Emergency Leadership: The Lived Experience

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Abstract
This qualitative phenomenological study set forth to discover lived experience associated with becoming a leader. The researchers recruited four executive level leaders from multiple emergency and public service organizations to participate in the study. The study emerged from a thorough review of the literature and advances the knowledge of academic leadership theory. The study’s participants willingly took part in audio-recorded interviews using a script developed by the researchers. To discover how different leaders interpreted their lived experience of becoming a leader, the researchers employed a phenomenological design, allowing for a rich understanding of the participants’ experience. The coding and data analysis process revealed multiple themes from the words of the participants. The implications of this study seemingly address the lived experience in a way so as to offer leadership academic theory in the emergency services a pathway for strengthening leadership development amongst aspiring officers.

Keywords: emergency services, leadership, phenomenology, ontology
Emergency Services Leadership: The Lived Experience

This qualitative phenomenological study set forth to discover the lived experience of becoming a leader within the emergency services. Much of what has been researched and explained about leadership is from an epistemological perspective. Epistemology is the systematic consideration, of knowing; when knowledge is valid, what is truth, and so on (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Leaders have been observed, dissected, analyzed and deconstructed, ad nauseam, in the attempt to unlock the secrets of leadership. Unfortunately, leadership is an abstract human dynamic, not a physical one.

Using the scientific method to attempt discovery of leadership secrets has not been very effective, nor can it be. Van Manen (1909) has argued that human science, in contrast to natural science, involves interpretations descriptions and self-reflective or critical analysis. Stated differently, we explain nature but we must understand human life. This requires discovery of the lived experience (ontology) to coincide with what is known or in other words the consideration of the experience of becoming or being; what is, what exists, what it means for something or somebody to be (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Leadership is the lifeblood of an organization. Without it, little gets done and organizations run the risk of wandering in circles, headed nowhere. Leadership in the emergency services is not only vital; it is the key to success. Therefore, it is critical that emergency services’ educators learn not only how to teach leadership, but how to get students to experience it. This may require new way of approaching leadership education. Every-day leadership in the emergency services is similar to any other organization, except when there is an emergency. Leadership under emergent situations is compounded by time, pressure, and consequence. This creates a different kind of pressure to perform, yet does not have the luxury of reflection,
contemplation, and long-term analysis. Decisions must be made quickly, efficiently, and effectively. To not do so, may lead to disastrous outcomes. So, using the traditional means of teaching leadership may not be effective and needs to be explored through the context of the lived experience of public and emergency services leadership.

Bennis (2009) stated: “I tend to think of the differences between leaders and managers as the differences between those who master the context and those who surrender to it” (p. 41).

Anecdotal observation posits this is generally true for leadership in the emergency or disaster. We can either surrender to the effects of disaster or we can master the situation by leading people to success and resilience. So, what is it that makes a legitimate leader?

Kellerman (2012) contends that, “while the leadership industry has been thriving growing and prospering beyond anyone’s early imaginings—leaders by and large are performing poorly, worse in many ways than before, miserably disappointing in any case to those among us who once believed the experts held the keys to the kingdom” (p. xv).

Leadership is holistic, not prescriptive. This may be where our thinking may have led us to a wrong paradigm. As Kellerman (2012) asserts in her book, the leadership-training trend is somewhat nascent and based on the belief that anyone can become a leader if they take a few classes and apply a few principles. But as she points out, this does not seem to be necessarily true.

As stated above, most educational pedagogies are based in the epistemological or theoretical domains. Journals and textbooks on leadership are replete with theories and explanations of attributes and behaviors extrapolated from observation and empirical study of recognized leaders. One of the more widely used textbooks in leadership academia is Leadership: Theory and Practice (Northouse, 2016), and the work gives an overview of
leadership theories and approaches. These theories/approaches are: 1) Trait approach; 2) Skills approach; 3) Behavioral approach; 4) Situational approach; 5) Path-Goal theory; 6) Leader-Member exchange; 7) Transformational leadership; 8) Authentic Leadership; 9) Servant leadership; 10) Adaptive leadership; and, 12) Psychodynamic Approach.

Most of these have been empirically studied and presented as ways to develop leaders. But as van Manen (1990) said, we need to understand human experience, not define it. Moreover, because we are dealing with the dynamics of being human, leadership or being led is a subjective, not an objective experience. It is customary to study, survey, quantify, and statistically analyze formative and summative results of various leadership strategies to find what works. However, it does not tell us how it works; or how one leader is able to get results that another leader does not, while using the same strategies. Applying strategies or theories is only part of the leadership equation. If we are to truly study leadership, we may need to approach it from a differing aspect, such as understanding the lived experience of leaders in complex and exigent circumstances.

