

DEL Year One Reflections

Year One Residency

August 2024

Kevin L. Cecil

University of Charleston

In-Depth Papers

2.1 In-Depth Papers:

The first paper we submitted for DEL 700 focused on a Culture of Inquiry. I like to define the best definitions of words, so I found the following. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines culture as the set of shared “attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). There are three definitions for the word inquiry. The most apt one perhaps for scholar leader purposes states “a systematic investigation often of a matter of public interest” (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

This course established the foundation of creating “habits of the mind”. The focus on critical thinking was already very close to my heart. I have observed leaders fail to consider all context of a situation and make poor decisions as a result, including myself. The supporting foundation of my personal leadership model is empowered communication. Taking the time to get all the details informs a leader’s decision making. It also helps them identify what narratives are being put into the organization, be they about an individual or group of people. Narratives, and how they are used across all spectrums interest me very much and are a possible dissertation focus.

Additionally, this course and paper took me to examine concepts such as leader development, innovation, and resiliency. I am still curious about those topics and seeing how they fit into establishing further habits of the mind through inquiry of the literature.

DEL 710 was a building block that I found very interesting as it very much went down the road of examining how a culture of inquiry helps refine focus. Using pre-writing tools and matrixes, I learned the power of those tools to refine the information I examined. Of the leadership styles studied in this course, I discovered that the two that most interested me were

charismatic and discursive leadership. This set the stage to examine them in a paper that morphed into an examination of how these leadership styles fit into political context as relevant to President's Obama and Trump.

Once again, I looked up the definitions of previous scholar leaders and came across the following. The word charisma springs from ancient times and was originally used to describe a divine gift, favor, or supernatural power (Conger, 2011). Further thinking and study about the concept found me realizing that the original definition in relation to divine attributes evolved. It has been secularized into the secular vernacular and is often associated with politicians. In relation to the campaigns of Obama and Trump I was able to discern relationships and patterns. This came about through study and thinking about that leader's identity and how it was reflected in their ensuing presidencies. This expansion of my thinking, and examination of both men, fascinated me when I connected that the concepts applied to both.

Given their obvious differences in many areas, being able to draw the parallels was enlightening. Further examination of the discursive leader enhanced and highlighted how these two styles can complement one another. By stepping back and examining them through the prism of scholarly literature, similarities in these traits were obvious, at least to me. Despite the wide gulf in their politics. There is the little 'd' discourse based on social interaction and a Foucauldian view as big 'D' Discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000b). "Change" was the message of President Obama, and that was his 'D' discourse. The ability he had to use his speaking skills and convey the supporting little 'd' elements was very powerful. When I examined President Trump, his charismatic and discursive messaging was very similar. From a structural perspective based on the definitions of the concepts themselves that is. His 'D' message was Make America Great Again (MAGA). Having it translated into an acronym was

very convenient from a messaging perspective. His small ‘d’ messaging was much different, but ultimately as effective.

Armed with this perspective, I am curious to examine other leaders juxtaposed to each other despite great differences. These two styles that were common in the two men mentioned above, despite a large difference in their intent, has led to thinking about how common it is. Do these two fit those leadership styles the way I perceived them? Or did I apply too much of my perspective based on the research I did to examine them and the perspective styles? Did I project those attributes on both, and did they best fit my conclusions about their styles? This is also an area of considered study which may inform my dissertation journey.

When we began studying leadership in context in DEL 720, I found myself once again focusing on the same two Presidents. This is not surprising given that Donald Trump was still in office, and I took this class in 2020. The paper started out from a perspective of the importance of understanding context. I found myself thinking about the traditional and social media news sources and how the focus is often on being first with a story rather than seeking accuracy. During the last three years, I believe this problem has only grown as our politics and society have divided further. One of the first things I found was a perspective that struck me in its simplicity. Gardner (2011) concludes that leaders must assume that most of their audience has a well-stocked five-year-old mind. This is also where I seemed to warm up even more to the power and effect of narratives in leadership and society.

