

Leading from Within: A First-Person Study on How Meditation Might Enrich Leadership Praxis

by

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### **Abstract**

Long before I find the words, my body begins the conversation, revealing truths about stress, conflict, and leadership that language alone cannot hold. It is from this embodied dialogue that the central inquiry of this study emerged: How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis? Motivated by a desire to deepen my awareness of my physiological responses and their triggers while working in a dynamic and often stressful environment, I sought to cultivate a leadership style that is both mindful and resilient, one that reflects my authentic self. At the heart of this inquiry was a curiosity about meditation's potential to support personal well-being while simultaneously enhancing my leadership capacity within my organization. Recognizing that leadership decisions shape futures and inspire change, I explored how meditation can strengthen the integration of rational analysis and intuitive insight, empowering me to respond to organizational complexity with thoughtful, deliberate decisions rather than reactive ones. This first-person, qualitative study employed a collaborative, action-oriented methodology that integrated journaling, meditation, reflective dialogue with three feedback participants and one subject matter expert, and creative artifacts—a poem and a photo collage. Key findings revealed that meditation supported stress reduction, deepened self-awareness and self-regulation, enhanced emotional intelligence, and strengthened my capacity to lead with authenticity. This research adhered to Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy.

*Keywords:* leadership development, meditation and leadership, first-person inquiry, reflective practice, intuitive insight, self-awareness, self-regulation, reframing, presencing, boundaries, authenticity, ethical leadership

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### Executive Summary

Long before words can capture experience, the body reveals truths about stress, conflict, and leadership that underscore the importance of resilience and authenticity. In today's complex organizational environments, leaders must navigate mounting stress and relational challenges, calling for practices that nurture resilience and authenticity. Through a nine-week qualitative first-person inquiry, this research examined meditation's role in reducing harmful stress, enhancing emotional intelligence, and supporting ethical leadership.

Meditation can help individuals navigate workplace challenges more effectively, promote team well-being, and improve organizational performance amid uncertainty (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Khemraj et al., 2023). Within my complex organization, I applied systems thinking to analyze feedback loops-patterns of behaviour, positive or negative, sustained over time (Meadows, 2008). Power dynamics also emphasized that transformative change begins with self-awareness and growth, inspiring collaboration, and organizational learning. Building a positive workplace culture leads to improved performance and drives innovation, creating an impact that extends beyond individual teams. As Senge (2006) observed, "if teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization" (p. 219).

At the outset of the inquiry, I reflected on how my stress responses and upbringing had shaped my leadership style, often leading me to react impulsively in ways that undermine effectiveness. Recognizing this tendency, I applied a structured framework to design questions that drive actionable change. This framework guided the development of subquestions, clarifying the current state, envisioning the desired future, identifying necessary steps, and mobilizing resources (Beckhard & Harris, 2009). In doing so, my inquiry was grounded in a structured path to instill resilient and authentic leadership.

I framed my inquiry around the primary question: How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis? Four subquestions supported this exploration:

1. How do I currently understand and experience meditation in my personal life and leadership practice?
2. What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?
3. How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity?
4. What tools, resources, and opportunities are available to assist with this process?

The literature review section of my inquiry examines how meditation informs leadership through stress reduction, emotional intelligence, and ethical practice. It highlights meditation's role in mitigating workplace stress, fostering resilience, and enhancing relational dynamics. By cultivating self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, meditation can strengthen team cohesion and support systems thinking in complex environments. Therefore, the most effective way to influence and leverage the system is to begin by changing self (Senge, 2006; Stroh, 2015). Meditation can empower leaders to set boundaries, reframe challenges, and embody presence with clarity and compassion. Ultimately, this approach enriches leadership praxis by turning ethical, values-based action into a lived expression of authenticity, resilience, and relational trust. In doing so, it offers a holistic pathway for leaders who aim to act effectively and mindfully within the complexities of modern organizational life.

The methodology section outlines the nine-week, action-oriented, qualitative study. Grounded in constructivist epistemology and *Living Life as Inquiry* (Marshall, 2016), this research integrated self-reflective journaling, semi-structured participant interviews, photo collage, and poetry. Living in inquiry means paying attention to and questioning my interactions within the organizational system and

participating in the co-creation of both positive and negative patterns of influence (Marshall, 2016). Daily meditation paired with both free flow and structured journaling was used to explore mindfulness, emotional awareness, and my leadership insight. Feedback participants and a subject matter expert (SME) offered their perspectives at the end of each iterative cycle of reflection, dialogue, and action. Data was analyzed using manual (non-software) in vivo coding and analytic memos at the end of each cycle to capture themes and overall experience. The collaborative, multi-method approach emphasized authenticity, ethical rigor, and continuous adaptation, supporting personal growth and organizational relevance.

Each cycle focused on a different recorded meditation - Cycle 1 on self-love, Cycle 2 on self-trust, and Cycle 3 on authentic self. This study found that meditation and journaling reduced harmful stress, enhanced emotional intelligence, and deepened my ethical leadership. Key themes developed included resilience, boundaries, emotional regulation, relational dynamics, and values-based leadership. Feedback participants and the SME reinforced insights of presence, reframing, trust, and ethical clarity. Artifacts such as poetry and collage provided a meaningful way to conclude the study and were shared with feedback participants to invite their perspectives on the process. They documented, illustrated, and deepened my understanding of the journey – offering an alternative lens through which to examine my personal and leadership growth. Overall, meditation fostered self-awareness through ongoing observation of thoughts and emotions, cultivated compassion through intentional practices of empathy and non-judgment, and supported intentional leadership by enabling reflective rather than reactive responses. Together, these processes contributed to greater resilience, authenticity, and value-aligned decision-making in complex organizational contexts.

The inquiry findings translated into six actionable recommendations: adopt meditation and journaling, assume responsibility for well-being, reframe challenges as opportunities, practice

presencing, use centering practices in challenging situations, and reflect on values for authentic leadership. These practices strengthen resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical clarity, fostering healthier organizational dynamics.

The personal implications of meditation and journaling in this study included how these practices (a) grounded my behaviours in self-awareness, (b) supported boundary-setting that protected my energy, (c) enabled reframing that sustained optimism, (d) cultivated presencing that deepened empathy and connection, (e) strengthened centering practices that enhanced composure and clarity, and (f) guided values reflection that ensured integrity. As personal next steps, I intend to apply learning by coaching others to adopt my recommendations, presenting my *Reflective Leadership Practice Diagram*, and sharing my three-step *Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments*. The inquiry affirms leadership praxis is a personal, evolving journey rooted in authenticity, resilience, and intentional practice, offering a response to the primary question: How meditation might enrich my leadership praxis?

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### Chapter 1: Focus and Framing

Amid the hidden turbulence of daily life, my body speaks before I can. It communicates through a racing heart, quickened breath, and tension that spreads across my shoulders and travels up my neck. Over time, these physical responses have become companions, offering profound insights into navigating conflict, stress, and indecision. Before I can interpret their message, these physiological changes often trigger reactive behaviours such as shutting down, taking flight, or speaking impulsively. Consequently, this can undermine my effectiveness as a leader.

I was raised in a strict, sheltered environment by immigrant parents who upheld a hierarchical view of respect and community, accompanied by rigid and limiting ideologies. While not entirely negative, this upbringing fostered a deep sense of anxiety within me, as well as a fear of failure and judgement. As a middle-aged woman working in a multi-generational, culturally diverse organization, I recognized how my upbringing has shaped my thoughts and behaviour. It was within this context of inherited anxiety and self-judgment that I first turned to meditation, seeking a practice that might offer relief and grounding.

Several years prior to undertaking this research, I experimented with meditation in hopes of finding the ease and grounding the practice seemed to promise. My initial engagement was limited and unguided. In the absence of formal coaching or technological aids, I attempted to sit quietly for fifteen to twenty minutes, seeking calm and peace. Instead, I experienced frustration, which led me to discontinue this early attempt. Yet over the years the will to learn persisted, and these early struggles with meditation left me wondering how my mental conditioning may have shaped my initial approach to the practice.

This curiosity and awareness extended into the present inquiry. I acknowledged that my own biases and mental models may have influenced my earlier attempts at meditation, as well as my broader

behaviours and actions, including those expressed in leadership. I also recognize that, depending on their positionality, others might interpret my reactive behaviours as offensive, self-demeaning, or even indicative of weakness. I also identified a tendency towards confirmation bias, believing in advance of this inquiry that meditation would likely have a positive impact on my leadership. This awareness will support a more objective analysis, preventing me from favouring evidence that merely affirms this belief.

I am committed to living authentically, feeling grounded and connected, and managing my emotions in ways that foster thoughtful, rather than reactive, decision-making. This work is rooted in self-awareness, which is essential for fostering empathy and navigating misunderstandings, which are capacities that underpin relationship-building and effective leadership. I believe developing a deeper awareness of my physiological responses and their triggers will support a more mindful and resilient leadership style that aligns with my authentic self, enhances my well-being, and fosters trust. Central to this pursuit is my curiosity about meditation and its potential to strengthen personal well-being and elevate my leadership capabilities. This curiosity forms the foundation of my first-person, action-oriented thesis and my pursuit to cultivate a leadership style that is intentional, transformative, and grounded in leading from within.

### **Inquiry Questions**

Senge (2006) described creative tension as the “gaps between our vision and reality”, a motivational force that drives individuals and organizations towards taking action to achieve their vision (p. 139). Creative tension can serve as a catalyst for change when approached with an action-oriented mindset (Senge, 2006). To harness this potential, I drew on Beckhard and Harris’ (2009) change process approach to structure my questions in ways that could foster actionable change. Their framework

helped to articulate my subquestions by identifying the ideal future state, assessing the present state, and formulating strategies to support the transition state (Beckhard & Harris, 2009).

My overarching research question: How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis? Praxis is the thoughtful application of theory and self-reflection, guiding actions to create meaningful and practical change for oneself and others (Penney & Warlow, 1999). I was eager to explore how meditation might open new pathways for leadership growth and transformation.

For a more comprehensive study, I explored the following subquestions:

1. Current State – How do I currently understand and experience meditation in my personal life and leadership practice?
2. Ideal Future State – What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?
3. Transition State – How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity?
4. Possible Resources—What tools, resources, and opportunities are available to assist with this process?

### **Significance of the Inquiry**

In this section, I outline the potential opportunities this exploration may present and explain why adopting a first-person perspective is essential. The inquiry could reveal several avenues for growth, each requiring a personal, and authentic lens to capture their full significance.

Beyond contributing to the existing literature and knowledge on how meditation might enrich leadership praxis, the exploration presented the opportunity to deepen my understanding of multidimensional awareness (Marshall, 2016). Such awareness may have the potential to support informed decision-making, improve communication, and strengthen relationships. Experiencing

multidimensional awareness firsthand might enable me to perceive situations from diverse viewpoints, foster teamwork, and create an environment of trust where people share knowledge, feel valued, and are respected. A first-person approach is essential, as it enables deep reflection and awareness (Marshall, 2016).

Success in the workplace, in my view, gains its deepest significance by celebrating staff's accomplishments and sharing in the collective achievement of our goals. As Senge (2006) discussed, cultivating the conditions of a learning organization, such as shared vision, team learning, and personal mastery, strengthens organizational performance and supports innovation, amplifying the impact of collaborative work across the organization. In this context, this study offers an opportunity to explore how positive workplace culture can be intentionally developed and sustained. According to Senge (2006), "if teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization" (p. 219). Anticipating this process underscores the value of a first-person lens, as my actions and reflections are integral to understanding the dynamics of how culture-building unfolds.

Meditation may offer an opportunity to align my personal values with my professional practice, cultivating an engaging and dynamic learning environment that inspires growth, encourages collaboration, and promotes continuous improvement. Such alignment could strengthen my integrity by ensuring that my actions are consistent with my words, thereby modeling authenticity in leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). As a first-person study, an inquiry into oneself that enhances awareness (Trullen & Torbert, 2004), I engage in a valuable process of deep reflection on my values.

Finally, this study may present the opportunity to cultivate personal mastery, which Senge (2006) identified as crucial for resilient leadership. Integrating meditation into my practice could provide clarity to navigate challenges with composure, empathy, and grounded perspective. Recognizing my own emotional responses, as Hodges (2021) suggests, may empower me to better understand the

reactions of others and guide them through change. This opportunity requires a first-person lens, as only through direct engagement with my personal experiences and emotional awareness, I can meaningfully reflect on the system where I work (Marshall, 2016).

I aim to pursue self-development by deepening multidimensional awareness, cultivating a positive workplace culture, aligning personal values with my leadership praxis, and advancing personal mastery and resilience. This growth is intended to strengthen my personal life and leadership praxis. While this study was not designed to evaluate or prove the effectiveness of any particular meditation program, nor to compare meditation techniques, it seeks instead to illuminate how mediation practice can enrich my leadership. Through sharing my journey in a first-person inquiry, I hope to inspire other leaders to recognize the transformative potential of meditation and contribute to the broader body of knowledge. In doing so, I seek to foster a more conscious and compassionate approach to leading others and create a ripple effect that encourages a reflective leadership culture across my organization.

### **Organizational Context and System Analysis**

From a first-person perspective, I understand myself as a system shaped by my inherent and experience-based beliefs, the stories I tell myself, and the ways I perceive and interact in the world. In Senge's (2006) terms, this reflects an ongoing practice of personal mastery and awareness of mental models that influence my actions. As I integrate myself into the organization I work in, I become part of its broader system. I immerse myself in its structures, processes, and interdependencies, consistent with Senge's (2006) emphasis on systems thinking (see Appendix A).

I work within a large, multi-generational, and culturally diverse municipality characterized by bureaucratic structures and clear hierarchical authority. The leadership team, composed of a chief administrative officer (CAO), deputy CAO, and general managers, reports to the mayor and council. Together, the mayor and council, the leadership team, and their staff work to enhance the quality of life

for citizens of the municipality. I report directly to a general manager, and my team supports both our department's staff and constituents while also collaborating with other departments on projects and events. Within this dynamic and interconnected environment, I aim to contribute to a culture of shared vision and team learning, striving to lead, interact and engage in ways that support collective growth and positive organizational impact.

Living in inquiry means that I am paying attention to and questioning how I interact within the organizational system, and how I participate in the co-creation of both positive and negative patterns of influence (Marshall, 2016). Therefore, the most effective way to influence and leverage the system is to begin by changing myself (Senge, 2006; Stroh, 2015). Embracing this responsibility is a meaningful step towards self-development and achieving organizational goals.

System structures significantly influence organizational performance, with each individual within these systems playing a crucial role. They are dynamic and complex structures, composed of tangible elements such as policies and procedures, alongside intangible elements that drive behavior, like power dynamics, individual perspectives, assumptions, and personal goals (Stroh, 2015). Adding to the organizational complexity is the unpredictability of peoples' behaviour, which requires constant adaptation to a dynamic, uncertain, and ambiguous environment (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

I have observed that when personal goals drive behaviour, and are prioritized over organizational objectives, they can disrupt team alignment and undermine collective progress. Bolman and Deal (2021) described this as "thirsting for power" (p. 30) and leaves you feeling like you need to "watch your back" (p. 30). For instance, during organizational restructuring, my experience has been that senior leaders frequently prioritize expanding their portfolio and vying for additional budget allocations. This tendency underscores the idea that a larger domain equates to greater influence and

authority. The detrimental effects of this self-serving behaviour can include depleted budgets, damaged relationships, demotivated staff, poor customer service, and stalled projects to name a few.

As a leader, addressing the impacts of this behavior presents significant challenges and requires a commitment to self-reflection and intentional thought. The process of self-reflection, potentially strengthened through practices such as meditation, not only helps address immediate challenges but also offers new perspectives that expand the range of possible solutions and deepen my understanding of the organizational dynamics at play. From a self-development standpoint, broadening my perspective and insight equips me with a greater ability to drive systemic change within this dynamic and complex organization (Stroh, 2015).

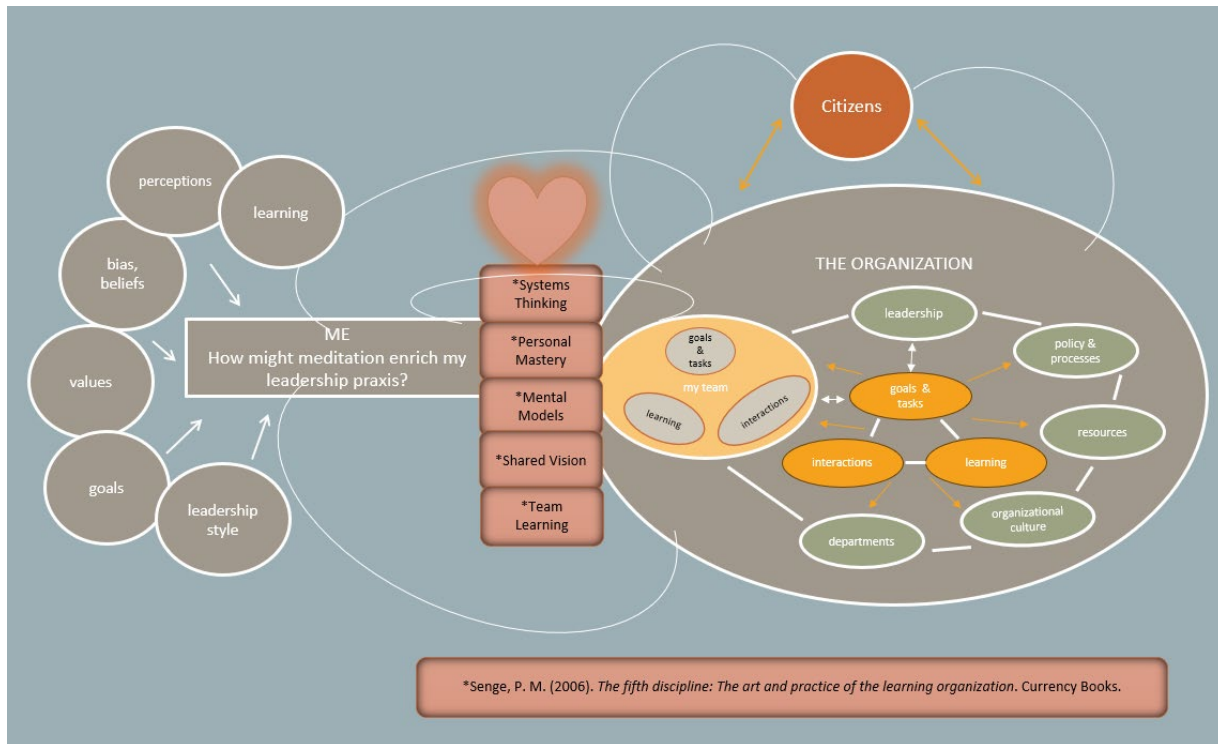
Senge's (2006) concept of systems thinking, reminds me that workplace challenges are rarely isolated; they emerge from interconnected patterns and structures. When faced with complex workplace challenges, I must take a step back to uncover the system's true story by analyzing the underlying trends and patterns at play (Stroh, 2015). For example, identifying behaviours, either good or bad, that have occurred over a sustained period are known as feedback loops (Meadows, 2008). Two common kinds of feedback loops are balancing and reinforcing (Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015). Balancing feedback loops keep operations acting as they should or close to the required capacity, while reinforcing feedback loops generate and escalate behaviour (Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015).

As I navigate my role within the hierarchical organizational structure I work in, I must remain mindful of my contributions to feedback loops, whether I am fostering stability or intensifying existing conflicts. Within this system, change is shaped by both facilitators such as supportive leadership, cross-departmental collaboration, and shared purpose. There are also barriers, including entrenched mental models, bureaucratic processes and the pace at which large organizations adapt. Engaging in self-development can enrich my leadership praxis by strengthening the self-awareness needed to mediate

conflicts more effectively. Heightened awareness serves as a catalyst for change by deepening my understanding of my role within the system and enabling me to leverage relationships to achieve organizational goals (Stroh, 2015). Understanding strategic leverage points help me to address issues and creates opportunities to drive meaningful improvements and aligns organizational efforts with overarching goals (Stroh, 2015). To illustrate this, I have mapped out my organizational system in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*My Organizational Systems Map (see Appendix A for full version)*



*Note.* Figure 1 illustrates the organizational systems map developed for this study, showing the relationships that shape the current dynamics and highlights key interdependencies within the systems.

**Overview of Thesis**

I have concluded the focus and framing section, where I discussed my inquiry questions, the significance of my research, and an analysis of organizational context and systems. In the literature review, I explore key terms and concepts related to meditation, its influence on wellness, and its role in leadership. By identifying central themes, I establish a foundation for my discussion and contribute meaningfully to the existing body of research on meditation's potential influence on leadership praxis.

The methodology section then follows, detailing the research design and approach used to gather and interpret data. I described study participants, study conduct, data analysis, ethical implications, outputs, and knowledge mobilization. Then, in the *Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions* chapter, I discuss the findings, study conclusions, and scope and limitations of the inquiry. In the final chapter, *Inquiry Implications*, I synthesize my work and outline the study recommendations, organizational implications, and future research, followed by the thesis summary and conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines literature on how meditation informs and shapes leadership praxis across three interconnected categories: stress and wellbeing, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership. Across the literature, these areas emerged as primary pathways through which meditation may enrich leadership praxis. Within these broad categories, the literature review investigates five subcategories: navigating complexity and cultivating resilience; boundaries and self-care; emotional insight and regulation; relational and team dynamics; and ethics and value-based leadership. Together, these areas provide a foundation for understanding how meditation may contribute to the development of leadership praxis. The review begins by examining how meditation is defined and conceptualized in the existing literature.

The literature reveals various definitions of meditation. Meditation can be defined as a structured practice that helps quiet the mind and deepen awareness of ourselves, our thoughts, and the world around us (Behan, 2020). Kabat-Zin (2015) described meditation as “the systemic and intentional cultivation of mindful presence, and through it, of wisdom, compassion, and other qualities of mind and heart conducive to breaking free from the fetters of our own persistent blindness and delusions” (p. 1482). This is important as it captures the essence of meditation and how it can be relevant to leadership praxis and frames it as a systemic, intentional practice that could cultivate the self work leaders need to navigate complexity. Interestingly, the analogy by Laureys (2021) “Just like exercise is a common noun for different types of sports, like jogging or bodybuilding, meditation is a common noun that covers different types of mental exercise” (p. 33) offered a useful framing for understanding the diversity of meditation practices. Similar to various sports and levels of exercise to maintain physical fitness, there are different forms of meditation and levels of practice to sustain mental fitness (Laureys, 2021, p. 33). This study begins at the first stage of meditation, described by Laureys (2021) as

“understanding that we can gain better awareness of ourselves and those around us, of our emotions, sensations and thoughts” (p. 34). As such, the connection between meditation and mental fitness underscores its potential relevance to leadership development and to the central inquiry of this study: How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis? The integration of meditation and leadership development praxis is first considered through its influence on stress and wellbeing within organizational environments.

### **Meditation for Stress, Well-Being, and Leadership Praxis Within Organizations**

The pressures of today’s demanding work environment can lead to significant harmful stress, impacting well-being and professional performance. Occupational stress is real, making it difficult for some leaders to cope (Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010). Manifestations of workplace stress, such as insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, and high blood pressure, further compromise employee health and well-being (Sharma et al., 2022). Research indicated that prolonged exposure to such stress can impair job performance and ultimately undermine organizational outcomes (Mehta & Patel, 2023). Contributing factors include flexible work arrangements, remote work, new technology, efficiency-driven management systems, and evolving employee-employer relationships all of which are prevalent across many modern organizational settings (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008).

Similarly, Chaskalson (2011) and Gifford et al. (2014), emphasized how ambiguous climates can negatively impact the well-being and performance of both leaders and their teams. Relational capacity and well-being erode when shared perceptions of the work environment, combined with collective stress shaped by leadership behaviours, generate negative emotional and behavioural patterns (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008). Given this influence, leaders play a pivotal role in shaping these dynamic conditions (Yao et al., 2014). Mindful leadership, in particular, is associated with healthier workplace relationships and reduced stress levels for both leaders and their teams (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Reb et al.,

2019). Mindfulness is described by Kabat-Zinn (2015) as “paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (p. 1481).

As a foundational practice in mindful leadership, meditation helps mitigate the physical and psychological effects of stress, enhancing personal well-being and professional performance (Cheng, 2016; Khemraj et al., 2023). Meditation supports leaders in aligning their drive with meaningful, effective action (Gifford et. al., 2014), while cultivating intrapersonal skills that restore calm, facilitating healing, and protect against further harm, such as reducing high blood pressure (Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010). These benefits extend to positive organizational outcomes by lowering stress-related absenteeism and improving systemic resilience (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010).

Meditation, as a mindfulness-based intervention, improves communication (Chen et al., 2022), supports strategic alignment (Barua et al., 2019), and strengthens performance across individual, team and systemic levels (Urrila, 2022). In doing so, it enables the embodiment of effective leadership (Day et al., 2014; Frizzell et al., 2016) and underscores the importance of leadership practices that reduce harmful stress and foster relational resilience. Stress, when left unaddressed, can compromise emotional health, disrupt work performance, and strain relational dynamics within organizations (Valosek et al., 2018).

Meditation can also play a critical role in enhancing relational dynamics. Cheng (2016) found that it improves interpersonal connections. Similarly, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) emphasized that mindfulness practices, such as meditation, can help leaders cultivate emotional self-awareness and empathy, thereby enhancing their ability to lead with resonance and relational attunement. As they note, “...we have become convinced that being awake, aware, and attentive to self, others, and the

environment is a key to effective leadership” (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 143). Furthermore, meditation can foster empathy, compassion, and generosity towards colleagues, qualities essential for building and sustaining healthy workplace relationships (Aouani et al., 2024). During stressful moments, these interpersonal bonds help teams navigate challenges with greater ease, grounded in mutual support and shared purpose.