What is the process of leadership approached from the leader perspective, as opposed to the follower? Bennis (2014) suggests that opportunity for leadership abounds. However, the challenges of leadership are also many. This may lead to a need for development of completely different pedagogies for leadership education. As the work of Bennis (2014) alludes, literature often talks about becoming leaders, but it is still unclear as to when one does actually “become” a leader? This thought led to the question of this study: What is the lived experience of leaders in the public and emergency services disciplines?

Review of the Literature
As stated above, leadership in emergent or exigent circumstances does not have the luxury of reflection, contemplation, and long-term analysis. It is relatively easy to lead people to where they already desire to be when times are calm. But an effective leader will realize that his/her position is more than just being in charge (Henman, 2010). So, is leadership in the emergency services and/or public arenas similar to leadership in the private sector? Maybe. Gill (2009) offers the following with regard to that question.

So, is leadership different in the public and private sectors? Yes – and no. It is similar in relation to social and environmental responsibility and employees’ attitudes to their immediate managers – two favorable characteristics. It is different in relation to perceptions of top-level leaders, risk-taking, adequacy of leadership development, and organizational approaches to motivation and decision-making involvement. Differences in attitudes and approaches in the challenges and constraints that leaders face probably largely explain the differences in leadership characteristics between public and private sectors (p. 22).

Creating confidence for the followers may not be possible in the spur of the moment. This means for followers to have confidence in the leader’s decisions it may be dependent on the quality of past decision-making and or influence. Useem, Cook, & Sutton (2005) offer the following:

The under-focus on leadership decisions may have resulted in a partial misspecification of the behavioral foundation of leadership. Many observers have concluded that organizational leadership calls for at least four major attributes; strategic thinking about the organization’s environment, mobilization of its resources to achieve its strategy,
execution of the strategy, and selflessness (see, e.g., Bennis, 2003; Bossidy & Charan, 2002; Collins, 2001; Gardner, 1993; George, 2003; Tichy, 1997; Useem, 1998).

Yet a leader’s personal reputation for these qualities may largely depend on the quality of the underlying decisions he or she has previously taken. Thinking strategically depends on making good decisions.... If the leader’s decisions have been made well, they come to constitute what we often attribute to the leader as strategic thinking, resource mobilization, effective execution, and personal selflessness. If taken poorly, by contrast, the leader’s decisions diminish these same four defining attributes of leadership (pp.463-464).

It seems apparent then, that authenticity/legitimacy gained from prior decision-making successes may be the social affect central to leader effectiveness (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

**Leadership Ontology**

Leadership epistemology (what is known) has been much of the focus in leadership research. Many theories developed in the past and current centuries have been studied and refined or have resulted in new theories of leader effectiveness. Less prevalent however, are studies on the ontological (lived experience) aspects of leadership. It appears that most of the research on leadership has been undertaken from the perspective of followership--the effectiveness of leaders to create followership or identifying the characteristics, behaviors, and/or strategies that create willing followers. These explorations have led to the development of leadership theories (epistemologies) being taught in leadership and management courses. However, this may create a deficit in the ability to apply what is learned. Bearance and Holmes (2015) posit the following:
Typically, graduate students are expected to understand the concept of ontology through pedagogy of lectures and assigned readings of theoretical texts and journal articles. Difficulty arises when students are required to move from the definition and theoretical perspective of ontology to an experiential understanding and comprehension of how ontology contributes to their sense of self and to their frame of reference for research.

The authors propose a mindfulness process that would assist in teaching the concept of ontology in an accessible and meaningful way. Mindfulness is defined as “deliberately paying attention, being fully aware of what is happening both inside yourself—in your mind, heart, and body—and outside yourself, in your environment” (Boyce 2011, p. 1).

The authors argue that if ontology is to be fully embraced and authentically understood, learners need to find a way to explore their inner experience through their living bodies. As Abram (1996) states, “the living body is thus the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge (p. 45). It is this critical reflection that is sought to develop a deeper understanding of one’s ontology through a mental, physical, and emotional lens by exploring one’s own lived experiences, perceptions, and reality (pp. 143-144).

Failing to understand the experiential mind and how it influences the rational mind may undermine rationality. Cultivating both the experiential (ontological) and rational (epistemological) minds may allow for greater wisdom in the individual (Chisholm, Harries, Northwood, & Johrendt, 2009).