The statement by Gardner could be taken as offensive by some, as there are those who would see it as someone talking down to a group. I came to think of it as powerful because I am always interested in where the baseline of personal accountability lies. My thinking was that by using common concepts a leader can make analogies common to all. This approach is not

condescending at all. It could establish rapport with a group using common themes that all consider positive. The danger in any narrative is when the truth is spun by the speaker and received by a user who is unwilling or uneducated to step back and examine the context. The drawback is that whoever is speaking to someone may not have their best interest in mind.

The context of the era I was writing in, COVID, the death of George Floyd, and all the competing narratives, served as a backdrop to examine leadership narratives. I found myself once again focusing on the current and former President. On the similarities in terms of leaders using narratives to define their vision and how that affects the message received. Seth McDougal (2013) examined the framing of those issues in terms of structural/institutional and personal/individual frames. To me, this had everything to do with understanding the context of both the leader and the followers, and how that affected the discourse. It also highlighted the way those who understand these concepts best can use them for their own agendas.

Interestingly, one of the areas that came to light in my reflection was the subject of immigration and how the facts of policy get lost in the narratives. One advantage of taking a long break in the DEL program is that I can examine the same concepts after the passing of some time. I find that the concepts associated with leadership and the context required to be a leader that best serves the common good further distorted by opposing agendas. One line in my writings from three years ago stands out to me. It discussed presenting sets of circumstances as absolute despite a set of facts not supporting a premise. We see this in politics and other areas of our society continually. Examining that relationship and how it can be understood by leaders to guard against misusing narratives interests me as a research topic.

In an increasingly challenging environment, leadership must understand ethics and how their decision-making process impact outcomes. Studying these concepts in DEL 730 became a

dive into ethics in America. It only made sense to start with the foundational ethics embedded in the Declaration of Independence and subsequent documents. Our very founding documents are a study in the utilitarian mode of ethics. They serve as a list of grievances with the King of England and a platform to express how a group of people start at one place and evolve over time. Kohlberg (1984) identifies this progression as culminating in post-conceptual principled reasoning as the third level.

This speaks to narratives and the way they are communicated that culminate in a shared identity as a group or organization. When the narratives are distorted in opposing views, for whatever reason, there is a danger of the common good being in jeopardy. This common good can be what the mission and intent of an organization is defined as. It may also be the common good of citizens within a nation.

The use of narratives again shows up as a tool that can be used to distort previously agreed upon ethics and principles in an organization or society. The use of a false narrative, particularly to a group who will not cross check facts to filter opinions, can cause a negative climate to prosper. Departing too far from pragmatic realities and perpetuating a false narrative undermines leadership, whatever the context. Examining these concepts introduced me to the concept of civil religion. The concept prescribes the idea that there is a higher law (Bellah, 1967). Civil religion does not mean an adherence to any particular faith. It aligns with the commonality of utilitarian ethics within in many religions and faiths. Once a group or society agree on those commonalities, or common good, it serves as a baseline for everything else. How narratives and communication from leaders' impact those commonly held principles is another area for possible dissertation exploration.

The idea of an integrated theory of leadership within DEL 760 tied many of the elements of the proceeding courses together. I found myself discussing identity development, a personal moral compass, and experience as some elements of a leader's approach and make up. This paper was based on the leadership development experiences I had during my military career. A key theme that started it off espoused the goal of leaving things better for our children and descendants. Regardless of how we go about it, everyone conducts strategic thinking in the planning outcomes of how we live our lives. The use of metacognition (Nelson & Narens, 1990) and their focus on one's own mental processing and states of knowledge highlights this idea. We are all using developmental process at any given time to determine outcomes. The concept complements the first stage of leadership, learning to lead oneself.

The ideas behind that unique internal moral compass and creating a sounding board within define how we lead others. Developmentally, this has much to do with those who we are surrounded and lead by early in our formation. I believe that being a part of many different types of organizations and missions is key to this also. If we spend our lives only exposed to one climate and culture, then we do not have a point of reference other than what we bring with us. I found it interesting looking back how the previous focus on ethics in DEL 730 influenced this the paper for DEL 760. I am sure this is intentional. As doctoral students we are introduced to concepts that we have probably experienced before, or even taken as lower-level courses. The intent of a doctoral program seems to me to be learning to plumb the depths of a topic. The development of other leaders is no different.