The diverse benefits of meditation influence how individuals’ approach and experience their work. McCollum (1999) observed how meditation energizes individuals, helps them stay organized, and increases their enjoyment of work. Sylven (2023) also found that meditation and contemplative practices aided some Canadian commissioned police officers in recovering from mental and physical injuries, contributing to more prosperous and resilient careers. As Sylven noted, “the finding that most study participants reported being introduced to meditation while recovering from psychological or physical injury is a significant finding concerning the wellness of police officers” (p. S43), highlighting how such practice emerges as a vital tool during periods of personal crisis. As a practice that reduces stress and strengthens interpersonal skills, meditation can help individuals navigate workplace challenges more effectively, promote team well-being, and improve organizational performance amid uncertainty (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Khemraj et al., 2023).

The existing literature also underscores how workplace stress, shaped by evolving organizational structures, ambiguous climates, and leadership behaviours, can erode well-being, relational capacity, and performance. Meditation, as a core practice within mindful leadership, offers a restorative counterbalance by mitigating stress, strengthening intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities, and fosters healthier workplace dynamics. By supporting emotional balance, empathy, and strategic clarity, meditation can equip leaders and their teams to meet demands of the modern workplace with greater

resilience, cohesion, and purpose. This synthesis of meditation and leadership laid the groundwork for exploring how meditation can support leaders in navigating complexity and cultivating resilience.

### ***Navigating Complexity and Cultivating Resilience***

To navigate the complexities of organizational life, leaders could benefit from practicing systems thinking, presencing, and reframing. In this study, these three concepts serve as the organizing structure for examining how leaders could cultivate awareness and respond to complexity. I begin with systems thinking, which offers a way to understand and effectively make use of the broader context in which leadership could take shape. I then turn to presencing to explore how leaders could connect with deeper sources of insight, and conclude with reframing as a way leaders shift meaning-making and reinterpret challenges.

Systems thinking enables transformation of self within and through the system (Laszlo, 2012). That is, it enables transformation by helping leaders see their role within the larger system, recognizing interdependencies, and evolving through conscious engagement with organizational dynamics (Senge, 2006; Stroh, 2015).

To grasp the organizational system and its current reality, it is important to recognize patterns, observe shifts, and understand how actions and collaboration skills can contribute to meaningful change (Stroh, 2015). This requires human connection, curiosity, and engaged interactions that empower authentic relationships and fosters creativity (Laszlo, 2012). A study conducted by Müller et al. (2016), claimed that meditation could support the creative process. Their research found that “participants were more creative after completing a meditation session... suggesting that meditation can function as a means to enhance creative thinking” (p. 282). A leader who practices meditation could foster emotional connection, and cultivate an environment that supports collaboration (Urilla, 2022) and creativity, which can be key drivers to system performance and decision-making.

Creative and actionable ideas tend to emerge from holistic and unified space grounded in love and care, contrasting with stressful environments that provoke reactive, fear-based decisions (Laszlo, 2012). Khisty (2006) mentioned that systems thinking requires a holistic perspective; therefore spirituality, which includes “intuitive, the non-measurable, the aesthetic, values of society” (p. 297) should not be omitted. Approaching leadership praxis from a holistic perspective enables thoughtful decision-making that benefits the organization (Khisty, 2006), supported by intuitive knowledge that enhances effectiveness under pressure (Malewska & Sajdak, 2014). Meditation can support leaders by cultivating resilience and deepening awareness (Chesley & Wylson, 2016; Rupprecht et al., 2019), helpful in demanding work cultures that call for systems thinking for purposeful change.

Presencing is an intangible yet powerful feeling, rooted in service, a desire to support others, and has the capacity to foster trust (Bailey et al., 2022). To be fully present involves slowing down with intention, staying open to another’s experience, and continually recognizing the interconnectedness we share (Zerwekh, 1997). This practice invites leaders to align with what is emerging (Gunnlaugson, 2025) by shifting perspective from self to system or source, adapting to the needs of the whole (Scharmer, 2009). Kouzes and Posner (2017) discussed envisioning the future as “paying attention to the little things that are going on all around you and being able to recognize patterns that point to the future” (p. 103). From a deeper sense of knowing, rooted in the heart of the matter, arise responses that are authentic and aligned with what is truly needed (Scharmer, 2009). Presencing enables leaders to shape cultures grounded in trust, authenticity and collective insight while offering comfort and stability during times of organizational uncertainty.

Leaders who practice presencing can cultivate trust, encouraging followers to engage more comfortably (Bailey et al., 2022). The approaches and techniques a leader embodies can be modelled by followers, creating alignment, fostering a more positive and collaborative work environment, and

offering focus and direction during organizational uncertainty (Bailey et al., 2022). In preparing for the emergent future, leaders who practice presencing offer not only emotional steadiness and shared purpose, but strategic clarity (Scharmer, 2009). Before trust can be cultivated or alignment achieved, presencing begins with the leader's commitment to self-awareness and reflective practice for the authentic connection required for transformational change (Scharmer, 2009). Meditation could offer a practical means for leaders to deepen self-awareness and embody the relational presence essential for leading with clarity, compassion, and collaborative strength (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022).

In complex environments, mindful leaders have the capacity to reframe and leverage ambiguity during organizational change (Chesley & Wylson, 2016). They re-examine assumptions, embracing possibility, and identifying leverage points to refocus their approach, with greater clarity and purpose (Chesley & Wylson, 2016). Recognizing negative thought patterns can create space for a fresh perspective and insight (Catanzano et al., 2023). Bolman and Deal (2021) described reframing as "a powerful tool for gaining clarity, regaining balance, generating new questions, and finding options that actually make a difference" (p. 23). It involves consciously shifting how you view a situation, from negative to positive, opening the door to new possibilities (Garg et al., 2022). Reframing a powerful tool that fosters deeper insight and aids in revealing core issues (Sharma et al., 2022), also provides a coping strategy for alleviating stress (Garg et al., 2022; Hughes et al., 2011; Sharma et al., 2022). Given Wong-Parodi et al.'s (2015) definition of resilience as "a trait reflecting a general ability to master challenges" (p. 1), reframing may serve as a valuable tool for cultivating resilience by enabling individuals to re-examine adversity to uncover a strategic pathway forward. Developing a greater ability to face perceived workplace threats can strengthen a leader's resilience, enhance confidence in coping effectively, and support the reframing of difficult situations for change management (Kantor et al., 2020; Wong-Parodi et al., 2015).

For leaders navigating complexity, meditation offers a grounded practice that could support reframing. Meditation cultivates states of gratitude and hope (Strohmaier et al., 2022), illuminating positive perspectives, and enhances awareness of self and our mental patterns (Behan, 2020). Behan (2020) stated that a consistent “practice of meditation allows individuals to react to their environment and anything that arises in the course of their day with more calm” (p. 257). Additionally, “meditation helps in controlling the mind” and with regular practice “it is possible to put a switch on the mind and turn it off when it is not needed” (Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010, p. 7). Hence, meditation enriches leadership praxis by cultivating the capacity for reframing by processing mental activities, increasing awareness of negative habitual thought patterns, and mitigating reactive tendencies. This contemplative shift enables leaders to re-examine their perspectives and respond to complexity with clarity, calm, and a refreshed lens for decision making. In this way, reframing becomes not just a cognitive strategy but a core element of embodied leadership practice. It empowers leaders to show up with confidence, clarity and resilience. Yet sustaining these qualities in complex environments also calls for leaders to honor boundaries and prioritize self-care.

### ***Boundaries and Self-Care***

In complex and unpredictable organizational climates, establishing healthy boundaries can be a vital practice for sustaining resilience, supporting well-being, and navigating interpersonal dynamics with clarity and care (Chernata, 2024a). Brown (2018) stated that “setting boundaries is making clear what’s okay and what’s not okay and why” (p. 39). Boundaries are necessary for true connection and relationship building, and to nurture empathy, and compassion (Brown, 2021). When emotional intelligence is well developed, it serves as a powerful guide for setting respectful, clear personal boundaries that support healthy interpersonal interactions (Chernata, 2024a; 2024b). This connection is reinforced by research highlighting how emotional intelligence enhances interpersonal communication,

particularly through empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation (Kakarla, 2025), which are foundational to boundary-setting (Chernata, 2024a; 2024b). Boundaries help navigate and strengthen relationships in our rapidly changing work environment marked by rapid social change, constant interruptions and information overload (Chernata, 2024b).

A lack of boundaries could lead to “emotional exhaustion, decreased self-esteem, and interpersonal relationship difficulties” (Chernata, 2024b, p. 60). Without clear boundaries, maintaining the mental focus and energy needed to work efficiently, make effective decisions, and meet deadlines becomes increasingly difficult. Clear personal boundaries empower individuals to align decisions with their values and priorities, while engaging thoughtfully with external pressure (Chernata, 2024b). Understanding personal boundaries helps clarify spheres of influence, prevents over-identifying with others’ emotions or actions, and reduces susceptibility to manipulation (Chernata, 2024a), especially when making decisions that support organizational goals and team effectiveness, while preserving individual well-being. By honoring personal boundaries through emotional intelligence, leaders cultivate the inner clarity to lead with compassion, authenticity, and resilience, qualities further strengthened through meditation (Doornich & Lynch, 2024).

In high-pressure environments, unmanaged stress and diminished well-being can disrupt the effectiveness of individuals, teams, and organizational systems, challenging leadership to respond in ways to foster a healthy culture. Through meditation, leaders can shift from reactive habits to intentional decision-making, develop the capacity to reframe challenges, and establish healthy boundaries. Meditation strengthens resilience and creates the conditions for emotionally intelligent leadership, where self-awareness, empathy, and relational awareness help shape effective leadership. This underscores how meditation can directly contribute to leadership praxis by enhancing the leader’s capacity for self-regulation, intentionality and relational attunement within organizational life.

### **Leading with Emotional Intelligence Through Meditation**

At times, the emotional mind could override the rational mind, compelling individuals to react. The intensity of the emotions directly correlates with its ability to overshadow rational thought (Goleman, 1995). This protective, self-serving impulse is embedded within the nervous system, inherited through evolution and cultural influence (Goleman, 1995). Shifting this self-centered focus towards empathy, through genuine listening, attending to one's emotions, and the adoption of another's perspective could support leaders to navigate situations with greater clarity and compassion (Goleman, 1995). Doing so requires leaders to be emotionally intelligent (Goleman, 1995). With emotional intelligence leaders recognize their emotions, reflect on how they react and shape responses, examine underlying influences of their decisions, consider possible outcomes and alternative approaches, and embrace both their strengths and responsibilities (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence stands out as a key determinant of effective leadership. As Nwagwu and Henry (2025) emphasized, "businesses should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence in their leaders" (p. 139), affirming its centrality to organizational success. Their study concluded that emotional intelligence is "an important aspect of good leadership" (p. 139), reinforcing its value as a foundational leadership capacity.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, comprehend, manage, and utilize emotions constructively (Nwagwu & Henry, 2025; Valosek et al., 2018). This capacity enables individuals to navigate a wide range of situations by thoughtfully regulating their own emotions and responding to the emotional states of others in a constructive and adaptive manner (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2019). As Drigas and Papoutsi (2019) study affirmed, "People (leaders) who manage emotionally—who know and control their feelings and distinguish and effectively treat the feelings of others—are beneficial in every area of life" (p. 61). This underscores the far-reaching impact of emotionally attuned leadership. Individuals

with heightened emotional intelligence demonstrate greater self-control, allowing them to remain calm under pressure and to navigate setbacks with greater ease (Aouani et al., 2024). Emotionally intelligent leaders can manage their emotions during stressful situations in a calm and intentional manner, rather than overreacting or reacting negatively, and increase job performance (Mehta & Patel, 2023). When leaders regulate stress and maintain emotional composure, they enhance their ability to make sound and effective decisions (Nwagwu & Henry, 2025). With meditation emerging as an effective method for cultivating emotional intelligence (Aouani et al., 2024), leaders can deepen their capacity for self-awareness, empathy, and ethical decision making.

### ***Emotional Insight and Regulation***

In addition to stress reduction, meditation fosters a deeper attunement to intuition, enabling individuals to approach decision-making with greater adaptability and composure, even in high-pressure situations (Miller, 2000). It also creates space for inner wisdom and reflective processing (Miller, 2000). Meditation helps individuals move away from previously ingrained reactive behaviours (Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015), by improving mental clarity and reducing negative emotions, making it easier to stay calm and focused (Gethin, 2011). Reddy and Srinivasan (2015) noted, "Often, instincts and prior conditioned reactive behaviour seem to take over during stressful contexts, instead of premeditated actions," (p. 46), underscoring the importance of cultivating awareness and intentionality through contemplative practice. Regular meditation practice increases self-awareness, allowing practitioners to embrace the world as it is (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Similarly, Trautwein et al. (2024) observed that meditation induces states that reduced activity in the brain linked to rigid self-perception, making self-awareness more flexible and adaptable. These qualities help leaders withhold judgement, consider diverse perspectives, and make holistic decisions (Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015). With improved self-

awareness and a calmer mind, meditation could empower leaders to critically evaluate assumptions and make thoughtful, effective decisions, enriching their leadership praxis (Tenschert et al., 2024).

Most leaders operate in a demanding “always-on” work culture (Baron & Cayer, 2011; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019, p. 12; Petrie, 2014). This environment often presents “complex situations and interrelationships” (Baron & Cayer, 2011; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019, p. 12; Petrie, 2014). To navigate this effectively, leaders should reflect on their mental models and adopt a broader mindset or a big-picture view, encouraging an all-encompassing and systemic approach (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019). Moreover, Santorelli (2011), emphasized that effective leadership requires cultivating inner strength to meet life’s continuous challenges, a process strongly connected to self-awareness and self-regulation. In other words, self-awareness and self-regulation are necessary in cultivating effective leadership (Santorelli, 2011). Meditation supports these abilities by soothing the mind while deepening our understanding of our inner world and the world around us (Behan, 2020). Van de Velde et al. (2023) highlighted how meditation reshapes the perception of stressors, making them feel less threatening.

Congruently, Donaldson-Feilder et al. (2019) research shows that meditation impacts neural functions by calming activity in the amygdala. The amygdala is central to emotional reactivity (Goleman, 1995; Pessoa, 2010). As observed by Goleman (1995), “the more intense the feeling, the more dominant the emotional mind becomes—and the more ineffectual the rational” (p. 8). During stressful moments, the amygdala rapidly evaluates emotional significance and influences behaviour, often before conscious reasoning fully engages (Goleman, 1995; Pessoa, 2010). When this occurs, the outcome of one’s actions may not be desirable, since the neocortex is not working as it should (Goleman, 1995). Recognizing this, meditation can help individuals self-regulate (Tang et al., 2014), respond with intention (Mehta & Patel, 2023), and make sound decisions (Sun et al., 2015). In turn, meditation could foster greater self-

awareness and self-regulation (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), valuable for leaders and benefiting teams and organizations with enhanced emotional intelligence (Korakis & Poulaki, 2025).

### ***Relational and Team Dynamics***

By working on their personal development and cultivating self-awareness, leaders lay the groundwork for a thriving organizational culture. Individuals with elevated emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate stronger communication skills, enhanced empathy, and have a stronger capacity to understand others' emotional experiences and needs (Goleman, 1995; Sadri, 2012; Nwagwu & Henry, 2025; Shrestha et al., 2025). These qualities strengthen interpersonal bonds, promote team cohesion, and deepen collaborative engagement (Nwagwu & Henry, 2025; Shrestha et al., 2025). Emotionally intelligent teams are more creative, collaborative, and effective because they support one another, embrace diverse perspectives, navigate conflict constructively, and adapt to enhance collective outcomes and purpose (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2019). An emotionally attuned leader can foster a supportive workplace culture, motivate their team, cultivate meaningful relationships, and maximize team potential.

Leaders who practice meditation, may enhance their emotional intelligence and refine their leadership abilities, enabling them to lead effectively (Aouani et al., 2024; Nwagwu & Henry, 2025). Meditation promotes a composed state, allowing for reflection that improves the ability to make sound decisions and adapt to challenges (Aouani et al., 2024; Miller, 2000). Additionally, meditation practice can improve interpersonal skills critical for collaboration, cooperation, and unity within a team (Chies et al., 2025). Consequently, meditation can nurture emotional balance and interpersonal awareness, enhancing team cohesion and relational capacities that are foundational to resilient, collaborative, and effective leadership.

Leaders who cultivate emotional intelligence through meditation can develop the inner capacity to navigate complexity with clarity, compassion, and presence. Aouani et al. (2024) referred to meditation as a “transformative tool for deepening self-awareness, emotional regulation and mental resilience” (p. 25). Practices that enhance self-awareness and self-regulation allow for thoughtful responses rather than reactive ones, while presencing fosters team trust and alignment in times of uncertainty. These qualities can strengthen organizational resilience and underpin the groundwork for ethical leadership, where leaders are guided by ethics and values one step at a time. Building on these insights, emotional intelligence, cultivated through meditation, enriches leadership praxis by supporting thoughtful action, relational trust, and resilience needed to lead ethically.

### **Leading Ethically Through Meditation**

Ethical leadership is a dynamic process which is contextual and emergent (Naeem & Syed, 2024). Leading ethically could be envisioned as a path forged, moving through tall grass, and forming the way forward with each intentional step. It’s a journey rooted in self-awareness, reflection, and values-based action (Maak & Pless, 2006). This means aligning one’s decisions with conscience rather than conditioned mental models (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008), and embodying integrity that others may mirror. In the following section, I explored authentic and intentional leadership, and the importance of leading by example.

### ***Ethics and Values-Based Leadership***

Ethical leadership is defined as demonstrating and encouraging normatively appropriate behaviour, such as honesty, fairness, and care, through credible role modeling, open ethical communication between leaders and employees (Brown et al., 2005; Keselman & Saxe-Braithwaite, 2020). It also involves reinforcing ethical standards and engaging in principled decision-making (Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leadership aligns with authentic leadership, particularly in its focus is on cultivating

supportive, trusting relationships with staff (Brown et al., 2005; Keselman & Saxe-Braithwaite, 2020).

The difference between the two is that the construct of authentic leadership includes self-awareness and authenticity (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Authentic leadership unfolds as a lived and evolving self-directed journey, rooted in ethical awareness and shaped by the dynamic interplay between individual character and collective systems (Rebek, 2025). The process is anchored in self-awareness and grows with experience and intentional self-examination to discern personal conscience from inherited programming and conditioning (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008). Avolio and Wernsing (2008), reflecting on Martin Luther King Jr., described authentic leadership as “inner-guided yet other-focused” (p. 148), a values-driven approach committed to the “betterment of humankind” (p. 148), and the pursuit of collective well-being over individual advantage. There emerges an opportunity to engage in deliberate, intentional, forward-thinking, and meaningful action that reflects and honors one’s values and morals (Kinsler, 2014). This reflects a devotion to integrity, choosing what is right, fair and honest, not only for oneself, but in service of the greater whole and the larger system one is a part of (Senge et al., 2015). In practice, this means making decisions that may not align with others’ preferences (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008; Cianci et. al., 2014) or “living the ideal or conforming to received opinion” (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997, p. 122), choosing instead to live authentically rather than conform. Leaders must follow intuition and stay true to their values in service of the greater good (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008).

A commitment to values-based action could lay the foundation for intentional leadership development, where authenticity becomes a driving force for collective growth. Intentionality serves as a catalyst for growth, beginning with individuals and expanding across the organization (Kubicek, 2012). It reflects a leadership approach grounded in self-improvement and collective learning, aimed at empowering others to grow as leaders. Kubicek (2012) described this through the lens of apprenticeship as “a process of intentional training, everyday” (p. 38), a consistent and deliberate practice of sharing

knowledge to support development and strengthen team effectiveness. When adopted organization-wide, this intentional approach to growth and leadership could cultivate a purpose-driven culture capable of achieving meaningful and sustainable goals. Moreover, it can inspire motivation and resilience, especially in times when organizations are expected to accomplish more with fewer resources (Kinsler, 2014).

Centering the leadership journey in mindfulness and meditation strengthens the capacity for authentic, intentional action rooted in self-reflection and self-awareness. Doornich and Lynch (2024) proposed a framework that outlined three qualities of a mindful leader—attention, awareness, and authenticity—which they called “three pillars of mindful leaders” (p. 1). They described attention as being “intentionally present to what is taking place in the moment, and to maintain a sustained attention over a significantly longer period of time, despite frequent distractions” (Doornich & Lynch, 2024, p. 6). Awareness was characterized as “heightened insight and clarity” offering “insight into our own thoughts and feelings, behaviours and emotions, and toward the multiple dimensions of our surroundings” (Doornich & Lynch, 2024, p. 8). These practices are deeply connected to self-regulation and self-awareness, key concepts of authentic leadership (Kinsler, 2014), particularly useful during triggering leadership moments (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008), when pausing, reflecting, and responding in alignment with core values can be beneficial to avoid reacting from impulse or fear.

Doornich and Lynch (2024) described authenticity as “our integrity, which involves acting true to our true core beliefs and values” (Doornich & Lynch, 2024, p. 9). Further, Avolio and Wernsing (2008) described authenticity as “doing what is good for others while being guided by inner conscience, even at great personal sacrifice” (p. 150). It anchors leadership in trust and integrity, strengthening relationships and team cohesion (Kleynhans et al., 2021; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

From an organizational perspective, authenticity is important for collaboration and teamwork.

Brown (2018) succinctly stated “no trust, no connect” (p. 222) and both are required for organizational success in performance and goal achievement. Strong relationships based on trust are foundational for commitment, innovation and for goal achievement (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). As Kouzes and Posner (2017) emphasized in the context of leadership and motivating people “Trust comes first; following comes second” (p. 200). Effective leadership that fosters innovation and successful goal achievement requires authenticity and intentionality, qualities that could be strengthened through meditation.

The qualities outlined by Doornich and Lynch (2024) reflect attributes widely recognized as essential for effective leadership. Leaders who embody these traits nurture trust, cultivate confidence, and create environments where individuals can thrive. This is distinctly different from environments where a leader’s self-interest and pursuit of dominance and entitlement, conditions that often leave followers feeling manipulated, excluded, and devalued (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997), ultimately undermining the health and integrity of the organization. In contrast to leadership rooted in ego and control, meditation cultivates the inner capacities of attention, awareness, and authenticity (Doornich & Lynch, 2024), that empower leaders to build trust, inspire growth, and sustain healthy, values-driven organizations.

Leaders encounter daily demands that require them to activate cognitive processes such as self-regulation, empathy, and attention in their roles. Their success relies on their dedication and the adoption of strategies to cultivate mental agility. Santorelli (2011) and Donaldson-Feilder et al. (2019), emphasized that self-improvement, particularly mental conditioning, improves our cognitive processes. Meditation can enrich these processes and help shape how leaders model behaviour—leading by example. On modeling behaviour, Doornich and Lynch (2024) explained the pivotal role of neuropsychology in understanding how meditation influences brain functions and mental processes, including cognition, emotions, and behavior. Winerman (2005) referenced the work of neuroscientist

Giacomo Rizzolatti on mirror neurons, which explained how these neurons are responsible for empathy and the ability to read other people's minds. This rationalized how one person's behaviour and actions can encourage similar responses in others (Barua et al., 2019). Notably, leaders serve as role models by exemplifying behaviors for others to follow (Barua et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

According to Doornich and Lynch (2024), the emotions, behaviours, and actions identified within their three-pillar framework namely attention, awareness, and authenticity are considered essential for effective leadership. Additionally, they proposed "that mindfulness meditation must be integrated into our proposed framework, as we are convinced that leaders who hope to benefit from these qualities must integrate a regular mindfulness meditation practice into their daily leadership life" (Doornich & Lynch, 2024, p. 1). As such, meditation integrated into daily leadership practice, supports the development of attention, awareness, and authenticity, qualities that empower leaders to lead ethically and shape culture through relational integrity.

### **Adverse Effects of Meditation**

It is important to note that several studies have examined possible adverse effects of meditation. Similar to other treatments for mental health care, meditation could be linked to negative psychological outcomes (Anderson et al., 2019; Britton et al., 2021; Cebolla et al., 2017). These could include emotional and psychological impacts such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, flashbacks, dissociation, and body pain (Britton et al., 2021; Cebolla et al., 2017). As well as drawbacks such as time invested in meditating, consistency needed to form a habit, and the commitment to learn how to meditate effectively (Anderson et al., 2019). When discussing drawbacks, Anderson et al. (2019) stated that "Time Demands was the most frequently reported category in the survey", and that "Learning Curve was the second most commonly reported drawback-category" (p. 212). Also, it is important to note that the frequency and duration of meditation practice may contribute to reported effects

(Anderson et al., 2019; Britton, 2019; Britton et al., 2021; Cebolla et al., 2017). For instance, Lindahl et al. (2017) examined adverse effects among Buddhist practitioners and found a range of issues, with a significant portion meditating between 1 to 9 hours daily and even more so beyond 10 hours. These findings underscore the importance of context, intention, and moderation in exploring how meditation may enrich leadership praxis.

This literature review explored how meditation relates to leadership through three interrelated themes: stress and well-being; emotional intelligence; and ethical leadership. Across these domains, meditation is positioned as cultivating resilience; self-care; self-awareness and emotional regulation; relational dynamics; and authenticity. While some studies acknowledge potential limitations or adverse effects, the prevailing literature highlights meditation's capacity to potentially support leaders in navigating complexity with clarity, compassion, and integrity. These insights provide a conceptual foundation for the central inquiry: "How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis?" The methodology is outlined in the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

*“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” – Albert Einstein (Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010)*

Albert Einstein’s quote speaks to the imbalance between logic and intuition in modern society, where structured reasoning often takes precedence over deeper, instinctive knowing. In pursuit of enhancing my leadership abilities, I embarked on a reflective journey to uncover the complexities of my mind and to develop a more holistic approach to my leadership praxis, one that values both analytical thinking and intuitive insight. Given that leadership decisions and actions help shape the future and inspire change, understanding the interaction between rational and intuitive thought is paramount for navigating the complex challenges organizations face in our contemporary society. In this section, I outline the methodology and methods I used to explore how inward reflection through meditation might harmonize my cognitive processes, foster well-being, and enrich my leadership approach.