**Constructivist Ontology**

Constructivism basically asserts that learning is a process of “constructing” meaning from one’s experience (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Social constructivists such as Piaget and
Vygotsky, had different perspectives, but both based their works on the idea that experience held a major role in learning. Piaget is considered one of the pioneers in constructivism. He theorized two types of constructivism: personal (cognitive) and social. Personal constructivism draws heavily upon an individual’s adaptation to his/her environment. The social constructivist’s view asserts that knowledge is constructed through social interactions, or in other words, socially sharing problems or tasks (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This leads to the understanding that learning and growth then, are the result of an understanding of what is known (epistemology) and what is experienced (ontology). To expand on this idea, it is important to address what Packer and Goicoechea (2000), wrote:

We believe that the debate over the similarities and differences, merits and limitations of sociocultural and constructivist accounts of learning (e.g., Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Cobb & Yackel, 1996; Confrey, 1995; Greeno, 1997; Nuthall, 1996; Prawat, 1996; Sfard, 1998; Wertsch & Toma, 1995) can be furthered by extending the discussion beyond epistemological matters to include ontological concerns. Epistemology is the systematic consideration, in philosophy and elsewhere, of knowing: when knowledge is valid, what counts as truth, and so on. Ontology is the consideration of being: what is, what exists, what it means for something--or somebody--to be. In this debate, learning is considered chiefly in terms of changes in knowing; we shall explore the notion that learning entails broader changes in being. Constructivist and sociocultural accounts of learning each rest on ontological assumptions, but these often go unnoticed. This is due in part to their relatively unarticulated character and in part to a lingering anxiety, traceable to the logical positivists, that discussion of ontology is merely "metaphysical," untestable, and therefore unscientific or even meaningless. We want to
reintroduce ontology as a valid, meaningful, and necessary topic in research on learning and development (pp. 227-228).

Most leaders are not “created” at an instance. Leadership seems to be a process of learning through a combination of what is known and what is experienced. However, learning will not take place just by being in a work environment (Chisholm, Harries, Northwood, & Johrendt, 2009). Learning and growth take place through a process of understanding how one learns (metacognition) and reflecting on that knowledge and experience as part of a learning schema.

**Metacognition**

Maxfield (2008), in his work on adult learning for non-traditional adult learners offered the following on metacognition:

*One method of enhancing learning with the adult learner is to incorporate metacognitive practices into instruction. Metacognition has been simply defined as “thinking about thinking.” It is not that simple, but gives a brief view into the process of metacognition.

*Cognition is the gaining of knowledge. For example, if a student is taught that 2 + 2 = 4, then he or she has learned the answer to the problem and will be able to get it correct the next time. Metacognition, however, is the thought process (usually reflective) on how the cognition took place. If the student were to think about how he/she became cognizant of the answer, he/she may realize that a mental picture of two objects being added to two other objects was used, thereby learning that visualization is a metacognitive activity (p. 35).

Metacognition then, is a strategy for understanding using self-questioning (Livingston, 1997).

Metacognition is applicable and appropriate for a leader. After reflecting on his/her vast
reservoir of experience, the leader can understand his/her unique learning process. Metacognition enhances learning and gives the leader a tool(s) to use in further development of leadership effectiveness. Most importantly, however, this is done through a process of reflection.

**Reflective Learning**

Peter Jarvis posited a theory about the process of learning and growth through social experience and reflectivity (Maxfield, 2008). The premise of Jarvis’ learning process model is based on the assumption that all adults have experiences; good and bad, from which learning and/or change occurs. Moreover, the learning process then calls for an experience out of the “norm,” which elicits a response at a different level than would be typically done. In other words, the experience requires some reflective action, which is the heart of Jarvis’ model (Maxfield, 2008).

Merriam and Cafferella (1999) present that Jarvis posited from an experience, there are nine different routes or responses a person can make.

