporting, a M or F designation for gender and an identifying number. When names were needed, subjects were represented by pseudonyms in the dissertation. Each subject signed an informed consent form prior to the interview; the interviewer explained the purpose and use of the research, and the risks involved, both verbally and in writing. All data were housed in the researcher’s office and stored in a sealed box to be destroyed by shredding three years after completion of the study. Interview tapes were housed in a sealed box and will be destroyed within one year of transcription. In return for the interview, the subjects received a free hour of leadership coaching, a copy of the dissertation research and a copy of their interview, if they wished.

Potential Benefits of the Research

The researcher believes that professionals in the business and leadership fields often fail to understand either the role of failures in building their leadership capabilities or their role in framing the way their organizations use failures. The participants and readers of this study can benefit from a fuller understanding of these issues and processes. The researcher attempted to shed light on three potential benefits of this research: the richness of the failure experience as a leadership development tool, the processes by which learning is transmitted into organizational routine and the opportunities for information and learning that are inherent in every failure experience.

Potential Risks of the Research

Given the researcher's commitment to and awareness of the needs for confidentiality in this type of personal research, the risk to individual participants was deemed to be minimal. The researcher extended an invitation to participants to call her with questions or concerns at any time. None did. Furthermore all the data was coded in such a way that no person, place or organization could be identified in any written or oral information coming out of this study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was a doctoral graduate student and has worked with approximately twenty-five organizations as a human resources and organizational development consultant over her twenty year career. This background prepared the researcher to maintain an objective role in the interview process and in the data analysis phase, despite the personal nature of the interviews. However, the researcher was biased towards the ability of humans to learn from failure. She believed that organizations could utilize failure more thoroughly for learning and innovation and that the leader's behavior was of critical importance in this regard. These biases may have shaded the findings, although the researcher strove for objectivity.

Summary

*“Success traps us in a system of praise or blame, credit or shame, a system that gives primacy to goals and external evaluations devalues the gift of self-knowledge and diminishes our capacity to take risks that may yield growth”
(Parker Palmer).*

This chapter described the methods that were used in the research portion of this study. This research used a qualitative approach because of the depth that this approach provides. Subjects were selected through nomination, using the Success Case Method (Brinkerhoff, 2003) which recommended selecting subjects who meet certain criteria. The data was collected through the course of two interviews, the goal of which was to understand the subject’s learning process through their description of the failure events.

It is the consistent hope of the researcher that what they study produces detailed, rigorous and beneficial information for all involved. The study was a tremendous learning opportunity for at least one person as well. During the time necessary to complete this study, two certainties occurred: the researcher failed at times and learned much from it.

CHAPTER IV: THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Introduction

“One must be God to be able to distinguish successes from failures and not make mistakes” (Anton Chekov).

This research explored important leader behaviors and influences associated with failure, specifically, how leaders learned from their own failures and how they influenced others in organizations to learn from their failures. The organizational effects of learning from failure were also described.

The guiding questions for this research study were:

- 1) How did leaders learn from their own failures?
- 2) How did leaders transmit this learning to others within the leader's organization?
- 3) What was the impact on the organization of learning from failures?

To answer these questions, 43 individuals were nominated through this researcher's contacts. They were nominated for their reputations as learners, leaders and individuals who fit the study criterion for leadership (See pg. 62). The subjects were interviewed by telephone or in person and asked to relate two incidents when they failed and were successful in learning from that experience. The subjects were asked additional questions about their backgrounds, employees, and personal characteristics, as well as questions about the organizational effects of learning from failure. The design of the study was a qualitative approach using the Success-Case Method and structured interviews as the method of data collection. The data derived from these interviews was analyzed through a content analysis approach.

All nominators and subjects were guaranteed anonymity, with subjects being assigned a code number and an M or F designation for gender. The name of the subject's organization was not used or captured anywhere in the data. If mentioned in the interview, identifying characteristics were removed from the interview transcripts to ensure that individuals and organizations could not be identified.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to six selected research subjects through their vignettes of learning from a failure experience. These six subjects were chosen because their failure incidents were representative of the types of learning vignettes that emerged during the interviews. Their vignettes offered a balanced perspective between the disappointment of failing and the gradual strengthening of confidence that results from learning from the failure. Their ability to see the lesson inherent in the failure experience and to capitalize later upon that lesson emerged immediately during the interviews and the data analysis. These six subjects were similar to the other leaders who learned from failure and were interviewed by the researcher, but what differentiated them slightly were their humility, perseverance, and resilience. Though their incidents were similar in theme to others, these six were also chosen for this chapter because they were enjoyable to interview, full of self insight and loved to learn.

During the interviews, five categories of vignettes about failure emerged from the data which the subjects shared. These type-of-incident categories were titled:

1. Relationships at Work: managing peers, bosses, subordinates and one's self,
2. Unmet expectations: reality does not match expectation,
3. Critical Dialogue: missed opportunities to communicate,

4. Changing Direction: unsuccessful attempts at organizational change,
5. Life Happens: a category of twenty different types of vignettes that appeared less than four times in the total of 86 vignettes.

Table 3:***Type of Failure Incidents***

Incident Type	Numbers 132	Percentages 100%
Relationships at Work	50	38%
Unmet Expectations	25	19%
Critical Dialogue	13	10%
Changing Direction	11	8%
Life Happens	33	25%

(The category of relationships at work was the largest, with 38% of the incidents sorted into this category. The researcher selected two vignettes from the relationships at work category for a total of six vignettes told by six subjects.) The total of these categories did not equal 100% because some of the incidents were grouped into more than one category as they contained multiple themes by the incident and the type of learning experience. The researcher has protected the identity of the six by altering or removing any identifying information and giving them pseudonyms.

The next section contains portions of the subjects' vignettes. The portions give the reader a small taste of the subjects' personality and their concepts of failure and success. Thirty-eight percent of the incidents described during the interviews were

placed in Relationships at Work theme. The theme included vignettes about work relationships with peers, bosses, and subordinates and with the task of managing one's self and one's emotions in a work context.

Tom: Relationships at Work-Managing Others

*"When I get in trouble it is because I am confident
I know what the right answer is" (Tom).*

At 58, Tom was President of his own small company of 11 employees, doing what he loved which is solving problems. He was a highly educated and thoughtful entrepreneur who began his own business as a result of what he viewed at the time as a major failure, getting downsized out of an organization.

The incident where he believed he failed has to do with hiring a graduate school friend into his company at a senior level. "The reality is that I just had happy ears. I heard what I wanted to hear. It would be great to work with this guy again, great to have my buddy around [p.2]." He disregarded the counsel of his Board of Directors against the hire and watched his friend flounder trying to build a new line of business for the organization.

He [the college friend newly hired] was draining resources, money, time from us, but he was trying to build the [change management consulting] business and coming to work but no real action was going on, he wasn't calling on customers. Of necessity, I gave him a project that was part of some business the company sold. We sold more of this type of business and he was given two more projects. The third time we came to him with a project we had sold, he said, 'I can't do these projects and build a business.' I said, 'But you aren't building a business. I

have to pay your overhead.’ We had a parting of the ways over that. He decided it wasn’t going to work and resigned which was good for him and good for me. Then I had to call a board meeting and fall on my sword. Sign a paper to my VP of operations that said the next time I do this, remind me of this story.

We invested too much for it not to work, beyond what I would have done for anyone else. I didn’t listen to my board or my senior management counsel telling me that is not what we do, we’re not positioned to do it or rich enough to fund that kind of investment. They didn’t agree with the idea and I bulled my way through it. The bottom line was it didn’t work. I had to say it didn’t work and admit I hadn’t done it well [p.2].

When I get in trouble it is because I am confident I know what the right answer is. History has a way of proving me wrong, but you always go into it thinking that it is the right thing to do. Life has a way of reminding you don’t have all the answers [p.3].

Tom strongly believed in using a ‘what went right, what went wrong and what did we learn’ discussion process after work projects to increase learning and has institutionalized this type of learning discussion process in his organization upon project completion. People who learn from their failures were “...action oriented, prone to doing something rather than just thinking about it, results oriented [p.4].” He ended the interview with an adage that he continues to find inspirational, “Experience is only a good teacher if you are paying attention [p.5].”

Tom’s incident was representative of the theme Relationships at Work. This superior subordinate relationship which was also a friend and colleague relationship

caused Tom discomfort when the work relationship was no longer financially sustainable. Tom believed he let his friend, his management team and himself down by making an ill considered hire. Thirty-eight percent of the incidents described during the interviews were placed in Relationships at Work category (See Table 3). The category included vignettes about work relationships with peers, bosses, and subordinates and with the task of managing one's self and one's emotions in a work context.

Cathy: Relationships at Work-Managing Herself

"You can never get anywhere by losing your temper" (Cathy).

Cathy, an executive director for a council within a large government agency, has a small staff of four reporting to her. She was 46 years old, married and related the failure she first experienced when learning to manage her emotional states in a large government agency meeting.

When I was at a national government organization as head of research, I was meeting with my immediate boss and a couple of people from another office within our organization, procurement people who do all the back office purchasing. These people have risen beyond their level of incompetence. The purpose of the meeting was to convince them about what we were doing – which was procuring research services. We were putting RFP's out for research services, they thought we were buying pencils. It was so maddening that I blew my top at this meeting and at the end of it, I stomped out of the room. I made it very clear that these people were stupid.

Of course, afterwards, I realized that was dumb, expressing that kind of frustration in a meeting doesn't get you anywhere, so of course I apologized to the people I had the meeting with.

I talked with my boss and told him that what I had done was stupid and I was sorry. I was thinking about it and even though these folks are not in right, it was my behavior that was the dumbest thing about the whole event. It was a very useful learning experience for me. You can never get anywhere by losing your temper. My behavior was in the wrong. It ended up not serving the interests of the meeting. It was counter productive. It wasn't that it set us back necessarily, but it didn't get us anywhere. It was not necessary.

I learned that one should always take the high road even in that kind of a situation, it is unnecessary and a failure to lose control or let your guard down and act that way. I felt mad at myself. I am smarter than that, I didn't need to do that.

I think what helps me to learn from failure is that I am able to be introspective and look at myself and my behavior as if I was someone else. I have the ability to reflect on myself and what I am doing as well as my impact on others. I know quite a number of people who don't have a clue how their behavior impacts other people. They will never have that ability to reflect on their behavior. I take criticism and feedback and look at the truth in what people are saying instead of immediately putting up defenses.

I have never done anything like that since then [losing my temper.] It has been ten years and I have met with folks like that since then, people who you would just as soon slap or call them an idiot, but you don't. It's more useful to

see what the goals of the meeting are and how you can get the people at the other side of the table to buy into that outcome. Win-win instead of get my way [p.1].

For Cathy, failure was an opportunity to pick one's self up, shake one's self off and start over. This type of 'shake yourself off' recovery, she felt, was a typically American approach to failure in life. In the United States, Cathy has seen failure used as a stepping stone or an opportunity for the next success. Her work in developing entrepreneurial enterprises in foreign cultures gave her a multi-faceted perspective on experience. This approach she contrasted to that of other non-US countries and cultures where failure experiences were viewed more seriously and from which there may be no social redemption, no second or third chances.

I'm thinking particularly about entrepreneurship, viewing as I have cultures outside of the US, when it comes to starting and growing a business. A lot of European countries, you get one shot to start a business and if you fail, it is so onerous and costly, in terms of money and societal scorn, that you have one chance to make it. You can't try something and then go try something else. That is stultifying and slows everything down [p.3].

When she was growing up, Cathy's parents were willing to experiment with ideas and activities and allowed her to as well. She credited team sports as one of the ways young people learned to fail with grace and returned to win another day. Regarding learning, Cathy called herself a huge sponge, one who believed that learning was lifelong. She explained that the interview itself was a learning experience for her; she saw everyday as an opportunity to learn about herself and those around her. The leadership behaviors she used to teach others to learn from their failures were: leading by example,

role modeling, observation and talking. Cathy described people who don't learn from their failures as arrogant, unable to self-examine, and unable to admit failures.

Dorry: Unmet Expectations

"We had been like fireworks. We shot up and fizzled" (Dorry).

Dorry was a female physician and administrator working in a for profit corporation. At 48, she was married and had both large and small staffs reporting to her at various times in her career. The failure incident she related centered on the rise and fall of a business venture several years ago.

A partner and I started a hospitalist group four years before. [Hospitalists are medical professionals who care for a doctor's hospitalized patients and work closely with the doctor's hospital to ensure twenty-four hour, low cost, effective patient care during hospitalization.] It was very successful, we started from zero, put in some of our own startup money, worked very hard and did the chores ourselves, like payroll and billing. This is in addition to doing a full load of clinical work. But it caught on and we hired other people. We knew it would grow. It was enormously successful, within 18-20 months, we had 7 employees and were operating around the clock. By 24 months we were billing \$1.3 million.

I started getting burned out. We were at a hospital, which hadn't wanted to help us get started, but as soon as we were successful, they wanted to take us over. We declined and then had problems negotiating contracts. We were all working so hard and were burned out. We turned down several untenable contracts and the hospital made good on its threat to start their own group and

steered contracts away from us. Our financial base began to erode and a couple of our employees took jobs at other facilities because they were easier and paid about the same, not such long hours. We ended up hiring more temporary help at a higher price and lost some contracts.

Things got stressful between my partner and I. I was weary to the bone. After having trouble making payroll, we decided to close the practice. It was very hard. I really enjoyed the people that I worked with. I felt like I was letting the people that worked for me down and letting medical community down because of the physicians had come to count on us to take care of these patients for them or along with them. I felt it was a failure because we had a good thing going and it eroded and we were physically worn out. We weren't as savvy and smart as we could have been or should have been, getting more help sooner. We were too slow in making the staff decisions to get the right people or let go of the people who weren't a fit for us. By the time we made changes, there was money we never recovered because of late billing. We were novices at owning a business and managing all these people. But some of our employees wanted to be partners immediately. But we didn't want to do that because we had taken the risk and made the investment first. It was such a Herculean task, doing too much ourselves, being thrifty because we didn't know what was around the corner, but in fact we would have been better off if we had spent more on securing help for ourselves early on and not gotten so exhausted.

What I learned is that I needed to be more realistic about my physical limits. I think we held our own and did a fantastic job for four years, but it took a

high toll. I should not do that to myself. We had been like fireworks, we shot up and fizzled. Four years isn't an insignificant period of time. We astounded everyone with how successful we had been. So then to fizzle out was embarrassing. Had we tripped over our own shoelaces by doing something wrong, it would have been different, but we were good doctors. Financially, and physically, we couldn't manage it anymore.

But I learned from that experience because we changed the face of our business in the community. There had been other groups like us, but we really became the gold standard to which others were compared. I was called and hired for a new job right away, to a bigger, better job. Rather than failing, what I had done had won me enough regard to be first choice for this other job. That took the sting out of it. It was a big job, but a Monday through Friday job, an executive management job. I took some courses on my own in business management that had helped me along the way. It helped position me for the executive job, but local reputation made a difference. Half of life is showing up. Even though I had failed at this particular business endeavor, I had done well enough and there had been enough bright moments in it, that it won me the regard of my peers, who recommended me for the executive job. It was a very good job [p.3].

Dorry saw failure as an inevitable part of life, but also as a good experience, which provided one with two of life's necessities: humility and perspective. For her, failure was a hallmark of learning at your top speed or your best potential because failing meant that you were making opportunities for yourself and others. She loved learning

and placed it at the center of her busy life. But her failures weighed on her because they were disappointments; she did not see herself as handling disappointment well. Dorry shared her stories of failure with her employees as well as sharing the emotional component of those failures as her way of teaching others how to fail and learn from the experience. But she realized how critical it is for employees to get distance from their failures before they could understand the lesson of experience in them, similar to the grieving time needed after a loss experience. She believed we each have different coping mechanisms and different timetables for healing. Her three important components of learning from failure were a self-deprecating sense of humor, a systematic process to analyze the root cause of the failure and the absence of blame and humiliation when failure occurs.

In Dorry's experience, those who fail to learn from failure did not accept responsibility for themselves and their actions; instead they blamed others. In the medical profession she believed there was a similar reaction to the experiences of death and failure. Both brought a sense of loss and regret for what you should or could have done when viewed in retrospect.

Dorry's incident was typical of nineteen percent of the incidents related by the subjects where they failed to meet expectations, such as passing a certifying or qualifying test or interview, failing with a new business or product, missing a promotion or a job opportunity or a standard of performance. This category was titled Unmet Expectations. Dorry's vignette was typical of leaders who began a venture with high expectations, learned several hard real life lessons and subsequently labeled their experience as a failure because their expectations were unrealistic. The distinct difference for Dorry and

others, whose incidents were in this category, was their ability to seek out what they needed to learn from the situation in order to be successful in later ventures.

Jean: Critical Dialogue

"I needed to do some things differently" (Jean).

At 62, Jean, CEO of a not-for-profit organization, relates an incident about her work on a major city development initiative.

The situation involved a grant from our local city. The city was working toward building a conference/incubator space that would include a space for us. It didn't happen. The staff assigned was my head consultant, the most knowledgeable and skillful staff member. The city decided to deal directly with her and brought her in as an independent contractor and she accepted that arrangement. She left our company in order to do that. From my point of view, I was betrayed and I lost the contacts to a staff person who left.

The city manager also was on our board of directors. He was the person from the city who caused this to happen so it was a double betrayal. I chose this example because it was my worst and an early failure for me. I didn't see what was coming and I didn't pay enough attention to see what was coming. Both parties claimed innocence and both parties claimed the other instigated the idea. To this day, I don't know what happened.

At first I was sad and then I got angry and then resolved. I learned that I needed to have better communication with all people and that I needed to build a team. And I hadn't built a team. I didn't have the buy-in that I needed from the

city for the organization. I didn't have the buy-in from the staff. That was the result of me being too independent, not being close to the team and not building the team. Ongoing communication was critical and I needed to do more than that. I needed to be willing to work harder at that part of it and not make assumptions that because I got a contract and a grant, everything was going to be fine. I needed to take care of it constantly. Stay engaged and include myself in certain meetings so that I was there as the recognized leader. I think I had stepped back too much. I really wasn't much of a leader then. I was a manager. I began to build my leadership then. I wasn't much of a strategist either. I learned that I needed to be a better planner, to realize there were politics in everything.

I like people and building successful relationships. I hadn't done that, so I needed to do some things differently. I bore some responsibility for that relationship. I needed to be more open to sharing my knowledge and power, vision and not hold it as close. I had been too protective of what I knew and that came from insecurity. I was able to look inside and see how I was behaving and how I could change my behavior. Until that point, I was more 'I'll do it myself' and I couldn't do it myself. I needed to share everything and build a team. I got a lot out of the experience. In the end it was a fine thing. The person who left, she and I collaborate very well now. The most satisfying thing is that she and I have regard for each other. I understand her a lot better now [p.2].

Jean used two behaviors to help others learn from failure. She publicly admitted her failures and reassured people that she understood they put their best effort forth. She took action to repair any damage that the failure may have caused. People unable to learn

from failure shared the characteristics of inflexibility, arrogance, stubbornness, self-involvement and self-importance. Jean also had a great self-deprecating sense of humor, which emerged when she told about a time she failed and did not learn from the experience. Jean laughed from her soul and said, somewhat sheepishly: “This will contradict everything I’ve just said. When I get really frustrated, I stop being cooperative and start being stubborn [p.4].”

Jean’s incident, typical of those where the leader missed an opportunity to communicate a direction or to address a conflict, described the learning that the experience held for her. Not only was she able to learn about herself from the incident but she eventually repaired the relationship with the other person involved, the one who she felt betrayed her. This category of Jean’s incident, Critical Dialogue, included those situations that described failures due to an unclearly articulated vision, strategy, expectation or values and unresolved conflicts. This category was about an essential leadership and organizational function, using information and the spoken work to resolve problems.

Hal: Changing Direction

“Personally, I don’t do well when I get hit upside the head with a 2 by 4” (Hal).

My mother has an iron clad will and is a bulldog. She sticks to her principles and doesn’t care what gets in the way. If she gets knocked down she gets right back up and fights twice as hard. You contrast that with my Dad, whose whole goal in life was just to see what he could do. If you combine those two, I ended up with a desire to be successful in my parents’ terms because they were both uneducated. I

was the first person in my family to ever get a PhD, only the third to ever get a college degree, so education was highly valued. My dad was a steamfitter, I come from a family of laborers. That was a driving force to stay in school, seeing how they struggled financially and in general to keep things going. They were incredibly persistent and never threw in the towel. So that is my personality, not only in my work world but in my family life.

We adopted two kids internationally, neither was an easy task. We adopted the first child from Peru during the revolution there. My wife was in Lima for six months, trying to get him out. I spent a fortune on the adoption. It was just plain tenacity. We hung in there and got him home and then did the second one (adoption) in Guatemala. The second was easier, but there is no piece of cake adoption. It wasn't as easy as taking a roll in the sack [p.3].

Hal, 52, a professional working at a nationally recognized non profit agency, told the above story to illustrate what he referred to as his quality of 'hillybillyism' or what this researcher termed resilience in the face of obstacles. Earlier in Hal's career, he was the director at another large, well-known non profit agency, a complex, national organization where he directed a function that may not be well understood, program evaluation. He viewed part of his role there as a catalyst to help the organization understand and use evaluation as a learning tool. In other words, to change the organization's cultural thinking about the role and place of evaluation. Hal recounted that when working within an organization, professionals in his discipline must be

...so carefully attentive to the context of the organization in which you are working. Trying to understand the complexity of where you sit in your role,

personally, interpersonally, the organization's culture of evaluation. How you have to frame issues and articulate them in a way that they are understood. That cuts across my 25-year career in this field....One of the things that I have learned, in working in a variety of environments, is that each of them come with their own particular context, culture, subcultures and support for evaluation and how they define evaluation. You have to get your head around what people are talking about, how you can identify the players and how you can move forward to make the study successful with all the underlying assumptions in the organization, the power relationships and the roles of people [p.2].

Hal learned this powerful lesson when conducting a nationwide study in which he overlooked including a stakeholder when gathering data sources for the evaluation. "I left out someone who in the end, was able to come back later and totally disrupt and undermine the study and undermine the efforts of introducing evaluation into the organization long term. And if you miss one, you can lose a whole year or more [p.1]." Hal was physically affected by this misstep and needed time to regroup after the event.

It disrupted my whole position, my function, my department. It was frustrating; I felt blindsided. Personally, I don't do well when I get hit upside the head with a two by four. It took me time to regain my balance and get some perspective on it and move forward....It was a very difficult situation and it did affect me physically. It affected my relationships with others and everything in general [p.1].

But like other leaders, Hal has used this lesson learned to sharpen his own successful practice and to be mindful of organizational context and involvement when a

change initiative is underway. “That is the hardest part of self-reflection and understanding. To have the ability to see what you are doing with a third eye and ear, and to grasp the principles of the way you are going at things that isn’t working, is a higher order skill. To some extent, I have done that in my professional practice [p.4].”

The last category, Life Happens, was composed of stories, with twenty different topics, whose themes appeared less than four times in the 86 incidents. As a category, these incidents made up 25% of the total incidents. Typical topics of the vignettes in this category were: hirings and firings, failure to build a team, subject didn’t meet their own expectations, organizational politics, organizational fit or the inability to think creatively.

Tip: Life Happens

“I was so smart that I outsmarted myself” (Tip).

In 1981, I was just out of school and knew everything there was to know. I was a brand new executive with an education committee that I was working with. One of the members was a proponent of video training—making video education tapes and then selling or shipping them out. I knew this was a completely idiotic idea. At the time videotape machines were very expensive, cumbersome, very temperamental, usually you found them in high schools or universities, there was usually one, locked up someplace. So I said this is ridiculous, there is no way, no one will ever have videotapes in their homes. Of course, a few years later, everyone and their brother had videotapes in their homes. A company called Blockbuster was sold a few years later for \$8 billion dollars.

I reflected on that not too many years later when it became very apparent to me what a complete utter fool I was on this subject, how blinded I was to this concept of technological solution, change and market conditions. I reflected on that and thought that I was so smart that I outsmarted myself. I was so locked into what I knew: that the price of videotape was high, machine price was high, they were hard to use. It locked me into being stupid.

As a result of that, I became much more attuned to trends and looking at the fringes of change. Trying to get a better handle on what might happen. A few years later I was out doing futurist presentations and talking about future trends. Today I talk about trends in our field. Often now, I am the one now in front of the audience who is saying these are trends to watch for....As a result of that I have tried to be more open and ready to consider possibilities and trends [p.1].

Tip called this incident his “failure of imagination and knowledge [p.1]” that so embarrassed him that he felt compelled to”...rethink how I would approach this in the future [p.1].” At 46, Tip was CEO of a large non-profit organization in a major city. Besides the encompassing work of leader, Tip saw his role as one of leading his followers to the same place that he himself was. He did this by teaching.

As an educator, I know about the concept of readiness to learn. You cannot teach anything to anyone, until they are open to it. You can't force someone to learn something until they desire to learn it. But I have now taken that concept into other areas of my life, especially working with the Board and staff, you have to bring them to the place. If you trying to get them to do something that they at first don't want to do or you think they don't want to do, you have to help them

come to a place where they are ready to hear it and to learn the options and the possibilities. I now am more willing to bring people along than I used to be [p.6].

Like other leaders from this study, Tip had a great sense of humor and used it to laugh at himself. When asked about a failure experience that he was unable to learn from, he laughed from his belly, responding:

You should talk to my wife. My personal life is a shambles. I have terrible cholesterol, back surgery twice, I'm 25 pounds overweight. For 15 years, I've been told, 'Lose weight, get more exercise, eat healthier' and I don't do any of that. I don't know why exactly. I'm genetically disposed to cholesterol. I'm in a job that lends itself to hospitality, but I don't do anything about it. I'm a total failure in terms of my own health management. I know I should be doing something differently. I've tried. I've been a member of several health clubs. They have benefited enormously from my dues [p.8].