#### Methodology

In my first-person thesis exploration, I adopted an action-oriented approach grounded in constructivist epistemology, which emphasizes the collaborative creation of knowledge and allows participants to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences (Coghlan, 2019; Lincoln et al., 2018). By using a collaborative approach, I ensured that the research incorporated diverse viewpoints, avoiding the limitations a singular perspective can bring. The knowledge generated through my research evolved as I shared themes from my data analysis with my feedback participants, integrating their perspectives and enriching my understanding of how my perception had shaped my actions and relationships. Collaborating with my feedback participants allowed us to explore ways to refine my behaviour and interactions, ultimately enhancing my leadership praxis. Collectively, the SME, feedback

participants, and I worked together to explore how meditation could enrich my leadership praxis through shared insights and reflective dialogue.

Additionally, this research adopted a qualitative lens, which, as Saldaña & Omasta (2022) described, is “used to examine the human condition” (p. 130) and provides “insight into people’s personal and social lives” (p. 131). This approach was well suited to exploring how meditation influenced my cognitive processes and, in turn, transformed my behavioral patterns. My aim was not to evaluate or prove the effectiveness of a particular meditation program, nor to compare meditation techniques; instead, the study focused on my subjective experience and meaning-making of data (Saldaña & Omasta 2022). Furthermore, an action-oriented approach follows an iterative cycle of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan, 2019). This method supported my ongoing learning and adaptation, enabling deeper insights into the process while fostering continuous improvement and refinement over time (Coghlan, 2019).

This iterative process of generating knowledge aligned closely with Judi Marshall’s (1999) *Living Life as Inquiry*, which cultivates an environment where questioning is encouraged, and progress evolves through experimentation and adaptation. Using this framework, I remained curious by engaging with “inner and outer arcs of attention” (Marshall, 1999, p. 157). These feelings I experience internally, create narratives, and identify how they influence my behaviour within external environments (Marshall, 1999). *Living Life as Inquiry* encourages ongoing reflection and adaptation, which helped me to recognize and refine my thought processes (Marshall, 2016).

One way to structure this self-examination is through the Ladder of Inference, a mental model that encourages more intentional thinking by slowing down, examining my reasoning, and ensuring my actions are well considered rather than rushed (Parvez, 2024). Although I did not encounter a critical scenario during this study that required applying this approach, the iterative process offers a valuable

model for assessing how closely my interpretation of reality aligns with the objective truth. It involves critically examining my interpretations, assumptions, conclusions, and beliefs, each representing a different rung on the ladder (Parvez, 2024). I intend to adopt this process in the future, in crucial moments, when I need to realign my thinking, shifting the ladder to reconsider my perceived reality and re-examining each rung, rather than “jumping to conclusions without testing the evidence” (Coghlan, 2019, p. 191). While my exploration employs a first-person, action-oriented approach, this framework also has the potential to inspire transformative changes at the organizational level (Marshall, 2016). My personal transformation may inspire others to adopt reflective practices, and together, we will drive an organizational culture that evolves more intentionally or thoughtfully with emerging challenges.

Additional literature that has inspired this research methodology includes Senge’s (2006) work on personal mastery, Brown’s (2018) insight on authenticity and brave leadership, and Kouzes’ and Posner’s (2017) modeling the way. This literature underpins the importance of personal growth, values, and leading by example, all of which hold significant importance. With this focus, I explored how meditation enhanced my overall well-being and ultimately enriched my leadership praxis.

Furthermore, I took a multi-method approach. This included qualitative methods such as self-reflective journaling, meeting with feedback participants, and engaging in arts-based methods that included collage and poetry (Leavy, 2023). By using this multi-method approach, I developed a more comprehensive understanding of my experience (Leavy, 2023). Further, the art process brought me joy and inspired me to creatively think about my data in new ways.

### **Data Collection Methods**

This section provides an overview of the data collection methods that I utilized throughout the study. My engagement methods included self-reflective journaling, voice notes, feedback participant

interviews, a photo collage, and poetry. The study was conducted over a nine-week period (mid-June to mid-August), organized into three cycles, each lasting three weeks.

### ***Self-Reflective Journaling and Voice Notes***

In the past, I have kept a journal, finding it helpful for capturing memories, organizing my thoughts, and enhancing understanding of my life experiences. Building on this, I used self-reflective journaling for this study, which allowed me to record my thoughts, reflections, and experiences. This practice not only helped me to document my learnings and connect them to specific events but also provided space to express my thoughts and emotions (Coghlan, 2019). A key element of my research was the way journaling can cultivate mindfulness, encourage present-moment awareness, and provide a judgment-free space for reflection (Crawford et al., 2021). I wrote and expressed myself more freely since the fear of being judged by others was eliminated.

Additionally, journaling would allow me to capture detailed insights that shape my understanding and support my personal growth (Hayman et al., 2012). Marshall (2016) discussed that writing about experiences can often help uncover themes, provide clearer insight, and offer new perspectives on our experiences. This process was essential for recognizing my emotional and behavioural patterns and identifying ways to implement meaningful change.

When considering a process for my self-reflective journaling, I reflected on Marshall's (2016) discussion on free fall writing practice (Turner-Vesselago, 2013, as cited in Marshall, 2016, pp. 102-104). Free fall writing is a technique designed to capture authenticity by encouraging unfiltered expression, allowing thoughts to unfold naturally without hesitation or revision (Marshall, 2016). Embracing this approach means surrendering to the natural rhythm of my thoughts, allowing ideas to emerge organically and without constraint (Marshall, 2016).

By embracing this fluidity, I cultivated a stronger connection with my writing, trusting that authenticity would emerge and make it more reflective of my genuine perspectives and experiences. Therefore, I adopted this practice, using some of the elements but not all, and dedicated the first ten minutes of my journaling process to writing in free fall. Next, I used journaling prompts to capture my thoughts and feelings both before and after meditation. My journaling prompts were influenced by the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle, reflecting on experience, learning from the experience, and trying something different (Kolb, 2014; see Appendix B). Although I did not encounter a highly triggering situation during this study, I had planned to reflect on the Ladder of Inference (Parvez, 2024) and spend an additional fifteen minutes answering a series of questions related to its rungs if an intense situation occurred (see Appendix B).

Beyond its reflective benefits, journaling is known to reduce stress, thereby enhancing well-being (Lepore & Smyth, 2002). Research has shown that journaling can reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol, helping to alleviate the long-term effects of stress and, in turn, strengthen my immune function (Lepore & Smyth, 2022). Writing a personal narrative shifted my perspective, contributing to mental health benefits and transformed my outlook on life experiences (Farber, 2007). I kept a handwritten journal, as writing by hand strengthened my cognitive connection to learning and understanding my experiences (Marshall, 2016). Although I had initially planned to use iRecord, a transcription app, when journaling was not possible, to capture nuances of triggering moments, such as verbal expression and tone, I did not need to implement this strategy during this study. However, I intend to keep this tool in mind for future leadership experiences to document my thoughts for later analysis. Overall, I believe that journaling is a valuable leadership tool for building self-awareness, offering insight on behavioural shifts, and ensuring continuity in my leadership development.

To fully maximize the benefits of journaling and meditation, I established a structured approach for this project. I used guided audio meditations, recorded by my SME, to meditate twice daily, once in the morning upon waking for ten minutes, and again in the evening for ten minutes. The content of the meditation was established by the SME and informed through our collaborative discussions. For ten days in each cycle, I paired my evening journaling sessions with meditation, dedicating up to forty-five minutes each day to reflective writing. Each session began with ten minutes of free fall writing, allowing my thoughts to unfold naturally. Next, I spent ten minutes responding to pre-meditation prompts (see Appendix B), followed by ten minutes of meditation. The practice concluded with ten minutes of journaling, during which I reflected on and answered post-meditation questions. As mentioned, my journaling prompts were influenced by the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 2014). Since I did not encounter any challenging or triggering incident that required the Ladder of Inference framework (Parvez, 2024), I did not spend the additional fifteen minutes answering the related prompts. Therefore, all my journaling sessions were thirty minutes long. My journal entries were written in a hardcover journal, dated, and timestamped. By maintaining a structured routine, I ensured the collection of reliable and meaningful data, enabling a thorough analysis of how journaling and meditation influenced my self-awareness, emotional well-being, and leadership practices.

While journaling offers many benefits, it is important to acknowledge its potential challenges, such as emotional overwhelm, exhaustion (Edwards, 2023), and the time commitment it requires. To mitigate these risks, I implemented a self-care plan that included counseling support services, regular exercise, a healthy diet, and sufficient rest. Additionally, just as I scheduled time for exercise, I dedicate a specific period in my daily routine to journaling and meditation. This structured and scheduled approach reduced the stress of trying to fit these practices into my day.

From my perspective, decision-making, especially when it impacts others, is a significant responsibility. While journaling can help with the decision-making process, it is important to recognize its inherent subjectivity. Therefore, I critically examined my entries and insights to ensure they were rational, ethically grounded (Coghlan, 2019), and holistic, including data that conflicted my “own understanding of self” (Coşkun & Karahanoğlu, 2023, p. 2353). I was willing to engage with reflections that challenged my self-perception despite the discomfort.

My feedback participants, as detailed in the section below, supported this process, but it was imperative that I established boundaries to protect privacy and build trust (Coşkun & Karahanoğlu, 2023). With this in mind, I shared only the aspects of my journal entries that I felt comfortable disclosing, focusing on themes and reflections rather than specifics. Additionally, there was a mutual understanding that my entries were intended to support my learning process, that feedback should align with this purpose, and that we were committed to maintaining a supportive environment. Lastly, to ensure protection of all participants, I sent a confidentiality agreement at the outset of the study (see Appendix C).

Overall, from my perspective, journaling is a valuable tool for capturing events, documenting my emotions, and clarifying my ideas. This method collected authentic insights that directly informed my leadership approach, helping me implement meaningful changes and enhance my effectiveness as a leader.

### ***Participant Interviews***

In this exploration, I was a participant alongside the subject matter expert (SME) and feedback participants, who played key roles in providing support and guidance for my project. To gather meaningful insights, I conducted one-on-one, up to one-hour, semi-structured discussions via Zoom. To help maintain privacy protection under Canadian law, I received a student Zoom license from RRU,

where recordings are stored in Canada, ensuring they are not subject to examination by the U.S. government under the USA Patriot Act.

These recurring meetings took place at the end of each of the three cycles, with scheduling kept flexible to accommodate my participants' schedules and my own. In addition to the end-of-cycle recurring meetings, the study process began with up to a one-hour introductory session with my SME focused on reflective practice and meditation guidance and with each feedback participant to review the project goals and address any questions they had. Upon completing the study, I met with each participant for thirty-minutes to present my poem and collage to receive their feedback, and to formally conclude our engagement. A total of five meetings with each participant occurred. This engagement process was designed to foster meaningful conversation, with participants' feedback thoughtfully integrated throughout my research journey.

The discussion format for the recurring meetings, including the final meeting, were guided by an agenda (see Appendix D). This includes a welcome and check in; review of previous discussion and action items; data and reflection insights; refinements and adjustments; next steps and take-aways; and final thoughts and questions. In the topic of data and reflection insights, I asked predetermined open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Open-ended questions are commonly used in qualitative research because they allow for additional questioning to clarify responses and gain deeper insight of the experience (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Mann, 2016; Taherdoost, 2022).

Given these advantages, this method was well-suited for data collection in my project because it provided some structure to guide conversations with enough flexibility to foster in-depth discussion, explore emerging themes, and gain deeper insights. The initial meeting with each feedback participant and the SME had a separate agenda (see Appendix F). This agenda consisted of a welcome; project

overview and goals; discussion of role expectations; next steps; and time for questions. Together, these agendas provided a clear yet flexible framework to support meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

### ***Photo Collage and Poetry***

Over the course of each cycle, as detailed in the section below, I captured a weekly photo that reflected my thoughts and experiences for that week. Saldaña and Omasta (2022) described how a photograph can be an extension of the human experience, serving as a mental recollection of what was important at the time and how it was being perceived. Each photo served as a visual diary, capturing the emotions I experienced that day. My photos featured places, objects or scenery that reflected my mood in the moment. I uploaded, dated, and labeled each photo, then saved them on a USB drive and on my laptop for safe keeping. I completed the collage, analyzed it to gather additional insights, and then asked my feedback participants for their reflections at our last meeting. The collage represented my journey and progression over the period of my inquiry. Its purpose was to visually depict my journey but also potentially uncover themes and patterns emerging from my experience. Through the creation of these artifacts, I deepened my understanding of my personal growth and nuances of my journey, engaging in meaningful reflection throughout the process (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022).

In addition to the methods mentioned above, I created a poem in the form of “poetic writing” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 270). At the end of each cycle, I carefully and thoughtfully collected words that “capture the essence and essential” of my daily experiences, using manual In Vivo Coding to support the process (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 270). My experience shaped the language that naturally unfolded after each study cycle. Blending rhyme and free verse, my poem allowed me to express emotions fluidly and authentically, offering another avenue to deepen my understanding of the data. In addition to the photo collage, this served as another way to “represent and present data” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 270). Poetry can have the power to “generate a deep understanding of the

human condition” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 271). The photo collage and the poem, deepened insight of the data collected.

From my perspective, poetic writing and photo collage are valuable methods for conveying my research experience, offering a unique lens for collecting data and revealing perspectives that traditional approaches might overlook. I shared my poem with the photo collage at the last meeting with my feedback participants for their insights.

### **Project Participants**

This section outlines the plan I used to engage participants in my action-oriented first-person thesis project. The study involved five participants, including me, serving as both a researcher and participant. There was one subject matter expert (SME), who also provided feedback, and three feedback participants. All discussions with the SME and feedback participants were held one-on-one, between each participant and me.

The recruitment of the SME and feedback participants took place prior to the start of my research cycles. Criteria I considered for their recruitment were power dynamics in participant engagement, ensuring invitations were accepted freely, without fear of consequences for declining (Royal Roads University, n.d.). To foster open conversations, I avoided recruiting direct reports or those I report to, instead selecting individuals trusted friends, learning peers, or coworkers in lateral roles across divisions, departments, or other organizations—individuals with whom I shared personal reflections while maintaining psychological safety.

Participants, including the SME, were individuals in leadership roles within bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations similar to my own. They exhibited leadership qualities I admire and embody attributes I sought to develop. Additionally, the SME was a spiritual and meditation coach, and Reiki practitioner.

The role of the SME was to provide guidance and support in my exploration of meditation techniques, which helped me strengthen my connection to my inner self. The feedback participants offered valuable insights that supported my self-reflection, allowing me to critically examine personal biases and assumptions. Both the SME and the feedback participants played a vital role in fostering my personal growth, maintaining objectivity, shaping my leadership praxis, and strengthening my ability to positively influence those I led. Their constructive feedback was invaluable in sharpening my critical thinking skills and applying them to real-world scenarios.

My selection approach followed purposive sampling, deliberately choosing participants who I believed could provide meaningful insights due to their experience, position, or identity markers (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 86). Other criteria included familiarity with meditation (SME), leadership experience, whether formally trained or shaped through lived experience, as well as what I perceived as high levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence. This framed a well-structured inquiry where one-on-one discussions yield valuable insights and robust data for analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022).

Drawing from Coghlan's (2019) cycle of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action, as well as Marshall's (1999) *Living Life as Inquiry*, I cultivated an environment centered on questioning, experimentation, and adjustment. This approach applied to me and the participants, fostering a shared commitment to inquiry, experimentation and adaptation throughout the study. To formalize participation, I sent an email invitation (see Appendix G), accompanied by an information letter (see Appendix H), a consent form (see Appendix I), and a confidentiality agreement.

### **Study Conduct**

The study was conducted over a nine-week period (see Appendices J, *Study Conduct Schedule*, and K, *Study Conduct Schedule Diagram*), organized into three cycles of three weeks each. Data collection and analysis followed an iterative and emergent design, which ensured adaptability

throughout the research process. Before commencing this study, I sought ethical approval from Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board (REB), following the core principles outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement's*: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and Justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022). Once approval was received, I invited potential participants, via email, to be part of this study. The email included an information letter, a consent form and confidentiality agreement.

I ensured that participants were provided with agendas and discussion questions prior to our meetings. All meetings were conducted individually, which ensured a one-on-one format for focused discussions, and they were transcribed using the transcription function on Zoom. The transcriptions were saved both on a USB drive and on my laptop, and date stamped. Communication with the participants were held via Zoom, email, and by phone. After receiving acceptance from the SME and feedback participants I began the study.

Before beginning the first study cycle, I completed a half-hour free-flow journal entry to initiate my self-inquiry study and establish a baseline assessment of my personal and professional well-being, which I shared with my SME and feedback participants. I then met with my SME via Zoom for up to one hour, during which I received guidance on reflective practice and the meditation program. This initial conversation informed the SME's development of the first meditation program. I also met with each feedback participant to provide a general overview of the study and offer an opportunity for questions.

Each cycle followed the same structure, with the three-week format consistently mirrored across all three rounds. At the end of each cycle, I met with the SME to review the emerging data, and these discussions directly informed the creation of the next recorded meditation. Conversations with feedback participants at the end of each cycle similarly informed the new leadership actions I undertook for the next cycle. The study concluded with thirty-minute individual meetings with the SME and each feedback participant to discuss my photo collage and poem, and to formally close the inquiry session.

In week one of cycle one, I began daily meditation, practicing ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the evening for a total of twenty minutes per day. Journaling occurred for the first ten days of each cycle, in the evenings for thirty minutes. The first ten minutes of the journaling sessions were free-flow writing, followed by ten minutes answering pre-meditation prompts. I then meditated for ten minutes and concluded with a ten-minute journaling session with post meditation prompts.

Although I did not encounter a triggering incident where the Ladder of Inference framework (Parvez, 2024) was applied, I had allotted an extra fifteen minutes to respond to additional journaling prompts.

At the end of each cycle week, I conducted a preliminary data analysis, identifying key themes from my journal entries using manual In Vivo Coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022), as outlined in the data analysis and validity section. During this process, I took a weekly photo for my collage, selected a word or phrases for my poem, and wrote an analytic memo, further discussed in the data analysis and validity. At the end of each cycle, I met with my SME and feedback participants to discuss my meditation experience and reflections, review key themes identified in my journaling, and explored ideas for implementing meaningful change into the next cycle.

This study was designed as a collaborative and iterative nine-week process, aimed at generating recommendations on how meditation influences my leadership praxis. Structured into three cycles of three weeks each, the study integrated meditation, journaling, and reflective discussion to explore its impact on my leadership development. Ethical approval was obtained through Royal Roads University's REB, ensuring alignment with core ethical principles to protect all individuals involved. Participants were engaged through a structured process involving individualized meetings, guided reflections, and ongoing dialogue. By maintaining consistent cycles and interactive discussions, this study not only enhanced my personal leadership growth but also encouraged participants to take an active role in shaping

meaningful insights for my practical application. These shared reflections and discussions provided a strong foundation for implementing the study's recommendations in my leadership practice.

### **Data Analysis and Validity**

Qualitative analysis is a dynamic process that engages both the mind and body to identify patterns in data and explore their connections (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). In this study I synthesized my observations and reorganized them into new insights to better understand how the data collected reflected the impact of meditation on my leadership praxis. To achieve this, I used a manual method, In Vivo Coding, to identify key themes in my journaling, Zoom meeting transcriptions, and my handwritten meeting notes analyzing notable words and phrases. These words or phrases were ones that “deserve to be italicized, bolded, underlined, or highlighted for visual emphasis” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 108) and that “originate organically and possess a living quality unto themselves” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 108). When using data exactly as it appears, such as a direct excerpt from my journal, it's known as In Vivo Coding (Jnanathapaswi, 2021).

In Vivo Coding ensures that the participants' perspectives are accurately represented as it captures their words verbatim (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). This process revealed common behaviour patterns and helped maintain the study's objectivity. Analytical approaches, such as In Vivo coding, helped me transform codes into themes, enabling meaningful interpretations of the qualitative data (Williams & Moser, 2019). The codes I selected were concise, typically short phrases, and closely aligned with the research focus, which enabled their organization into broader, meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Themes emerged by clustering codes with similar meanings or traits, which were then analyzed to create conceptual cohesion and support hypothesis development (Jnanathapaswi, 2021). In vivo coding encouraged deeper reflection and uncovered the underlying significance of my words (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022).

To start the analytical process, I highlighted key words and phrases in yellow within my journal entries and Zoom meeting transcriptions. The words I selected reflected my emotions, embodied my values, captured my actions, echoed key concepts, conveyed symbolic meaning, featured bold language, or carried deep personal significance in the moment. For each journaling process, including free flow, pre-meditation, and post-meditation, I gathered highlighted words which served as codes. These were analyzed for themes and organized in a Word document, where each code was listed alongside its corresponding identified theme. Throughout this study, I refined and labeled emerging themes and patterns. Each cycle's list underwent several modifications to ensure the coded words aligned well with the themes selected and that the list was sufficiently exhaustive and representative of the data, so that important patterns weren't overlooked. For safekeeping, all data was dated and securely stored on both a password protected USB drive and my laptop.

Additionally, I wrote reflective analytical memos to interpret my observations, to compare and contrast the different journaling processes and cycles, and to develop deeper insights from my journal entries and meeting transcriptions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). This analytical approach broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of my experiences, allowing me to identify emerging themes, recognizing connections with the data, and detecting anomalies that deviate from established patterns (Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Rather than relying on preconceived assumptions, results emerged inductively through the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships in the collected and analyzed data (Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Recognizing patterns and anomalies informed my practical actions for change to improve my leadership praxis.

All analytical memos were typed in Word, dated and titled, and securely saved on both a USB drive and my laptop for easy access and backup. Data, including my creative artifacts—photo collage and

poem—were discussed with my feedback participants during our Zoom meetings, which were transcribed to capture their perspectives, and were documented and stored as part of the data set. Using multiple methods and data sources ensured triangulation in my research, increasing the trustworthiness of my findings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Through this systematic and reflective approach, this study generated meaningful insights into the relationship between meditation and leadership praxis. This process not only enhanced the credibility of my findings but also provided a foundation for actionable changes in my leadership practice.

### **Ethical Implications**

To ensure ethical integrity in my research, I completed an ethics application with Royal Roads University REB. The research will align with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2022). This policy is guided by three core principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022, p. 6). An artificial intelligence transparency statement is also provided in Appendix L. While I used AI-assisted platforms for literature searches and editorial tasks, all conceptual, analytical, and reflective work is entirely my own.

### ***Respect for Persons***

Respect for persons emphasizes the importance of valuing individuals and honoring their autonomy, their freedom to make their own decisions (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022, p. 7). To uphold this principle and ensure participants' rights are respected, I obtained informed and ongoing consent. This included providing a research information letter, a research consent form, and a confidentiality agreement at the outset of the study. Additionally, throughout the research process, I verbally confirmed with the participants whether they wish to continue their involvement.

***Concern for Welfare***

While this is first-person research and I am a participant, I involved an SME and feedback participants. To ensure ethical integrity, I exercised due diligence to prevent harm and uphold the principle of “maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms” (DHEW, 1979, p.6, as cited in Saldaña & Omasta, 2022, p. 171). I ensured this by clearly informing participants about the process, obtaining ongoing consent, monitoring emotional well-being by recognizing signs of stress, reminding them that they can take breaks when needed, and discussing access to counselling services if necessary. I protected privacy throughout the study by securing records with password protection on my computer and storing hardcopy materials in a locked filing cabinet to which I only have access. To maintain my own well-being, I continued my daily workout routine and outdoor walks, while prioritizing healthy eating, adequate rest, and seeking counseling if necessary.

***Justice***

I committed to treating all participants fairly and equitably, ensuring each individual was valued and respected equally. Maintaining justice in research required me to actively prevent power imbalances between myself and the participants (Royal Roads University, n.d.). To uphold this principle, I carefully select participants to promote an environment built on mutual respect, open communication, and transparency. Further, I implemented ethical safeguards by ensuring informed and voluntary participation, providing clear explanations of the research process, and offering opportunities for participants to express concerns iteratively throughout the study meetings.

**Outputs and Knowledge Mobilization**

By exploring how meditation might enrich my leadership praxis, and completing my thesis, I will fulfill my obligation to the Master of Arts Degree in Leadership by March 15, 2026. Additional proposed outputs for my first-person action-oriented thesis includes a photo collage and poem that represent my

journey and further contribute to leadership knowledge. These creative outputs will artfully capture my reflections, challenges, and growth throughout the research. Additionally, I will share my best practices and guidelines for incorporating meditation into daily routines with peers, friends, other fellow leaders, in future workshops, meetings or conferences. Through these means, I will demonstrate how meditation has strengthened my leadership approach and enhanced my personal and professional growth.

### **Contribution and Application**

My goal was to complete a study that fosters self-development and inspires others to explore the transformative potential of meditation in leadership praxis. By sharing my personal journey and the practical changes I implemented, I will offer best practices and guidelines that empower leaders to incorporate key meditation concepts into their daily routines, fostering well-being in their leadership praxis. Emphasizing the benefits of meditation contributes to leadership knowledge while promoting a more conscious and compassionate approach to leading others. Through this effort, I aspire to create a ripple effect, encouraging a reflective leadership culture within my organization. In cultivating mindfulness and emotional intelligence, I hope to build stronger connections with my team and others, enhance my resilience and adaptability, and to help drive organizational change.

#### Chapter 4: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

This chapter presents the study's key findings, discussion and analysis, conclusions, a reflection on its scope and limitations, and a brief introduction to the recommendations. It begins by revisiting the central research question and its guiding subquestions, followed by a brief overview of the study participants and the coding system used for identification. In the discussion and analysis section, each cycle is addressed separately with its own subheadings. This is followed by a comparison of the three cycles and artifact discussions. The primary question was: "How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis?". The following subquestions helped to guide my inquiry:

1. How do I currently understand and experience meditation in my personal life and leadership practice?
2. What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?
3. How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity?
4. What tools, resources, and opportunities are available to assist with this process?

This first-person qualitative study employed a collaborative, action-oriented approach, integrating journaling, recorded meditation, reflective dialogue with three feedback participants and one subject matter expert, as well as artifacts—a poem and collage. Each cycle included a distinct recorded meditation, selected through reflective dialogue with the SME to determine the area of focus: Cycle 1 focused on self-love, Cycle 2 on self-trust, and Cycle 3 on authentic self. Conversations with feedback participants at the end of each cycle informed the new leadership actions I undertook. For the purpose of discussing the data, the SME and feedback participant codes are as follows: the SME is

identified as SME/FBP, and the feedback participants are identified as FBP1, FBP2, and FBP3. The following chart provides an overview of the study participants.