1. Presumption—mechanical response or a presumption that what has previously worked will work again.
2. Nonconsideration—too preoccupied with something else to even consider the experience.
3. Rejection—a conscious choice to reject the opportunity to learn.
4. Preconscious—a person unconsciously internalizes something.
5. Practice—practice a new skill until it is learned.
6. Memorization—acquire information with which they have been presented and learn it so it can be reproduced at a later time.
7. Contemplation—thinking about what is being learned.
8. Reflective practice—similar to problem solving.
9. Experimental learning—actually experimenting on one’s environment. (p. 284)

Experiential learning through reflection encourages learners to engage in reflective
practices and then generalize the information for inclusion into one’s life/learning schema (Lamm, Cannon, Roberts, Irani, Snyder, Brnedemuhl, & Rodriguez, 2011). Kolb (1984), asserts that knowledge results from a combination of grasping experience and transforming it through reflection. Kolb (1984) also offers an experiential learning cycle that identifies for learning stages: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observations, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation (which also follows Jarvis’ model shown above).

Schön (1983) has been credited with bringing the idea of reflectivity to the forefront. His work asserts that the practitioner allows him or herself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion from an uncertain situation (Schön, 1983). He or she then reflects on the situation or phenomenon, through which this reflection brings new understanding, growth, and learning.

Methodology

Van Manen (1990) offers that the prescribed method for human science, involves description, interpretations, and self-reflective or critical analysis. In other words, understanding human life. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores human or social issues or experiences.

Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology used to explore and interpret deep human experiences. “[A] phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). A phenomenological study becomes hermeneutic when its method is viewed to be interpretive and not just descriptive. Since this study explored the lived experiences of emergency services leaders and their lived experiences, a hermeneutic phenomenological design seemed most appropriate.
Phenomenological studies are based in psychology and have been addressed by many writers and philosophers. However, researchers are expected to use these as guidelines, while developing studies suited to understanding the particular experience or phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). Husserl (1927) described the use of phenomenology:

Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out—the values, goals, and instrumentalities—we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become “conscious” of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they “appear.” For this reason, they are called “phenomena,” and their most general essential character is to exist as the “consciousness-of” or “appearance-of” the specific things, thoughts (judged state of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth.

Phenomenology is oriented theoretically, but does not make deductions from propositions that can be tested empirically. Rather, it demonstrates its findings/premises through descriptive analyses. By this, readers gain an understanding of how the phenomena of human perception are experienced. Whenever one has a certain type of experience that causes one to pause and reflect, may lead to a phenomenological question. “Doing phenomenology means to start with lived experience, with how something appears or gives itself to us” (van Manen, 2014, p.32).

**Study Participants**

The number of participants for this study was four. The participants of this study ranged in age from 40 to 57, three identified as male and one identified as female. The participants were purposely selected based on fitting the following criteria: (a) a command or executive level position; and (b) they were members of a fire response agency, law enforcement agency, military emergency services division, or a politician in local, state or national offices; see Table 1.
Table 1

The Participants of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Organizational Position</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Chief Officer</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Executive Level Chief Officer</td>
<td>Fire and Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Elected Official</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Police Chief Officer</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
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The Study

Selected participants were contacted and the purpose and process of the study were explained. Those participants who agreed to participate were then given an informed consent form to sign. Anonymity of the participants was assured as all identifiers have been removed. Participants were randomly assigned a participant number and this was used throughout the study to identify participant responses.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of interviews of each participant, scheduled at his or her convenience and the interviews were recorded. The interviews were semi-structured, in that each participant was given two questions to begin the interview, then the interview was allowed to go where the participant took it. Follow-up questions or questions for clarification were asked by the interviewer, but were only in response to the offerings of the participants.

As stated above, two initial questions given to each participant. To give a starting point for the interviews, each participant was given a definition of leadership. The leadership definition given was:

Leadership is a process and state where an individual influences a group, and the group agrees to the influence of the individual in order to reach a desired ideal or vision.
They were then asked if they agreed with that definition or not, and why or why not.

The second question, which was based on phenomenological ontology, was, “When did you first realize you had become a leader and what led you to that discovery?” From that point, the interview was allowed to progress where it would, without any guidance from the interviewer.

Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed. Copies of the transcriptions were sent to the correlating participant for review or clarification before the process of data analysis continued. Corrections or clarifications, if any, were made immediately upon receipt from the participant.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began as soon as the first interview was completed and was ongoing throughout the duration of the study. A constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data. Because qualitative research is an emerging process, the purpose and the questions asked were dynamic and changed based upon the responses and feedback of the participants. Some revisions occurred throughout data collection and/or analysis of this study (Creswell, 2002).