Summary

"An error, gracefully acknowledged, is a victory won." (Caroline Gascoigne)

This chapter presented a summary of the research subjects and a brief portrait of six of the subjects, Tip, Dorry, Hal, Jean, Tom and Cathy, representing five of the incident categories. All of the stories were selected because the subjects spoke deeply of personal experiences that had a shaping influence on them. A few of the stories caused this researcher to cry, most caused her to laugh and each one helped her to wonder more deeply about the power of learning from experience, particularly from those setback experiences that seem random, bewildering and painful at the time they occur. In

Chapter Five, Findings, the emergent themes based on these success incidents will be explored. These themes, based on the three research questions framing this study, were an outcome of content analysis and open coding of the data.

CHAPTER V: THE FINDINGS

*“This aspect-making [qualitative research] all come together-
is one of the most difficult things of all, isn't it?
Quite apart from actually achieving it, it is hard to
inject the right mix of
(a) faith that it can and will be achieved and recognition
(b) that it has to be worked at and isn't based on romantic inspiration,
(c) that it isn't like a solution to a puzzle or math problem but has to be created,
(d) that you can't always pack everything into one version, and
(e) that any one project could yield several different ways of
bringing it together.” (Paul Atkinson)*

Chapter IV briefly introduced the reader to six of the research subjects as they recounted vignettes of their experiences of failing, learning and maturing. The six vignettes were a sampling of the five major varieties of success cases that the subjects shared with the researcher when they recounted how they learned from past failures.

This chapter displays the findings from the content analysis, as based on the three research questions of this study. The research questions that framed this study were:

- 1) How did leaders learn from their own failures?
- 2) How did leaders transmit this learning to others within the leader's organization?
- 3) What was the effect on the organization learning from failure?

These questions provided the structure for sorting the data and analyzing the content of the data. Content analysis was used to derive codes for behaviors, themes and categories under each of the research questions. A total of 60 codes were used and when compared to the data produced 1,005 pieces of data in response to the research questions. Open coding was used to place each piece of data with the appropriate research question and into the appropriate category. The categories of findings were then subdivided into

themes in order to describe and display the learning and teaching behaviors in the subject's own words. Table 4 presented a display of the research questions, the finding categories, the themes and the frequencies.

Table 4:

Research Finding Categories, Sub-themes and Frequencies

How did leaders learn from their failures?		
	629[#]	100[%]
<u>Reflected to gain understanding and perspective</u>		
• <i>Sought out perspective</i>	57	9.2
• <i>Used time to regroup and critically reflect</i>	111	17.6
• <i>Showed concern for letting others down</i>	9	1.4
<u>Practiced four personality traits</u>		
• <i>Humility</i>	12	1.9
• <i>Resilience</i>	26	4.1
• <i>Perseverance</i>	27	4.3
• <i>Expertise</i>	7	1.1
<u>Demonstrated continual learning</u>		
• <i>Adopted a model for learning from failure</i>	27	4.3
• <i>Understood what they need to learn</i>	160	25.4
• <i>Saw every situation as learning opportunity</i>	40	6.4
• <i>Expected to learn</i>	33	5.2
• <i>Used support network</i>	8	1.3
• <i>Readers</i>	16	2.5
<u>Used failure as opportunity</u>		
• <i>Failing was an event, not state of being</i>	57	9.1
• <i>Failing was as much a part of life as success</i>	15	2.4
• <i>Failing was powerful teacher</i>	24	3.8

Table 4 Continued

How did leaders teach others in their organizations to learn from their failures?		
	270[#]	100[%]
<u>Acted with an internal locus of control</u>		
• <i>Positive focus</i>	14	5.2
• <i>Solution focus</i>	9	3.3
• <i>Personal responsibility</i>	26	9.6
• <i>Accurate self image</i>	14	5.2
• <i>Not taking things personally</i>	4	1.5
• <i>Kept promises</i>	3	1.1
• <i>No shame and criticism</i>	15	5.6
• <i>Treated others with respect</i>	7	2.6
• <i>Admitted failures publicly</i>	9	3.3
<u>Modeled behaviors for others</u>		
• <i>Supported employees</i>	14	5.2
• <i>Attended to complexity and learning</i>	24	8.8
• <i>Led by example</i>	15	5.6
• <i>Tolerated failures</i>	13	4.8
• <i>Shared failure stories</i>	16	5.9
• <i>Observed and listened</i>	8	3.0
• <i>Took risks</i>	17	6.3
• <i>Used humor</i>	4	1.5
<u>Institutionalized learning processes</u>		
• <i>Used learning and performance cycle</i>	35	13.0
• <i>Conducted learning discussions</i>	10	3.7
• <i>Provided room to fail</i>	8	3.0
• <i>Promoted reflection</i>	5	1.8
What were the effects of learning from failure on an organization?		
	106 [#]	100[%]
<u>Positive effects</u>		
• <i>Increased profit and productivity</i>	44	41.5
• <i>Enhanced communication</i>	15	14.2
• <i>Improved organizational climate</i>	14	13.2
<u>Negative effects</u>		
• <i>Decreased profit and productivity</i>	12	11.3
• <i>Decreased communication</i>	8	7.5
• <i>Hindered organizational climate</i>	7	6.6
• <i>Death</i>	1	1.0
• <i>No negative effects</i>	5	4.7

Prior to presenting the findings of the research, the researcher presents an initial remark about an interesting and unexpected theme that came out of the data. This interesting and unexpected theme related to the research questions in only a tangential way, but it was unique enough to be described briefly before the findings were presented. The unexpected finding was the variety of ways that the subjects themselves defined the word failure. The researcher was not expecting that several of the subjects would wish to clarify how they defined failure or that some rather not to use the word at all. The subjects' definitions of failure are discussed prior to an explanation of the findings.

One of the most challenging aspects of this research study was arriving at a comprehensive yet concise definition for words that were frequently used in this study. Leadership and failure were just two examples of words that could have different meanings depending upon their context and usage. The researcher defined failure according to Webster's Third International Dictionary as a 'want of success; lack of satisfactory performance or effect' (Gove, P.B. (Ed.). 1993). But what about the word failure? It has been used synonymously for failure, or to mean a lesser type of failure. Some use the word daily, others do not have it in their vocabulary. In the academic tradition, the researcher defined failures using Marsick and Watkins (1990) who source their definition back to the work of Dewey, Lewin and Argyris when they defined failures as triggers, surprises, errors and unmet expectations. The Center for Creative Leadership (1992) defined failures as missteps, faulty judgment, faulty or missing information and lapses. Are failures and failures synonymous? Although interesting, it was outside the scope of the study to ask the subjects to define terms like leadership, failures and failure; however ten subjects made a point to articulate their definition of

failure, during the interview. Ten of the 43 subjects, five men and five women, half from for profit and half from not-for-profit organizations, defined failure in their own unique terms. The language these leaders used to explain what a failure means to them helped the researcher to broaden her perspectives on what it is that truly constitutes a failure. If nothing is a failure, every action taken is an attempt to succeed. This was the mental construct of failure for at least one of the subjects. The following quotations illustrated the variation in the subjects' definitions of failure.

As an example, the first time the word failure was used in the interview by the researcher, subject M19 replied that he doesn't...

...think in those terms. It is not even a typical word that I would use. There are times when things don't work out the way I want, when I've made a decision, in retrospect I would have made another decision. But I couldn't come up with anything that I could say was a total failure, nothing redeemable from it, nothing that could not be learned [p.1].

M35 also did not use the word failure in his personal vocabulary, but instead...

...I use the word failures. We make failures all the time and then we correct from our failures. My view is we are all making failures, if we correct them as we go along, you're fine. Life is constantly making failures and constantly adjusting. I see that as normal. If you make a big failure, why? What will you do to not do it again [p.1]?

M35 expanded on this thought as he explained that the attitudes one brings to failures can be either a help or a barrier to productivity.

By the time I went into business, what I thought about failures was that it was important to always take the most productive route [to the goal]. If you focus on punishing someone or on the error, you are not moving forward. Being in business and having a clear objective, you don't let things get in your way. You see failures in the right perspective, because failures would get in the way [of the goal] if you dwelt on them. You find people doing unproductive things, especially with respect to failures, like covering their ass [p.2].

M08 and M39, defining their meaning of failure, viewed the word in a similar way to the researcher, as the inability to reach an expected outcome. "My definition of failure would be that I was not able to accomplish what should have been accomplished, what I would have liked to accomplish [p.1]." M39 did not achieve his desires, but unsure why that would be deemed a failure: "Some people, in regards to the term failure, will over sensitize themselves. Whether the incidents I will relate were failures or not, I will classify these as an inability to achieve the envisioned results [p.1]."

M05 and F41 experienced the word failure as too negatively connotative to be used in a business, management and learning context.

I have trouble with the word failure. When I think of failure, it is a complete and utter stop, you can't move forward from that. There are very few utter failures. People find their place and operate there. If I wanted to be the President of the US, I would probably fail, but most of us, when we are pursuing our lives, unless we get fired and are told we are no good, I don't think there are failures. In management, I characterize what you are calling failure as course correction or making adjustments [p.1].

Failure is a harsh term. I don't think there is such a thing as failure. I think people make failures and that is one of the things I try to convey to my employees. You are going to make failures, you learn more from your failures than from any class that you can take [p.2].

F24 viewed failure, or what she referred to as trial and error work, as part of her role as a leader.

It is interesting for me to sort out what one means by failure. The kind of work I do is about trial and error. It sounds arrogant to say I've never failed, but there are lots of things that didn't go the way I wanted them to, but I don't know if I could label them a failure. It was hard for me to think about failure. I can tell you about times where it didn't work out, we learned and then we went back and re-did it [p.1].

Three of the female leaders, F42, F30 and F38, defined failure in more metaphysical terms. Failure was seen as one way of 'psychic learning.' "I think we engineer these (failure) situations for ourselves. We somehow know we are going to learn something and we'll figure it out one way or another [p.4]." Another subject, raised in the Buddhist tradition, described the ying and yang quality of failure that influenced her growing up and in her years as a leader. "I was reinforced to try again [when I failed]. I am Japanese and my family has a Buddhist outlook to failure. It is as much a part of life as success. You wouldn't have success if you didn't have failure [p.4]." The third leader, coming from the Navajo tradition, described her tribe's worldview of failure:

When we did something wrong, especially in the Navajo belief, it is felt to be beyond you. You are going along in harmony and you contaminate yourself or

something happens to contaminate you. You need to bring yourself back into balance and harmony. You are not necessarily accountable for your actions. If you do a lot of bad things, there are many ceremonies [held] for you to bring you into balance. When you take part in these ceremonies it gives you an opportunity to sit among your family, your larger tribal family, and relate to them what you have done wrong. For example, if you have to work with dead bodies as part of your medical education, that contaminates you. If you find yourself getting into problems with money or with people as a result of this contamination, your family and your tribe is going to be wishing the best for you and chanting for you. When [your family] talks about it in a larger environment that is helpful. Forces beyond your control are making these things happen, but your whole family is there to make things better for you with a ceremony [p.3].

Hearing the subjects clarify their view of failure was just one of the aspects of qualitative description that made the interview data so interesting to the researcher. Their perspectives reminded the researcher to consider objectivity and multiple perspectives when coding the data. Understanding their definitions of failure also established the link between their internal locus of control, and their reactions to the failure experiences that occurred to them.

Research Question One:

What Behaviors Did Leaders Use to Learn From Failure?

*“Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us...” (Robert Burns).*

The research subjects' descriptions of how they learned from their failure experiences were categorized into four major findings. These leaders:

- Critically reflected to gain understanding and perspective
- Practiced four personality traits
- Demonstrated continual learning
- Used failure as opportunity.

These four finding categories were further sub-divided into sixteen themes. Each of the sixteen themes was found in at least two or more subject's interview transcripts and one theme, understanding what lesson needed to be learned from the failure experience, was mentioned by every subject at least once. See Table 4 for an overview of the four categories and sixteen sub themes of the findings for the first research question.

Each of the four major finding categories for the first research question and their sub themes were described below as the subject's related incidents, behaviors and strategies of successful learning from a failure experience. Six hundred and twenty nine items of data were found in 220 interview transcript pages that referred to ways in which subjects learned from their failure experiences. Responses to the question of how leaders learned from failure represented 62.6 percent of the total items of data found as responses to all three of the research questions.

Critically reflected to gain understanding and perspective

Critical reflection is the process of suspending decision making in order to examine the underlying assumptions and impacts of an event in terms of one's current perception of reality. It differs from simple reflection in the examination of underlying assumptions and motives that drive behavior, as compared to automatic acceptance of those assumptions (Harback, 2000). The three themes under the critically reflected category were that leaders: sought perspective, took time for critical reflection and showed concern about disappointing others.

Sought perspective. Webster's Third International Dictionary defined perspective as the "capacity to view things in their true relation or relative importance; viewed with a proper pattern of relationships as to value, importance or other basic quality." The responses about perspective, 57 items of data identified, made up nine percent of the total data items coded for this question (See Table 4.) Study subjects sought out perspective through a variety of methods: their own personal curiosity, their job responsibilities, coaching from others, their desire to be of service and through the shaping effect of the experiences itself. The following quotes demonstrate this theme.

For M33, M07 and M20, seeking perspective and challenging their own point of view came from their personal curiosity and the need to analyze their life experiences.

(M07) I was analyzing the whole situation from every different direction and I think that I really developed a skill to be able to step outside the situation and view it as others might, which is important. Being able to perceive the situation and yourself as others might perceive it, to be able to look at it from other's points of view [p.4].

(M33) By my nature and background, I'm inquisitive. I look at things from a variety of angles in analyzing a situation. I try to use different modes of thinking when I approach a problem: emotional, factual, and strategic. I try not to get myopic and I take a step back [p.1].

(M20) I'm analytical and I have a long memory. I remember stuff and put it together. You need a long memory and an ability to reach back 20 years ago and put yourself back in that situation, experience it, pay attention to it and play that tape back and have reasonable fidelity to it, what the language was, and what the feeling was. You don't get to be 58 and still believe that [the world] is black or white [p.2].

An interesting similarity in the statements above was the use of the word 'analyzing' and 'analytical.' Each of the subjects described himself in those words without prompting or probing from the interviewer. The ability to be analytical and curious about their own thought patterns was part of the process of perspective and reflection.

Subject M25 seemed to have the natural and humorous ability to put himself in proper context with his larger world. "[Everything] goes beyond me. I am just one little guy in an office of 150, within an organization of 8,500, here in this city of over a million people [p.4]."

Subject F24 viewed perspective seeking as part of her leadership responsibilities when directing individuals and organizations in learning.

(F24) We work with high-risk organizations and we accept that failure and loss is part of the process. There were a number of projects early on that didn't work out

where we spent time collectively reflecting on that. The process of acknowledging that things haven't worked out is the way I was trained. That is who I am. I am interested in learning, processing, analyzing, thinking, problem solving. In many ways, this is a good environment for me. I work in the context of entrepreneurship, so we have to have a tolerance for failure ourselves [p.1].

M19 saw trial and error as a process that taught him perspective and the habit of the long view. "When [failure] happens, the issue is what did I learn from it, where do we go, could we apply this? You may not have an answer to that immediately; it may take a couple of years before you begin to understand the situation in a different light [p.2]."

M39 used the touch stone of his son's disability to gain perspective when he learned he would no longer be promoted to a higher military rank.

One of the great balancers for me is my son, who is a downs syndrome guy.

When you consider what you have going on in your life in regards to how crappy or how good it might be, and you have a counter weight [such as a disabled child], everything is in perspective. Even when you see other kids with disabilities, a lot of people take that real hard, it could always be worse. It is unbelievable how true that is. Why let it bother you? You get up and you keep moving [p3].

Often, one of the best and most accessible ways for leaders to gain perspective was to ask for coaching and feedback from trusted associates. Subjects M10 and F26 used that type of coaching to gain perspective after a failure.

(M10) After recovering from the "Oh shit" feeling, I sought out data. I have a really good partner I work with, a 15-year veteran in engineering. I talked with him on what certain behaviors look like and how to do them. I talked with my

manager on my perceptions. He didn't view it as largely as I did. I asked what I could have done differently. When I find I have failed and want to learn, I look for data, external learning sources that may be out there. I look for someone I admire and how they do it. I talk to them and ask them for advice. I have to translate that into personal notes, type it or write it to learn it, put it in my own words. Something I can post and pull out to help me remember, using this until I can integrate it into my behavior and skill [p.2].

Female subject 26 also expressed:

I allowed myself to listen to a few people who were coaching me. Another boss was very supportive, told me he understood and gave me his view of the world. I allowed myself to listen to him and to my spouse. I would vent, he would play things back to me and I would listen to what he was hearing me say. Part of it was soul searching about what mattered to me. I don't think I really understood my values until I went through that [failure] experience because the thing that got me was the lack of integrity. Saying one thing and doing another. It dawned on that integrity is like lifeblood for me. It really made me sit up and realize that it is not just about me. If I just change I can make this work, but a relationship takes two. I was not willing to become the person I had to become for the relationship to be viable. I saw the line in the sand I was not willing to cross and I was ready to resign rather than cross it [p.2].

Subjects M16 and F26 gained and enriched their own perspective by using their failure experiences to deeply examine themselves and then to reach out to others.

(M16) I failed my [national medical] boards. Everyone knew. That was very painful and a big failure. I am not a good studier; I have come to accept that about myself. What I took away from that failure [is the ability] to talk to other medical students who have either failed that board or who are terrified of it and who view me as someone who is so successful they can't ever imagine that I [as a highly credentialed faculty member at a prestigious university] would even have feet of clay. The experience is an illustration that you cannot extrapolate from failure to failure. Unfortunately, this is often how medical students think of themselves. They need to be perfect. I am very open about the fact that I flunked my boards the first time and that I didn't study much during remediation, but I passed. But I don't try to change who the students are, to beat their heads against a wall when [their behavior] is something that is part of them. I embraced and owned my difficulties with test preparations. I don't think it's made me a much better studier for tests, but it has made me approach [testing] with a little bit more kindness to myself [p.1].

Female subject 26 suggested that:

The [relationship failure] experiences [with a boss] I had at work helped me to become a better parent and vice versa. I recognized with my daughter that me trying harder wasn't going to solve our problems; we were starting to fight and the grades were becoming an issue. Just like the situation at work. We went to counseling together. Before I went through that experience with my boss, a life altering experience, I would have just kept trying harder. Now I am much better

at saying I don't know how to do something and I need to call in some experts [for help] [p.5].

Then there were the crucible experiences-those life shaping events that knocked the subjects down and were figuratively life altering, but provided necessary perspective. F02, M01 and M06 shared three crucible events in their careers that gave them perspective they use to this day.

It was a real leadership failure on my part [subordinate falsified important project information.] I let myself be fooled. I didn't do enough checking. This was her [subordinate's] first direct position; I promoted her and didn't provide her with enough structure; I didn't mentor her enough in a job that was very new to her. I didn't understand that while she was very successful in another job, this job was so different that it was over her head. She was such a bright, energetic, smart person that I didn't think it through. I didn't understand the mismatch that I had created. Then I allowed myself to treat and manager her the way I treated the other seven department managers I had at the time. But in contrast, they were all very experienced veteran people; most of them were older than me, well-compensated people with good track records. I didn't adjust my style quickly and thoroughly enough to address her situational leadership needs differently from the others. The others could be relied on to be much more independent and resented micromanagement, which I'm not inclined to do anyway. I didn't do that with her and I should have asked for more proof of progress from her rather than just reports. I am much more aware of the situational component of leadership now (M06) [p.2].

Male subject 01 indicated that:

I learned that he who has the biggest title wins out over what is necessarily right [lost disagreement with boss and was sent to work overseas.] I learned that if you disagree with someone, especially your boss, you couldn't just bull ahead with what you want. You need to come to some sort of understanding [with the boss] and you need to move on from that disagreement. The worst thing that could happen to you [getting banished overseas] can occur and you can work your way back out of it; you can gain perspective when the worst thing happens to you. The stress that is going on at the time is insidious. At first you don't notice it so much, but it accumulates over time. This situation wasn't my boss's fault. We had a disagreement about the way this product was going and the failure on my part was to respond to the situation the way I did. When the big boss wants you to go in a certain direction, you do what he wants or you decide to leave [the organization] (M01) [p.2].

Female subject 02 put it this way:

I should have been able to manage his behavior better and outsmart him. [Subject lost disagreement with powerful, but unstable co-worker and was forced to resign from prominent position.] I got overly involved emotionally and when attacked emotionally I rose to the bait and became like he was and wanted to get rid of him, like he wanted to get rid of me. I lost my head in a sense, becoming overly emotional about it rather than tactical and strategic, like I know how to be. I wasn't willing to sacrifice my pride and suck up to him. That is the only thing that works with a bonafide narcissist is suck up and inflate their ego or threaten

them. That is not my nature. I was between a rock and a hard place. I tried to do the right thing as far as the patients and the physicians go and I was scapegoated. I've learned that I should have left earlier. I would have been better off not getting up in the middle of the night grinding my teeth. Life is too short to put up with assholes. I should have cut my losses and quit. Paid for my education myself. There are worse things than quitting. But quitting is very hard for me (F02) [p.6-7].

Used time to regroup and reflect critically. In what ways had these leaders gained perspective? How had they processed the learning they were receiving through the failure incident? What enabled them to question their assumptions and then accurately contextualize the situation? The researcher found that by taking the time necessary to critically reflect, these leaders synthesized their failure experiences. When they spoke of taking necessary time, subjects called that time by different names, such as 'regrouping' or 'a time out.' The length of this critical reflection time varied by the person, but taking it was an essential ingredient for reflection and perspective. This was the next theme under the Reflect to gain perspective category, Use time to regroup and reflect critically. The 111 data items under this sub theme represented 17.6 percent of the total coded items for the first research question. In this section, the subjects acknowledged using reflection to examine their assumptions and behavioral patterns in order to change, but called critical reflection by various names: gut check, feedback, introspection, balance, learning, compassion, self-examination, crystallization, and examination. The following quotes represented that theme.

I think that I am able to be introspective and look at myself and my behavior as if I were someone else. The ability to reflect on myself and what I am doing. My impact on others. I know quite a number of people who don't have a clue how their behavior impacts other people and they will never had that ability to reflect on their behavior. I think I am able to do that. I take criticism and feedback and look at the truth in what people are saying instead of immediately putting up defenses and saying, you are trying to get me by that (F09) [p.2].

Female subject 42 acknowledged:

I'm always trying to balance what it is about me that I have to change and what is it that is not going to work. As a leader, as one person, what can I influence and change and what can I not change? How hard should I push and when should I back off? Sometimes backing off is the smarter thing to do, to realize the greater goals of the organization.... It [a situation of misreading the organization] required a lot of reflection on my part. I was feeling like, 'I can't believe I've done this.... development, relationship building, those are my strengths. What happened? How could I have misread the tealeaves (F42) [p.2]?'

Male 25 said:

Learning in that way [reflective learning] is not one isolated incident. It is an ongoing process, an interconnectedness of a variety of things, learning, stepping back, reflecting, and moving forward to the best extent possible, rather than seeing that I made a failure here (M25) [p.3].

Male 27 put it this way:

I was struggling and one day, it all just crystallized for me. I could feel it in my whole body and my mind... From that point, I never was concerned about being a failure or a success again. That happened when I was 29. That is when I developed single-minded determination. When I set my mind to do something, I will get it done. I have that much confidence in what I want to do. That was a shift for me (M27) [p.3].

Male 25 indicated that:

People who reflect on their lives are far more likely to learn than those who are non-reflective and non-psychologically oriented. People who reflect are able to step back and it is a constant struggle in today's world where email is expected to be answered within 48 seconds. [Reflection] is not a part of the day's work world. If you are not able to have a psychological and sociological sense of the world, you would just keep doing the same thing over and over and over and not understand why it is not working (M25) [p.4].

Male 28 suggested that:

Introspection [is critical for me]. After he left [a disgruntled subordinate] I asked myself what I would have done differently, what I would have changed because I anticipate that I could be in this job from one to ten years. The academy is always changing because people are rotating in and out, so it is probably not the first time I am going to run into this type of situation. I can't afford to allow that to happen again (M28) [p.2].

Female 40 stated:

I lead an examined life. Whether I want to or not, I am relentless with myself. Not examination for the sake of examination, but to extract what I learned from this [experience]. Where did I mess up? I am unwillingly to carry the bags of a heavy lifetime. This examination has served me better than whining and being bitter. Think about how difficult it is to be with bitter people (F40) [p.2].

Male 08 articulated:

A healthy ego [is what] allows me to take responsibility for what is mine and distinguish what is not mine. Even though there may be periods of time when I may be overly responsible or overly blaming of other people, I'm able to find the right balance on that eventually. Both my training and my personality is one that is designed to be self reflective and self-analyzing; I theoretically and practically believe in growth and analysis (M08) [p.2].

Male 34 also expressed:

I learned to pay close attention to the contingencies operating in the organization. When a person appears to be operating irrationally, my first hypothesis now is, that person is in fact operating rationally. I just don't understand what is operating on them, their context. That in turn, has led to insights in how to deal with people, change and organizational issues. It has helped me pick my battles. I have learned to pay attention to that, what I can and can't change and whether I can participate in the organization. It has helped in talking to senior managers. Senior managers get frustrated by their own organizations and don't understand why the organizations are not responding as they wished they would.... there was

a huge gap between the stated mission of the organization and the contingencies that were operating in practice [espoused theory vs. theory in action] (M34) [p.1-2].

Male 04 said:

One of the overarching things that I think about...is the amount of personal reflection that I have found myself doing whenever I am unsuccessful in an activity. I'm the kind of person who feels like overall I have been pretty successful and yet, I am probably never satisfied that I am doing as good a job with everything as I probably should. I don't think I take myself too seriously, but I do take the job seriously. So when incidents occur that are unsuccessful, I tend to think about them a lot, replay the tape and try to understand what could have been done differently, of the things over which I have some control (M04) [p.1-2].

Only one subject disagreed with the importance of introspection in learning from his own failures, because of the severe toll such introspection took on him. M23 remarked, "I don't like to do introspection. The reason is that I am such a harsh critic of myself I always end up seriously depressed, with an unbalanced list of the 16 things I could have done better; I ignore the 500 I did well [p.3].