Leader development is one pillar of my personal model. It is what I enjoy thinking about and what I spent a large part of my career focusing on. You cannot develop someone unless you have established a baseline for accountability within an organization. If that is not a part of an

organization's mindset, then they have no goal to develop anyone towards. Given that accountability is the first part of my model, it only makes sense that development is the second. As I further study DEL concepts, I am finding different ways to think about what seems to be a natural progression from accountability to development. I can also see and expand my thinking in how they compliment each other at all levels. When you add in the moral feedback loop in a climate and culture such as the military, it points to commitment as a key factor in success. The third major pillar of my model is commitment, and I am drawing parallels to organizations beyond my experience.

The last thing that strikes me in reviewing DEL 760 is how it helped codify my thoughts on feedback loops in general. The literature also introduced me to differing ways to think about feedback and describe how it is used in all aspects of our lives. Effective feedback is time consuming and in a military context, must be firmly established at the start of one's career. New military members learn very quickly where the line of acceptability is. Many civilians see the military as extreme in their communication and expectations. This may be true, but it is for good reason, as the stakes can be much higher in that environment. While not all decisions seem like life and death, in the military you are part of a system of decisions where something that seems minor can snowball into terrible results. The interplay of these concepts makes me want to explore them more and see how they can morph into possible dissertation research.

Complexity and sustainability concepts in DEL 810 again brought me to using my leadership model and exploring those concepts within its framework. Right out of the gate I observed references to cognitive frames and mental models (Rouse & Morris, 1986). These can be used to transpose one's thoughts on leadership into a model and framework for how they lead. It also takes me back to the emphasis on narrative framing that I keep finding as a running theme

in just about everything these days. I can see how my model was built as I navigated my career in the military and better understand the complex systems I was a part of. Each organization, or system, was unique and required gaining an understanding of their baselines of accountability. Further, differing organizations could go about doing things in completely opposite ways and still be successful. Even when their narratives, mental models, and frameworks were embedded in what an outsider might see as a negative environment.

Understanding the complexity embedded in your organization and subscribing to the idea that you must have insight to be successful is key to my leadership model. Foundationally, the model points to the first step being personal and direct accountability for one's own actions and outcomes. An argument can be made that focusing on what is directly within your span of control is a game changer. The first thing you can control is completely dedicating yourself to being the best version of yourself at any given moment. This will lead to individual success and contribute to the organization's success. This internal narrative will produce external inherent credibility. By producing the best possible result in your own sphere of influence, you are building the ability to influence the complexity and sustainability of the organization. As your experience and inherent credibility grow, you may reach a point where the intentional development of your mindset allows you to eventually lead at the highest levels. I intend to develop my leadership model into a set of tools that I can hopefully help others be successful. Exploring this dynamic further in literature and eventually as a part of my dissertation process will help to expand the thinking that goes into such a goal.

When the time came to study the concepts of organizational dynamics in DEL 740, I was already thinking about dissertation topics. Looking back, I can see how this led me to examine the prison system in America. Once again, I looked to the concept of establishing mental frames

(Noteboom, 2010) through actions that build trust. While writing the paper, I incorporated aspects of my leadership model in the discussion. A baseline of accountability is established at both the macro and micro level. It is reflected in the way communities are impacted by internal and external factors and how they think about themselves. This thinking is linked to how communities develop themselves as individuals and influence those around them.

Leadership requires a balance of establishing a baseline for standards and seeking to gain buy in by those affected by those standards. In a prison environment communication is essential to gaining the buy in of the population to ways they improve during their incarceration. It is the demarcation line between punishment and rehabilitation, at least in my view. I found myself repeatedly touching on the power of communication within any system, but particularly in a closed system environment such as a prison. The foundation of my model is empowered communication at all levels of an organization. In a prison environment a leader who seeks to build a cohesive group focus will be more successful. It seeks to find commonalities in the ultimate goals to result in the best outcomes for all involved. Narratives are a key to communication and breaking false narratives seems to be a good place to start in rehabilitation. This line of thinking ties back to the importance of being a leader given the context in the environment you serve in. These are all interrelated concepts which have built a foundation to examine dissertation themes as I go from year one to year two in the DEL program.