**Table 1**

*Study Participants*

<b>Study Participants</b>			
<b>Participant Identifier</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Recruitment Criteria</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>
No Identifier	Researcher Participant	Self	meditative Inquiry, self-reflective Journaling, photo Collage & poem writing
SME/FBP	Subject Matter Expert in meditation and Feedback Participant: reviewed and challenged emerging interpretations, offering alternative insights, and contributed to understanding of the data	Trusted friend whom I am comfortable sharing emotionally sensitive matters; holds a leadership role in a government organization; serves as a spiritual and meditation coach; is a Reiki practitioner; demonstrates strong interpersonal and intrapersonal competence	5 individual meetings involving semi-structured discussions, open-ended questions, and transcribed meeting notes
FBP1	Feed Back Participant: reviewed and challenged emerging interpretations, offering alternative insights, and contributed to understanding of the data	Trusted friend whom I am comfortable with sharing emotionally sensitive matter; is a learning peer; holds a leadership role in a hierarchical organization; demonstrates strong interpersonal and intrapersonal competence	5 individual meetings involving semi-structured discussions, open-ended questions, and transcribed meeting notes
FBP2	Feed Back Participant: reviewed and challenged emerging interpretations, offering alternative insights, and contributed to understanding of the data	Trusted friend whom I am comfortable with sharing emotionally sensitive matter; is a learning peer; holds a leadership role in a hierarchical organization; demonstrates strong interpersonal and intrapersonal competence	5 individual meetings involving semi-structured discussions, open-ended questions, and transcribed meeting notes
FBP3	Feed Back Participant: reviewed and challenged emerging interpretations, offering alternative insights, and contributed to understanding of the data	Trusted friend whom I am comfortable with sharing emotionally sensitive matter; holds a leadership role in a hierarchical government organization; demonstrates strong interpersonal and intrapersonal competence	5 individual meetings involving semi-structured discussions, open-ended questions, and transcribed meeting notes

*Note.* This table provides an overview of the participants, their roles in the study, the recruitment criteria, and the data collection methods.

At the end of each cycle, I met with the SME and feedback participants on Zoom for sessions lasting up to an hour. Together, we reviewed the data that I had synthesized and refined. From my journaling, I selected and grouped similar phrases to identify emerging themes. While the initial data set was expansive, I focused on key points that revealed recurring patterns and meaningful insights. Drawing on both my personal reflections and the participants' feedback, I generated insights that clarified the relationship between meditation and my evolving leadership praxis. This work provided the foundation for the findings outlined in the subsequent section.

### **Study Findings**

The data analysis revealed three interconnected primary categories, each supported by subcategories, resulting in a total of five subcategories overall. The findings of this study are:

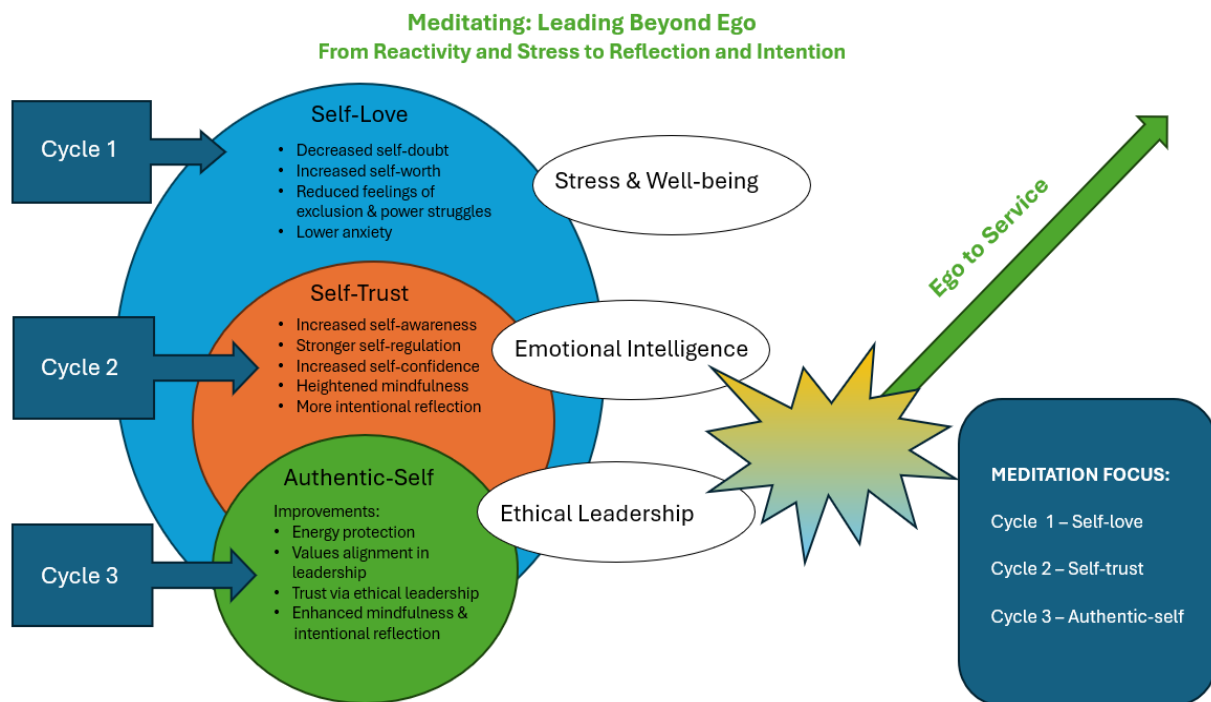
1. I found that I have reduced stress and enhanced overall wellbeing.
  - a. I improved my capacity to navigate complexity and cultivate resilience, including systems thinking, reframing challenges, and practiced presencing.
  - b. I have cultivated stronger boundaries and a commitment to self-care.
2. I found that I have enhanced my emotional intelligence.
  - a. I have enhanced my emotional insight and regulation, including increased self-awareness and self-regulation.
  - b. I have strengthened my ability to foster relational and team dynamics, including collaboration and teamwork.
3. I found that I have cultivated a deeper commitment to ethical leadership.

- a. I have strengthened my ethics and values-based leadership by leading with authenticity and intentionality; and by example.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 on the subsequent pages present the findings of the study, followed by a narrative that deepens the interpretation of those findings. They visually represent the thematic structure that the subsequent narrative explores in greater depth.

**Figure 2**

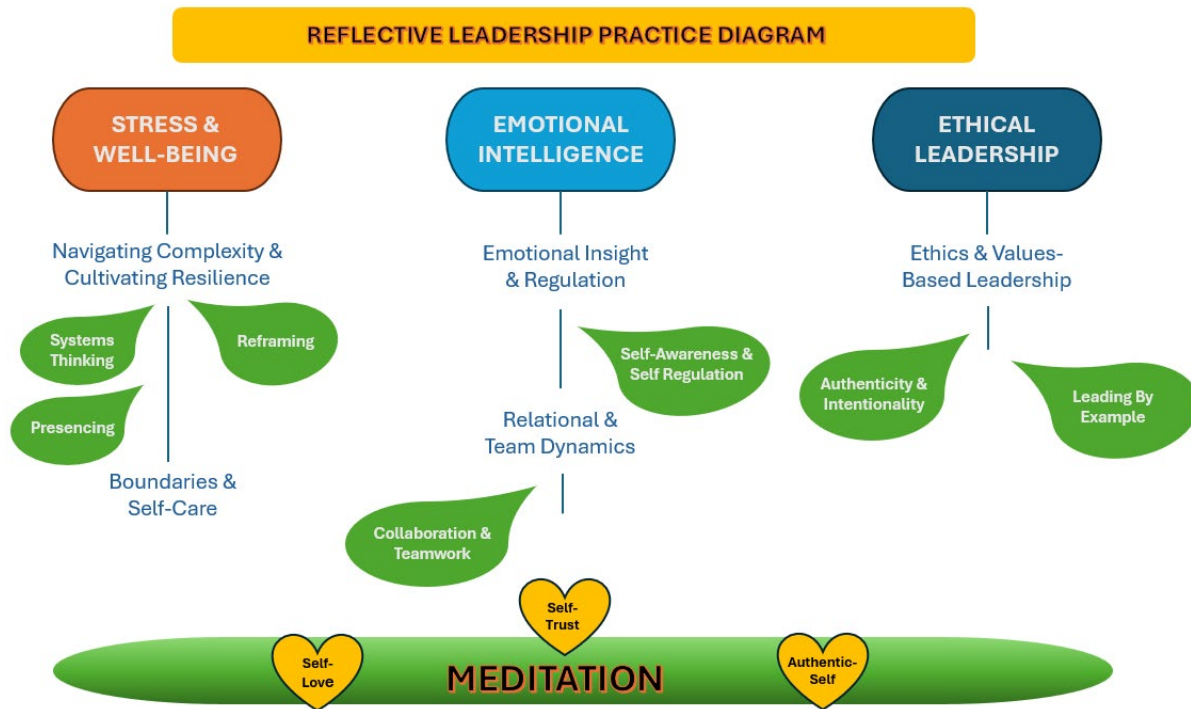
*Conceptual Framework for Leading Beyond Ego*



*Note.* Figure 2 is a visual representation of the study’s progress and the primary categories that emerged across the three cycles.

**Figure 3**

*Reflective Leadership Practice Diagram*



*Note.* This figure offers a visual representation of my reflective leadership practice that emerged from this study, illustrating the categories that shaped my leadership, including the three primary categories and five subcategories supported by the study’s literature review.

During Cycle 1, the meditation centered on self-love, and I integrated both meditation and journaling to generate the initial codes. I began with 132 data codes in Cycle 1. This total includes 68 entries from free-flow journaling, 35 from pre-meditation prompted journaling, and 29 from post-meditation prompted journaling. I refined the data by removing repetitive codes and retaining those that had the greatest personal impact. I then grouped similar words to develop emerging themes for the coding (see Appendix M). This thematic grouping provided a foundation for identifying key findings in each cycle.

In Cycle 1, my free-flow journaling prior to meditation data captured raw, unfiltered emotions tied to daily events, revealing layers of emotional clutter and inner turmoil. Prominent themes that emerged prior to meditation include emotional strain, relational tension, social positioning, and questions of identity. When I incorporated guiding questions into my pre-meditation journaling, there was a noticeable shift toward deeper self-reflection and heightened awareness. This approach brought forward new themes such as embodied attention, inner conflict, relational leadership, and a sense of purpose. Post-meditation journaling revealed further evolution, highlighting embodied physical awareness, emotional regulation and clarity, spiritual connections, and the ability to positively reframe experiences. Through ongoing dialogue with my SME, deeper underlying patterns of abandonment, inadequacy, and rejection also surfaced. As the cycle progressed, I experienced a growing sense of relaxation, improved sleep, and an overall increase in contentment, marking a transition from ego-centered thinking to a more compassionate, connected, and service-oriented mindset. This change was facilitated by the growing self-awareness cultivated through meditation and reflection, allowing me to recognize ego-driven reactions and replace them with more intentional, compassionate responses. This shift enabled me to think beyond myself and attend more fully to the needs of my team members.

As a result of the findings from Cycle 1, a new recorded meditation on self-trust and a micro-practice for intense leadership moments were introduced in Cycle 2. This three step micro practice consists of grounding myself by feeling my feet rooted and embedded into the earth; pause by taking a deep breath into my belly and slowly releasing; and reframe and center my thinking by telling myself “This is not a threat, it’s calling me forward—What does this moment need from me?”

Cycle 2’s meditation focused on self-trust. I integrated meditation and journaling, and codes were selected from these practices. I began with 150 data codes in Cycle 2. This total includes 63 entries from free-flow journaling, 42 from pre-meditation prompted journaling, and 45 from post-meditation

prompted journaling. Similar to Cycle 1, I refined the data by removing repetitive codes and retaining those that had the greatest personal impact. I then grouped similar words to develop emerging themes for the coding. This thematic grouping provided a foundation for identifying key findings in each Cycle 2.

Cycle 2 data was developed into themes of enhanced intuition and self-trust, fostered through consistent meditation practice. Journaling entries described intentional leadership behaviours, including setting clear intentions and responding with awareness rather than reactivity. References to emotional regulation, mindful presence, energy management, and somatic awareness were frequent.

Compassionate reframing of challenges and reduced emphasis on comparison also emerged, with relational differences noted as opportunities for growth. Overall, the data reflected leadership as a dynamic and holistic process connected to personal growth, expanded awareness, and increasing confidence. Appendix M highlights key themes and supporting language from Cycle 2 journaling.

Cycle 3 meditation focused on authentic self. I continued with the same study cycle as the previous 2 of integrated meditation and journaling. A total of 96 codes were generated: 51 entries from free-flow journaling, 20 from pre-meditation prompts, and 25 from post-meditation prompts. Key themes developed emphasized emotional self-care, including increased confidence, compassionate self-talk, and a stronger ability to ground myself, often supported by restorative time in nature. Entries reflected increasing awareness of ego, evident in my internal responses and in noticing how ego manifests in others, accompanied by intentional efforts to letting go and cultivating emotional clarity. Data also appeared to highlight recognition of the transient nature of experience, fostering presence and acceptance. Ethical leadership and alignment with core values were identified as contributing to calm and inner harmony. Data indicated strengthening of self-trust, along with evidence of withheld trust in others, highlighting relational dynamics for further consideration.

Cycle 3 journaling produced themes related to energy protection, alignment with core values,

and the role of personal wellness in leadership contexts. Entries documented increased self-confidence and noted meditation as a practice that supported mental clarity and supported intentional thinking. Workplace challenges were recorded, including experiences of ageism, which highlighted ethical considerations and power dynamics within leadership, reflecting assumptions that had already informed my perspective. Data also appeared to emphasize the importance of trust-building through authentic, value-driven connections and intentional actions. Appendix M provides supporting language and coded themes from Cycle 3 journaling.

Across the three cycles, meditation and journaling generated a total of 378 initial data codes, which were refined and thematically grouped into key findings. In Cycle 1 (132 codes), themes included emotional strain, relational tension, social positioning, identity, embodied awareness, inner conflict, relational leadership, purpose, embodied physical awareness, emotional regulation and clarity, emotional regulation and clarity, spiritual connection, and underlying patterns of abandonment, inadequacy, and rejection. Cycle 2 (150 codes) appeared to reveal enhanced self-trust, intuitive leadership, emotional regulation, somatic awareness, and a shift away from comparison toward relational growth. Cycle 3 (96 codes) appeared to emphasize emotional self-care, ego awareness, presence, ethical leadership, and alignment with core values, while also highlighting challenges in relational trust and impact of ageism. The findings outlined here serve as the foundation for the discussion and analysis presented in the next section.

### **Discussions and Analysis**

This section presents a discussion and analysis of the findings across the study cycles. I analyze the themes that I developed from my journaling, meditation practice, and meetings with the feedback participants, highlighting their relevance to my leadership practice and personal development. The discussion is organized by cycle to provide a clear structure. In addition to the cycle-specific analysis, this

section includes a comparison across the three cycles and integrates my artifacts—a photo collage and a poem—which document and illustrate my learning journey throughout this study.

### ***Cycle One***

In Cycle 1, I began with free-flow journaling, which revealed ego-centred themes and a strong focus on emotional strain, relational tension, social positioning, and identity related concerns. These entries captured the raw emotional landscape of my daily leadership experiences and highlighted the internal noise that often accompanies my work. As I introduced pre-meditation prompting questions, I observed a shift as these guiding questions helped me set clearer intentions, direct my attention inward, and foster greater self-reflection and awareness. Following meditation, I experienced a sense of groundedness and connection to something larger than myself, which brought feelings of belonging and shifted my mindset from reactivity to intentionality. This mental clarity supported reframing challenging leadership moments into positive affirmations, prompting me to create a list of these reframed experiences as reminders of my growth. Most notably, the progression from free-flow to post-meditation journaling marked a movement away from ego-driven thought toward compassion, connection, and a desire to lead in service of the greater whole.

In discussion with SME/FBP, she observed that I appeared to be “becoming more spiritually connected” and noted that my experiences were “pretty consistent to normal patterns of someone just starting to meditate”. When we explored the potential of negative impacts of meditation, such as the risk of psychosis, which I did not experience, the SME/FBP acknowledged that “some people may not be able to differentiate between the real world and the spiritual, especially if there are underlying health conditions”. She also mentioned that the “feeling of oneness, the high from meditation that some people can achieve with drugs, can be addictive”. In reflecting on the inner conflict I had been experiencing, the SME/FBP suggested it may stem from deeper emotional themes, including “a fear of

abandonment (opposite–defended), inadequacy (opposite–enough), and rejection (opposite–cherished)”. This insight informed our decision to focus the recorded meditation in Cycle 2 on the theme of self-trust.

My meeting with feedback participant FBP1 offered valuable insights that I had initially overlooked in my own analysis. Through our discussion and her review of the data I shared, she observed “my presence being impactful to others”. This comment struck a chord with me, prompting a visceral reaction as the realization resonated deeply. I shared with her a recent dream in which I was present with a young boy, someone I didn’t recognize, in an unfamiliar room, standing watching him as he lay on his deathbed, waiting with him as he passed. In my dream it felt like I was there to support the boy and provide comfort as he passed over. I also recounted a recent experience where a coworker asked me simply to sit with her, expressing that my presence and energy were comforting in her moment of unease. While “presencing” had emerged as a clear theme in Cycle 1, FBP1 also highlighted “reframing” as another significant theme that had shaped my experience during this cycle.

Similar to the previous feedback meetings, FBP2’s perspective added meaningful depth to my research. She described Cycle 1 as “liberating and transformative” noting that I had approached it “courageously and authentically” and was “leaning into change”. In our discussion on reframing, she observed that it helped me process experiences “more positively and lightly” rather than through a “negativity bias”, which she described as “an evolutionary mechanism”. She also highlighted my ability to “separate the experience and depersonalize”, and noted that I was beginning to deal with challenges by “Let[ting] it be without carrying it” instead of “sweating something that is not yours to continue to carry or wear”. Furthermore, she pointed out that I “engage, rather than prune the interaction, you actually lean into it and engage to address”. Lastly, FBP2 reflected on how I bring light to others by using my “sphere of influence, because of your own internal sphere of control”. This insight illuminated my

role within a larger system and affirmed my capacity to influence from within with more clarity.

My conversation with feedback participant FBP3 added a reflective and grounded layer to my understanding of Cycle 1. She emphasized the value of asking consistent questions to oneself and embedding a thoughtful process, noting that this supported self-regulation and had a calming effect. She also highlighted how the tactile reassurance of a “worry stone” has helped her during stressful moments and even suggested I purchase one. FBP3 explained that rubbing the stone’s smooth surface helps her manage anxiety by providing a calming, grounding sensation, similar to the effect of meditation in moments when mediation may not be possible. This metaphor of “meditation awareness, like a worry stone” resonated with her as a calming tool, and it may also serve as a helpful reminder for me when navigating difficult moments by symbolizing a moment of pause and grounding, encouraging a calmer, more intentional response. Additionally, she appreciated the simplicity of choosing whether to take action or let things be, noting that “we’ve got that choice”. FBP3 acknowledged in my data that searching for clarity can be elusive and draining, sharing her own experience of offering clarity to others even when her own was “just the current clarity.” We discussed how an overly active imagination can lead us down unnecessary rabbit holes, and how moments of overwhelm can result in freezing or internal conflict. She reflected on the importance of discernment, recognizing that “some things aren’t worthy of being held,” and the power of letting go after emotional reactions. Curiosity emerged as a guiding principle, describing it as “always a good approach” (FBP3). Lastly, she expressed surprise that ageism appeared in my data, then reflecting on her own response by saying, “that aging came up... and maybe I shouldn’t have been”, acknowledging that, in hindsight, she should not have been surprised given its relevance to my experience of identity and leadership made its emergence understandable (FBP3).

In my analytical memo, at the end of Cycle 1, I wrote:

Overall, I feel less anxious and have better control of my emotions. I am able to adjust my reactivity to situations before it escalates to a greater source of anxiety. I recognize my ability to reframe situations resulting in better outcomes in my daily interactions. Additionally, I notice that I am more compassionate in my daily interactions, taking a moment to understand how others may be feeling, and why they may be making certain decisions, or acting in a certain way.

### ***Cycle Two***

Building on the insights from Cycle 1, Cycle 2 introduced a deeper focus on intuition and self-trust. Alongside these developments, themes of emotional intelligence emerged, particularly in emotional insight and regulation, and in relational and team dynamics. These discussions informed the introduction of a micro-practice for centering myself during intense leadership moments, which I called *Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments* (see Appendix N) in Cycle 2. The practice entailed grounding by feeling my feet rooted and embedded in the earth, pausing to take a deep breath into my belly and slowly releasing, and reframing by stating and questioning: This is not a threat—it is calling me forward. It is information. What does this moment require of me?

In Cycle 2's meeting with SME/FBP, she shared a powerful insight: "The body was meant for action, and the soul was meant to flow." This resonated deeply with me and became a lens through which I began to understand my own learning. It helped me recognize the importance of aligning presence with inner fluidity, moving with intention while allowing space for intuition, emotion, and reflection. This quote aligned with the shift in how I approached leadership and personal growth, encouraging a more embodied and spiritual way of engaging with uncertainty and transformation. Our discussion informed our decision to focus the recorded meditation in Cycle 3 on authenticity.

Building on the previous cycle, my meeting with FBP1 offered rich insights aligned with the

emerging theme of emotional intelligence, particularly emotional insight and regulation, as well as relational dynamics, including collaboration, teamwork, self-awareness, and self-regulation. FBP1 emphasized that meaningful change begins with ourselves, noting that “change is about changing ourselves,” and reminding me that while “we cannot change others,” we can reflect on “how is my behaviour impacting others.” This highlighted the importance of recognizing my influence without assuming responsibility for others’ emotional responses: I “can influence them but not change how they feel” (FBP1). She also underscored the need to preserve emotional insight without becoming emotionally depleted, pointing out that emotional intelligence must be balanced with “boundaries for self-preservation and sustainability” (FBP1). These reflections deepened my understanding of how emotional regulation and relational awareness are essential to effective and sustainable leadership.

In Cycle 2, my conversation with FBP2 echoed many of the core themes that emerged around emotional intelligence, particularly (a) emotional insight and regulation; (b) relational and team dynamics; (c) collaboration and teamwork; and (d) self-awareness and self-regulation. Our dialogue touched on the importance of protecting one’s energy, setting boundaries while navigating professional responsibilities, and maintaining a positive outlook despite organizational and team challenges. FBP2 observed in my data a strong presence of “authenticity and courage and self-reflection.” She emphasized that while creating a safe space is valuable, it does not mean becoming “an emotional dumping ground”, especially because “I am an empathetic person”, and because of that “people just offload”.

Reflecting on my data, FBP2 highlighted how meditation seemed to serve as “a cleansing” enabling me to gain “a different perspective”, and release the weight of “triggers and experiences.” Additionally, she reminded me of the power of focus, “what you focus on, you amplify” (FBP2) and how dwelling on negativity can perpetuate it. One of her most impactful reflections was that “your intentions

are being realized”, underscoring the role of introspection in “self-propulsion” (FBP2). Knowing how central living in alignment with my values is to me, she also challenged me to consider: “How can you navigate your boundaries so that you can always keep your values?” This exchange reinforced how meditation not only enhances emotional regulation and self-awareness but also strengthens my leadership praxis by fostering clarity, resilience, and value-driven boundaries.

In Cycle 2, my dialogue with FBP3 reinforced the overarching themes of emotional intelligence. Upon reviewing the data, FBP3 observed a clear shift from Cycle 1, acknowledging that I “had moved on and were making progress” and was actively integrating my learnings into my professional practice by stating that I was “finding ways of working it [learnings] into your work and job”. She expressed appreciation for the way I was applying these insights in my work, highlighting that I appeared “more comfortable with yourself, more settled and grounded”. She also reflected on my ability to remain composed during stressful or triggering moments, recognizing my capacity to self-regulate and reframe situations and view them as information: “this is just information, it’s not a threat... I can do what I want with it or nothing with it” (FBP3). We also discussed how the actions of certain team members, particularly those who take advantage of others, can influence the emotional tone of the group. FBP3 remarked that taking advantage of others is unacceptable, which highlighted the ethical contrast and prompted reflection on how such behaviours, even when not our own, can shape our perspective and challenge our emotional boundaries. This insight reinforced the importance of emotional regulation and self-awareness in maintaining integrity within relational dynamics. Regarding self-awareness, she observed in the data that I had, on several occasions, “released what was never mine to carry” (FBP3), a reflection of growing clarity around emotional boundaries and personal responsibility.

Our conversation also explored the importance of authenticity in leadership. We discussed introducing a new practice for Cycle 3—keeping a reflective list to help me stay aligned with my values

while navigating the complexities of teams and the corporate environment. This idea stemmed from a shared understanding that authentic leadership requires ongoing self-awareness and intentional boundary-setting and that I now “can recognize that” (FBP3). FBP3 emphasized that meditation appeared to be supporting the process, helping me cultivate clarity, emotional intelligence, and reinforcing value-driven decision making. She shared that the changes were apparent and “came out in my notes”. She added that “writing was helping you formulate that”, highlighting how journaling was aiding my ability to process and articulate these shifts.

In my analytical memo, at the end of Cycle 2, I wrote:

Overall, I feel content with the progression forward moving away from ego and into authenticity. Trying to understand what the moment is asking from me and handling it the best way possible in that moment. My journaling is proof that without even realizing it the twenty-one day cycle of meditation has helped reprogram my thought progress in a positive way. The changes I’ve made have mostly had a positive outcome with my team and coworkers. Positive energy seems to radiate and motivate others to take on more and do well. My self-talk is more positive and is underpinned with confidence. It’s easier for me to redirect negative situations, reframe and to de-escalate situations for others. As FBP2 mentioned “what you focus on you amplify”.