The next step in the analysis was to look at the actual data gathered from the participants and begin the process of reduction. We found statements in the transcript of the interviews about how the participants’ lived experiences were discovered or understood. We then developed a non-repetitive list of single words or short phrases, which were then grouped into meaning units. Care was taken to ensure that the original intent of each statement had not been compromised by the meaning(s) we derived. The aggregate meanings were then coded (grouped or clustered by theme). Several codes or themes were identified or differentiated. This process led to the need of further clarification or more detailed analysis, and then more grouping or coding until saturation
had been achieved. To validate the themes, they were compared to the original statements to ensure that something significant in the original statements had not been left out in the groupings or that the coding created something not in the original statements.

**Verification**

One of the main questions to ask when reviewing a study is, “How does one know this study is trustworthy and a clear reflection of the lived experiences of the participants?” In quantitative research, trustworthiness can be confidently assured with the elimination of threats to external or internal validity. In qualitative research, it is reasonably assured through (a) verification and (b) acceptable standards of quality. Verification was conducted based on accepted qualitative methods and is outlined in the following sections and standards of quality were met according to the qualitative research literature.

Verification was handled using a few of the recognized and accepted methods. First, our biases were explored, explained and bracketed. Bracketing, sometimes known as epoché, is a phenomenological approach to suspend all judgment about what is real until it can be founded or explained on a more certain basis (Creswell, 1998). So, once biases had been identified, they were suspended to allow the data to develop naturally and thereby uncover the phenomena.

Member checks or allowing the participants of the study to review the transcripts and data to demonstrate that what is being presented represents the intent and general perceptions of the participants were done. The checks were done to ensure that we did not misinterpret feelings or make inaccurate statements. Member checks were an ongoing process. As data were interpreted and the coding process was conducted, periodic contact with the participants via telephone or email was done to clarify the participant’s meaning regarding his/her interview responses and journal entries. Once the data had been analyzed and interpreted, a final member
check was done to assure that member intent had been maintained. This step was the most critical for establishing credibility (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). The participants of this study were all given the opportunity to review the narrative and that it captured their attitudes, experiences and perceptions as presented with just a few minor word changes for clarity or grammatical correctness.

Finally, to ensure our biases were kept out of the study as much as possible, we had a peer review the data and our findings. Since there were no issues identified by the peer, our study was assumed to be verified.

Limitations

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of only one group of leaders in the emergency services and/or public arenas. As it was intended that the study participants provide a rich sample of perceptions and experiences, there is no way of presenting or representing all possible experiences which could be brought forth and understood. Therefore, transferability of the results of this study is left to the judgment of the reader.

Results

As the data analysis and coding continued, three separate themes began to emerge as a common lived-experience of the participants. Those themes were (a) Leader authenticity/legitimacy; (b) Ethical/value-based leadership; and (c) Leader affect. Each of these themes was prevalent in the responses from the participants and explored in the sample narratives which follow. To facilitate brevity for this report, selected responses to exemplify some of the themes, rather than long narratives are presented below.

Leader Authenticity/Legitimacy

As the data were being analyzed, the concept of leader authenticity/legitimacy began to
emerge as a consistent theme. Authenticity/legitimacy as revealed in these interviews, did not mean that leader legitimacy was derived through holding a position of authority, but through experience, education, attention to detail and awareness of the ability to influence. Bennis (2009) asserts that components of leadership cannot be taught, they must be learned and are made as much by their understanding and application of their experiences as by skills. This seemed to be borne out by the responses of the participants.

Each of the participants shared reflections of how they gained that “authenticity or legitimacy.” Participant 1 shared the following:

*But, when you actually recognize that you have the, the trust of someone, they'll come to you with more than just completing the task. They'll come to you with recommendations with how to complete the task; recommendations either along the way or recommendations afterwards for improvement. So, I think trust. When you recognize that you have trust from those below you and those above you, I think that’s when you actually recognize that um, that you are at that point. What led to that? Small steps of trust along the way. Not one big “set of trusts,” right? Like your um, you've accomplished one particular, you know, big goal or big task. It's a lot of little things along the way that have led to trust and that the trust is verified by those below you and those above you, all along the way with little micro experiences, micro steps.*

Similar to this, Participant 2 offered his view on legitimacy in the following expression.