There was the element of time necessary for critical reflection to take place and subsequent perspective to occur. For some leaders, the time needed to regroup and reflect after a failure was sixty seconds, for others, a life time, but for each leader, taking the necessary time was an essential ingredient to understanding the information they were getting. The following quotes demonstrated this.

The message was that my performance was not all that great. Up until that conversation with the boss, I assumed I was doing ok as a director. I recognized the truth in what my boss told me. Looking back, it took a while to analyze why and how I had arrived at that state (M23) [p.1].

Female 26 indicated that:

It took me two years to figure out my problem. I battled the situation with the boss who I could not get on the same page with, trying to run the organization the way I thought it needed to be run. Part of it was soul searching about what mattered to me. I don't think I really understood my values until I went through that experience (F26) [p.1-2].

Female 13 put it this way:

Business stuff you can get over, you can learn, you can take classes, alter your behaviors. It is a challenge but it is not inside your heart. It is the personal failures that are the more challenging ones [to reflect upon]. It takes two people to move a relationship forward and it took me three or four years before I felt ok with that. That is a long time. Subsequently, I do pay attention to interpersonal relationships at home and [I am able to] be a better partner myself (F13) [p.2].

Female 11 also expressed:

I regrouped, took a few days off work and made a decision to not stay [with the organization]. The regroup from that failure was to challenge myself to say they made a failure and given the right set of circumstances I can perform in the different roles [as CEO], even though I may not be comfortable (F11) [p.2].

Male 20 said:

It took about 18 months for the wheels to turn all the way through that cycle before I really learned how wrong I was in making the decision that I did [to resist a new reporting structure, resulting in his department's elimination.] I put all the pieces together and realized that decision was stupid. I could have been reporting to the guy that directly ruled the world. But no, I'd rather be in this ivory tower than connected to where the business is. Big lesson. I felt really stupid. It was obvious in hindsight, but of course, everything is. At the time, when I was being laid off, I thought how could they be making this failure? In the intervening time I came to realize the failure I made based on ignorance, arrogance, and loyalty to the guy who hired me. Big lesson, big failure (M20) [p.1].

Male 25 indicated that:

It took me time to regain my balance and get some perspective on [the unsuccessful organizational change initiative] and move forward. It was a very difficult situation and it did affect me physically (M25) [p.1].

Female 31 also expressed:

I had an administrative person [working for me] who wanted to move into a vacant senior level job. She asked for the job and I really put her down. I was incensed that she could even think that she could fill these shoes. I was angry and so I got snippy. I was merciless because I was fearful and I didn't know how to tell her nicely that she didn't have the qualifications that I was looking for. That was my first experience with conflict. I didn't communicate properly. I made her cry and I knew I had crossed the line and I felt bad. She quit within six weeks,

taking another job in the organization. It took me ten years to tell her I was sorry. She was working in another area and she had to take my picture. I apologized to her and told her what I said was wrong. She said to me, 'Well, I'm sure you're a better manager now.' All those years I was worried about it. [Now] when I feel bad about [an incident] I know from my personal practices that I need to look at my behavior. I need to look and see why my behavior is making me uncomfortable (F31) [p.1].

For these leaders, learning, whether driven by reflection or personal curiosity was an ingrained life habit as well as an expectation set for them by others. This expectation to learn was another theme that will be examined later in this section.

Concerned about letting others down. Six leaders remarked during the interview that they felt they had let others down by their failure, most often in instances where employees lost their jobs because of the leader's perceived failure. This sub theme was only one percent of the total data items coded in response to this research question. But feeling that one has disappointed others resulted in new perspectives and learning. In the most heart-wrenching of all the vignettes on successful learning from failure, the youngest leader, M07, recognized that his inability to control the outcome of an impossible situation had horrifying consequences for those he was responsible for.

[After I notified the authorities of the illegal activities and quit the position] I

found out that there was sexual abuse happening in several of the programs.

Later, one client was killed in restraints by two staff members; another client died under mysterious circumstances. My failure, as I see it, was to not have impressed upon the folks responsible for these kids how serious this was, as

evidenced by the further abuse and the death of the kid. The death happened six months after I left. I am not responsible for their deaths even in a tertiary way, but had I been able to do things differently at the time [I was employed there, the deaths] may have not happened [p.3].

When failure occurred, one of the helpful behaviors leaders used to cope with the consequences of failure was a solid sense of what they were responsible for; in other words, their internal locus of control. The internal locus of control differed from the external, where one believes they have little or no control or responsibility over events or their reactions to events. The second important finding from the first research question of how leaders learn from failure was their use of personality traits. Four sub themes that further defined the personality traits that emerged from the interview data were: humility, resilience, perseverance and expertise (See Table 4).

Practiced four personality traits

The study participants used their personalities, specifically their humility, resilience, perseverance and expertise to shape they way in which they reacted to failure events. During the data gathering for this research, the subjects remarked that their reactions to a failure subsequently affected the eventual resolution of the failure. Although the themes of humility, resilience, perseverance and expertise are thought of as personality characteristics and not behaviors, these themes were found in 72 data items and make up eleven percent of the total data found in response to the first research question. Humility, resilience, perseverance and expertise were included here since the subjects repeatedly acknowledged these characteristics as ‘what they did’ when they were learning from failures.

Humility. Webster's Third International Dictionary defines humility as "modest in spirit and self-effacing." This quality was characteristic of the subjects interviewed for the study, however only 1.9 percent of the subject's comments directly named humility as an integral characteristic of learning from failure. The humble sensibility these subjects had about themselves, was evident when some stated they were surprised they were nominated as a leader. This quality of humility was difficult to quantify or qualify behaviorally, but their humility emerged from between the lines of their interviews. Cited by experts as an important leadership characteristic, humility has been defined as the choice one makes to remain teachable and open to others in every situation. Humility, self-effacing, open behavior, was a choice each leader made daily when faced by events and personalities. Humility, like leadership and failure, was defined in various ways as these leaders described their experiences. For some, humility was part of the self-knowledge needed to lead others. "Failing is humbling and gives you a new perspective at times (F02) [p.2]." "If I screw something up and tell [my employees about it], it gives them room to move as well. It is humility that can be infectious (M35) [p.2]." "So when incidents occur that are unsuccessful, I [want] to understand what could have been done differently, of the things over which I have some control (M04) [p.2]."

A few of the subjects saw humility as part of who they were, their identity as a leader and a worker among workers.

Leadership is a fuzzy term for me. In some ways I think I am a leader, in other ways I am just a soldier. I just come in and do my work, do the best job possible and go home. There are all kinds of reasons you keep plugging. If you have two young kids like I do, you have to pay the bills.... My role here is not to be leading

the function, but I try to do whatever I can to support the overall function and to do what I do in a way that is complementary to a focus on outcomes (M25) [p.2].

Male 06 articulated:

[I felt] that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, [I] outsmarted myself. Here I was, a very effective manager overall. Profitable, getting all the tough assignments from the CEO, the can-do-go-to guy. I was pretty pumped up about myself. What I realized is I had taken my eye off the ball on the most critical thing we were doing-a hugely controversial, difficult, challenging undertaking [standards testing in their profession]. I was seduced (M06) [p.03].

Males 05 stated that:

My wife thought it was funny that I got nominated for your study. She said, "Why do you think that Steve nominated you?" We got a kick out of that. You would love my wife; she is good about keeping me humble. I think I have been blessed. I can't take credit. I have worked in good places, with good people (M05) [p.3].

Female 14 put it this way:

As one starts to think about failures, it is very humbling. You accumulate quite a list (F14) [p.1].

Resilience. The second theme under how leaders learn from their failures was resilience, defined as the process of struggling with hardship by accumulating small successes, failures, setbacks and disappointments. Another definition of resilience is that ability to quickly recover from change or failure. Twenty-six data were coded as having to do with resilience representing four percent of this total category for question two.

Like humility and perseverance, resilience was a choice and a personal responsibility decided anew each day by each leader. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

I realized that my strength was in the passion for the mission. I was not dead in the water and the organization would not die because of this [failure]. There was more strength to us. I could rebuild because I understood the mission. I could attract other people to the organization after this. When I decide I will prevail, I will prevail (F29) [p.2].

Male 25 put it this way:

[Two of my qualities are] stubbornness and pure hillbillyism [and] having a dad who did things just to see if he could do them [p.2]....[My parents] were incredibly persistent and never threw in the towel. So that is my personality, not only in my work, but also in my family life (M25) [p.3].

Male 39 also expressed:

Successful people have an internal locus of control. [They say] 'I didn't do great there, but I can do better. Nobody told me I can't do this, so I am going to do it. I know I can achieve, I know where I want to be in my life.' They have goals (M39) [p.5].

Female 41 acknowledged:

Somewhere I learned that you just keep going and you don't give up. Giving up is a bad thing. An old boss told me that he'd never seen anyone jump hurdles the way I do. I feel like I am at a hurdle right now and it will hurt more than any of the other hurdles I have been over, but I [will] get over this hurdle. I don't give

up. It must come from my childhood and both my parents. If you got hurt, you got up and kept going (F41) [p.3].

Female 40 stated:

[When I blew the whistle on the organizational misconduct] someone slit the roof of my convertible. I was maligned in the local papers.... I was told by the CEO, 'Listen, this is an old boy's network, the executive involved is not going to be fired, even though you are telling the truth, so where do you want to go?' They wanted to send me overseas. I resigned and got a [severance] package. I went to Nepal and climbed Annapurna, [a mountain peak in the Himalayas] where I found myself again (F40) [p.1].

Female 41 said:

There are days when I ask myself, "Why don't I quit? This is too hard." The stress part of it wears on you. I think that in management style, women have a much harder time [than men]. If you are at all pushy or tough, you are labeled a bitch. They grumble about men being that way [pushy or tough], but it is somewhat expected of them. Am I supposed to be maternal when I'm managing? Or if I'm tough, what then? You have to be that much better of a manager in order to not be seen as a bitch, especially, if you have the tendency to be tough and demanding. It is harder (F41) [p.2].

Male 39 put it this way:

What we are really talking about is [I am] a guy who is willing to take on risk. I don't mind it being hit hard and falling down a few times, if I can see where the thing is going...I have done some wacky stuff, but it is about pressing the

envelope a bit. Without hurting people. Every single time I have [pressed the envelope] nothing really bad has happened to me (M39) [p.3].

Female 11 also expressed:

At the core of who I am is the ability to be resilient. Growing up I had an uneven childhood and was in foster care-I always had to regroup and be resilient and press on. I've run marathons. I don't run them well, but I stay the course, so that I finish. That resilience and ability to challenge people's perceptions of who they think I am is very much a part of me (F11) [p.4].

Perseverance. The next sub theme in this question was the characteristic of perseverance. The interview subjects believed that determination alone could remedy some failure situations. Some called that determination hard work, others called it perseverance. Four percent of the items coded for this question were placed in this theme. One leader, subject F02, described hard work as the differentiating choice for her in three incidents of successful learning from failure.

(F02) [I] really committed myself to putting a lot of time and energy into [correcting my failure]... I was working and I spent a lot of time attending the courses and studying [p.1]. Well, one [thing I learned] is perseverance. That you have to keep at it. That you are not successful the first time [p.2]... There were a lot of people who discounted us. 'Pretty good for a couple of girls' sort of thing. It gives you a kick in the pants and makes you angry. You have to work twice as hard to be thought half as good. It was a great motivator at first. We had clawed our way to respectability and to the top [p.5].

Similarly, other leaders maintained that work and persistence gave them some control over the failure situation. One subject, M33, remembered his father's example of hard work when he spent the day in jail waiting for a ride home.

I grew up around people who owned their own businesses, working six or seven days a week. That has been the reason for some of my success in bigger companies....I learned to treat whatever I am doing as if it is my business and my money-working hard to produce value. When I was 14, my mother was at Mayo Clinic having surgery and I took her Cadillac out and almost hit a Cook County [Chicago] cop. I got arrested. My dad was at work [his own retail business] and my mother was in the hospital so I spent the day in jail till my Dad could get me out when he closed his business that night (M33) [p.2].

For the next four subjects, Female 31, Male 22, Male 01 and Female 14, hard work was the key ingredient in perseverance.

Whenever something looks like it is going to go south, I work really hard not to make it go south; failure can be overcome by hard work (F31) [p.3].

What was driving me is that I had a contribution to make and I wanted to make it. I wanted to make a difference. To show measurably that the work is improving. I wanted to expand my influence (M22) [p.2]

I worked really hard overseas in order to get invited back to the adult table (M01) [p.3].

I had to do a performance improvement plan for [a subordinate] and all the discipline stuff, so I worked really hard (F14) [p.1].

Expertise. Seven leaders acknowledged that once they failed, they took the area of failure and built it into their area of expertise. This theme represented one percent of the items coded for this research question. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

I got out of town and started building my state and national connections. I became part of the whole arena of micro-enterprises and became an expert. I made myself bigger than [the failure] was by getting connected, educated [p.2]. I didn't feel like an expert in my field. But now I am (F29) [p.3].

Male 06 expressed his vignette:

So now [after the failure of ignoring an important trend] I am the one in the front of the room, speaking to people who are coming to me and saying, "Oh, this will never happen, this is never work." I say, "Ok, I may be wrong, but try to be more open and ready to consider possibilities and trends (M06) [p.1]."

Male 19 said it this way:

One of the things that I have been responsible for over the years is helping other people prepare and go through those same kinds of interviews [fellowship]. I have been able to draw on my experience to make that process much better for that individual. I ended up being on a national committee that looked at the process by which those [fellowship selection] committees were conducted and we brought about some changes in terms of how it was done. On one hand, it doesn't mean the committee's decision on failing me was incorrect, but on the other hand, it was taking that experience and saying, there are better ways to do this, finding those and getting those implemented (M19) [p.2].

Female 11 expressed:

After that [bad survey experience] any survey that happened in our organization, I asked to be involved in. Within a year, I got to be involved in four other surveys. Since then I have done a lot better at being able to guide that process. So now within our system, even though I might not be attached to a facility being surveyed, I get paged from the CEO of that facility to alert me about the survey and to ask me for consultative help. The experience was negative certainly, but it turned into something that I have developed a niche for (F11) [p.1].

Subject F11, relating her second successful learning incident told about her attempts to gain air time in all male meetings.

I would look ahead at the meeting agenda items and find the items I knew there was not an expert on; items where I knew that we were weak from an organizational perspective. I had to find those opportunities, so when the meeting item came up, I jumped in the spotlight, which is very unlike me and even though I had a bright red face and stuttered quite a bit, I had the information and they all listened. I took at least two opportunities at meetings that I would showcase myself, essentially. I got more comfortable each time (F11) [p.3].

Demonstrated continual learning

The third finding under the research question of how leaders learn from failure was their demonstration of continual learning. These leaders saw nearly every situation as an opportunity for learning. They replaced outdated lessons with newer material or examined their deeply held assumptions in order to learn from a specific experience. Six sub themes were under the continual learning heading: examining their parent's

teachings on failure, understanding what they needed to learn from the failure experience, placing high value on continual growth and learning, expecting themselves to be continual learners, using relationships for support and reading. The category of continual learning was 45.2 percent of the data coded under this research question (See Table 4).

Examining their parental failure model. When children fail, a parent's attitudes about the failure have lasting and strong influences on the family dynamic. Each of the subjects was asked what they learned about failure from their parents. They related that they either found their parent's lessons about failure helpful or irrelevant to their adult lives. As adult leaders, some used what their parents taught them about failure and others rejected those lessons, developing their own meaning of failure and the tools to manage its consequences. The data items coded for this theme make up four percent of the 629 total items coded for the first research question. The leaders below acknowledged their parent's positive response to their childish failings and the affect it had on them as adults. The following quotes represented this theme.

The messages [from my parents] were that you did your best, try hard and keep trying hard. There was a tacit acknowledgement that things don't always work well and you keep trying, figure out how you pick yourself up and keep going. Keep on paying attention to what is important and right (M17) [p.3].

I had very supportive parents; we didn't talk a lot about making failures, though. As a manager, when you screw up you have to fix it and clean up the mess you made. That is the penalty you have to pay. Maybe that is what I got growing up is the responsibility to clean up what you have done. That is a good

motivator to not mess up. But I didn't get a lot of punishment beyond that (F14) [p.4].

My parents did not engage in punishment when I failed. Ad nauseum, they would sit me down and ask what I had learned from the situation. Anytime I was out of line, those periods of self examination were much more punishing to me than [actually] getting punished (M34) [p.3].

When I did something wrong as a child, like not watching my sister, [my parents] would tell me it was wrong, but [there was] no yelling and no spanking. My parents never yelled, so we never heard loud voices. [In my culture] people [who] yell are really bad. If my parents wanted to get our attention, all they had to do was raise their voice (F30) [p.3].

My mother... knew I hated to fail. Everyday she would tell me that a person who hates to fail hasn't failed enough, not tried enough things. She was trying to balance my personality. She never wanted you to be afraid to try something new (F18) [p.2].

Some of the subjects abandoned their parents' models and messages about failure and found a new framework for themselves as adults.

The way I look at things today would be diametrically different from the way they were looked at in my family. The messages that I grew up with [was that] I was supposed to be in control of everything and understand everything. And as long as I could do that, everything would be fine. If everything wasn't fine, it was because I had failed in one of those areas. All of that was built around the myth that you could actually control the future (M19) [p.3].

The [lesson from my elders] that I am [still] fighting against is that when failure occurs, I am not the failure. All of my upbringing, sports, coaching, military experience and early experiences were very judgmental of failure. This organization is very results oriented. One 'Oh shit' knocks out ten 'Atta boys.'

People that give you the success and failure messages in life have transferred how they feel about you with that success and failure [message]. You failed me, so they apply less love and less respect or give love conditionally. That doesn't match my current parenting values (M10) [p.4].

My parents are highly intolerant of failure. My mother is recriminative. If you did anything wrong, all your past sins were brought up. My father was not so punitive, but if you got a 98 where were the other two points? I was bright enough that I would hide it if I got mediocre grades or when I struggled in college. My grandmother was an incredibly loving woman, not at all academically sophisticated, an immigrant. She was supportive and couldn't believe I would ever do anything wrong. I still remember her with the greatest fondness. I wish I was the positive person that she was. I carry some of my mother in me. I do notice when people don't meet expectations, I don't always say so because it is not helpful, but I regret this quality in me. I wish I had more of my grandmother's temperament of unconditional regard. My brother and my sister both have twins and I need to remember with the twins that as a child I adored the people who adored me (M16) [p.4-5].

My parents didn't tolerate failures. It was not a particularly joyful way to grow up. They were pretty rigid and had extremely high expectations for me. I

would just play it their way until I was on my own and could do what I wanted (M38) [p.4].

My family wanted me to be perfect, but it is hard to remember because I have changed my DNA from [that] of my family. I may be related to them biologically, but what I learned [from them] was a lot of things not to do (M27) [p.3].

Each of these leaders then later related how they developed their own model of failure for their roles as business people and parents. For example, Male 27, “I just took on a different leadership style than both of my parents had; they were bullies. That doesn’t do a whole lot of good (M27) [p.3].”

Understanding the lesson in the failure experience. “Experience is only helpful [to learning,] if you are paying attention (M20) [p.3]. That was an apt adage to begin the second thematic finding under the category of continual learning, understanding the lesson in the failure experience. Making up 25.4 percent of the data items for the first question, this theme was found most frequently in the responses to the first research question. Five lesson types identified under this theme were lessons about relating to others, competing interests, speaking their minds, leading others and understanding themselves. The following quotes illustrated the five lesson types under this theme.

Relating. [I learned that] one of my values is relationship-based work. We do our best work when we know each other to some degree, strengths and weaknesses, to see each other completely and in our humanness. To fill the gap for each other on days when we are not so hot. We give our prime hours to our work, so it has to have meaning for us (M17) [p.2].

I learned that I needed to have better communication with all people and that I needed to build a team. And I hadn't built a team. I didn't have the buy-in that I needed from the city for the organization. I didn't have the buy-in from the staff. That was the result of me being too independent, not being close to the team and not building the team (M29) [p.1].

Speaking their mind. I have learned to be more forthright and willing to take my stand. Defend myself and my ideas. More willing to listen. I've learned a lot about listening instead of [being] a person who talks a lot. Hearing and responding to what I heard instead of being ready with my next retort (M29) [p.2].

I think I learned, in retrospect, that there are times when you need to call someone on their actions. The best way to deal with some situations is to push back. For some reason, some cultures and some people expect that and they are not going to pay attention to you unless you do. There are respectful ways of doing that (M34) [p.3].

Understanding competing interests. When I am asked to take on or lead a project, if I can't see how I can get buy-in from others, I tell them to re-vamp [the project] or I won't do it. It is frustrating to them, but if you don't have buy in why even start one of these boogers (F18) [p.1]?

It reinforced for me that people change because it's valuable for them to change and not because of what I want. Understanding people's frame of reference and their reality is essential to coming to the same place with them. I learned a lot about staff response to management style (M17) [p.1].

[I learned] to take a critical look at the competing contingencies that are operating on the people in an organization and how those motivate people. In retrospect, the people I was dealing with were behaving rationally to optimize their concerns. It was the difficulty that the organization had in changing the contingencies to correspond to its mission that really made it impossible for the organization to succeed (M34) [p.1].

I learned that you couldn't assume that educated people will make educated decisions based on the facts. You have to play the players and do your homework to understand what is of interest to each of the players. You have to lay the groundwork before things come up for a vote (F30) [p.1].

Leading others. [What I learned is that] I was not practicing what I was teaching. I really started to pay attention to my listening. In meetings, I would keep track of how much time I was speaking and how much I was listening. That was a big eye opener for me (M01) [p.3].

I learned if you can't be a billionaire philanthropist running around throwing money at problems and living on the beach, the next best thing, if you have to work for 8-9 hours a day, is to have as much leverage on your chosen field as possible (M07) [p.3].

Right now I am learning that I have to enable others to lead beyond me, to create an organizational model that is self-sustaining, not dependent on me (F26) [p.3].

Understanding themselves. I let my desire for work and competition override what I was really capable of. I asked for an opportunity, but maybe I wasn't the

best person. I should have been more ready to say, 'I think my peer is the better person for that. Let me work with him and see how he does this. He would be better at this, if it is that important. Let me be his wingman (M10) [p.3].'

I had a coach at the time. Having that coach really helped me think about the things I did that [were] successful. One of the things we talked a lot about is the gut feeling stuff and having more faith in that. I am starting to listen to [my gut] more and more (F14) [p.2].

I have learned to be very clear on what I expect and what I won't tolerate (F38) [p.3].

Placing high value on growth and learning. Six percent of the items coded under the category continual learning were in the category of placing high value on growth and learning. Here the subjects, nominated as leaders who learned from failures, remarked on the importance of growth and learning as part of their daily experience. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

Some days I will stop myself in the middle of the day, and realize that I learned something new today. I can go home now. I got my nugget for the day.

Approaching [learning] with a willingness to be open and know that you can always pick up some tidbit that will make your life better, your relationships better, your family better, you just have to be willing to take them (F04) [p.2].

The goal is still the same for me. [I strive for the mindset that] I haven't failed, I'm learning. What can I glean from this [experience] to be ready for the next one? This incident may have failed, but I am not a failure. I am learning, I

am moving forward. How can I do it better? Prepare myself for the next opportunity and be ready (M10) [p.3].

One of the fortunate things about me is that I have grown up trying to learn from my own failures and from the failures of others (F 15) [p.1].

[Learning] gives me the confidence and self esteem that I have achieved. It shows progress and growth (F02) [p.3].

The minute someone stops being curious about learning, they wither and die. I don't think you should ever stop learning new things, no matter how old you get. Everyday there is something a person ought to learn, whether it is about themselves or someone else (F09) [p.2].

I wanted to instill in my kids that education is so important and to set an example [for them]. I wanted to show them that you have to be educated even if you are going to be a slurpee-maker at 7-11. You have to get the college degree. I'm thinking about a second graduate degree, my wife is getting her graduate degree and my daughter is getting a graduate degree in criminal justice. They see that education is going to get you farther than sitting in a bar (M28) [p.3].

I have a natural inclination, still do and always will, to constantly be learning new things (F38) [p.4].

I always like a job where I am learning something different and growing in new skills. Learning and growing are important; otherwise, boredom sets in (F12) [p.4].

Learning was a familial expectation. When speaking about early learning influences, subjects for this study acknowledged that both formal and informal learning

was expected of them from a young age. Five percent of the data items for research question one were coded under this theme of learning as a family expectation. The leaders in this section have continued the expectation of their families by their own desire for continued learning. The following quotes represented this theme.

Part of my basic orientation toward life is that life is always a learning process, a continual learning thing. When something happens, what did I learn from it, where do we go, can we apply this? You may not have an answer to that immediately; it may take a couple of years before you begin to understand that in a different light (M19) [p.2].

I teach my own kids that learning is a requirement, that we do it all the time; I tell them that I'm still doing it at 58. I learn new stuff all the time (M20) [p.4].

My parents had high expectations for themselves and for all of [the children] to succeed and live up to their capabilities. We were encouraged to think that learning was fun (F13) [p.3].

I was raised to understand that education was important and there was no tolerance for me not getting a good education. My parents did not have unlimited wealth, but they were going to send me to a great college; it was a core value for our family (F38) [p.4].

[Learning] became part of the message of the family. Education is so valuable; I'm going to see how I can get it to fit in my life. I learned by [my family's] example (F17) [p.3].

My cues growing up were that the world was out there to learn from; you can do anything you want to if you put your mind to it. There weren't limitations that I felt. No "girls can't do that, or you can't do that" I never felt that at all (F09) [p.3].

My dad didn't graduate from high school because his dad died when he was 13 and he supported the family. He was a very smart guy who did a lot with his life. He believed education was very important; all his 11 kids were going to go to high school, which was more than he had. Everything he learned, he learned from life, observing what was going on around him, he brought that to us (F15) [p.3].

[Learning] was highly stressed. As a stereotype, [my culture] values education. Learning, experiencing and looking at the world from a lot of different perspectives was emphasized over grades. We were encouraged to try different things, be involved in the community and contribute to society (F42) [p.3].