These insights informed the direction of Cycle 3, where authenticity became the focal point of my recorded meditation and reflective practice. As a part of this shift, I introduced a new tool. I kept a list at my desk to guide my day-to-day interactions as a reminder of how I can stay aligned with my values while leading authentically in an organization—Daily Reminders of Authentic Leadership (see Appendix O).

**Cycle Three**

In Cycle 3, my meeting with the SME/FBP offered valuable guidance on how to interpret and narrate the data emerging from my reflections. She emphasized the importance of letting the data lead, encouraging me to “describe the data and tell the story”. When I mentioned some frustrations in my learning, she reminded me that “growth is not linear and plateaus before growth continues”. We discussed relational dynamics, particularly around trust and power. The SME/FBP reflected on when “someone uses their power to influence others” and has an “underlying agenda” can make it “difficult to trust when abusing their power”. These observations aligned with my own reflections on authenticity and the tension between “keeping your job yet remaining authentic to yourself”, as she described. She encouraged me to continue exploring positive reframing and mindset work, introducing ideas such as, “telling and believing we are lucky brings on more luck”, and affirmations like “I have so many people that choose me” and “I am starting to name the people around me I can trust”. These tools were offered as ways to support trust-building and protect my energy. Finally, we discussed real-life examples, to illustrate how assumptions can sometimes cloud interpretation, reinforcing the importance of staying grounded in the data.

In our Cycle 3 meeting, FBP1 emphasized that ethical leadership begins with self-awareness and values alignment. She shared, “I’m really learning that it starts with the self”, and reinforced that “you can’t be a systems thinker...until you know your own system”. This perspective supports the idea that intentional leadership must be rooted in personal clarity before extending outward. FBP1 highlighted the importance of values-based decision-making, asking, “What are the steps you take internally? To make sure you’re aligned with your values?” This inquiry reflected her belief that ethical leadership requires deliberate reflection and emotional awareness. She connected this emotional intelligence, referencing Brene Brown’s (2021) *Atlas of the Heart* and the power of “naming emotions” as a tool for

navigating leadership challenges. Authenticity emerged as a central theme. FBP1 asked directly, “Is authenticity one of your values?” and later shared “In my research... I wasn’t living authentically before, but my research is helping me to do so” (FBP1). She acknowledged the difficulty of leading authentically in environments that may not welcome vulnerability, noting, “Society doesn’t always welcome it... it’s a bit of a growing pain”(FBP1). She also encouraged leading by example through intentional practices. She reintroduced the concept of the “circle of control, influence, and concern”, advising to “spend time in what you can actually control, and not driving yourself crazy in the other areas.” We discussed the importance of releasing unnecessary burdens to maintain ethical clarity. Lastly, FBP1 affirmed the impact of my leadership journey, stating, “From day one, you’ve had growth and... confidence, clarity, and courage”, and acknowledged how those traits helped to navigate leadership challenges.

In our Cycle 3 meeting, FBP2 offered thoughtful insights into ethical leadership, emphasizing the importance of self-trust, emotional awareness, and values-based decision-making. She affirmed that ethical leadership begins with a strong internal foundation, stating, “If you’ve fully, fully 100% trust yourself, then you will trust yourself to be able to navigate whatever level of trust you’re navigating with other people” and that “whatever level of trust you’re navigating with other people... That’s external”. This framing positioned self-confidence as essential for navigating relational uncertainty in the workplace. FBP2 recognized my leadership as both ethical and authentic, particularly in a situation where I handled conflict between one of my direct reports and another manager. She observed, “You stayed authentic in this... you’re seated in your values” and described my actions as “authentic leadership in stepping into your power”. These reflections highlighted my intentionality in responding to vertical violence—managerial mistreatment of one of my team members, by another manager, and my commitment to protect my team and myself. The theme of leading by example was reinforced through FBP2’s acknowledgement of my influence on my workplace’s culture by stating that “Leadership practice

also has ripples”, and “You facilitated a conflict situation... and propelled her [referring to the manager] to try to make it right”. As FBP2 noted, through this example, my actions contributed to shaping a more ethical and emotionally aware environment. FBP2 affirmed how meditation, as a key practice, has helped support ethical leadership by stating that “your emotional reasoning and your emotional self-management has really... evolved”. She emphasized meditation as a tool for emotional regulation, helping me “sit with your values, and you do it with grace”, even in a complex and dynamic environment. She also observed a more objective lens in my reflections, explaining that my ability to “name it to tame it” fosters emotional clarity and supports ethical responses in high-pressure situations. FBP2 praised my emotional growth, because she saw that I was “able to read others more and more... in a way that helps your boundaries and protect yourself”.

My Cycle 3 meeting with FBP3 brought additional insight as she observed a meaningful shift in my leadership approach, attributing it in part to my meditation practice. She remarked that I was “...observing more. You were experiencing more” and that “It wasn’t happening to you. It was happening around you”, reflecting on an enhancement of self-trust and emotional regulation, foundational to ethical leadership. She connected this change to a reduction in self-blame and over-responsibility, saying, “...you weren’t blaming yourself as much... or taking on responsibility” and emphasized “That’s partially, I think, self-trust.” This clarity enables more intentional and ethically sound decisions.

This study also inspired FBP3 personally, as she shared, “I thought that was really cool. And it also encouraged me to meditate more, too.” Her response reflected how the positive outcomes of my research data, combined with my intention to lead by example, created a ripple effect that influenced her own practice. FBP3 acknowledged my growth and authenticity, stating, “Look at what you’ve learned about yourself! Through it. That’s everything,” and recognizing that my leadership role allowed

me to “initiate some of it, include some of it, and see results”. These reflections affirm that meditation has been a catalyst for intentional leadership, making it both ethically grounded and effective.

### ***Comparison of the Three Cycles***

My memos revealed clear progression across the three cycles. Cycle 1 reflected emotional instability, marked by anxiety, feelings of exclusion, perceived power struggles, and self-doubt. My journal reflections were reactive and driven by a need for validation. Whereas, in Cycle 2, I began to develop emotional regulation, self-trust, and mindfulness. Meditation and journaling brought clarity and deepened self-awareness, shifting my responses from reactive to intentional. By Cycle 3, I was protecting my energy, aligning my leadership with core values, and fostering trust through ethical, authentic actions. I embraced the transient nature of challenges and strengthened my ability to reframe situations with clarity and compassion. Overall, the data suggests a shift from stress and reactivity to a leadership style grounded in reflection, intuition, and intention. My growing self-confidence and trust in my inner guidance are evident in the *Reframing Leadership Moments Document* I’ve created and my list of Leading Authentically Leadership Reminders that help me stay grounded and true to myself.

### ***Artifacts: Photo Collage and Poem***

To explore the nuances of my personal growth, I created a collage as an artifact (see Appendix P). This visual representation alongside reflections on leadership and meditation revealed several key concepts. The photo of me with my backpack and the plant potted in a ceramic head symbolized my intention to embark on a journey of self-discovery and learning, representing intentionality. The tiny green leaves and the image of my garden evoked the idea that transformation is a gradual, reflective process, one that often requires a reframing of perspective. A picture of my family dog and scenes from nature highlighted the importance of rejuvenation and rest, underscoring my commitment to emotional awareness, boundary setting, and self-care. The white hydrangea signifies my openness to transparency,

my willingness to receive feedback, and my dedication to engaging authentically throughout the learning process. The school of fish conveys themes of abundance, hope, and interconnectedness, reflecting the spiritual connection cultivated through meditation and reinforcing my belief in collective growth. A photo of a puzzle pieces illustrates the need for systems thinking and analytical insight to navigate complexity, identify gaps, and act ethically for positive change. Finally, the central image of a tranquil beach evokes a sense of peaceful reflection, while the horizon symbolizes an ongoing journey, one filled with endless possibilities and continuous learning.

To further deepen my understanding of personal growth and the nuances of my journey, I created a second artifact—a poem (see Appendix Q). The poem reinforced the categories of stress and well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership.

The poem serves as a creative representation of the themes identified throughout the study, offering an alternative lens through which to examine personal growth and leadership development. The process of crafting the poem revealed how meditation and journaling had shaped my internal landscape. The language used throughout the poem pointed to recurring themes that aligned with the broader conceptual framework of the research. Stress and well-being emerged through imagery of energy preservation, boundary setting and the restorative power of nature, suggesting a growing capacity for emotional regulation and self-care. Emotional intelligence was reflected in lines that emphasized discernment, reflection, and the ability to navigate complexity with grace rather than impulsivity. Ethical leadership surfaced through expressions of authenticity, purpose, and responsible influence, underscoring a commitment to leading with integrity and compassion. The poem served as a creative representation of my experience and as a lens through which the core dimensions of the research—well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership—came into focus through a reflective and interconnected process.

Upon discussion, the feedback from my feedback participants on my artifacts, collage and poem, reinforced some core themes of my research. FBP1 described my collage as “very powerful” and said it “wraps up the whole journey of growth... And transformation, really”. She added, “You can see the confidence grow” which indicates how meditation and reflection have strengthened my self-trust. With FBP2 we discussed one of the biggest takeaways as being self-reflection and she noted that “Through self-reflection, you will be a lifelong learner”. Additionally, her insight on boundaries “By differentiating yourself, you have to draw where the self ends”, shows that clarity and emotional boundaries are essential to leading with integrity. Although the artifacts did not generate new data in my research, they were instrumental in solidifying my learning, bringing closure to the project, and artfully capturing my internal transformation.

Through the discussion and analysis, I have traced the progression of categories and subcategories across the study cycles and reflected on how my artifacts deepened this understanding. In the next section, I turn to the study conclusions, where I integrate these insights, and compare them to literature from Chapter 2, considering their significance in my leadership journey.

### **Study Conclusions**

The study generated rich, qualitative insights that addressed the central question and sub-questions. Guided by an action-oriented approach, the inquiry unfolded through iterative cycles that blended reflection, experimentation, and diverse knowledge-gathering methods. This evolving process enriched insight while establishing a foundation for continued growth in leadership practice. This study’s conclusions are:

1. Meditation has been a factor in reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being.
  - a. Meditation has enhanced the ability to navigate complexity and foster resilience through systems thinking, reframing, and presencing.

- b. Meditation helped cultivate stronger boundaries and a deeper commitment to self-care.
2. Meditation has contributed to greater emotional intelligence in both professional and personal settings.
  - a. Meditation fostered greater emotional insight and regulation, particularly through practices of presencing, self-awareness, and self-regulation.
  - b. Meditation improved relational and team dynamics by fostering collaboration and teamwork.
3. Meditation cultivated a deeper commitment to ethical leadership.
  - a. Meditation supported the growth of leadership rooted in ethics and core values, fostering authenticity, intentionality, and a commitment to leading by example.
4. Meditation and journaling worked in harmony, fostering clarity and reflection while strengthening connection to both inner experience and the external world, insights I actively applied within the workplace, which served as a valuable resource for growth.

Each conclusion is presented below and, where relevant, is accompanied by sub-conclusions.

These are further enriched through references to key findings, literature from Chapter 2, and my perspective as a researcher engaged in first-person, action-oriented inquiry within an organizational setting.

***Conclusion 1: Meditation Has Been a Factor in Reducing Stress and Enhancing Overall Well-Being***

Meditation has been a transformative force in reshaping my emotional landscape, significantly reducing stress and enhancing my overall well-being. Similar to the findings of Cheng (2016) and Khemraj et al. (2023), this study supports the view that meditation helps reduce stress and improves personal well-being and professional performance. Operating in a complex and dynamic environment,

I've experienced profound shifts in diminished self-doubt, increased self-worth, reduced feelings of exclusion, greater ease in navigating power dynamics, and lower anxiety. These changes have led to a marked improvement in my workplace well-being and stress levels.

At the outset of this research, my journal entries revealed the emotional toll of leadership. I described feeling "tired and edgy", found it "difficult to disconnect", noted that I "I felt hurt and old", "left out of the loop" and that I was "shrinking myself". Sharma et al. (2022) observed that workplace stress can manifest as insomnia, fatigue, and anxiety, ultimately compromising employee health and well-being. These reflections underscored the emotional strain, relational tension, and identity concerns inherent in my role. As the research progressed, I began to experience a steady reduction in anxiety, improved sleep, and a growing sense of contentment. My journaling captured this evolution with phrases like "better rested", "calm and connected", "more relaxed, curious, and thankful", "letting things be", and "I can do this". I also expressed a deepening sense of "connection to a higher power".

This internal shift was echoed in the observations of my feedback partners. The SME/FBP noted that I was "becoming more spiritually connected" and guided me in exploring how my inner conflict might stem from deeper emotional themes, specifically, "a fear of abandonment, inadequacy, and rejection". These insights resonated with my own experiences of self-doubt and anxiety. FBP2 described the process as "liberating and transformative", highlighting that I was "leaning into change", and learning to "separate the experience and depersonalize". This directly reflects my efforts to manage power dynamics and reduce emotional reactivity.

This reflection answers Subquestion 1, by offering my understanding and experience of meditation in both my personal life and leadership practice. Meditation has become a foundational tool for emotional regulation, spiritual connection, confidence and professional resilience. Personally, it has helped me move from a state of emotional exhaustion and self-doubt to one of calm, clarity, and inner

strength, as captured in my journaling. Professionally, it has enabled me to navigate complex power dynamics with greater ease, reduce anxiety, and foster a deeper sense of self-worth and inclusion. I found that I spoke up more, especially during difficult situations, and was less hesitant to share my views, whereas in the past, I would have remained silent or avoided the conversation entirely. The feedback from my participants further affirmed this transformation, highlighting my growing spiritual awareness and ability to depersonalize challenges, key shifts that reflect how meditation informs not just how I feel, but how I lead.

***Conclusion 1a: Meditation Has Enhanced the Ability to Navigate Complexity and Foster Resilience Through Systems Thinking, Reframing, and Presencing***

Meditation has catalyzed more conscious approaches with complexity, deepening my presence and systems awareness. Early journaling captured ego-centered concerns such as emotional strain, relational tension, social positioning, and identity. This reflected the internal noise generated by my role and my perception of it within complex organizational dynamics. As I progressed, feedback from FBP2 highlighted how I was beginning to recognize and influence systems through my “sphere of influence”, grounded in an “internal sphere of control”. This shift was further supported by my ability to engage rather than withdraw from interactions, suggesting a systems-oriented mindset that values relational interdependence. FBP3’s reflections on discernment and the choice to act or let go also reinforced the idea that leadership operates within a web of decisions, emotions, and consequences. These insights affirmed my capacity to influence the system not by controlling it, but by shifting how I show up within it.

Reframing emerged as a prominent theme early in the research, echoed by FBP1 who shared, “reframing was a big theme for me”. It offered a way to navigate ambiguity by re-examining assumptions and identifying leverage points to refocus with greater clarity and purpose (Chesley &

Wylson, 2016). This marked a transition from reactive, emotionally cluttered thinking to intentional, constructive interpretation of my experiences. This shift helped me move away from raw emotional expression to a deeper self-awareness. As a result, I was engaged in a more deliberate way, allowing for appropriate and constructive decision making and actions in complex leadership situations.

My journal entries began to reflect a growing ability to interpret challenges through a lens of clarity, emotional regulation, and spiritual connection. In conversation with FBP2, I shared that “reframing has been pretty big” and that I find it easier to “reframe situations quicker”. FBP2 referenced that meditative practice seemed to “soothe your nervous system so that you are better positioned to reframe” especially “from a spiritual perspective”. Reframing also resonated with FBP3, particularly in leadership moments that triggered me, where I stated, “I choose to respond with calm and confidence instead of reacting impulsively”. The micro-practice introduced at the end of Cycle 1—ground, pause, reframe—embodied this new approach, offering a practical tool to center myself and respond with intention. I found myself using the practice often, but one moment stands out. During an intense meeting focused on employee conduct, I grounded myself, took a deep breath, and felt a wave of calm before continuing. That pause gave me space to reset and reframe how I was internalizing the situation, which allowed me to respond appropriately, rather than reactively when questioned by the union representative. As Bolman and Deal (2021) noted, reframing is “a powerful tool for gaining clarity, regaining balance, generating new questions, and finding options that actually make a difference” (p. 23). This theme continued to shape my leadership, offering a pathway to navigate complexity with greater emotional agility and purpose.

Presencing also surfaced, reflecting my growing ability to be fully present with myself and others. Meditation facilitated a shift from ego-driven thought to a more compassionate, connected, and service-oriented mindset. This was echoed in my journaling which evolved from emotional turbulence to

a sense of groundedness and spiritual connection and that I was “acting compassionately with others and myself” (Cycle 1 journaling). FBP1’s observation that “my presence is impactful to others” resonated deeply, especially when paired with personal stories of simply being with others in moments of vulnerability. I recalled a moment where a staff member was having a stressful day and I listened. She had asked me to sit with her as my presence was helping her. This moment also illuminated that presencing can cultivate trust (Bailey et. al., 2022), so that people can share difficult moments with you.

These experiences underscored the quiet power of presence, of holding space for people without a need to fix or change anything. Together, these insights further supported that presencing is about mindfulness, embodying stillness, empathy, and attunement in leadership and life (Scharmer, 2009). As my research progressed, I noticed more instances of staff collaborating and approaching me to discuss difficult workplace situations and explore ways to improve them. They also began sharing their personal hardships that were affecting their ability to engage and perform at work. An example of having built trust, and of relying on my intuitive sense, occurred during a one-on-one meeting with a staff member. I had this growing sense she needed to tell me something, reinforced by my awareness of her body language and her reluctance for the meeting to end. I probed, and because of the trust we had established and the confidence I had developed, she felt safe enough to tell me about a health issue and a concern involving a coworker. This openness to improve and collaborate reminded me of how essential self-awareness and relational presence are for leading with clarity, compassion, and collaborative strength, qualities that meditation actively cultivates and reinforces (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022).

Another incident comes to mind involving confidentiality, an outdated process, and staff error. By grounding myself, pausing, and reframing the situation, I was able to make the most of it. I saw it as an opportunity to revisit and improve outdated procedures, increase efficiency and reducing the risk of

recurrence. It also presented an opportunity to have a constructive conversation with the employee, reinforcing expectations while giving space to hear their perspective. As I became more present and attuned, I noticed increased collaboration among staff, affirming meditation's impact on thoughtful decision-making and relational leadership. This observation illustrates the practical benefits of meditation in my leadership context, offering a direct response to my inquiry into its role in fostering composure and intentional decision-making during challenging moments.

Meditation helped me stay calm and composed during stressful situations by fostering emotional regulation, clarity, and presence. It enabled me to shift from reactive, ego-centered thinking to intentional, constructive responses, especially through practices like grounding, pausing, and reframing. This empowered me to navigate complex leadership challenges with greater self-awareness and compassion, engaging more relationally with others and reframing difficult moments as opportunities for thoughtful action. This directly responds to my primary question and Subquestion 2—What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?

***Conclusion 1b: Meditation Helped Cultivate Stronger Boundaries and a Deeper Commitment to Self-Care***

The research revealed a growing capacity to establish and honour personal boundaries, particularly through meditation and reframing practices. This shift from ego-centered thinking to intentionality helped me recognize when I was internalizing others' emotions or workplace dynamics unnecessarily. In discussion with FBP3, I shared that "setting boundaries is important", "allowing me to preserve my energy,... and avoid fueling unnecessary conflict" (Cycle 1 meeting). As mentioned earlier in the literature review, a lack of boundaries could lead to "emotional exhaustions, decreased self-esteem, and interpersonal relationship difficulties" (Chernata, 2024b, p. 60). My journaling reflected a growing

awareness of “understanding when to action and when to listen”. Personal boundaries helped me engage thoughtfully under external pressure and act in ways that align with my values and priorities (Chernata, 2024b).

FBP2 reinforced this when she observed my ability to “separate the experience and depersonalize”, and to “let it be without carrying it”, rather than “sweating something that is not yours to continue to carry or wear”. Personal boundaries prevent over-identifying with others’ emotions or actions (Chernata, 2024a). This insight affirmed the importance of discerning what is mine to hold and what I can release. FBP3 reinforced this boundary-setting mindset by emphasizing the power of discernment and the idea that “some things aren’t worthy of being held” (Cycle 1 meeting). Below is an example of an entry from my *Reframing Leadership Moments Document*. I labeled the sections “Leadership Moment” and “Reframed” to show the two stages of my process. On July 7, 2025, I wrote:

Leadership Moment- “Setting boundaries with peers when I’m at or close to my maximum capacity is important. Especially when they could potentially be asking me to do things that are outside my scope of work while posing flattery such—as you’re really good at this.”

Reframed- “I’m grateful that my work is valued and appreciated. To maintain healthy boundaries and relationships, and for my own well-being, I will set clear limits upfront, while staying mindful to contribute where my impact is most meaningful.”

These reflections, paired with the micro-practice of grounding, pausing and reframing, supported a more intentional approach to leadership, one that respects emotional limits and protects personal energy.

Meditation and journaling cultivated a deeper practice of self-care by promoting emotional regulation, spiritual connection, and mental clarity. The transition from emotional clutter to grounded awareness was evident in my post-meditation journaling, which reflected themes of embodied physical

awareness, emotional clarity, and positive reframing. I observed feeling “more relaxed, sleeping better, and generally feeling content” (Cycle 1 journaling), suggesting that meditation was soothing my nervous system and improving my overall well-being. Meditation helped me manage stress, reduce anxiety, and approach leadership with greater compassion, for myself and others. Boundaries and self-care directly addressed my primary and Subquestion 2—What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?

***Conclusion 2: Meditation Has Contributed to Greater Emotional Intelligence in Both Professional and Personal Settings***

Meditation significantly enhanced my overall emotional intelligence by fostering greater composure, clarity, and intentionality in both personal and professional settings. I became more grounded in moments of uncertainty, shifting from reactive to conscious responses, and began to embrace relational differences as opportunities for growth. With heightened emotional intelligence, I demonstrated greater self-control, remaining calm under pressure and navigating setbacks with greater ease (Aouani et al., 2024). I became more aware of how intense emotions can overshadow rational thought (Goleman, 1995), as reflected in my Cycle 2 journaling where I wrote to “not become overly reactive”. In my analytical memo for Cycle 2 I reflected that “meditation has helped reprogram my thought process in a positive way”. Feedback further highlighted my increased ability to influence without over-identifying, maintain emotional boundaries, and lead with authenticity. This was echoed in my journaling through reflections such as “not mine to fix”, and a desire of “living into my values”. On July 11, 2025, in my *Reframing Leadership Moments Document*, I noted:

Leadership Moment- “When personal matters come to light. How does one comprehend the incomprehensible and take it at face value without trying to solve the matter at hand.”

Reframed- “Comprehend the incomprehensible by letting it flow with grace by listening and sending love and compassion to those involved.”

This change supported a more value-aligned approach to leadership, helping me understand when to listen with empathy rather than act, especially in situations that called for presence, not solutions. These shifts supported a more value-aligned leadership approach, grounded in emotional regulation, self-awareness, and a deepened sense of connection and purpose.

***Conclusion 2a: Meditation Fostered Greater Emotional Insight and Regulation, Particularly Through Practices of Presencing, Self-Awareness, and Self Regulation***

Meditation revealed a deepening of emotional insight and regulation, helping me shift from a more reactive state to a more grounded and conscious response, particularly in moments of uncertainty. My journaling in Cycle 2 reflected this shift, noting the importance of “observe and listen”, “clarify my understanding”, and striving to “truly understand what is”, and the “true nature of things”. These reflections enabled me to better manage emotional triggers, reframe challenges with clarity and compassion, and maintain a sense of calm under pressure. Feedback from FBP1 and FBP2 emphasized the importance of recognizing emotional influence without assuming responsibilities for others’ feelings, highlighting the need to preserve emotional energy through boundaries. FBP2 described that meditation “seems like a cleansing, so that I am able to get a different perspective”, especially on days when “triggers and experiences ... weigh you down”. This process allowed me to release emotional weight and approach situations with renewed clarity. Enhanced emotional intelligence supported my ability to identify, comprehend, manage, and use emotions constructively (Nwagwu & Henry, 2025; Valosek et al., 2018). These insights underscored the importance of emotional regulation as a foundation for sustainable leadership, where clarity, resilience, and value alignment guide responses rather than emotional reactivity.

Within the broader theme of emotional regulation, self-awareness and self-regulation emerged as critical subthemes. Meditation fostered a stronger connection to my intuition and helped me become more aware of my internal state. As Miller (2000) noted, meditation creates space for inner wisdom and reflective processing. This was affirmed in Cycle 2's journaling, where I wrote: "I try not to let that disrupt my energy flow", and "time to recharge", reflected that sometimes we need to intuitively assess situations. Furthermore, on July 12, 2025, I wrote in my *Reframing Leadership Moments Document*:

Leadership Moment- "Trying to understand the root cause of conflict especially when there are multiple parties involved can be challenging."

Reframed- "Leadership in complex moments of conflict, requires holding space by listening deeply, using intuition to foster resolution through empathy, clarity, and grace. This is an opportunity to build trust not by managing people but by trying to understand them."

As my awareness deepened, I became increasingly conscious of how my behaviour impacted others. I learned to pause, reflect, and respond with intention. Journaling phrases from Cycle 2 such as "I wonder how this may impact them", "how much do you do for others", and "sharing with those around me" illustrates this shift.

FBP3 noted my progress in integrating these insights into my leadership practice, observing that I appeared "more comfortable with yourself, more settled and grounded". She also highlighted my ability to reframe stressful situations as "just information", which allowed me to choose how to respond rather than react impulsively. In a discussion with FBP2 about self-awareness, she remarked, "you're just not letting things get to you so much", and reminded me that "you never know what people are dealing with". We also explored self-regulation, reflecting on "our own reactivity, and whether we moderate and temper our thoughts, and how much we identify with our thoughts... as truths (FBP2)." This reminded me of how meditation can help me shift away from ingrained reactive behaviours (Reddy &

Srinivasan, 2015), enabling me to embrace the world (Brown & Ryan, 2003), consider diverse perspectives, and make holistic decisions (Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015).