Application Assignments

For DEL 700 my application assignment was titled Habits of the Mind, Strength and Weaknesses. It started off discussing my pending exit from the military and discussed being cognizant of the change in risk assumption. The risks in military life are different than civilian in many ways. Civilian life has much more freedom to take chances that could go either good or

bad. I was concerned that caution could make me limited in the amount of risk I would be willing to accept, which could affect my success.

I interviewed a leader for DEL 720 who the store manager of the Walmart was where my sister worked. I found her leadership style to be framed in empathy, engagement and enthusiasm. This translated well with the concept of situational resiliency as the environment she worked in is results oriented, and those results are always being counted. She described herself as an empathetic leader who liked to be in the trenches. This foreshadowed our study of leadership in context. Being this type of leader, the manager was exposed to the context of what was always going on, which made her successful. Her ultimate responsibility for managing millions of dollars in assets put her name on the line with everything. This made me think of my leadership model and how accountability takes on many different forms.

Building towards the development of our leadership models, the two previous classes and their applications helped me refine my model. DEL 710 followed 720, but in retrospect it makes sense from a progressive perspective. By the time we got to DEL 710 I was already thinking about ways to modify my model to make it less military centric. Examining the foundations of leadership as a field of study and the different types of leaders was informative. Learning further how to research questions with a goal of challenging my own bias was a natural progressive step. While the fundamental elements of my model did not change, I have adjusted them over time and after exposure to new ideas and concepts within the DEL program.

I enjoyed DEL 730 because I had always lived within a military code of conduct that I was not a part of creating. It worked well in a military environment and was built into a cause-and-effect paradigm. This means ethical choices should be aligned with the consequences of those decisions. I explored this idea and stated that every problem I ever had was a consequence

of a choice I had made. Understanding that means you can be aware of the ripple effects of your decisions both in your life and as a leader. I found myself warming up to utilitarian leadership because my communication preference is deliberately based on concepts of open and direct communication. At the end of this application, I found myself making the statement that I believed that all successful leaders become so with communication as a bedrock to their approach. I still believe this and have not discovered anything in literature, classwork, or civilian professional life to change that idea. I am open to challenging that potential bias, however.

For the application assignment in DEL 760, it was connected to and served to complement the in-depth assignment. Returning to the idea of utilitarian actions leading to impacts on society and organizations, I drew a parallel using data from the 1960s to the early 2000s. There was a direct correlation between the increase in divorces and the number of people incarcerated in America. The graph lines were very similar when placed side by side. The conclusion I drew is that this is a possible example of how changing ethics within our society impact our outcomes. During this period, it seems that walking away from a commitment to a spouse became easier and more acceptable within society. This is not a political statement but a declaration of facts. It struck me that data shows that one in every 28 children, or 3.6 percent, have a parent who is incarcerated. This strikes me as a leadership problem across our society that calls for a leader to take on and fix. Not from a perspective of changing people's ethical decisions or practices, but rather figuring out ways to address the damage done. Doing so may very well transform some of those ethical decisions within the groups being help. It is an interesting line of thinking to continue to pursue dissertation research.

The focus of my DEL 810 application was on utilizing innovation at the tactical, or worker, level to improve an organization. In my last assignment in the military, I served with a

commander whose focus was on building leaders from the ground up. This might seem like it would be elementary in a military environment which is very structured to developing leaders. In the Air National Guard there is much more focus on technical expertise as a part of the culture. This means they do an amazing job from a nuts-and-bolts perspective but can sometimes have breakdowns in leadership development as Airmen progress. This is reflected in a lack of ability to examine the complexity within the interrelated organizations that make up an air wing. Leaders wind up in positions who are great at executing a mission within their specialties. They find it hard to see the cross organizational factors that lead to stagnation of Airmen at a certain point in their career. The concepts of feedback loops were introduced and many stated that it was the first time in their careers. The innovation and empowerment aspects of the application reflected where the Air Force in general was at the time.