*I think, I think for as long as I can remember in a way I've felt that I was leader and I think part of that has come from knowing myself and knowing that, that I had a set of values that I would stick to; knowing that I can communicate with others--maybe not consciously seeing people follow me, but knowing that I could influence people and that*
people were emulating me sometimes, trying to mirror certain things that I was doing. I can think back in Little League baseball being on a baseball team, knowing I was leader on the team. Not because I was the team captain or the whatever, but I think just in my interactions with other people it became evident to me. The way the coaches treated me; the way they sought my input for things and it was a back-and-forth thing. I think, I remember specifically...how this ties into leadership I don't know. I think it was the back-and-forth between me and the coach. I remember we had signals for stealing bases or taking a pitch or bunting or whatever, and the coach had said--I don't remember exactly, but it was like if he touched the brim of his hat--oh I remember what it was, he said if you're on base and I call you by the wrong name, that means steal. He had just let mentioned once in practice and I remember leading off on the base and he said something like, “Come on Ronny let’s go.” and so I did. And I remember looking at him and I don't know if he gave me a “thumbs up” or whatever but I remember there was this shared like “wow, he got it,” and I looked at him like, “Yeah, I picked up on it.” Yet, I don't think that kind of interaction was happening with the other players and I knew that the coach could count on me to pick up on it. So, I think there was a lot of that. There were interactions with other people that led me to start to believe that there is something different and that I can influence—I am intelligent--I can help other people get things. I don't know, I don't know that there was ever a time that I specifically just went, “Wow I must be a leader.”

Participant 3 offered this on legitimacy:

You can't walk into a group of people and know less about the subject than they do—well that’s not always the case. You might have a panel of experts and you need to get all their
input—but you need to at least be knowledgeable enough to speak their language.... You have to be seen as someone who understands the issue. I prefer it if I know more than anyone else in the room (ha ha); that can’t always be the case. But if I can’t, I have to at least be able to discuss with them close enough to their own level that I can say, “okay I understand a, b, and c, can you walk through to x, y, and z?” They understand that I haven’t just come into this cold. So, preparation is very important. I think you have to show confidence. Confidence is not being bullied. Confidence is letting them know, and it’s everything from body language to tone of voice, to what kinds of things you talk with them about they have to know you have confidence in your abilities and in them. They have to feel you have confidence in them to get to the right conclusion if they’ll you follow you... If you’re trying to project confidence without any of that they’ll figure you’re a phony pretty easily; first question or two or first discussion you’re floundering around, they’ll figure out you’re a phony and they won’t listen to you anymore.

Participant 4 had a similar take on legitimacy, but from a slightly different perspective. He shared the following about leader legitimacy:

Well, being a manager and a leader to me are two very, very different things. I know some fantastic managers and they can’t lead their way out of a paper sack. I also know some really, really super caring people that because they don’t know how to get the job done they fail as a leader.... How they got into a leadership position is on the Peter Principle or dumb luck. I understand I’m a company man as a command level person in my organization, that I’m a company... that’s a manager side of me that I have to...there’s things that need to be done and I mean, there are leadership principles you can employee in developing a budget, but it’s more making sure the proper staffing. Those are daily
concerns, you know, making sure people have their training and you dabbling into...with budgets cops like stuff.... Those are managerial components, seemingly, but they’re tools. I think if you stay focused on the other, like I said from the start there are principles of integrity and being honest with people That seems like a really hard...that's not a manager...often, I know...I've known of managers who will if one of their officers makes a mistake or gets in a bad accident or something, where they have to give--you know our policy requires some formal disciplinary process--that they'll like leave it in their box or on email. They are taking care of the managerial component.... Yeah, but they're avoiding the interpersonal, the best part of leadership. The best part of being a supervisor is the leadership component. The best part of being a commander is the leadership component. it's not fun sitting down with someone and saying, “Hey you know I am going to recommend a day off for this,” or “you’re getting a written warning and this is why.” But that's where you really make a difference as a leader. If you’re daring enough to step up and be honest with your people.

Ethical and Value-based Leadership

The second theme was Ethical and Value-based Leadership. This theme was very prominent in the responses of all participants and something they seemed very animated about throughout the interviews. Participant 4 expressed this in the following passage,

“I think leaders show, and should show, what can, not just what should be done, but what can be done.”

Participant 1 was very adamant about trust and other value-based leadership by offering the following perspective on the issue of trust:

“So, I think the biggest thing that stands out is at what point did I realize and it's also I
think what led me, was trust; was trust--trust from below and trust from above.”