FBP2 further affirmed that “your intentions are being realized” and that I had been “steadfast about introspection for your own self-propulsion”. This growing awareness was further reflected in my journaling, where I documented a shift toward positive self-talk, emotional clarity, and confidence in navigating interpersonal dynamics. Examples from my Cycle 2 journaling include: “I will be able to handle that with grace”, “trust the process”, “feeling more sure”, and “I can handle situations”. This reflects a transformative shift towards intentional leadership grounded in emotional awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal empathy. With the ability to stay calmer and hold focus through meditation (Gethin, 2011), I am empowered to critically evaluate my assumptions and make effective decisions, enriching my leadership praxis (Tenschert et al., 2024).

Conclusion 2 and 2a answers the primary question and Subquestion 2 of this study—What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions? Beyond its impact on individual composure and decision-making, meditation also played a pivotal role in enhancing relational and team dynamics.

***Conclusion 2b: Meditation Improved Relational and Team Dynamics by Fostering Collaboration and Teamwork***

The research illuminated the role of emotional intelligence in navigating relational and team dynamics. This was affirmed in my Cycle 2 journaling, where I reflected on team interactions with entries such as: we are “working well together”, “everyone is pulling their weight”, “grow team’s experience”, and “feeling pretty grateful for my team”. Meditation supported a more authentic and embodied presence, enhancing my ability to engage with others in a grounded and compassionate way. Emotional intelligence fosters communication skills, empathy, and a strengthened ability to understand others’

emotional needs (Goleman, 1995; Sadri, 2012; Nwagwu & Henry, 2025; Shrestha et al., 2025). I began to embrace relational differences as opportunities for growth as reflected in my journaling entries like “being of service”, “put my best foot forward”, “living authentically and in harmony”, “living into your values” and “send good vibration her way”. Feedback from FBP1 and FBP2 emphasized the importance of relational awareness, noting that effective leadership involves understanding how one’s presence and energy influence team dynamics. In a conversation I had with FBP1, we discussed sphere of influence, and FBP1 highlighted the importance of “empowering others while freeing myself”, and considering “how does it align with my priorities” when asked to take on something new.

FBP3’s reflections on ethical contrasts within the team further reinforced the need for emotional boundaries and integrity in relational interactions. In a conversation on generational gaps, FBP3 shared that certain ideologies have “been programmed into us a certain amount” though perhaps “not as much as it would be into the next generation”. On July 13, 2025, I wrote in *my Reframing Leadership Moments Document*:

Leadership Moment- “Navigating the ebb and flow of life while leading with authenticity and maintaining harmony with others can be a delicate balancing act but ever so challenging in today’s climate, where political, economic, and social despair weigh heavily on many.”

Reframed- “This is an opportunity to lead with authenticity, embrace life’s flow, and rise with grace through every challenge as best as I can, so as a team we can grow together through every experience.”

These insights helped me recognize how emotional regulation and authenticity contribute to a healthier team environment, one where mutual respect and shared growth are prioritized. They also reinforced the importance of shifting from an individualistic mindset to a collective one. To navigate complex environments, leaders should reflect on their mental models and adopt a broader mindset (Donaldson-

Feilder et al., 2019). In a team, it's not about "I", but about "we", a unified approach that strengthens collaboration, resilience, and purpose.

Collaboration and teamwork were strengthened through increased emotional intelligence. Meditation and journaling helped me maintain a positive outlook and manage stress, which in turn created a more supportive and motivating atmosphere for my team. Emotional intelligence improves interpersonal skills essential for collaboration, cooperation, and for team unity (Chies et al., 2025). In Cycle 2, I wrote that I was experiencing "lower levels of frustration", feeling "calm, at ease, content", and "focused around boundaries".

FBP2 noted that while I created safe spaces for others, I also learned to protect my own energy and avoid becoming "an emotional dumping ground". My analytical memo for Cycle 2 reflected that the positive shifts in my mindset and behaviour had a ripple effect, motivating others to engage more fully and take initiative: "The changes I've made have had a positive outcome with staff and other coworkers", and "positive energy seems to radiate and motivate others to take on more and do well". I noticed team members stepping up more to help one another out, fill in gaps, and get the work done. Despite working in times of constant change, the team pivoted and optimized results of the current situation. Teams with greater emotional intelligence are more creative, collaborative, and effective because they support one another to navigate complex and dynamic situations (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2019). This suggests that emotional intelligence, cultivated through meditation, enhanced my individual leadership capacity and contributed to more effective and collaborative team dynamics.

Conclusion 2b answers the primary question and Subquestion 3 of this study—How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity? As meditation helped me align with my core values and lead with authenticity, it also deepened my commitment to ethical leadership, reinforcing integrity as a guiding principle.

***Conclusion 3: Meditation Cultivated a Deeper Commitment to Ethical Leadership***

The research highlighted the deepening role of ethical leadership in my practice, through meditation. Experiences with ageism and power dynamics in the workplace surfaced ethical challenges, prompting reflection on how leadership must be grounded in integrity and fairness. I wrote that “ageism in the workplace seems more relevant than ever” and emphasized the importance of creating opportunities “that help me live within my values”. My Cycle 3 journaling described my desire to “live a more organic and fulfilling life”, “fulfill and serve the heart”, “brighten someone’s day just a little”, “feel good as a human and contributing to the organization”, and “contributed to society in a positive way”. Aligning with core values fostered a greater sense of calm, inner harmony, and emotional regulation. I noted that “content is how I feel”, “good leadership is to show self-health”, and that I often “escape into nature to foster connection to self” and to unwind.

Conversations with the SME/FBP and FBP1 reinforced that ethical leadership begins with self-awareness and clarity of values. FBP1 emphasized, “you can’t be a systems thinker... until you know your system”, underscoring that ethical leadership is an inside-out process. Avolio and Wernsing (2008) described authentic leadership as “inner-guided yet other-focused” (p. 148), a values-driven approach committed to the “betterment of humankind” (p. 148). Similarly, FBP2 framed ethical leadership as rooted in self-trust, stating, “If you’ve fully 100% trust yourself...then you will trust yourself to navigate whatever level of trust you’re navigating with other people.” While self-confidence has been a vital component of ethical leadership in my journey, meditation also fostered authenticity, intentionality, and a commitment to leading by example.

***Conclusion 3a: Meditation Supported the Growth of Leadership Rooted in Ethics and Core Values, Fostering Authenticity, Intentionality, and a Commitment to Leading by Example***

Values-based leadership emerged as a central theme, with meditation supporting my ability to declutter thoughts and align decisions with personal values. Journaling revealed increased confidence and clarity, while reflections on workplace challenges, such as vertical violence, where another manager exerted intimidation on a staff member on my team, highlighted the importance of how power is used to influence others. FBP2 recognized my response to this situation as “authentic leadership in stepping into your power”, affirming that my actions were grounded in ethical intent. She was referring to how I managed a situation involving an abuse of power by a manager from another team toward a member of my team. In the past, I may have procrastinated addressing such a difficult situation, but meditation enabled me to respond with calm and confidence. I noted that I was “feeling more confident in my choices and in the way I handle situations”.

In my Cycle 3 Analytical Memo, I noted, “my leadership growth is contributing to the normative culture of the workplace... I countered that situation... [although the other manager] caused ripples through my team, my leadership had counter ripples”, stabilizing the situation before it escalated further. This response functioned similarly to a balancing feedback loop, where I intervened, to restore equilibrium to the system, and ensure operations continued as they should (Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015). FBP1 appropriately inquired, “What are the steps you take internally to make sure you’re aligned with your values?”, reinforcing the importance of deliberate reflection in ethical decision-making. Kubicek (2012) emphasized that intentionality serves as a catalyst for growth, beginning with self and expanding organization wide. These insights affirmed that values-based leadership is not only about what we do, but how intentionally we choose to do it.

Meditation helped me reconnect with my authentic-self, and journaling captured this shift with entries focused on letting go, protecting energy, and living in alignment with my values. I specifically noted in my journal that “my intention–authenticity and emitting good energy”. The vertical abuse situation mentioned earlier became a moment of authentic leadership, where I acted out of integrity, “which involves acting true to our true core beliefs and values” (Doornich & Lynch, 2024, p. 9), and was “doing what is good for others while being guided by my inner conscience” (Avolio & Wernsing, 2008, p. 150). In discussion, FBP1 asked, “Is authenticity one of your values?” and shared her own journey of learning to lead authentically. She acknowledged the societal discomfort with vulnerability, describing it as “a bit of a growing pain”. FBP3 observed that I was “observing more... experiencing more”, reflecting a shift from reactive to intentional leadership. These reflections affirmed that authenticity is not static, it requires ongoing emotional awareness and the courage to lead from within (Brown, 2018).

Leading by example emerged as a powerful outcome for this study. Leaders serve as role models by exemplifying behaviours for others to follow (Barua et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). My actions in navigating conflict and protecting team dynamics were recognized by FBP2, who noted that “leadership practice also has ripples”. She observed that my approach in a particular situation “propelled the manager to try to make it right”, demonstrating how ethical and emotionally aware leadership can influence others. FBP3 echoed this ripple effect, sharing that this study inspired her to meditate more and reflect on her own leadership. She affirmed, “Look at what you’ve learned about yourself! Through it. That’s everything.” These moments illustrate how intentional leadership, grounded in authenticity and emotional clarity, can model ethical behaviour and inspire growth in others. Meditation has helped me cultivate attention, awareness and authenticity (Doornich & Lynch, 2024), inspire growth and holds potential to foster values-driven organizations.

Conclusion 3 and 3a address my primary research question as well as Subquestion 2 and 3— What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions? and How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity? Next, I will discuss how meditation and journaling worked together to foster clarity in this research.

***Conclusion 4: Meditation and Journaling Worked in Harmony, Fostering Clarity and Reflection, and Strengthening Connection to Both Inner Experience and External World***

Throughout this research, meditation and journaling worked in harmony to cultivate emotional clarity, deepen reflective practice, and strengthen my connection to both my inner experience and the external world, specifically within my workplace and as a leader. Meditation created space for stillness, allowing me to observe my thoughts, emotions, and behavioural patterns in a safe, nonjudgmental way. It can also help leaders align ambition with purposeful and effective actions, enhancing both clarity and impact (Gifford et al., 2014). Journaling has served as a bridge between insight and action, helping me process experiences, track growth (Coghlan, 2019), and share meaningful reflections with my feedback participants. Journaling fostered a heightened sense of mindfulness, encouraged present-moment awareness, and offered a nonjudgmental environment for introspection (Crawford et al., 2021). Together, these practices supported my journey and enhanced my ability to interpret and make sense of the data collected.

I was grateful to have my SME/FBP develop personalized meditation recordings for each cycle, which were tailored to the specific themes emerging and the emotions underpinning my journey, enhancing the relevance of each session. At the same time, I recognized the value of widely available meditation apps as convenient and accessible resources that offer flexibility and variety, especially when personalized guidance is not available. Together, these tools supported a consistent mindfulness

practice and deepened my engagement with the reflective process. Meditation and journaling proved to be transformative tools in exploring—How meditation might enrich leadership praxis? This reflection forms the basis of Conclusion 4, which addresses Subquestion 4 of the research questions.

These conclusions demonstrate how meditation became a central practice in my leadership learning. It reduced stress and strengthened well-being, enhanced resilience, emotional intelligence, and relational awareness, and fostered a more profound commitment to leading with authenticity and intentionality. While these conclusions highlight the significant contributions of meditation in answering this study's questions, it is important that I acknowledge the scope and limitations of the research. The following section outlines these boundaries, clarifying areas where further attention is warranted.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

The scope of this research centers on exploring how meditation can enrich leadership praxis by fostering well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership. It considers meditation both as a wellness tool and a reflective practice that strengthens a leader's ability to align values with behaviour, navigate complexity, and respond with clarity and compassion. The study draws on qualitative insights, including personal experiences, journaling, and cycles of reflection and action, to examine how meditation supported the integration of thought and action in leadership contexts.

However, the research is not without limitations. The subjective nature of meditation means its impact can vary across individuals, making broad generalization challenging. In conducting this study, I acknowledge that my sample is small and homogenous, which may limit its generalizability of the findings to more diverse leadership populations. The timeframe of the research may also present constraints, as leadership development through meditation tends to unfold gradually for some and may not be fully captured in a short-term study. I've noted that sustained practice is essential for meditation to be effective, yet some leaders may discontinue or struggle to maintain it over time. Furthermore,

other developmental influences, such as coaching, therapy, or other professional training, may intersect with meditation, making it difficult to isolate its specific contributions to leadership growth. Additionally, I acknowledge the possibility of confirmation bias in this study, since my belief in meditation's positive impact could have affected the interpretation of data, resulting in an emphasis on favorable findings while minimizing contradictory perspectives.

Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into how meditation can strengthen core leadership capacities. By fostering well-being, enhancing emotional intelligence, and grounding ethical leadership, meditation emerges as a practice that enables leaders to integrate reflection with purposeful action. The following chapter builds on these insights by discussing the inquiry's implications and offering recommendations focused on meditation, journaling, grounding, and reframing.

### Chapter 5: Recommendations and Implications

Having established the inquiry findings and conclusions, this final chapter addresses the recommendations and implications, synthesizing the work undertaken to date. This includes personal implications, implications for future inquiry, and thesis summary and conclusion.

This inquiry set aimed to explore the primary question, “How might meditation enrich my leadership praxis?” The subquestions that were used to guide this inquiry were:

1. How do I currently understand and experience meditation in my personal life and leadership practice?
2. What role might meditation play in promoting calm and composure during stressful situations, empowering me to make thoughtful and effective decisions?
3. How might meditation help me align with my core values in my personal life and in leadership, fostering authenticity?
4. What tools, resources, and opportunities are available to assist with this process?

This first-person qualitative inquiry employed a collaborative, action-oriented design that integrated recorded meditation, journaling, reflective dialogue with feedback participants and a subject matter expert, as well as creative artifacts—poem and collage. Each cycle introduced purposeful changes through distinct meditation, selected in consultation with the SME to guide the next stage of inquiry: Cycle 1 cultivated self-love, Cycle 2 shifted toward self-trust, and Cycle 3 focused on authentic-self. Additional actions taken include the creation of a *Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments* (see Appendix N) during Cycle 2, and in Cycle 3 I maintained a list of guidelines for navigating the corporate world while remaining aligned with my values and leading authentically (see Appendix O:

*Daily Reminders of Authentic Leadership*). These dynamic inquiry cycles and practices formed the foundation for the study recommendations, which extend the central question “How might meditation enrich leadership praxis?”

### **Study Recommendations**

Synthesizing the insights from the inquiry cycles, the following recommendations translate the study’s findings and conclusions into practical and actionable guidance. They are intended to support leaders’ well-being, strengthen emotional intelligence, and uphold ethical leadership. This inquiry’s recommendations are:

Recommendation 1: Adopt meditation and journaling as a regular practice.

Recommendation 2: Assume responsibility for maintaining your well-being.

Recommendation 3: Seek to reframe difficult situations as opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Practice presencing to cultivate empathy and connection.

Recommendation 5: Consider a centering practice in cultivating leadership moments.

Recommendation 6: Reflect on values to lead with authenticity and intentionality.

The following recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions presented in Chapter 4.

#### ***Recommendation 1: Adopt Meditation and Journaling as a Regular Practice***

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, meditation and journaling were central to the emergence of key themes across the study cycles. Journaling provided the raw material from which words and phrases were synthesized into recurring patterns, while meditation created the reflective space that allowed for self-trust, confidence, examination of values, and leadership insights to surface. These practices helped me make sense of my experiences, enabling me to reframe situations in a positive way. The literature reinforces this finding by framing meditation as a structured practice that quiets the mind and deepens awareness of self and others (Behan, 2020). Laureys (2021) further likens meditation to exercise, noting

that just as physical fitness requires varied forms and levels of practice, mental fitness can be sustained through different types of meditation. Like physical fitness, meditation should be practiced consistently to realize its benefits, and the diversity of approaches may allow individuals to find a form that works for them.

At its most foundational stage, meditation cultivates awareness “of our emotions, sensations, and thoughts” (Laureys, 2021, p. 34), a capacity directly relevant to leadership development. Research also highlights meditation’s role in mitigating stress and enhancing well-being in organizational contexts (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010; Sharma et al., 2022), while fostering empathy, emotional self-awareness, and resonance in leadership relationships (Aouani et al., 2024; Boyatzis & McKee, 2006; Cheng, 2016). These benefits extend to improved communication, strategic clarity, and resilience across individual and team levels (Barua et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022; Urrila, 2022).

Taken together, both the study findings and the literature underscore the value of meditation and journaling as practices that sustain mental fitness, reduce stress, and strengthen relational capacity. Based on this evidence, I recommend adopting meditation and journaling as regular practices to enrich leadership praxis and support resilience in complex organizational environments. Importantly, following the completion of this study, I have continued these practices and experienced their benefits firsthand, further affirming their relevance to ongoing leadership development.

***Recommendation 2: Assume Responsibility for Maintaining Your Well-Being***

This study revealed that sustaining personal well-being proved essential for clarifying values and strengthening self-trust, because it created the space to reflect on what truly mattered. It also reinforced confidence in navigating challenges with integrity, and communication of boundaries that protected my energy and focus. These practices enhanced my leadership praxis and contributed to

healthier organizational dynamics. My reflections showed that when I assumed responsibility for my own well-being, I was better able to navigate challenges with confidence and clarity, which in turn supported healthier relational dynamics.

A key aspect of this responsibility involved establishing boundaries, which protected my time, energy, and focus. These boundaries not only safeguarded my personal well-being but also reinforced my capacity to lead with integrity and balance. The literature reinforces this finding, noting that occupational stress is real, making it difficult for some leaders to cope (Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010). Prolonged exposure to stress can also impair job performance and undermine organizational outcomes (Mehta & Patel, 2023). Research further demonstrates that excessive workplace stress manifests in insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, and high blood pressure, compromising both individual health and organizational effectiveness (Sharma et al., 2022). Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping these conditions, as their behaviours influence collective stress and relational capacity within teams (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008; Yao et al., 2014).

Mindful leadership practices, including meditation, have been shown to mitigate stress, foster emotional balance, and enhance workplace relationships (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Reb et al., 2019). By assuming responsibility from maintaining well-being and setting clear boundaries, leaders protect their own health and model resilience, empathy, and relational attunement, thereby strengthening organizational cohesion and performance. This is consistent with Selvi and Thangarajathi's (2010) observation that occupational stress undermines leaders' ability to cope, and that unmanaged stress manifests in fatigue, anxiety, and high blood pressure (Sharma et al., 2022), compromising both individual and organizational effectiveness (Mehta & Patel, 2023).

Leaders shape workplace climates (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008; Yao et al., 2014), meaning that when they model healthy boundaries and self-care, they foster collective resilience and relational

capacity. Mindful leadership practices, such as meditation, have been shown to reduce stress and strengthen workplace relationships (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Reb et al., 2019). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) also argue that being “awake, aware, and attentive to self, others, and the environment is key to effective leadership” (p. 143). Overall, these concepts affirm that leaders who prioritize their well-being sustain their own health and cultivate trust, psychological safety, and ethical clarity, thereby enhancing leadership praxis and organizational outcomes. Since completing this study, I have sustained these practices and found that they continue to ground me and strengthen my confidence, reinforcing their value for ongoing leadership development.

***Recommendation 3: Seek to Reframe Difficult Situations as Opportunities***

Reframing difficult situations was a recurring theme in my reflections, allowing me to shift perspective and uncover growth opportunities even in moments of challenge. This practice helped me make sense of complex experiences, reduce the weight of adversity, and approach problems with renewed confidence and creativity. By reframing, I was able to transform setbacks into learning moments, which strengthened my resilience and clarified my leadership praxis. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing that leaders who adopt reframing strategies are better equipped to manage stress, foster adaptability, and maintain relational capacity in uncertain environments. Bolman and Deal (2021) described reframing as “a powerful tool for gaining clarity, regaining balance, generating new questions, and finding options that actually make a difference” (p. 23). Garg et al. (2022) and Sharma et al. (2022) highlighted its role as a coping strategy that alleviates stress and uncovers new possibilities. Catanzano et al. (2023) further identified that recognizing negative thought patterns can create fresh space for perspective and insight, reinforcing the value of reframing in leadership practice.

In complex environments, mindful leaders have the capacity to reframe and leverage ambiguity during organizational change, re-examining assumptions, embracing possibility, and identifying leverage

points to refocus their approach with greater clarity and purpose (Chesley & Wylson, 2016). Reframing is also closely tied to resilience, which Wong-Parodi et al. (2015) defines as “a trait reflecting a general ability to master challenges” (p. 1). Developing this ability enables leaders to face perceived workplace threats with confidence, strengthening their capacity to cope effectively and to guide change management (Kantor et al., 2020; Wong-Parodi et al., 2015).

Meditation further supports reframing by cultivating gratitude and hope (Strohmaier et al., 2022), quieting mental chatter, and increasing awareness of habitual thought patterns (Behan, 2020; Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010). This contemplative shift allows leaders to respond to complexity with clarity, calm, and a refreshed lens for decision-making. In this way, reframing becomes not only a cognitive strategy but a core element of embodied leadership practice, empowering leaders to show up with confidence, clarity, and resilience. Continuing to use reframing beyond this study has enabled me to approach challenges with perspective and creativity, helping me remain grounded in my leadership praxis and strengthening my ability to guide others through organizational complexity.

***Recommendation 4: Practice Presencing to Cultivate Empathy and Connection***

This study revealed that cultivating presence was essential for deepening empathy and strengthening authentic connection in leadership praxis. By slowing down, listening attentively and remaining open to others’ experiences, I was able to foster trust and relational attunement, even in moments of organizational uncertainty. Presencing helped me move beyond self-focus to recognize the interconnectedness with teams and systems, which supported healthier collaboration and reinforced my confidence in leading with compassion and clarity. This practice not only grounded me personally but also created conditions where colleagues felt more engaged, valued, and aligned with shared purpose.

The literature reinforces these insights. Presencing is described as an intangible yet powerful feeling, rooted in service and a desire to support others, with the capacity to foster trust (Bailey et al.,

2022). To be fully present involves slowing down with intention, staying open to another's experience, and continually recognizing the interconnectedness we share (Zerwekh, 1997). This practice invites leaders to align with what is emerging by shifting perspective from self to system or source, adapting to the needs of the whole (Gunnlaugson, 2025; Scharmer, 2009). Kouzes and Posner (2017) emphasized that envisioning the future requires "paying attention to the little things that are going on all around you and being able to recognize patterns that point to the future" (p. 103). From this deeper sense of knowing, responses arise that are authentic and aligned with what is truly needed (Scharmer, 2009).

Leaders who practice presencing can cultivate trust, encouraging followers to engage more willingly and creating alignment that fosters a collaborative work environment (Bailey et al., 2022). In preparing for the emergent future, presencing offers emotional steadiness, shared purpose, and strategic clarity (Scharmer, 2009). Importantly, presencing begins with a leader's commitment to self-awareness and reflective practice, which enables authentic connection and transformational change (Scharmer, 2009). Meditation provides a practical means to deepen this self-awareness and embody relational presence, equipping leaders to lead with clarity, compassion, and collaborative strength (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022).

Overall, practicing presencing cultivates empathy and connection, strengthens trust, and supports organizational resilience. Within my leadership praxis, it has helped me remain grounded, foster authentic relationships, and guide others with stability and purpose.

***Recommendation 5: Consider a Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments***

This study highlighted the value of a centering practice for cultivating leadership moments, which I developed and continue using as a micro practice. This practice involved grounding myself by feeling my feet rooted and embedded in the earth, pausing to take a deep breath into my belly and slowly releasing, and reframing by asking myself: This is not a threat; it is calling me forward. It is

information. What does this moment require of me? Through this process, I was able to regulate my stress, restore clarity, and respond in a more intentional way. It provided a way to remain calm and grounded in challenging situations, strengthening my confidence and reinforcing my leadership praxis.

The literature supports the importance of such practices. Stress, when left unaddressed, can compromise emotional health, disrupt performance, and strain relational dynamics within organizations (Valosek et al., 2018). Meditation, as a mindfulness-based intervention, helps mitigate these effects by improving communication (Chen et al., 2022), supporting strategic alignment (Barua et al., 2019), and strengthening performance across individual, team, and systemic levels (Urrila, 2022). Yet, in leadership moments when meditation is not possible, a micro practice can provide immediate clarity and calm. Like meditation, which cultivates emotional balance and self-awareness and fosters responses that are reflective rather than reactive (Behan, 2020; Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010), a micro practice can be applied in real time.

Overall, I have found that my centering practice continues to equip me to pause, regulate, and reframe during complex, intense moments. By cultivating calm, clarity, and intentional focus, leaders can strengthen resilience, embody empathy, and guide actions with authenticity. Continuing to use my centering practice has helped me to remain grounded in leadership moments, strengthening my ability to respond with clarity and composure. As a leader, this practice sustains my well-being and enhances my capacity to guide others with confidence, reinforcing its value as a practical tool for fostering healthier organizational dynamics.

***Recommendation 6: Reflect on Values to Lead With Authenticity and Intentionality***

Revisiting my values was central to leading with authenticity and intentionality. By pausing to reflect on my values, I gained the clarity needed to respond with intentionality and purpose. Knowing what's important to me most in leadership, helped guide my decisions, ensuring that my actions aligned

with integrity, further strengthening my leadership praxis. This process helped me navigate complex organizational dynamics with greater confidence and ease. I ensured my choices aligned with both personal values and the collective organizational good, while also making it easier to select language that effectively articulated those choices to others. In practice, reflecting on values created space for intentional leadership, where decisions were rooted in clarity, empathy, and ethical awareness rather than external pressures.

The literature reinforces this perspective, noting that authentic leadership unfolds as an intentional, lived and evolving journey, rooted in self-awareness and values-based action (Maak & Pless, 2006), and shaped through the conscious interplay between individuals and the collective systems (Rebek, 2025). Avolio and Wernsing (2008) describe authentic leadership as “inner-guided yet other focused” (p. 148), committed to the betterment of humankind and the pursuit of collective well-being. Similarly, Kubicek (2012) highlights intentionality as a catalyst for growth, beginning with individuals and expanding across the organization, cultivating a purpose-driven culture capable of achieving meaningful and sustainable goals. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) further argue “awake, aware, and attentive to self, others, and the environment is key to effective leadership” (p. 143), highlighting how engaging with values strengthens relational awareness and deepens authentic connection.