The Chief of Staff wanted to push decision making back down to the tactical and low operational level, where it belongs in his opinion. This senior leader willingness to let Airmen innovate at the lowest level where the complexity is best understood had amazing results. Again, I was struck by how the narrative he used and the way he communicated his vision to empower the force were key. Continuing to examine these ideas within the framework of the DEL program is something I look forward to.

Intellectual Community

When reviewing the intellectual community posts, I saw that early on my former cohort were sharing experience-based leadership stories and practices. I chose to focus on leader development, innovation, and resiliency in relation to habits of mind. In one of the early IC posts one of my cohort members shared leadership quotes related to his focus. Many leaders enjoy quotes as they are simple tools to share an overarching concept to build on. One of the

quotes I found was “Experience is the name we call our mistakes”. Going back to the mind habit of focusing on leader development, I am convinced that leaders who seek continuous improvement are on the right track. Sharing quotes and experiences within the IC forums is a way to help develop each other as scholar leaders. Putting stories that often turn into narratives behind such quotes can be a powerful way to communicate across multiple spectrums.

As a part of the IC and team building activities it is easy to see in retrospect how our cohort combined experiences to seek innovation. Given that we were meeting during COVID, there were plenty of discussion points to be utilized, right from the headlines. An ever-evolving society and situations that affect it require leaders who have studied leadership as a practice. The IC forums and team activities allowed us to put concepts to work in an academic environment. The widely varied experiences among the cohort were key to utilizing past individual circumstances and how we lead in those situations to enhance the cohort conversations. The program outcomes served as a platform to compare these individual experiences with the new information we were learning. It also expanded our individual thinking in conducting and interpreting research as related to the topics within the course. The cross talk of concepts planted seeds of ideas that we could attempt to generate new knowledge in our research.

Leadership Theories & Personal Leadership Model

It is interesting to revisit my leadership model after three years and think about it in terms of where I was in my life then as compared to now. In terms of how my individual leadership model is constructed, I think the biggest impact the first year of the DEL for me was in considering my choice of words when communicating. This is partly because of the transition from being military centric towards a model that is more palatable across a broader audience. This is a result of considering the use of narratives and how they impact a leader’s ability to lead

groups of people. A leadership model by design is a narrative that an individual is going to follow. The elements of the model will be derived from their personal experiences. By building a model based on four concepts I can see the potential for how it would be presented and potentially received.

In terms of charismatic leadership there would be a certain amount of inherent credibility based on my background. This would differ depending on the type of group I was speaking to. A more critical audience would be military members. They are naturally going to weigh my ideas and approaches against their own experiences. A civilian audience would perhaps be critical from a different perspective and elements of charisma would be more impactful.

In both cases the macro (D) and micro (d) elements of discursive leadership would be important and for different reasons. The big “D” is to establish overarching concepts to operate beneath, which is where the little “d” enters the picture. From a worldview perspective, I see things through the lens of utilitarian leadership and have a great appreciation for the discursive style. My leadership model has communications as its foundation which serves, at least in my opinion, as a buffer to becoming too entrenched in any tenet of the over all model. Being open to feedback on a continual basis is key to a leader’s ability to adjust the narrative and direction of an organization. I feel that climate drives culture so the various theories about leadership from positivist to complexity all have a place in my approach.

Reading Thinking & Writing

I believe the biggest progression I made during the first year of DEL was in learning to take an even bigger step back in thoughts and beliefs about leadership. Developing a mind habit to continually challenge thinking, regardless of the topic, is key to being truly objective. Learning to think of writing in terms of establishing a topic with sub points was not a new

concept but the degree to which I have learned to do so with supporting research increased. After a three-year break I can see where my writing evolved during year one. I also see it in the way I write in emails and even in posts on social media. Having a main idea, providing evidence and analysis using references, and linking it to the next main point is an easy path to follow. It is also a path that will take you from being a lazy writer to someone who edits what they are writing. Editing will often result in evaluating the research you used in these steps and result in going back to look for more supporting information in literature. The entire experience of the first year reinforced the need to try and eliminate bias by seeking research that countered what I found.