My parents put an extreme premium on education, but also on experience (M23) [p.3].

Learning was valued very highly. Everyone [in my family] was expected to be learning all the time. [My parents] modeled that behavior (M34) [p.3].

My sisters and brothers are all highly educated, so what they did, I followed. It was expected that I was going on to school. I don't remember any other vision. My parents had no idea what it was going to take monetarily for us to go to school, they didn't have the money. But they said if you want to do it, do it. They never said you couldn't do it because we don't have the money or

because we are native people. It was a given that if we wanted to do something, we would have to come up with the money ourselves (F30) [p.4].

Using relationships for support during failure. The fifth theme under the category of continual learning was the finding that leaders used relationships as support to help them learn from failure experiences. One percent of the data items for research question one were coded under this theme. Relationships and networks of support assisted these leaders in learning by providing perspective and unconditional regard at times when they may have questioned their own competence. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

[What helped me learn was] Friends, consultants, wife, trusted advisors. Having a support system, a group of friends, a men's group, a therapist, a wife, a family, a spiritual director, even my board of directors (M09) [p.2]

I have a very extensive network of friends and family that have been very supportive. That is important. People who accept you in an unqualified way. My female friends listen and reflect and tell me not to be so hard on myself and give me ideas. Support. A receptive ear and a warm shoulder. That makes a big difference (F02) [p.5].

[To take part in a Navajo cleansing ceremony] gives you an opportunity to sit among your larger family and relate what you have done wrong. When they talk about [what you did wrong] in a larger environment, it is helpful [for you]. Your family is going to be wishing the best and chanting for you. Your whole family is there to make things better for you with a ceremony. Navajo families are enmeshed in each other's lives. [That can be] a lot of pressure (F30) [p.3-4].

I have been active for many years in the International Society for Performance and Instruction. The theoretical frameworks in that organization helped me to understand what was going on in the organization [where I worked] and what needed to change. I naively assumed that the principle challenges would be technical, but the challenges were interpersonal (M34) [p.1].

Reading. Years ago, libraries ran a campaign to increase library usage and reading, with a slogan 'Readers are Leaders'. This last theme in the category of continual learning was an unexpected finding emerging from the data. The researcher did not specifically ask about reading or library experiences during formative or adult learning experiences. Yet the subjects who mentioned the importance and their love of reading (16 of the 43 subjects) did so spontaneously, usually while responding to a question about learning. Two and a half percent of the data items for research question one mentioned the reading theme.

Some leaders, like Male subjects 04 and 19, were paid to read as part of their work, "What a job [I have]. They pay me to learn about this [leadership and learning] stuff. I'm paid to read all the time. I know so much more now than I did back when I [actually] was a leader (M04) [p.6]." "I have done a tremendous amount of reading. I really do love learning and so I have read really extensively in these [professional expertise] areas (M19) [p.3]." Another leader, Male 01, required regular reading for himself and his staff. "I am always analyzing myself. I suppose that is because I am an avid reader. I require my employees to read, I ask them to read a business book every three months, then I put together a study guide for their reading and we have a conference

call to talk about it [p.2].” Male subjects 33 and Female 30 simply liked to read and did it often. Male subject 10 saw reading as a tool for continued learning.

Continued learning is critical. My learning is not over. I enjoy reading professionally. Certain things excite me; I want to learn more about them. I enjoy personal reading and I am big on biographies. I can look for key things about what people did and what they learned and integrate them in my life. I enjoy learning spiritually; it keeps us alive, vibrant and growing (M10) [p.3].

As a child, Male 07 found reading an alternative to learning in the classroom:

I could go to the library and rip through a book in no time, but if it was social studies and because you were making me do it, forget about it [the structure of school learning]. So I developed an appreciation for learning from sources other than a teacher lecturing, which is why I can appreciate learning from practical experience (M07) [p.3].

Several of the leaders interviewed learned the value of reading from their families and continued that tradition in their own families.

My grandmother read everyday and my Daddy taught me that every night you read or study something for 30 minutes that will improve your business or your life. He did that every night. Wouldn't have to be something complicated.

Everyone in my family is always learning something (F18) [p.3].

We are always pulling out books [in my family] (F14) [p.4].

There were books and magazines all over the house, Atlantic Monthly, New Yorker, Scientific American, stuff like that. There was constant discussion about ideas and things going on. That carried through, my own daughters

commented that one of their principle memories of childhood was some topic came up at the dinner table and before long, somebody would spring up from the table, go over to the encyclopedia and look something up. One of the norms in the family, which I got from my parents, is, you don't debate matters of fact, you look them up. Whenever a matter of fact would come up, we looked it up. I still do that (M34) [p.3].

I was always encouraged to read. We lived next door to a public library for three years and because we didn't have a lot of money, I spent a lot of time at the library reading. [I read] every book that I could read. I had Mr. Easter as my 4th grade and 6th grade teacher. He was an African American graduate from Howard University with two master's degrees. He told me when I was in the fourth grade to try to read a book a week. But I have kept that as a yardstick, a goal or a touch point. Except when I was in college, when it was tough to read [anything] besides what you were already reading, I've always tried to be reading one or more books at the same time. I buy non-fiction and history. I'm always reading something; I go to a bookstore every month. I've always had that kind of desire. We read to our daughter every night. Our house is full of books. She goes to library programs. Reading and learning go hand in hand. I've always found that I gather something and am able to think about things in different ways after reading. It has always been a comfort and a hobby (M06) [p.5].

There was an excitement in books. We went to the library every Friday, my sister and I. We loved books and my mom was an avid reader (F29) [p.3].

I lived in books. I remember reading the Iliad and the Odyssey in the 3rd grade. I knew mythology backwards and forwards, was a very fast reader with high comprehension. I literally devoured books and learning was my protection, my escape, and my refuge (M16) [p.4].

For these leaders, reading was a part of their identity. They viewed the process of reading as a learning door through which one can find necessary tools, a best friend, a home and the facts to win an argument. It was beyond the scope of this research to study the effect reading has on leadership and learning behavior. However, reading improves concentration and focus, two essential leadership skills.

Used failure as opportunity

The four categories of findings from the question of how leaders learn from their failures were: acted with an internal locus of control, reflected to gain understanding and perspective, demonstrated continual learning habits and the final category, used failure as opportunity. Three sub themes under the failure as opportunity category were: failing was described as an event, not a state of being, failing was an integral part of life, and failing was a powerful teacher. Fifteen point three percent of the items coded for research question one were in the failure as opportunity category.

Failing was an event, not a state of being. Nine percent of the data coded in this category fell under this sub theme. The leaders below saw failure as a finite event or situation not a lasting commentary about who they were and what they had achieved. Failure was not about them or their personalities; it was about a situation or event, often unforeseen and uncontrollable. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

One day my employees called me in and told me [my] relationship [with them] wasn't working...this was a serious eye opener for me (F21) [p.2].

I handpicked a person for my sales team, became close to his family, moved him and his family across the country and then had to terminate him for cause. This felt like a huge failure to me (F38) [p.2].

When I was a firehouse captain, I allowed two practical jokes to get out of hand. In both situations the individual's families were affected and in retrospect, I can see it should never have happened. I was supposed to set the example and I let it get far out of hand. I should have stopped it much sooner so they didn't get carried away. I really learned from that (M28) [p.3].

We were in the process of purchasing a company and had the deal almost completed. When the opportunity arose, we made a quick financial offer based on our misunderstanding of the true financial status of the company to be purchased. We lost a fair amount of money because the company we were interested in purchasing had destroyed its marketing position voluntarily in the process of filing bankruptcy. We never figured out their motivations (M 37) [p.1].

On one day, three union employees threatened to walk off the job because of a manager that reported to me (F12) [p.2].

In the first two years as Director, the whole staff resigned, the organization was \$50,000 in the hole, and owed me back pay. The auditor issued a going concerns letter, saying we couldn't continue to exist. The building burned down. I was accused of unethical conduct by an angry, vengeful person, who got swept

up in this sick system. So certainly, two to three years into my tenure here, it felt like pretty much of a failure (M09) [p.2].

Upon my return from maternity leave, a peer of mine became my boss. She told me that she expected me to travel to another state every week. I had an infant, was traveling 70% of my time and [my peer] turned into the wicked witch of the west (F26) [p.1].

I left a prestigious firm to start my own entrepreneurial business. That failed in 15 months. I decided to hang it up and go back to the firm (M33) [p.1].

I applied and interviewed twice to become a fellow in my profession. I was turned down both times (M19) [p.1].

Failing was an integral part of life. This second sub theme under the finding of how leaders saw failure as opportunity was the notion of failure as a natural part of life and a necessary counter balance for success. Failing after repeated attempts made final success seem sweeter. Success and failure were defined against one another; you needed one to have the other, two halves made the whole. Like loss, failure was painful, but necessary for growth and regeneration. Two percent of the coded data items were placed in this sub theme (See Table 4). The following quotes represented this theme.

I'm sad when people fail, but failure is a part of aspiring. There is a prayer in the Episcopal prayer book, "Help our young people to understand that failure is simply an opportunity to start anew." That is a good message. Failure is an opportunity to learn and grow. I certainly have learned and grown from my failures. That doesn't keep me from wanting to avoid failure now and in the future. I don't like to fail. But I have learned that failure can be a wonderful

launching pad. I wouldn't pursue [failure], but I can give thanks for it (M08) [p.3].

My view is we are all making failures, if we correct them as we go along, we're fine. Life is constantly making failures and constantly adjusting. That is normal. I see that as normal. If you make a big failure, why and what will you do to not do it again (M35) [p.3]?

My [father's] assumption was that [because]he knew how to do something, I was supposed to know how to do something and I didn't. On the downside, that can create a lot on anger, frustration and anxiety. The upside is that I learned how to learn when I didn't know how to do something. So I would go read or experiment, try, not be successful and try again (M19) [p.4].

If you fail and learn, that is part of life (F15) [p.3].

I have used failure in working with other people to say everyone has these [failure] moments or incidents and as long as you can learn from them and look at them with a sense of humor, then it is not really a failure. You hear those clichés about failure is not possible if learning happens and no successful person has ever gotten successful and not failed at something along the way [but the clichés are true] (M07) [p.4].

I have failed in thousands of ways; in fact, I make a habit of failure. I have always been a risk taker, so I've taken lots of risks and they don't always pan out, but I tend to move on and try something else or something new and different....Trying is not a bad thing (M06) [p.1].

Failures are inevitable. Everyone is going to fail. It is a good experience. It is humbling and gives you a new perspective a times (F02) [p.2].

Failing as a powerful teacher. Data items coded for this sub theme made up 3.8% of the data for the first research question (See Table 4). If teachers represented guides along the route of learning, then failure was a powerful teacher in the intensity and speed in which it delivered consequences to the learner. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

[Failing is] always a learning opportunity. It is important to me that we use our time wisely. We have much to do [in organizations], if something isn't working, it would be a waste of time, if we just let it go by and not use it as a learning opportunity. Everything we do gives us an opportunity to say 'What did I learn from that?' So that next time I am in a similar situation, I can do it better (F03) [p.2].

People actually learn more from their failures than their successes (M33) [p.2].

[My father] believed that [trying and failing] was a better option than not participating at all. If you are not failing, you are not experiencing life (F15) [p.3].

But [with my parents] failure was always treated as a learning experience. It was never 'You disappointed me,' it was always, 'What did you learn?' They never criticized or brought up the past (M23) [p.2].

At the age of twenty, I was able to work with a woman who told me she would teach me and that I would have more failures than successes, but that

would be ok, because as time would go on, I would make fewer failures. That was incredibly powerful-it was my first management experience. And she was right. After each project, we would critique. She would have me self-critique and she and I would do a joint critique and this is something I still do with my staff. She put the structure in place to help me see it as an objective experience, which was great. Fortunately, I worked for this woman for three years (F11) [p.5].

If you are not failing, you are not learning at your top speed (F02) [p.2].

I learned [through the failure of not soliciting my staff's ideas] to involve people in decisions that affect them. That is basic Administration 101, and I'm sure I was taught that in many ways in many classes, but I needed to learn it through experience (M04) [p.5].

Failure is a learning experience. If you are not failing, you are not trying anything [new]. I learned this from my parents and my professional mentors. Their attitude has always been to take risks, try things and maintain a high degree of professional integrity. Doing that even when it is risky and looks like it won't pay off (M34) [p.3].

[Failing] was the best thing that ever happened to me (M39) [p.2].

It is the dark times and the failure times that really strengthens you and opens the door to greater success and deeper satisfaction. [Through my failures] I've learned dependence upon divine providence. [Failure] is about my own limitations, trusting God and trusting the universe, the mystery of it all (M08) [p. 2].

Research Question Two: What Behaviors Did Leaders Use in Teaching Others to Learn
From Failure Experiences?

“We ought to learn from the animals’ one thing: ruminating.” (Nietzsche)

Three findings emerged from the data concerning the second research question on how leaders taught others to learn from failure. Leaders acted with (and demonstrated to others) an internal locus of control; they modeled appropriate learning behaviors and put learning processes into the organization’s culture. Two hundred and seventy items emerged from the data that concerned this finding category, representing 27% of the total data items for all three research questions.

Acted with Internal Locus of Control

A term that was repeated by several leaders when they described themselves was having an internal locus of control. When failure experiences occurred, one of the coping mechanisms leaders mentioned as helpful was having a solid sense of what they were and were not responsible for, what they could and could not control. This was the definition of an internal locus of control. This differs from an external locus of control, where one believed that they could have no control or responsibility over what happened to them or their reactions to it. The finding that leaders used their own internal locus of control as a model to teach others to learn from their failures and to build their own locus of control was 37.4% of the data items for this second research question. The nine sub themes under the locus of control category were:

- Positive focus
- Solution focus

- Personal responsibility
- Accurate self image
- Not taking things personally
- Keeping promises
- No shame or criticism
- Treating others with respect
- Publicly admitting failures.

The sub themes mentioned most in response to the second interview question (how leaders taught others to learn from failure) was by the leaders themselves having positive focus, taking responsibility, not shaming or criticizing others and having an accurate self image. Other themes, less often mentioned, represented from one percent to three percent of the data coded for this category.

Positive focus. Of the data for the second research question, maintaining a positive focus made up 5.2% of the data items for this question or 14 items. Positive focus meant visualizing success, keeping the mood upbeat, and finding the positive in every situation. Leaders used positive focus for their own failures and the failures of their employees. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

[It is my job to] give people the sense they can succeed, fostering good teamwork to make it happen. Giving [my employees] some of the same things my parents gave me as a kid, that is what my job is here....[I tell them] don't worry about what is not working, don't waste your time. Keep going. They do [keep going] and it works (F13) [p.3-4].

I like to define and talk about what success looks like with my employees (M23) [p.4].

I'm positive and I have an outlook that most people mean to do well. Failure is not the result of neglect generally. People want to learn from their failures and improve (M07) [p.4].

[It helps] to see the world as win-win, not zero-sum (M34) [p.3].

I emphasize and praise people for their strengths, in fact, I over emphasize their strengths (M27) [p.3].

[My leadership approach] with employees is to reassure them they are on the right track and to support their development (M25) [p.3].

As a leader, I have to look for the silver lining for everyone else's sake. That helps us to move to where we need to be (F09) [p.2].

Focus on solution. This sub theme, representing three percent of the data for this question acknowledged that the subjects saw failure incidents as problems to be solved, not opportunities to blame and find fault. They believed that by focusing on the solution to a problem, personalities were less likely to be involved, the solution was more quickly discovered and the failure less apt to be repeated. The following quotes represented this theme.

If there is a problem, we identify the root cause, and solutions and steps to prevent a future occurrence (F36) [p.3].

If there is a behavior that is leading to a continued pattern of failures, it is important to understand it (F38) [p.5].

When people admit they made a failure, I go to the solution, and go on from there (F41) [p.3].

I will always separate the person from the problem. I will acknowledge that I own the problem as much as they do. I failed them as much as they failed me (M34) [p.4].

If you make a failure, rectify it [with the solution] as soon as possible (M28) [p.3].

I do damage control. What has happened, has happened. How can we move forward (F29) [p.3]?

I try to get people working on the solution, rather than blaming people or talking about the problem extensively (M23) [p.4].

It is useful [for helping others learn] to be able to see what the goals of the meeting are and how you can get the people at the other side of the table to [make the goals theirs as well] (F09) [p.2].

My staff helps me work toward a solution and then the problem gets solved usually (M05) [p.4].

Take personal responsibility. Personal responsibility or controlling what part of the situation you own was the central idea in the concept of internal locus of control. This sub theme was 9.6% of the data items under this research question and was the most frequently mentioned answer to the question of how leaders teach others to learn from failure. Leaders included taking personal responsibility to mean both modeling this behavior for others and encouraging others to take their own personal responsibility. No

subjects specifically reported how they teach others to take personal responsibility. The following quotes illustrated the theme of taking personal responsibility.

There are some people I have seen who keep doing the same [behavior] and self-sabotaging. They don't have the insight to say, 'I did the same thing I did before and got the same outcome. Why is that happening?' [These are] people who fail to accept any responsibility or any accountability for failures. It is always someone or something else's fault. Then they don't learn from the event and don't gain any insight, so they are destined to experience [the failure] again (F02) [p.9].

People who can't learn from failure have an external locus of control. They say [the failure] is them, never me. You never hear them say, 'I'm not smart enough to get this. Or if I only knew this about myself.' They blame others and put the responsibility for success on others. These people give up and can't take it anymore. That [quality] is in a person early. Even going to work everyday and plodding through life is no great success. I want to see people pressing on the edge a bit (M39) [p.5].

People who don't learn from failure tend towards deflecting and victimizing. 'It's not my fault, I couldn't help it. They made me.' It is the way work and co-workers get approached. Nothing is ever their fault. They complain a lot about things because nothing is ever their fault. Compare this to people who say, 'That may not have been my fault, but I can sure learn from it. I can help in the solution. If it was my fault, let me step back, what did I learn (F03) [p.5]?'

I love to work with people who accept responsibility. They apologize, they ask for advice; they admit they are feeling bad. They look at themselves and they think ahead (M10) [p.5].

When something happens, you don't make excuses. The first thing people want to hear is, 'I'm sorry it happened. I'm going to fix it (F12) [p.3].'

[People] have to be willing to admit a failure and take responsibility for their piece of it. Responsibility allows you to say, 'Now that I own it, what can I learn from it (F14) [p.4]?'

When things aren't going the way I want, I don't think who is messing with me. I think what I need to be doing differently (M22) [p.4].

If an employee is making a failure, it is because I haven't provided them with the resources they need to do it right. The first time they make a failure, it is my responsibility. I have given them something to do but not the tools they need to be successful. I hope they do the same thing with each other (F15) [p.3].

Accurate self-image. Accurate self image or seeing ourselves as others see us has been written about in many leadership books as a key skill for leaders to cultivate. In this research, five percent of the data items under the second research question belonged to the sub theme of accurate self image. Subjects saw a link between accurate self image and learning from failure, but did not articulate specifically what the link was or how they taught it to others. The following quotes represented this theme.

I think that I am able to be introspective and look at myself and my behavior as if I was someone else, the ability to reflect on myself and what I am doing, my impact on others (F09) [p.1].

People who can learn from failure have the ability to think objectively and introspectively about their own behavior (M34) [p.4].

[Acknowledging your blind spots] is the hardest part of self-reflection and understanding. To have the ability to see what you are doing with a third eye and ear and be able to grasp the principles of the way you are going at things that isn't working, is a high order skill (M25) [p.4].

The people who I've had to fire or who are unsuccessful seem to be unable to perceive themselves as others perceive them. You think you are being appropriate and others think 'What a wacko (M07) [p.4].'

People who don't learn from failures have bigger egos and are more into themselves than [into] the goal of the organization they represent. It is about them, not the mission. They are not willing to change their behavior or even look at how their behavior is affecting the mission that never reaches the top for them, because it is all about them (F 15) [p.4].

People who repeat failures are not open to accepting the failure, more defensive. They shield themselves from any judgment or blame. These people don't deliver results or grow (M10) [p.5]

I have been taken by the writing of Daniel Golman on emotional intelligence, self-awareness, reflective learning. It has to do with being able to see and accept you as human, good at some things and not so good at others. In order for people to learn from failures they have to be at a place where they can acknowledge that they will make failures in a way they can learn from them.

People know they make failures, but how does that fit in with who they see that they are? And who they want to be (F17) [p.5]?

[One of my student interns] is always saying he wants to learn, but what he is learning is data, not lessons [about himself], like being more gentle with others. He terrified a fellow student. He wasn't learning what he needed to learn and what he still needs to learn [how his behavior affects others] (M16) [p.5].

Does not take things personally. This sub theme was a small part of the data items coded for this question, only 1.5%. However this theme was similar to the theme of accurate self assessment above it. If one knew themselves well, any situation wasn't all about them, it was about many competing interests. Even when the situation was only about them, these leaders cautioned others to pick wisely which battles they will fight. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

I think the adage of taking your work seriously without taking yourself seriously is really important. Most of the people in my department who see me in a leadership role would tell you that I am not highly ego involved. I take my work seriously. I want to do a good job and I want our department to be an excellent department, except I try not to take things personally. It is really tough to do. It pains me when we don't succeed. When we are around the table talking about our programs and work, we talk collectively, as if we all owned it because we all do own it. It is not mine; it is ours (M04) [p. 5].

[The failure event] is not about you, it is about keeping things going so you can move ahead. Sometimes you have to put your ego aside (F12) [p.5].

Business is not the center of my emotional existence; it is the center of my intellectual existence (M37) [p.2].

[A key to learning from failure] is not taking things personally (M32) [p.4].

Several subjects also expressed the theme of not taking things personally in what they described as ‘picking your battles.’

You have to pick your battles. You can’t get mad about everything that is said to you (F30) [p.2].

I just can’t chase everything. I have to pick my battles (M37) [p.3].

[What I have learned and try to teach others] is the lesson of picking your battles (F36) [p.2].

Keep promises. Two similar themes (honesty and trust) were blended with the theme of keeping promises, which was only one percent of the data items for this question. These sub themes of building trust, dealing honestly with others and keeping promises were understood as providing a safe environment for learning. A leader acted with integrity and total forthrightness and expected this same behavior from those around her. Learning was minimal in an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

Gaining people’s trust [is important to successful employee learning] (F13) [p.2].

I like the idea that the [students] trust me. My students for the last 15 years have told me things I can’t ever imagine telling the members of my faculty when I was in medical school. I am much more approachable than any of the faculty I trained with (M16) [p.1].

I have learned to tell the truth better [in order to help other's learn] (F40) [p.4].

I'm a really honest person [with my faculty and staff], probably sometimes too honest. I believe in openly assessing what we do and trying to measure it and looking at the results together (M04) [p.5].

We try to create a culture where we are honest and up front. We meet every morning at 7:30 to talk about the previous day's issues (F36) [p.3].

No shaming and criticism. Five percent of the responses were coded for this sub theme in research question two. This theme acknowledged the need for a lack of criticism, shame or blame when failures occur. Criticism was seen as serving no constructive purpose. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

It is too late to blast someone after they have already [made a failure]. That makes them more reluctant to call and tell you about it the next time it happens. It causes them to hide things. You get a healthier interaction and people will disclose errors if they know they will not be castigated publicly for it. It is ok for them to fess up, go about fixing it and try to prevent a recurrence, if it is handled in that way. [Not being critical] leads to growth and relationships, when people feel they can admit failures and that they will not be humiliated, but learn from it (F02) [p.8].

I encourage people to disagree with me publicly. Those people are not punished (M10) [p.5].

(F09) If someone does a bad thing, that should not be pointed out and sneered at [p.5].

There is not the feeling [in this organization] that if I screw up, I'm going to get beat with a stick (M25) [p.4].

[Helping others to learn from their failures] is a big part of what I do. I never single people out for an error, we use root cause analysis. If someone does something wrong, they always feel bad about it. No one sets out to do things wrong. I always tell them it could happen to all of us, what can we do now? I don't believe in making people feel guilty in any way. They do that to themselves. They don't need me to punish them (F12) [p.5].

I changed [covering your ass] behavior by not punishing people. We are here as a team to move the ball forward, not to punish people (M35) [p.2].

I can't remember ever yelling or punishing an employee for a failure (F15) [p.3].

One leader, who worked in the field of behavioral health, went beyond simply not criticizing employees, but used forgiveness as a leadership tool. "I'm patient and forgiving [with failures]. I give people second, third and fourth chances. Probably too many. I err on the side of being too forgiving (M08) [p.4]."

Treat others with respect. This theme included the behavior of apologizing publicly for failures, which only one leader used as a teaching behavior. (F12) "If people deserve an apology, I learned to do it and I don't think it has hurt me, but helped give me more credibility. I know apologizing first allows others to admit they were wrong too. Then you can get back on track [p.5]." This theme of treating other with respect, no matter who has failed or what the failure, was two percent of the coded data items for this question. The following quotes represented this theme.

I regard each person with a great respect and high regard (F13) [p. 3].

I always double back and tell people I know they tried their best (F29) [p.3].

You get more results by treating people with positive regard and respect (F30) [p.4].

When you [show employees] that you are behind them and that you appreciate them, then you have the right to point out [errors] in their work (M35) [p.2].

Every company is like going into a different country. They have different histories, traditions, values, written and unwritten rules, and informal and formal structures, power structures. I respect each culture, just like [I] respect each different country. Is it good or bad, right or wrong? We all have our values, based on our own experiences (F42) [p.2].

Admits failure in public. This sub theme, three percent of the items coded for the second research question, has its foundation in a secure self image and internal locus of control. Did the leader have confidence to admit failure publicly and risk appearing less than all knowing? The following quotes illustrated this theme.

If you can't even admit to yourself that you made sub optimal decisions then you got a problem. Sometimes, you can admit to yourself, but not to others.

Admitting to others is important. If there is a failure of some sort, it is not in isolation. It is not just you that senses a failure; other people sense it as well. If you admit to yourself that you were wrong, but you don't tell anyone else, that is almost as bad as not admitting it to yourself at all (F 09) [p.4].

I shared my own failures with my employees, that makes them feel more comfortable. If I screw something up and tell them, it gives them room to move as well (M35) [p.2].