Participant 3 talked a little more about ethics and offered the following:

*I think it is, I think it is because if you don’t have some common values somewhere in the group you have a very hard time defining what success--deciding what it is that the group wants or needs to accomplish. For me, when I talk about the ethics of it, those things don't change. I like to think that I'm appealing to people with similar ethics. If I realize that I'm not, then my ethics don't change, but how I interact with them does. I do try to start off at least somewhat trusting people. I have a “prove to me I'm wrong for trusting him” before I quit trusting, but that's only if I haven’t had dealings with him before; or if I know people that I absolutely trust and had dealings with them before. I tried to start off in finding that shared value.*

Participant 2 shared the importance of knowing one’s self and one’s own values with the following:

*“I think I've always just felt in my heart that I was [a leader]and I think a lot of that comes from being a leader of myself, having my own set of standards and values and knowing what they were; in being able to lead myself.”*  

**Leader Affect**

The third emerging theme was Leadership Affect. Leader affect could be best defined as the ability to affect followers, or better said, allow followers to feel a sense of belonging, to see the vision of the organization or group, to feel validated and empowered.

All participants at one point or another shared their feelings about this.

Participant 2 shared his perspective by sharing a recent conversation he had with a friend who had an interaction with one of the people who works under Participant 2’s direction.
I think it's a combination of couple things. I think number one, like I said, a lot of it has to do with who I am, and myself, and how I represent myself. I think they pick up on that and you know just in the manner of dress, in the manner of the way you talk to people, the way you treat people—that kind of stuff. I think, I think the other thing goes back to communication as well, and being able to communicate with others. Again, not just with words but with how I dress and how I talk and how I treat other people. I was talking to my friend today and I was asking him if one of the fire captains of my department, who does construction work on the side, had come over to give him a bid for his basement. He told me later, that when the captain was there he said, “Yeah, Chief [------]. The one thing is that [----] treats everybody fairly; doesn't judge people. [-----] can look at a situation and just always be objective and fair about it. No matter who you are, [-----] will treat you that way.”

I think a lot of it is that stuff--regardless of who the individual is, what strengths or weaknesses, or whatever I'll treat them the same and help them with whatever it is they need.

Participant 4 had similar views and shared them through a his deeply held belief about how to treat followers. He offered:

Your primary responsibility is to take care of your people. It seems like the leaders that I see that nauseate me are the ones that are far more worried about what their command thinks than taking care of their people. And if you take care of your people and that's your focus, that's your number one priorities to take care of every person; making sure that they have a good work/life balance; that they have the skills they need to be successful in the job; that they trust you; that there's trust so that there are problems or
there is a situation they need help with they will come to you. When you take care your people that's--you don't need worry about people above you. That shouldn't ever be a concern That's surprising to some new leaders when I talk to them about that. It seems like you should be worried about what your boss wants, but if you take care of your people, you make sure that they get the job done and get it done well, then you don't have to worry about--that you take care your boss. That's how you make sure the people above you are happy is you take care your people and they do a really great job and it takes care of the concerns and needs of the organization.

Participant 3 had a little different viewpoint, but was still in line with the leader affect theme and shared the following:

But, how I treat people in the group sometimes has to change depending on their behavior. So, if I cajole a group around...it's always my preference to listen to people, to try to address their concerns, that's where I'll start. In a huge body people and I'm talking about running meetings of a thousand people, you can't always do that. I'll still start that way. I usually start by trying to put everybody at ease, whether it is a joke or a silly story about myself where I am the one who looks silly, not anybody else; something to try to get them to feel comfortable with me as a leader.

Participant 1 shared the importance of empowering people to do their job and to have confidence in their abilities. In this, people will respond to the leader affect.

I think the first thing is letting go of, letting go of the reins. We've all probably work for those for, those guys that wanted to control everything over the radio. For instance, I mean they would command a scene from their bed at 3 o'clock in the morning. And, I think just letting go. I worked for both--I've worked for those that want to command a
scene, you know, from the bed at 3 o’clock in the morning I work for those that would get out of bed and actually come to the scene and observe what was taking place--what was what was happening; and I worked for those that, you know, the next morning it was simply I heard you had a call out, how’d that go? Any issues, any problems and I always found myself much more passive, if you will. And that was just letting them control it--letting them take care of things. And I thought that was one of the greatest compliments that that I would ever get was from an AC for instance that would say, you know, sheesh, you let me have that; you let me take control of that and I’m used to you know, the Fire Chief coming out in the middle the night to control things. And, and I think I learned that from...it was a learned behavior. I think definitely--a learned behavior--because I was frustrated with seeing that interaction as I was coming up.

Discussion

The three emergent themes discovered in this phenomenological study were (a) Leader Authenticity/legitimacy; (b) Ethical/Value-based Leadership; and (c) Leader affect. The lived experience of these leaders came from a process of life-long study, reflection, and application of lessons learned. Each of the participants shared that they had recognized very early in their lives some abilities to lead and worked to develop them through study, experimentation, reflection, and refinement. As Bennis (2009) asserted, these things could not be taught, but had to be learned.