Peer Feedback

Once of the tenets of my leadership thinking and model is feedback. I cannot say that I have come to understand myself better from a holistic personal and leadership perspective. I can say the cross talk impacted the nuanced aspects of it to me. Perhaps this is the point? In terms of my feedback to others the DEL learning has made me more cognizant of slowing down in gathering of information. Particularly in my current remote role, it is vital to do so as I am not located with any of the employees that work on my team. This puts me at a disadvantage as I do not have all the normal exposure to the wide number of factors that affect a work center. What is striking is that I can make those assessments faster than I may have if my military and educational experience were different. Constantly seeking feedback, and encouraging it, enhances the parts of the daily things I may be missing for other cues. Being patient and gathering as much info possible about any situation allows me to make the fairest decisions. That is my fervent hope anyway. I believe it is vital to being the best long-distance leader possible.

Self-Assessments

The study of self has always been very interesting to me. Embracing the many differing tools used to do so gives us insight into who we are across many areas. In my home life I am very stable and because of my remote job, homebound much of the time. We split our time between Texas and WV for family purposes. This involves quite a bit of logistics which I see my ability to navigate stress is probably very helpful with. On the work front, I now have three years of experience in a civilian setting. Given that this is a remote position the high level of empathy is hard to act upon in an interpersonal way. Over the last year I have become more engaged in my faith and that has helped to center and ground me in my heart and spirit. Of all things my focus on being engaged in the community in this area is something I wish to focus on more in the next year.

Code of Conduct

My code of conduct closely aligns with my leadership model. From an accountability perspective I seek to lead by example and seek continual feedback. I struggle with the civilian world because development is stagnant in the civilian company I work for. It is a great company but there is virtually no intentional focus on training and education. It is frustrating because the level I am at limits my ability to influence more focus in this area. I do find myself living up to the commitment to be an engaged leader as a part of my code of conduct. I continually find my language being presented in the phrases and terminology that have developed during my military career and beyond. As it stands now, I have no reason to change my code of conduct but will continually seek to consider new information and modification to improve it.

Self Development

During the first year of DEL the skill I probably sharpened the most was my writing ability and focus on research to support or discredit my assumptions or thoughts. I have learned that most opinions in a general sense are either misinformed or negatively affected by an accepted narrative. All of us are vulnerable to this kind of experience. Being deliberate in stepping out of your comfort zone and seeking to become truly objective is challenging. I am very interested in becoming meta cognitive in my thinking. The two areas I wish to focus on are the community and cohort going forward in the next year. I think it is important to focus on the cohort within the umbrella of the DEL course design. The continual feedback and perspectives we give each other will be key in becoming meta cognitive scholar practitioners. Examining the approach, writing style, and EQ of our cohort members will give us areas to look at within ourselves.

I still hold the worldview that most things all circle back to personal accountability and then flow from there into personal and organizational outcomes. The interdependence that we shared during my first year was important as we are all in the same boat so to speak. All of us were high achievers and I anticipate that will be the same in the new cohort. I find myself frustrated in some situations because I transitioned from a role where I had broad influence. I liken it to going from the high strategic level of leadership to the low operational level. I find this stifling and sometimes hard to deal with when I see behaviors that I think are misaligned for organizational success. I must remember my place in the organization and I constantly remind myself that a good leader must also be a good follower. Conceptually however, this does not make it easier to see something and be forced to kind of look away.

I struggled for a long time with the idea of returning to the DEL program. I have reached a very pleasant state of mind and equilibrium in my life both personally and professionally. It

would be easier by far to accept the status quo and in no way be a bad thing. I do enjoy the job I have but it highlights even more my desire to teach and share the lessons I have learned in my life. Of all the things that I did in my career, teaching was by far the most rewarding. A large part of deciding to return to the DEL program was knowing that I would be amongst peers who also have a desire to make a greater positive impact. I look forward to getting to know my cohort and instructors.