There is a certain self confidence you have to have if you are going to admit a failure that you are not going to be crucified (F14) [p.5].

The bottom line was it didn't work out. I had to say it didn't work out and admit I hadn't done it well [to my board] (M20) [p.3].

My best defense against criticism is to [criticize] myself first (M37) [p.2].

People who learn from failures admit the failure. They admit the failure publicly. People who don't admit their failures don't get very far [in this organization]. I've seen people who can't admit their failures; they aren't around [this organization] any more (F31) [p.4].

Modeled Behavior for Others

This was the second finding in answer to the research question of how leaders teach others to learn from failure. This finding made up 41% of the total data coded in all three categories for this question, being found in 111 of the 270 items of data for the second research question. This category was divided into eight sub themes of the types of behavior these leaders modeled:

- Supporting employees
- Attending to complexity and learning
- Leading by example
- Tolerating failures
- Sharing failure stories

- Observing and listening
- Taking risks
- Using humor

Skillful leaders used every opportunity to model the behavior they wanted to see from others in the organization. Through their own behavior, leaders made their values tangible, especially with failures and missteps (Kouzes and Posner, 2002.) Illustrations of the eight sub themes follow below.

Support employees. Leaders interviewed taught their employees to learn from failure through their support of those employees at the time of failure. Support from leaders came in the form of talking, listening or just being there. This theme was 5.2% of the data items for the second question. (See Table 4). The following quotes exemplified this theme.

[I show others it is acceptable to fail and learn] by giving them moral support, listening and a hug (F02) [p.6].

I encourage employees to talk to me, for us to sit down and talk about [their goals] (M04) [p.5].

[I show others it is acceptable to fail and learn] by having an open relationship style that encourages conversation about failure (F03) [p.4].

My students call me when they are in trouble and ask my advice. They find me approachable. The Dean used to introduce me as the Pied Piper of Pediatrics (M16) [p.4].

(Young professionals) are insecure and need someone to reassure them that they are on the right track and to support their development (M25) [p.2].

In counseling people, [I try to] remember what it feels like to move between different cultures, instead of being judgmental. I have developed a much broader view [of people's behavior] (F42) [p.2].

Attending to complexity and learning. Making up 8.8% of the coded items for question two, the sub theme of attending to complexity and learning was the most frequently mentioned modeling behavior. When subjects spoke of complexity, they described attending to the richness, variation and levels of meaning in situations. The following quotes represented this theme.

I try regularly to ask questions about complexity. Part of our failure comes from our belief that things are black and white and there is a right answer. We regularly talk about how complex problems and solutions are, attempting to see things as complex, diverse, ambiguous. We've tried to understand the inherent tensions in our environment because those create barriers where we avoid situations. Understanding that there is a natural pull between ideas, issues and how we talk and negotiate about those. For example, the tension between autonomy and accountability, creativity and rule following, independence and belonging to an organization, personal and professional life, caring for one or caring for many. There are things we will see differently and we will feel that people are right or wrong. We have different realities, you can try something, but there is no right or wrong (F17) [p.4].

[What has helped me be successful and what I try to teach others] is being so carefully attentive to the context of the organization in which you are working. Trying to understand the complexity of where you sit in your role, personally,

interpersonally, the organization's culture of evaluation. How you have to frame issues and articulate them in a way that they are understood. That cuts across my 25-year career in this field (M25) [p.2].

Knowing what their employees needed to develop and making those learning opportunities available was one of the ways these leaders attended to their employee's development. "I try to identify learning opportunities for my employees during their evaluation (M05) [p.4]"

As an educator, I know about the concept of readiness to learn. You cannot teach anything to anyone, until they are open to it. You can't force someone to learn something until they desire to learn it. But I have now taken that concept into other areas of my life, especially working with the Board and staff, you have to bring them to the place, if you trying to get them to do something that they at first don't want to do or you think they don't want to do, you have to help them come to a place where they are ready to hear it and to learn the options and the possibilities (M06) [p.6].

What I think is interesting is that [not being successful with the council] was a learning experience for me and for the whole staff. It was a good experience for them to see how to deal with differences of opinion and to truly listen to everyone, not just let them talk and go yeah, yeah. To learn to compromise (F09) [p.2].

Leading by example. Data items coded under this sub theme made up 5.6% of the total data coded for the second question. Leading others by setting an example was the essence of this category and fundamental to how humans learn. Recent behavioral

studies have uncovered new information about a portion of the brain called the mirror neuron. This part of the brain not only responded when humans acted, but as well when they watched others acting (Cort, 2005.) The following quotes illustrated this theme.

I think there is a conscious and proactive way that you [lead by example], talking to a staff member about something that didn't work and get them to think about moving on from it or how to adapt and change what didn't work to make it work a different way. There is also the learning by example, having others see how you handle things. There is the sitting down to talk about something, but others are certainly watching you. Knowing you are a role model and handling yourself accordingly (F09) [p.4].

When I was a young employee, my manager would walk the area, note details of cleanliness we had missed and then we would get a memo about it later on. Think about the message that gives. We were never good enough. The focus was not on the customer or the service we gave. I never felt she was approachable. The department was not organized around the right values. [As the executive in charge], I do walk the area. I never send any information back, even if I see things I don't like. I try to ask the staff questions about their day, or frame those questions so they can know what I really value. I want them to be able to feel they can talk to me, even through most of them don't. By doing it regularly and often, they get used to me. I try to role model my failures, small things that I don't think are going to completely erode my credibility (F17) [p.4].

If you see (modeling, risk-taking, talking about failure) at the top levels of the organization, you see people do this throughout the organization-that is

evidence of learning. There is a culture created about failures, learning and continuous improvement (F03) [p.4].

I work really hard trying to be positive and model enjoying my job, even though there are aspects of it I don't enjoy (M04) [p.5].

You look at your employees and see that they are modeling your behavior, so they must be learning something (M05) [p.4].

[M]odeling and a willingness to try new ideas, even if the project doesn't go anywhere, we have picked up ideas for the next time we want to do something. Modeling trial and error experimentation (F03) [p.4].

The only way people can learn how to profit from a failure is to watch someone else do it. Model it, not sugar coat it. Failures are a random aspect of life and being human (F38) [p.5].

I try to show them [that you can learn from failure] through my own course corrections (F41) [p.3].

I try to let people know we are taking on big projects and I give updates on it, including missteps, play that out to them and role model my own failures. So they see I make them too and what do I do when I make them. That leads to active discussion. Sometimes people are more free to talk about my failures than their own (F11) [p.4].

I demonstrate [saying I was wrong and I am sorry] in my actions with the people that report to me and with their staffs. I apologize when I need to. Apologizing takes some practice (F12) [p.5].

I admit when I have made a failure so [the employees] understand that we all do it (F15) [p.3].

I will never accept that it is someone else's fault. I try to role model this. I do [after project reviews] with my boss and I share these with my staff. They will see that I take responsibilities for what I am accountable for and I list my key learnings. I talk about how I am going to do it differently next time. Role modeling is important and you can't let yourself get really angry about failures. I only get really angry with someone who makes the same failure twice or three times (F26) [p.6].

I shared my own failures with my employees, that makes them feel more comfortable. If I screw something up and tell them, it gives them room to move as well (M35) [p.4].

Tolerating failures. Making up 4.8% of the coded items for the second research question, this theme described the activity of providing employees with enough learning opportunities that they can fail on non critical tasks, rather than micro managing them or doing the task for them. The following quotes represented this theme.

I don't know that I think it is important to let people know that if they fail it will be ok. I think I am more likely to say that failure is inevitable and the only thing that is not ok is not admitting to it, not processing and not learning from it. Obviously, there are some failures that are so critical that there are truly dreadful consequences. I would never want anyone to think that they could be protected from that. But we all understand that there are things you do to protect both

yourself and the organization from the kind of failures that can be made by any of us (F38) [p.5].

[Employees] don't need me to punish them [when they make an error]. My job is looking at systems and cleaning up after the fact. I learned that when something happens you don't make excuses (F12) [p.5].

We hear no to our sales proposals all the time. That is not a failure that is the nature of the beast. You are not going to win everything and you go onto the next one. It is a matter of odds, the more you get out there, the better we do. Don't worry about the ones that aren't working, don't waste your time. Keep going (F13) [p.4].

We try to do small-scale experiments to see how things will work. We see if we have reasonable processes in place (M33) [p.3]

[I show employees that I tolerate failures by] physically leading them through it. When I first began working with them, I had to repeat over and over, 'Let's try it, if it doesn't work we can stop it or change it.' Then I start hearing them say it to each other. With all of the downsizing we had to do, I had to be the person they hated. All of that negative energy, increased failures and anxiety, so we had a lot to overcome (F30) [p.4].

When people do something wrong [at this financial organization], unless it is fraud, we talk it through. When people admit they made a failure, I don't get mad. I go to the solution and go on from there (F41) [p.3].

I try to create my own [departmental] space where failures are tolerated (F42) [p5].

My view is we are all making failures, if we correct them as we go along, you're fine. Life is constantly making failures and constantly adjusting. That is normal. I see that as normal. [T]hey feel comfortable to try things and see the results of their actions (M35) [p.4].

Sharing failure stories. When leaders told stories to employees about their own failures and how they recovered, employees sensed that failure was not fatal to a career. Often these stories were excellent teaching and learning opportunities. These items made up 5.9% of the data coded for this question. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

I told [the student intern] that I had been through the same experience many times before. I tell them stories about my own failures (M43) [p.3-4].

I talk about my own failures and why they happened (F36) [p. 2].

I freely talk about these [failure] stories. I tell [employees] what happened. But the fact that we executives here tell our stories in leadership development programs gives permission for other people to tell their [failure] stories when it is their turn. If a VP can make a failure, it can't be too damaging to their career. It comes out ok (M23) [p.4].

I tell stories and use examples from some of my administrative meetings. I will use an example from there. I use examples to demonstrate my own lack of knowledge or the need to explore more (F21) [p.3].

I start out [analysis meetings] with my own stories [of failures] and ask for their input (F13) [p.4].

I use personal experience and illustration. I very frequently tell my own stories, gaffes that I have made in my training. I remember to couch things in

ways that I own them. I must do it well, because I remember one of my research assistants saying, 'What I like about you is that you never criticize, you own stuff by saying this is how I felt when you did that.' I try to bring a lot of that to consciousness. I am open about my failures. I may overdo it in fact (M16) [p.4].

I talk about my own imperfections, not always in great detail, but I acknowledge that I am not perfect (M08) [p.4].

[I help people learn by] sharing my own personal failures, maybe not personal ones or as dramatic as the ones I've shared today, but in the context appropriate when they might come up. I did it and I'm the boss, so it happens to everybody (M07) [p.5].

You have to tell employees about your failures (M05) [p.4].

[I] tell [employees] that I have had failures and cite historical examples. If you talk about your own failures, others tend to think you are making it up to make them feel better, because all they see is your success in comparison with their failure. I do talk about having the same feeling that they are probably having, the disappointment, and embarrassment. Gandhi was a loser as a lawyer, shifted from job to job. So was Einstein. There are many historical examples of people who failed miserably in whatever they first tried to do and then eventually choose something different and were successful (F02) [p.7].

Observing and listening. These two communication skills aided leaders in communicating to and teaching their employees. This theme was found in 3% of the items coded for the second research question. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

Leaders can't know everything. They have to listen to their employees (F36) [p.2].

I am more willing to listen. I've learned a lot from listening instead of being a person who talks a lot. Hearing and responding to what I heard instead of being ready with my next retort (F29) [p.2].

When we started listening, employees started speaking up (M10) [p.5].

I demonstrate a willingness to listen (M20) [p.4].

One of the things that I do is I learn what people do and I do it for them and have them watch me and I'm explaining the why's to them, not in a belittling way. You get more results by treating people with positive regard and respect (F30) [p.4].

People who learn from failure have the ability to be observational (M07) [p.5].

I have learned [about failure] by observation [of others]. I have done a lot of learning by observation with my past bosses, learning what to do and learning a lot of what not to do. You see a boss doing something that is not going in the right direction and you see that is not the way you would handle it or that is not a very successful way to do things (F09) [p.4].

Taking risks. In taking risks themselves and allowing employees the room to take small risks, leaders taught others the value of experimentation. This theme was coded in 6.3% of the interview items for the research question. The following quotes demonstrated this theme.

I know it is ok for me to walk [around the organization] and tell the truth and see where we can go. It gives me some comfort that I can deal with future situations...[It helps to learn from failure when there is] a willingness to try new ideas, even if the project doesn't go anywhere, we have picked up ideas for the next time we want to do something. Modeling trial and error experimentation (F03) [p.2-4].

[As an organization] our job is to try, to experiment, to do new things and it is better for us to try and fail and get back to [our clients] on the good or bad of it than for [our clients] to try things and feel that they might get fired as a result of it. We have a quarterly feature in our magazine, where we try new things. I tried a Segway for use at a convention. I wrote about it for conventions. We try things and then we give our members the unvarnished truth. I have embraced this [risk-taking] as part of my brand, my differentiator as an executive. I am known as an innovator, someone who will take risks and be very public about it what worked and what didn't (M06) [p.7].

People who learn try [to do new] things and put themselves on the line, take personal risk. People who take personal risk can either win or lose, but over time, they will take considered risks and they will probably win (F13) [p.4].

It is just as important to have a failure part well developed in yourself as it is to have a leadership part well developed in yourself. If you are ashamed of failure or you ignore that part, then you are not going to take a risk. If you can develop the failure part, it can become an early warning system for yourself, it can be cherished. People have to be able to engage in an internal discussion with that

[failure] part of themselves. Most of them exile the failure part of themselves to Tora Bora. They tell the failure part of themselves to shut the fuck up. But that part has to be acknowledged because only that part is going to give you the internal feedback-“This is not a good thing to do.” The failure part of you can morph and become a very important part of your personality (M27 [p.4]).

I took a new job with a new organization, after being with a company for a long time. I wanted to do something different. When I got there, I realized that the people were not of the highest integrity. I tried to figure out a way I could be successful in this new organization. Maybe [I could] change some things, showing the relationship between happy satisfied employees and happy satisfied customers. I don't think that was the value proposition the organization was built on, so that was a hard lesson for me to learn. Not all companies have a value set that I can believe in. I kept trying to find the common equation for the leadership group at this organization. My boss felt we need to make these cultural changes, giving employees more ownership, but there was nothing inspiring, like a hook. People don't get all worked up about cutting costs. We do provide a service and the promise of being there [for the customer], but it was just rhetoric. One guy told me [being there] was just public relations; it wasn't what the [organization] was really about. So there was a lie going on, telling employees one thing, but the underlying proposition was figuring out ways around it. So then my boss and executives above him got moved and they made someone CEO who would do anything to have the job. Do people have a moral center? What will you do and what will you not do? I am attracted to people with a strong moral center. Things

really changed. I could not work with the guy they brought in. He was headed in a completely different direction. I decided to leave. I didn't believe in what was going on. It was a great experience for me. I learned a lot (F42) [p.1].

To learn from failures, you have to experience them. I don't think you can learn that from a book. The impact isn't there when you read it, but making failures is costly emotionally and financially expensive. The best training is making failures and living through them (M28) [p.4].

When you are in business, it is about taking risks and you have to have the courage to take the risks. But when you take the risks it means you will have to face the consequences. Do you have enough courage to take the risk and face the consequences? The consequences don't end up being as bad as you thought they were going to be (M35) [p.4].

What we are really talking about [in learning from failure] is a guy who is willing to take on risk. I don't mind it being hard and falling down a few times, if I can see where this thing is going. I knew in 1990 that I would be doing something like what I am doing today. Everything had led to that. I have done some wacky stuff, but it is about pressing the envelope a bit. Without hurting people. Every single time I have done it nothing really bad has happened to me (M39) [p.3].

Using humor. One and a half percent of the coded items for research question two had to do with using humor when modeling behavior to help others learn from failure. The following quotes represented this theme.

One of the people I worked for was good at self-deprecating humor. It helped everyone relax and that made a good atmosphere of teamwork and support (F02) [p.8].

[I try to use a sense of humor] about failures assuming it is not grossly negligent failure. I think a sense of humor is important as well to de-mystify failure, especially with my employees, letting them know its' ok (M07) [p.5].

I think that [a sense of humor] is important. I can laugh at myself and invite us to laugh at ourselves (M09) [p.4].

Institutionalized learning processes

To answer the research question of how leaders taught others to learn from failure experiences, the third and final finding was that leaders influenced their organizations' cultures in order to make certain practices part of that culture. These practices then became part of the organization's culture, or became institutionalized, as this researcher termed it. The themes under this category were:

- Used a performance process
- Conducted learning discussions
- Provided room to fail
- Encouraged reflection

This final finding for the second research question represented 22 percent of the data coded for the second research question.

Used a performance process. The feat of achieving great performance through people was not the result of wishful thinking. For the interviewed leaders, performance was a cyclical process of learning where the parties jointly set performance expectations,

found and monitored performance data, coached and provided feedback, assessed, evaluated and rewarded results. Then the cycle began again with new performance expectations. Leaders who helped employees learn from failure experiences used the cycle of performance as a consistent part of managing. The data items coded for the performance process theme made up 13% of the responses to question two. The following quotes illustrated this theme.

One person comes to my mind that worked for me. He was doing a lot of ass covering and shifting the blame. It was very obvious to me. He thought it wasn't obvious. What I did with that guy when I evaluated him, I used metrics with him to quantify how he was doing. You could put a number on everything he was doing. So he would have to do his own evaluation by showing me the numbers. It wasn't personal. He then knew when he was screwing up and couldn't blame anyone else and I told him to fix it. My view is we are all making failures, if we correct them as we go along, you're fine. Life is constantly making failures and constantly adjusting (M35) [p.2].

[You show employees how to learn from failure by being] very clear on expectations and goal setting. For everyone to monitor and course correct against these expectations and goals. Making sure the information we use [performance data] is correct (M22) [p.4].

One person has been with me for 20 years. Brilliant, talented in so many ways, but had some limiting behaviors that were going to de-rail him eventually. He was hard to correct, because there was so much that was right and extraordinary, but there were a couple of troubling things. I had a conversation

with him and we talked about it for a long time. I don't think he could believe it or see it. Finally, after we had this dialogue for a couple months, I told him that he probably wouldn't be around to reap the benefits of all his hard work, because I didn't see him making the cut if this [behavior] doesn't change. For all of the talking, counseling and amateur analysis, it wasn't until I just said it in a very straightforward way that he changed and he changed overnight. He has absolutely fixed the problem. I presented it as a situation he had to decide to fix or not (F38) [p.5].

With our company, you fail so many times a day trying to meet perfection. Our company seeks perfection. We teach the employees to take one success out of ten and look at that. If [customer] service time is 90 seconds, I can't hit that with every customer, but maybe I can hit it three hours out of eight hours. The employees get frustrated, so you have to be patient (F18) [p.3].

I try to bring [failure] to their attention and be as specific as I can on what they could have done differently and why. But typically I don't dwell on it. I may try and help people see that their skills are better suited for another area. It is talking in depth and trusting one another enough to disclose what is going on (F42) [p.4].

The one thing I ask people to do on this team is over communicate. Talk about what they are thinking about and talk to their peers 2-3 times a day. We are a virtual company, so no one is in the same office. I ask them to call each other a couple times a day, because in having those conversations they will learn something they didn't know and that is how they will get better. It is not about

being ok to fail, but it is ok to try some new stuff as long as you are well prepared. If you go in and blow it because you are unprepared, it is your own fault (M39) [p.5].

I watch [my employees to assess how they are doing]. I look for the things that I hope they have learned. I watch them over a period of time and set them up in a learning situation without their knowledge. If I know someone has difficulty with creating a pact with the stakeholder, I will look for an opportunity to force them into doing that and make sure I am available to coach and help them. I'll open the door for them; it is their choice whether they walk through it (F26) [p.6].

[You show employees how to learn from failure by] doing assessment and evaluation. It is a natural part of the way we operate here. We put far more time and energy looking at what went right with something so that we can be sure to repeat it if we need to. When we look at the things that did not go right, we look at them from a perspective of what can we do differently (M19) [p.4]?

You try to be clear with the expectation, be clear with the results, choices and consequences. Making sure [the employees] understand that together we can do better than this. How do I [as a leader] more positively engage them in changing this behavior, rather than start on the steps of discipline? It is very analogous to parenting, physical discipline as opposed to non-physical discipline. How you coach and supervise in a directly confrontational style versus explaining courses, options, what else could they have done, do they have all the tools, is there something I can give you more feedback on more regularly. I want you to

be successful... You have to hold people accountable; you give them tools and the opportunity to learn and do better. If they fail and again, and it is within their control, you have to give them that message as well (M10) [p.4-6].

[I]n another organization I headed, we had a monthly celebration of failure, trying to get the [employees] to shake off tremendous lethargy. We talked about failures and joked about it to get them to understand that failure is ok when we are doing it for the right reasons. A brochure with the wrong date on it is stupid or accidental, but a failure of 'Hey, I want to try this for these reasons and this is what I am looking for.' That is ok failure (M06) [p.6].

For my [loan] officers, I have to let them make the failures and not take the heat for them. I try to give them best practices when it comes to loan exceptions. I try to hold to the rules; I make them accept the consequences of their business decisions. I publish a report of their successful and failing loans that the big bosses see (F31) [p.3].

Conducted learning discussions. Four percent of the coded data items for the second research question had to do with conducting learning discussions. Often called post mortems (after forensic science) or lessons learned where a project or deal, once completed was dissected for learning opportunities, these talks were standard practice for some of the subjects. The following quotes exemplified this theme.

I have tried to institutionalize [learning from failures]. We are a project-oriented company and that give us multiple opportunities every year to be reflective. We are not finished on a project until we do a post mortem. We have a formal meeting where we conference the client in and we try to have a celebration that it

is over and we try to have an analysis by the team of what went well and what didn't go well. What do we need to do to improve doing this kind of work next time? We are methodology rich. We look at our processes and say, 'What have we learned about our methods that need to be institutionalized? What tools have we developed? What worked and didn't work?' We try to institutionalize that on every project regardless of size. Then you show people it is safe to say this didn't work. What I try to do is listening and white board what they say. I demonstrate the willingness to listen and learn from the project. I couple it with the good news along with the lesson. Not be judgmental, but be analytical and open to learning (M 20) [p.4].

Whenever we do a large project, we always do a lessons learned at the end. It is a way of operating (F03) [p.4].

[I know people are learning] because performance is better and post mortem discussion is richer (F11) [p.6].

Another way that I show them it is ok to fail and learn is how I conduct lessons learned (M10) [p.5].

We use root cause analysis. I focus on processes...I let the policy and process take care of the big stuff. You can't be arbitrary on a case-by-case basis. At the end of the day, you have to ask is there anything else we can do about this big error. There are frequently contributing factors when people make errors, sometimes they don't care enough. The corrective process helps learning for that person and even makes the whole area think. Near misses focus your attention- have I gotten sloppy on this? All of us have near misses at times that we are

grateful for. In our line of work precision counts and people to try to be precise (F12) [p.5].

We always do a post mortem. There is no retribution for talking about what didn't work well. The world is so full of novel failures you can make; it is a waste of energy to repeat one (M23) [p.4].

Every six months, I get the team together where we are discussing what went right and the ones that got away and what we can learn from that stuff. Those aren't painful sessions, they are usually pretty energizing discussions and out of that others learn too. The first time we started doing this there was some trepidation because we were going to talk about the ones that got away. I can say that since we have started doing that we are better at not losing [opportunities]. I start it out with my own stories and ask for their input (F13) [p.4].

When something hasn't gone well, we [the staff] get together to look at it, there is a nice rotation [of leading the discussion], someone may be looking at it critically, but someone else will point out the valuable things or here is what we learned. Or sometimes, it is just everyone saying, 'Crap', and laughing about it, picking up and going on (M19) [p.5].

We've created a culture where we are up front and honest [about learning from failures]. We meet every morning at 7:30 to talk about issues we had from the day before, production issues, system issues that impacted the customers or clients. [Employees] now come to these meetings willing to provide candid information. We get the kinds of support we need from our partners to identify an issue, usually technical. We do the same thing on a bi-weekly basis. Managers

know it is important to always look for ways to improve things but to be factual and honest. If there is a problem, we identify the root cause, and solutions and steps to prevent a future occurrence (F36) [p.4].

Provided room to fail. Several subjects mentioned providing employees with the space and latitude to fail, which is an element of the organization's culture. Three percent of the items coded for question two were in this theme and the following quotes illustrated the permission to fail theme.

I am more comfortable being in an organization where failure, which is constructively utilized, is not fatal. I'm more comfortable being in a place where how we handle failures is more important than not having any failures (F38) [p.6]

I often find myself saying, 'Let's give it a shot' so I think I am giving employees permission to try and fail. We do our best based on our understanding and then we fix it (F24) [p.2].

People always say others need to be allowed to fail. But [often, in organizations] when you don't do something well, you are in line to get killed. If you say people need to be allowed to fail, you have to cut people some slack. If I ask you to figure out and implement a project, and you do it and I get a complaint about you and jump on you, I have just set you up. One of the things I saw people do early in my career is set people up. I've always tried to make sure I never did that. If I said somebody should do something, I had to let them do it. If it was an important matter, I didn't give them that kind of leeway. I kept track of things as they were going on. I refuse to set people up. I see that over and over again in

organizations. People have to be allowed to fail, but they are not cut any slack at all (F12) [p.6].

Institutionalized reflection. Making reflection a part of each work activity was the way that several leaders used to teach employees and their organizations how to learn from failure. Only 1.8% of the coded data fell into this theme. The following quotes represented the theme of making reflection part of how an organization does its business.

We moved our education to a reflective learning model to try to get at how adults learn and how we are going to help people turn experience into learning. Not everyone has the skills to be lifelong adult learners; we decided we weren't doing as good a job teaching adult learners, so we needed to change to reflective learning. We asked our interns to write a reflective narrative on the characteristics of staff who they consider to be role models and summarize how they intended to use those experiences in their own practice. It tells us what kind of role models we need to be cultivating and it tells the interns how to move from here is what I have seen to here is what I am going to do with it. Reading what these interns say about our staff as role models is inspirational. What they say about people being flexible, adaptable, trying things and re-grouping, talking with others, stepping out when they need to (F17) [p.5].