Weischer, Weibler, and Petersen (2013) offer the following thoughts on the importance of authenticity.

Among various prevailing leadership theories that tend to emphasize integrity, morality, and honesty (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Greenleaf, 2002; Treviño, Hartman, &
Brown, 2000), authenticity has played a dominant role over the last decade (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The roots of the concept of authenticity lie in an aphorism derived from Greek philosophy and expounded by Shakespeare’s Polonius: “To thine own self be true” (Shakespeare, trans. 1992, 1.3.82). Consequently, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) defined authentic leaders as people who, because they are true to themselves, are consistent in their beliefs, words, and actions. If leaders are to be perceived as authentic, followers must be able to judge them as acting true to themselves (Fields, 2007, p. 198). (p. 477).

The theme of authenticity/legitimacy of this study seems to support the concepts of authentic leadership theory. The experiences shared by the participants gave their perspective on what they believe gives them the legitimacy and authenticity in the eyes of their followers, which is centered in living their own values and understanding who they were. Much of the authentic leadership model is based on ethics, transparency, self-awareness, and balance (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), which is what seemed to be the experience of the participants of this study.

With the more recent scandals, ethical and moral failures of public and corporate leaders, there has been a plethora of new value-based leadership constructs (Copeland, 2014). The lived experiences of the participants of this study seemed to exemplify the importance of those constructs, especially in the emergency services and public domains. As a society, we have been so enamored with charisma and fame over the last few decades, only to be disappointed time after time (Maxfield & Broomé, 2014). Copeland (2014) reinforced this idea with the following:

*It became clear that in order to restore hope, confidence, integrity and honor to leaders and organizations, leadership theorist argued that entities needed to look beyond the*
persuasive lure of a charismatic, ostensibly transformational leader and ensure that leaders also possessed a strong set of values, morals and ethics (p. 106).

The participants’ understanding of their lived experience of leadership reinforced this concept, as they shared beliefs that their success was grounded in moral and ethical behavior.

The third theme of this study was leader affect. Successful leaders tend to attract followers who want to be around them or with them (Ingram & Cangemi, 2012). This was also reinforced by the perceptions and experiences shared in this study. Without identifying it as such, all of the leaders through their interviews relayed the importance of emotional intelligence in their leadership experiences. Each leader asserted that understanding followers’ needs, treating followers with respect and empowering followers were key to their success. “Leadership is about supporting and guiding associates to achieve success” (Ingram & Cangemi, 2012).

The three emergent themes also support portions the LEAP leadership model presented by Maxfield, Broomé, & Fisher (2015). Their leadership model posits that leaders exhibit the following attributes: (1) Legitimate—a leader has legitimate (authentic) power, knowledge, skill and ability developed through his or her work, experience, education, and attention to detail; (2) Ethical—a good leader has strong character, strong values, and makes ethical decisions when confronted with choices and/or dilemmas; (3) Affective—a good leader has the ability to instill, trust, confidence, emotion, passion, and create vision with others; and, (4) Persistent—a good leader does not give up when times are tough or there is resistance to a righteous idea or plan, but rather shows determination in achieving goals and objectives. The three themes emerging from this study, for the most part, verified that model.

**Conclusion**
The results of this phenomenological study uncovered the attitudes and perspectives through lived experiences of public and emergency services leaders and reinforces the notion that leadership is learned through ontology as well as epistemology. The post-phenomena reflections and narratives of the participants brought forth the importance of knowing one’s self, one’s values, and the importance of serving the other (follower). The growth from becoming a leader to being a leader was exposed by these experiences. This also affirms the concept of self-actualization asserted by Russell, Maxfield, & Russell (2016); “This transcendence leads to the leader’s self-actualization (Conley, 2007; Maslow, 1965). In addition, the self-actualized leader realizes greater authority, strength, and success” (Greenleaf, 1996; Russell, 2016; Sendjaya, 2015).

The main implication from this study is that experimentation, experience, reflection, emotional intelligence and application are important for leader development. Therefore, developing pedagogies that do not just introduce epistemologies, but rather give opportunities for lived experience (ontologies) will enhance the potential success of leaders. Further research into these concepts is strongly suggested and experimentation with new pedagogical methods should provide interesting and hopefully, strong results.
References