The study affirmed that reflection on values equips leaders to act with authenticity, integrity, and intentionality. This practice strengthens trust, and provides ethical clarity, while modeling a leadership approach that inspires collective resilience and alignment. Continuing to reflect on values has helped me remain grounded in my leadership praxis, ensuring that my actions are both ethical and purposeful in service of healthier organizational dynamics.

These recommendations, beyond informing organizational dynamics, also carry profound personal meaning by shaping how I understand and enact my leadership practice. They reinforce the

importance of well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical responsibility in my daily decision-making and interactions as a leader. The next section outlines the personal implications this study has had on my leadership.

### **Personal Implications**

The following section discusses the impact of this study on my leadership praxis. I describe the six recommendations that I have implemented, reflect on systemic impacts that have emerged, and consider how these recommendations have enriched my leadership praxis. This section also highlights how these practices may inform and inspire the development of leadership praxis in others.

The six recommendations I practice that were inspired by this study, have revealed and enacted profound personal implications for my leadership praxis. The inquiry has affirmed the significance of its core categories—well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership—along with their subcategories: navigating complexity and cultivating resilience; establishing boundaries and practicing self-care; developing emotional insight and regulation; strengthening relational and team dynamics; and embodying ethics and values-based leadership. These categories provide a framework for understanding how leadership principles can be enacted in practice. Building on this foundation, the six recommendations—adopting meditation and journaling; assuming responsibility for well-being; reframing difficult situations; practicing presencing; considering centering practices in cultivating leadership moments; and reflecting on values—translate these categories into tangible actions that shaped my leadership praxis.

First, adopting meditation and journaling as regular practices has grounded me in self-awareness, enabling clarity and resilience in the face of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational challenges. Meditation brought me peace and calm, deepened my connection to self and to the world around me (Behan, 2020), and opened a sense of connection to something greater than myself, leaving

me feeling supported by a spiritual realm. Journaling, in turn, allowed me to capture my raw emotions and reflect on them, helping me see the bigger picture and recognize how I may be contributing to a situation in either positive or negative ways. It fostered systems thinking, enabling me to see my role within the larger system and recognize interdependencies (Senge, 2006; Stroh, 2015). This reflection helped me identify patterns, observe shifts, and understand how actions and collaboration contribute to meaningful change (Stroh, 2015).

Based on this study, I suggest a customized meditation program for beginners, which proved beneficial when delivered through a guided recording created by my SME. Moving forward, I plan to use a meditation app to introduce greater variety and tailor my practice to my daily needs. In addition, journaling provided space to express my thoughts and emotions while documenting my learnings from specific events (Coghlan, 2019). In combination, these practices created a powerful synergy—meditation cultivated awareness and calm, while journaling helped transform this awareness into insight for action. Together, they strengthen my leadership praxis by cultivating greater self-awareness, intentionality, and resilience, and by supporting my overall well-being in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Second, assuming responsibility for my well-being has reinforced the importance of self-care in my leadership, ensuring that I can sustain the energy needed to perform effectively while safeguarding my health. Chernata (2024a) emphasized how establishing healthy boundaries can be a vital practice for sustaining resilience, supporting well-being, and navigating interpersonal dynamics with clarity and care, particularly in complex and unpredictable organizational climates. In practice, this has meant implementing clear boundaries, recognizing what is mine to hold as a leader, and releasing what is not.

Understanding personal boundaries also clarifies spheres of influence and prevents over-identifying with others' emotions or actions (Chernata, 2024a). This discernment has helped me avoid unnecessary burdens and remain focused on the responsibilities that truly require my attention. Equally

important has been knowing when to step back, take a break, and seek replenishment in nature. Time outdoors provides renewal, perspective, and balance, enabling me to return to my leadership praxis with greater clarity, and resilience. By maintaining boundaries and replenishing my energy, I contribute to a healthier organizational climate where resilience and clarity are modeled for others.

Third, learning to reframe difficult situations as opportunities has shifted my perspective from stress and resistance toward growth and possibility, allowing me to lead with greater optimism and adaptability. This practice has helped me approach challenges not as obstacles to be endured but as occasions for learning and innovation (Garg et al., 2022). Additionally, it has provided me hope in times of despair. By consciously reframing, I cultivated resilience and modeled a constructive mindset for those I lead. This seemed to foster a culture of openness and problem-solving within the organization. Leaders who embrace reframing are better equipped to navigate complexity and uncertainty, as they transform setbacks into sources of insight and renewal (Chesley & Wylson, 2016). In my own praxis, this has meant pausing to ask what a difficult moment might be teaching me, and how it can strengthen both my leadership and the collective. Ultimately, reframing has become a vital tool for sustaining optimism, adaptability, and foster organizational resilience.

Fourth, practicing presencing to cultivate empathy and connection deepened my relational awareness. By being fully present, a mental state enhanced through meditation practice, I cultivated trust, encouraging my team and others to engage more willingly (Bailey et al., 2022). Presencing required me to suspend distractions and judgments so that I could engage authentically with others, actively listen, observe body language, and seek to understand the deeper intention behind the discussion. It fostered a deeper sense of knowing, rooted to the heart of the matter, enabling authentic responses that are aligned with what is truly needed (Scharmer, 2009).

This practice helped me recognize subtle relational dynamics, respond with greater sensitivity, and create space for meaningful and sometimes difficult conversations. I now have greater awareness in my one-on-one meetings with staff, in team discussion, and across departmental meetings. What I have learned through this research remains front of mind and has permanently shaped how I move forward. In moments of tension or uncertainty, presencing allowed me to remain grounded, connect meaningfully, and model openness, which encouraged collaboration and trust across my team and the organization. Presencing became a central element of my leadership praxis, demonstrating how empathy and authentic connection directly shaped the way I led and influenced organizational resilience.

Fifth, a centering practice in cultivating leadership moments helped me pause and respond with intentionality rather than react impulsively. This practice ensured that my decisions were grounded in my values and aligned with both personal integrity and with the broader good of the organization. My micro-practice for centering during intense moments involved imagining my feet firmly rooted in the earth, pausing to take a deep breath into my belly and slowly releasing it, and reframing the situation by reminding myself—“This is not a threat; It is calling me forward. It is information. What does this moment require of me?”

This approach allowed me to access clarity even under pressure, regulate my emotions, quiet reactive impulses, and create space for discernment. It built on emotional intelligence, which enabled me to navigate diverse situations by thoughtfully managing my own emotions and responding to the emotional states of others in a constructive and adaptive way (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2019). In doing so, I was better able to listen deeply, weigh options carefully, and ensure that my decisions remained aligned with my values and the organization's purpose. Responding with clarity and steadiness fostered trust and confidence in my leadership. At the organizational level, centering contributed to a culture where

reflection and values-based decision-making are prioritized over haste. This practice became integral to my leadership praxis, demonstrating how intentional presence strengthened my effectiveness, inspired confidence in my leadership, and nurtured my own sense of well-being and self-worth.

Finally, reflecting on values to lead with authenticity and intentionality became a cornerstone of my praxis. This reflection equipped me to act with ethical clarity, model integrity, and inspire collective resilience. Understanding my values, knowing what is truly important to me, created a pathway for consistent and meaningful action. Yet I found that values reflection was not a one-time exercise—it required ongoing re-evaluation as contexts shifted and organizational priorities evolved. Understanding my values ensured that I was not caught off guard during sudden organizational shifts. Although such changes felt unnerving, being grounded in my values offered stability and clarity.

I found that aligning my personal values with those of the organization was important, as misalignment could lead to personal and workplace tension, disengagement, or ethical compromise, undermining both individual effectiveness and organizational trust. The feeling I often experienced when I was not living within my values was resentment (Brown, 2018, p. 196), along with regret, and wondering how I could have handled a situation differently. Conversely, when alignment is strong, it fostered coherence, shared purpose, and resilience across the collective. Equally important was recognizing that failing to understand my own values left me feeling vulnerable to external pressures, drove reactive decision-making, created undue stress, and undermined authenticity in practice. Although, living within my values was not easy, it remained essential. Brown (2018) stated that as a leader she knows she's in her values:

when a decision is somewhere between tough and really tough. I wish doing the right thing was the easy thing, but it rarely is. I no longer expect wonderful moments. Instead, I look for quiet moments when I feel strong and solid. And, usually, tired. (p. 197)

By continually clarifying and aligning values, I strengthened my leadership praxis, ensuring that my actions remained grounded in integrity while contributing to the broader good of the organization.

Overall, this study affirmed that leadership is a deeply personal journey with implications that extended across organizational contexts. It provided the opportunity to observe how the guiding principles of well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership manifested in practice and shaped my lived experience. The six recommendations demonstrated that cultivating well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical clarity is not an abstract ideal but a lived praxis, enacted through tangible practices that sustained resilience, authenticity, and connection. These practices have strengthened my leadership by grounding decisions in values, fostering trust, and modeling intentional presence. At the organizational level, they contributed to a culture of reflection, collaboration, and integrity. Looking ahead, the ongoing re-evaluation and alignment of these practices will remain essential, ensuring that my leadership continues to adapt to complexity while remaining anchored in authenticity. The inquiry highlighted personal implications of leadership praxis while also pointing to systemic impacts and future possibilities for others to embrace resilient, intentional, and values-based leadership. As personal next steps, I intend to apply what I have learned by coaching others to adopt my recommendations, presenting my *Reflective Leadership Practice Diagram*, and sharing my three-step *Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments*.

These insights were transformative at an individual level, reinforcing the value of integrating meditation practice into daily leadership routines. While the personal implications were meaningful, they also raised broader questions about how meditation might be experienced, adapted, and sustained across diverse leadership contexts. Beyond individual growth, meditation may also influence organizational outcomes. The following section describes implications for future inquiry.

**Implications for Future Inquiry**

This section outlines opportunities for future research, identifying potential gaps and limitations that could be addressed. It also highlights new directions that emerged from the findings, suggesting ways to broaden and deepen the understanding of meditation's role in leadership.

Building on the conclusions, recommendations, and personal implications of this study, further research is needed to extend and refine understanding of meditation's role in leadership development praxis. Although this study advanced insight into meditation and leadership development, further research opportunities remain. Diversifying the participant sample to include leaders from varied industries, cultural backgrounds, organizational contexts, age groups, and genders would increase the external validity of the findings and reveal whether meditation's impact varies across settings.

Longer-term research designs could track the progressive development of meditation's effects, distinguishing short-term benefits from longer-term leadership growth. Comparative studies that situate meditation alongside other developmental practices, such as coaching or therapy, may clarify its distinct contributions and interactions with alternative approaches. Such studies could also explore barriers leaders encounter in adopting meditation, particularly those linked to diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as accessibility, cultural relevance, and psychological safety. They could further examine differences in effectiveness between digital meditation apps and more personalized formats, including customized recordings and facilitator-led programs. Addressing these factors could provide a more nuanced understanding of meditation's role in leadership development across varied contexts.

Employing mixed methods that combine qualitative reflection with quantitative assessment could provide a more comprehensive understanding of meditation's influence on leadership praxis. Quantitative indicators might include psychological surveys to capture shifts in stress, focus, and emotional regulation; 360-degree feedback reviews to assess changes in interpersonal effectiveness and

leadership behaviours; and collecting biometric data to measure physiological markers of resilience, such as heart rate variability or cortisol levels. In addition, examining factors that support sustained practice, including organizational culture and peer support, could provide valuable insights into why some leaders continue meditating while others cease. Finally, future studies should be mindful of potential researcher bias, including confirmation bias, and employ strategies to strengthen credibility. By extending inquiry in these directions, future research can build on the personal insights of this study to generate more robust evidence for meditation's role in leadership at both individual and organizational levels.

This inquiry underscored the potential, value, and the complexity of integrating meditation into leadership practice. By examining its influence on stress and well-being, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership, the study highlighted how meditation practice can support leaders in aligning values with action and navigating organizational challenges with clarity and compassion. Simultaneously, the limitations and opportunities for future research emphasize that this work represents a valuable waypoint in a broader exploration of meditation's role in leadership praxis. With these considerations in mind, the following thesis summary and conclusion draw together the key elements and contributions of this study.

### **Thesis Summary and Conclusion**

This section provides an overview of the study, highlighting its key elements, and the contributions it makes to both theory and practice. It synthesizes the insights gained throughout the research, demonstrating how the conclusions and recommendations extend academic knowledge while also offering practical guidance for the everyday practice of leadership. In addition, this section underscores the potential benefits for organizations, showing how meditation enriches leadership praxis.

The action-oriented, first-person research undertaken here illustrates the transformative potential of integrating meditation into leadership practice. It shows that meditation can enhance personal well-being and strengthens leadership effectiveness by cultivating emotional intelligence and promoting ethical leadership, with the capacity to reshape teams and transform organizational culture. By integrating literature, personal experience, feedback, and the creation of artifacts, the study provides a holistic understanding of how meditation can enrich leadership praxis. Importantly, it identifies practical ways for leaders to embed mindfulness into their daily routines, cultivating emotional intelligence, fostering ethical leadership, and ultimately strengthening organizational resilience.

The motivation for this research arose from an embodied awareness: before words take shape, my body begins the conversation, revealing truths about stress, conflict, and leadership that language alone cannot fully capture. Seeking to understand my physiological responses and their triggers within a dynamic and often stressful environment, I endeavored to cultivate a leadership style grounded in mindfulness, strengthened by resilience, and anchored in authenticity. This exploration revealed how the intentional practice of meditation translated into measurable benefits for both personal wellness and leadership effectiveness.

The findings demonstrated that consistent practice reduced stress, enhanced well-being, fostered emotional intelligence, and cultivated ethical leadership. These qualities, while personal, extended beyond myself to shape interpersonal relationships and team dynamics. In my experience, meditation helped me navigate complexity and build resilience through reframing, presencing, and systems thinking, although its effectiveness depended on my ability to prioritize self-care and establishing boundaries.

Moreover, heightened self-awareness and self-regulation positively influenced relational and team dynamics, improving collaboration and teamwork. Authenticity and intentionality served as the

foundation for trust, and it was through leading by example that the ripple effect began, extending individual transformation into collective change. I observed that emotionally intelligent and ethical leadership often supported greater resilience, collaboration, and cohesion within my team. These personal and collective shifts highlighted my central insight that meditation positively impacted my leadership praxis, enriching it in diverse and meaningful ways.

Meditation is positioned here as both a wellness practice and a strategic dimension of leadership theory. Beyond its role in supporting individual well-being, this study pointed to contemplative practice and embodied awareness as meaningful foundations in my leadership approach. They fostered emotional intelligence and ethical grounding, qualities increasingly recognized as essential for navigating organizational complexity and uncertainty. In extending theoretical discourse, this research situated meditation within a broader range of leadership capacities: reframing challenges to uncover new possibilities; presencing as a way of cultivating attentiveness; systems thinking to understand interconnected dynamics; self-awareness and regulation as mechanisms for resilience; collaboration and teamwork as relational practice; authenticity and intentionality as anchors for trust; and leading by example as a catalyst for organizational transformation.

This research contributes to practice by offering six actionable recommendations to enhance leaders' well-being, strengthen emotional intelligence, and uphold ethical leadership:

- adopt meditation and journaling as a regular practices;
- assume responsibility for maintaining personal well-being;
- seek to reframe difficult situations as opportunities;
- practice presencing to cultivate empathy and connection;
- consider a centering practice in cultivating leadership moments; and
- reflect on values to lead with authenticity and intentionality.

I also developed the *Reflective Leadership Practice Diagram*, designed to support personal development, strengthen team dynamics and enhance organizational impact, along with a three-step *Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments* to guide leaders through intense situations. Combined, these contributions provide leaders with practical tools to embed mindfulness into daily routines.

This thesis affirms that meditation enriches leadership praxis as both a personal discipline and a strategic leadership practice, cultivating resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical grounding that can reshape teams and transform organizational culture. Holistically, this study equips leaders with actionable recommendations to embed into their daily routines. On a personal level, this study has profoundly shaped me, embedding new ways of thinking, expanding my sense of possibility, elevating my self-confidence to new heights, and shifting my perspective from an ego-centric mindset to one grounded in service. What once felt impossible now appears within reach, reframed as opportunities waiting to be explored.

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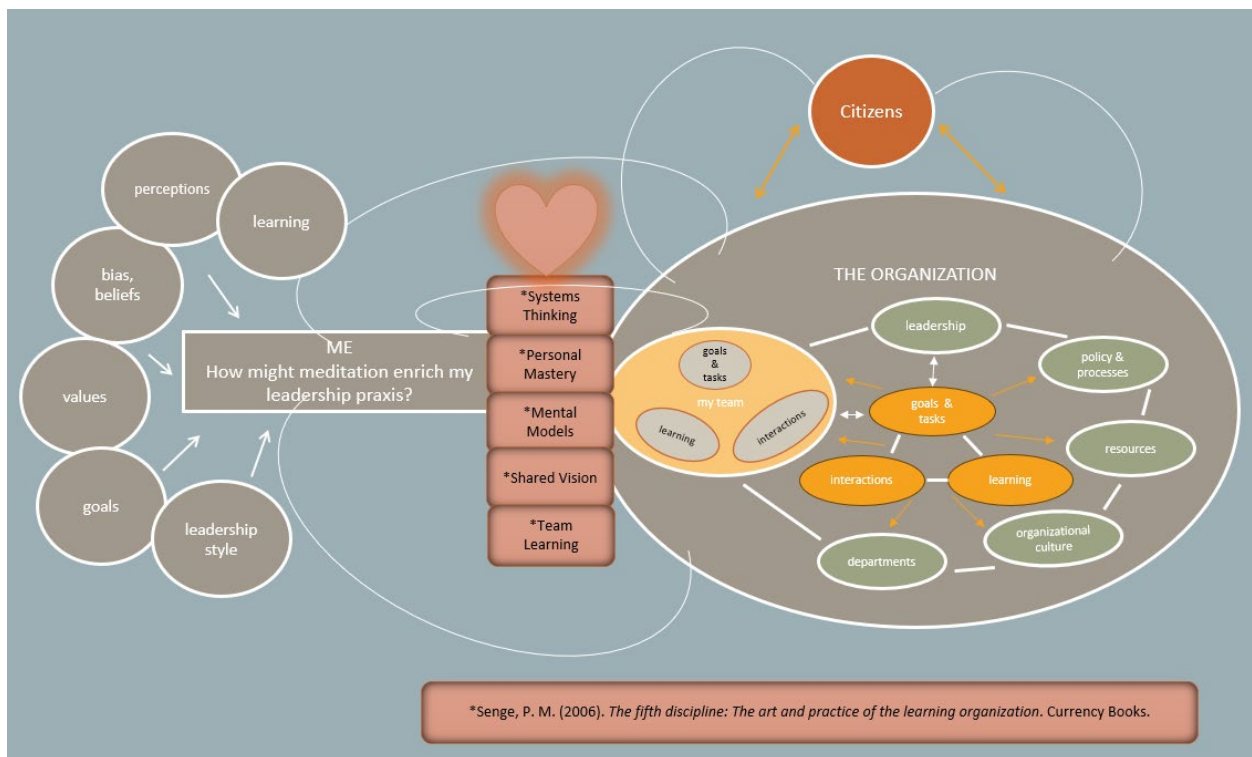
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### Appendix A: My Organizational Systems Map

The system map illustrates how my personal development through meditation interacts with my leadership praxis within the broader organizational system. On the left of the map, individual elements are indicated which represent the internal conditions I bring to my leadership. These elements feed into the central inquiry guiding the study: How might mediation enrich my leadership praxis?

The five disciplines of a learning organization are outlined and adapted from Senge (2006): systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. These disciplines function as a bridge between my individual development and my organizational work environment.

On the right side of the map, the organization is depicted as an interconnected system that includes leadership, policies and processes, resources, culture, departments, interactions, learning, and goals. My team is shown as a smaller nested system with its own goals, learning, and interactions. The map also acknowledges the influence of citizens, who interact with and shape the organization through reciprocal relationships.



### Appendix B: Journaling Method Prompts

I journaled for ten days at the beginning of each of the three cycles, writing each evening for thirty to forty-five minutes. The first ten minutes were dedicated to free-flow writing, followed by ten minutes responding to the pre-meditation prompts listed below. I then meditated for ten minutes and concluded with ten minutes answering the post-meditation questions. Since I did not encounter any challenging or triggering incidents that required the Ladder of Inference framework (Parvez, 2024), I did not complete the additional fifteen minutes of related prompts. As a result, all my journaling sessions lasted thirty minutes. Influenced by the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 2014), I created the following journaling and meditation prompts.

- Pre-meditation—My intentions for today’s meditation (personal or leadership issue for the day)?
- Pre-meditation—How am I feeling physically and emotionally?
- Post-meditation—How am I feeling?
- Post-meditation—Any changes noted, and any emotions arise during meditation?
- Post-meditation—Any further thoughts on personal/leadership issues for the day? What could I have done differently?

Additionally, if I had been triggered by a high-intensity incident, I would have engaged the Ladder of Inference framework by asking myself the questions associated with each rung, informed by Parvez (2024) on the PsychMechanics website.

#### Actions:

- What is driving my actions, and are they leading to my desired outcomes?
- What alternative approaches could better align with my intentions?

#### Beliefs:

- What shaped my beliefs, and have I examined them critically?
- Did I adopt this belief intentionally, or was it influenced by others without deeper reflection?

#### Conclusions:

- Are my conclusions based on sound reasoning and solid evidence?
- What assumptions influenced my conclusions, and are they valid?

#### Interpretations:

- What influences my interpretation of reality, and what alternative perspectives might I be overlooking?

#### Selected Reality:

- How have my beliefs and assumptions shaped my perception of reality, and have I critically examined my perspective to ensure I’m seeing a meaningful and well-rounded view?

**Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement for Participants**

Throughout this study, *Leading from Within: A First-Person Study on How Meditation Might Enrich Leadership Praxis*, participants will engage in discussions, sharing reflections, and gain insights from how others have addressed comparable issues. While this process is critical to the study, it also raises ethical considerations regarding confidentiality. Some information shared, though general in nature, may be considered privilege.

To ensure confidentiality, participants agree to keep all information shared within the study confidential. While they may speak about their personal experiences and learning, they must not disclose identifying details outside the study discussions and meetings. Maintaining confidentiality enables honest reflection and open dialogue. All participants are expected to exercise discretion in how much they choose to disclose about specific situations.

By signing this agreement, I acknowledge that I have read and understand its terms, and I agree to abide by them. Please respond by Month, Day, Year.

First & last name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Agenda for Recurring Meetings with SME and Feedback Participants**

## Agenda for Feedback Participant Meetings

1. Welcome and Check-in
  - Reminder of ethical considerations
  - Overall general personal or project updates since last meeting
2. Review of Previous Discussion and Action Items
  - Summary of take-aways from last meeting
  - Update on recommendations from last cycle
3. Data and Reflection Insights
  - Present new findings from journaling
  - Discussion questions
  - Feedback and alternate interpretations
4. Refinements and Adjustments
  - Questions, perspectives and observations
  - Evaluate and identify potential improvements to methodology for next cycle
5. Next Steps and Takeaways
6. Final Thoughts and Questions

## Agenda for Subject Matter Expert Meetings

1. Welcome and Check-in
  - Reminder of ethical considerations
  - Overall meditation updates
2. Review of Previous Discussion and Action Items
  - Summary of take-aways from last meeting
  - Update on recommendations on meditation from last cycle
3. Refinements and Adjustments
  - Questions, perspectives and observations
  - Evaluate and identify potential improvements to meditation for next cycle
4. Next Steps and Takeaways
5. Final Thoughts and Questions

**Appendix E: Discussion Questions with Feedback Participants**

Below is a list of semi-structured discussion questions that I asked feedback participants during our one-to-one meetings.

1. What are your thoughts on the information I have shared with you?
  - How does this information align with or challenge your perspective?
2. What tendencies, mindset, or patterns do you observe?
  - Do any of these patterns seem consistent or surprising to you?
3. What suggestions do you have that might improve my approach?
  - What insights or themes stand out most to you?
4. What other observations have you made?
  - Is there anything unexpected or thought-provoking that emerged from the data?
5. What final thoughts or recommendations would you like to share with me?
  - What aspects of my feedback process do you think I should refine, expand, or adjust moving forward?

**Appendix F: Agenda for Initial Meeting with SME and Feedback Participants**

1. Welcome
  - Introduction to the project
  - Ethical considerations, confidentiality, and boundaries
2. Project Overview and Goals
  - Project's objectives, scope, and significance
  - Outline methodology
3. Role Expectations
  - Clarify expectations and feedback methods
  - Discuss potential biases or alternative perspectives
4. Next Steps
  - Confirm timelines and logistics for future meetings
5. Final Thoughts and Questions

**Appendix G: Email Invitation**

Dear [Prospective Participant],

My name is Lisa Dotto and I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. The purpose of my research is to understand how a cyclical and self-reflective practice can best support my leadership approach and explore how meditation might enrich my leadership praxis. This project is part of the requirement for my Master of Arts Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Tammy Pozzobon at (email address), MA Leadership, School of Leadership Studies.

I have identified you as a prospective feedback participant (or subject matter expert) because we have developed a baseline reciprocal relationship, grounded in trust and mutual respect for each other, and a practice of enriching conversations regarding our own leadership practices. Alongside my reflexive practice, I will recruit 2-3 individuals who are willing to provide honest feedback on my personal development journey. This phase of my research project will consist of up to one-hour virtual, one-on-one discussions, once every two to three weeks for a nine-week period via Zoom. It begins with an introductory meeting and concludes with a final session to close our time together, for a total of five meetings.

The attached document information letter contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

I realize that due to our collegial relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. You may withdraw without prejudice at any time. However, I cannot withdraw any influence you have had on me and the emerging research themes. I will remove any direct quotes from you in my own writing.