I think that one speck of evidence [of reflecting from failure] that I've seen is people are assessing themselves and thinking about what they are doing and attempting to learn, to modify their behavior (M04) [p.6].

[To help employees learn] I talk about my own failures and why they happened. Both as a manager and as a parent (F36) [p.3].

We have tried to institutionalize learning from our failures. We are a project oriented company and that gives us multiple opportunities every year to be reflective (M20) [p.4].

Research Question Three: What Were the Organizational
Effects of Learning From Failure?

*“One and the same thing can at the same time
Be good, bad, and indifferent.” (Spinoza)*

Positive Effects

The three positive findings from this question were that learning from failure increases positive organizational metrics (earnings, performance, service, growth, productivity, flexibility, creativity), improved organizational climate, and enhanced organizational communication. The positive effects were 69% of the data coded for this third research question. (See Table 4.)

Increased positive organizational metrics. Forty-four data items were coded for this finding, representing 41.5% of the total data for the third question. This broad category included the metrics of earnings, performance, service and retention of customers and employees, market growth, productivity, flexibility and creativity. The following quotes illustrated this finding.

[When people learn from failure, we see an] increase in earnings, customer satisfaction. The average time to do the work [decreases]. We [find] new things we have learned technology and process wise (M20) [p.4].

We're getting new business, our numbers are good. The employees ask questions and stay engaged (F31) [p.4].

[When people are learning from failures] there is increased performance, teamwork, better products, and personal accountability (M34) [p. 4].

The marketplace and the world reward organizations that learn from their failures (F40) [p. 4].

Performance is better and [learning] discussion is richer. If I get them involved early and set up the appropriate structure, the number of times I have to step in are few versus if it is something I don't give the attention to regarding structure, the number of times I have to step in and occasionally take over increases exponentially. Most of the evidence is metrics, budget, and timelines (F11) [p.6].

One of the things that I would point to is that we are able to provide a continually high quality of service to a growing number of people with relatively little increases in stress (M19) [p.5].

I see people doing more critical thinking and looking at the market place in a more critical and thoughtful way. People seem to use bigger picture thinking, more strategic thinking in their work. We have to do less discounting for our happier customers, and we are still making more money, selling better, selling value, managing the businesses better (M01) [p.3].

We don't make the same failures over and over. Our rate of sales success has improved. Lots of good ideas come out of those [talks about our failures]. We have changed how we support our sales effort as a result of that sharing (F13) [p.4].

Our clients leave if we don't learn from our failures. They are not satisfied. There are long waiting lists to get into our organization and clients stay with us until they have to leave. [When they leave prematurely] you can trace it back to one or two specific failures-communication, follow through or programming. You know it immediately when you are or are not moving forward (M07) [p.6].

My business was talking about scrap; our potential for scrap is 100-150 pieces per machine. Our potential for scrap is huge and it is caused by human error. We very successfully showed that human error and personal choices, when changed, could reduce our scrap average to half. I have one group that is going 20 weeks without a human error incident, at a time [in the past] when [they had an incident weekly]. The data shows that learning is happening on a personal basis (M10) [p.5].

Creativity/Flexibility.

[You see people] thinking on their feet and being flexible, searching for alternatives (F36) [p.5].

[Learning from failure] helps in innovation and creativity, which is a root strength of being the type of organization that we are. We are always looking for the next horizon and the next edge, specifically in the science and engineering world. But we need to have an overall corporate culture that says that as well. We are a cutting edge industry. I think it helps us to build in a resiliency in the service part of our jobs because we get beat down a lot. We can say that customer is mad at me today, what did I pick up from it, how do I dust myself off and go

on-tomorrow is another day. Tuck that into my coping tool kit to help me do my job (F03) [p.4].

[Learning from their failures] caused the staff to create, innovate, get very involved and improve the [evaluation] system (M04) [p.6].

Low Employee Turnover.

We have a high retention rate for our teachers. They stay with us around 6 years, in the county, average teacher retention is 8 months (M07) [p.6].

Enhanced Communication. The positive effect identified as enhanced communication, represented 14.2% of the total responses for the entire question, and three themes were mentioned under enhanced communication: exchange of ideas, collaboration and self-generated learning. The following quotes exemplified the positive effects that learning from failure has on organizational communication.

Exchange of ideas.

[When people learn from failures, we see] higher levels of dialogue and exchange of ideas. [The organization is] more flexible and innovative in the marketplace (F42) [p.5].

[You know people are learning from failure when the organization] stops killing the messenger and it responds appropriately to bad news (M22) [p.4].

People do learn and monitor things. Our turnover is low. We are all very intentional about keeping open lines of communication. It doesn't matter how well you plan something, it is not until you implement it that you begin to learn things. So we have been really clear that everyone has the responsibility and the

right to bring back information into the process. Negative information is as valuable, or more valuable, as what is working (M19) [p.4].

Collaboration and relationship building.

It makes for more relaxed environment to know that people can bring up an idea without it being shot down [by failure]. There is a collaborative atmosphere, if you have that, good things happen (F09) [p.4].

I have a staff run committee that is putting together an application for us to have magnet status in the city [high distinction in health field]. If they weren't [learning from failures] we wouldn't be in that place generally (F17) [p.4].

The people in my group are talking to others outside out group about some of the things we are trying, because people are asking me questions, so they are saying good things about [taking some risks]. Some of it is getting around (F14) [p.3].

Self-generated learning.

Over the years I have seen my leadership team grow and one of my peers came in today complaining about the number of goals he has to re-write for his managers before he can send them on [to his board]. I don't re-write the [goals for my managers] because I've spent time re-educating my team on how to write goals. I send what they write on to the board because I trust their learning. My team knows how to write business plans and proposals. I have set that expectation for them and we have a mentor program so they teach one another. [I want to be] creating systems to teach each other so they extend beyond me (F21) [p.3].

You see people learn when you can watch behavior months later and say that lesson took. You see ah-ha moments, that is very satisfying. All you can do is hope it lasts, it happens in the short term, but whether it sticks with them is their challenge (F09) [p.4].

I watch for the things that I hope they have learned. I watch them over a period of time and set them up in a learning situation without their knowledge. If I know someone has difficulty with creating a pact with the stakeholder, I will look for an opportunity to force them into doing that and make sure I am available to coach and help them. I'll open the door for them; it is their choice whether they walk through it (F26) [p.6].

Improved Organizational Climate. The final finding of positive effects to organizations of learning from failure was improved organizational climate, which was comprised of comments about organizational climate and employee development. This finding was 13.2% of the data for the question and was exemplified by the quotes below.

Organizational Climate.

I don't always see [employees] making the same failure again. I think people highly regard the organization and feel as if there are good people working there. There is a reputation for doing good work and helping others. Our organization makes a difference (F29) [p.3].

The organization is functioning effectively and morale is healthy. People demonstrate organizational loyalty, improving productivity (M08) [p.4].

My employees started speaking up again, when we starting listening and showing people how to move problems up the chain, with no repercussions (M10) [p.5].

I see change that is their doing [when they learn from failure]. Their ownership of things, their multiple approaches to problems, which I encourage. People have more of a commitment [to the work] (F24) [p.2].

Employees relax and are having a good time and you know they get it (F18) [p.3].

Employee Development.

Managers who work for me are developing and becoming strong leaders in the organization (F36) [p.5].

Over 6 years you get a chance to see [employees'] change; I participate extensively in the review process and am very committed to sending people to continuing education and paying for it. I have an opportunity to see people develop over a long span of time. I can observe that if there is a failure, they move forward from that (M07) [p.4].

Negative Effects

The effects on organizations of learning from failure that had negative consequences for organizations were mentioned thirty-three times in the interviews, or 31% of the total. These items were categorized into five areas. The first three areas were inversely identical to the positive effects, those effects that decreased positive organizational metrics, impaired communication and damaged organizational climate.

Two other additional areas added here were loss of life and the theme of learning from failure having no negative effects. The following quotes illustrated these categories.

Decrease positive organizational metrics.

Some good people have left [the organization] because they don't think there is a place for them. When people don't understand how decisions are made and how people are elected to leadership roles, they could leave the organization (F11) [p.6].

Sometimes my managers may view [learning from failure] as not having a solid strategy. But the landscape of our business is changing so much that you can't just have one way to do it because you could be wrong in 6 months. Some people aren't comfortable with being that flexible (F36) [p.5].

We have to be careful that [learning from failure] doesn't take a turn towards a lackadaisical attitude-that it is ok to do sloppy work. That would be bad. When you are taking care of the nation, sloppy work is not an option. Misplacing things is not an option. It's hard to take the heat sometimes when you do try something and it doesn't work out, then your customers use that as an opportunity to beat you up. Build that thick skin and move on (F03) [p.4].

[The negative effect of failure] is perhaps how we learn about failure, through our own experiences. I have seen executives paralyzed by fear of failure; as a result they don't do anything. Or they do it in such a limited way that it is negligible. They tend not to rise to the top, they don't move very fast. They are not seen as the bright people in the profession. It is fear of failure that keeps people dragged in their career. They have a harder time with creativity,

imagination, discovery, less inclined to wonder what is over the next hill.

Satisfied with the status quo. The tyranny of the known, we can't be held hostage by the tyranny of the comfortable (M06) [p.7].

There could be a crisper focus that during learning time, we still need to make our goals and stay on course (F41) [p.4].

People who don't stay for 5-6 years are the ones who aren't able to learn even if they are minor failures, like following through. A client says, 'Hey, I'm coming at 3, can you have things ready?' and they don't do it. The client likes you a little less now and administrators have to get involved. So you learn that you have to follow up and then make it up to the client. People who do that end up staying and the ones that don't are unhappy and quit (M07) [p.7].

I have seen a few folks who have a different idea of what they want from their jobs. For whom our way of doing things doesn't match their way of doing things. They ask why they should have to do a self-evaluation or a literature review as part of their performance review. There are some folks who envision their job and learning differently [from each other]. Some are making a choice to leave and some are disgruntled and do some stirring. Trying to understand what it is we want and should be doing with that is our work (F17) [p.4].

Impaired communication.

There are some folks who are hesitant to be candid about [failure] because they are expecting you to judge them. They still don't want to deliver bad news. But they don't understand that their real bad news is the news you tell me that is late. Bad news that is old, I can't do anything about it. If you tell me bad news

on the day it is bad news, I can do something about it. It is tough with some folks to get them to realize that you can say bad things and no one will yell at you (M20) [p.5].

I think there is some learning now that we could be applying organizationally that we are not. Our business is so dynamic; people that don't learn reach their level quickly and don't make it any higher. They are still repeating failures they made years ago. The difference is that the person who repeats the failure is not open to accepting the failure, more defensive, blaming something outside their control. They excuse or rationalize their way out rather than say, 'I did that and I'm sorry.' They are shielding themselves from any judgment or blame and what happens is that people know they don't deliver results or grow (M10) [p.5].

If you talk over things ad nauseum, sometimes decisions may not get made or things don't happen. There is a balance between being autocratic and collaborative. Things don't happen as quickly, but this is balanced by the energy and enthusiasm of shared ideas (F09) [p.4].

The other negative [of learning from failure] is that it has made people be less true to themselves. Teaching others requires patience and not everyone has the patience to want to learn in a structured way. Some people just want to experience it, but often it is too important to the organization to just let people experience it, there are few low risk things at my level (F11) [p.6].

Damaged organization climate.

[Failing] takes its toll in the community of the organization. If someone has created turmoil, everyone has become aware of it. It affects everybody, usually not in a positive way. Now we have to fix this. That can stop everybody in their tracks (F29) [p.4].

When people get punished for what is out of their control (often failure) they will become cynical within an organization. They become a victim and stop learning and contributing (M22) [p.4].

Some individuals are not comfortable in the kind of setting [where people are learning from their failures]. People who need things to be black and white, and measured as acceptable or unacceptable or good or bad find that too loose for their comfort. If they stay they adapt and see the value in it. One of our operating assumptions is that if you identify a problem, it is important that you bring the problem to the attention of others with a recommended solution. People who would rather blame and point out errors would not be comfortable here because it will get turned back to them-what do you think we ought to do. Some people are a lot better at blaming and diagnosis than they are at looking for possible solutions (M19) [p.5].

When people have been dismissed from the organization because of a failure, that sends a huge message out because we are like a family here. There is a lack of forgiveness. X was a great person, but she made a big failure, and now she has to leave here. That is a harsh message (F21) [p.3].

Loss of life.

When a firefighter makes a failure, it could be the last failure they make.

Firefighters wear a device that emits a sound so we can track them, a personal safety system. We had a warehouse fire that got very bad, very quickly. Two of the firefighters got lost in the warehouse and did not turn on their personal safety systems. They died as a result. In that case, a failure cost them their lives. We try to do a post mortem [learning discussion] when deaths occur. I believe that 80% of the fatalities in firefighting occur because a firefighter makes a failure. In many cases it is something they learned in training and know how to do (M28) [p.3].

No negative effects of learning from failure.

[I don't see any negative effects from learning from failures.] Not yet. But I have a feeling that one of my employees will be leaving. She will have to either change her behavior or leave. I don't think she is going to learn from her failures with the team. People leaving is not necessarily a bad thing, a startup [organization] isn't for everyone (F15) [p.3].

[I don't see any negative effects from learning from failures.] Not yet. We are at a place organizationally, where we could be tempted to build a fence. That is dangerous. We have to keep risking and growing (M08) [p.4].

Follow-up Interviews

*“It’s not what you don’t know that hurts you,
it’s what you know that just ain’t so” (Satchel Paige)*

Since critical reflection and perspective were early indication of two of the behaviors that leaders use to learn from failure, the researcher again contacted the subjects to conduct a follow-up interview. The purpose of the follow-up interview was three-fold: to examine if talking about failure and learning experiences had an affect on the subjects, to see if the subjects had any reactions to the interview, and to capture any additional insights the subjects had from a period of reflection and perspective after the initial interview. The researcher contacted all 43 subjects again via email, within sixty days of the first interview. Twenty-eight subjects or 65% of the subject population responded to the follow-up questions, which are listed on the Interview Guide (See Appendix A).

The subject’s reactions to the interview were positive. Twenty-five subjects reported that they found the interview enjoyable, interesting, thought-provoking or curiosity-arousing. Four other themes emerged most often in response to the ‘how did you react to the interview’ question. Those themes were responses about leadership, learning, the emotional nature of failure and the ying and yang quality of success and failure. The following quotes illustrate those themes. A learning reaction to the interview:

The conversation we had definitely got me to reflect more on leadership, and go over in my mind what my achievements and shortcomings have been in the recent

past. So it was a good nudge for me to do some more thinking about what it means to be a leader, and to assess how I think I'm doing at it (F09) [p.1].

rior to the interview, I spent lots of time reflecting on my past leadership failures, dilemmas, difficulties, etc. This was both uncomfortable and useful in that it caused me to recall tough times, but also enabled me to think about what I might have learned from those challenges and opportunities (M04) [p.1].

“I was “living” the recollection of my leadership evolution” (F29) [p.1].

Several had reactions that concerned their learning from failure. “I continued to ponder the situations I selected and what I had learned and continued to learn through this revisiting” (F17) [p.1].

“[P]articipating in your project provided a good opportunity for reflection and learning” (M04) [p.1].

“A sense of relief and understanding that always comes along with spending time assessing one's mistakes and learning from them” (M01) [p.1].

“The self analysis helped me see ways to alter my attitude and actions when I am in situations of conflict” (F31) [p.1].

“I spent several says wondering if I had missed any lessons and what would they be. I also thought about what lessons or values I had passed to my children” (F18) [p.1].

Even one subject, not fond of introspection, had a positive reaction to the interview.

I don't like to do introspection so I have learned to welcome opportunities that force me to do it. It was hard coming up with the examples of "failures" that I felt would be relevant to the research, but once I did that it was surprisingly easy

to describe what I had learned and what changes I had made in my work approach or life approach as a result. Immediately after the interview my reaction was that it was a very interesting experience that led me to think about myself a bit more deeply and differently, a valuable introspection (M34) [p1].

One female subject described the ying and yang reaction that the subject of failure and success evoked for her.

I found the interview challenging, compelling me to think about my experiences in ways that I don't often do. I struggled with the idea of failure and didn't really relate to it as a way of describing my less successful efforts. The interview also affirmed my belief in myself as a person who learns from experience - not just from mistakes. I think that I tend to see my work as an ongoing process, with ups and downs, and many opportunities to learn (F24) [p.1].

A few subjects remarked on the emotional reactions the interview had for them.

“It is hard to bring some memories back, especially when they stir your emotions” (M05) [p.1].

“[I] wondered if I talked too much and if I would be embarrassed by the transcript” (M16) [p.1].

It was humbling to think of the number of different stories I had to tell. During the interview: it felt like I was right back in the middle of my mistakes, and I found myself rehashing all the why's and why didn't I do this, etc., that I have many times. It was clear to me that I still was not over them, and it was very easy to remember the uneasy feelings and self-doubts I experienced at the time and after. [I] found that it was helpful to have someone to listen to me try to sort it

out. I don't think I had ever really gone over these mistakes in detail with anyone (F12) [p.1].

I need to keep reminding myself, in those darker moments, of the learning and improvement opportunities that I spoke about in the interview (F03) [p.1].

I initially thought I had little to offer in terms of insights. I guess by talking through it, I discovered I did have some things to share (M06) [p.1].

When asked to describe how the interview affected them, twenty four of the subjects, 56%, stated that the overall affect was positive. The four themes that emerged from the twenty-four responses were: emotional affects, affects to the self, leadership affects and reflection affects. The quotes following illustrate the affective theme of reflection. “[A]fter the interview I was more reflective about considering options and other ways I could have handled situations” (F15) [p.1]. “[The interview] gave me an opportunity to think aloud” (F11) [p.1].

Since the interview I have thought about my reaction to failures, my own and those of my subordinates and associates, and been more conscious of my reaction to them. I have always viewed mistakes or failures as learning opportunities but the interview slightly increased my conscious thinking about them in that way (M34) [p.1].

I was very reflective after the interview for a couple of hours. It was good for me to consider what I should be acting upon to improve my leadership ability (F13) [p.1].

[It] Helped [me] to tie up the ends on some matters (F40)[p.1].

I liked the fact that the interview stimulated my thinking both about my responses to my own experiences and about my responses to those who report to me and to those who are my peers. Being somewhat extroverted, I find that conversation will bring ideas to the surface that I am not necessarily aware of. Although the interview was relatively short, I have found myself thinking about it and the issues that it raised from time to time – particularly over the past several weeks when we were in the process of completing annual performance reviews (F24) [p.1].

It reminded me that the lessons of life/work sometimes come in ways we might not have selected. At times the process is difficult or involves us in ways we would rather not be involved, which can delay our learning. Having the time and assignment to consider these added to the reflection and the learning. This served as an important reminder to create times and processes for reflection and consideration (F17) [p.1].

The following quotes were on the theme of how the interview affected their leadership.

If anything, [the interview] got me thinking about the need for good sponsorship and peer management. If an idea is generally sound, there is no reason for it to fail other than due to the inability/oversight re these two areas of support (M39) [p.1].

I believe it caused me to realize that all leaders fail at times and that failure should not be looked at as a shortcoming, but rather an opportunity to learn and grow (M04) [p.1].

I learned a lot about my own emergence as a leader (F29) [p.1].

Other subjects had personal reactions to the interview: “It made me feel like I am getting wiser, which is a nice thing considering that I am certainly getting older (M06) [p.1].

Made me recall some things in my business life that I don’t like to dwell on. I freely admit that I made/make mistakes; just don’t like to focus on them.

Probably prefer to understand and move on. Not sure that is always what happens but seems like a perfectly acceptable rationalization (M20) [p.1].

Anytime you genuinely reflect on your past, there are issues around how you see your success. It is easier to judge yourself when you see success and harder to accept failure. Days after the interview, I was still thinking about the failures we had discussed and what I could have done differently. It has also led me to review my goals and try to define what success really means (M05) [p.1].

Made me ...less "black and white" in my thinking (F31) [p.1].

Finally, a female subject remarked on the emotional affect of the interview: “The interview affected me in that I realized how painful I still find incidents in which I do not perform well, and feel that I have let others down” (F12) [p.1].

Forty-nine percent of the study subjects or 21 leaders indicated that they had insights during the interview process. Five reported that no insights occurred to them. Of the 21 who did respond with insights, three themes of insight came out of the data: insights about leadership, learning or the self. The following quote illustrates the theme of leadership:

[I] realized that a revisit of decisions [I] made in the past [was] probably a benefit - especially to guide future decisions that need to be made. Recognized what things in the workplace environment are "drivers" (important) to me (i.e. the ability to make a difference in the workplace) - and what things are not (i.e. the size of my office) (F11) [p.1].

The majority of the insights the subjects had about themselves related to the self. There are lots of ways to make an error, but the two types I worry about the most in myself are: (1) failure to give adequate weight to disconfirming evidence in a decision (one kind of "group think), and (2) acting on first impulse, without all available information. In others, I see these errors, and a third: (3) expecting a different result by repeating an action, only with greater effort (M34) [p.1].

[The interview] reinforced my feeling that it's ok/good to take some risks – and even if you fail, you will benefit in some ways (M34) [p.1].

Again, I realize that I am my own worst critic. I am trying to let things be and appreciate myself for who I am (F31) [p.1].

I think that I have figured out some of the main lessons of how my behavior in difficult situations (avoidance, willingness/gratitude to accept what appears on the surface, etc.) and know myself better. I am more willing to take responsibility rather than hope for the best, and I have been successful in important situations by doing this. I give this advice to younger colleagues dealing with difficult situations (basically, this is what you get paid for, and it is okay to be assertive and to do the right thing) But, good gracious, I am getting old, and why did it take so long (F12) [p.1]??

As I think I mentioned, I had recently been reflecting on my relationship to failure (my need to avoid it if possible), so it was an opportunity to reinforce my intentions to risk more failure going forward – in order to strive for higher goals (M22) [p.1].

I realize that I like being at the limits of my knowledge, that it is exciting and challenging to me to put myself at the edge of my experience. I think that if I didn't see 'failure' as a learning experience, I could be seriously limited in my ability to be any kind of leader. It is the willingness to accept 'failure' that allows a person to accept risk. We probably discussed the fact that the culture's tolerance for failure is an important factor in stimulating entrepreneurship. In general, our culture has a generous tolerance for risk, although I firmly believe that that tolerance is affected by gender: i.e., women are held to a different standard than men are (M24) [p.1].

Accepting your past failures and how those failures led to success is important in understanding yourself (M05) [p.1].

I came to realize that my approach [to failure] mirrored and extended that of my parents. It was another reminder of the influence we have as parents on our children and by extension as bosses on our subordinates. That influence is sometimes invisible for years, but shapes the lives of others nonetheless (M34) [p.1].

The final insight shared had to do with learning.

As noted above, [the interview] helped me refocus on reflection as a critical learning tool. I have revisited some readings on reflection, tried to re-work my

schedule a bit and have added comments to a talk I give to nurses during their first year of practice on reflection, learning from experiences, how to move forward after mistakes, etc. It has also led me to consider some other readings on leadership, purpose, etc. as it moved me to consider the work that I as an individual was doing (and how much of it was conscious and planful and how much was I letting happen) (F17) [p.1].

I have thought about "learning from failure" and have noted how we don't recognize its importance in the workplace. The process improvement types who talk about celebrating failure as a learning step have the right idea but it is remarkable because it doesn't occur in real life. Or not in any of the work environments I have operated in not as a part of the culture. I have however thought about reframing my "failures" in terms of new learning experiences. Not all together successfully (M32) [p.1].

I am always taken aback by how much there is yet to learn about human behavior, development, capacity building and how every moment of our lives count toward the building of something or other....(pretty scientific thinking, eh?) (F29) [p.1].

Summary

"Often wrong, never in doubt." (Unknown)

This chapter reviewed the findings from the three research questions that framed this study on learning from failure. The behaviors most frequently indicated by leaders when learning from their own failures were reflection to gain understanding and

perspective, use of internal locus of control, demonstration of continual learning and use of failure as opportunity. Leaders interviewed indicated that they taught others to learn from their failures by acting with an internal locus of control, modeling appropriate behavior for others and institutionalizing learning processes in the organization. The primary positive effects of this type of learning were increased profit and productivity, enhanced communication and improved organizational climate. Negative effects cited were decreased productivity and profit, impaired communication, hindered organizational climate, loss of life and no negative effects.

The next and final chapter, Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations contains a summary of the ways in which these research findings could be helpful to organizational consulting practitioners, human resource professionals, trainers, adult educators, leadership developers and academics. It also contains suggestions for further areas of research and how this research might be expanded.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things which should be changed,
and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other” (Reinhold Niebuhr).*

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of the study and a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the findings. It concludes with recommendations for how this research might be used in several areas: additions to the fields of literature and research on this topic, recommendations for the application of this topic in leadership development, organizational consulting, employee training and adult learning.

Summary of the Study. This study explored how leaders and managers themselves learned from their own failures and how they influenced others in the organization to learn from failure. The final area of exploration was the organizational effects of learning from failure. Three primary questions framed the study:

- 1) How did leaders learn from their own failures?
- 2) How did leaders teach subordinates and peers within the organization to learn from their failures?
- 3) What was the impact on the organization from this type of learning?

The design of the research study was a descriptive qualitative analysis utilizing as the two data collection tools, the Success Case Method and semi-structured interviews. The researcher contacted business associates and colleagues across the United States that she was acquainted with, and asked them to nominate leaders whom they considered to be exemplary learners from failures as well as exemplary teachers of others on how to

learn from failure. (See Chapter III for the specific criteria.) Approximately seventy-five individuals were nominated and 43 were chosen because they met the study criterion and filled one of four categories:

- men working in not for profit or government organizations (12 were selected),
- women working in not for profit or government (11),
- men working in for profit organizations (10) and
- women working in for profit (10).