Projects

Although my duty title is Project Manager it does not really reflect what I do daily, at least not in terms of how I think of that designation. My role is remote, and I have a recruiter and a credentials expert who help me hire and evaluate the 250 employees we lead across seven military bases. I am continually trying to highlight the aspects of recruiting tools that I feel the entire recruiting team could benefit from amongst my fellow PMs. This is largely overlooked, and I understand why.

The company is well established and does not have a very large corporate staff despite a large workforce of about 800 employees, all of whom are managed remotely. To be honest, the transactional aspects of the job do not really allow for the time it would take to develop any type of new initiative. I have several ideas about things that I believe would benefit the company but I'm not able to lead in those areas. I am gratified when I do make experience-based suggestions which are sometimes implemented. Again, it is important to be a good follower and not be concerned about credit. Perhaps being engaged in the DEL program will open new ways of thinking about how to lead strategically from a more subtle approach? Perhaps this is even a subtopic hidden in that line of thought for dissertation research. I anticipate my continuation of the program to enhance my thinking and flow into my present roles and beyond.

The Way Ahead

When I started the DEL program in April of 2020, I was on the cusp of retiring from the military. That experience provided the foundation for understanding how to set goals. In terms of my personal development the DEL program provided a different approach that enhanced that understanding. Knowing what the goal is in clear tangible terms is always the first step. Segmenting them into strategies and the required tasks to achieve those goals is the second step in the way I approach them.

I intend to utilize my doctorate degree to teach and establish a program to educate and advise other leaders on strategies for success. I have minor technical challenges in the latter category but fortunately a great friend and professional from my military days to help me. He is an expert in creating products to use in web design and other tools I would want to develop to establish a system for teaching others. I don't believe I have any adaptive challenges in that area. As far as technical challenges I will need to learn how to use tools that did not exist when I exited the program three years ago, perhaps such as AI assisted research tools. I will continually update my personal development through studying within the DEL and engaging in technical tools to enhance that experience. I do not see any overwhelming challenges in either category, just committing to the hard work and staying in the lifelong learner mindset to be successful.

I do not use meditation techniques based on tools such as the labyrinth. I have no problem with those who do but for me my faith serves as the foundation of mindfulness. As a Christian, I pray and meditate on the teachings of Jesus Christ to help me determine what the right path is in my life. I believe that God has a plan and purpose for my life and if I seek His will, He will always provide the answer to where my path should lead.

When it comes to the mentoring experience during my first year, I remember discussing possible dissertation topics and Dr. McLaughlin. He gave me several suggestions for ways to scope out my research using vin diagrams. He also advised keeping the framework at a very high level at the time and flesh out where things would go from there in terms of research and focus. I took this as very good advice and would have followed through but as it turns out life got in the way for a while, and I paused my program shortly after. My last entry from speaking with him was on April 8th, 2021. I look forward to perhaps working with him as my mentor again.

References

Merriam -Webster Dictionary (2020) Retrieved from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com>

Conger, J.A. & Kanungo, R.N. (1999) Charismatic leadership in organizations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Alvesson, M. & Kärreman, D. (2000b). Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53, 1125–1149.

Gardner, H. with Laskin, E., (2013). *Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership* New York, NY: Basic Books, Perseus Books Group. ISBN Number: 978-0465027736 (paper)

McDougal III, S. (2013) Framing the Black Experience: A Discourse Analysis of President Barak Obama's Speeches, *Journal of Pan African Studies*. Sep 2013, Vol. 6 Issue 4, p1-17.

Kohlberg, L.A. (1984). *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages (Essays on Moral Development, Volume 2)*: Harper Collins, ISBN 0060647612

Bellah, R. N., (1967) Religion in America, *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 1967, Vol. 9,6, No. 1, pp. 1-21.

Nelson, T. O., & Narens, L. (1990). Metamemory: A theoretical framework and new findings. *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, 26, 125–173.

Merriam-Webster (2020) metacognition, noun, retrieved from:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metacognition>

Rouse, W. B. & Morris, N. M. (1986). On looking into the black box: Prospects and limits in the search for mental models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 100, 349-363

Nooteboom, B. (2010). *A cognitive theory of the firm: Learning, governance, and dynamic capabilities*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publications, Inc. ISBN 978-1-84980-169-0