If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision not to participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

Should you accept this invitation to serve as a feedback participant, it is important that you will be able to give me forthright and clear feedback. If you would like to participate in my research project, please email me at (email address) or contact me at (telephone number), by Day, Month, Year.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dotto

## Appendix H: Information Letter

### Information Letter for Feedback Participants

Leading from Within: A First-Person Study on How Meditation Might Enrich Leadership Praxis

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Lisa Dotto, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Tammy Pozzobon at (email address) MA Leadership, School of Leadership Studies.

Through this study, I am endeavouring to explore how might meditation enrich my leadership praxis. I hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of my research topic, gain personal growth and implement practical changes to my leadership practice which in turn could benefit the organization I work for.

Using first-person action research as my methodology, I plan to engage feedback participants to mitigate my unconscious biases and broaden my perspectives and understandings of my own experiences and actions. I plan to meet one-on-one with my feedback participants for up to one-hour virtual conversations using Zoom. Importantly, to help maintain privacy protection under Canadian law, I have received a student Zoom license from RRU, where recordings are stored in Canada, ensuring they are not subject to examination by the U.S. government under the USA Patriot Act. Additionally, these meetings will occur every two to three weeks for a total of nine weeks, during which I will present my preliminary analyses of my personal data (e.g., my journaling). There will be one informational meeting to open our research time together and another to conclude our discussions, bringing the total to five meetings. I may also share complex experiences I have faced for your feedback.

This research will benefit me in enhancing my leadership practice and achieving a requirement for my Master of Arts in Leadership program. You may also benefit from this research whereby insights into your own leadership practice might be achieved through dialogue with me.

I anticipate there will be minimal risk to the participants in this study. Participants will not be pressured to share specifics that they do not wish or feel comfortable to share. I will analyze and present the data, ensuring that no individual's specific thoughts or contributions are singled out. If you feel that there are any risks to you in participating in the research, you are welcome to withdraw from the study. Kindly inform me of your decision.

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence, identified in my final reply only by code number. Recordings will be kept on

**Appendix H: Information Letter (cont.)**

my password protected computer. Hard copies of the interview notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to; electronic copies of files will be kept on a secured flash drive that is password protected. Information will be recorded in hand-written format, audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data gathered from feedback participants will be kept until June 2027, at which time hard copies will be shredded, and electronic and audio files will be deleted.

In addition to submitting a final report to Royal Roads University to fulfill my obligation to obtain a Master of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing research findings in the form of a poem and photo collage. Moreover, I might share my best practices and guidelines for incorporating meditation into their daily routines with peers, friends, and other leaders, in future workshops, meetings or conferences.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, I will delete transcripts of our previous conversations. Data collected in conversation is more difficult to delete, especially as your ideas may have already influenced my thinking and action. However, I will not quote your specific ideas and feedback in my final report.

You are not required to participate in this research project. Your decision not to participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

Please reply directly to this email by (Day, Month, Year) to confirm whether you would like to participate in this project. Your response will indicate that you have read and understood the information above and, if you choose to participate, that you are providing your free and informed consent.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dotto

**Appendix H: Information Letter (cont.)****Information Letter for Subject Matter Expert**

Leading from Within: A First-Person Study on How Meditation Might Enrich Leadership Praxis

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Lisa Dotto, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Tammy Pozzobon at (email address), MA Leadership, School of Leadership Studies.

Through this study, I am endeavouring to explore how might meditation enrich my leadership praxis. I hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of my research topic, gain personal growth and implement practical changes to my leadership practice which in turn could benefit the organization I work for.

Using first-person action research as my methodology, I plan to engage with a subject matter expert (SME) for spiritual guidance on integrating meditation into my daily practice, focusing on how it might enrich my leadership praxis. I plan to meet one-on-one with my SME for up to one-hour virtual conversations using Zoom. Importantly, to help maintain privacy protection under Canadian law, I have received a student Zoom license from RRU, where recordings are stored in Canada, ensuring they are not subject to examination by the U.S. government under the USA Patriot Act. Additionally, these meetings will occur every two to three weeks for a total of nine weeks, during which I will present my preliminary analyses of my personal data (e.g., my journaling). Additionally, there will be one informational meeting to open our research time together and another to conclude our discussions, bringing the total to five meetings. I may also share complex experiences I have faced with meditation for your feedback.

This research will benefit me in enhancing my leadership practice and achieving a requirement for my Master of Arts in Leadership program. You may also gain valuable customer experience insights from this research, as our dialogue could offer perspectives that enhance your leadership and in your business practice.

I anticipate there will be minimal risk to the participants in this study. Participants will not be pressured to share specifics that they do not wish or feel comfortable to share. I will analyze and present the data, ensuring that no individual's specific thoughts or contributions are singled out. If you feel that there are any risks to you in participating in the research, you are welcome to withdraw from the study. Kindly inform me of your decision.

**Appendix H: Information Letter (cont.)**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information collected will be maintained in confidence, identified in my final reply only by code number. Recordings will be kept on my password protected computer. Hard copies of the interview notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to; electronic copies of files will be kept on a secured flash drive that is password protected. Information will be recorded in hand-written format, audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data gathered from the SME will be kept until June 2027, at which time hard copies will be shredded, and electronic and audio files will be deleted.

In addition to submitting a final report to Royal Roads University to fulfill my obligation to obtain a Master of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing research findings in the form of a poem and photo collage. Also, I might share my best practices and guidelines for incorporating meditation into their daily routines with peers, friends, and other leaders, in future workshops, meetings or conferences.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, I will delete transcripts of our previous conversations. Data collected in conversation is more difficult to delete, especially as your ideas may have already influenced my thinking and action. However, I will not quote your specific ideas and feedback in my final report.

You are not required to participate in this research project. Your decision not to participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

Please reply directly to this email by (Day, Month, Year) to confirm whether you would like to participate in this project. Your response will indicate that you have read and understood the information above and, if you choose to participate, that you are providing your free and informed consent.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dotto

**Appendix I: Consent Form Participants**

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project, that you agree the feedback participant virtual one-on-one discussions may be audio and video recorded, and that data you contribute will be used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs—poem and photo collage, and for presentations at meetings or conferences.

- I consent to the use of material gained through the participant virtual conversations being used in this study and the resulting paper.
- I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the participant virtual conversations be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed.
- I commit to respect the confidential nature of the participant virtual conversations by not sharing identifying information about the researcher.
- I consent to the use of material I have contributed being used in any scholarly article, community or conference presentations, and/or other knowledge products resulting from this study.

Please respond by Day, Month, Year.

First & last name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix J: Study Conduct Schedule**

Below is my outline for this nine week inquiry on how meditation might enrich my leadership praxis. Prior to the first three week study cycle, I wrote a free flow journal entry, timed for half-hour, to establish a baseline self-assessment of my personal and professional well-being. Additionally, I met with my SME, via Zoom for a one-hour session to receive guidance on reflective practice and meditation. I also met individually with each of my feedback participants for a thirty-minute discussion via Zoom to discuss the study and address any questions they had.

#### **Study Cycles**

Each study cycle consisted of 3 weeks and repeated for a total of three cycles.

#### ***Cycle Schedule***

##### **Meditation daily**

- Recorded guided meditation for 10 minutes in the morning upon waking and 10 minutes in the evening

##### **Artifacts**

- During cycles take weekly photo for collage
- During cycles choose weekly word or phrases for poem

##### **Journaling**

###### **Evening journaling integrated with meditation (10 days)**

- 30 - 45 minutes of journaling / 10 minutes of meditation
  - 10 minutes free-flow journaling
  - 10 minutes journaling responding to pre-meditation prompts
  - 10 minutes of meditation
  - 10 minutes journaling responding to post meditation prompts
  - If I was triggered by a high-intensity incident, I would have applied the Ladder of Inference framework (Parvez, 2024) and spend an extra 15 minutes answering additional prompts related to each rung of the ladder

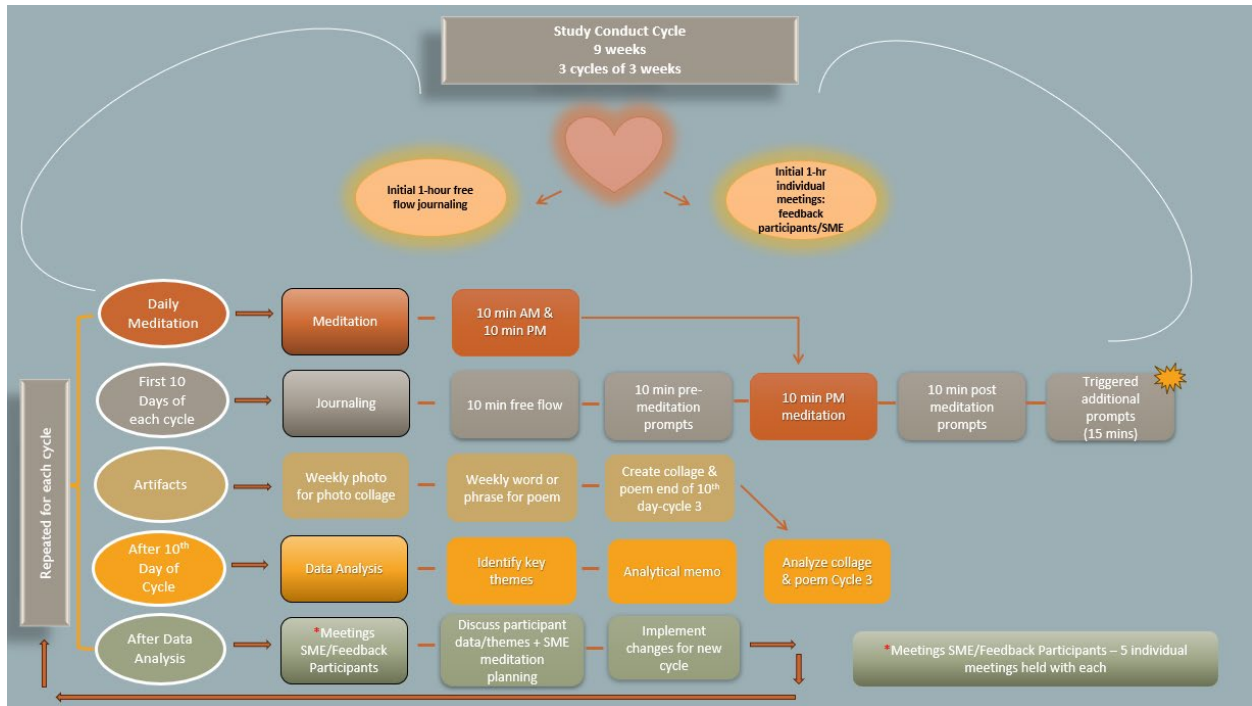
##### **Last week of each cycle**

- I conducted a data analysis to identify key themes and typed a reflexive analytical memo.
- I met individually with the SME and feedback participants on Zoom for up to one hour, with flexibility to accommodate participants' schedules. With the SME, we reviewed my meditation practice and discussed the data collected, and the SME selected the meditation theme for the upcoming cycle based on our conversation. With each feedback participant, we discussed the data, reviewed key themes, and explored actionable items to integrate into my leadership practice for the next cycle.
- I implemented the identified changes in the following cycle, refining my meditation practice and my leadership practice by integrating new thoughts and behaviours that shaped my actions.

**Appendix J: Study Conduct Schedule (cont.)**

At the end of cycle three, I met individually on Zoom with the SME and each feedback participant to close the study. In total, I held five individual meetings, up to one hour long, with each feedback participant, including the SME. Additionally, I created a photo collage and wrote a poem, which I shared during our final meetings to gather their perspectives. This process helped refine and deepen my analysis of how meditation might enrich my leadership praxis.

Appendix K: Study Conduct Schedule Diagram



### Appendix L: Artificial Intelligence Transparency Statement

I, Lisa Dotto, confirm that I wrote *Leading from Within: A First-Person Study on How Meditation Might Enrich Leadership Praxis*, and I used artificial intelligence (AI) software including Google Scholar for literature searching, iRecord application for data capturing, and CoPilot to enhance my work. While I used AI-assisted platforms for literature search and editorial tasks, I conducted all conceptual, analytical, and reflective work. Additionally, I used Zoom for discussions with my SME and feedback participants. I have obtained a student Zoom license from RRU, where recordings are stored in Canada. My use and disclosure of these tools comply with the RRU Guidelines on Use of Generative AI.

Copilot is an AI-powered app that is included with my Microsoft 365 subscription. This app offers insights on grammar, spelling, and sentence structure.

Google Scholar is a platform for searching for scholarly literature.

iRecord is an application for transcribing voice to note.

Zoom is a digital communication platform that enables video conferencing, audio calls, messaging, screen sharing, and transcription services, facilitating collaboration and accessibility.

#### Sources:

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**Appendix M: Manual In Vivo Coding**

<b>Cycle One – Manual In Vivo Coding</b>		
<b>Journaling Event</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>Supporting Words</b>
Free-Flow Analysis	Emotional Strain	tired and anxious; mood swings; glad work week is done; quite busy; getting pulled in many directions; it can be exhausting
	Relational Tension	micro manager; micromanaging; not comfortable to talk to her; consider this disrespectful; been taken advantage of; choose their battles wisely; putting her foot down
	Social Positioning	I want to feel like I’m part of things; do not want to be excluded; left out of the loop; outshining me; there are no great plans for me
	Identity	realization that I’m getting older; no longer useful; shrinking myself; I can be more involved; feeling content; I feel a little hurt and old
Pre-Meditation with Prompting Questions Analysis	Embodied Attention	Stay positive and in the moment; living in the moment; understanding when to action and when to listen; learn to manage daily interruptions
	Inner Conflict	I’m worried of not being enough; I need to show my value; working in obscurity; feeling left out
	Relational Leadership	send love and support to those who need it; support my co-workers; there is enough for everyone
	Purpose	where I want to go; commit to doing; job that’s fulfilling; I’m still useful; not too old
Post Meditation with Prompting Questions Analysis	Embodied Physical Awareness	falling asleep; radiating heat; feeling warm; feeling good; better rested; stable and grounded
	Emotional Regulation and Clarity	more relaxed; no thoughts; no emotional shift; letting things be; allowing thoughts to come and go; not restrictive; forgetting the day’s worries
	Spirituality and Connection	connecting to a higher power; feeling love and supported; into alignment; acting compassionately; strong emotion of love
	Positive Reframing	Stronger feelings of gratitude; more relaxed and thankful; feeling good

**Appendix M: Manual In Vivo Coding (cont.)**

Cycle Two – Manual In Vivo Coding		
Journaling Event	Key Themes	Supporting Words
Free-Flow Analysis	Emotional Reflections	quite happy, feeling pretty grateful for my team, lovely morning today, a little tired and slow, makes me sad, anxious moments, nothing too terrible
	Leadership Intention and Team Dynamics	working well together, everyone pulling their weight, being of service, grow team’s experience, prepared to talk, doing my best, I do what I can
	Relational Clarity	meditation has helped, not to become overly reactive, observe and listen, let it be, not mine to fix, send love to both, simply look at face value
	Cognitive Shifts	I’ve reframed, start thinking of a plan, clarify understanding, cause and effect, truly understand what is, ones’ mind could wander
	Leadership and Values	living authentically, not hiding parts of your life, share themselves in entirety, living into your values
	Workplace Stress	struggling with interruptions, constant interruptions, exhausting emotionally, changed deadline, rushing to complete, brush people off, prove that I am really busy
	Symbolic Awareness	full moon coming soon, transition to rain, looking forward, my mind is on summer, want to get back to living my life
Pre-Meditation with Prompting Questions Analysis	Emotional State/Regulation	feeling calm, at ease, content; lower level of frustration; feeling pretty good; ease and contentment; good, content, stable; feeling grounded; good emotionally and physically; generally feeling better; higher energy; feeling tired; a little anxious; felt exhausted
	Mindful Awareness	bringing in positive energy, let things be, send love, send good vibration her way, trust, instincts, time to recharge, purge energy that has not served me well, remain level-headed
	Reflective Process and Insight	thinking about this realization; what I see as an opportunity; doesn’t sit well with me; not being so quick to assume; where are the limits; focused on moments; focused around boundaries
	Leadership and Relational Awareness	I can handle situations; spread myself; happy to see each other; sharing with those around me; she was disconnected; she was not in control
	Transitional Energy and Flow	progressed stalled; moving backwards; couldn’t come fast enough; too many moments to focus on today; Living authentically and in harmony
Post Meditation with Journaling Prompts Analysis	Emotional Sensations	pleasant feeling; deep relaxation; calm and grounded; feeling a little better; a little refreshed; feeling fine but a little annoyed and frustrated; after a full day of work, I’m tired; wasn’t relaxed enough
	Sensory and Somatic Experiences	body getting hot; radiated through meditation; auras of light; seeing colors; drifting; I was smiling; dream like state during meditation
	Reframing and Insight	why those feelings show up; not living in wallow; reframe this learning situation; thoughts start to shift; understand the root of the issue; point of view
	Self-Efficacy and Leadership Presence	feeling more sure; I can connect better; I will be able to handle with grace; showed up as best as I could; sometimes that is enough; not pass judgement; trust the process
	Spiritual Transformation	love was a thought that came to mind; spiritual growth and transformation; opening; doesn’t scare me; just go with it; trust; I felt whole, safe, calm; connected better; less stressed; potential healing; curiosity; I’m excited

**Appendix M: Manual In Vivo Coding (cont.)**

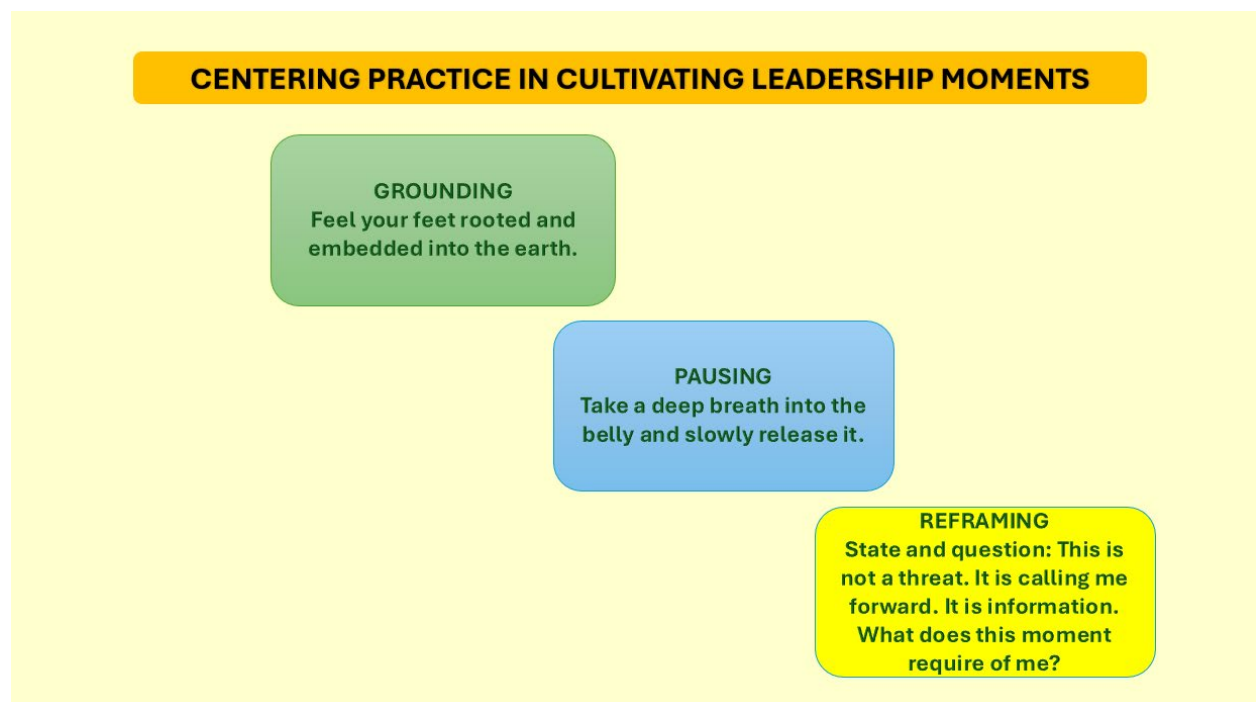
Cycle Three – Manual In Vivo Coding		
Journaling Event	Key Themes	Supporting Words
Free-Flow Analysis	Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation	let it roll; it has nothing to do with me; try not to take it personally; I remained level-headed without jumping to conclusions; Instead of completely freaking out I paused and took a moment to reframe; I listened; always check my assumptions; I as quick to think of the worst
	Leadership Authenticity and Integrity	Keeping your job yet remaining authentic to yourself; I have to do what makes me feel good as a human and contributing to the organization; I will not feel threatened by the knowledge I share with others; Good in leadership to show self health; good role models; Other leaders abused the system reminders of what not to do
	Letting Go	let it go, this is not personal; It's not mine to carry – let it go; I surrender my desire to the universe; let it be that's not on me
	Fulfillment and Purpose	live a more organic and self fulfilling life; fulfilling and serves the heart; manifest something wonderful; I want to feel I've contributed to society in a positive way; as I evolve; I do love myself; I am useful
	Boundaries and Self-Care	Sometimes breaks are warranted for a reset; retreating into nature; home is my grounding place and where I heal; need boundaries so that everyone understands how to operate; hefty day; a trying day left me depleted
	Integrity of Influence	someone uses their power to influence others; underlying agenda; difficult to trust when abusing their power; serve themselves – ego; tarnish reputations; destructive when building trust
	Reflection and Reframing	redirect my attention; due to my intuition and increased self-awareness I noticed; how can I make this work; Is this giving away my power; why am I not protecting myself; is this one for me
Pre-Meditation with Prompting Questions Analysis	Emotional Regulation	name it to tame it and let it go; live in the moment; take a breath and unwind; let myself slip back; moment of stepping back; today's meditation is to chill
	Growth and Self-Care	growth is not linear; release guilt; self care is important; feeling more confident in my choices and in the way I handled situations; navigating this conversation with myself
	Intention and Values	lead by example; build opportunities for myself that help me live within my values; focus on being a good leader; my intention – authenticity and emitting good energy
	Letting Go and Ego	releasing any ego related thoughts; sent intention for a bountiful manifestation
	Leadership Challenges	leadership often tears people down instead of building them up; ageism in the workplace is more relevant than ever
	Confidence	I feel good about myself
Post Meditation with Prompting Questions Analysis	Letting Go	things I have dwelled on in the past I no longer sit with; don't dwell; let go of things you cannot control; life situations ebb and flow but all will be good
	Self-Care and Grounding	escape into nature to foster connection to self; allow time for self-care; relaxed and centered; deep breathing felt good
	Confidence and Self-Worth	I am confident; I am important; good overall; general feeling of wellness and all is good

**Appendix N: Centering Practice in Cultivating Leadership Moments**

Micro-practice for centering one-self during intense leadership moments.

1. Grounding: Feel your feet rooted and embedded into the earth.
2. Pausing: Take a deep breath into the belly and slowly release it.
3. Reframing by stating and questioning the following: This is not a threat. It is calling me forward.

It is information. What does this moment require of me?



**Appendix O: Daily Reminders of Authentic Leadership**

Reminders on how to stay aligned with my values and lead authentically:

- delegate tasks when I can to empower others
- provide teaching or mentoring opportunities when possible
- take a walk after an intense situation
- if it's not mine to carry let it go
- set clear boundaries and expectations
- share knowledge
- know when to say no
- practice empathy and deep listening to better support those around me
- be curious and not defensive
- take a pause and breath
- try not to jump to conclusions
- listen, really listen, and investigate the stories I create
- everything ebbs and flows; not to fear but accept the impermanence of the moment
- trust the process and evolution of each leadership moment



**Appendix P: Collage—My Leadership Journey Through Meditation (cont.)**

- 5) The white hydrangea reflects purity in growth, reminding me that true learning requires transparency, honesty, and openness to feedback.
- 6) A snapshot of my garden, showing that growth takes time and is best appreciated when you pause to reflect on how far you've come.
- 7) The school of fish, evokes feelings of hope, prosperity, and spiritual connection, reminding me that we are all linked and abundance is possible.
- 8) A nature scene offers a sense of rejuvenation, as I turn to the outdoors to find peace and harmony when I feel overwhelmed or close to burnout.
- 9) A photo of puzzle pieces reflects the process of understanding data, sometimes pieces seem to fit until closer inspection reveals gaps that need attention.
- 10) The final image, taken at a beach, captures a peaceful moment of reflection, placed at the center of the collage not as an ending, but as a symbol of possibility as I move forward.

**Appendix Q: Poem—A Journey Inward to Lead**

*(cycle one)*

Deeply grateful to crack the mold,

I proceed with care, preserving my energy yes, indeed.

Calm and confident, I will lead;

I dare not react impulsively, so I meditate and speculate intentionally.

Am I enough? I worried, as obscurity and ambiguity racked my brain.

To bring value and uplift others, I must train.

I reflect to grow, through joy and strain, for I won't be passed by again.

Micromanaging derails my lead;

Domination and exclusion destroys the team.

Adapt we must, not burn or crash

We thrive through change, not meaningless flash.

*(cycle two)*

Twice a day I meditate,

Reframing my thoughts along the way.

It keeps me grounded and calm,

To lead with heart and open palm I proceed.

I shine positive energy along the way

Where are the limits? I say.

The full moon is rising can't you see?

Be wary of those who beg and plead.

That is enough no more delay

**Appendix Q: Poem—A Journey Inward to Lead (cont.)**

I must rise, protect, and lead the way.  
For not all is mine to mend or fix,  
I send good vibes to heal and walk away.  
The true nature of things must be revealed,  
As cause and effect comes into play.  
With authenticity I lead,  
Aligned with purpose, I proceed.

*(cycle three)*

Roll with it as I evolve  
Escape into nature I absolve  
Every moment is fleeting, so let it be;  
Not everything is on me.  
Though I've seen it many times before,  
Power to influence must not be abused.  
Bruised I watched it play,  
Remembering this, I muse.  
Lead with care—I excuse.  
Quick to think, I must not be;  
Trusting the process, I will breathe.  
Situations ebb and flow, I'll see.  
All will be okay for me.