Twenty-one of the 43 subjects selected were female and 22 were male (See Appendix D.) Six of the female and four of the male subjects reside in the researcher's home state of New Mexico; the remainder are from other areas of the United States. None are from outside of the United States. The researcher interviewed five of the subjects in person, the other thirty-eight were interviewed by telephone. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. A total of eighty six (86) successful learning from failure vignettes were related by the nominated leaders. Content analysis was used to classify the success vignette data into three categories based on the guiding questions framing the study. The researcher then began a process of open coding of the data items in order to inductively place them into themes under each of the three research questions.

The behaviors most frequently indicated by leaders when learning from their own failures were: a) reflection to gain understanding and perspective, b) use of internal locus of control, c) demonstration of continual learning and, d) use of failure as opportunity. Leaders interviewed indicated that they taught others to learn from their failures by acting with an internal locus of control, modeling appropriate behavior for

others and institutionalizing learning processes in the organization. They reported that the primary positive effects of this type of learning were increased profit and productivity, enhanced communication and improved organizational climate. Negative effects of failures cited were decreased productivity and profit, impaired communication, hindered organizational climate, and loss of life.

Conclusions

I first conceived of this research idea in the late 1990's, when I was half way through with my graduate course work; I was hopeful that I would discover a new and mysteriously missing link as to how people in general and leaders in particular, learn from their failures. I remain grateful that no one reminded me of the many others before me, more gifted than I, who have examined this phenomenon of learning from failure and have said most everything there was to say about it. Until the day that brain imaging can tell us which neurons fire across which synapses at the exact moment of learning from failure, I don't believe new insights in this field will be discovered. What I hope I have done however, is to reconfirm what is already known about the importance of reflection and perspective when failure occurs. I have restated the role of a facilitative leader in encouraging learning when failure occurs and I have attempted to suggest how this learning positively links to organizational effects.

Leaders (and all of us for that matter) first have to understand and learn from our own failures before we can guide others who are seeking to learn from failure. Learning from our own failures and helping others to learn from theirs, requires a certain amount of road testing or life experience. The mean age of those nominated for the study was fifty. This higher age would suggest that learning from failure or experience requires us

to conduct long periods of trial and error learning during our own life as we consciously or unconsciously acquire the wisdom of experience.

The leadership behaviors that facilitate the ability to learn from failure include: reflection, internal locus of control, continual learning and use of failure as opportunity. These behaviors are not yet the typical behaviors historically associated with leadership or leadership development. According to Yukl, (1998), leadership studies conducted from the 1950's to the 1980's focused on a range of task and relationship oriented leadership behaviors. Effective leaders demonstrated a dual, yet competing concern for these demands in their daily leadership behaviors. But more current leadership research, focused on understanding the specific ways leaders influence and teach followers has emerged in the last twenty years. This more current research attempts to take very particular and focused leadership situations and variables, and understand the impact of leader behavior, as I have done with this study. Since this study on failure is only one variable, the common and uncommon situations and variables leaders face are a fertile ground for leadership researchers. Hopefully, more focused, future research will shed light on the more routine behaviors necessary for leader influence, particularly in learning situations.

The leader's role as teacher, guide, role model and facilitator of organizational learning is not emphasized often enough or explicitly enough in leadership development literature. Instead leaders are encouraged to be visionaries, decision makers, strategic thinkers, and deal makers. But are these daily tasks of a working leader? Or is the daily work of leaders the teaching, guiding, reflecting, modeling, and offering perspective that

occurs during meetings and conversations. I suggest that the latter is how the bulk of executive time is spent.

Given the speed and complexity of today's competitive environments, strategic leaders need to be 'ambidextrous'-that is, they need the capacity to simultaneously implement diverse courses of action: incremental and discontinuous innovation, exploration and exploitation, flexibility and control and feedback learning...Two characteristics of emotional leadership (Goleman, 1998)-self awareness and self regulation-would particularly help strategic leadership to assess their own ability to adapt their moods and behaviors to the needs of the situation. The ideal leader might recognize his or her own limitations and share the leadership of organizational learning with colleagues in the top management group (Vera & Crossan, p. 227).

This study's findings suggest that learning from failure is an important, but little recognized process not just for leaders, but for all of us. For leaders, using that process themselves and teaching the process to others is an important way to influence the cultures of their organizations and contribute positive effects. In 1998, Bass described the 'transformational leader' as one who motivates others to question assumptions, be inquisitive and take intelligent risks (Bass, 1998). The behaviors Bass describes are similar to those this study's subjects identified as helping them to teach others to learn from failure. Leaders who learn from failure and teach others to learn from failure:

...value effective communication as a means of fostering individual and group participation. They encourage individuals to break through learning boundaries and to share their learning experiences both within and across departments. By

being accessible, asking for input and serving as ‘fallibility models’ (Goleman et al., 2001) (leaders) create positive attributions toward the transfer of learning and by promoting and exhibiting these behaviors to the top management, they help these behaviors cascade to lower levels of management. (Leaders) who are available and who manage by walking around convey a clear message about the value of others’ opinions....These leaders create an environment for information sharing. And by admitting their shortcomings they foster a learning orientation that signals to other firm members that errors and concerns can be discussed openly (Goleman et al., 2001, Vera & Crossan, 2004).

Learning from failure may not be as charismatic and appealing as being a visionary or making the deal of the century, but the suggested positive effects that come from encouraging its use as a process are no less remarkable. For those of us who choose not to lead, learning from failure can help us to realize our potential as parents, partners and community members.

During the two years that I lived closely with this study, visiting with it daily, I spent time thinking about what this research meant for me and for the larger world. Those thoughts are woven into this last chapter. Like my subjects, I had reactions to the research process and the interview data in particular that I would like to share with the reader.

- It was an honor talking with the subjects. Asking people who didn’t know the researcher to talk about their biggest failures and what they learned, over a phone, was a leap of faith in itself. The subjects for the study were open and willing to share what were anxiety producing experiences for them. As each

interview ended and as each transcript was re-read, the researcher again experienced gratitude to these leaders for the gifts that they gave through their insights.

- Stories are powerful. In the circles of learning, story telling was a useful tool to convey a lesson. Experiencing the learning from failure stories told by the subjects was a more direct, powerful and meaningful way for the researcher herself to learn, compared with what would have resulted from a survey or a test instrument.
- Seven of the ten women subjects I interviewed who worked in for profit organizations seemed dissatisfied with corporate life. This sense of dissatisfaction was never stated outright, but conveyed through vocal tone, word choice and other non-verbal clues. The source of this dissatisfaction could be lack of promotional opportunity, the expectations about a woman's management style versus her maternal role or simply the unending stress of corporate work, but the sense I got is that corporate women are not satisfied.
- The subject's big picture sense of the organization. Every one of the eighty-six stories of failure was moving, in some way. I found myself going back to the same specific fifteen subjects for insights. The quality of the subject's interview was dependent upon their position in the organization, their past experience and their ability to see issues broadly. Executives with broader views of the organization and the industry were more insightful about failure and learning, both their own and others.

- No matter what their position in the organization, age and experience added an additional dimension and richness to their interview. The median age of the subjects was 50, perhaps because the researcher is acquainted with many professionals in their fifties. For some reason, young people were not nominated for the study. Time could be one of the necessary ingredients in the ability to understand what one has learned from failing.
- Subjects were most forthcoming about their own failures and what they learned, a bit less about what their employees and peers learned and even less about what effects this type of learning has on the organization.
- Although asked about their behavior, subjects responded with information about their personality traits. The researcher assumed that business people would speak about their behavior, using behavioral vocabulary, but this wasn't the case. Regardless of the questions asked in the interview, how they were phrased or rephrased, subjects responded with information about their personality traits, not strictly their behaviors. I think that people do not think in behavioral terms when they talk about themselves, but they do think in terms of attributes.
- Over half of the subjects were surprised that they were thought of and nominated by someone as a leader. This prompted me to wonder, what is a leader, anyway? Although answering this question is beyond the scope of this research, I wondered about leadership's exclusivity; who is and isn't a leader? Aren't we all leaders, in different ways? Doesn't leadership manifest itself in many different ways beyond those pronouncing in the spot light and flying on

the corporate jet? In my work, I have observed legions of what I would call the 'quiet leader.' This man or woman does their best, positively role models to others, has an internal locus of control, continually learns from everything, quietly inspires others and can't imagine why they might be called a leader.

- This study served to reemphasize and support the research on leadership and learning that has been conducted by others. What was unique about this study is the way it was designed and implemented. I found no other purely qualitative research designs on the topic of how leader learning from failure. I have built on the research work of Ellinger (1997), Bales (1993), Harback (2000), Edmunson (1996), Sitkin (1992), and Goleman, et al., (2001), McCall (1988). Much about learning from failure is already known, but helping people teach and learn this skill is one area needing further research, among others.

Since leaders are pivotal in shaping organizational culture, including learning cultures, these study findings can broaden leadership development curriculums from learning more transactional leader behaviors of control, standardization and efficiency to more transformational leadership behaviors, such as reflection, role modeling and influencing the values of employees. This broadening of how leaders' are developed can benefit the leader's themselves and their organizations.

Recommendations

The recommendations I propose for the practical use of this research are in six areas: a) ways that the study extends the current scholarly literature, b) gaps in leadership and learning research that it does not fill, c) ways this study can extend leadership

development, d) adult education, e) workplace training, and f) organizational consulting. I conclude the recommendations section with a brief note on my future plans for using this material.

Future Research

The purpose of scholarly research is to create new knowledge; support knowledge already created or extends the research work of another. As stated earlier, this study confirmed the work of several earlier learning and leadership scholars and worked with a relatively new research methodology. Table 5 summarizes where the current research lies within the existing literature for each behavioral theme found in answer to the first research question, how did leaders learn from failure?

Table 5:

Leader Behaviors When Learning From Failure

Findings	Supports	Extends	New
Reflected for understanding and perspective	Brookfield (1987) Marsick & Watkins (1991) Bales (1993) Harback (2000)	Tamuz (1987) McCall, et al., (1988) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Bennis & Goldsmith (1997) Yukl (1998) Gardner (1998) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.

Table 5 Continued

Findings	Supports	Extends	New
Internal locus of control	Argyris & Schon (1978,1996) Marsick & Watkins (1991) Conner (1995) Garvin (2002) Kouzes & Posner (2002)	Tamuz (1987) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Bennis & Goldsmith (1997) Gardner (1998) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.
Continual learning		Tamuz (1987) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Gardner (1998) Yukl (1998) Garvin (2000) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.
Failure as opportunity	Argyris (1991) Bennis & Goldsmith (1997) Kouzes & Posner (2002)	Tamuz (1987) McCall, et al., (1988) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Gardner (1998) Yukl (1998) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.

Table Format Adapted from Ellinger, 1997.

Table 6 summarizes where the current research lies within the existing literature for each behavioral theme found in answer to the second research question, how did leaders teach others in the organization to learn from failure?

Table 6:

Leader Behaviors When Teaching Others to Learn From Failure

Findings	Supports	Extends	New
Internal locus of control	Argyris & Schon (1978,1996) Kouzes & Posner (2002)	Tamuz (1987) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Ellinger (1997) Yukl (1998) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.
Modeled behavior	Brookfield (1987) Argryis (1991) Ellinger (1997) Preskill & Torres (1999) Kouzes & Posner (2002)	Tamuz (1987) McCall, et al., (1988) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Ellinger (1997) Yukl (1998) Garvin (2000) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.

Table 6 Continued

Findings	Supports	Extends	New
Institutionalized learning processes	Senge (1990) Schein (1992) Bales (1993) Watkins & Marsick (1993) Slater & Narvin (1994) Argyris & Schon (1996) Bennis (1997) Ellinger (1997) Preskill & Torres (1999)	Tamuz (1987) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Ellinger (1997) Garvin (2000) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.

Table Format Adapted from Ellinger, 1997.

Table 7 summarizes where the current research lies within the existing literature for the positive and negative effects found in answer to the last research question, what were the organizational effects of learning from failure?

Table 7:***Organizational Effects of Learning from Failure***

Findings	Supports	Extends	New
Positive	Preskill & Torres (1999) Garvin (2000)	Tamuz (1987) Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.
Negative	Argyris & Schon (1996)	Sitkin (1992) Edmunson (1996) Mulqueen (2005) The current study broadened and deepened the repertoire of leader learning behaviors.	Mulqueen (2005) The current study employed qualitative analysis to study leader learning behaviors.

Table Format Adapted from Ellinger, 1997.

New research and literature, especially with a practical focus, could be added to each of the leader behaviors listed in Tables 4, 5 and 6. Like this study, additional research to reinforce and extend the current knowledge of the field would help to solidify and strengthen leadership data.

Conducting this research raised many other questions for me about leadership and learning from failure which I hope to answer in years to come. A sampling of those questions are as follows:

- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same across different industries?
- How do leaders learn?

- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same across different cultures?
- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same across different genders?
- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same across different minorities?
- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same across different age categories?
- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same in on-line learning environments?
- Are learning from leader learning from failure behaviors the same in high risk organizations? Edmunson (1997) researched hospital setting failures in drug administration and patient care. Other high risk areas such as hazardous materials (nuclear, chemical, biohazards), surgical procedures, manned space flight, fire and police work are several that could benefit from understanding the role of failure in learning.
- What are the best ways to develop the skills of reflection, role modeling and locus of control in leaders?
- Should these same behaviors and skills be taught to all learners, not just leaders?

Powerful and insightful research can come out pairing leadership with any number of other topics, such as gender, power, cultural differences, follower behavior and loyalty. In leadership alone, there are an abundance of approaches, theories, levels of

analysis, however, most of it is inconclusive (Yukl, 1998), which still leaves a wide field for the researcher. A leader's role as teacher, mentor, facilitator and guide in the learning organization has been relatively unexplored. Organizational learning is a more recent field of study than leadership, and many of its processes and methods remain untested. Regarding further research benefiting the field of organizational behavior and learning, well-done studies linking organizational learning with organizational culture and leadership would provide insight into specifically what leaders do to help or hinder organizational learning.

Leadership Development

Assuming that leadership can be taught, how can this research be useful to the field of leadership development? Unfortunately, too often, leadership development sessions are a week long class, sometimes filled with valuable materials for leaders, which gets put aside when the leader returns to the daily unrelenting pace of the workplace. Development of leaders is best done through experience (McCall, et al, 1988) which means reflecting on success and failure incidents, behaviors, and feedback. Development of leaders is on-going and continual, not a one-shot affair, concluded in a week. As developers of leaders, we need to take the behaviors found in this study into account when designing curriculum for leadership development. How do we assess, design, develop, instruct and evaluate the skills necessary for accurate self reflection or role modeling? Can internal locus of control, emotional intelligence or resilience be taught? How do we evaluate it in others? How can we ensure transfer of these skills from the classroom to the workplace? Learning from failure is an untapped treasure in leadership development. We fail all the time. Successful people learn quickly from those

failures and get better because of the failure. Can we teach leaders that skill? I believe that these skills and the behaviors can be taught and have the potential for great untapped organizational benefit, financial and climatically.

But like other practitioners of leadership development, the practical considerations are of high interest to me. Who are the best people to teach this skill to leaders: other leaders, failures, successes, instructors and coaches? I think the best instructors for these skills are those who share the traits of internal locus of control, continual learning, critical reflection, accurate self-assessment, role modeling and positive perspective. The process of learning would be similar to psychotherapy- dialogue, assessment, feedback, writing, action, reflection, interpretation and more dialogue. Having some failure to speak of yourself would also be helpful, but more than that, would be the learning and self awareness that resulted from that failure. The instructor would need the ability to talk about their experiences and their learning with candor and a sense of humor.

Leadership development curriculum should contain both a hands on, experiential component where leaders learn how these behaviors are done and then have an opportunity to try them, followed by a practical component where they take the skills to the workplace, use them in real life situations and then de-brief with a coach or another leader. On the job transfer could be evaluated by the learner, the coach and a trusted additional person.

Development of the reflective arts, locus of control, and role modeling should happen at least once every five years for an experienced leader and once every two years for a leader in development. This work should take place as close to a real world work

setting as possible, if not the actual real world work setting, perhaps a project designed with setbacks, coaching and reflection in mind.

Leadership curriculum's teaching skills of learning from failure would benefit both individuals and organizations by possibly reducing the high costs associated with top level turn over, corporate wide failures and demoralized employees. Learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of shame and fear. In order to be successful in the economy of the 21st century, knowledge creation and organizational learning may be the only source of sustainable competitive advantage in the future (Day, 1994; deGeus, 2002; Garvin, 2000; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Senge, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1995). However, all too often in organizations, failures can cost a career, a promotion, reputation or a livelihood. Because organizations hide financial failures, the only information attended to corporate-wide is information from successful activities. Unfortunately, humans don't learn as much from success as they do from failure, although the increasing use of Appreciative Inquiry as a learning process may be changing that. This skewing of information contributes to a variety of false beliefs about what comprises effective management behavior (Denrell, 2003). How can we use information from failure experiences to learn when organizations only publicize their success and cover up their failure? Just imagine the time when learning from failed attempts would receive as much attention and publicity as success.

Employee Training

I believe that every one of us is a leader or has leadership potential within. Each of us certainly has experienced failure in our attempts to succeed. But not many of us

know how to harness what we learn from failure in order to succeed more quickly on the next attempt. Everyone could benefit from learning how to learn from failure.

In the workplace, where our processes, policies, and even interactions with customers start with trial and error, or pilot programs, we need to help employees quickly learn from failures so that they will try again until they succeed. This is especially true in any organization that has more than one employee. When there is more than one employee and you fail, someone else will know about it and will probably tell someone else.

The practicalities of teaching a 'soft skill' like reflection or role modeling surface again as they did in the recommendations made about how this research could be useful in leadership development. In employee training, where corporate resources are spent on developing the workforce, skills that produce a return on investment are more likely to be funded and promoted throughout the organization. For soft skills that may be difficult to quantify, like reflection or role modeling, we practitioners of adult learning need to make a case for the long-term return on investment these skills bring. Practitioners of adult workplace learning need to ask:

- How can we assess, design, develop, instruct and evaluate curriculum that teaches the skills of learning from failure?
- Does every worker need to learn the skills?
- Can internal locus of control, emotional intelligence or resilience be taught to average individuals?
- How do we evaluate internal locus of control, emotional intelligence or resilience in others?

- How can we ensure transfer of these skills from the classroom to the workplace?
- What benefits do after action reviews (post mortems) provide for leaders? For followers?
- Is qualitative research the best method to study this topic or the topic of leadership in general?

Finally, instructional developers and instructors would provide a benefit to learners by adding learning from failure components to every course that they write or teach. Adding this feature would enable learners to enhance and accelerate failure learning through reflection, perspective, internal locus of control, and learning frameworks (framing failure as experiments towards a successful outcome.)

Organizational Consulting

Organization consultants can use this research to assist their client organizations to learn from failure in several ways. The first of these ways is for consultants to help their client organizations quantify what their current attitudes towards failure are costing the organization. What are their lost opportunity costs when ideas are never surfaced because ‘the last time we tried that, it didn’t work?’ Consultants can then help prepare organizations to begin learning from failure. This change may require shifting the existing culture of the organization, especially if that culture defines failure as a damning event. Working with the organization’s staff, the consultant can assist in developing learning from failure components for each employee learning intervention. Consultants who coach employees, mentors and leaders can teach critical reflection and emphasize its use to accelerate learning.

When entering a dysfunctional organization, a consultant could add an understanding of the way the organization deals with failure to his or her diagnostic and assessment tools. Understanding how a culture used failure as an organizational artifact would be very revealing about the less obvious dimensions of the culture. If the consultant was able to guide the organization in using failure to learn quickly, the organization may realize some of the positive effects that other organizations experienced. The data from this study suggested that the positive organizational effects of such learning were improved communication and organizational climate.

Organizational consultants can assist organizations in institutionalizing learning from failure practices into organizational routines, which was a behavioral finding from this study. Using the processes of performance cycles, after action reviews, space and tolerance to fail with periods of analysis and reflection, consultants could significantly alter the pace and productivity of organizational learning. In organizations with large research and development needs, consultants can assist in institutionalizing a variety of learning from failure processes. Since learning will be a key ingredient for future differentiation between competing organizations, consultants can play a catalytic role in teaching organizations that must transform their paradigm of innovation to compete. (Day, 1994; deGeus, 2002; Garvin, 2000; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Senge, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1995).

Another area of inquiry for consultants is how the finding from this study could be used in government and not for profit organizational cultures. These cultures tend to be more bureaucratic and less innovative; could learning from failure be an effective process for these organizations? Learning from failure within an organizational

framework requires openness, agility and rapid feedback mechanisms. Government and non profit institutions are not known to excel in those organizational characteristics.

Child and Adult Education

Since an integral part of learning is trial and error, how can formal education develop the capacity in learners to synthesize failure experiences and learn quickly from them? This kind of learning is not emphasized enough throughout formal education. Some children would benefit enormously from a caring teacher or adult who demonstrated the multiple ways to perceive a failed attempt, each building towards eventual success. On the other end of formal education, where is learning from failure in medical and professional schools, where only the top students unaccustomed to failure even gain entry? How might they benefit from framing failure differently, understanding its place in learning or perceiving its significance to successful outcomes?

Recent brain research conducted at the National Institutes of Health showed that adults can, by intensive learning experiences, alter and enlarge various regions of their brains (Shreeve, 2005). The research told of blind adults, who after learning to read Braille, experienced an enlargement of their touch sensitive brain areas. This prompts the question, can all types of learning, including learning from and about failures, help us to grow parts of our adult brains?

Summary

When I began my doctoral studies, my first objective was to learn and complete my degree. Mission accomplished; but something else happened that I didn't bargain for. I have been transformed by this experience. I am a different woman than the one who began her course work eight years ago. To detail those differences would mean another

two hundred pages, so I will spare the reader. Knowing what I do today, I would conduct some parts of the research differently if I could. I answered my research questions to my satisfaction, but I still don't totally understand how or why learning from failure occurs.

I wondered out loud to my advisor if all the energy put into this task really makes the world a better place; disserting often seems similar to counting angels on the head of a pin. She reminded me that the world will be different because I'm different as a result of this work. And she is right; the research and the writing was a transformational experience for me. My worldview and my thinking will never be the same again, having changed for the better. That is what learning and leadership are about.

APPENDIXES

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Learning Through Failure
Data Collection Procedures
Interview Guide and Questions

Prior to Interview:

1. Contact nominators by letter or email to inform them of the purpose and protocol of the research. Next contact will be made by telephone or email to secure nominations.
2. Contact nominators by telephone to solicit at least three nominees who are considered leaders skilled at learning from their failures.
3. Read definition below of leadership and failure, if requested.
4. Ask nominators to provide name, address, fax, email and phone for those they nominate.
5. Contact each subject nominated and ask for their voluntary participation in the study. If they are willing to participate, a formal letter will be faxed, mailed or emailed which describes the study purpose, procedures and what is required of them by participating. A personal interview time will then be scheduled and confirmed in writing. Each subject will be assigned a code number. Their name or their organization's name will not be used anywhere in the study.
6. An informational packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will contain a study description, a consent form, an overview of the success case method, interview guidelines and a copy of the background demographic questions and the interview questions. The subjects will also receive a self-addressed, stamped envelope to mail back the consent forms.

Subjects must meet the following criteria: 1) They must be seen as a leader by others (A leader is defined as a member of a group or organization who influences the events, strategies, activities, motivations, skills, confidence, resources and relationships inside and outside of the group in order to accomplish goals), 2) They must be someone who learns from their own failure and, 3) someone who helps or influences others to learn from failure.

Failure can be defined as triggers, surprises, errors and unmet expectations, missteps, faulty or lapsed judgment, decisions made on faulty or missing information.

Material needed for each interview:

File of correspondence with each subject, copies of all contact, information and emails.
 Code number for each subject
 Interview protocol for researcher
 Copies of consent form
 Copy of demographic questionnaire
 Copy of interview questions
 Tape recorder/extra batteries, extension cord, microphone, and cassette tapes
 Note pad and pen

Interview Procedures:

1. Introduce self, thank subject for participation and briefly explain purpose of research.
2. Explain interview process.
3. Ask if they received consent form, research protocol, demographic and interview questions by mail, email or fax.
4. Explain use of tape recorder, confidentiality and code use.
5. Get signature on consent form or affirm you have received the consent form.
6. Complete demographic form with assigned subject code.
7. Get verbal permission to tape record and take notes.
8. Confirm researcher's commitment to confidentiality of information and written records.
9. Ask where they would like follow-up information (transcripts and research study) mailed or emailed.
10. Ask subject if they have any questions on research protocol.
11. Review how they were nominated.
12. Begin interview.

Demographic Information

Name	CODE:
Contact information Address	
Phone	
Fax	
Email	
Age	
Gender	

Marital Status

Approximately, how many people report to you, both directly and indirectly?

Is your organization considered for profit, or not for profit?

What is your occupation?

Who do you consider yourself reporting to (please use their title only)?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I will be tape recording this interview, so that I can accurately transcribe the interview for later analysis. In my introductory correspondence with you, I asked you to think about three incidents when you failed and were successful in learning from that failure. Starting with the first incident, please tell me the story of that incident in detail.

What happened?

Why did you characterize this situation as a failure or a mistake? How did you know you had failed?

- **What did you learn from the failure?**
- **What specific knowledge, skills and abilities helped you learn from your failure? (What is it about you that helped you to learn from the experience?)**
- **How did failing make you feel?**
- **What are your beliefs and attitudes about failure?**
- **What are your beliefs and attitudes about learning?**
- **How did you know that you were successful from your failure?**

Second incident?

- **What are your beliefs and attitudes about failure?**
- **What are your beliefs and attitudes about learning?**

- In both of the incidents that you just told me about, did you use one or more of these behaviors? Yes or no
 - A) Publicly admitted a failure
 - B) Apologized publicly for a failure
 - C) Appraised your own behavior extensively
 - D) Talked about your behavior with another person
 - E) Became aware of yourself as a result of a failure
 - F) Changed as a result of learning from a failure
 - G) Turned a failure into an opportunity.
- How do you show others that it is acceptable to fail and learn from those failures? Specifically, what knowledge, skill and abilities do you use?
- How do you know that they learned?
- What are the positive effects to your organization of learning from failure?
- What are the negative effects to your organization of learning from failure?
- How do you know your organization has learned from its failures? What evidence do you have that learning has taken place?
- What is the difference between people who learn from failure and those that do not?
- What is the difference between organizations that learn from failure and those that do not?
- Can you tell me about a time when you did not learn from a failure?
(Specifically, what did you do or fail to do that contributed to your inability to learn?)

- We are coming to the close of our interview. Before we end, is there anything I did not ask you about the learning from failure experience? Is there anything that comes into your mind that you think is important about failure, learning, leaders, etc?

Would you like a copy of your interview transcript emailed to you?

Would you like a copy of my dissertation emailed to you?

Would you like to use the free hour of leadership coaching I offer as a token of appreciation for this interview?

During your responses to the interview questions, the researcher may ask for additional information through questions such as:

- Please tell me more about....
- What do you mean by this?
- Can you please explain this?
- What happened when this occurred?
- What did you learn?
- How do you know you learned?
- Why is that?

After the data have been collected, the researcher will again contact you within sixty days of your interview. The purpose of this contact is to ask you follow-up questions concerning your reaction to the interview. Those follow-up questions are:

- What were your reactions to the interview, before, during or after?
- How did the interview affect you?

Please tell me about any insights or learning that occurred to you, during or after the interview.

APPENDIX B
NOMINATION CORRESPONDENCE

Dear

I hope you are doing well. I am terrific and knee-deep in my dissertation research. I am studying 1) how successful leaders use failures to be more effective, 2) how leaders help others be more effective from their failures and, 3) the organizational effects of such activities.

When I thought about a person who is familiar with successful leaders, you came to mind. Can you please nominate several successful leaders for my dissertation research?

Here is the criterion for the leaders I hope you can nominate. These leaders can be from for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. The leaders you nominate need to meet all three of the following criteria:

1) They must be seen as a leader by others (A leader is defined as a member of a group or organization who influences the events, strategies, activities, motivations, skills, confidence, resources and relationships inside and outside of the group in order to accomplish goals), 2) They must be someone who learns from their own failure and, 3) someone who helps or influences others to learn from failure.

Please nominate as many men and women as you can, from anywhere in the US. I need their names, contact info, email address. I will be asking them to volunteer as a participant in this research. They will have to sign consent forms and will be interviewed and tape recorded by me over the telephone twice for a total time of approximately one-two hours. In return, I will provide them with a copy of their interview transcript, a copy of the research study when it is completed and also give them one free hour of leadership coaching via phone or email, if they wish. They will be given codes for the study and will remain anonymous throughout the process, as will their organizations. This research has been approved by the University of New Mexico's Internal Review Board for Research. To find out more about me, please refer to my website: www.consulting4hr.com. Could I please have your nominations as soon as possible?

As always, thanks so much for your help and support on my dissertation efforts.

Kate Mulqueen
505-792-8408
kate@nm.net
www.consulting4hr.com

August, 2004

Dear:

I would like to introduce myself. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico, conducting research on how effective leaders use failure to learn. I asked my business contacts to nominate successful leaders who learned from their failures and you were nominated by .

Specifically, I am studying 1) the behaviors that successful leaders use to learn from failure, 2) the behaviors successful leaders use to help others to learn from failure and, 3) the effects these behaviors have on organizations. I asked the nominators to name people who are seen as a successful leader by others. A leader is defined as a member of a group or organization who influences the events, strategies, activities, motivations, skills, confidence, resources and relationships inside and outside of the group in order to accomplish goals. Congratulations on being nominated!

Can you please assist me by volunteering to participate in my research? In order to volunteer, I will be asking you to sign a University of New Mexico consent form and agree to be interviewed and tape recorded by me. I will conduct two interviews with you either in person or over the telephone: one longer interview and then a follow-up interview 60 days later. The total time for both interviews should be no longer than two hours and will be scheduled at your home or office, by your convenience. This research has been approved by the UNM's Internal Research Review Board.

In return for your interview, I will provide you with a copy of your interview transcript, a copy of the research study when it is completed and also one free hour of leadership coaching via phone or email, if you wish to take advantage of it. You and your organization will be given a code for the study and your names will not be used anywhere in the research.

To find out more about my background, education and experience please refer to my website: www.consulting4hr.com.

If you are willing to participate in this important leadership research, please respond to this email and I will mail or email you a copy of the interview questions and two consent forms. Please read and sign both consent forms and mail or fax one back to me, keeping the other for your files. I will be contacting you by telephone or email to schedule an interview time at you convenience, if you participate. I hope you will agree to be interviewed and increase the understanding of what it takes lead others and learn from mistakes.

Sincerely,
Kate Mulqueen
505-792-8408 (v)
505-792-8411(f)
kate@nm.net
www.consulting4hr.com

Dear Ron :

First of all, thanks for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research. You were nominated as a successful leader who learns themselves and teaches others through failure. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico, conducting research on leadership and learning from failure. I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedule to help me.

I am studying the behaviors leaders use to learn from their own failure and the behaviors they use to help others to learn from failure and the effects these behaviors have on organizations.

In order to participate in this research you will need to take seven steps:

- Read and sign two copies of a University of New Mexico research consent form. (The form is attached to this email.)
- Fax one copy of the consent form back to me (505-792-8411) and keep the other one for your files.
- Read over the attached copy of the interview questions. When we agree on an interview time, either in person or on the phone, I will be asking you to respond to these questions. **Specifically, I will be asking you to tell me about two incidents when you failed and were successful in learning from that failure. I will need you to tell me about the incidents in detail. Please see the interview guide for the specific questions I will be asking.**
- Once I have received your consent form, I will contact you to schedule a one to two hour time when I can interview you either in person or over the phone. We can do this scheduling via email or phone. I can interview you at home or work, at your convenience, day or evening.
- When we have finished our first interview, I will ask you to schedule a shorter follow-up interview with me for 60 days from our first interview. The total time for both interviews should be no longer than two hours.
- Please decide if you would like a copy of your interview transcript mailed to you, a copy of my research study and/or a free hour of leadership coaching. I will ask you at the end of our interview if you would like to take advantage of these "thank you" gifts for agreeing to talk with me.

You and your organization will be given a code for the interview and the study. Your name and your organization's name will not be used anywhere in the research. To find out more about my background, education and experience, please refer to my website: www.consulting4hr.com.

Please respond to this email and fax me a signed copy of your consent form. I will then call or email you to set up an interview time. If you wish, I can mail you a hard copy of the interview questions; the two consent forms and a self-addressed stamped envelope, which you can read, sign and return to me. Thanks again for helping to increase the understanding of what it takes lead others and learn from mistakes. I look forward to talking with you.

Yours truly,
 Kate Mulqueen
 505-792-8408 (v)
 505-792-8411(f)
kate@nm.net
www.consulting4hr.com

APPENDIX C

FAILURE INCIDENT TYPE TABLE BY KEY LEARNINGS

	Key Learnings	Subsequent Success
1.Failure to manage boss 1 2.Communication 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disagreements must be settled, not ignored. Power triumphs over right Listening is more important than speaking 	Now manage boss and self more effectively. I evaluate the time I spend listening vs talking
3. Failure to gain admission to med school 2 4.Business failure 2 5.Relationship with peer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perseverance Take the time needed to prepare and try again Realistic about my physical limits Get the help you need sooner Think strategically Life is too short to put up with assholes-I should have got out sooner. You can't trust everyone all the time. 	Lower anxiety I stay with something and see it through We changed the face of business I was given other bigger opportunities
6.Project delay 3 7.Project lacked support, couldn't read corporate winds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It takes courage to put issues on the table and admit errors. The power of language-change the language, change the attitude Learning the political landscape takes time. 	As soon as we dealt with the issue it was over with and on to the next problem.
8. Failure to coach subordinate 4 9. Failed change initiative, didn't get support 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing theory and using it are very different You can confront issues without stomping on people How much self reflection is necessary when you don't succeed The power of tenure Be more in touch with my own feelings Involve people in decisions that affect them 	Better at managing people and confronting senior faculty Damage done by a mistake can be short term if you work on repairing the damage.
10. Project performance 5 11. Downsized department 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I needed to learn more about working with others Team perform better than individuals Leadership does not have all the answers. Stay flexible 	More effective delegation More strategic and big picture in my thinking Received promotions More responsive to customers

<p>12. Failure of imagination and knowledge. Didn't see something coming 6</p> <p>13. Failure to manage and coach subordinate 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think outside what you know • Stay open to ideas, opinions and trends • Situational leadership. <p>People who are new to an area need help</p>	<p>Became an expert in the field and help others</p> <p>Pay more attention when someone is transitioning into role</p> <p>Asking more questions</p>
<p>14. Change initiative 7</p> <p>15. Failure to communicate concern and influence others 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational culture is difficult to change • That I need to be the boss, have as much leverage as possible to change things 	<p>Able now to rally people around a common cause.</p> <p>This organization's metrics are successful.</p>
<p>16. Change initiative 8</p> <p>17. Legal, financial and management concerns 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not omnipotent. Growth and progress take time • The importance of a shared vision • Power and importance of persistence • Trusting God and the universe 	<p>I am more focused and aware of my limitations. Increased awareness about what I cannot change.</p>
<p>18. Communication-losing temper at meeting 9</p> <p>19. Change initiative 9</p> <p>20. Managing self 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the high road, don't lose control of your emotions. • Importance of compromise • Importance of how you frame a situations 	<p>Not repeated behavior</p> <p>Too early to say, but many minds are better than one, but process is frustrating.</p>
<p>21. Team did not meet objectives 10</p> <p>22. Did not meet objectives on project 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly understanding role expectations • Importance of accurate feedback • Assessing my own readiness for growth • Asking for help • Honest self assessment 	<p>Received more opportunities</p> <p>Good feedback</p> <p>I feel I am learning</p>
<p>23. Public correction 11</p> <p>24. Gender Dynamic 11</p> <p>25. Passed over for promotion 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of planning • Importance of communication • Becoming an expert at your deficiency • Becoming an equal business partner at the table • Understanding criterion for selection • Understanding selection process • Ability to learn different behavior styles • Organization must accept me as I am 	<p>Reduce personal anxiety</p> <p>Meaningful experience</p> <p>Financial reward</p>

<p>26. Relationship with peer 12 27. Failure to handle conflict in timely manner 12 28. Failure to understand expectations of new role 12 29. Relationship with subordinates 12 30. Inability to meet other's expectations 12 31. Failure to handle conflict in timely manner 12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming an equal business partner at the table • Stand up for myself • I overlook problems in those I respect • People issues are difficult. You never get them completely right. • Leaders need to care more about the outcome than continually appeasing people along the way. • Leaders cannot always collaborate, often they must make tough unpopular decisions. 	<p>Now equal business partner is second nature Improving a unit is often painful</p>
<p>32. Passed over for promotion 13 33. Failed to adapt management style to org culture 13 34. Painful divorce 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance focus of efforts on people and performance • The people you love come first 	<p>Attended to personal management skills Focus on the people I love everyday</p>
<p>35. Poor hiring choice 14 36. Interpersonal situation with boss 14 37. Managing self 14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to what your gut is telling you • Speak from my heart about my concerns, don't try to control everything. Be ok able not being able to control the outcome. 	<p>Using a coach has helped me pay more attention to my intuition and value it. I told my boss I wanted him to be successful and how could I help with that? It worked!</p>
<p>38. Missed opportunity with Board of Directors 15 39. Building a cohesive team 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of preparation for myself and listeners • Balance focus of efforts on people and performance 	<p>I don't assume the audience knows what I do about the subject. I summarize the history of the issue. For this organization to succeed the employees need to succeed.</p>
<p>40. Failed a certifying examination 16 41. Communicating with a patient 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None of us is perfect. Failing one thing does not make the person a failure • We needed to change our process and our thinking around how we communicate with patients 	<p>I can be an example to my students and be more empathetic. We have re-structured our communication process.</p>
<p>42. Unsuccessful coaching with subordinate 17 43. Change initiative 17 44. Managing self 17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding people's frame of reference is essential. • Staff holds professionals to different standards than they want to be held to themselves 	<p>I have become more direct and clear with people as well as myself. Still trying to learn and use incident to be successful.</p>
<p>45. Change initiative 18 46. Failure to deliver expected results on project 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need to see what is in it for them to change. • When the vision changes, overcommunicate it. 	<p>If I can't see how I can get the "what's in it for me" answered, I won't get involved. Ask more questions and be more communicative with group.</p>

<p>47. Failed a qualifying examination 19 48. Poor hiring and staffing decisions 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To trust myself • Situations matter more to me than to anyone else, my own self-esteem rather than how anyone sees me. • Understanding what part I play in the situation 	<p>Made me a better coach for others. Helped me look at our process of selection and change it. The quality of hires and my satisfaction with their performance has improved.</p>
<p>49. Career decision that lead to lay off 20 50. Hiring and managing subordinate 20 51. Failure to take advice 20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get close to the customer and know as much about the core business as you can. • Don't follow just heart or head but a balance. • Listen to advisors 	<p>Have used this in most of my project engagements Will not repeat that mistake.</p>
<p>52. Acted dishonestly 21 53. Relationship with subordinates 21 54. Managing self 21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check with your gut and heart when something doesn't feel right. • Listen to yourself • Difficulty switching from male to female management styles 	<p>I check in more now with myself and others when sometime seems funny. Now it is a priority to develop relationships and trust with my team.</p>
<p>55. Relationship with peers and manager 22 56. Communication 22 57. Change initiative 22 58. Managing self 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion does not work when you are trying to influence people. • Treat others with respect, really listen to their perspective • The big movers in the world not only learn from their failures, but also have more failures to learn from, they learn more and learn faster. 	<p>Developed a respectful consulting model. Still waiting to see success.</p>
<p>59. Mediocre performance 23 60. Communication-too little vision and direction setting 23 61. Communication-too much logic, too little emotion 23 62. Lack of high level strategic thinking 23 63. Managing self 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In leader's job is to think long-term and big picture. • I am my own worst critic. • Stay out of details and not get consumed by the urgent. • Surround yourself with good people. • I'm doing the best that I can. • Prepare for the emotional reaction as well as the logical reaction. 	<p>I ask should I be dealing with this. I now understand that the skills that got me to this level will not suffice for the next level. Never repeated that mistake I invite people to challenge me, I am always willing to listen.</p>
<p>64. Mediocre performance on project FNFPU24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust requires consistent contact over time • Hire a person responsible for the whole project 	<p>I tried the project a second time and it worked</p>
<p>65. Change initiative 25 66. Need to broaden my approach to my discipline, could have done it sooner. 25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is a process for me, learning, stepping back, reflecting, and moving forward. • Cultural context is most complex and important, so attend to it. • Participation of the stakeholders is critical. 	<p>I am never 100% confident I have it right, no matter how hard I try. I can read cultural context better and faster.</p>

<p>67.Relationship with boss 26 68.Relationship with subordinates (feels she let them down) 26 69.Naïve world view and assumptions 26 70.Failure to develop self-sustaining endeavors. 26 71.Managing self 26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading by charisma and my personality isn't sustaining. • Importance of developing others • Clarify my expectations • I cannot personally overcome everything just by hard work. 	<p>More backbone about expectations I self disclose and invite the other to do so. Always had to work harder and smarter, do more and be more to prove myself as a non-technical female in a technical male environment. More confident in my skills and abilities. Trust my instincts. Take responsibility if I'm wrong. Question myself less.</p>
<p>72.Business failed 27 73.Interpersonal relationship with peer 27 74.Business failed 27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful in judging people prior to involvement • Be careful when working with family members 	<p>Had two similar experiences where I was able to change</p>
<p>75.Relationship with subordinate28 76.Relationship with subordinates 28 77.Failure to enforce policy 28 78.Managing self 28</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are the boss, be the boss. Being boss is not a popularity contest, you have to make unfair and unpopular decisions • As leader, you set the example. • As a leader you must ensure the rules are enforced or change them 	<p>I was able to get people on board with my vision regardless of what happened. I didn't make the same mistake again.</p>
<p>79.Relationship with subordinate and peer 29 80.Communication 29 81.Team building 29 82.Relationship with boss 29 83.Lack of forward vision 29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of assumptions you hold • Over communicate • Stay engaged in the process • Better planning and preparation • When I couldn't change the situation, I made myself bigger by getting educated and connected. • Defend myself and my ideas • More willing to listen • Be available to my staff 	<p>I became an expert in my weak area. When I decide I will prevail, I will prevail That boss taught me about the kind of leader I don't ever want to become</p>
<p>84.Change initiative 30 85.Coalition building 30 86.Gender issues 30 87.Relationship with boss 30 88.Managing self 30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of building and maintaining relationships in order to accomplish goals • Keep my emotions under check • Pick your battles • It takes a very long time to repair a damaged reputation 	<p>I am still learning, everything is political. I have received my promotions on time, so I must be on the right path</p>

<p>89.Relationship with subordinate 31 90.Managing self 31 91.Communication 31 92.Inability to deal with conflict 31 93.Relationship with subordinate 31</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not shoot from the hip • If you are asked a question you are unprepared for, throw it back to the questioner. What are their ideas? • It is easier for me to give bad news to men, they don't take it personally. 	<p>I apologized for what I said. When I don't lose sleep over an incident, I'm satisfied with the way I handled it. I have learned to be more factual in how I handle employees. Be less emotional about feedback.</p>
<p>94.Relationship with peers 32 95.Managing self 32 96.Relationship with boss32 97.Managing self 32</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of advance planning • Importance of delegation and engaging other people • How mean I can be-it is painful • The importance of a chain of command • Letting people do their own roles and responsibilities, stay focused on my own 	<p>Did not repeat mistake Used what I learned with current boss, adjust my style to other's style.</p>
<p>98.Business failure 33 99.Project failure 33</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing and leverage needed to start a business • Should have used other people's money • People learn more from their failures than they do from their successes. 	<p>Continue to ask for feedback. Detach from the negative emotionally, look at what is there and take it to heart.</p>
<p>100.Felt ineffective in job 34 101.Felt ineffective in job 34 102.Unable to deal with conflict 34</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to the cultural contingencies operating in the organization • Pick your battles • You cannot change the culture, but you can change yourself • Difficulties caused by theory is use vs. espoused theory 	<p>Understanding the cultural contingencies, makes work less frustrating I have used what I learned in personal and professional relationships Sometimes the best action is to push back and call someone on their actions</p>
<p>103.Product failure 35 104.Relationship with subordinates 35 105.Dealing with conflict-communication 35 106.Quality of hires 35</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in contact with your customers • Establish feedback sources • Get good people to work with you, people smarter than you 	<p>Seem to repeat mistakes less often Always make sure we are talking to the customer</p>
<p>107.Relationship with peer 36 108.Politics 36 109.Relationship with boss 36</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick your battles • Get a support base for your ideas • Use an influence approach, rather than driving your ideas • You can't do things you don't believe in • Leaders can't know everything, they have to listen to and rely on their employees 	<p>I gather information from multiple sources before deciding. I will fight for the customer, service delivery or the morale of the workforce.</p>

<p>110. Failed business deal 37 111. Missed market opportunity 37</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I presumed we learned since we talked about what happened. • Flexibility in looking at opportunities • My worldview could be broader. • It doesn't matter if I don't like something, if the market is asking for it, we need to do it 	<p>I will know we have been successful when we get another opportunity My best defense against criticism is to criticize myself first.</p>
<p>112. Manage self 38 113. Organizational fit 38 114. Relationships with subordinates 38 115. Having to fire an employee 38</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To change my work style and perspective on the business • To move from an entrepreneurial mental model to a growth/nurturance model • You can have a good employee go bad without condemning yourself as a bad boss • Be clear about what you expect and what you will not tolerate • Do not form personal relationships with subordinates 	<p>I have not repeated these mistakes. I am more wary of being clear on my boundaries with employees. I have a more satisfying personal life.</p>
<p>116. Failed to attain promotion 39 117. Failed job assignment 39 118. Managing self 39</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything you do counts so be mindful of your behavior • Be clear about who you are as a person • If you want to be successful, think of yourself as successful • Focus on the future • In any initiative, stakeholder and sponsorship support are critical. • I should have let some people go. 	<p>Both incidents moved me to launch my own business, which has been very successful. It is important to focus on the future.</p>
<p>119. Political 40 120. Manage self 40 121. Relationship with boss 40 122. Relationship with subordinate 40 123. Managing self 40</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to read the political landscape and how to keep yourself safe. • How intense it is to be a woman of integrity • Get yourself strong allies • Nobility and self-righteousness is great, but it is own better kept to yourself • Do not reveal all you know • Know and maintain your boundaries 	<p>I went to Nepal and climbed Annapurna. I want to help other women in leadership positions. Not to take them out when they oppose me, there can be more than one leader</p>

<p>124.Relationship with subordinate 41 125.Relationship with boss 41 126.Relationship with peers 41</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more accepting of people at whatever their level • Be more available to help people learn • There is often a better way to manage • If there is conflict, reach out to work with those you are in conflict with 	<p>I work on my management style all the time Listening has increased Reaching out to others and asking questions has become part of management behavior Still learning</p>
<p>127.Organizational fit 42 128.Relationship with subordinates 42 129.Communication /expectations 42 130.Consequences of a decision 42</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all organizations have a value set I can believe in. • Every company is like a different country, can we respect each culture? • When I make a decision that turns out bad, it requires a lot of reflection on my part 	<p>I'm always learning and will continue to learn about events. It is always an education. In coaching people, I have a broader and more hopeful view of development. Skills are like tools, we can learn to use them.</p>
<p>131.Academic failure 43 132.Project failure 43</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give importance events enough time and attention • I need to be clearer and more vocal when the chances for success seem low. 	<p>I did not let that failure stop me nor did I let significant people discourage me. Still learning</p>

APPENDIX D
SUBJECT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics Based on Gender & Marital Status

ID and Gender M=Male F=Female	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
M1	51	M	Software Sales EVP
F2	48	M	Medicine Chief Med Officer
F3	47	M	HR Director
M4	51	M	Professor Leadership
M5	53	M	Manager Apprenticeship Program
M6	46	M	CEO Association Management
M7	33	M	Ex Dir. Day Care
M8	60	M	Ex Dir, Rev. Therapist, Counseling Center
F9	46	M	Ex Dir Woman's Council
M10	43	M	Group Leader Hi Tech Manufacturing
F11	44	S	COO Hospital
F12	53	M	Risk Manager Hospital
F13	53	M	Bank VP
F14	43	M	Scientist
F15	42	M	Ex Dir
M16	51	S	Physician, Professor Geneticist
F17	47	M	VP Hospital
F18	57	M	Business Owner/CEO
M19	52	M	Ex Dir Rev Therapist
M20	58	M	Business Owner/President
F21	50	M	Sr VP Hospital Officer
M22	44	M	Performance Consultant/Business Owner
M23	61	M	Security VP
F24	57	M	Sr Dev Officer
M25	52	M	Evaluator
F26	44	M	Director Supply Manufacturing
M27	56	M	Business Owner
M28	48	M	Fire Chief/Training
F29	62	M	CEO
F30	44	M	Chief Dental Officer
F31	56	M	Bank Sr VP
M32	43	M	Consultant
M33	46	M	Consultant
M34	56	M	Sr VP Evaluation
M35	55	M	Investor/CEO/Business Owner

F36	49	M	Bank EVP
M37	72	M	CEO/ Business Owner
F38	50	M	Banker
M39	48	M	CEO Software
F40	46	S	Ex Dir
F41	45	M	Banker
F42	51	S	OD Director
M43	50	D	Physician Executive

Demographics Based on Occupational Data

ID and Gender M=Male F=Female	Type of Organization FP=For profit NFP=Not for profit	Direct and Indirect Reports	Occupation	Reports to
M1	FP	440	Software Sales EVP	CEO
F2	FP	16	Medicine Chief Med Officer	Corporation
F3	NFP	180	HR Director	VP
M4	NFP	30	Professor Leadership	Dean
M5	NFP	60	Manager Apprenticeship Program	Director
M6	NFP	18	CEO Association Management	Board
M7	NFP	25	Ex Dir. Day Care	Board
M8	NFP	26	Ex Dir, Rev. Therapist, Counseling Center	Board
F9	NFP	4	Ex Dir Woman's Council	Chairwoman
M10	FP	130	Group Leader Hi Tech Manufacturing	Manager
F11	FP	200	COO Hospital	CEO
F12	NFP	0	Risk Manager Hospital	CEO
F13	FP	28	Bank VP	EVP
F14	NFP	20	Scientist	Director
F15	NFP	5	Ex Dir	Board
M16	NFP	130	Physician, Professor Geneticist	Chairman
F17	NFP	315	VP Hospital	CEO
F18	FP	250	Business Owner/CEO	
M19	NFP	25	Ex Dir Rev Therapist	Board
M20	FP	11	Business Owner/President	Customers
F21	NFP	1,100	Sr VP Hospital Officer	CEO
M22	FP	0	Performance Consultant/Business Owner	
M23	NFP	600	Security VP	President
F24	NFP	11	Sr Dev Officer	President
M25	NFP	6	Evaluator	Team Lead
F26	FP	15	Director Supply Manufacturing	VP/CIO
M27	FP	20	Business Owner	
M28	NFP	4,000	Fire Chief/Training	Fire Commissioner
F29	NFP	10	CEO	Board
F30	NFP	30	Chief Dental Officer	CEO
F31	FP	19	Bank Sr VP	Gr Sr VP
M32	NFP	160	Consultant	Manager
M33	FP	25	Consultant	CEO

M34	FP	0	Sr VP Evaluation	EVP
M35	FP	0	Investor/CEO/Business Owner	
F36	FP	2,000	Bank EVP	Vice Chair
M37	FP	450	CEO/ Business Owner	
F38	FP	350	Banker	EVP
M39	FP	10	CEO Software	Board
F40	NFP	15	Ex Dir	Board
F41	FP	85	Banker	Sr VP
F42	FP	8	OD Director	HR VP
M43	NFP	158	Physician Executive	President

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